Small modular nuclear reactors: not small, not clean, not green, not affordable

By GORDON EDWARDS WITH MICHEL DUGUAY AND PIERRE JASMIN

The Three Nuclear Amigos

Promotional stories about nuclear energy in the Telegraph-Journal are appearing more frequently now. Readers are increasingly encouraged to accept the mantra that nuclear power is safe, clean and even, while the nuclear industry is in a state of decline.

The living-owned Brunswick News papers and the New Brunswick PC government are following the advice of a handful of private entrepreneurs and setting the stage for what they hope will be the big economic miracle of 2020: tens of millions in federal funding to top the $30 million already invested by the province in Small Modular Nuclear Reactors to transform New Brunswick into a booming and prosperous Energy powerhouse for the entire world.

This recent public relations campaign for nuclear energy follows many months of behind-the-scenes meetings held throughout New Brunswick with utility company executives, provincial politicians, federal government representatives, town mayors and First Nations, all designed to sell the vision of a new generation of nuclear reactors.

Two nuclear start-up companies in Saint John have laid out a dazzling dream promising thousands of jobs — nay, tens of thousands! — in New Brunswick, achieved by mass-producing and selling components for hitherto untested Small Modular Nuclear Reactors, which, it is hoped, will be installed around the world by the hundreds or thousands! Although the order books are currently filled with blank pages, massive sales will be essential to achieve a break-even point, let alone to become profitable.

The premiers of New Brunswick, Ontario and Saskatchewan have hitched their hopes to the same nuclear dream machine. The three amigis have announced their desire to promote and deploy some version of Small Modular Nuclear Reactors in their respective provinces.

All three claim it is a strategy to fight climate change, and they want the federal government to pledge federal tax money to pay for research and development of the reactors. Perhaps it is a way of paying lip service to the climate crisis without actually achieving anything substantial; prior to the 2019 election, all three men were opposed to even putting a price on carbon.

Motives other than climate protection may apply. Saskatchewan’s uranium is in desperate need of new markets, as some of the province’s most productive mines have been mothballed and over a thousand uranium workers have been laid off, due to the global decline in nuclear power. Meanwhile, Ontario has cancelled all investments in more nuclear power, as some of the province’s most productive mines have been laid off, due to the global decline in nuclear power.

Saskatchewan’s uranium is in desperate need of new markets. In North America and Western Europe, the prospects plummeted from 17 percent in 1997 to about 10 percent in 2018. In North America and Western Europe, the prospects for new large reactor projects are virtually nil, and many of the older reactors are shutting down permanently without being replaced.

Climate change: a valid preoccupation

Many people concerned about climate change want to know more about the moral and ethical choices regarding low-carbon technologies: “Don’t we have a responsibility to use nuclear?”

The short reply is: nuclear is too slow and too expensive. The ranking of options should be based on what is cheapest and fastest — beginning with energy efficiency, then on to off-the-shelf renewables like wind and solar energy.

In Germany the green energy sector is contributing to the lowest unemployment rate since reunification in the early 1990s. Post-Fukushima Angela Merkel’s decision to close down all of its nuclear reactors by 2022 has pushed the

continued on page 2

Campaign targets myths about people living in poverty

By DALLAS McQUARRIE

The Common Front for Social Justice is running a campaign targeting the most common myths and prejudices about people living in poverty.

“It’s important to expose these prejudices and misconceptions because they are constantly used to blame people being forced into poverty for circumstances beyond their control,” Moncton Common Front spokesperson Auréa Cormier said. “These stereotypes make it impossible for those most in need to adequately feed, clothe and shelter themselves and their families.”

The campaign is based on research by the Common Front that identified the three most common myths and prejudices about New Brunswickers living in poverty, each covered by a radio ad. The three mistaken, but common, perceptions are: that people receiving social assistance are lazy and don’t want to work, that they should get off booze and drugs, and that they choose to be on social assistance.

