First Nations in New Brunswick among 250 Indigenous communities experiencing long-term water advisories

By DAVID GORDON KOCH

A map of the country is riddled with blue markers, each one pointing to a First Nation that has been affected by a long-term drinking water advisory, meaning that it lasted more than 12 months.

In recent years, the number of communities with unsafe drinking water has dropped, but the long-running problem has remained a source of embarrassment for Canada — and a hazard for residents of the affected communities.

Now, funds from a massive class-action suit are meant to address ongoing problems with drinking water on reserves and compensate people and communities affected, although statutory limits mean that many individuals aren’t eligible. The deadline for claims is coming up on March 7.

More than 250 communities across Canada affected

In December 2021, the federal court and Manitoba’s Court of Queen’s Bench approved the $8-billion settlement between Canada and First Nations affected by drinking water advisories that lasted more than one year.

The class-action settlement applies to “boil water,” “do not consume” and “do not use” advisories.

An interactive map on the website for the class action shows locations across the country known to have long-term drinking water advisories during the time frames covered by the settlement.

In New Brunswick, they include Tobique, Woodstock, Oromocto, Buctouche, Indian Island, Edmundston, and Port Folly First Nations.

The settlement includes $6 billion to deal with ongoing water infrastructure issues on First Nations land, along with $1.8 billion in settlement funds for First Nations and their individual members.

Roughly $1,300-$2,000 per year without safe water

The class-action court-ordered water advisories ended on December 20, 1995, until June 20, 2021. The amount available per person depends on a number of factors, said Jaclyn McNamara, legal counsel with Toronto-based O’Neil LLP.

“The rough amounts (per person) are about $1,300 per year for a boil water advisory, $1,650 per year for an order not to consume the water, and about $2,000 per year for a ‘do not use’ advisory,” she said.

Other factors include the number of people who make claims, the length of time living under an advisory and whether the community is located in a remote location.

First Nations that opt into the settlement can also receive $500,000 and an amount equal to half of damages paid to individual members, McNamara said. People who suffered injuries related to unsafe water can also receive additional compensation.

“There’s no amount of money that can compensate for the harms that people experience living under these kinds of long-term drinking water advisories,” McNamara said. “And those harms are extraordinary.”

“We’ve got a commitment from Canada to make all reasonable efforts to ensure the class members have

continued on page 2

For more grassroots news, visit: nbmediacoop.org

Migrant workers join national-wide calls for permanent resident status for all

By DATA BRAINANTA

Migrant workers and organizers from Migrant Workers Alliance for Change visited the Shediac office of Liberal MP Dominic LeBlanc on Dec. 16, 2022 with a letter calling for equal rights for all. Photo from Migrant Workers Alliance for Change.

On December 16, migrant workers and organizers from Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC) visited the Shediac office of Liberal MP Dominic LeBlanc to deliver a letter asking him to support permanent residency status for all in Canada. Migrant rights organizers say that such a move would benefit approximately 1.7 million migrants in Canada, including 500,000 undocumented people and their families.

LeBlanc represents a region of the province with some of the highest numbers of low-wage temporary foreign workers. The workers are employed in the province’s seafood processing plants.

LeBlanc is also the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and is one of the fourteen federal Ministers in the Cabinet Committee on Economy, Inclusion and Climate “B” that are meeting to discuss who and how many people will be granted residency status.

“We are asking the ministers to give equal rights for all the migrants; workers, students. We want all migrants to be included, no caps and no exclusion,” explained Niger Saravia, an organizer with MWAC, to staff at the Minister’s office.

LeBlanc was in Ottawa and not available to meet with MWAC and the migrant workers but that did not deter the group from delivering the letter and making a statement outside his office. They held signs that said, “Status for all!”, “No exclusions. Regularize everyone!”

Regularization involves legalizing or “regularizing” the immigration status of people with no or precarious immigration status in the country.

Saravia further explained to LeBlanc’s staff, “A year ago, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in the Mandate Letter sent to Immigration, said that he was going to regularize immigrants, and he hasn’t done it yet... We are here, and we are going to be here until you do something about it.”

One of the migrant workers, who wishes to not be named, added, “It’s not easy to be here working and have no rights.”

