

## Labour and the Environment: Five Stories from New Brunswick Since the 1970s

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## RESEARCH NOTE / NOTE DE RECHERCHE

# Labour and the Environment: Five Stories from New Brunswick Since the 1970s

**Joan McFarland**

A CLIP CIRCULATING ON THE INTERNET of the announcement of new investment in Irving Pulp & Paper shows Jerry Dias, the national president of Unifor, at the mill in Saint John, New Brunswick thanking Jim Irving, President of J.D. Irving Ltd., and the Irving workers for a job well done in getting a new forestry plan in NB.<sup>1</sup> The event, with Premier David Alward in attendance, took place just after the New Brunswick government's 12 March 2014 announcement of the plan. The latter, which increases the cut on the province's Crown lands, has been emphatically denounced by environmentalists. This alliance between labour and industry, by ignoring environmentalists' concerns, is an aberration. In the past 40-plus years, and at present in other sectors in New Brunswick, labour has a history of alliance-building and significant cooperation with environmentalists.

This is not just an issue in New Brunswick. Throughout North America and much of the world, the question of whether the labour and environmental movements can work together has been a central one.<sup>2</sup> Government and industry would have us believe that there is an inherent conflict between jobs and the environment. Yet many have argued that juxtaposing "jobs versus the environment" is a false choice and that the environmental and labour movements can work in alliances to build a more sustainable world. Indeed, my

1. Accessed 23 May 2014, <https://vimeo.com/89037184>.

2. Laurel Sefton MacDowell has written a very useful paper summarizing labour's response to environmental issues up to the mid-1990s across Canada: "Greening the Canadian Workplace: Unions and the Environment," in L. Anders Sandberg and Sverker Sorlin, eds., *Sustainability, the Challenge: People, Power and the Environment*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1998), 167–174.

research indicates that since the 1970s in New Brunswick, the labour and environmental movements have been working together on environmental issues. In this paper, I am going to tell five stories about these labour-environment alliances in New Brunswick and discuss what I believe to be their significance for other contexts.

Recently, John Bellamy Foster, a leading Marxist scholar and editor of *Monthly Review*, has been focusing on the environment and the climate change question. In two 2010 papers, he acknowledges the gap in Marxist writing on the environment and calls for an ecological revolution.<sup>3</sup> By 2013, in several papers, he calls for “an epochal transition” for “an epochal crisis.”<sup>4</sup> The “epochal crisis” arises from the intersection of the economic and ecological crises that capitalism is facing. Capitalism is geared to exponential growth in search of profits but has come up against the reality of finite resources. As such, the rapidly accelerating ecological threat is itself a by-product of capitalist development. He likens the kind of transition or epochal structural change, as he calls it, to Marx’s call for the revolt of the working class against capitalists. The transition is to be led, not just by the working class, but by what Foster calls an “ecological working class alliance.” Based on the “degradation of material conditions” brought about by these crises, the alliance would be made up of gender, race, class, Indigenous, and environmental movements. The transition would mean the end of the capitalist system and its oppression and exploitation, not only of workers, but also of the planet.

Foster draws on Naomi Klein’s work on climate change and more specifically the concept of “ecological sociability,” that is movements reaching out to other movements in alliances.<sup>5</sup> Marx saw the “socialization of labour” – that is “a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production” – arising out of the concentration of capital leading to the revolt of the working class.<sup>6</sup> In a similar fashion, “ecological sociability” arising out of the current economic and ecological crises of capitalism would bring the required pressure for this new epochal transition. Klein, like Foster, argues for the necessity of an end to the present capitalist system since an environmentally friendly change of

3. John Bellamy Foster, “Why Ecological Revolution?” *Monthly Review*, 61 (January 2010): 1–18. Fred Magdoff & John Bellamy Foster, “What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism,” *Monthlyreview.org* (7 March 2010), accessed 3 July 2010, <http://www.countercurrents.org/foster070310.htm>.

4. John Bellamy Foster, “The Epochal Crisis,” *Monthlyreview.org* (1 October 2013), accessed 17 April 2014, <http://monthlyreview.org/2013/10/01/epochal-crisis>; John Bellamy Foster, “Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature,” *Monthly Review*, 65 (December 2013), accessed 17 April 2014, <http://monthlyreview.org/2013/12/01>.

5. Naomi Klein, “Capitalism vs. the Climate,” *The Nation* (28 November 2011), accessed 21 April 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/164497/capitalism-vs-climate?page=0,0>.

6. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 929.

direction in production would require planning based on collective priorities rather than corporate profits. Such a change is not going to happen under our present market system. Klein also suggests that the time frame imposed by the ecological crisis could be a blessing in disguise. She says, "Climate change, by putting us on a firm deadline, can serve as a catalyst for this profound social and ecological transformation."<sup>7</sup>

Both Foster and Klein point out that the formation of such an ecological working class has not taken place yet. In his explanation, Foster alludes to obstacles posed by "conflicts ... within working class communities around labor, environmental and cultural issues."<sup>8</sup> Klein argues that while the reality of climate change "should be filling progressive sails with conviction" that "this isn't happening."<sup>9</sup> Among the problems, she says, is that progressives are leaving environmental issues up to "the big green groups" to deal with while the latter are not tackling the roots of the crises.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, some broad labour-environmental alliances have already been created. In 1999, a historic alliance was formed at the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle between what was coined "the teamsters and the turtles" (the unions and the environmentalists).<sup>11</sup> Their alliance in the anti-globalization movement later developed into a broader BlueGreen Alliance, first in the United States and later in Canada. A strategy of the BlueGreen Alliance is the call for the creation of green jobs in the economy. If jobs are lost with the phase-out of fossil fuels, a corresponding number of jobs in alternative energy can be created and thus address the problem of jobs versus the environment.<sup>12</sup>

