



The Brief

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Shipment of armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia picketed in Saint John

By NORM KNIGHT



On December 22, 2018, protesters against the sale of armed vehicles to Saudi Arabia picketed the King Street entrance to the Port of Saint John.

Sharon Murphy-Mayne of the group PEACE-NB, which helped organize the picket, called the sale of armaments to Saudi Arabia “immoral” and said: “We’d like to send a message to the Canadian government that this is unacceptable.”

The protesters noted Saudi Arabia has caused massive civilian casualties and human rights abuses during the three and a half year military intervention in Yemen.

Canada has sold nearly \$4 billion worth of armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia over the last three decades, and is currently in a 14 year, \$14.8 billion contract to supply 742 light armoured vehicles to that country.

Protester Wayne Dryer, who is associated with the Council of Canadians in Saint John, said he learned about the scope of the abuses in Yemen a few months ago and feels that if he did not speak up, he would be “complicit in all of the actions that take place using the vehicles that pass through our port.”

Groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International say the Saudi-led coalition intervening in Yemen has violated international law by bombing civilians, hospitals and schools.

The armoured vehicle Canada is now sending to Saudi Arabia is the LAV 6.0, made by General Dynamics Land Systems Canada at its Oxford Street plant in London, Ontario. A consignment of the vehicles was scheduled to be loaded onto the Saudi ship Bahri Yanbu at Saint John on Dec. 22.

Picketers arrived at 7:00 a.m., in pre-dawn fog and drizzle, to protest Canada’s arms shipment to Saudi Arabia and to call for a lasting ceasefire and humanitarian relief in Yemen. Initially, several cars and trucks drove through the picket line and entered the dock area. However, at about 7:30 am, members of the International Longshoremen’s Association Local 273 arriving for work refused to cross the picket line. The dock workers parked their cars on the inland side of the picket and stood watching the two dozen picketers pacing the road below.

The picketers began packing up their signs at 9:00 a.m. Two or three of the longshoremen drove to the gate to report for work but were refused entry by their employer. The picketers went up as a group to applaud the longshoremen and thank them for their support. The longshoremen had lost a day’s pay and thought additional punishment from the employer was likely, but expressed no bad feeling toward the picketers, saying simply: “We don’t cross picket lines.”

The Bahri Yanbu remained offshore all day on Dec. 22 due to “bad weather,” according to Saint John port officials.

The Bahri Yanbu docked at the Saint John port the next morning, on Dec. 23 at 1:34am. The ship, loaded with the armoured vehicles, was seen leaving the port that afternoon.

Why the protest?

An estimated 85,000 children under age five have starved to death in Yemen during the last three years, according to the aid group Save the Children. UN World Food Program head David Beasley has told the UN Security Council that as many as 12 million of Yemen’s 28 million population “are just one step away from famine.” A naval and air blockade imposed by the Saudi-led coalition is mainly responsible for this.

The blockade was called for in April 2015 by the UN Security Council – with the abstention of Russia – but was intended only to intercept “arms and related material” bound for the Houthi insurgents. However, the neighbouring states which the Security Council resolution called on to implement the blockade applied it more broadly, so that not just weapons, but food and the critical fuel needed to run pumps that bring drinking water up from wells, are kept out of the hands of the Yemeni people.

Several members of other New Brunswick unions, including George Vair, a past president of the Saint John and District Labour Council, were among the ranks of the picketers.

The Saint John longshoremen have refused cargos on ethical grounds before. In 1979, they refused to ship heavy water for the Argentine military junta’s CANDU nuclear reactor and in 2003, during the Iraq War, they refused to ship military equipment destined for the Middle East.

Weapons are not Saint John’s only trade with Saudi Arabia. About 115,000 barrels of Saudi crude oil arrive in the port on an average day – 14 per cent of Canada’s oil imports and 5.7 per cent of our total supply (domestic and foreign).

Cancellation of those 115,000 barrels would not greatly punish the Saudis, who export 7 million barrels a day to the rest of the world.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Saudi Arabia was the world’s second largest importer of military equipment over the last five years, behind only India. According to the global information firm IHS Inc., Saudi military imports in 2015 were \$US 9.3 billion.

Norm Knight writes on labour for the NB Media Co-op and was among the picketers against the Canada-Saudi arms deal.

Saint John longshoremen receive historic recognition

By DAVID FRANK

They call it the movement of goods, as if the goods moved on and off ships of their own accord. But from the days of square timber and lumber deals to the cargoes and resources of today, none of this activity has been possible without the longshore workers. By muscle and by machine, they have done the loading and unloading at the blunt interface between the port of Saint John and the rest of the world.

In return, they have asked for their fair share of benefits in their conditions of work and some measure of recognition. The longshoremen of Saint John hold a special place in Canadian history because they were among this country’s first workers to take common action to achieve those goals.

They did this by founding the Labourers’ Benevolent Association. It was a cautious name, calculated to allay fears in a time when the legal status of trade unions was uncertain. But, as historians have long recognized, it was one of the earliest labour unions in British North America. Possibly, it was one of the oldest continuously existing dockers’ unions in the world.