“These vicious prejudices result in untold suffering by innocent people year after year,” Cormier said. “Today the lives of thousands of people living in poverty are devastated by the continued attacks on those who are struggling to survive, while going hungry is an ever present threat that too often becomes a cruel reality and, all the while, unfounded prejudices are as the authors of their own misfortune,” she said. “The truth about poverty is that people want to work, but provincial policies create barriers rather than helping them.”

“Most people are forced onto social assistance by circumstances beyond their control, and provincial policies, not drinking and drugs, make it harder for people on social assistance to survive.”

Along with eight weeks of radio advertising, people living in poverty will be available to the mainstream media for interviews and video produced by the Common Front with first person accounts by people living in poverty are available to the mainstream media for interviews and video produced by the Common Front with first person accounts by people living in poverty are available to the mainstream media for interviews and video produced by the Common Front with first person accounts by people living in poverty. The Common Front has also set up an online fundraising page where people who wish to support the radio campaign can make contributions to help pay for the ads at the gofundme page. Help Us Tell The Truth About Living in Poverty organized by Nancy Alcox.

Dallas McQuarrie writes for the Media Co-op and lives in St. Ignace, New Brunswick, on unceded Mi’kmaq land in Kent County.

Leading provincial anti-poverty activist Auréa Cormier (center) presencing media with radio ads and first-person video accounts of people living in poverty. Anti-poverty campaign project manager Robert MacKay (left) and Johanne Petipas (right) are both featured in the Moncton Common Front’s Facebook videos giving personal accounts of living on social assistance. Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.
that systematically marginalized Blacks. Instead, I resorted to awareness of Black identities, such as David Muhammad's stats, I would often gloss over local activists' calls for an prime minister for Black improvement. Regardless of such

98 percent dark-coloured descendants, of which 40 percent are considered to be mixed. The need to speak out about issues of equity and inclusion encouraged me to join several communities within the framework of future conferences with the aim of raising consciousness and promoting Black communities. My advocacy for Black inclusion was heightened when I was asked to give a presentation at the University of New Brunswick, where I am a doctoral student.

The need to speak out about issues of equity and inclusion encouraged me to join several communities within the framework of future conferences with the aim of raising consciousness and promoting Black communities. My advocacy for Black inclusion was heightened when I was asked to give a presentation at the University of New Brunswick, where I am a doctoral student.

I, therefore, look in anticipation toward a more inclusive environment where Black students feel less isolated and issues of equity and oppression become topics discussed throughout the university.

For these visions to become realities, as Black students, we need to accept the power that is innate in our lineage and, in so doing, become proactive partners in reworking current narratives. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a quest for transformation. It is, therefore, our duty as Black activists to learn of our heritage and, consequently, educate ourselves on the impact that Blacks have made on the growth and development of New Brunswick. We must be proactive in instilling change. We will be the authors of our collective story and help us grow.

Memberships and donations can be paid online at nbmediacoop.coop or by sending a cheque made out to the NB Media Co-op at the address below.

By ALICIA NOREIGA

Alicia Noreiga, Photo submitted.

In September 2018, I arrived in Fredericton from my native country of Trinidad & Tobago. I was amazed that Fredericton International Airport was roughly the same size as the A.N.R. Robinson International Airport on Tobago. However, that was where the resemblance ended. Anticipated reality did little to prepare me for actuality.

I felt like a single black dot on a white T-shirt and for the first time I was conscious of my Blackness. I expected to be different. A Black woman, Trinidadian accent, clearly new to the environment, of course. I would stand out in Fredericton. What I did not anticipate were the futile glances in search of someone remotely resembling me. Butterflies aggressively swarmed my stomach. Anxiety against uncertainty, fear against excitement, but pride won the war.

I was about to embark on a journey that would turn my dreams into reality and empower me to change my community forever.

My homeland

I grew up in a small rural fishing village on the North Coast of Trinidad. Isolation and neglect often place my community at a disadvantage in education and economic opportunities. The constant grappling with social challenges did not prevent me from being the first in my community to obtain a masters degree and, in the near future, a doctorate.

Upon arriving in Fredericton, I brought with me the identity of a survivor of poverty, rural isolation, and gender-based discrimination. Never before had I considered race or ethnicity as a contributor or hindrance to my success. Thus, throughout my educational path, my Blackness had never signified privilege.