However, such alliances have not been easy and without setbacks. For example, in 2012, the BlueGreen Alliance in the United States lost the membership of the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) over the proposed Keystone XL pipeline that would connect Canadian oil sands crude to US Gulf Coast refiners.<sup>13</sup> Although the BlueGreen Alliance did not take a stand on the pipeline, LIUNA objected to what it called "job-killing attacks on Keystone XL" by some of the Alliance's labour and environmental members.

7. Klein, "Capitalism vs. the Climate," 19.

8. Foster, "The Epochal Crisis," 8.

9. Klein, "Capitalism vs. the Climate," 16.

10. Klein, "Capitalism vs. the Climate," 17.

11. Luis Cabrera, "US: Seattle WTO Protests Mark New Activist Age," *Corp Watch: Holding Corporations Accountable* (25 November 2000), accessed 25 June 2011, [www.corpwatch.org](http://www.corpwatch.org).

12. "About us," accessed 26 May 2014, <http://bluegreenalliance.org>.

13. "LIUNA Leaves BlueGreen Alliance," *Talking Union: a Project of the DSA Labor Network* (20 January 2012), accessed 24 June 2012, <http://talkingunion.wordpress.com>.

## The Organizational Players

THE MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL PLAYERS in the New Brunswick stories are the New Brunswick Federation of Labour (NBFL) and the Conservation Council of New Brunswick (CCNB). Two particular unions, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP), which merged with the Canadian Autoworkers Union (CAW) to become Unifor, and the New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBUPPE), which now goes by the name New Brunswick Union, will also emerge as key players in our stories.

The NBFL, which dates back to 1913,<sup>14</sup> sees itself as “the central voice of labour in New Brunswick” and a lobbying body representing its members’ interests with the provincial government.<sup>15</sup> As expressed in its constitution, this mandate is “to secure provincial legislation which will safeguard and promote the principle of free collective bargaining, the rights of workers, and the security and welfare of all people.”<sup>16</sup> With an office in Moncton, the NBFL had only one full-time staff person for many years and did not get a full-time president until 2005. In terms of membership, it increased from 30,000 in 1960 to a peak of 48,626 in 1979 and was at 40,550 in 2013.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, the breakdown in membership into public and private sector unions is currently more than three to one respectively. From the late 1960s until the mid-1990s, the industrial unions in northern New Brunswick had played a leading role in the NBFL. Most of the presidents of the federation had come from there. Since the mid-1990s, the public unions, especially Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), have taken a leading role with most of the presidents of the federation coming from these unions. Also of note is the fact that, for some time, there have been no building trades represented in the NBFL. After having been expelled in 1982 from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) for non-payment of dues and hence also from the NBFL, very few of these unions ever rejoined the federation.<sup>18</sup>

The original board of the CCNB was dominated by resource scientists from both the public and private sectors. The council was envisioned as a decentralized volunteer umbrella organization dedicated to bringing the values of the Conserver Society to New Brunswick.<sup>19</sup> In its more current iteration, the

14. For the history of the NBFL, see David Frank, *Provincial Solidarities: A History of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013).

15. Information from interview with John Murphy, retired executive secretary of the NBFL (2 March 2012).

16. Information from the NBFL website accessed 20 June 2012, [www.nbfl-fttnb.ca](http://www.nbfl-fttnb.ca).

17. Membership figures are reported in the *Proceedings* of the bi-annual conventions. *Proceedings 2013*, 31.

18. Information from interview with Raymond Leger, retired researcher with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) regional office, (13, 20 January 2012).

19. Mark J. McLaughlin, “Welcome to the Conserver Society”: The Institutionalization of the

CCNB describes itself as “a citizens’ action group that creates awareness of environmental problems and advocates solutions through research, education and interventions.”<sup>20</sup> It is individual member based and funded through membership fees, donations, and research and project grants from foundations, activist groups, and government. The CCNB shares with the NBFL the goal of influencing public policy. Although there are a number of other environmental groups in the province, including the New Brunswick Environmental Network, the CCNB has been the most active in pressuring government and in trying to get labour involved in environmental campaigns. With an office in Fredericton, the CCNB has a full-time executive director and office manager, several program staff, and an active contingent of volunteers, including those on the CCNB board.

Richard White, in his 1995 article, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?” and book, *The Organic Machine*, rejects what he sees as the environmental movement’s push for a pristine nature and its position that there has to be a choice between humans and nature or between leisure and work.<sup>21</sup> However, for the CCNB, particularly under the leadership of David Coon, the goal has always been to support sustainable natural resource industries in areas such as agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. For example, in forestry, the council has worked for wood allocations on Crown land that would not only allow the Acadian forest to continue production into the future but also maximize economic benefits to the people of the province through both employment levels and direct community investment.<sup>22</sup>

## The Five Stories

IN NEW BRUNSWICK, despite the current setback in the forestry industry, there have been some very positive alliances and instances of working together by the labour and environmental movements. I am going to describe these in the form of five stories: the 1983 conference against “environmental job blackmail,” the nuclear story, the NBFL committee on environment story, the forests and Crown lands story, and finally, the climate change story.

