



# The Brief

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## NB Power asked to put conditions on blood coal from Colombia

By TRACY GLYNN



Francisco Ramirez Cuellar in Fredericton in November 2015. Photo by Brian Atkinson.

Fredericton - A Colombian union leader, lawyer and survivor of eight assassination attempts told a crowd gathered on November 24 in the province’s capital that New Brunswickers have a responsibility to know about and act on the blood coal that is leaving his country and being sold to NB Power.

Francisco Ramirez Cuellar spoke of the murders, violence and poverty linked to multinational mining companies in his country and asked NB Power to put conditions on the coal leaving his country. He believes that if NB Power cannot guarantee the rights of labour and indigenous peoples from its current sources it should buy coal from co-operative mining operations in his country that respect the rights and lives of workers and people affected.

Ramirez also wants workers in Canada to get their pension funds to divest from mining companies implicated in egregious human rights violations. “We want workers in Canada to have good pensions. Workers everywhere deserve good pensions but pensions should not be invested in companies that are killing us in Colombia,” said Ramirez in a meeting with union leaders in Fredericton.

NB Power imports coal from the Cerrejón coal mine that is owned by multinational giants BHP Billiton, Anglo American and Glencore. The world’s largest open-pit coal mine is linked to the murders of union and community leaders and violent forced displacements of communities.

Besides Cerrejón coal, NB Power confirmed at a meeting with Ramirez on Nov. 24 that the public utility is also buying coal from Glencore’s La Jagua mine and a mine in Montana, U.S. The coal is burned at the Belledune Generating Station in northern New Brunswick.

Colombia has the highest rate of assassinations of unionists in the world. About 3,000 union organizers have been murdered in the country in the past 25 years. One of the attempts on Ramirez’s life happened while he was walking with his children to a lunch counter in Bogota, the country’s capital.

José Julio Perez from Tabaco, a community that was displaced by the Cerrejón mine, told a Fredericton audience in 2006 that 500 soldiers and 200 police officers forcibly evicted the residents of his Afro-Colombian community before bulldozing their homes in 2001. Indigenous Wayúu, one of the most endangered indigenous communities in the world, have also been displaced for the mine. An estimated 5.8 million people are internally displaced in Colombia.

Jairo Quiroz, a union leader in Colombia, told a 2006 delegation of Canadians and Americans from places that buy the Cerrejón coal that the affected communities’ fundamental rights have been violated. “These communities lack the most minimal conditions necessary for a decent life. They seem to belong to the living dead,” said Quiroz.

Debbie Kelly, a RCMP forensics officer from Nova Scotia and a 2006 delegation member reported, “Some only eat

every three days and for the smiling little children, it is hard to take. Even though their little bodies are racked in open sores from contaminated water, they don’t cry.”

SINTRACARBON, the union at the Cerrejón mine, has included the demands of the affected communities, including compensation, in their collective agreements. The union will soon be negotiating a collective agreement with Cerrejón, making a letter from NB Power to the mining company very timely and important for the workers, says Ramirez.

Ramirez is again the subject of an action alert demanding his safety. Now, a leader with the federation of energy sector unions, FUNTRAENERGETICA, Ramirez is under serious threat from paramilitary groups in the country because of his union activism that involves a number of lawsuits against Canadian and multinational mining companies for their involvement in assassinations and displacement of thousands of Colombians.

Ramirez’s union is moving forward with a lawsuit against Alabama-based Drummond Coal for war crimes. Ramirez says they plan to sue Cerrejón for similar crimes as the company is implicated in the murder of eight indigenous Wayúu women in 2004 in Puerto Bolivar, the port community where the coal leaves on boats owned by Canada Steamship Lines, once owned by former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin.

In his 2004 book, *The Profits of Extermination: Big Mining in Colombia*, Ramirez explains that Canadian organizations like the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Canadian Energy Resources Institute (CERI) were involved with rewriting Colombia’s mining code to make mining more favourable to foreign investors in the way of reduced royalties. Ramirez argues that the new mining code is not providing the revenue it should from his country’s mines, revenue that is needed for essential public services like healthcare, education and drinking water.

