

Fighting oppression key to preventing suicide of Indigenous people

(continued from page 1) ...from 1913 to 1932. The film’s description of Scott as a key player in many of Canada’s assimilation policies towards Indigenous peoples was an appropriate backdrop for Chrisjohn and McKay’s discussion of Indigenous suicide as part of larger social issues, historical and current.

Chrisjohn and McKay established the urgency of the suicide crisis – and the Canadian Federal Government’s awareness of the issue – by pointing to a 1977 graph taken from the Department of Indian Affairs, which revealed that Indigenous people were 3 to 10 times more likely to commit suicide than non-Indigenous people of the same age groups.

The Canadian Federal Department of Health reaffirms the prevalence of this issue today, stating that suicide rates amongst First Nations youth are 5 to 7 times higher than those of non-First Nations youth. The Department of Health also states that suicide rates among Inuit youth are 11 times higher than the national average and among the highest in the world.

For Chrisjohn and McKay, the suicide statistics beg a change of approach in Indigenous suicide intervention.

Chrisjohn, a founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Canada, lost a friend and fellow founder of AIM to suicide decades ago. Chrisjohn, who holds a doctorate in psychology from Western University, became disillusioned with psychological approaches to addressing Indigenous suicide after working for six years in crisis intervention services for Indigenous people during the 1980s in Toronto.

In referring to his criticisms of psychologists working in the field of suicidology, Chrisjohn states that, “Models of Indian suicide are individualistic, relying on supposed internal characteristics instead of looking at...social, economic, and political forces impinging on Aboriginal Peoples.”

Instead, Chrisjohn and McKay present an alternative: “We invite suicidologists to stop peering inwardly, start looking at the world around us, and see what’s happening to us all.”

Chrisjohn and McKay include what they call a partial list to make their point that Indigenous people of Canada are not the only oppressed peoples in the world experiencing a suicidal crisis: the Guarani Indians of Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Bolivia; unemployed young males in Greece; dispossessed farmers in Chennai; veterans of the U. S. army who served in the Middle East; South Koreans; women with illegitimate pregnancies in India; rape victims; Sri Lankan refugees; Virginians; American farmers; unemployed British youth; the elderly in Greece; Pennsylvanian prisoners; Chinese factory workers; Canadian first-responders; and more.

For Chrisjohn and McKay, a collective step back that takes the time to “think, discuss, understand, share, then act” on what they call the “capitalism-alienation-oppression suicide progression” is key.

“We have no doubt that the most positive ANTI-SUICIDE [authors’ emphasis] program for Indigenous peoples that has been seen in Canada in the last few years is the Idle No More Movement, Indians behaving like Indians, which at the same time was perhaps the scariest thing seen by the government.”

Chrisjohn quoted early twentieth century Irish Revolutionary Michael Collins on how the Irish should respond to British oppression: “We have a weapon more powerful than any in the whole arsenal of the British Empire. And that weapon is our refusal... Our only weapon is our refusal.”

With that, Chrisjohn and McKay ended (or perhaps began) an important discussion on Indigenous suicide by calling for a new understanding of its causes, as well as advocating for structural social change, informed activism, and a refusal to die.

Shawn Martin is a social work student at St. Thomas University interning with the NB Media Co-op.

In Brief

- Following public outcry and an organizing campaign by its lawyer members, the **Canadian Bar Association** has gone back on intervening on a lawsuit against Chevron by Ecuadorean claimants brought forward in Canada. The jurisdictional question of whether Canada’s courts should hear the case will be decided at the Supreme Court of Canada in December. Chevron is attempting to impose barriers to block a group of Amazon villagers from Ecuador seeking to enforce a controversial US\$ 9.5-billion judgment against the U.S. oil giant for clean up of oil pollution. The legal battle between the villagers and Chevron has lasted for 13 years. Chevron refuses to pay the amount awarded in a 2011 judgment.
- Forty-three students in the Guerrero state of **Mexico disappeared** on the night of September 26. Twenty-eight corpses were found in a mass grave a few days later. Local police are denying that the bodies recently exhumed are those of the missing persons from the Iguala teacher’s college. More than 22,000 people have gone missing in Mexico in the last eight years, according to the Mexican government.
- Jian Ghomeshi**, host of CBC Radio's Q, has been fired following allegations that he sexually assaulted several women. Ghomeshi hired crisis communication consultants Navigator to craft an explanation that was posted on his Facebook page describing the interactions as consensual BDSM and attributing the accusations to "a jilted ex girlfriend." *The Star* reported that 3 women allege that he non-consensually "struck them with a closed fist or open hand; bit them; choked them until they almost passed out; covered their nose and mouth so that they had difficulty breathing; and that they were verbally abused during and after sex." A fourth woman described being subjected to workplace sexual harassment and assault by Ghomeshi when she worked at CBC.

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Fredericton firefighters take brunt of Woodside’s spending decisions

By MATTHEW HAYES and NIKITA HARTT

Fredericton - As Fredericton’s firefighters and the City of Fredericton await a decision from an arbitrator on a longstanding labour dispute, Fredericton Mayor Brad Woodside is publicly lambasting firefighters in the media for wanting too much money.

Arbitration hearings between the city and firefighters took more than 11 days, in contrast to two days in Moncton and one day in Saint John. The City brought in several expert witnesses to delay proceedings, even on issues that were not contentious, according to union officials.

At the heart of the dispute is the City’s proposal to move to a shared risk pension system, salaries and public safety.

Glenn Sullivan, president of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) local 1053, says that shifting to a shared risk pension plan is not necessary. “Our pension has been recovering quite nicely,” he argues.