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Conservation Council of New Brunswick and the Search for Alternatives to Indiscriminate Growth, 1969–1983,” paper presented at the Environmentalism from Below: Appraising the Efficacy of Small-Scale and Subaltern Organizations workshop, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 7–9 August 2014.

20. Information from the CCNB website, accessed 20 June 2012, [www.conservationcouncil.ca](http://www.conservationcouncil.ca).

21. Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature” in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 171–185.

22. The Crown Lands Network, *Unlocking the Economic Potential of New Brunswick Crown Lands* (Fredericton 2005), accessed 20 June 2011, [www.conservationcouncil.ca](http://www.conservationcouncil.ca).

The main source of information for my stories is from interviews with provincial labour and environmental movement leaders of the 1970s to the present.<sup>23</sup> In these interviews, my team focused on questions about the relations between the labour and environmental movements as the interviewees remembered them.<sup>24</sup> The stories of these relationships had not been told elsewhere before. After the interviews, the draft manuscript was sent back to the interviewees to make sure that I got the stories right. I also studied media reports and archival documents, including the *Proceedings* of the NBFL's conventions containing the record of resolutions passed.

### **The 1983 Conference: Fighting “Environmental Job Blackmail”**

THE FIRST STORY IS OF A CONFERENCE put on in 1983 by the New Brunswick Research and Resource Centre at St. Thomas University. The theme of the conference was of the “environmental job blackmail” tactics being carried out by business and government, particularly in the context of the deep recession of the early 1980s in New Brunswick and most of the world. John McEwen, first vice-president of the NBFL, Larry Hanley of the Canadian Paperworkers Union, and Dana Silk, executive director of the CCNB, were among the participants.

The keynote speaker, Richard Kazis, who had come up from Washington, DC, was the co-author of the recently published and much discussed book

23. We interviewed five leaders from the labour movement in New Brunswick. John Murphy, who started working for the NBFL in 1972, was the first and only salaried staff person at the NBFL for many years. He retired as executive secretary in 2005. At that time, there were only two staff and an office secretary at the NBFL. Sandy Beckingham, from Dalhousie in Northern New Brunswick, was a delegate and later secretary of his District and Labour Council, 1976–88, president of his Canadian Paperworkers Union local from 1984, and a vice-president of the NBFL from 1990–2004. Raymond Leger is a union researcher and has been in the labour movement in New Brunswick since the mid-1980s. He was a full-time labour representative for the Retail Wholesale Department Store Union in Newcastle and later in a research staff position for CUPE at the regional office in Fredericton. Michel Boudreau, from a CUPE local in Moncton, was in his third term as full-time president of the NBFL when we interviewed him. He was first elected to this position in 2005. From 1998 to 2012, Tom Mann was the executive director of New Brunswick Union (NBU), the second largest union representing public-sector workers in the province. Prior to that, Mann had been the executive director of the NB Nurses Union for sixteen years. In 2012, he left his position at NBU and is no longer in the labour movement. Unfortunately, due to his poor health, we had to cancel several interviews we had set up with Tim McCarthy, president of the NBFL from 1982 to 1991.

We interviewed three leaders from the environmental movement in New Brunswick: Janice Harvey, David Coon, and Tracy Glynn. They have all worked with the CCNB – Harvey and Coon as executive directors and Glynn as forest campaign coordinator. In the summer of 2012, Coon resigned from the CCNB to become leader of the Green Party of New Brunswick. He had been at the council since 1985. Glynn is still at the CCNB. She has been there since 2006.

24. The interviews were conducted by an interview team consisting of myself, my colleague Andrew Secord, and several research assistants, in succession, who took notes.

*Fear at Work: Job Blackmail, Labour and the Environment*.<sup>25</sup> Kazis explained that putting an issue in terms of jobs or the environment creates a false choice that is “environmental job blackmail” against workers.<sup>26</sup> One of the book’s best illustrations of this false choice is the 1974 case of the United Steelworkers of America and the Inland Steel mill located on Lake Michigan. In alliance with other environmental groups, the union stood up to the company when it had refused to clean up its coke ovens and threatened, if forced to do so, to shut down the plant, which would involve laying off 2,500 workers. Yet the union insisted, commissioning their own research on the issue that allowed them to publicly accuse the company of “lying to the workers and lying to the community.” The company eventually backed down, cleaned its coke ovens, and no workers were laid off.<sup>27</sup> Another example involved the proposed Bailly Nuclear Power Plant on Lake Michigan. Again the union and environmental groups opposed it, the former having been convinced that the safety of its members would not be addressed in the plant. The Bailly plant was never built.<sup>28</sup>

John McEwen, from the NBFL, was a millworker from Dalhousie, NB, who would later become president of the NBFL, 1991–94. He was one of a group of leaders coming out of the largely foreign-owned multinationals in the mining and forestry industries of northern New Brunswick. These leaders had taken strong positions in the past. In 1975, the Newcastle-Chatham District Labour Council had sent a motion to the federation that “the province take control of resource industries and the profits derived from these resources be used for the benefit of the people.”<sup>29</sup> Although eventually reworded by the federation executive from “take control” to “more effectively control,” the motion shows the state and mood of labour in this region in this era.