Exxon-Mobil and the National Colombian Mining Company started the Cerrejón mine in 1982. The International Monetary Fund imposed free market reforms on Colombia in 2002 and the mine was sold to a consortium of multinationals. Today, Anglo-American, BHP Billiton and Glencore, three of the world’s biggest mining companies, own the mine. All three companies are implicated in human rights abuses and environmental degradation in the Philippines, Brazil and elsewhere.

Ramirez’s tour in Canada was organized and supported by the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network and was supported locally by the Fredericton & District Labour Council, the Association of UNB Teachers, the Public Service Alliance of Canada and St. Thomas University’s History Department.

Tracy Glynn is a member of the Atlantic Regional Solidarity Network and a member of the board of directors of MiningWatch Canada.

## The Worry Ladders: an art show that seeks to save NB’s forest

By MARGO SHEPPARD

Fredericton - “The Worry Ladders,” a multi-media exhibition on New Brunswick forestry by artist Ann Manuel, cries out for action, in pieces with names like “Loss,” “Waste” and “Sustainability.”

Manuel’s show embodies public anger following provincial government announcements in 2014 that it had struck deals with forestry companies to hike harvest rates on Crown lands by twenty percent.

“You start out on the bottom rung (of the worry ladder) and as you go up you approach full-blown anxiety,” said Manuel in an exhibition walk-through at the University of New Brunswick’s Memorial Hall in October, “As everyone knows, worry stalls action.”

The name of the exhibition comes from a quotation in a book called *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones and depicts the artist’s perspective on political and economic forces affecting New Brunswick’s public forests.

Public forests on unceded Wolastoq, Mi’kmaq and Passamaquoddy territory comprise half of this Maritime province, but few actually know the details of what goes on there. Industrial cutting licences issued by the Department of Natural Resources give ownership privileges to a handful of companies such as J.D. Irving.

Manuel’s show has five meticulously crafted ladders: composites of the trunks of native species (birch, poplar, spruce and alder), interwoven with aluminum ladder sections and ingeniously-placed cast-offs from old wood working equipment. A ceiling-mounted canopy of red osiers enshrouds the installation, their bright red bark, Manuel says, “an alarm system” of sorts.

The ladder is a metaphor for the ladder of success, and its triumph over all that is less-than, looked down-upon, denigrated, dominated—in other words, nature, and non-human living things. In this language of exploitation, nature falls into two categories: merchantable and everything else. Alders, white birch and willows for example, are “weed” or “junk” species. Manuel says that how we refer to objects is a reflection of a culture; words shape opinions and strongly influence our perceptions of the world.

Even the word “harvest,” normally associated with the idea of goodness or bounty, takes on a more sinister connotation when used to describe tree cutting. Picture the less than cornucopia-like maw of a chipping truck, always working but never satisfied. That image efficiently sums up the state of industrial forestry in this province.

The loss of deer herds is the theme of another ladder called “Loss.” In 2014 the NB Government, with the stroke of a pen, halved the number of deer yards and imperilled many bird and mammal species. Even white-tail deer, plentiful and numbering close to a quarter million when the Crown Lands and Forests Act came into effect in 1982, have dwindled and now number less than one-quarter of this. Biodiversity, misunderstood and having no perceptible market value, is a casualty of government indifference and industry greed. We are passing what Manuel calls a “tolerable equilibrium” as a result of our mistreatment of public forests.

A ladder called “Sustainability” features rungs made out of pieces of axes, handsaw and chainsaw blades, culminating with a part from a mechanical harvester. At the “low” end, the axe represents hundreds of men



The Worry Ladders by Ann Manuel. Photo by Alyssa Donaldson.

