Angelica Choc's fight is our fight too:

Guatemala, like Canada, has a brutal history of colonization, and Guatemala has suffered 300 years of severe colonial repression and fear imposed by the country's oligarchy, its military, the U.S. government, and multinational companies such as American banana king, the United Fruit Company (rebranded as Chiquita in 1984), and Canadian nickel giant, Inco. A brutal 36-year civil war killed 200,000 people, mostly Maya, according to the United Nations-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission.

Angelica, a mother of five and grandmother of four from Barrio La Union in Guatemala's nickel-rich region of El Estor, the story that brought her to Canada left many in tears.

On September 27, 2009, Angelica's husband, Adolfo Ich Chaman, was murdered, hacked with a machete and shot, by the head of the security guards for Inco's subsidiary, Compania Guatemalteca de Niquel (CGN). Adolfo's son, Jose Manuel, witnessed his father's murder. His father had told him that his father was dead. Angelica says that memory inspires her to go on fighting for justice for her husband.

Adolfo was 50 years old when he was murdered. His widow says the time for mourning is over and now is the time to fight. Her fight is making legal history in Canada.

On July 22, an Ontario Court made a precedent ruling that will allow a case against a Canadian company over actions of one of its international subsidiaries to go ahead in a Canadian court for the first time.

Thirteen Maya people from Guatemala are suing HudBay in Canada for actions of its Guatemalan subsidiary. Other claimants besides Angelica include 11 women who say they were raped by the mine's security guards, police and military, and German Chub, a 20-year-old man who was shot by the mine's security guard while playing soccer and left paralyzed from the waist down in the same day that Angelica's husband was murdered.

Angelica, too emotional after the film screening to offer further insights to the tearful audience, said she was not prepared to hear her voice again. Adolfo, a teacher, often entertained his neighbours with his songs. Defensora includes a recording of Adolfo singing a lively song of resistance to destruction of the land and extermination of their people.

Angelica said it was important for her to visit the Mi'kmaq people and their allies against shale gas during her visit to New Brunswick. At both the Mi'kmaq Traditional Government Longhouse on Route 116 and at the camp in Renox where the RCPM violently arrested those blocking shale gas fracker trucks on October 17, Angelica saw Mi'kmaq people facing legal struggles of their own.

Earlier that week, on October 28, ten people, well known organizers in the anti-shale gas movement in New Brunswick, were named in a statement of claim by SWN Resources, the company that explores for, extracts from and discards on unceded Mi'kmaq territory in Kent County. They face a variety of charges, including blocking and damaging the company's vehicles and harassing and threatening bodily harm to the company's employees.

Serena Financial's Mi'kmaw Chief from Ekluskog, met with Angelica at the Longhouse. Despite the language barrier, From the Longhouse they speak with the same heart in defence of the land.

Harper's EI changes:

- serving a long tradition of flooding the low wage market

- Community, labour and student groups across Canada are sounding the alarm over the federal government’s failure to control the EI fund for workers who are preparing for a long winter. On November 5, over 80 groups advocating for fair employment insurance policies issued a statement opposing the changes and suggesting their immediate withdrawal.

- “The unemployment rate hasn't gone down, but the number of people collecting EI benefits has. It may be a failure of the economy, or perhaps it may be that they couldn’t get the EI benefits and there were no jobs so they relocated out of province,” says Patrick Colford, president of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, the New Brunswick Federation of Labour.

- Many workers, particularly in Atlantic Canada, are dependent on seasonal employment with little or nothing available in off seasons. Others are laid off and required time to find another job suitable to their skills. Evading these considerations and ignoring the fact that there are more unemployed people than available jobs (in NB there are 10 people searching for each available job), the federal government has suggested that their EI changes target laziness. It was in this context that Federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty famously commented that “there is no such thing as a bad job,” and the Prime Minister spoke of millions of dollars being lost through “false or fraudulent or inappropriate claims.”

- These comments distort reality and have a special design. The plan into the mythology of the lazy recipient. There is this idea of someone collecting EI getting back, enjoying gifts or handouts from the state.

- This mythology is being used to restructure the program,” argues Dr. Thom Workman, Chair of the Political Science Department at Brock University and the author of If You're in My Way, I'm Walking: The Assault on Working People Since 1970.

- The EI changes force workers into lower wage jobs, and eliminate the formula that determines the amount of EI benefits that individual workers could be entitled to. Change to the formula were categorized into three tiers: long-tenured, frequent and occasional claimants. Workers in all three categories must accept jobs at lower wages. Failure to accept or to locate a job within 30 days of registration would result in an automatic 25 per cent of the total, the face steepest drops, with both. Even worse, the government’s changes have also eliminated the “false” EI benefits. In addition, EI recipients must accept a job within an hour’s distance, with no subsidies to cover travel costs. A Prince Edward Island woman, Marlene Giersch, lost her EI benefits last November when she chose not to accept a job that was too far.

- Even worse, many workers have no access to any EI benefits. Among the changes, “special parental benefits” were eliminated for migrant workers, the only subclass of EI to which they had access, in spite the fact they pay EI premiums.

- “Instead the government is cutting more. EI benefits are also being limited more deceptively. As revealed in a leaflet by the Good Jobs for All Coalition, Service Canada has already made a number of job cuts, with no subsidies to cover travel costs. Many of these workers would have processed EI claims. Last winter, the media was full of stories about EI processing delays and unresolved files. Today, many calls to the 1-800 call centre are not even transferred due to high volumes.

- While the Harper Government’s EI changes may seem particularly noteworthy, reality lists that Harper’s welfare cuts as the Conservatives. Between 1994 – 1996, the Chrétien... (continued on page 2)