In his remarks to the conference, McEwen brought up several instances of health and safety issues at workplaces around the province and claimed that over the past ten years workers, including those at the mines in Bathurst, had gone on strike over such issues. With the 1982 changes in the Occupational and Safety Act in the province giving workers the right to refuse unsafe work, he stated, “The health and safety of workers is not for sale and never will be again.”<sup>30</sup>

25. Richard Kazis and Richard L. Grossman, *Fear at Work: Job Blackmail, Labor, and the Environment* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982).

26. MacDowell in “Greening the Canadian Workplace” sees the polarized slogan of jobs versus the environment as a perspective taken and spread by the media (174). Also, she notes that, in 1991, Keith Newman of the Canadian Papermakers Union recognized the linking of pollution and layoffs by employers as “job blackmail” (173).

27. Kazis and Grossman, 263.

28. Kazis and Grossman, 270.

29. Frank, *Provincial Solidarities*, 142.

30. John McEwen, Presentation to Jobs and the Environment in New Brunswick conference, Transcript of *Proceedings* (10 March 1983).



In terms of employers playing off environmental regulations for jobs, McEwen was also emphatic. He spoke of the necessity for labour and others to speak with “one voice” against government and business:

In these hard economic times it is easy for the companies to blackmail us because they usually have the support of the community. If there is strike action there are more people waiting to take the jobs. There has to be dialogue between workers and environmentalists to work out these problems. We all live here so the environment concerns everyone.<sup>31</sup>

Larry Hanley of the Canadian Paperworkers Union (CPU) and the immediate past president of the NBFL was from the Rothesay mill in Saint John. Speaking in the context of the controversial budworm spraying program that was going on in New Brunswick forests, he said that the average paper mill worker was against it, although the CPU had taken an official position in its favour. He also spoke about the problem of asbestos in the Nackawic mill, which he claimed was a more severe problem than the one in several buildings that recently had been closed down in the province. Overall, Hanley agreed with an environmental approach:

An environmental approach complements jobs and a healthy safe workplace because it looks at the overall picture of the environment.<sup>32</sup>

## The Nuclear Story

IN 1974, THE BUILDING of the Point Lepreau nuclear plant was announced by the provincial government of Progressive Conservative Richard Hatfield. From the beginning, nuclear power was strongly opposed by the CCNB. A Maritime Coalition of Environmental Protection Associations, later to become the Maritime Energy Coalition, was formed in the 1970s. The coalition was made up of environmentalists, community activists, fishers, woodlot owners, and environmentalists.<sup>33</sup> At this time, labour was not directly involved.

However, in 1979, there was an anti-nuclear, pro-labour protest, involving both the CCNB and the NBFL, with Larry Hanley of the Saint John District Labour Council playing a key role in linking human rights, environmental, and labour supporters in the protest. This was the “No Candu” action in which the longshoremen shut down the Saint John port for one day to protest the shipping of heavy water for a Candu reactor recently sold by Canada to Argentina. The action, cross-Canadian in nature and originating from Toronto, involved labour, community groups, and environmental groups.<sup>34</sup> However, for labour,

31. McEwen, Presentation to Jobs and the Environment conference.

32. Larry Hanley, Presentation to Jobs and the Environment in New Brunswick conference, Transcript of *Proceedings* (10 March 1983).

33. Andrew Secord, *Megaprojects in Maritime Canada: A Case Study of the NB Electric Power Commission*. PhD thesis, University of Sussex (1992), 180.

34. George Vair, “No Candu for Argentina,” (nd), accessed 18 June 2014,

the protest was perhaps more about democracy and the abuse of labour and human rights under the Argentinian military dictatorship than about the nuclear issue *per se*.

Starting in 1983, a series of anti-nuclear resolutions were passed at NBFL conventions. The first one was brought in 1983 by a Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) local from Campbellton. Strongly worded, it “oppose[d] the use of nuclear power for any purposes whatsoever” and called for a moratorium on nuclear power development.<sup>35</sup> Although the resolutions on the nuclear issue brought forward over the subsequent years varied in strength, the basic anti-nuclear position prevailed, including opposition to the building of a Point Lepreau II. Important to note is that the federation’s anti-nuclear position was made possible by the 1982 withdrawal of the construction trades from the federation. These unions have traditionally taken a pro-nuclear stance so, had they stayed in the federation, the anti-nuclear resolutions at the conventions would likely have been contested.

In the latter half of the 1980s, there had been an incident in Saint John of open conflict between environmentalists and labour. A group calling itself People against Point Lepreau II was protesting the building of a second nuclear plant. Members of the building trades unions disrupted the protest.<sup>36</sup> In the words of David Coon of the NB Conservation Council, who was there, “They showed up and cut the microphone cord, popped everyone’s balloons and scared little kids. It wasn’t pretty.”<sup>37</sup>

## The New Brunswick Federation of Labour’s Environmental Committee Story

FROM THE MID-1980S TO THE MID-1990S, the environment received considerable attention by labour in New Brunswick. Tim McCarthy’s leadership of the NBFL and David Coon’s of the CCNB were crucial factors in this.

