



The Brief

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Decision to shut down Rexton camp by force adding new resolve, support to protest movement



After being pepper sprayed by a RCMP officer, an Ilnu grandmother holds up an eagle feather and rosary beads as a line of armed police move in to arrest those holding their ground at a blockade to stop shale gas exploration in Rexton, on unsundered Mik’maq territory, on October 17th. She was arrested and held in custody until the next morning. Photo by Ossie Michelin.

By DALLAS MacQUARRIE

St. Ignace – Anti-shale gas protesters in New Brunswick are gearing up for more confrontations with the province in the wake of the Alward government’s decision to have the RCMP shut down a protest camp in Rexton by force on October 17th. The camp, outside the Irving Compound on Highway 134 south of Rexton, had been the site of a three-week peaceful protest that had kept five shale gas thumper trucks confined to the compound.

The decision to end a peaceful protest by force ended in a debacle that saw 40 people arrested, five RCMP vehicles burned, and the use of pepper spray and rubber bullets. It also triggered spontaneous demonstrations elsewhere in New Brunswick. Activists in Kent County report that people previously not involved in the protest are now calling to ask how they can help.

Less than 24 hours after the Rexton camp had been stormed by more than a hundred RCMP officers in riot gear, some with weapons drawn and attack dogs, hard questions were already being asked about the Alward government’s timing and motivation. Protesters point to the fact that the provincial government’s use of force to end the Rexton protest came the day before Aboriginal peoples were to seek a court injunction against SWN for invading their territory. That the attack was designed to portray protesters as violent people and influence how the Aboriginal injunction would be received in court cannot be discounted.

Since Aboriginal land in New Brunswick has never been sold or ceded to the Crown by treaty, several lawyers have stated privately that Aboriginal peoples have a very strong basis on which to assert they are still the rightful owners of so-called Crown land in New Brunswick. As the legal owners, the Aboriginal peoples would have the right to evict SWN from their territory.

On October 2, Elsipogtog Chief Arren Sock stunned the provincial government by announcing that his band and the Signitog District Grand Council representing Aboriginal peoples in the Maritimes were immediately resuming direct control of their ancestral lands. A week after Sock’s historic announcement, Premier David Alward began direct talks with the Mi’kmaq people and representatives of community groups across the province seeking to stop shale gas development aimed at peaceful resolution of the Rexton stand-off.

Yet, after only two such meetings with the Alward government, Chief Sock and members of the Elsipogtog band council were among those arrested when RCMP overran the Rexton protest camp. Protesters say the move to arrest Sock, who has been an outspoken advocate of non-violent resistance, shows the Alward government has no real commitment to listening to the legitimate concerns of the people.

Also scooped up, for the second time since June, was *Halifax Media Co-op* reporter Miles Howe. Howe’s June arrest has been investigated and condemned by the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. Today, many are questioning whether free expression on the issue of shale gas really exists in New Brunswick anymore.

The belief that the Alward government is using the RCMP to achieve its political goals has been indirectly bolstered by its already-demonstrated commitment to ideology rather than to science. For the last two years, Premier Alward and his cabinet have pointed to a government-sponsored study as the scientific basis for their decision to develop the shale gas industry.

In September, however, that report, entitled *The Path Forward*, was reduced to mere “junk science” in the service of politics when it was revealed that Louis LaPierre, the man hired to prepare the report, did not have the scientific credentials he had claimed. Undaunted, the Alward government declared it didn’t really matter if its own report was fraudulent junk science because it was going ahead with shale gas development anyway.

The cynicism with which the province discarded the need for an independent, scientific evaluation of shale gas is evident in its newly-assumed pose of seeking some sort of peaceful resolution to a violent situation which it created. Thus, the Alward government is still proclaiming it wants to negotiate, but that it has no intention of changing its position.

The province’s heavy-handed action may actually be creating a bigger political headache for the beleaguered Conservatives, who face an election in 11 months. Protesters are heartened by an upswing in calls of national and international support, and report they are ramping up plans for more peaceful resistance. Far from cooling off protesters or frightening them away with a show of force, the dismantling of the Rexton camp by force appears to be generating new support to the anti-shale gas movement.



Wolastoqiyik grandmother Alma Brooks takes part in constructing the Traditional Government Wolastoq Longhouse on Saturday, Oct. 26 along the banks of the Wolastoq River (Saint John River) in front of the N.B. Legislature in Fredericton. The next day, the sacred fire lit at Saint Mary’s was moved to to the Longhouse where indigenous people and allies gathered inside the Longhouse and witnessed ceremonies and listened to the words of Harry LaPorte, Wolastoq Grand Council Chief and the Wolastoq chiefs. Saint Mary’s Chief Candice Paul read a declaration signed by the chiefs calling for a moratorium on shale gas. A Traditional Government Wolastoq Longhouse is a place for democratic assembly to discuss important matters that involve the clans (families) of the nation. Photo by Liane Thibodeau.

Food insecurity: is it just a neoliberal euphemism for hunger?

BY SARAH-JANE THIESSEN

Fredericton is all abuzz about food. We hear things like “buy local,” “buy what’s in season,” “buy organic.” We are encouraged to replace our lawns with vegetables and to grow our own food. People are honing the almost forgotten skills of canning and preserving to enjoy the bounty of a fall harvest all year long. There is a growing culture of treasuring not only the taste of food, but also where it comes from and how it’s cooked. Some people who are really into this call themselves “foodies,” others “locavores,” but regardless of what you call it, it’s likely delicious.

This growing awareness about food is considered a step towards a more environmentally sustainable and healthy food system. Nevertheless, there is more to food than where it’s grown and how it’s prepared. There is a part of the food movement that some “foodies” and locavores appear to be distinctly detached from. In conversations about food and sustainability, we seldom discuss one of the most pressing issues in New Brunswick today – who gets to eat this way?

Anyone who has been in a grocery store lately will likely have some idea. The local, organic foods are “fancy” foods, they are luxuries, they are expensive. Prohibitively so. Anyone who has ever been to a food bank or a community kitchen will understand what I mean. The food there is donated, much of it from food corporations. It is non-perishable, so it can stay on the shelf indefinitely. But it’s not as if the food on the shelves of a food bank gets the opportunity to collect dust.

This is where the culture of “foodies” is dangerous. It perpetuates notions of class and social status through hierarchicalization of food. If we think about the words of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, “tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are,” and how they have been reduced to the popular idiom “you are what you eat” we quickly see how ingrained food is to identity, society and culture. How we get our food, where it comes from, what it is, and why we make those choices (if they are choices) are all indicative of our individual personalities and histories, and our places in greater social and political arrangements. There are many people who are not afforded the opportunity to choose their food, much less choose local, seasonal and organic foods.

Having the luxury of making food choices is called food security. Being worried about where your next meal might come from, running out of food and skipping meals for economic reasons are all indicative of food insecurity. According to the 2011 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 16.5% of people in New Brunswick are food insecure. The rate for children in this province is 24.5%. The CCHS was used in a research and policy paper by Valerie Tarasuk, Dachner called “Household Food Insecurity in Canada” published in 2013 by PROOF. PROOF is a program of research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity. From a national perspective, New Brunswick ranks third on rates of food insecurity, behind Nunavut (36.5%) and narrowly below the Yukon (16.7%).

Food security is defined by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN as occurring when “all people have physical and economic... (continued on page 2)