The letter, endorsed by hundreds of organizations across Canada and signed by organizations in New Brunswick such as the Madhu Verma Migrant Justice Centre and the Filipino-Canadian CommUNITY of New Brunswick, asks the federal government to treat all migrants equally and force employers to follow existing regulations.

Migrant justice advocates say that regularization, ensuring permanent residency for all migrants, will improve labour conditions as employers will not be able to easily threaten workers with deportation, making it more difficult to hire workers informally or for cash payment, forcing employers to follow existing regulations.

Considered key to economic growth and labour mobility, regularization programs were implemented by 24 of the 27 member states of the European Union from 1996 to 2008, affecting an estimated 5.5 to 6 million people.

The number of migrant workers coming to New Brunswick has increased over the years. According to Statistics Canada, in 2021, there were 3,628 people working under the federal Temporary Foreign Workers Program in New Brunswick’s agriculture and agri-food sector, including seafood processing.

One of the migrant workers outside LeBlanc’s office was an elementary school teacher in Mexico before coming to Canada and signed by organizations in New Brunswick and permanent residents.

However, more than a million of them do not have equal labour rights or access to the same kinds of social services such as health care provided to Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

Migrant justice advocates say that regularization, ensuring permanent residency for all migrants, will improve labour conditions as employers will not be able to easily threaten workers with deportation, making it more difficult to hire workers informally or for cash payment, forcing employers to follow existing regulations.

Migrant justice advocates say that regularization, ensuring permanent residency for all migrants, will improve labour conditions as employers will not be able to easily threaten workers with deportation, making it more difficult to hire workers informally or for cash payment, forcing employers to follow existing regulations.

Regularization involves legalizing or “regularizing” the immigration status of people with no or precarious immigration status in the country.

Saravia further explained to LeBlanc’s staff, “A year ago, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in the Mandate Letter sent to Immigration, said that he was going to regularize immigrants, and he hasn’t done it yet... We are here, and we are going to be here until you do something about it.”

One of the migrant workers, who wishes to not be named, added, “It’s not easy to be here working and have no rights.”

The letter, endorsed by hundreds of organizations across Canada and signed by organizations in New Brunswick such as the Madhu Verma Migrant Justice Centre and the Filipino-Canadian CommUNITY of New Brunswick, asks the federal government to treat all migrants equally and consider the undocumented people, mostly racialised, low-waged, and disproportionately more women, in their plan to regularize the status of people in Canada.

Migrants have often been praised as the lifeblood of the Canadian economy, paying taxes but not receiving services accorded to citizens and permanent residents.

continued on page 2
Rent control supporters paraded a coffin draped in a New Brunswick flag in downtown Moncton on January 3, part of a mock funeral to protest against the province’s decision not to renew the rent cap.

The mock funeral held by ACORN NB, a tenants’ union for low- and moderate-income people, had members as mourners dressed in black, marking the end of the temporary rent cap, which limited rent increases at 3.8 per cent. It expired at midnight on Dec 31, 2022.

“The casket was basically to represent all the thousands of dollars that tenants stand to lose, the sacrifices they will make, and the struggle to survive, said Peter Jongeneelen, co-chair of ACORN NB, in an interview with the NB Media Co-op.

The New Brunswick government introduced Bill 25 on Nov. 24, 2022, to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, but the legislation did not extend rent control.

The rent cap was introduced last March in response to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent.

The government appears to have deleted a page about the rent cap from its website. Jongeneelen said the decision not to renew the rent cap is a “direct insult to tenants who are struggling to survive” at a time when inflation is high and their incomes aren’t keeping pace.

The Higgs government had faced criticisms for giving leaseway to landlords last year by granting “a 50 per cent reduction in the provincial property tax rate for non-owner-occupied residential properties and a 15 per cent reduction for non-residential properties and other residential properties.”

“To give them tax breaks, at 50 per cent and then say no, we can’t extend the rent cap, it makes no sense,” Jongeneelen said.

“If they had come out when the rent cap was introduced to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent, that would have been fair, it would have been balanced,” Jongeneelen said.

However, Jongeneelen says that the provincial government has sided with the landlords and has failed to understand that unaffordable housing will result in people leaving the province and a surge in homelessness.

The province’s population reached 800,000 last year but uncontrolled rent increases could be an Achilles heel to sustaining continuing population growth.