McCarthy, a pipefitter and electrician who came to Canada from Ireland in 1955, worked in a paper mill in the Miramichi. He was president of the Federation of Labour from 1982 to 1991. At his resignation, the federation established the Tim McCarthy Environment Prize to be awarded annually in his honour.<sup>38</sup>

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<http://www.wfhatthewaylabourexcitcentre.ca/labour-history/no-hot-cargo-for-argentina/>.

35. *NBFL Policy Manual 1988*, Resolution 109, 13.

36. These could have been some of the workers that Joy Parr writes about in her article that describes the acquisition of working knowledge in radiation protection by local workers at the Point Lepreau nuclear plant during the 1980s. “Working Knowledge of the Insensible: Radiation Protection in Nuclear Power Plants, 1962–92” in Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953–2003* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 53–77.

37. Interview with David Coon, Executive Director of the CCNB (12 December 2011).

38. David Frank, *Provincial Solidarities*, 166.

Coon came to the Conservation Council in 1985. Working as a policy director in those years, Coon actively cultivated relations with workers both within and outside of the labour movement. Examples of the latter were farmers, woods workers, and fishers.

There were also, during this period, a number of activists in the locals of the federation such as Sandy Beckingham of Dalhousie and Maurice Clavette of Edmundston. Beckingham and Clavette were whistle blowers in their mills, as well as activists on environmental issues in their communities.

Beckingham worked in the Canadian International Paper (CIP) paper mill in Dalhousie from 1976 to 2004. A member of the CPU later to become CEP, he was the president of his local from 1979 to 1988, president of the Campbellton-Dalhousie and District Labour Council from 1984 to 2004 and a vice-president of the NBFL from 1991 to 2001. Beckingham described his environmental concerns as involving health and safety issues in his mill and in his community. Issues at the mill that Beckingham fought included the presence of toxins, methods of waste disposal, and the pollution of the nearby bay. In the community, he had been concerned with a proposal for docking nuclear subs in his port, the province's budworm spray program, and the forestry practices of the big corporations.<sup>39</sup> Beckingham brought resolutions from his Labour Council to the conventions, sat on the executive council of the federation, and attended conferences like one in Montreal where he publicly disputed the facts presented by a New Brunswick "expert" on the forests.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of his involvement with environmentalists and the CCNB in particular, Beckingham said that he wanted "to show them that the [labour] movement had a place and that they had a credible voice to the issue." Further, he didn't want environmentalists to feel that "they were singing in the wind by themselves" – that "environmentalists were not the enemy." He said that he liked David Coon, Janice Harvey, and David Thompson of the CCNB, that Coon had even "come up home," and they had been able to visit some of the sites that Beckingham was concerned about.

Also important in this period is the fact that several of these activists from the locals, including Beckingham, sat, for a time, on the board of the Conservation Council.<sup>41</sup> In addition, in the early 1990s, both McCarthy and Beckingham were on the province's Round Table on the Economy and Environment. However, Beckingham resigned and McCarthy refused to sign the final report of the Round Table citing "fundamental differences

39. Information from interview with Sandy Beckingham (5 March 2012).

40. This story is also recounted in Jamie Swift, *Stories from CEP's First Ten Years: Walking the Union Walk* (Ottawa: CEP Canada, 2003), 2.

41. Information from interview with Sandy Beckingham (5 March 2012).

over its conclusions relating to the province's future energy options."<sup>42</sup> This issue was specifically about the plan to build Point Lepreau II, a second nuclear plant.

In 1990, the NBFL held a conference on the environment in Fredericton. At the conference, an *ad hoc* committee on the environment was set up. Based on discussions that took place at the conference, the committee came up with a policy statement to take to the NBFL convention to be held later that year. The statement, carried by the convention, had many notable aspects. It named the environment as a critical issue for the 1990s. Taking the framework of sustainable prosperity, it called for treating New Brunswick "as if we plan to stay" and rejected "'jobs at any price' economic thinking." Further, it stated that "job blackmail will no longer be tolerated." It identified the four common areas of concern discussed at the 1990 conference: energy, forestry, solid waste, and the use of chemicals and pesticides. In the area of energy, it opposed any future nuclear power development. Finally, the policy called for "working with Federation affiliates and strengthening ties with the environmental movement."<sup>43</sup>

For various reasons, mostly involving the loss of its leadership, the environmental committee was inactive by 1995. McCarthy chose not to continue as NBFL president in 1992 but continued to serve on the environmental committee for a few years. Beckingham and Clavette continued on the NBFL executive but seemed to have taken up other issues. One of our respondents described the committee as "having gone into the dark" after 1997, although it remained on the books.<sup>44</sup>

## The Forestry and Crown Lands Story

ALTHOUGH THE ALLIANCE between labour and the environmental movement over forests in New Brunswick has since broken down, there was a time when the two movements were working together. In 1999, they formed an alliance, the Emerald Alliance, which included not only the Conservation Council, but also other conservation and wildlife groups such as woodlot owners, First Nations, hunters, the Wildlife Society, and the Trappers Society. The purpose of the alliance was to oppose recommendations such as those of the Jaakko-Poyry Report of 2002, commissioned jointly by the government and industry, which called for the greater cutting of wood on Crown lands.