A reason for my lack of Black confidence can be credited to the fact that Trinidad & Tobago's population is comprised of 98 percent dark-coloured descendants, of which 40 percent are African heritage, 48 percent Indian heritage, and 18 percent are considered to be mixed.

The 0.6 per cent white population is perceived to be the most powerful ethnic group—a legacy of colonialism. This is in contrast to citizens of African heritage who primarily reside in the impoverished areas of the country, consist of the prison population, and comprise an estimated 72.3 per cent of the country's convicted murderers.

A January 2019 newspaper article, entitled "Afros must do better in Trinidad," highlighted the pleas of my country’s prime minister for Black improvement. Regardless of such statistics, I would often gloss over local activists’ calls for an awareness of Black identities, such as David Muhammad’s Black Agenda Project. I paid little attention to social issues that systematically marginalized Blacks. Instead, I resorted to the philosophy that awareness of Black identities should be replaced with national awareness. I was misguided by the notion that, in a country where the majority of persons were of dark complexion, there was more need for promoting a national identity of “Trinbagonians” and less need to recognize the Black identity of African descendants.

From Majority to Minority

In Fredericton, I find myself in an environment that is diverse yet lacking in inclusivity. The feeling of isolation is shattering. My physical characteristics stand out both on and off campus. The unfamiliarity of foods, sports, or cultural activities similar to home fuels my feelings of isolation, and the constant awareness of stereotypical labeling exacerbates my fear of being a black woman with a Trinidadian accent in this environment. Role models or counselors do little to raise my self-esteem as I struggle with this new identity.

In 2019, while attending the Creative Connections Conference on March 2nd, I seemed to be the only Black attendee. A feeling of uncertainty overwhelmed me as I grappled with a simultaneous sense of pride and confusion over the perception of Black presence. At the same time, I was saddened as I was confident that there are many Black creative minds in Atlantic Canada. I, thus, felt my presence underscoring in comparison to those who should have been there in my place. Although disappointed, I had grown accustomed to being among the few, if not the only Black attendee at education conferences in Atlantic Canada.

My internal strength that had driven me to overcome obstacles in my homeland stepped in as I opted to replace my feeling of isolation with activism. I was pleased to learn of Black Canadian Living, an organization building up to a cumulative capacity of 30,000 MWh after 8 years. With nuclear, even if you could manage to build 30,000 megawatts in 8 years, you would get absolutely no benefit during that entire 8-year construction period.

I, therefore, look in anticipation toward a more inclusive environment where Black students feel less isolated and issues of equity and oppression become topics discussed throughout the university.

For these visions to become realities, as Black students, we need to accept the power that is innate in our lineage and, in so doing, become proactive partners in reworking current narratives. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a quest for transformation. It is, therefore, our duty as Black activists to learn of our heritage and, consequently, educate ourselves on the impact that Blacks have made on the growth and development of New Brunswick. We must be proactive in instilling change. We will be the authors of our collective story.

Alicia F. Noreiga is a second year doctoral student at the University of New Brunswick’s Faculty of Education in Fredericton.

Support The Brief

Independent journalism by the NB Media Co-op

Join

Become a member of your local media co-op. Memberships are $30/year.

Donate

The NB Media Co-op is supported with donations from individuals, labour unions and social justice groups.

Donate today and help us grow.

Volunteer

- Research, write, edit, factcheck stories
- Distribute The Brief
- Organize special events
- Sign up for email alerts.

Email: info@nbmediacoop.coop

NB Media Co-op
180 St. John St., Fredericton, NB E3B 4A9

www.nbmediacoop.coop

March is Membership Month at the NB Media Co-op

During the month of March, we are marketing a membership/funding drive. Join your local media co-op and help us grow. Annual membership is $30/year.

Sign up or renew your membership on our website (nbmediacoop.coop) or by mailing a cheque made out to the NB Media Co-op at 180 St John St., Fredericton, NB E3B 4A9.

If you make a contribution to us in the month of March, you will be entered in a draw to win a subscription to the Briar Patch magazine!