



# the Tide

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## The Emera Connection

### NS AND GRAND BAHAMA SHARE SIMILARITY IN PRIVATE POWER MONOPOLY

By MILES HOWE

Emera, the parent company of local power monopoly Nova Scotia Power Inc., is currently under investigation on the island of Grand Bahama, where they own the Grand Bahama Power Company (GBPC). Allegations of fraudulent billing practices, including over-billing, questionable meter monitoring, and appliance-damaging electrical surges, has led a group known as Operation Justice Bahamas to file an official complaint against Emera with the Bahamian government. The complaint, accompanied by over 5,000 signatures, is the first step towards what Operation Justice Bahamas hopes is a class-action lawsuit against Emera.

Osman Johnson, the group's pro-bono lawyer, claims

that since Emera purchased a majority share in GBPC in 2010, power bills have begun to rival mortgages. Hundreds are now doing without power on Grand Bahama.

"Emera has come here, and it's...like the Wild West," says Johnson. "They are literally charging whatever they wish. We don't have any alternative. We are totally vulnerable to the company and their total lack of corporate social responsibility. They're fully aware of the fact that hundreds of homes on the island where we live are without power for months on end. You go to some areas where 3 or 4 houses out of 10 have no power. And you've got little babies of a few months old, whose mothers are telling me, 'I can't feed my kids properly because I can't cook any food.'"

Emera refutes the charges, claims that the allegations are overblown, and argues that the meteoric rise in power bills is related to fluctuations on the global oil market. The price of oil is passed on to consumers

in the form of a "fuel surcharge". This charge, about 24 cents per kilowatt hour, makes up about 2/3 of a typical bill. Johnson doesn't believe this argument for a second.

"Emera has consistently stated that the fuel surcharge which they levy against customers in addition to usage is based upon the price of oil internationally," says Johnson. "We have figures from 2008, which show that when the cost of oil was \$145 a barrel, the surcharge was 14 cents (per kw). Today the cost of oil is under \$90 a barrel, and they are charging nearly 24 cents (per kw) in surcharge. So a two-year-old could look at those figures and realize that there's a serious discrepancy."

When recently questioned, Nova Scotia representatives of Emera denied any knowledge of the investigation in Grand Bahama.

Troy Garvey Interviews Local NSPI Customer.  
| Photo by Miles Howe

## It Takes a Village to Raise a Vegetable



Amy Louder, who spoke at ACORN, is a musician and a civil servant in addition to being a farmer.

| Photo by Steven Wendland

### FOOD CONSCIOUSNESS COALESCES AT ACORN CONFERENCE

By STEVEN WENDLAND

"Farmers need a shitload of support," says Amy Louder, an organic farmer who runs Avon River CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in Centre Burlington, NS. "And not just financial support but support in a lot of different ways, like support in information, of learning how to problem solve."

The annual Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network (ACORN) organic farming conference and tradeshow, which took place in Dartmouth from November 11-13, aims to support organic farmers and farming by providing a forum for knowledge sharing. Offering over 40 workshops on topics ranging from pastured pork to permaculture, the conference brought together a broad range of farmers representing diverse agricultural communities.

"We have more young folks here this year than ever before," says Lucia Stephen, ACORN conference coordinator. "It's nice to see a more well-rounded demographic since a new generation of farmers is needed in the Maritimes."

The event showcased some of the innovative methods by which a new generation of Atlantic Canadian farmers and organic food producers are bypassing the industrial

food system and supplying quality product to their communities.

Louder apprenticed on CSAs in Ontario and New York before returning to her native Nova Scotia, where she has been running her CSA for two years. She has taken an unconventional path to growing, tailoring her winter CSA on the Noel Shore to suit her diversified lifestyle, "I grow in the spring and summer, harvest in the fall and do distribution in the winter," says Louder.

Louder, who spoke at the conference, is a musician and a civil servant in addition to being a farmer, so finding a balance has been imperative. "Being able to split up my workload has been really beneficial to me. I started my seedlings in March in my backyard in the city...I was able to go to work, come home, check on my guys, water them, and kind of maintain both lives."

The CSA model, explains Louder, brings the consumer and grower together, and yields benefits to both parties. "In this type of vegetable system the consumer invests at the beginning of the season their full dollar amount regardless of what's going to happen actually in the season. The grower therefore has so much more support and security, and there's a social support; people know and they care about the farm and about the farmer."

"If we continue to use the old models, we'll continue to see rural exodus. I think we have to start looking at more creative ways of creating different models of retention," says Av Singh, Organics and Rural Infrastructure specialist at Agrapoint.



# Separation Over Gentrification

## A CONDOMINIUM PROJECT PITS NEIGHBOUR AGAINST NEIGHBOUR

By NATASCIA LYPNY

The conversion of a former Halifax church site into a condominium building is dividing a North End community.

St. Joseph's Church once stood on the square formed by the intersection of Gottingen, Kaye and Russell Streets. Developer ECL General Partner IV Limited, a subdivision of Sobeys Incorporated, is looking to erect a nine-storey mixed residential and commercial building in its place.

