Wabanaki people invite solidarity in the face of threats to their land and water

By TRACY GLYNN

Alma Brooks, a familiar face in the movement against shale gas, wants non-natives to join the Wabanaki Confederacy in solidarity with the Wabanaki Nation on September 1st and 2nd. Recognizing multiple threats to Wabanaki territory, members of the Maliseet Grand Council and St. Mary’s First Nation are for the first time inviting non-natives who wish to join them in struggle against destructive resource extraction and historical and ongoing colonization to sit in council and witness the traditional celebration of the state of their conference. The conference organizers state, “Creating a circle of solidarity is the first step in the connection of the different peoples. These issues must be addressed head-on before true reconciliation and sincere relationships can be formed.”

The Wabanaki Confederacy, including the Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples, have been gathering in council in Wabanaki territory long before European settlers arrived. Wabanaki means people of the dawn and downland people. Wabanaki territory covers the Atlantic provinces, southern parts of Québec, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Brooks, a member of the Maliseet Grand Council and St. Mary’s First Nation, says, “We will talk about the obstacles found in our peace and friendship treaties. The land and water in New Brunswick has never been ceded by our people. The time has long passed for us, nation to nation, to ignore the suffering of Wabanaki.”

Shale gas, the Sisson tungsten and molybdenum mine near Saint John Harbour, to name a few, are the realities of New Brunswick. “I’m certainly not the only one concerned about the potential threats to the environment,” says Brooks. “Maine are some of the concerns that Brooks wants discussed at the conference. She wants strong resolutions and plans of action coming out of the conference: ‘We need to take another look at our land and water: now they are the building blocks of life. We all depend on the land and water. Right now they’re at risk.’”

Brooks’ story of fighting for the Wulustuk River, known as the ‘River of Highways’, is one that will be told. The proposed 4th ivies explorations for shale gas in August 2011, the blockade in Stanley that stopped the exercises, are all stories exploring for shale gas. Brooks’ story of the Sisson tungsten and molybdenum mine near Saint John Harbour, to name a few, are the realities of New Brunswick. “I’m certainly not the only one concerned about the potential threats to the environment,” says Brooks. “Maine are some of the concerns that Brooks wants discussed at the conference. She wants strong resolutions and plans of action coming out of the conference: ‘We need to take another look at our land and water: now they are the building blocks of life. We all depend on the land and water. Right now they’re at risk.’”

Upon returning from the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, Brooks is sharing what she learned at the forum. The theme of this year’s forum was the doctrine of discovery. “The doctrine of discovery has been recognized as the most discriminatory, genocidal document in the world. It is condemned around the world,” says Brooks. The doctrines of discovery, domination and terra nullius (land belonging to no one) were used by colonizers across the world to justify theft of land, destruction of culture, and the abrogation of the rights of indigenous peoples. The Permanent Forum called upon states to renounce the doctrines that deny the rights of indigenous peoples.

The threat of lands and destruction of the hunting territories of the Maliseet people is described by Andrea Beaulieu, a St. Thomas University professor of native studies, in A Summary History of St. Mary’s to 1950: “These events have been characterized as the natural progress of civilization, but they were not natural, or even accidental. They were the direct consequences of greed and corruption on the part of wealthy colonial authorities who began by granting away huge tracts of Maliseet lands, often to themselves, and in direct violation of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. Next they designated all ungranted lands as Crown lands, overlooked or participated in massive and uncontrolled lumbering operations, profited from huge land settlement schemes, passed the offensive 1844 act legalizing the management and disposal of lands reserved for Indians, and became directly involved in massive fraud as railroad barons/legislators by granting more Crown lands to one another.”

Today, the endemic problems rooted in a social system based on production for profit continue to wreak havoc across Maliseet lands, Wabanaki territory and Turtle Island. Indigenous people have fiercely defended their rights by various means necessary including suing the government over mining or hunting, physically occupying the Orono Dam in Barriere Lake and Grassy Narrows to stop logging. The repressive apparatus of the capitalist Canadian state including the police, military and the courts have been used to crush movements across the country that attempt to assert indigenous sovereignty. Many indigenous leaders have gone to jail and faced fines for defending their territories from mining exploration like former Aんどc Algonquin Chief Robert Lovelace and Kitsherumaykoosing InnuNWig Chief Donny Morris.

According to Pat Paul, editor of Wulustuk Times from Tobique, “Supreme Court decisions rendered during the past few years state that full consultation and Aboriginal consent and agreement must be conducted and reached well before any resources can be harvested and removed from native territories.”

“Treat the demand for cultural survival seriously is key to forging alliances with Aboriginal peoples according to David Bedford, a professor of political science at the University of New Brunswick, in his paper, Marxism and the Aboriginal Question: The Trajectory of Progress. He renounces the idea of progress as it is today understood. Bedford writes, ‘In New Brunswick, the Maliseet nation survived primarily on fishing salmon, on hunting deer and moose, on gathering berries, fiddleheads and so on, and on staple agriculture. A socialist society committed to the continued existence of Maliseet culture would have to make significant changes to the industrial development of the region. It is not enough simply to set aside some land and then pay out welfare. Cultural survival requires that the economic base of culture be preserved. This means saving old growth forests, stopping clearcutting, close to stream beds and significantly reducing industrial activity on the major river arteries.’

For Alma Brooks, the survival of all of us depends on beginning the process of decolonization by stopping shale gas exploration and the Sisson tungsten and molybdenum mine on Wabanaki territory. She invites you to join her in these struggles.

El reform: a gift to capital and a slap in the face for labour

By CHRIS WALKER

In light of looming El reforms, it’s worth taking a good hard look at the justifications being presented for the proposed changes, what the expected consequences will be, and what we may actually think about all the El proposals.

The editorial pages of corporate media follow a well-worn script that demeans the Atlantic Canadian seasonal work. Maclean’s magazine asserts that El is “discriminatory” in that it “rewards seasonal unemployment and encourages a culture of give me work, pay me, and I’ll give you another.” According to MacLean’s, not only does El exclude most seasonal work from Atlantic Canadian, El “imposes a tremendous price on the Canadian economy as a whole.”

Buying into this theme, Andrew Coyne explains in the National Post that because El “raises costs to employers” in regions where seasonal work is being employed.” Coyne added that removing the El subsidy to PEI’s potato and lobster industries would allow other, more stable industries to develop. This would supposedly free Islanders from their El dependency trap. Coyne is making a prediction based on a comprehensively espoused economic theory, but is it actually true? Does employment increase as El benefits are rolled back? Does employment decrease as El benefits become more generous? The C.D. Howe Institute, a conservative think tank, has stated that, “[M]ajor changes to El in 1990, 1994 and 1996 effectively increased the barriers and reduced the benefits available to recipients,” but such changes had an “imperceptible effect” on the number of individuals reducing their work to social assistance in order to make ends meet, and in other cases individuals would “search harder for an alternative job.”

Their conclusion is that, “macroeconomic conditions have an extremely strong impact” and declining unemployment (from 12% in 1993 to 6.7% by 2005) “was the single most important factor in reducing the incidence of [social assistance] benefits.” These conclusions are the opposite of Coyne’s assertion. Macroeconomic factors are the more important determinant. “Since the 1990’s, El has been used to stimulate job growth in any significant way.” What if we ask the opposite question? When El was introduced, did that increase unemployment? When federal employment insurance was introduced in the 1940’s, Canada’s unemployment was 7% and has been 7% since the 1940’s. Again, El was utterly insignificant: El did not cause this boom, it supported it.

And what are the predictable… (continued on page 2)