Woodside and other city mayors have argued that arbitration awards are too much and are lobbying the province to change the way that arbitration proceedings are done; the mayors would like the arbitrator to choose a side rather than impose a settlement.

The dispute with firefighters has become a national issue, as Woodside has used his position as the head of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to draw attention to the cost of labour union contracts for cities.

Last month, Woodside told the *Telegraph-Journal* if municipalities could not keep labour costs under control, they might be forced to cut their workforce.

The salary settlements at arbitration in Moncton (an increase of 16% over 4 years) and Saint John (12% over four years) are commensurate with annual increases in similar trades, according to figures from Statistics Canada.

Woodside has targeted labour costs as a way to reduce spending in city budgets while pouring money into capital projects over the last 10 years.

The \$34 million convention centre and \$11 million parking structure, the hallmark of Woodside’s mayoralty, have consistently operated below capacity since their opening in 2011.

The firefighters are asking for a wage package that would maintain comparability with other firefighters in Atlantic Canada.

The City of Fredericton has tried to cut its firefighter costs in other ways as well. In February, they decided to cut a tanker truck from their fleet and replace it with a rescue vehicle, which is staffed by only two firefighters, instead of three.

Firefighters responded publicly with a pamphlet informing Fredericton residents of the changes and were berated at a public council meeting by Mayor Woodside who dismissed their concerns about public safety.

“They made operational changes that would basically prevent them from having to hire more staff,” Sullivan says. The process, he argues, was driven by Lean Six Sigma, a



Fredericton firefighters shown here putting out a fire in downtown Fredericton in August 2014. In February, Mayor Brad Woodside dismissed the firefighters' concerns about public safety and berated them for taking their concerns to social media. Video still by Charles LeBlanc.

management efficiency approach, rather than by an independent fire risk analysis.

The Mayor and firefighters have also clashed over the relocation of one of the Northside fire stations to Two Nations Crossing, which has facilitated further suburban development in an as yet incomplete part of the city. The move, say firefighters, has increased response times and is a public safety concern.

Rising costs for Canadian municipalities have been an issue for years, as high energy costs and aging suburban neighbourhoods require infrastructure renewal over sprawled city spaces.

While the City has yet to identify a way to reduce urban sprawl, it has taken aim at municipal workers. According to the City of Fredericton, firefighting service costs each household \$41.35 on average. The cost of road and street maintenance is 60% more at an average of \$65.03 per household.

Other cities, such as Calgary and Halifax have prioritized sprawl reduction as a means of reducing road maintenance costs as well as future capital costs. Calgary has instituted new suburban development costs to curb sprawl.

“I don’t think it is fair to blame firefighters for not being able to fund other things in the community,” Sullivan says. “Decisions about where to allocate funds are political decisions.”

Matthew Hayes is a sociology professor at St. Thomas University and Nikita Hartt is an English student at the University of New Brunswick interning with the NB Media Co-op.

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Several dozen people demonstrated outside the Dieppe postal plant on October 17 in opposition to Canada Post stopping door-to-door delivery and slashing jobs. The protest was organized by the New Brunswick Federation of Labour. A petition on Change.org reads: “Have you ever tried to push a wheelchair through the mud or snow? That’s the question I asked the government and Canada Post almost a year ago, when I learned that I would be one of millions of Canadians who may have to travel kilometres just to get our mail. My youngest son has cerebral palsy—for me and every other Canadian dealing with mobility challenges, Canada Post’s plan to end home delivery would mean a difficult and even dangerous walk to get the mail. I felt angry and helpless, so I started a petition. I didn’t think my petition would go anywhere, but boy was I wrong! Since then, over 154,000 Canadians have joined our fight to save home mail delivery, and have stood up to defend those who would most feel the impact - people with young children, the disabled, the elderly, and those who care for them.” Photo by Patrick Colford.

Community Calendar

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

- Nowhere Else to Go. Cinema Politica Fredericton presents as part of the NB Film Co-op’s Silver Wave Film Festival, Nowhere Else to Go. Directed by Michael Shade.
- A chronology of the 2013 indigenous anti-fracking protests in New Brunswick from their early days up to the later violent clashes with police. When: Friday, Nov. 7 at 7:00pm. Where: Conserver House, 180 Saint John St., Fredericton. Contact: fredericton@cinemapolitica.org.
- Making the Connections: Resistance and Movement Building Across Borders and Nations Resource. Annual gathering of the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network (ARSN). Nov. 14 at 7 pm to Nov. 14 at 1 pm. With Alma Brooks and Eliza Star Child Knockwood. Alma is a Maliseet traditional leader with the Wabanaki Confederacy from St. Mary’s First Nation. Alma attended the May 2014 UN Forum on Mining and Indigenous Peoples. She has been a leader in the New Brunswick resistance to fracking. Eliza is a Mi’kmaq woman from Abegweit First Nation, PEI. She spent the summer or 2014 in Elsipogtog, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks worked together to resist fracking. Contact Kathryn at kathrynannde@gmail.com.
- NB Media Co-op Story Meetings. Join us at our monthly story meetings in Fredericton where we discuss politics and current events and decide what to put in this paper every month. To find out the meeting time and venue, email info@nbmediacoop.org.
- Cinema Politica believes in the power of art not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica is the largest volunteer-run, community and campus-based documentary-screening network in the world. Cinema Politica Fredericton is back this fall screening films on Fridays. Check out film schedules and venues, or start your own chapter at: cinemapolitica.org.