At a ceremony held November 16, 2018 at the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibit Centre in Saint John, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada unveiled a plaque recognizing the founding of the Labourers’ Benevolent Association as an event of national historical significance. These designations are not handed out casually. A nomination was put forward by Local 273, International Longshoremen’s Association, in 2009, and it has taken until now to go through all the stages of consideration, approval, and implementation.

In the earliest days, the longshore workers belonged to the precarious employment and gig economy of their time, hired in season and by the day, working in all weather, under conditions threatening to life, limb and health, for meagre pay and zero security, twelve. They worked 14 or 15 hours a day, all the while competing against each other in a race to the bottom to work for worse conditions.

The arrival of the union in 1849 was announced with the raising of the Labourers’ Bell on Market Slip, a bell that governed the working day, ringing in the day of work and bringing it to a close at the end of 10 hours. At a later date, the plaque will be permanently installed at this location, making it a notable stopping point for all members of the public and for walking tours of the city.

This normalization of the working day, first to 10 hours, later to nine and eight, began to bring some order to the chaos of exploitation on the docks. It helped make work available for more workers, made conditions safer, and gave workers more time for family and community. The bell rang out, in their words, a “message of hope for the workers.”



The plaque was unveiled on November 16 at the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibit Centre in Saint John. Left to right: Saint John Mayor Don Darling, Saint John-Rothsaway Member of Parliament Wayne Long, Local 273 Secretary-Treasurer Pat Riley, labour historian David Frank, and Bernard Thériault, New Brunswick representative on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Photo credit: Kurt Peacock/Parks Canada.

A call to action by anglophones on language rights in New Brunswick

By GERRY MCALISTER and SUSAN O’DONNELL



Blessing of the fleet in Caraquet. Photo by Brian Atkinson from the Images of New Brunswick databank.

In 2019 New Brunswick celebrates 50 years as Canada’s only officially bilingual province. The equality of both linguistic groups is protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Constitution of Canada states that English and French are the official languages of New Brunswick and have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the legislature and the government of New Brunswick.

New Brunswickers recently voted the People’s Alliance (PANB) into our legislature, a party that campaigned on abolishing the office of the Official Languages Commissioner and reducing the second language requirements for some public service jobs. In concert with the Progressive Conservative government, they are already attempting to make these changes.

The only way to reduce the right to services in both official languages in New Brunswick is to change the Constitution. This requires the approval of the legislative assembly in New Brunswick and of the Senate and House of Commons in Ottawa. Any political party serious about trying to change the Constitution would be making convincing arguments, in both English and French, to win over the hearts and minds of Canadians. Instead, PANB’s message aims at a much narrower audience of anglophones in New Brunswick.

Ambulance NB has repeatedly stated that the ambulance shortage is not linked to language requirements. By spreading misinformation that the shortage is due to bilingualism requirements, PANB is stirring up anti-francophone sentiment for political gain. The tactics of the “old” Confederation of Regions party still serve their purpose.

However, the challenge to language rights goes beyond only PANB voters. Before the election, a CBC Vote Compass survey of 10,700 New Brunswickers found that 78% of PANB voters strongly agreed the office of the Official Languages Commissioner should be abolished. Yet, if the number of actual voters for the various parties in the recent election is calculated with the survey results, more Progressive Conservative voters strongly agreed, as did a minority of Liberal, Green and NDP voters.

Since the implementation of the Official Languages Act, people lacking adequate second language skills have difficulty securing public service jobs requiring those skills. In New Brunswick, three of every four francophones are bilingual but only one in six anglophones.

For bilingual anglophones and francophones, communicating in a second language is a skill they have worked to achieve. If a public service job requires second language skills and a candidate is missing those required skills, the candidate is not qualified for the job. Yet when they miss out on a bilingual government job because they are not bilingual, some anglophones lobby to make these jobs unilingual English, rather than fight

for better French language training.

Judging by the standard test results for students that were reported recently, we can surmise that the standard of teaching overall in New Brunswick needs considerable improvement. Informal conversations have provided examples of French immersion graduates in New Brunswick unable to achieve the required second language proficiency to work in the government.

Learning a new language demands a huge amount of energy. It is not something you just do half-heartedly. It involves a bodily and emotional commitment. Mouth, throat, lips and even the whole body have to perform a different set of movements. Due to poor teaching, some anglophones are unaware of this or are too shy or embarrassed to make the necessary effort.

There are other reasons why some anglophones are lobbying to reduce the second language requirements for government jobs. There is a resurgence of old animosities going back long before the Confederation of Regions Party of 1991-95. Anglo-Loyalist culture in New Brunswick was originally a privileged land grab, taking from both the Indigenous peoples and francophones. Inherent in that act of pillage was a presumed superiority, a sense of entitlement. Despite the passing centuries, some anglophones of that heritage resent having to learn a language and familiarize themselves with a culture with which they have no empathy and to which they feel superior.