When the church was closed and sold to ECL, the grounds were not purchased at a fixed amount, explains the Archdiocese of Halifax Financial Administrator, Peter Browne: "Our value is somewhat dependent on what they build," he says. "So, if they have more density, we do get more money."

This is causing a conflict of interest in the eyes of some community members.

Robert McKillip lives on nearby Russell Street and is not a member of the church. He was one of several community members who outlined their concerns with the project, from its height and lack of green spaces, to its effect on traffic and shade, at a public meeting in April.

He says the financial interests of the archdiocese make its representatives more willing to vote in favour of the project.

Browne disagrees with this sentiment. "If you think those people in the parish are coming forward just because they're going to get an extra couple of dollars and saying, 'We like it': I don't think that's happening," says Browne.

McKillip has struggled to gain access to meetings where decisions are being made regarding the project. He says, "I believe they wouldn't be having private meetings with the developers and the parish trying to

exclude all the other people from it... they wouldn't be hiding something if they didn't think there was a distinct negative element to it."

John Murphy, a lifelong parishioner of St. Joseph's Church, attended the parish meetings and says dissent and disapproval for the project within the congregation are "certainly muted."

Murphy says he was torn between wanting to save his church and feeling the need to protect his neighbourhood. At first he agreed to ECL's proposal, but ultimately he fought against the project at the joint public meeting.

He says he was subsequently removed from a community mailing list and excluded from committee meetings on the development.

Murphy sees other churches nearby as possible targets for future closures. He worries the St. Joseph's proposal sets a troubling precedent for Halifax.

The hole where St. Joseph's church once stood.

## NEWS in BRIEF

### OCCUPY NEXT MOVES

By early November one question hung over the Occupy Nova Scotia site—"What means will officialdom employ to close this inventive, in-your-face progressive initiative? The positive impact of the camp, its impact in the media and the true ring of its ideas on the street left them little choice.

We now know the answer to that question. The Halifax campsite's closure laid naked this fact: political power is wielded by the few, and for their own interests.

So, 'What next?' If, over the long term, both the egalitarian and democratic arguments of the Occupy movement remain linked and are advanced together, this just may be a movement that takes root.

### ANOTHER MILL TOWN SACKED

Bowater-Mersey paper mill owners in Brooklyn trashed their workforce mid-month. Claiming that the mill is unprofitable, Abitibi/Bowater officials imposed a set of take-it-or-we-leave demands on the community, province and their own workforce.

Queens County cut the plant's property taxes by 15 per cent; the province prepared to pony up an as-yet undisclosed fistful of public cash; and union members were forced to vote on a bundle of contract modifications, effectively laying off half the membership and eviscerating their collective agreement.

No sooner had union members voted to abandon their own contract than it was revealed that two senior managers of the 'struggling' wood fibre company received \$4 million in salaries and bonuses this year. One of the allotments: a \$760,000 payout for "restructuring"—a bonus for gutting the lives of those who built the company.

### WE GOT 18 WHAT???

Employers faced with a workforce that's just organized a union occasionally engage in a protracted process of union-busting. Non-negotiations and a decertification campaign sometimes kill the union before it's begun to breathe; the pain of an unnecessary strike can also

result. First Contract Arbitration (FCA) puts an end to this connivance. If the parties can't get to a first contract, an arbitrator will get to it for them.

Commonplace legislation, but when Nova Scotia's provincial government introduced FCA legislation in November, our local business class had a cow. A coalition of 18 'employer organizations' wrote to the Chronicle Herald, declaring that economic disaster was just around the corner.

In so doing, they identified what's really holding back Nova Scotia's economy—the burden of an excess of employer organizations.

### THERE'S NO FREE LUNCHROOM

One of the strangest exercises we yearly endure is the AIMS rating of Atlantic Canada's high schools. Their witches' brew (apology to witches) of off-the-wall measurements results in a seemingly serious set of detailed charts.

The ninth annual rating doesn't disappoint. Fewer schools than ever were actually measured in 2011. Among the overlooked: Citadel High, the largest school in the province. Special congratulations to École NDA in Cheticamp, first place in the 'Conseil scolaire acadien' category, ahead of all nine other Acadian schools that were tied with "not enough information."

Why bother? Well, our friends on the right have always had this education=measurement=ranking bee in their bonnets, of course. But drill a couple of pages below the AIMS Education webpages, and you'll discover that their motive may well be their love of 'educational choice.' That is, charter schools—or 'let's get the public to pay my kid's private school fees.'

### FROM THE CCPA: THE ANNUAL CHILD POVERTY REPORT

It is utterly sobering to learn that 14,000 kids in Nova Scotia wake up every morning in poverty. In November, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released its Annual Nova Scotia Child Poverty report. The number of children living below the poverty line across the province had been steadily falling since 2003. But now, in the present economic crisis, this positive trend has reversed: 8.2 per cent of the province's children under the age of 18 live in poverty, with more than a quarter of these kids living in one-parent families. Children under six are particularly vulnerable, as are native, immigrant and disabled children.



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