

# Shale gas opponents rally at N.B. Legislature



About 400 shale gas opponents marched through the streets of Fredericton and rallied in front of the N.B. Legislature over the noon hour on Tuesday, Nov. 27th as New Brunswick MLAs returned to work. The rally goers relayed their call for a province-wide ban on shale gas to Energy Minister Craig Leonard, other ministers and other MLAs as they entered the Legislature. "The strength of our grassroots movement was evident by the large number of groups represented in the march," said Mark D'Arcy, a member of the Fredericton Chapter of the Council of Canadians. "What impressed me the most was to have the large parade led by the Grade 5 students from Chief Harold Sappier School (St. Mary's First Nation) and ended by farmers from the New Brunswick Chapter of the National Farmers' Union. This show of solidarity gives me confidence that we will stop shale gas fracking in this province."

**Grade 5 students from Chief Harold Sappier School located at St. Mary's First Nation led the march against shale gas to the steps of the N.B. Legislature on Nov. 24, 2012. Photo by Stephanie Merrill.**

# The roots of hunger: why food bank use is up in Atlantic Canada

By JASON EDWARDS

Food Banks Canada released its latest statistics on national food bank usage in late October. The data are assembled in a document titled HungerCount 2012. Not only has food bank usage continued to increase, more and more users are working and more are families with children. According to the report's authors, "In March of this year, 882,188 people received food from a food bank in Canada. This is an increase of 2.4% over 2011, and is 31% higher than in 2008, before the recession began."

The statistics for Atlantic Canada aren't good. In Newfoundland and Labrador more than one in twenty people received assistance from a food bank in 2012. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick one in forty residents were assisted by a food bank. Prince Edward Island's food banks were used by more than 2.3 percent of its inhabitants.

What's worse, many of those assisted in 2012 were not adults. About one in three food bank users in the Maritimes, and almost 40 percent of users in Newfoundland and Labrador, were children. Forty-nine percent, almost half, of Canadian households assisted are families with children.

Food bank usage, a result of low income, is moving further into the mainstream. The food bank is no longer exclusively the realm of the homeless and hyper-marginalized.

About one quarter of total food bank users were living in two-parent families in Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, and one-fifth in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Further, a large portion of those seeking assistance are wage-earners. In Nova Scotia, 13 percent of those assisted are in families whose primary income is a paid wage; in New Brunswick the number is 10.4 percent, and in Newfoundland it's 8.4 percent. More than one-fifth of food bank patrons in Prince Edward Island live in a household with someone who is working.

Save for slight improvements in Newfoundland and Labrador, the number of food bank users in the Atlantic Provinces continues to rise.

Food assistance becomes a necessity when people are unable to afford to pay for the basics. The food budget is the one 'discretionary' expense in the budget that is often used for fixed necessities such as heat, electricity or phone expenses. As HungerCount's authors note, "People asking for help are working in low-paying jobs, receiving meagre social assistance benefits, managing on inadequate pensions. They face rising costs related to food, housing, and energy."

Like other social ills, hunger is not a problem that can be solved by charity. HungerCount 2012's authors provide ample evidence that the national demand for food-charity vastly outstrips the supply. In 2012, 14 per cent of food

banks ran out of food, 8 per cent were forced to close early (or not open), 60 per cent operated over capacity and 55 per cent had to lower the amount of food offered per family.

HungerCount 2012's authors suggest that governments should focus on, "affordable housing, social investment in Northern Canada, pensions, social assistance, and job quality." Each of these recommendations is about getting to the root causes of hunger, focusing on preventing hunger by implementing policies that reduce the number of people living in poverty. These recommendations also make good economic sense and would decrease the massive costs of poverty (over \$1.5 billion/year in Nova Scotia, over \$1.3 billion/year in New Brunswick and over \$240 million/year in Prince Edward Island).

Of particular importance for Atlantic Canadians is the movement of the economy away from stable, high-wage, unionized employment with benefits, toward precarious, low-wage, part-time, unprotected spheres of employment. Between 2001 and 2010, Atlantic Canada created about four times as many low-wage jobs as it did in high-wage sectors. Focusing on "jobs" does not solve hunger. Indeed, many of the people using food banks work fulltime in low-wage jobs and about half of Nova Scotian children living in poverty are in homes with at least one full-time, full-year earner!

The authors are rightfully concerned with policies that contribute to the growing war on workers. Among these issues are the federal government's recent changes to Employment Insurance and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program as well as the repeal of the Fair Wages and Hours of Labour Act. The authors understand that these regressive measures are "likely to have a negative effect on earnings across the board."

Hunger is a result of low income. Only by making Atlantic Canada a place where good jobs grow can we eliminate the demand for food banks. This means enacting pro-worker legislation and promoting organized labour. It means funding a strong public sector through unabashedly progressive taxation. Cutting services to fund corporate tax cuts will only exacerbate the growth of low-wage industries and promote further hunger.

