

Addressing poverty requires that we address the economic system

(continued from page 1) ...indication of the precarious situation of people. They act pretty well like the canaries in the coal mines, giving warnings of imminent explosions," says Basque. "It is basically the lack of adequate income that force individuals and families to rely on food banks to meet a fundamental need: getting food for their survival."

The neoliberal era, from the mid 1970s and on, saw vicious attacks on the working class to restore profits during economic downturns. The neoliberal project calls for privatization of essential social services, deregulation, trade and financial liberalization, openness to foreign direct investment, a competitive exchange rate, fiscal discipline and lower corporate taxes. Neoliberalism's failure to stimulate growth, reduce poverty or generate greater economic stability has its proponents calling for more neoliberalism. Workers are told to adapt, accept concessions and tighten their belts during economic crises.

In October 1976, one million workers in Canada walked off the job to protest Trudeau's wage controls. Saint John labour activist George Vair recalls how workers in Saint John mobilized to defend their unions and defeat the unpopular program in his book, *The Struggle Against Wage Controls: The Saint John Story, 1975-1976*.

"The historic importance of the Canadian labour movement's fight against this ill-conceived federal legislation should not be underestimated. The labour movement was successful in lessening the impact of the controls on its members and eventually killing the program. They also mobilized and educated millions of workers about the worth of their unions. Workers saw their leaders standing shoulder to shoulder with them at the bargaining table and in the streets. As a result, the Canadian labour movement took a strong position against attempts to wring concessions out of collective agreements throughout the 1980s," writes Vair.

Despite the historical militant labour movement in Vair's hometown of Saint John, the city is struggling with some of the highest poverty rates in the country today.

The Central Saint John postal area, with a median family income of \$34,211, was ranked the sixth poorest in Canada, according to 2006 Stats Canada data. The Acadian Peninsula (Paquetville) was seventh poorest on the list, with a median family income of \$35,849. The picture for personal income in New Brunswick may be even more bleak. Seven New Brunswick postal codes made the top ten poorest list for median personal income – Esgenoopetitj (Burnt Church), Kingsclear, Eel Ground, Tobique, Elsipogtog, Red Bank, and Adamsville. Esgenoopetitj was the poorest, with a median income of \$9,200. The median income in the other communities was below \$14,000.

Often oddly missing from the discussion on reducing or eradicating poverty are the mechanisms which generate, perpetuate, spread and further entrench poverty and social inequality.

Thirty-five years after the historical mobilizations against Trudeau's wage controls followed by Mulroney and Chretien's free trade deals, in 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement reminded the world of inequality with their slogan, "We are the 99%." Many Occupy protesters across the world drew attention to the economic system, capitalism, in their signs of protest and demanded a different system of economic and social relations where basic social needs are met for every human being.

Economist Eric Schutz, in his 2012 book, *Inequality and Power: The Economics of Class*, argues that, "Attacking inequality will require nothing less than attacking capitalism itself. There are a host of pragmatic measures that can reduce inequality, but only those that address the system-generated power of the capitalists can strike down the structures that give rise to it in the first place."

Fashionable initiatives to reduce poverty through offensive acts of charity and small increases in minimum wage and welfare do little to challenge inequality. For all the talk of what the Occupy movement achieved or did not achieve, Occupy reminded us that there is a desire across the world to understand why the masses are condemned to live on the margins and in misery and that there are many willing to sacrifice and struggle to give birth to a more humane world where equality is imaginable.

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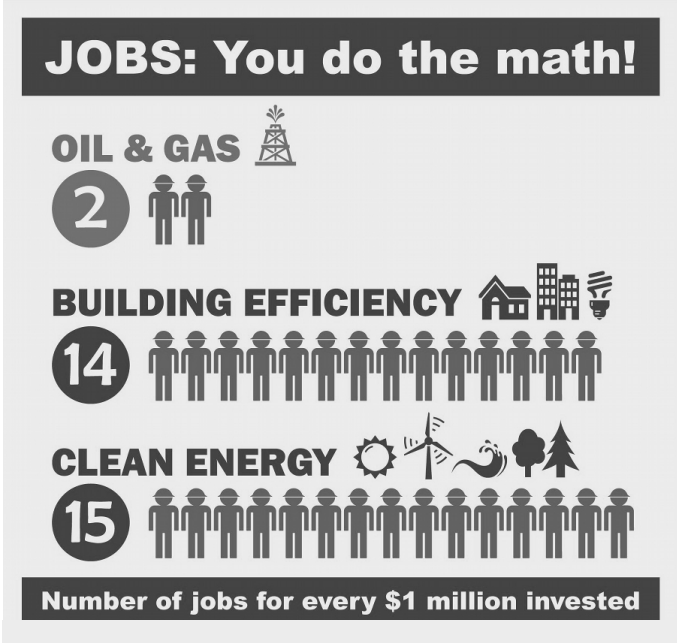
By JOAN McFARLAND

Government leaders and a number of other pundits are telling us that New Brunswick needs the shale gas industry and the West-East pipeline “for the sake of the economy,” particularly in regard to the province's serious unemployment problems. They are saying, basically, that “there is no alternative” vis-à-vis the economy even while admitting that both of these fossil fuel projects pose risks to the environment and bring on climate change.

The position that there is no alternative for the economy ignores a number of studies done in the last few years showing that investment in a green economy–e.g. in alternative energy, energy efficiency and low carbon transportation–is a far better engine of job creation than the oil and gas industry. All of these studies are available online.

A 2012 study by BlueGreen Canada entitled, *More Bang for Our Buck*, found that for every two jobs created in oil and gas, fifteen jobs could be created in clean energy. An earlier study (2010) also by BlueGreen Canada, *Falling Behind: Canada's Lost Clean Energy Jobs*, concluded that if Canada had matched, on a per person basis, the spending on renewable energy arising out of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, 66,000 (well paying) jobs could have been created in this country.

