While oil and gas companies report record profits, Higgins government abruptly cancels student benefit program

By DUNCAN MURRAY

Excess profits in the oil and gas sector have been met unchallenged by our elected officials while many families are struggling to make ends meet – one of the great injustices of recent memory. Writing in Business Insider, Ben Winck and Madison Hoff detail how American energy companies are profiteering from the recent hikes at the pump. The exuberantly high gas prices are not solely a consequence of supply and demand. Rather, they are largely caused by the profiteering of the gas companies themselves.

Pertinently to New Brunswickers, the province’s richest man, Arthur Irving, the sole owner of Irving Oil Ltd., has seen his fortune increase by hundreds of millions this year, according to estimates from the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. Since the beginning of the pandemic, his wealth has fluctuated between approximately $3.83 billion and $9.23 billion. With these facts in mind, it is logical to assume Irving Oil’s finances are accumulating similarly to the American companies.

Unfortunately, calls to combat the contrasting fortunes between classes are falling, largely, on deaf ears. Like that implemented in several European countries, a one-time windfall tax on the oil and gas industry’s excessive profit has been proposed by NB Green Party leader David Coon. The idea of a windfall tax, however, has been met with a mixed appraisal. Coon says that he has received a lot of support. But from some of his colleagues in the Legislature, the proposal has been met with ridicule and contempt.

There are ways to fund the NB-EI Connect program: Higgins and his colleagues are choosing not to. The claim that this government cannot afford to pay for the program is patently false. Students should not be made to work arduously, balancing low-paying, part-time jobs with full-time studies, at a moment in time when both tuition costs and inflation have never been higher. Meanwhile, executives and shareholders in the oil and gas industry are lining the pockets of their already egregiously expensive trousers.

Duncan Murray is an undergraduate student at the University of Prince Edward Island, majoring in Psychology and Biology.

“Continue to fight”: Moncton tenants

By DATA BRAINANTA

New Brunswick is considered one of the most unfair places for tenants in the country.

But tenants in the province are organizing and winning gains. Three Moncton tenants recently joined a national conference in Montreal aimed at addressing the housing crisis.

The New Brunswick chapter of ACORN (Association of Community Organization for Reform Now) sent its two co-chairs, Peter Jongeneelen and Vanessa Jones, and member Christina Francouer to ACORN’s national convention in Montreal, June 18-21.

With chapters across Canada, ACORN is a strong voice for tenants and people living on low incomes.

ACORN NB and other tenant advocates have been pushing for better tenant protection in New Brunswick, recently winning a rent cap.

However, the tenant advocacy groups say that the province needs to do more to address the housing crisis, including stopping evictions, which allow landlords to evict tenants for renovations as a way to raise the rent.

The NB Media Co-op interviewed ACORN NB’s two co-chairs to learn more about the dire situation facing New Brunswick tenants, as well as the organization’s plan to address the housing crisis in the province.

NB Media Co-op: Tell me about the ACORN convention in Montreal that you attended.

Peter Jongeneelen: ACORN Canada is a multi-issue, membership-based community union of low- and moderate-income people. We believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved by building community power for change.

A big portion of the first day of convention involved ways to learn new campaigning and planning skills through workshops and discussions on various issues.

The convention was attended by more than 200 ACORN members from BC, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, including an Ottawa ACORN member who hails from Labrador. It was a fantastic opportunity to network.

Many participants did not realize how bad the lack of rent control in New Brunswick was. Throughout 2020 and early 2021, tenants here faced huge rent increases every three months of around 30 per cent, 50 per cent, 75 per cent, and sometimes even up to 100 per cent due to the lack of tenant protections, rent control and the ineffectiveness of the Residential Tenancies Tribunal (RTT).

NBMC: What were the issues being discussed at the convention and who were the speakers?

Vanessa Jones: The issues that were discussed were full rent control, disclosure of building owners, ending the tax exemptions of Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), banning acquisitions by financialized landlords (REITs), tying financialized landlord incentives to affordability and maintenance, and building social housing.

NB ACORN co-chairs Peter Jongeneelen and Vanessa Jones taking part in a march against the financialization of housing in Montreal on June 21. The march went to the Public Sector Pension Investment Board’s headquarters to demand their divestment from Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs). ACORN organizers say that the financialization of housing is destroying affordable housing throughout Canada. Photo by John Anderson/ACORN Canada.

continued on page 2

Juliet, a fourth-year student at Concordia University, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in multimedia. She said EI-Connect saved her from a workplace where she was sexually harassed, overworked and underpaid. Photo submitted.
New Brunswick's media coverage of small modular nuclear reactors silences Indigenous perspectives

By HARRISON DRESSLER

In June 2018, the Government of New Brunswick committed $10 million to Molten and ARC Canada, two engineering companies interested in developing untitled small modular nuclear reactors (SMNRs) near the Point Lepreau Generating Station, southwest of Saint John.

New Brunswick, its energy grid, and over 700,000 citizens have become guinea pigs for the trial of SMNRs, aimed at revitalizing a failing nuclear industry.

After the announcement in 2018, a tsunami of discussions about SMNRs and Indigenous, First Nations, and engineering companies interested in developing untried nuclear reactors silences Indigenous perspectives.

After the announcement in 2018, a tsunami of discussions about SMNRs and Indigenous, First Nations, and Aboriginal issues. Of these articles, only five cited Indigenous perspectives.

The obvious conclusion: reporters, journalists, and editors in New Brunswick’s mainstream English-language press have almost totally ignored Indigenous perspectives.

