



The Brief

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“Poor and can’t pay anymore” St. Thomas students strike back against tuition hike



St. Thomas University students gather in front of the administration offices to send a message against rumours of tuition hikes in March of this year.
Photo by Tracy Glynn.

By TRACY GLYNN

Fredericton - St. Thomas University students plan to defend education as a right in light of the university’s decision to charge them \$434 more this year in tuition. Posters saying, “Poor and can’t pay anymore” appeared on campus last winter before the announcement of the tuition increase that students say they have come to expect every academic year. In March, a newly formed student group called Students Against STUition organized a protest in front of the administration’s offices to denounce the proposed tuition hike. “The administration at STU has decided to defy a tuition cap because they will obey a financial imperative before anything else,” says Denis Boulet, a third year history student at St. Thomas University and one of the organizers of the March protest. St. Thomas University’s President Dawn Russell argues that the tuition increase is needed to avoid a \$600,000 deficit in light of the provincial government freezing operating grants to universities in the last budget. The tuition increase means that the university will defy the \$150 tuition increase cap also outlined in the budget. Boulet claims he has been told by some in the university administration that inflating the price of a Bachelor of Arts degree will solve the university’s financial and enrolment woes because prospective students will think the cost of tuition is a direct indication of its quality. “This elitist interpretation of the value and nature of education completely ignores the fact that education is a

seriously contemplated by 9.5 per cent. “I have noticed that more of my students are experiencing serious health conditions, including what I expect to be anxiety-related, connected to having more on their plate than just getting good grades,” says Joan McFarland, an economics professor who has been teaching at St. Thomas University for over three decades. Brad Cross, a history professor at STU, shares McFarland’s assessment of the struggles facing students. He says that it is important for professors to join students in their fight to recognize education as a right and not a commodity. “The province used to cover about 75% of university budgets but that support has been eroded in the last few decades to meet only about 45% of the costs for undergraduate education. STU receives the lowest per capita funding of all New Brunswick universities but has the highest percentage of students from New Brunswick. It looks to me like the province is increasingly shifting the burden of undergraduate education onto the indebted shoulders of the New Brunswick student. This is a troubling trend,” says Cross. Boulet welcomes the support for students from professors and also the broader labour movement in Fredericton. “We are learning lessons from the Quebec student movement on how to get organized and we are building lines of solidarity with the labour movement in the Fredericton area. It is our belief that solidarity beyond the student body will be required to face our many challenges,” argues Boulet. “Only the rich will be able to enjoy the benefits of an education if nothing is done,” worries Boulet.

right, not a commodity. Students are not attending university or are dropping out because they can’t afford to pay. Graduates often have to work harder and at more than one job in order to free themselves from their debt obligations,” says Boulet. How students are dealing with the prospects of finding no job or a poorly paid job upon leaving university with a debt load of tens of thousands of dollars was examined in a study by the Canadian Organization of University and College Health. Over half of 30,000 Canadian students surveyed (55%) from January to April of this year said that they are simultaneously grappling with three or more problems related to finances, academics, health, and relationships. Almost 90 per cent of students surveyed said that they felt overwhelmed by all they had to do in the past year, and more than 50 per cent said they felt hopeless. Suicide was attempted by 1.3 per cent of the students surveyed, while it was

Alward government’s flip-flop on wetlands triggers outrage across Richibucto River Basin

By DALLAS McQUARRIE

What began as one couple’s simple fishing trip has become another shale gas nightmare for the beleaguered first-term Conservative government of David Alward. In mid-July, Tina Beers and her husband John went fishing near Harcourt, and caught a shale gas drill rig stuck in environmentally sensitive wetlands that the provincial government had been promising to protect only 60 days earlier. Beers is the chairperson of the Harcourt Local Services District (LSD), on which John also serves. Alarmed by the obvious damage to the wetlands, the Beers called the Conservation Council of New Brunswick (CCNB). That’s when the full extent of the government’s flip-flop on the wetlands was revealed. CCNB Freshwater Program Director, Stephanie Merrill, was informed by the Department of Environment and Local Government that SWN Resources Canada had been given a permit to work in wetlands and watercourse buffers in eight counties (Albert, Kent, Kings, Northumberland, Queens, Sunbury, Westmorland and York). Merrill says the wetlands are “extremely critical” because wetlands function as “the lungs and the kidneys” of the planet. She points out that wetland ecosystems are vital to “regulating the flow and filtering the water” all New Brunswickers depend on. “Letting industry into wetlands is the exact opposite of what New Brunswick needs,” Merrill says, adding that “extreme pressure” from industry has resulted in the Alward government sacrificing environmental protection to short-term political considerations. The decision to open the wetlands to SWN had been made quietly in April, and it has left both local residents and environmentalists feeling angry and betrayed. Just two months earlier, the Alward government had been loudly proclaiming that its new rules and regulations for shale gas development would protect wetlands and other critically sensitive ecological areas. Beers says she was “shocked” to learn how easy it is for industry to get permission to be in the wetlands. About 35 kilometres northeast of Harcourt, along the northern edge of the Richibucto River Basin, St. Charles LSD chair, Al Marsh, says giving gas companies “a green light” to enter the wetlands shows just how serious the “disconnect” between Premier Alward and residents of Kent County really is.” Marsh says people in the St. Charles area are very angry about what they see going on. After personally fighting shale gas development for three years, Marsh is frustrated and says he intends to run as an independent MLA in the provincial election next year. “The wetlands are an extremely sensitive area,” Marsh says. “If my livestock gets in a creek or a farmer cultivates in the wrong area, we get fined. But the Department of the Environment doesn’t see any problem with letting industrial equipment with oil, grease, hydraulic and brake fluids and all sorts of industrial contaminants plough around in the wetlands.” He points to shellfish beds with oysters, mussels and soft-shell clams where the St. Charles River empties into the Richibucto River, and similar shellfish beds at the mouth of the Richibucto River. The peculiarities of the two tidal rivers means shale gas pollution in either river will destroy the shellfish beds in both. “It’s not only environmentalists,” Marsh says. “Farmers here are scared to death too. A single water well can cost \$10,000, and many people have two or three, so even one mishap by SWN is a... (continued on page 2)

NB Media Co-op Annual General Meeting with Keynote Address by Jan Wong

Join the NB Media Co-op's 4th annual general meeting on Sat., Sept. 21st at Conserver House, 180 Saint John St. in Fredericton.

Agenda:
11am • Jan Wong on Out of the Blue: a talk about the media, under-reported stories and workplace depression
12:30pm • Break for refreshments and conversation
1pm • Annual General Meeting

Jan Wong is an author and foreign correspondent who has worked for the *Montreal Gazette*, *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Globe and Mail*. She currently divides her time between Toronto, where she is a columnist for *Toronto Life* magazine, and Fredericton, where she teaches journalism at St. Thomas University and is a columnist for the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, Canada's biggest independently-owned newspaper. Jan is the author of five books, including *Red China Blues: My Long March from Mao to Now*. Her newest bestseller is *Out of the Blue: A Memoir of Workplace Depression, Recovery, Redemption and, Yes, Happiness*. Everyone is welcome but you must be a member to vote at the Members' Meeting! Not a member yet? Own your media today by contacting us at info@nbmediacoop.org or signing up at www.nbmediacoop.org. We are a co-op because we believe media should be democratically produced and sustained. Own your media today before your media owns you!

