



# The Brief

## Fredericton postal worker talks climate justice in Durban, South Africa

By TRACY GLYNN

Ruth Breen, a Fredericton postal worker and activist, was in Durban, South Africa this past December, for the UN Climate Change Conference. She attended the 5,000-strong March for Climate Justice. Breen marched with members of La Via Campesina, the Landless People's Movement, the Waste Pickers Association, many environmental groups, youth groups, and farmer, labour and social justice activists from around the world. "We were all sending a unified message to world leaders that real substantive changes must be negotiated and implemented now," said Breen about the march. "While the march was a demonstration of frustration toward world leaders' inaction, the participants chanted, sang, danced and celebrated the unity and strong community that had gathered for the march. The collective resolve to continue the struggle for climate justice was powerful. World leaders may turn their heads away but this movement will not stop until there is climate justice."

On December 6th, 2011, Breen joined the Canadian Youth Delegation for an information picket just outside the conference headquarters. Six Canadian youth were kicked out of the climate talks a day later when they interrupted Canadian Environment Minister Peter Kent's opening address by turning away from the minister and revealing t-shirts that said: "People Before Polluters" and "Turn Your Back on Canada." Activists cite the Alberta tar sands and the Harper government's support for carbon-emitting fossil fuels as reasons why they must resort to civil disobedience.

A highlight of Breen's trip was participating in a day-long event on climate change and class struggle organized by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa. Speakers included Pablo Solon, the former climate change negotiator for the Bolivian government and a main organizer of the Cochabamba Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, George Mavrikos, General Secretary of the World Federation of Trade Unions and Dale Wen, a researcher on climate change and China for the Third World Network.

Breen found Solon's talk very helpful towards understanding the terminology around the commercialization of climate change through carbon credits. According to Breen, many of the delegates at the UN conference spoke in jargon and acronyms which only serve to hide the devastating realities of climate change. She said that Solon addressed very clearly the proposed solutions on the table including those who wish to green the capitalist economy and those who feel that we need system change in order to stave off climate change. Breen participated in thought provoking discussions around how to phase out fossil fuels and how to avoid the pitting workers from the global North against those of the global South. She said, "There is a need for International Courts to try climate crimes."

Breen is very grateful for the enormous amount of knowledge imparted to her on climate justice: "I had many opportunities to listen and to ask questions to



Ruth Breen, a Fredericton postal worker and activist (far left), participating in climate justice action in Durban, South Africa in early December 2011.

some of the wisest climate change experts and longtime social justice activists. My learning curve took a direct and steep incline and it has taken some time for me to process and contemplate all I have learned; only to recognize just how much I don't know or understand."

"There is no doubt that the responsibility to effect real change will have to fall upon workers, civil society and church groups around the world. It is clear that governments are neither willing nor able to arrive at real solutions and we need to step up and take care of our planet," stated Breen. Breen recognizes this will not be easy. "Some believe a green economy of cap and trade style solutions is the quickest and most possible way to effect immediate change. Others believe

that carbon emissions are directly related to the capitalist system and what is needed is a full system change," noted Breen.

Breen plans to work on climate justice within her union and workplace. "I think at this time it is important for the Canadian labour movement to take a strong and clear stand on our commitment to climate justice. We should incorporate climate justice into all of our educational programs as part of justice related topics not just environmental topics. We need to place a climate justice lens on all aspects of our union work and focus on system change to that end," argued Breen.

## Lower skilled temporary foreign workers shut out from citizenship

By NAJAT ABDOU-McFARLAND

According to Canadian Immigration and Citizenship, 1,750 temporary foreign workers came to New Brunswick in 2011. These workers included higher skilled professionals, lower skilled labourers and live-in care givers. Temporary foreign workers face a number of barriers with regards to obtaining permanent residency status, accessing basic social services and having their rights respected.

Temporary foreign workers can apply for permanent residency through most provinces' provincial nominee programs, provided they have six months to two years work experience in the intended occupation and intended province of settlement. Preference is given to foreign students with post-secondary educations received in Canada, people with Canadian work experience, those with family connections to Canada or those who have an entrepreneurial background and capital.

Those who identify as low-skilled upon their arrival are effectively shut out of the opportunity to become permanent residents of Canada. In 2007, according to government statistics highlighted by the Canadian Council for Refugees, 44 percent of female temporary foreign workers were ineligible for permanent residency because they were doing lower skilled labour and did not have skilled work experience.

While some temporary foreign workers can gain permanent residency status by working in certain sectors identified by each province's nominee program (ex. tourism and hospitality, food processing and long haul trucking), agricultural work falls outside the route to permanent residency in any of the provincial nominee programs.

The federal government's Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SWAP) is responsible for bringing in lower-skilled agricultural workers. Most of these workers are "borrowed" from the Caribbean and Mexico typically for a period of 6 months after which time the workers must then return to their home countries.

The struggle to gain permanent residency is far from the only challenge facing temporary agricultural workers. In an interview with Rabble Radio on Sept. 17, 2009, Eddie Huesca with the Guelph, Ontario-based migrant justice group, Fuerza/Puwerza said he witnessed firsthand how migrant farm workers in Ontario were not given proper protective gear for pesticide spraying and as a result had pesticide exposure burns. He also noticed migrant farm workers' reluctance to bring up health and safety concerns with their employers for fear of being sent back home. "Workers who come here illegally have no status, no rights, no access to social services, live in secret and live in fear of deportation," said Huesca.

Additionally, there are several documented cases of economically desperate migrants being abused by recruiters who charge steep recruiting fees... (continued on page 2)

**NB MEDIA CO-OP**  
independent media by and for New Brunswickers

The NB Media Co-op relies on financial support from its members to fund high-quality, independent journalism by and for New Brunswickers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_