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Hug Your Letter Carrier

CUPW WEIGHS IN FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN ISRAEL-PALESTINE

By MILES HOWE

"Our struggle is global and we need to be using our collective strength for global justice," says Toni MacAfee, Education/Organization Officer for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), Atlantic Region.

CUPW is 54,000 members strong, and is represented in every Canadian community with a post office. CUPW recently passed "Resolution 338/339", which deals with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Among other points, Resolution 338/339 calls for the support of the international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel, until Israel "recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and complies with international law including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes as stipulated in UN resolution 194."

Having passed this resolution, CUPW will now examine its own investments, ensuring that none are in Israeli companies. They will also implement a policy to ensure that none of the products that CUPW purchases are made by Israeli companies, and will encourage all levels of the union to participate in this campaign.

In Canada, where Harper recently said he'd defend Israel, "whatever the cost," CUPW's stance is an almost

radical act. But, as MacAfee explains, CUPW is no stranger to the global struggle.

"The activist side of CUPW comes from postal workers who were active in the 1970s and 80s. Our education programs focus not just on postal workers' rights, but human rights, women's rights.

"CUPW has always been considered a militant union. We've shut down bridges, not allowed planes to land when we've been striking. It's a history we're proud of."

MacAfee hands me the CUPW National Constitution. She leafs through the volume, pointing out CUPW's national policies on Cuba, Colombia, nuclear energy, pollution, and a variety of other issues. I ask her how CUPW, ostensibly a union for postal workers, finds itself looking globally, and in this instance taking a stand for peace in Israel-Palestine.

"In this case, CUPW was responding to a call made in 2005 by, among others, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, for a global campaign of boycott and divestment against Israel. Our members asked for us to respond."

Resolution 338/339 also calls on "other Canadian unions to lobby against the apartheid-like practices of the Israeli state." I ask MacAfee whether any other Canadian unions have answered that call with similar resolutions.

"CUPW is the first national Canadian union to respond, but we are joined by unions all over the world. CUPE in Ontario has joined, two unions in Quebec have

joined, including the Federation of Labour, and the PEI Federation of Labour has also joined. It is slowly gaining momentum."

MacAfee is also a member of the steering committee that is organizing next spring's Canadian Boat to Gaza. The boat will be part of an international flotilla heading to Gaza to deliver aid, and break Israel's illegal blockade. The boat will also play the role of mail carrier, as MacAfee explains.

"Israel has stopped allowing mail to be delivered to Gaza. Israel's official statement blames a Gazan employee of the postal service for this disruption in service, and at the moment all mail to Gaza is now being 'returned to sender'. As postal workers especially, we know the importance of mail, and stopping the mail is just another form of isolation. CUPW has endorsed the Canadian Boat to Gaza, and we will be delivering postcards to Gaza."

"CUPW participated in a conference held in Montreal to address the boycott, divestment and sanctions," says MacAfee. "One of the speakers at the conference was the President of Congress of South African Trade Unions. He had visited Palestine, and had lived under apartheid in South Africa. When he said that Israel is an apartheid state, we listened."



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Being Black and Out



Panelists Chris Cochrane (Left), Robert Wright and Clemon George speak at BlackOUT, a panel discussion on sexual orientation, gender identity, and race in Nova Scotia. | Photo by Hillary Lindsay

EXPLORING HOMOPHOBIA IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN NOVA SCOTIA

by HILLARY LINDSAY

"There is a homophobia in the discourse," noted Robert Wright. "But often love and acceptance in the relationships."

Wright was speaking on a panel exploring sexual orientation, gender identity, and race. Dozens of

people crowded into a room at Dalhousie University on November 30 to take part in the discussion, and a question had been posed about homophobia in black communities in Nova Scotia.

"The homophobic ethic that we think pervades the black community seems to be rooted first in the black church," said Wright, a social worker and self-described "church man" who grew up in the black Baptist tradition.

"The church has not been a friendly place for gay folk," said Wright. "At the same time, I think that black folk have a real history of being loving and accepting of everyone in the community."

Catherine Meade, a lawyer in Halifax and moderator of the discussion said she had a similar experience. Growing up, Meade's father was a Baptist minister, and she still attends church regularly.

"I sit in church..and really wonder what people are thinking to my left and right," said Meade. On the other hand, she continued, she has never doubted the love of her parents or other family members.

Meade described an occasion where she and her partner were worrying about whether or not they should tell Meade's 81 year old aunt that they were getting married. They needn't have worried: "Well praise the lord," her aunt replied happily.

Chris Cochrane is a transgender woman who goes by the stage name Elle Noir as a performer in Halifax. Cochrane found that her mother was accepting of her for who she was, first when she came out as a gay man and later with her desire to no longer be a man.

