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 goes relayed their call for a no-frack zone in the province of New Brunswick. 60 percent were on a shackle to Economy Minister Craig Leonard, other ministers and other MLAs as they entered the Legislature. The strength of our grassroots movement is growing," said the leader of the number of groups represented in the march," said Mark Drury, president of the Council of Canadians, "What impressed me the most was to have this rally, by the Grade 5 students from Chief Harold Sappper School (St. Mary's First Nation) and ended by farmers from the New Brunswick Farmers' Union. This show of solidarity means more to me today than we will stop shale gas fracking in this province."

Grade 5 students from Chief Harold Sapper School located at St. Mary's First Nation led the march against shale gas to the steps of the legislature. 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 people are working and more are families with children. According to the report’s authors, “In March of this year, 862,188 people received food from a food bank in Canada, which is an increase of 2.4% over 2011, and is 3.6% higher than in 2008, before the recession began.”

The statistics for Atlantic Canada aren’t good, in Newfoundland and Labrador more than one in ten people received assistance from a food bank in 2012. In Nova Scotia and New Brunswick one in forty residents was assisted by a food bank. Prince Edward Island’s food banks were used by more than 2.9 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 families. 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 indication 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 14.6 percent, and in Newfoundland it’s 8.4 percent. More than one-fifth of food bank users in Nova Scotia 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 food banks are working in low paying jobs and in many instances are minimum wage workers.”

Hunger is a result of low income. Only by making Atlantic Canadians increase to a growing class of people eliminated from the demand for food banks. This means enacting pro-worker legislation and promoting organized labor. It means funding a strong public education system. It means opposition to the government’s tax cuts. Cutting services to fund corporate tax cuts will only push people further into the growth of low-wage industries and promote further hunger.

Atlantic Canadians will cease to require the service of food banks when we are employed to living wage jobs, and are not experiencing social programs like affordable housing and child care. Gradually, that will occur. This is critical, to remember is 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 simple as the food stamps should be extended to volunteer work and donations. Rather, it is up to the public sector to fill in the gaps.

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

Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmedia cooperating To list your event, email: community@nbmedia cooperating

Film Screening: On Tip Toe: Gentle Steps to Freedom. The Playhouse and Cinema Politica Fredericton are partnering to screen films at The Playhouse as part of the Tip Toe film series dealing with human rights. The films begin at 7:30pm and are free to the public. Follow the series on Facebook. The first film is_tip toe_about freedom. The film takes place on the 31 at 7pm. The film tells the inspiring story of the group that introduced women and girls to South Africa to break the law. Ladybadie Black Mambazo. Nominated for an Academy Award, musicologists praise the origins of the music that has been called a “mystical music” due to the oppression of the apartheid years. In Conjunction with the Spotlight performance: Ladybadie Black Mambazo, February 7, 2013. More info: themanifesto. 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 6pm in the basement of the Uôk University Annex. The next film is screening first Monday of the month at the United Way Boardroom, Suite 1210, 22 Church St, in Sackville, monthly on Wednesdays at Mount Allison University, CP chapters also exist in Sussex, Saint John, Mount Allison, UNB, and University of New Brunswick. More info: cinema,politica.ca

Samira Farhoud, a survivor of the 1982 Iraqi 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.

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.nbmedia cooperating, and in our monthly broadcast publication, The Brief, which is distributed across the province. Send your pitch or questions to: editor@nbmedia cooperating

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