What was different between this period and later periods? One difference was that, in the 1980s and early 1990s, the majority of environmental activists in the Federation of Labour were from pulp and paper mills. As importantly, in 1999, the Emerald Alliance had been formed. The alliance, besides opposing

42. "Report of the Environment Committee," *NBFL Proceedings* 1992, 38.

43. *Proceedings* 1990, Resolutions 16–18, 52–56.

44. Description from interview with John Murphy (2 March 2012).

the companies' demands for more wood, contested the mechanization of the woods and the resulting job loss for woodcutters.<sup>45</sup>

The Emerald Alliance held a conference in 2000 in Fredericton. At that conference, a strong unified position on forest policy that rejected more cutting of wood was adopted by all participants. This is how Danny King, a federation organizer, described the meeting:

So, on a nice Saturday in the spring of 2000, we all got together at the Fredericton Inn – there was well over a hundred of us – and we actually had a civil conversation about what was developing in the Crown lands of New Brunswick. We also knew that the corporations were going out and they were in back rooms with the government and they were making plans to take over the Crown lands even more. So we came to a conclusion at the end of the day that we were going to work together, that we were going to call for a Royal Commission on the Crown lands, and that we were going to basically come out with the same voice at the Royal Commission.<sup>46</sup>

In 2003, the Select Committee on Wood Supply was set up by the government at the demand of the public. The committee's mandate was "to conduct public consultation into the subject of wood supply in the province and to respond specifically to recommendations made in the Jaakko-Poyry Report." Two members of the Federation of Labour, including King, made a presentation to the committee. In their presentation, the federation representatives rejected the Jaakko-Poyry recommendation for a "guaranteed annual allowable cut." They also opposed a "jobs at any price" approach to forest policy, which they claimed would be "at the cost of having no forest to leave to our children."<sup>47</sup>

However, the federation's position was being contradicted by what was going on in some of the locals. At a press conference after the Emerald Alliance conference, the regional executive of the CEP took a position that was hostile to the consensus that the Emerald Alliance had developed, much to the surprise of the alliance members who were there. According to Coon, labour's relationship with the Conservation Council over the Crown lands issue "fell off the rails" at this point.

In a telephone conversation I had with him in 2012, King, one of the organizers of the Emerald Alliance, explained the apparent discrepancy between the position that he had been taking on Crown lands policy and the position that the regional CEP had taken. He said that it was "politics." Union leaders have

45. Michael Clow and Peter MacDonald have written about the impact on workers of the mechanization process in the woods in New Brunswick. See for example, "If You Go Down to the Woods Today...: Accounting for the Survival and Eclipse of Tree Harvesting Production Systems on the Miramichi River in New Brunswick, Canada," *Technology in Society*, 23 (January 2001), 29–57.

46. Danny King, "Emerald Alliance," transcript of presentation to the *Work in a Warming World Atlantic Forum*, Fredericton (29 September 2011).

47. *Public Hearings for the Select Committee on Wood Supply*, Miramichi (27 November 2003), accessed 20 June 2011, [www.forestsfornb.org/hearings.htm](http://www.forestsfornb.org/hearings.htm).

to follow the wishes of their members, which had been to support the industry position, even if the union leaders themselves disagreed with it. Otherwise, those union leaders would not have been re-elected to their positions.<sup>48</sup> King's explanation of the discrepancy would support my observation that, in forestry, the resistance to environmental issues comes from the locals. As indicated by their speeches, participation in conferences and research publications, the leadership and the staff in the national union offices generally take very progressive views in relation to the environment.<sup>49</sup> Another factor that must have had an impact on the workers at the local level was the Irving Oil strike of 1995–97. It ended with a decertification of the CEP local, leaving the Saint John refinery as the only non-unionized oil refinery in Canada.<sup>50</sup>

To give context to this situation, it must be pointed out that the industry was going through a crisis during this period. By 2008, four mills in northern New Brunswick had been shut down.<sup>51</sup> Forestry workers in the NBFL had been reduced from 8,000 in the 1990s to 1,000–2,000 by this time.<sup>52</sup> Only three companies were left in the industry: J.D. Irving based in Saint John, Twin Rivers (formerly Fraser Bros.) based in Edmundston, and Aditya Birla based in Nackawic. However, whether larger wood allocations on Crown lands were the answer to such a crisis is another question. One of the relevant factors here is that private woodlot owners have not been able to sell all of their wood to the companies. The latter prefer to get their wood from Crown lands. This had become possible when the directive that the primary source of wood supply be private, established since the Crown Lands Act of 1982, was abolished by Premier Frank McKenna in 1992.<sup>53</sup>

The government's renewals of wood allocations came up again in 2007 and 2011. The Irving locals worked actively with the company in postcard (2007) and petition (2011) campaigns to sway the government. This is how the CBC described the 2007 postcard campaign:

J.D. Irving and the other forest companies had workers send thousands of postcards to Shawn Graham's Liberal government. Those letters also used the names of ordinary people to urge the provincial government to follow the industry's corporate objectives. Jeannot Volpé, a former natural resources minister and Progressive Conservative MLA, criticized the postcard campaign: "All the Irving employees were asked to send a letter of support.

48. Telephone conversation with Danny King, 16 April 2012.

49. This was evident, for example, in the participation of representatives from the national offices at the *Work in a Warming World Atlantic Forum*, Fredericton (29–30 September 2011).