Atlantic Canadians will cease to require the service of food banks when we grow high-wage, stable jobs, and fund good social programs like affordable housing and child care, through progressive taxation. Of course, it is critical to ensure that the food we can access comes from a sustainable, local food system — that means coupling poverty reduction policies with those that help our farmers earn a decent living and enable them to provide local, affordable food. Something as essential as the food security of communities should not rely on volunteer work and donations. Rather, it is up to the public sector to fill in where markets fail.

*Jason Edwards is a research associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. This article first appeared at behindthenumbers.ca, a publication of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.*

# Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org To list your event, email: community@nbmediacoop.org

**Film Screening: On Tip Toe: Gentle Steps to Freedom.** The Playhouse and Cinema Politica Fredericton are partnering to screen On Tip Toe at the Fredericton Playhouse on Thurs, Jan. 31 at 7pm. The film tells the inspiring story of the group that introduced South African music to the world: Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Nominated for an Academy Award, musicologists trace the origins of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's music back to the oppression of the apartheid years. In Conjunction with the Spotlight performance: Ladysmith Black Mambazo, February 4, 2013. Visit: theplayhouse.ca.

**Cinema Politica's** documentaries take us to places around the world where dehumanization and destruction wreaked by capitalism and colonialism warrant our examination, analysis and action. In Fredericton, films are screened on Fridays at 7pm at Conserver House, 180 St. John St.; in Moncton, on the first Monday of the month at the United Way Boardroom, Suite T210, 22 Church St.; in Sackville, monthly on Wednesdays at Mount Allison University. CP chapters also exist in Sussex , Bathurst, Taymouth and Saint John. Check out film schedules of the locals or start your own chapter at: cinemapolitica.org.

# In Brief...

- Widler Jules, a man from the northern New Brunswick village of Atholville, has filed a court injunction in the province of Quebec in an effort to **restore train service** in the Maritimes and eastern Quebec. Via Rail recently cut back its train service from Halifax to Montreal from six to three days a week. Jules hopes he can come to an agreement with Via Rail before the next court date, which is Dec. 12. Jules says that the train is an essential public service and should not be operated like a private company. He is arguing that Via Rail is in non-compliance with obligations under the Canadian constitution and is violating the Canada Transport Act, which considers the impacts of transportation to regional economic development.
- Transport Canada figures reveal that **federal transit funding has dropped** from \$1.1 billion in 2008 to about \$300 million in 2011. Meanwhile, road spending totalled over \$1.5 billion per year and support to carbon-intensive air travel increased from \$800 to \$900 million. Critics including NDP Transportation Critic Olivia Chow argued that the Harper government's slashing of public transit reveals that it is not taking accessible public transportation or climate change seriously.
- About **200 people protested the fourth annual International Security Forum** in Halifax on Nov. 17-18. Members of NATO gathered in public and private sessions. The people gathered protested imperialist wars and the fact that the two day forum was costing taxpayers over \$3 million. The protest occurred under the shadow of the statue of Edward Cornwallis, an 18th century man renowned for issuing scalping proclamations against the Mi'kmaq people, including women and children.
- The Harper government is being criticized for its **scandalous treatment of war veterans** suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. An estimated one in four Afghan war veterans suffer from PTSD, homelessness, clawed-back benefits and increased rates of alcoholism and drug abuse. Spikes in domestic violence, significant governmental invasions of privacy and demonization of vets who speak up for their rights are growing concerns. Many PTSD sufferers have waited several months, despite suicide attempts, to see a psychologist. Even if soldiers do find health care, the Auditor General pointed out in 2007 that the military fails to keep track of whether its medical staff have the requisite licences and certifications. In 2008, then Veterans Affairs Ombudsman Mary McFadyen said the military health care system was stretched to the limit, with CFB Petawawa, home to 5,000 troops, served by only one psychiatrist and one psychologist. Four years later, another report stated the situation at Petawawa was still a "crisis", with further federal government cuts of medical doctors involved in suicide prevention and treatment of PTSD.
- Israel launched an airstrike **offensive against the people of Gaza** on Nov. 14th, killing 164 people, including 50 children, and wounding 1,000 others. In 2009, during "Operation Cast Lead," the Israeli state killed more than 1,400 Palestinian civilians, a third of which were children. Israeli Interior Minister, Eli Yishai, was reported in the media saying with regards to the recent war waged on the Gaza Strip, "The goal of the operation is to send Gaza back to the Middle Ages. Only then will Israel be calm for forty years." Over 100 people gathered at Fredericton City Hall on Nov. 24th to rally in solidarity with the people of Gaza.



**Samira Farhoud, a survivor of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut, Lebanon, and a St. Thomas University professor and researcher on the Middle East and North Africa, spoke on how Israeli aggression affects the lives of Palestinians and others at the Rally for Gaza in Fredericton on Nov. 24th. Photo by Judy Burwell.**

# Write for the NB Media Co-op!

The NB Media Co-op will pay \$150 for investigative features this winter and spring. We welcome pitches from published writers, first-time writers, front-line activists, and anyone with a story they want to investigate and tell. Investigative features will be posted on our website, www.nbmediacoop.org, and in our monthly broadsheet publication, The Brief, which is distributed across the province. Send your pitch or questions to: info@nbmediacoop.org.

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