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# Watching Glory Die: Incomprehension remains : The Worry Ladders

By SOPHIE M. LAVOIE

Fredericton - Theatre New Brunswick showcased Nova Scotia’s Mulgrave Road Theatre Production of “Watching Glory Die,” written by Judith Thompson, and inspired by the tragic story of NB teen Ashley Smith who died while in prison.

This one-woman show featured the very talented Stephanie MacDonald, who carries the weight of the show by playing all three characters highlighted by the playwright. Glory is the incarcerated teen girl, Gail is the guard who works at the prison and Roseller is Glory’s mother.

MacDonald skillfully passes from one character’s monologue to the other in the blink of an eye. She was consecutively a creative and rebellious teen, a worried mother and a defiant guard and, showing her breadth as an actress, and was both distinct and believable as each protagonist.

Ashley Smith is a Moncton teen who committed suicide in the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener, Ontario, in 2007 while on suicide watch. As a young girl, Smith got in trouble for various minor offences and sentenced in juvenile court to detention at the New Brunswick Youth Centre in Miramichi, where her conduct, caused by a string of behavioural and personality disorders, triggered 800 separate incident reports against her and 150 attempts at self-harm.

When Smith turned 18, she was sent to adult jails and was transferred a total of 17 times from 8 institutions in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Ontario.

Although the guards and their supervisor were initially charged with negligence in 2007, the charges were later dropped. Smith’s mother, Coralee Smith, sued the Correctional Services of Canada for wrongful death in 2009. The teen’s death was investigated by two separate inquests in 2011 and 2012.

## In Brief

Saint John city council is moving ahead with a **public-private partnership (P3)** for a new 100 million litre/day drinking water treatment plant, three 11 million litre storage reservoirs and 15 other water transmission system improvements. Brookfield Financial Corp., a global investment bank, will lead the consortium that includes Spain’s Acciona Agua. The Council of Canadians, which opposes water privatization, is raising concerns that the Spain-based company could invoke the investor-state dispute settlement provision in the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), should it be ratified, if Saint John were to decide in the future to make their drinking water utility fully public. A retired commissioner for Saint John’s water has estimated the city could end up paying \$35 million more for the project than if it had been under a traditional tender.

Jaime Black, a Métis artist from Winnipeg, installed her internationally acclaimed **Redress** Installation around the St. Thomas University campus on Oct. 27. Black was accompanied by students, professors and Elder Sharlene Paul of the Tobique First Nation. Each of the dresses served as a reminder of Canada’s missing and murdered indigenous women. **Julie Kaye**, an Edmonton-based scholar and advocate for indigenous-led organizations, spoke about the importance of collectively mobilizing against Canada’s violence against indigenous women at the university on Oct. 28. Kaye highlighted the need for active engagement with indigenous organizations and with families of murdered and missing women to determine an action plan for change and reparation. Supported with images by an indigenous artist, Angela Sterritt, Kaye sought



The timing of the Fredericton play coincided with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s November 13th announcement that the Canadian government will move towards implementing recommendations from the last Ashley Smith inquest, specifically the banning of long-term solitary confinement for federal inmates and not putting vulnerable prisoners in solitary confinement.

Playwright Judith Thompson’s interlaced monologues capture the essence of the tragedy that surrounds the teen’s death, even today. Central to the performance is the incredulosity from all the people involved, as to the reason why and how the system somehow failed Ashley Smith. Given this conundrum, Thompson’s only answer in the play is to accentuate the incomprehension of all involved: Glory and Roseller wonder why Glory is in prison while Gail, the guard, wonders why she has this role. The bewilderment extends to the public’s reaction to the piece since it can’t help but feel for all of the actors involved.

Although the play claims to be loosely based on Ashley Smith’s story, those familiar with the details of her death (something hard to avoid since it was in the news so often and into 2013), will appreciate the precision in Thompson’s detailed monologues, especially in the characters of Glory and Roseller.

*Sophie M. Lavoie covers arts and culture for the NB Media Co-op.*

to raise awareness of the colonial violence that has both disproportionately criminalized and victimized indigenous women. Both events were organized by the Women’s Studies and Gender Studies Program at St. Thomas University.

