By TRACY GYNN

The Occupy movement has spread to the smaller city of Edmundston, New Brunswick, and has impacted public spaces that have been occupied in the past to demonstrate against the plight of the poor. Around 50 people, mostly students but also workers and retirees, demonstrated in front of Edmundston City Hall during the afternoon of Saturday, October 29th.

"I'm here today because of social and economic inequality," said Nicole Ouellé, a caregiver for the elderly who is making the same salary today in Edmundston that she made thirty years ago in Montreal. "Food prices are going up all the time but our salaries have not," remarked Ouellé.

At an age when she should be planning her retirement and enjoying time with her grandchildren, Ouellé has gone back to work in caregiving, a sector traditionally dominated by women that is today considered underpaid by pay equity advocates. Caregivers like Ouellé and her male co-worker who also participated in Occupans Edmundston would benefit from long-awaited pay equity legislation in the province. Pay equity is equal pay for work of equal or comparable value. Skill, responsibility, effort, and the length of time for which directors long ignored in jobs predominately done by women.

"My husband works in Alberta. One of our kids is forced to work outside the province. We wish we could live near our kids so that we could get to know our grandchildren better," said Ouellé.

France Ritchie, Ouellé's friend, who gave some of the students a hug upon her arrival, said, "They take $30 away from the poor all the time until the end of the war. I'm old enough so it doesn't affect me to protest. A lot of people are afraid to lose their jobs or their reputation and that's why they're not out in the streets. We're here to support the people occupying Wall Street. We will not take it anymore. It started in Egypt. I know it was only a matter of time before it spread here."

Another student who came out because his 15 year old son, Emmanuel, felt it important to attend, "I'm against the government, the 99% is the majority and the minority puts it in their pockets." The father and son held signs that conveyed this message. They were greeted with many students of support from other parts of the province, young but I'm thinking of the consequences," said Emmanuel Charest.

The majority of the people who participated in Occupans Edmundston were students from the Edmundston campus of Université de Moncton. They sang songs that warmed the crowd during the chilly October afternoon.

Two targets of protest have appeared at the Occupy sites: one attacks corporate greed and the banks while the other highlights the system, namely capitalism. Opponents of the latter target do not feel that equality will result as long as economic and political interests are inherent to the system. The latest crisis, its effect on workers, and now the Occupy movement have created opportunities to question capitalism and discuss another form of economic and social relations in which every worker is able to control their lives and realize their full potential, dreams and capacities.

"I'm here to protest against capitalism," said Sébastien Levasseur, one of the university students studying philosophy, politics, and international relations. "We are destroying everything including the environment." Étienne to withdraw any pension plans that ignore the student, who held a sign with the popular Occupy slogan, "Capitalism isn't broken, it was built that way," agreed with Levasseur. "I hate the system. The rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. It's expensive to study right now. We are the new generation and we don't do something," said Rousseau.

Dominic Duval, an arts and social sciences student, organized Occupans Edmundston after seeing someone to organize it and no one did. "The Occupy movement has spread to over 120 countries and 1600 cities. It is important for us to do its thing here. We don't want to promote the status quo. We want change. We need change," said Duval.

Nicole Ouellé said the Fraser Papers pensioners in Edmundston who lost about 35 percent of benefits of their pensions are part of their movement. When Fraser Papers received protection under the Companies Creditor's Arrangement Act in 2009, Brookfield Asset Management, its controlling shareholder, sold part of the company to itself and divested itself of pension obligations for all their pensioners and current workers.

Brookfield Asset Management, with former New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna, came under fire recently at the original Occupy Wall Street location for threatening to evict Occupy participants in Zucotti Park, which has been renamed Liberty Square by Occupy participants. Brookfield owns Zucotti Park. The company called for the cleaning of the park after their calls were not successful and the occupation continues.

Like Nicole Ouellé, some of the pensioners have been forced to go on the street. "We have nothing. We are on the streets," said one mill pensioner, said he sent 134 resumes over a five month period and got three part-time jobs at minimum wage. Sarabous said he had to take the jobs because he and his family need to pay rent and meet their necessities that require costly medications.

"I worked at the Fraser Papers' mill in Edmundston, New Brunswick for 36 years. On each pay cheque, I contributed a portion of my wages to the pension fund, which I believed would be a guaranteed investment. In 2009, with talk of a potential bankruptcy at Fraser. I decided to cash out each year with the amount of securing my assets. I signed documents and withdrew the first pension payment that I was entitled to. Unfortunately, I was able to benefit from my full pension for only three months. Having given 36 years of my life to Fraser Papers, I got a full pension for three months. In other words, one month of pension for every 30 years of service!" Edmundston pensioners were among the first to participate in Occupy actions in Canada. Organized as the Victims of Brookfield Association, with a membership of 800 retirees, four Edmundston pensioners and two Thuroc, Quebec pensioners participated in Occupy Toronto and demonstrated in front of the Toronto offices of Brookfield Asset Management on October 15th. They shared their stories of losing their hard-earned pensions.

It's not the first time that the pensioners occupied Brookfield Asset Management's head offices in Toronto. On January 10th, union leader Guelin Meminand and Fraser Papers' pensioners occupied the company's office. According to the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers' Union, the union representing the pensioners and workers, CEO Bruce Fatt was "not concerned" that pensioners could lose 40% of their pensions as a result of the company's restructuring plan. A year later, the pensioners and union leaders occupied the office again in an attempt to have the company reinstate the workers' pensions. The workers were escorted out of the office both times. "Why the Occupy movement? Because too many laws in this country are about protecting big corporations, not workers," wrote Sarabous.

Protesters at the Occupy Edmundston rally join in the global Occupy movement. Edmundston has experienced its fair share of economic hard times, prompting students, pensioners and workers to gather to speak out against the unfairness of the capitalist system. Photo by Tracy Gyinn.

Why I am participating in Occupy Fredericton

By TAYEON KIM

"Knowing what is enough is true wealth." - The Tao Te Ching

As we prepared to head out to Occupy Fredericton's rally, I asked my boyfriend if he wanted to join. The Occupy Fredericton occupation movement was about. Nope.

"Okay, I drew a circle and shaded in a small area. "Oh!" He looked excited. He'd seen this before in his math class, and before I could explain, he said, "I know, I know, it's not enough!"

"Yes, Ok. Imagine you're at a birthday party and there are ten people. One lady brings this whole big piece, and the rest of the nine kids have to split what's left. Is that fair? He looked offended. "No way."

Any kid can understand this. We take so much pains to nurture sharing and fairness in our children. But then, when we throw them off into the big wide world, suddenly they're confronted with a system where sharing is suspect and fairness is naive. If you want to get ahead and "succeed" in this system, otherwise known as capitalism, then you’d better learn the values you learned as a child.

But in that birthday cake scenario, our family would probably have gotten a pretty decent piece of that cake, though not as much as that 1% kid. We would probably have enough. Because within the 99%, some of us are still better off than others, some of us still have a job, a home, and a decent income. So if we’re doing so well, why did I go to the Occupy Fredericton rally?

Call me naive and my motives suspect, but I still hold to those values I grew up with as a child: sharing and fairness. Only now, as an adult, I call them equity and justice. Any movement for justice must rely on more than self-interest. It must tap into the conscience of those who are not directly suffering to recognize that we cannot live a moral life while others suffer because of us.

For years, we didn’t see how people in other parts of the world suffered at our expense. Because of our foreign policies fashioned by multinational corporations, because of our insatiable desire for cheap consumer goods, because of our careless destruction of the environment and overuse of natural resources, because of... (continued on page 2)