Whatever the reasons, after 50 years of the Official Languages Act, a majority of anglophones in New Brunswick have not learned French. At least some – the ones who want jobs requiring second language skills – will have to be persuaded to change their minds. They will need to find a way to motivate themselves and move past shyness, embarrassment, resentment, sense of entitlement or physical discomfort and focus on what they can actually change for them and for the generations to come. Instead of advocating to reduce language rights – which, like it or not, the courts will not allow – they will need to fight harder for improved access to and quality of French language training, and to find new ways of delivering the training that will work for them.

Our MLAs must show leadership, first by putting to rest the so-called debate about bilingualism. Our government has a duty to make a clear and firm commitment to the office of the Official Languages Commissioner, to bilingualism, and to all its citizens, to help New Brunswickers understand our rights and responsibilities under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And, most importantly, to stress the richness of life and culture that living in a bilingual province brings.

Moving forward, our political leaders must engage the federal government in a mission to improve second language skills in New Brunswick, with a focus on rural communities. With political will and vision, we could create a big social and cultural project with anglophones and francophones working together for our collective future. In Canada, New Brunswick can become the example of a bilingual province where people who want to learn their second language, can.

Let’s move language training out of urban institutions and into rural communities, supporting local language schools and immersion opportunities run by grassroots groups and local entrepreneurs. Building on our shared love of nature, we could support language skills training and cultural exchange opportunities designed as projects for rural community development such as small farms, local renewable energy, food security, community forestry, and climate change adaptation activities along our waterways and coastlines.

Models do exist. In Europe, Finland is also constitutionally bilingual. Belgium and Luxembourg have three official languages. Switzerland and the Netherlands each have four official languages. Good practices for learning and teaching second language skills in rural communities exist in other jurisdictions and could be applied in New Brunswick.

Finally, in this new year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act. Let us act in solidarity with our Acadian and francophone fellow citizens. We call on all anglophones to speak up to defend the constitutional rights of Acadians and francophones.

It should be unacceptable to anyone who respects the rule of law that the rights of Acadians and francophones in New Brunswick are under threat from our own government.

Gerry McAlister is a NB Media Co-op member and supporter; he delivers The Brief in Fredericton.

Susan O’Donnell is a NB Media Co-op reporter and member of the editorial board.

continued from page 1

Saint John longshoremen

With more than 1500 members in the 1860s, the Labourers’ Benevolent Association was one of the largest local labour unions in the Dominion of Canada at the time of Confederation. In an age when governments took little interest in such things, they negotiated wage agreements and provided benefits to thousands of injured workers and to the families of the hundreds of men killed on the docks.

And they built solidarities with other workers. They struggled to overcome ethnic and religious divisions, and in the face of a centralizing economy, they joined the International Longshoremen’s Association to strengthen unions in all the ports of the Atlantic coast.

The longshoremen helped establish the provincial Federation of Labour and lead the campaign for workers’ compensation, a cause that passionate social reformer Frank Hatheway could not win until the union took up the cause with a determination that could not be ignored. They went on to push for mothers’ allowances, minimum wages, pensions and other reforms that benefited all workers in the province.

The longshore workers also knew how to respect picket lines, and two notable examples can be mentioned here. In 1949 they stood with the Canadian Seamen’s Union when Canadian sailors were on strike in ports around the world. In 1979, they supported protests against the repression of civil rights in Argentina and the export of heavy water supplies to the military dictatorship there.

It is not possible to know if the Supreme Court of Canada was thinking of the Saint John longshoremen when they ruled in 2007 that union rights and collective bargaining are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As the court decision put it, the rights of labour are “the culmination of an historical movement” towards greater democracy that has made them a “fundamental aspect of Canadian society”. To understand these kinds of rights, all citizens need to know this kind of history.

There is no better example than the story of the longshore workers of Saint John and their union that is now one of the oldest continuously existing labour organizations in the country. By joining together in a shared cause, ordinary workers, with relatively few skills and little economic security, supported by their families and communities, found a way to raise their standard of living, to improve their working conditions and to share their achievements with fellow workers. This is a story that deserves to be known by all Canadians.

David Frank is a labour historian. He is the author of Provincial Solidarities: A History of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour (Athabasca University Press, 2013).

Community Calendar

To list your community event, email **info@nbmediacoop.org**. For an updated listing of events, check **nbmediacoop.org**.

Tertulias this winter at Milda’s Pizzas (732 Charlotte St.) in Fredericton will feature talks on the lives and works of philosophers, painters, poets, historians, a playwright and a mathematician on scheduled Wednesdays at 7:00pm. For the schedule, Facebook: Tertulia or contact: fredericton.tertulia@gmail.com.

Cinema Politica believes in the power of art not only to 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.

Calling all singer-songwriters and video makers for the environment

“**Moving NB to a Green Economy**” is the theme of a competition for music videos made using cellphones. The five top videos will each receive \$1,000.

The competition is a joint effort by the NB Media Co-op, the NB Film Co-op, the NB RAVEN project and JEDI. For the competition registration form, email: ravenvideocontest@gmail.com. **Competition deadline is March 15.**

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