"I didn't have any problems as a gay individual being accepted in a small community," said Cochrane, who believes that the accepting attitude is partly rooted in the fact that women are often considered the head of the family in the black community, rather than men.

"The black gay often finds the love of their mother is not overly confused," said Wright.

Nevertheless, he added, "The discourse is homophobic. It makes being in the black community and having those kinds of relationships a little crazy making."

"It is awfully hard to sit in the pew in a community where you know people love you on one level, but they're still trying to chase the demons with you on the other hand," said Wright.

"Amen," agreed Meade.

Nova Scotia: Electro-State



Neal Livingston says that despite new renewable energy opportunities, Nova Scotia will continue to burn fossil fuels. | Photo by Glenn Euloth

RENEWABLE ENERGY EXPERT NEAL LIVINGSTON SAYS NOVA SCOTIA WILL EXPORT ITS RENEWABLE ENERGY AND KEEP THE COAL BURNING

By TOM MACDONALD

Nova Scotia could soon follow in the footsteps of the Alberta tar sands energy boom. But instead of exporting upgraded bitumen, Nova Scotia – the province with the 4th largest amount of greenhouse gas emissions - would play a rather ironic role: that of renewable energy exporter.

“We’re becoming a sort of an electro-state the same way that you can be a petro-state like Alberta where, you know, very few interests really are the dominant players in the society,” says Neal Livingston. “All this hooey we heard about having to be better [grid]-connected to north-eastern North America, when you think about it now, it’s all about our preparation for export.”

Livingston, a filmmaker with 40 titles under his belt, has been a renewable energy practitioner in Cape Breton for 30 years. He owns the Black River brand of renewable energy companies, the holdings of which include a hydro facility and several industrial scale wind turbines in development. In November, he delivered a public presentation to a small crowd gathered at The Hub in Halifax.

Livingston has been sounding the alarm on Nova Scotia’s energy policy by calling into question the motivations behind the government’s new Renewable Electricity Plan. The recently released plan calls for 40% of the electricity that Nova Scotia Power sells in a given year to come from renewable energy sources by the year 2020.

“When the province legislated 40% renewables... nobody seemed to notice that that wasn’t linked to coal reductions; the coal reductions are separate, and those coal reductions are relatively minor... by 2020 in the range of 8 to 10 per cent.”

Against a backdrop of climate change, fossil fuel price swings, and relentlessly rising energy costs, Livingston paints a disturbing portrait of a provincial energy policy that is shifting away from a dwindling petro-economy, based on rapidly depleting offshore natural gas, towards an electro-economy based on growing exports of renewable electricity to New England.

“It appears that we’re staging up very quickly for Emera to own a transmission line from Nova Scotia to New England, and we’re going to export the renewables,

without turning off coal. So that’s rather despicable because... I think that’s not what the public wants, or thinks they’re getting,” says Livingston.

The governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland recently announced that renewable electricity from the Lower Churchill hydro mega-project in Labrador will be connected via sub-sea cable to Newfoundland, carried across the province, and then connected via another sub-sea cable to Cape Breton.

Emera is investing \$2 billion dollars in the project, and will own 20% of the electricity that is produced, or 8% of Nova Scotia’s needs. The company can then sell the electricity to New England in order to meet the 40% renewable energy goal.

“If we’re going to bring power in from Newfoundland, here’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to turn off, let’s say, 5 out of 7 of our coal fired power plants... and that’s not the plan. So effectively we’re allowing the next 50 years to 100 years of our energy supply to be planned around a private company and its profit, and that’s not coming with significant coal reductions in the short term.”

Livingston points to the new biomass plant in Port Hawkesbury and the new tidal power projects in the Bay of Fundy as further examples of Nova Scotia’s electricity future being planned around large corporate interests.

“What we’re doing is throwing shovel-loads and bucket-loads of public money at tidal power, and who’s doing the tidal power work? Well, it’s Minas Pulp and Paper, [which is owned by] the richest family in the province, and Emera, which is the largest company.”

But there is a decentralized, home-scaled approach to renewable energy development that returns ownership of our energy production into the hands of the public, says Livingston.

“The technologies can all be on our homes and buildings, and that means that in step one you put solar hot air and solar hot water [heaters] on all your buildings. On a societal level, if we went and put 100,000 of these on in the next five years on Nova Scotia homes and buildings, we’d massively add a bunch of employment and we’d make a big carbon reduction, and we’d have those benefits land from the energy savings in your pocket,” he says.

“Then the following five years you can go with the same crews of people who are trained, and you can put photovoltaics... on people’s homes, and effectively all our homes and buildings could become carbon-neutral at that point.”

The future of Nova Scotia’s energy system boils down to a simple question, says Livingston.

“Do you end up with one or two large corporate interests owning all of the energy supply in Nova Scotia, or do you end up with all of us owning this?”



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