50. Frank, *Provincial Solidarities*, 204.

51. Atlantic Provinces Economic Council, "Building Competitiveness in Atlantic Canada's Forest Industries: A Strategy for Future Prosperity" (Halifax 2008), accessed 26 May 2014, <http://www.apec-econ.ca>.

52. Estimate given by Danny King in telephone conversation, 16 April 2012.

53. Information from interview with David Coon (12 December 2011).

The letter was already done. All they had to do was put their name on it and where they were working, and say, 'We support what the Irving group wants.'"<sup>54</sup>

In 2011, the Conservation Council had taken a strong stand on the danger of overcutting. Based on Department of Natural Resources figures, the council declared that wood quotas needed, in fact, to be reduced:

The amount of wood cut from Crown lands in 2006–2007 was double what was cut in 1966–1967. We have seen the amount of wood cut from Crown lands on a five-year average increase by roughly 80% over the past forty years from 2.7 million cubic metres per year in the late 1960s to almost 5 million cubic metres in the past decade. The bottom line is we have overcut the public forest so wood quotas have got to be reduced in 2012. The good news is private woodlot owners across this province have plenty of wood to sell that can make up the difference and create work at the same time.<sup>55</sup>

At one point, the regional CEP union representatives publicly, in the media, accused the Conservation Council of having deliberately falsified figures on their website to make their recommendation.<sup>56</sup> Later, the matter was cleared up between the two, and the union withdrew its charges against the Conservation Council.<sup>57</sup>

At the 2011 NBFL convention, the Irving local in Saint John brought an emergency resolution to oppose, among other things, any reduction in wood quotas.<sup>58</sup> Recommended by the union executive and passed by the membership, this was notable in that it is the only anti-environment resolution that has been passed, that I am aware of, out of all of the federation's resolutions since the 1970s.

As described at the beginning of this paper, after CEP and CAW joined in 2013 to become Unifor, Dias, the new national president, came to New Brunswick to thank the Irvings and congratulate the workers on the announcement of a

54. CBC *New Brunswick News* (22 June 2011), accessed 26 May 2014, [www.cbc.nbnews.ca](http://www.cbc.nbnews.ca).

55. Press release, CCNB website, (20 June 2011), accessed 20 June 2011, [www.conservationcouncil.ca](http://www.conservationcouncil.ca). 57. Information from interview with David Coon (12 December 2011).

56. "Wrong Facts Threaten New Brunswick Forest Workers: The Conservation Council Needs to Clear Up its Act," CEP website, accessed 20 June 2011, [www.cep.ca/](http://www.cep.ca/). "Forestry company disputes green group's numbers," *The Daily Gleaner* (22 June 2011).

57. Information from interview with David Coon (12 December 2011).

58. NBFL Proceedings 2011, Emergency Resolution No. 1, 36.



new government forestry plan.<sup>59</sup> The new plan contains wood allocations on Crown lands that environmentalists claim are above sustainable levels.<sup>60</sup>

There is an interesting contrast with regard to the alliance in the forestry sector in New Brunswick and that on the West coast. In the highly publicized “war in the woods” in British Columbia between woodworkers and environmentalists, labour, led by the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), allied itself from the beginning with the thirteen big companies. The IWA became part of the BC Forest Alliance, which had been formed with the stated purpose of “neutraliz[ing] the impact of environmentalism.” From its inception in 1991, besides spending \$2.7 million yearly getting its message out, the alliance directed attention to “building broad-based work-led support groups in forest dependent communities.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, what is happening in New Brunswick now – labour allying itself with industry – happened from the beginning in British Columbia. The difference is that throughout the last more than 40 years, and even in the forestry industry up until 2000, all public actions and/or alliances by labour in New Brunswick had been in support of the environmental movement. Another difference with British Columbia in the recent forestry situation in New Brunswick is that neither the company, J.D. Irving Ltd., nor the union, Unifor, is taking an openly anti-environmentalist stand. Rather, they both claim that the government forestry plan that they pushed to bring about is environmentally sustainable.<sup>62</sup>

59. In the context of Unifor’s role vis-à-vis the forestry plan, it seems ironic that at the Founding Convention of Unifor in September, 2013, Naomi Klein, the guest speaker, urged not just the labour movement but Unifor itself to become a leader in the alliance against climate change. “Overcoming ‘Overburden’: The Climate Crisis and a Unified Left Agenda. Why unions need to join the climate fight,” accessed 8 May 2014, <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2013/09/04>. There are also contradictions arising from the fact that Unifor has taken a leading role in the anti-shale gas struggle in New Brunswick. It is one of the sponsors of the Spring 2014 Voice of the People Tour against shale gas development. However, underlying tensions have been created since most of the others involved in the tour such as the Conservation Council of New Brunswick are not only against shale gas development but also are vehement opponents of the new forestry plan.

60. “Irving clout with government challenged in the wake of forest deal. Green Party Leader David Coon says new deal allows Crown land to be ‘plundered and pillaged,’” *CBC News*, 14 March 2014; Chris Morris, “Forestry plan unsustainable, environmental group says,” *The Daily Gleaner* (17 March 2014).

