



The Brief

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Anti-fracking rally fills downtown Moncton

By STEPHEN DOWNES

Moncton - Police closed Main Street as about 500 protesters descended on downtown Moncton to protest shale gas and fracking in the province.

Protesters marched down Main Street from Highfield Square and assembled in front of City Hall. The demonstration was peaceful, with around a dozen police in attendance.

"Don't be fooled," said Moncton physician Dr. Angela LeGresley addressing the crowd. "This method (fracking) has a tremendous environmental footprint."

LeGresley spoke not only of immediate health effects such as increased asthma reported at drill sites but also of associated harms such as the exhaust of trucks needed to transport the 5 million gallons of water needed for one fracking event.

"The unconventional drilling for natural gas has gotten ahead of the science to prove it safe," she said.

She referred to legislation in Pennsylvania where news reports describe a "controversial section imposing confidentiality agreements on doctors who gain access to "trade secret" chemical compounds" - that would prohibit doctors from revealing to patients the nature of chemical compounds they have been exposed to.

"This appears to be a large ill-conceived experiment," she said.

"We are winning this battle," said another speaker, Brad Walters, noting that anti-fracking legislation has been passed in jurisdictions such as New York and Vermont. Walters is a professor of geography and environmental studies at Mount Allison University.

In New Brunswick, Southwestern Resources Canada (SWN) has abandoned testing for shale gas this summer, attributing the slowdown to delays in obtaining permits rather than declining gas prices.

The NB Chapter of the College of Family Physicians has called for a moratorium on shale gas exploration, said Dr. Elizabeth Massarelli, reading from a statement by Dr. Anick Pelletier, president of the NB College of Family Physicians.

Studies are only starting to emerge on the impact of fracking, and there is still a need to look at the cumulative effects, she said.

This article was originally published in The Moncton Free Press.



Hundreds of people, both young and old, protested shale gas development in New Brunswick on a sunny Saturday in front of Moncton City Hall on June 2, 2012. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

What does NB Power have to do with the extinction of the Wayúu in Colombia?

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - "We fear the Wayúu will become completely extinct," warned Angélica Ortiz at a special hearing of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C. this past March. The Constitutional Court of Colombia agrees with Ortiz's assessment. In 2009, the court named 34 indigenous nations in Colombia - including the Wayúu - to be in danger of physical or cultural extermination due to armed conflict and forced displacement. The court called the situation "an emergency which is as serious as it is invisible."

Ortiz, a Wayúu woman from Colombia's La Guajira peninsula, linked the extinction of her community to the expansion of the world's largest open-pit coal mine, Cerrejon, which is owned by three mining giants, BHP Billiton, Xstrata and Anglo American. Ortiz feels that the mine is responsible for escalating armed conflict, violence including sexual assaults, widespread environmental degradation, loss of food crops and increased incidences of cancer and other health problems. According to Ortiz, people in her community feel compelled to flee and the displacement is threatening the survival of her indigenous community.

What does NB Power have to do with the imminent extinction of the Wayúu? NB Power's Belledune plant burns coal extracted from the mine threatening Ortiz's indigenous community. Coal extracted from Cerrejon is exclusively exported to meet the energy demands of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Massachusetts and other areas.

Coal from Colombia has been dubbed "Colombian blood coal" because of violent displacements of communities and assassinations of union leaders at the country's coal mines. Colombia has the horrendous distinction of being the most dangerous country in the world to be a unionist and having the second highest number of internally displaced peoples of anywhere in the world.

About 4,000 trade union leaders have been murdered in the last two decades in Colombia. On March 22, 2008, Adolfo González Montes, a worker and union leader at

Cerrejón, was tortured and killed at his home. He is survived by his wife and four small children. The Colombian government's failure to act on such crimes allows the perpetrators to kill trade unionists with impunity. Frederictonians held a fundraiser for the slain unionist's family in May of that year.

Between 3.9 million to 5.5 million people are internally displaced in Colombia, depending on the source. Many of the people violently displaced from their homes come from lands rich in minerals, oil and gas where many Canadian companies hold investments. Since the development of Cerrejón in 1982, indigenous Wayúu and Afro-Colombian communities in La Guajira have been forcibly displaced from their lands. Traditional agriculture-based livelihoods have been destroyed by dispossession of the land and industrial contamination. During the violent displacement of the Tabaco community, José Julio Pérez told an audience in Fredericton in 2006 that several people, including himself, sustained serious injuries after being attacked by the police. Other communities including Tamaquito face similar fates with the planned expansion of the mine.

On a 2006 delegation to the communities affected by the Cerrejón coal mine, Jairo Quiroz, a union leader said, "These communities lack the most minimal conditions necessary for a decent life. They seem to belong to the living dead." Debbie Kelly, an RCMP forensics officer from Halifax, Nova Scotia, who participated in the same delegation, reported, "Some only eat every three days and for the smiling little children, it is hard to take. Even though their little bodies are racked in open sores from contaminated water, they don't cry."

Canada signed a free trade agreement with Colombia in 2010. Free trade critics say the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), serves the interests of capital. They describe free trade agreements as a mechanism that allows soaring profits and reduced labour costs through the super-exploitation of workers in economically and politically oppressed areas. Labour unions, human rights organizations and church groups across Canada decried 45 assassinations of trade unionists in Colombia in 2009 as reason enough to oppose the deal. The agreement was also signed amidst the "false positives" scandal where Colombian soldiers were revealed to be killing citizens then dressing them up as leftist guerrillas or paramilitaries to say they were killed in combat.

While Canada opened its trade lines with Colombia, it closed its borders to Jairo Epiayu Fuentes, a Wayúu man from Tamaquito, who was scheduled to speak in the Maritimes about the imminent eviction of his community for the expansion of the Cerrejon mine just before the signing of the free trade agreement in 2009. His two attempts at receiving a

visa to enter Canada were denied while he was granted a multiple-entry visa into the U.S.

Thousands of mineral, oil and gas concessions have been granted or requested over approximately 40 per cent of Colombia. According to a Mining Watch Canada report, Canadian companies operating in Colombia are aggravating, causing or benefiting from the forced displacement of communities, widespread environmental harms and the annihilation of local livelihoods and food security.

While the Harper government refuses to acknowledge the many serious human rights problems associated with their pursuit to forge friendly foreign investor relations with the resource-rich country of Colombia, social movements in Colombia as well as organizations here in Canada like Mining Watch Canada and Amnesty International are alerting the public to the imminent extinction of entire peoples like the Wayúu and demanding an end to the extermination of indigenous and Afro-Colombian community leaders and trade unionists in Colombia.



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