



The Brief

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

By GORDON EDWARDS WITH MICHEL DUGUAY AND PIERRE JASMIN



Three Nuclear Amigos: Blaine Higgs, Doug Ford, Scott Moe

Montage of photos from Wikimedia through a PhotoMania filter.

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 green, even while the nuclear industry is in a state of decline.

The Irving-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 \$10 million already invested by the province in Small Modular Nuclear Reactors to transform New Brunswick into a booming and prosperous Nuclear 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, township 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 amigos 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 emissions.

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 than 800 renewable energy projects – at a financial penalty

of over 200 million dollars – while investing tens of billions of dollars to rebuild many of its geriatric nuclear reactors. This, instead of purchasing surplus water-based hydropower from Quebec a lot less expensive and more secure.

These new nuclear reactors are so far perfectly safe, because they exist only on paper and are cooled only by ink.

“Nuclear renaissance” – clambering out of the dark ages?

This current media hype about modular reactors is very reminiscent of the drumbeat of grandiose expectations that began around 2000, announcing the advent of a Nuclear Renaissance that envisaged thousands of new reactors – huge ones! – being built all over the planet. That initiative turned out to be a complete flop.

Only a few large reactors were launched under this banner, and they were plagued with enormous cost-overruns and extraordinarily long delays, resulting in the bankruptcy or near bankruptcy of some of the largest nuclear companies in the world and causing other companies to retire from the nuclear field altogether.

Speculation about that promised Nuclear Renaissance also led to a massive (and totally unrealistic) spike in uranium prices, spurring uranium exploration activities on an unprecedented scale. It ended in a near-catastrophic collapse of uranium prices when the bubble burst. Cameco was forced to close down several mines in Saskatchewan. They are still closed. The price of uranium has still not recovered from the plunge.

The nuclear contribution to world electricity production has 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

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. “For people living in poverty in New Brunswick, life is harsh, and getting harder every day.”

“So-called social assistance rates – what some call ‘welfare’ – have been frozen for almost a decade,” Cormier said. “These starvation rates 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 thousands of people in New Brunswick, including up to 7,000 children, are leading lives of quiet desperation.”

“For New Brunswickers living in poverty, each day is a grim struggle to survive, while going hungry is an ever present threat that too often becomes a cruel reality and, all the while, unfounded prejudices portray them 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 six videos produced by the Common Front with first person accounts by people living in poverty are circulating on social media.

The Moncton 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) presenting media with radio ads and first-person video accounts of people living in poverty. Anti-poverty campaign project manager Robert MacKay (left) and Johanne Petitpas (right) are both featured in the Moncton Common Front’s Facebook videos giving personal accounts of living on social assistance. Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.

Unearthing Black identities and feelings of isolation in Fredericton

By ALICIA NOREIGA



Alicia Noreiga. Photo submitted.

In September 2018, I arrived in Fredericton from my native country of Trinidad and 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 all references to home 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 my 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 or marginalization.

A reason for my lack of Black consciousness can be credited to the fact that Trinidad & Tobago’s population is comprised of 98 percent dark-coloured descendants, of which 40 percent are of African heritage, 40 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 most 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 ‘Trinbagoians’ 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 unavailability of foods, sports, or cultural activities similar to home fuels my feelings of isolation, and the constant awareness of stereotypical labelling exasperates my fear of being victimized. The lack of Black professors to serve as role models or counsel does little to raise my self-esteem as I struggle with this new identity.

In 2019, while attending the Creative Connections Conference in Fredericton, I was astounded as 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. I was honoured to be a representation 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 undeserving 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 champions like Viola Desmond. My passion for exploring my Blackness as a means of empowerment encouraged me to work toward awareness and empowerment of Black people 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 University of New Brunswick (UNB) with the hope of raising consciousness and promoting Black communities. My advocacy for Black inclusion was heightened when I was asked to conduct a series of cellphilm (cellphone + film production) workshops with Black identified students. These workshops were aimed at stimulating discourse on issues concerning Black students at UNB, St. Thomas University, and the New Brunswick Community College.

My experience at UNB has allowed me to embrace my identity and purpose. I am privileged to learn of New Brunswick’s rich Black histories. I acclaim my colour as one that is resilient and continues to stand the test of time. More so, I now reflect on my fellow Afro-Trinbagoians and ways in which social challenges have both hindered and strengthened citizens. I welcome knowledge of my country’s African heritage and the promotion of awareness that leads to Black empowerment. I am no longer merely a woman who has overcome poverty, gender-based discrimination, and rurality. I am a Black woman who has overcome such obstacles.

As New Brunswickers celebrate Black History Month, I reflect on UNB’s purported aims toward inclusion and equity. I commend the many visions and initiatives that have been proposed. However, “actions speak louder than words.”

I, therefore, look in anticipation toward a more inclusive environment where Black students feel less isolated and where issues surrounding privilege 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 rewriting current realities. Nelson Mandela urges Black peoples to lead their quest for transformation. It is, therefore, our duty as Black activists to learn of our heritage and, consequently, educate others 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 destiny.

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

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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!

Small modular nuclear reactors

- country to purchase photovoltaic solar panels and 30,000 megawatts of wind energy capacity in only 8 years: an impressive achievement – more than twice the total installed nuclear capacity of Canada.

- It would be impossible to build 30,000 megawatts of nuclear in only 8 years. By building wind generators, Germany obtained some carbon relief in the very first year of construction, then got more benefit in the second year, even more benefit in the third, and so on, building up to a cumulative capacity of 30,000 MWe 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.

The costs of small modular – nuclear – reactors

- A new generation of smaller reactors, such as those promised for New Brunswick, will necessarily be more expensive per unit of energy produced, if manufactured individually. The sharply increased price can be partially offset by mass production of prefabricated components; hence the need for selling hundreds or even thousands of these smaller units in order to break even and make a profit.

- However, the order book is filled with blank pages — there are no customers. This being the case, finding investors is not easy. So entrepreneurs are courting governments to pony up with taxpayers’ money, in the hopes that this second attempt at a Nuclear Renaissance will not be the total debacle that the first one turned out to be.

- Chances are very slim however. There are over 150 different designs of “Small Modular Reactors.” None of them have been built, tested, licensed or deployed. The chances that any one design will corner enough of the market to become financially viable in the long run is unlikely.

- So the second Nuclear Renaissance may carry the seeds of its own destruction right from the outset. Unfortunately, governments are not well equipped to do a serious independent investigation of the validity of the intoxicating claims made by the promoters, who of course conveniently overlook the persistent problem of long-lived nuclear waste and of decommissioning the radioactive structures. These wastes pose a huge ecological and human health problem for countless generations to come.

- One suspects that our three premiers are only willing to revisit these bygone reactor designs in order to obtain funding from the federal government while avoiding responsibility for their inaction on more sensible strategies for combatting climate changes – cheaper, faster and safer alternatives, based on investments in energy efficiency and renewable sources.

Gordon Edwards PhD, is President of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, Michel Duguay, PhD, is a professor at Laval University and Pierre Jasmin, UQAM, Quebec Movement for Peace and Artiste pour la Paix.

Public Talks by Dr. Gordon Edwards

Small Modular Nuclear Reactors: not small, not green, not clean, not affordable

Saint John • Thursday, March 12

noon: UNBSJ, Irving Hall, Room 107, 100 Tucker Park Rd.

7pm: NB Museum, 1 Market Square

Fredericton • Friday, March 13

7pm: Charlotte St. Arts Centre, 732 Charlotte St.

Introduction by David Coon, MLA Fredericton South

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