



Bread, roses and books for Generation Y

By TRACY GLYNN and TOMI GBELEYI

Fredericton - Canada's youth today are starting off their adult lives in what has been called an age of falling expectations. Unemployment, underemployment and soaring education costs are making life especially difficult, stressful and challenging for them.

The jobless rate for Canadian youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 14.7 percent, about double the national average for all age groups, according to the latest Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey. Approximately 27,000 fewer youth are working today in Canada than at this time last year. Across the ocean, the youth unemployment rate has reached a devastating 51.1 per cent in Greece.

Thom Workman, Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of New Brunswick, writes in his 2009 book, *If You're in My Way, I'm Walking: The Assault on Working People since 1970*, about an age of falling expectations where today's generation face a future that will not be as bright as their parents'.

"They fear precarious work and doubt that they will be as comfortable both emotionally or materially as their parents or grandparents. Their lives have unfolded entirely in the context of neoliberal austerity, and it really is a stripping away of what was commonly thought of as job security," says Workman.

Rising wages and enhanced living standards for working class families in Canada followed the Second World War owing to pressures from labour and relatively high rates of profitability. However, in recent decades, achievements won by the working class have been rolled back. Workman describes the effect: stagnation of real wages, a disproportionate number of women entering low-wage work, gutting of social programs and unemployment insurance, and declines in unionization rates and union militancy.

"It really has involved dividing the working class according to the more protected—usually unionized—and the unprotected, and then hammering away on both fronts," says Workman.

Many university graduates are finding themselves working in positions that do not require a university degree. These students are in particularly precarious situations as they often have large student loans to pay back to the government, which are due for automatic repayment soon after graduation.

Soaring costs of post-secondary education mean that Canadian students who rely on public and private loans are graduating with an average debt load of \$37,000, according to Statistics Canada. Many students from lower-income backgrounds face student debt loads much greater than the average, especially if they are studying in professional programs that charge higher tuition fees. They also end up paying more for their education, since they must pay the loan principle and the accumulated interest. The burden of having a five-figure debt after graduation means that they are less likely to pursue more education, make large purchases or take financial risks.

For Adam Melanson, a student activist and political science student at the University of New Brunswick, the alienation that youth and all ages of the working class suffer is inherent to capitalist social relations.

"Young people want to work in a meaningful job. They also want to learn at our universities but can't afford it. They shouldn't be forced to give up their dreams of a university education. They shouldn't be forced to work alienating and precarious jobs for low wages or be coerced to remain docile and without complaint in bad work environments because... (continued on page 2)



About 100 students gather against tuition hikes at St. Thomas University on March 21st. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

Can we have prosperity without pipelines?



Hundreds gathered under the Idle No More and Frack No More banners greeted Premier David Alward and his cabinet ministers as they entered the Legislature on March 26th. In his budget speech, Finance Minister Blaine Higgs said, “the goal of building this west-east pipeline and finding new export markets for oil is key to the future of the nation.” Photo by Sophie Lavoie.

By CAMERON McLEAN

The Alward government's announcement in February that it would be offering its full support to the construction of a pipeline carrying crude bitumen from the Alberta tar sands has provoked vigorous debate about the merits of fossil fuel industries in New Brunswick.

The pipeline would be privately funded and the government's role would be to provide an efficient permitting process. Premier Alward believes that a West-East bitumen pipeline would lead not only to a stronger New Brunswick economy, but a stronger Canadian economy.

Ignored yet again on initial discussions of a pipeline proposal are First Nations communities whose lands the pipelines will cross and potentially contaminate.

Amidst a provincial economy that is struggling and growing environmental concerns, the question New Brunswickers must ask is whether the economic gains outweigh the risk to the environment.

Since the idea first emerged, Minister of Energy and Mines, Craig Leonard, has said that the pipeline could create as many as 2,000 jobs. These jobs would be temporary construction jobs, with a few hundred jobs being maintained upon its completion.

David Murrell, Professor of Economics at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, believes the pipeline could be what the province needs. With high unemployment rates and a timber industry still suffering from the U.S. housing crisis, Murrell believes bitumen could revive New Brunswick's economy.

"We don't have much in the way of energy. That's the main kick-starter for economies," Murrell said. With bitumen being brought to the East coast, Murrell believes we could see a drop in oil prices. Other analysts have pointed out that more export capacity in North America could raise North American crude prices to the international level.

Not everyone agrees that oil can be an economic engine for the province. David Coon, Leader of the Green Party of New Brunswick, thinks it is time to create jobs in industries with a future. "New Brunswick's old economy was based on maximizing the exploitation and export of natural resources such as timber and minerals. Doing more of the same is not going to solve our economic or our ecological challenges," he said.

Coon explains that the pipeline will not lead to lower prices since it requires an expensive upgrade to the Saint John refinery, but will only lead to further environmental problems. "The benefits of such a venture flow to the oil companies, to the banks, and to the Government of Alberta," says Coon.

Rod Hill, an economist at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John, shares this opinion. "In the long term its impact on employment and incomes would surely be negligible. A pipeline carrying crude oil from the west is just another way of importing oil, which is something we can already do. Why would we expect that to have any significant permanent impact on the New Brunswick economy?" says Hill.

Coon adds that, "Locally, a new pipeline will tear up a 400

km stretch of New Brunswick's countryside, deforesting it, eliminating and fragmenting habitat. There is also the risk of bitumen spills into our waterway from the pipeline."

A recent study from the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Pembina Institute considers bitumen to pose a higher corrosion risk for pipelines. Yet, in the debate about the Northern Gateway pipeline, industry researchers have contested this with studies showing no greater risks in pipelines carrying bitumen than other crude oils.

Since pipeline corrosion is influenced by weather and climate conditions, and bitumen can be diluted upstream for transport by pipeline, studies analyzing different parameters can show different results.

Fresh Water Program Director for the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, Stephanie Merrill, believes that the idea of a pipeline, like shale gas, is a distraction.

"Helping to expand one of the largest greenhouse gas contributing sectors is going in the exact opposite direction we need to go. We have no national climate strategy and this lays the tracks in a direction that will take decades to get off of when we need to stop now and transition to renewables," says Merrill.

In March 2012, a report from the London based Carbon Tracker Initiative argued that up to 80 per cent of the world's known oil and gas reserves are "unburnable" if the planet is to stay within two degrees Celsius of warming and avoid catastrophic climate change. The report bases its findings on the upper limits for atmospheric carbon agreed on by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

"To ignore this reality is to deny climate change," says Merrill. "The science tells us that really, we needed to make plans to transition off oil and gas yesterday. When are we going to take climate change, our contribution and the impacts to us here in New Brunswick, seriously?" she asks.

In the State of the Province speech, Premier Alward called innovation the foundation of our growing economy. "It is the key to increasing productivity in every sector, from industrial manufacturing to natural resource development," declared Alward.

Merrill, however, points out that "building new infrastructure for an old industry seems a lot like status quo rather than innovation."

Coon sees a need to build a new economy that is more local, greener, and accessible to all. He also points to local entrepreneurs across the province as sources for developing the economy.

The debate on whether the pipeline will bring prosperity to the New Brunswick economy is sure to continue, with the corporate media shunning discussion of climate change and focusing on potential economic benefits for the province. Yet, as Hill points out, "It could be good for private profits, but that is why we are supposed to have a government that considers the broader social good."