Wildlife and environmental groups, the scientific community and woodlot owners are calling for a new **Crown Lands and Forests Act**. In a statement sent to the provincial government on Nov. 26, 2015, the groups say a new Act must better manage the forest for water and wildlife protection, recreation, jobs and revenue.



**Over 100 people participated in the NB World March of Women in Fredericton Oct. 17. The World March of Women is a global feminist movement working to eliminate root causes of poverty and violence against women. Participants called for pay equity, universal child care, reproductive health care access, funding for gender confirming surgeries, action on Canada’s missing and murdered indigenous women and more humane refugee and immigrant policies.** Photo by Tracy Glynn.

working in the woods. As we go up a few rungs, an embedded chainsaw blade signals declining forest employment while at the top of the ladder, a greasy universal joint stands in for current day forest work: one person sitting in the cab of a giant harvester.

Manuel doesn’t advocate moving back in time or technology, but there’s a simple reality check owed to us by politicians who use specious claims of job creation to justify ever more extraction from our forests.

NB’s forest strategy creates very few jobs, in fact, only 1.3 jobs for every thousand cubic metres of wood cut. In places like Vermont, New York State and even Ontario, governments manage to get between three and five times the direct jobs that NB gets out of this same quantity of wood.

Modernization and technology have meant that fewer people can do an ever increasing amount of damage in the woods in a shorter amount of time. With little value added manufacturing in NB (most of the wood is exported as logs) and the government demonstrating no support for community-run forests and private woodlot owners, it is no wonder the jobs numbers just aren’t there.

As NB’s Auditor General has pointed out, the province has lost hundreds of millions of dollars in management fees and concessions to the forest industry in the past few years. Contrast this to the news that NB lumber exports have increased 40% over the past four years, to \$397 million. Someone is getting rich from our Crown wood and it is not the NB Treasury.

Manuel is philosophical about it all: “You can’t dive into this topic [forestry] and not get worried about things, the animals, the water, what we are losing or have lost already.” She has stopped representing large landscapes in her work, noting that her range of movement in the province includes many clearcut areas where even the “beauty strip” along the road has disappeared. Instead, she focuses on vignettes like “The Worry Ladders” in hopes of reaching people, raising awareness and perhaps stirring an emotional response that might move citizens to action.

The NB Liberals promise to deliver a new spin on the forestry plan in December 2015. To think it might address major flaws and concerns like climate change and critical habitat loss seems reasonable, but unlikely. The responsibility of the government is to represent the interests of the entire population and the public trust in a democratic manner. New Brunswickers have spoken; now it’s up to government to listen to them. Restoring balance cannot involve bowing to a single industry’s pressure tactics and threats.

Manuel thinks artists have a responsibility to reflect what’s happening in society back to itself, both the good and bad. “I kind of think of the artist as a bit of a canary in a coalmine,” she says.

The artist hopes to take “The Worry Ladders” to other venues in Atlantic Canada. To contact the artist about bringing the exhibition to your community, email [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).

*Margo Sheppard is the former executive director of the Nature Trust of New Brunswick. She continues to work on forest conservation efforts in the province.*

## Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit [nbmediacoop.org](http://nbmediacoop.org). To list your event, email: [community@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:community@nbmediacoop.org).

**Cinema Politica** believes in the power of art not only to entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. Cinema Politica Fredericton screens films on Friday nights at Conserver House, 180 St. John St. at 7:00pm. Check out the films and venues at: [cinemapolitica.org](http://cinemapolitica.org).

**Refugees Welcome Fredericton Rally.** Sat., Dec. 12 at 1:00pm at Fredericton City Hall (Queen & York). The rally will extend a warm welcome to refugees and call for humane refugee and immigrant policies in Canada. Contact: [refugeeswelcomefredericton@gmail.com](mailto:refugeeswelcomefredericton@gmail.com).



Photo from [refugeeswelcome.ca](http://refugeeswelcome.ca).

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