“We’ve seen new immigrants to the country arrive in New Brunswick, live here [for] two, three years. And then what happens is, they can afford to live cheaper in PEI, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Newfoundland. So they’re moving there, and they’re leaving the province.”

Government spokesperson Bruce Macfarlane provided this statement to the Sackville community radio station CHIMA:

“Please note the rent cap was fist announced on March 23, 2022, and came into effect upon Royal Assent on June 10, 2022. The RIT marketing campaign aimed to inform tenants of their rights and where to go for help began in December 2021.

“Once a tenant applies to have a rent increase noticed about, the Residential Tenancies Tribunal will consider the application. The tribunal will also have the authority to order landlords to seek permission if they wish to increase rent above certain thresholds.

The government appears to have deleted a page about the rent cap from its website. Jongeneelen said the decision not to renew the rent cap is a “direct insult to tenants who are struggling to survive” at a time when inflation is high and their incomes aren’t keeping pace.

The Higgs government had faced criticisms for giving leaseway to landlords last year by granting “a 50 per cent reduction in the provincial property tax rate for non-owner-occupied residential properties and a 15 per cent reduction for non-residential properties and other residential properties.”

“To give them tax breaks, at 50 per cent and then say no, we can’t extend the rent cap, it makes no sense,” Jongeneelen said.

“If they had come out when the rent cap was introduced to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent, that would have been fair, it would have been balanced.”

Rent control supporters paraded a coffin draped in a New Brunswick flag in downtown Moncton on January 3, part of a mock funeral to protest against the province’s decision not to renew the rent cap.

The mock funeral held by ACORN NB, a tenants’ union for low- and moderate-income people, had members as mourners dressed in black, marking the end of the temporary rent cap, which limited rent increases at 3.8 per cent. It expired at midnight on Dec 31, 2022.

“The casket was basically to represent all the thousands of dollars that tenants stand to lose, the sacrifices they will make, and the struggle to survive, said Peter Jongeneelen, co-chair of ACORN NB, in an interview with the NB Media Co-op.

The New Brunswick government introduced Bill 25 on Nov. 24, 2022, to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, but the legislation did not extend rent control.

The rent cap was introduced last March in response to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent.

The government appears to have deleted a page about the rent cap from its website. Jongeneelen said the decision not to renew the rent cap is a “direct insult to tenants who are struggling to survive” at a time when inflation is high and their incomes aren’t keeping pace.

The Higgs government had faced criticisms for giving leaseway to landlords last year by granting “a 50 per cent reduction in the provincial property tax rate for non-owner-occupied residential properties and a 15 per cent reduction for non-residential properties and other residential properties.”

“To give them tax breaks, at 50 per cent and then say no, we can’t extend the rent cap, it makes no sense,” Jongeneelen said.

“If they had come out when the rent cap was introduced to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent, that would have been fair, it would have been balanced.”

Rent control supporters paraded a coffin draped in a New Brunswick flag in downtown Moncton on January 3, part of a mock funeral to protest against the province’s decision not to renew the rent cap.

The mock funeral held by ACORN NB, a tenants’ union for low- and moderate-income people, had members as mourners dressed in black, marking the end of the temporary rent cap, which limited rent increases at 3.8 per cent. It expired at midnight on Dec 31, 2022.

“The casket was basically to represent all the thousands of dollars that tenants stand to lose, the sacrifices they will make, and the struggle to survive, said Peter Jongeneelen, co-chair of ACORN NB, in an interview with the NB Media Co-op.

The New Brunswick government introduced Bill 25 on Nov. 24, 2022, to amend the Residential Tenancies Act, but the legislation did not extend rent control.

The rent cap was introduced last March in response to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent.

The government appears to have deleted a page about the rent cap from its website. Jongeneelen said the decision not to renew the rent cap is a “direct insult to tenants who are struggling to survive” at a time when inflation is high and their incomes aren’t keeping pace.

The Higgs government had faced criticisms for giving leaseway to landlords last year by granting “a 50 per cent reduction in the provincial property tax rate for non-owner-occupied residential properties and a 15 per cent reduction for non-residential properties and other residential properties.”

“To give them tax breaks, at 50 per cent and then say no, we can’t extend the rent cap, it makes no sense,” Jongeneelen said.

“If they had come out when the rent cap was introduced to tenants’ complaints about rent increases reaching upwards of 50 per cent, that would have been fair, it would have been balanced.