Brunswick News’ coverage of SMNRs, June 2018 to June 2022

Stories that reference SMNRs and Indigenous issues (%)

Pro-SMR 72.2% 7.7%
Neutral 5.6% 22.2%
Anti-SMR 22.2% 50%

These stories championed small modular reactors as a way of building on the legacy of achievement of First Nations youth and working people. Yet only 7.7% of the articles which treated small modular reactors favorably included quotations, paraphrases, or summaries sourced from Indigenous people.

Among the articles that discussed Indigenous issues while remaining critical of small modular reactors, half included sources from Indigenous people. Of course, this amounted to only two articles. This low number of articles reflects a profound bias on the part of the province’s mainstream press, in which only four articles that discussed Indigenous issues while remaining critical of the nuclear industry were published.

Despite being silenced in the media, Indigenous nations have continued to fiercely contest the development of small modular reactors throughout Canada and New Brunswick.

In June 2019, the Anishinabek Nation’s Chief in Assembly in Ontario endorsed a resolution stating their opposition to the construction of small modular reactors on their territory.

In March 2021, the Wolastoq Grand Council in New Brunswick released a resolution calling on the Government of Canada to halt any further funding of nuclear reactors at Point Lepreau.

Just last month, on May 30, the Peskotomuhkati Nation and Mi’gmaq’s T’uqalal Incorporated made interventions to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, with the aim of shortening the length of NB Power’s proposed 25-year license of Point Lepreau.

Biased coverage of Indigenous issues is not new. Historically, media coverage has facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. In Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers, Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carolyn Robertson write that “the press has never been non-partisan or strictly objective in Canada.”

“Colonialism has always thrived in Canada’s press,” they add.

In New Brunswick, a series of mergers and buyouts have threatened the survival of Indigenous perspectives the norm in mainstream coverage. For decades, the J.D. Irving, owner of New Brunswick News conglomerate held a monopoly on the province’s news media.

While they were at it, they got the newly elected Nova Scotia Premier Blaine Higgs, Minister of Service Nova Scotia Mary Wilson (who oversees the Residential Tenancies Tribunal), and Minister of Social Development Bruce Linton impeached.

Once we win this campaign here, we will begin to explore the community at the expense of Indigenous perspectives.

While analyzing the results of this study, I was reminded of an interview I conducted with Hugh Bisney, Speaker of the Peskotomuhkati Nation back in May. “Have my questions been answered on Small Modular Reactors?” he asked me. “I am absolutely in opposition to these things, but that’s not the same as meeting with expertise.”

“I often say there’s a difference between listening and hearing—one is just sound waves, and the other is if you’re actually digesting the material and doing something about it.”

As of yet, it looks as if the province’s newspapers, and the Canadian nuclear industry, are doing neither.

Hamish Dodds, green lawyer writing out of the Human Environments Workshop (HEW) founded by RAVEN. He writes on New Brunswick and Canadian history, labour, politics, and environmental activism.

NB MEDIA CO-OP ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING & KEYNOTE

Wednesday, September 21st. By Zoom.
5:00pm - Annual General Meeting
6:00-7:00pm - Keynote with Emilie Nicolas, a journalist, media commentator and anthropologist, Nicolas will discuss how the media covers stories about Black lives and how this can fit in coverage.
For more information, contact info@nbmediacoop.org.

NBMC: Can you tell us more about the protest that you participated in after the convention?

Jongeneelen: On the final day of the convention, more than 200 participants marched from Concordia University to Nelson Mandela Park to peacefully protest.”

“Continue to fight”

A few notable speakers included John Cartwright, chair of the Disaster Relief Committee, and prominent human rights activist, for a peaceful protest of the Priti Patel’s office to be a powerful force of positive change. Senator Pierreette Rimette, a former resident of New Brunswick, spoke about the importance of the introduction. Bill C-21 at lowering the critical interest rate from 60 per cent to 30 per cent to help the poor who often face the most risky debt to pay for basic necessities. Finally, Advocate for Canada, talked about the need for more support for housing.

NBMC: Can you tell us more about the protest that you participated in after the convention?

Jongeneelen: On the final day of the convention, more than 200 participants marched from Concordia University to Nelson Mandela Park to peacefully protest "Continue to fight". The demonstration was organized by the National Action Network. It was a powerful demonstration of solidarity with speak the truth of the issues and causes that they care about.

"Continue to fight" can refer to a peaceful demonstration or a social movement that continues to fight for change.

Sign up for monthly email alerts.
Farewell to Liberal, longtime solutionary: 
Tom Jongeneelen

Greatly loved, respected and admired by many, Tom Jongeneelen was a social justice advocate, writer, and activist who dedicated his life to fighting against racism, inequality, and poverty. He was a powerful voice in the fight for social justice and a valued member of the community.

Tom Jongeneelen passed away on June 21, 2022, leaving behind a legacy of activism and dedication to making the world a more just and equitable place. His passing has been mourned by countless people, who remember him as a tireless fighter for the causes he believed in.

"Continue to fight" can be seen as a call to action, a reminder to keep pushing for change and not give up on the fight for justice and equality. It is a testament to Tom Jongeneelen's spirit and a call to the community to continue his work and values.

Sign up for monthly email alerts.
We should always remember to continue to fight. Housing is a human right!

Data Braintrust is a permaculturalist-in-training with an international perspective.

We need to work with allies to make New Brunswick and this country a better place for all. As a society we need to start taking care of the most vulnerable people and no one should be unhoused.

Should we always remember to continue to fight. Housing is a human right!

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