61. Jeremy Wilson, *Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 37.

62. “Fact vs Fiction. New Brunswick’s New Forest Strategy: Setting the Record Straight,” ad by J.D. Irving Ltd., *The Daily Gleaner* (14 March 2014). “The right strategy for stronger forestry,” statement signed by presidents of local forestry unions across the province as well as the local and federal leadership of Unifor, *The Daily Gleaner* (17 June 2014).



## The Climate Change Story

THE ISSUE OF CLIMATE CHANGE has been crucially important for the Conservation Council with their work leading to the adoption of a Climate Change Action Plan for New Brunswick. For organized labour in the province, climate change was dealt with sporadically in NBFL resolutions through the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. However, in 2008, Tom Mann, Executive Director of the New Brunswick Union, took on climate change as a central issue.<sup>63</sup>

Over the years, there had been resolutions brought to NBFL conventions: on tax deductions for energy efficient dwellings in 1980, on carbon emissions targets in 1990, and on green job creation in 1999.<sup>64</sup> The latter, green job creation, even became the theme of the federation's convention in 2000, with Coon of the Conservation Council as the keynote speaker. In 2006, the federation president, Michel Boudreau, proposed an initiative to NB Power on wind energy, which unfortunately did not go anywhere.<sup>65</sup> However, in 2008, Tom Mann, executive director of the NBUPPE, having completed training with Al Gore, started a campaign to educate labour and the public about action on climate change. Talks were given around the province. Two publications were written to educate workers on the issue.<sup>66</sup> Mann became the environmental representative at the Federation of Labour and brought a comprehensive resolution on climate change to the 2011 convention that was passed unanimously.<sup>67</sup> In 2009, Mann and his union were recognized for their work on climate change with the Milton F. Gregg Award from the Conservation Council. Finally, Mann joined the NB "Work in a Warming World" team to put on the 2011 conference in Fredericton, *Work in a Warming World Forum: Saving the Planet and Creating Jobs*. The conference brought together regional, national, and international participants from labour unions, environmental organizations, community groups, and the academy for two and a half days of sharing and discussion. A format was provided for the creation of new labour-environmental alliances, most especially in New Brunswick, on the model of the BlueGreen alliances, which have been formed at the national levels in the US and Canada. Unfortunately, despite some good work at the conference itself, none of the alliances, including the New Brunswick one, managed to continue successfully.

63. New Brunswick, Department of Environment, Climate Change Action Plan 2007–2012 (Fredericton 2007).

64. *NBFL Policy Manual*, 13. *NBFL Proceedings 1990*, 57–58. *NBFL Proceedings 1999*, 33–34.

65. Information from interview with Michel Boudreau (9 February 2011).

66. Peter Corbyn, *Cool Comforts: Bargaining for our Survival* (Fredericton: NBUPPE, 2008); Peter Corbyn, *Cool Comforts II: Using our capital to save our future* (Fredericton: NBUPPE, 2009).

67. *NBFL Proceedings 2011*, Resolution 52, 52–53.

In 2012, Mann stepped down from his position at New Brunswick Union (formerly NBUPPE) and in the labour movement. To date, no one in the labour movement in New Brunswick has effectively taken up the torch on the climate change issue.

### **What Do These Stories Mean?**

THE BASIC QUESTION THAT WE HAVE BEEN dealing with in this paper is “Can the labour and environmental movements work together on environmental issues?” I believe that the answer to the question is “yes.” In my research in New Brunswick, I found a number of cases where the two movements worked either in alliance or in cooperation with each other. Whether they can work together in all cases may be another matter. Theoretically, they could since we all have the same long-term interests. As was said by the Federation of Labour representatives at the Select Committee Hearings, we have to think about our children.

It is interesting to reflect about why, when, and where, in the New Brunswick context, these labour and environmental movement alliances and instances of working together took place as well as why, when, and where they failed. Certain catalysts seemed to have played a role. For example, Richard Kazis’ coming to New Brunswick in 1983 to speak on environmental job blackmail brought the two movements together. Leadership in both the labour and environmental movements was also important in getting the movements working together, e.g., McCarthy’s leadership in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the federation’s environment committee story, Coon’s in his 25 years at the New Brunswick Conservation Council, and Mann’s from 2008 to 2012 in the climate change story. Circumstance made the NBL’s position against nuclear power possible when the construction trades unions withdrew from the federation in 1982. In forestry, the decline of the industry starting in the late 1990s negatively affected cooperation between the union and environmentalists. Further, the dominance of a particular company, the J.D. Irving Company, both in the forest industry and in the province as a whole, played a pivotal role in the deterioration of the relationship between labour and environmentalists in the industry. The BC Forest Alliance strategy, in the 1990s, of industry’s focus on getting workers in forest dependent communities on its side appears to have been copied in New Brunswick. It may in fact have been the crucial strategy that has turned around previous alliances between labour and environmentalists over forests in New Brunswick.

In conclusion, alliances between the labour and environmental movements have played a crucial role in New Brunswick in getting labour’s support on environmental issues. Workers’ understanding of the role of environmental job blackmail and the keeping of that concept in the forefront, especially during crises, has also been a key aspect in maintaining those alliances. Both Foster and Klein emphasize the role of alliances in their work on the epochal

crisis and the epochal transition. Foster talks about an “ecological working class alliance” while Klein talks about “ecological sociability” and the strength of coming together in such alliances. The question is whether the pushbacks to such alliances can be overcome, not only in New Brunswick, but also in other places and in the broader society.