Even closer to home, there was an important study published in May 2012 by Environment Northeast (ENE). The study, entitled *Energy Efficiency: Engine of Growth in Eastern*



Canada, calculated potential macroeconomic effects of expanded energy efficiency programs for the region as a whole and for each province individually. In terms of job creation in New Brunswick, over a 28-year period, the study found that investment in energy efficiency programs alone (e.g. not even including new clean energy) could drive the creation of between 10,700 and 24,800 jobs years of employment in the province. The low estimate, 10,700 job years, is based on using just some of the potential of energy efficiency for job creation, while the high estimate, 24,800 job years, is based on using the maximum such potential.

The recent elimination of two energy efficiency programs at Efficiency New Brunswick flies in the face of the message of the ENE study. The message of the ENE study is that energy efficiency programs, in addition to lowering greenhouse gas emissions, are an investment in job creation for the province. Instead, it would seem, the programs were being seen merely as a cost which, if cut, would contribute towards the improvement of the province's fiscal situation.

Each of the studies described above is based, in approach and methodology, on a 2008 University of Massachusetts study, *Green Recovery: A New Program to Create Good Jobs and Start Building a Low-Carbon Economy*. *Green Recovery* showed the potential of green job creation for the recovery of the US economy after the 2008 financial crisis. Six key strategies were identified: retrofitting buildings, expanding mass transit and freight rail, constructing smart energy grids, production of wind power, production of solar power and production of next generation biofuels. With an investment of \$100 billion in these strategies, the study estimated that two million jobs could be created over a two year period, which offered a major contribution to the recovery of the US economy.

In conclusion, there is something missing in the conversation about New Brunswick's employment challenges. Not all projects offer equal job creation potential. In fact, the projects that are currently being touted offer relatively low job creation potential. Hopefully, when attention is brought to studies, which address the question of the job creation potential of various strategies and when the hoopla around the pipeline and shale gas has subsided, public policy can be turned to the greater potential of clean energy and energy efficiency.

Joan McFarland is a professor in the Department of Economics at St. Thomas University and is the Atlantic provinces' member of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council research project, "Work in a Warming World." A version of this commentary first appeared in the Telegraph-Journal on May 21, 2013.

Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org. To list your event, email: community@nbmediacoop.org.

Fall Feast & Fare: Fundraiser for the Conservation Council. Seasonal 3-course gourmet meal by Real Food Connections, Sat., Oct. 26, 6:30pm. Wilmot United Church, 473 King St. \$40/ticket. Tickets on sale at Conserver House (180 Saint John St.) or by emailing info@conservationcouncil.ca.

CCNB Media Co-op's Annual General Meeting. Sat., Oct. 19, 10am to 4pm at Conserver House, 180 Saint John St., Fredericton. Agenda: 10:00 am – Welcome / Business Meeting; 12:00 pm – Potluck, refreshments & networking; 1:00 pm – Guest speakers: Ron Tremblay, Maliseet elder, and Judie Acquin-Mikovsky, a St. Mary's Maliseet artist and activist, will speak on how environmental groups and First Nations can work together to protect the earth. Contact Tracy at 506 458-8747 or email info@ccnbaction.ca.

NB Media Co-op Story Meetings. Join us at our monthly story meetings in Fredericton where we discuss politics and current events and decide what to put in this paper every month. To find out the meeting time and venue, email info@nbmediacoop.org.

Cinema Politica believes in the power of art to not only entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica is the largest volunteer-run, community and campus-based documentary-screening network in the world. In Fredericton, films are screened on Fridays during the fall and winter at 7:00 pm at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. Check out film schedules and venues, or start your own chapter at: cinemapolitica.org.

In Brief

- SWN Resources resumed **seismic testing** in its hunt for shale gas in Kent County in September. Greg Cook, a well-known shale gas opponent, and a Mi'kmaq youth were arrested on Sept. 29th at what has been described as a peaceful protest. Cook was attempting to go around a line of police cruisers to deliver water to protesters during his arrest. His head was pushed to the pavement by police, leaving him bleeding from a wound above his left eye. The youth was arrested for leaning on a police cruiser. The RCMP blocked access to the north and south exits of Highway 134 and the road leading to the Irving-owned compound that houses five SWN Resource Canada seismic testing trucks the night of the arrests.
- The Higgins family in Nova Scotia lost their fight to prevent the **expropriation of their land for a gold mine** in a provincial Court of Appeal on Sept. 13. The provincial government expropriated a section of their property for Australia's DDV Gold Ltd. \$140 million open-pit gold mine. The Higgins family is planning to seek leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.
- Kim Chatillon-Meunier, a 24 year old University of Montreal student, was **jailed in the Philippines** for participating in an anti-government protest in Manila on July 22nd. A number of anti-government protests occurred in Manila that day following the State of the Nation address. There are 380 political prisoners in the Philippines as of May 2012.



Guatemalans attempting to sue HudBay Minerals, a Canadian mining company, in Canadian courts over alleged human rights abuses celebrated a court victory in July when an Ontario judge ruled their lawsuits can go ahead. For the first time, a case against a Canadian company over actions of one of its international subsidiaries will go ahead in Canadian courts. Angelica Choc (seen on the left, with solidarity activists in Halifax) is one of 13 Mayans from Guatemala suing HudBay. She claims that her husband, Adolfo Ich Chaman, was brutally murdered by HudBay's subsidiary's security guards. Choc will speak at the Fredericton premiere of *Defensora*, a film about her community's struggle, on Friday, Nov. 1st at 7:00pm at Conserver House, 180 Saint John St., in Fredericton. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

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