

**Submission to the Muskrat Falls Commission, For a New Earth (FANE)  
18 January 2019**

*For a New Earth (FANE) is a registered non-profit organization in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was founded in January 2018. Prior to that, FANE was a SSHRC funded research project of the Department of Philosophy at Memorial. Its mission is to raise awareness in the community around environmental issues. FANE has hosted several public events on Muskrat Falls, including the Labrador Muskrat Falls Symposium held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2018, in Happy-Valley Goose Bay (co-organized with the Royal Society of Canada and the Labrador Institute), and a follow up town hall meeting on Muskrat Falls in St. John's at the Peter Easton Pub on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, 2018. FANE co-director Sean McGrath, Professor of Philosophy at Memorial University, has published op eds on the topic over the past three years, some of which are appended to this report. FANE co-director Kyla Bruff wrote a paper entitled "Conceiving of a Collective Future After Muskrat Falls," which was read at the Aldrich Graduate Conference at Memorial University on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March, 2018, a summary of which is included below. The third co-director of FANE, Barry Stephenson, Professor of Religious Studies at Memorial, has documented, in video and audio, a number of Muskrat Falls meetings and interventions, adding the voices of concerned citizens to the public record; these are available on FANE's website.<sup>1</sup> FANE Science advisor Ian Goudie has been an outspoken critic of the project for many years and has written a report on the project for the Commission, also included below. FANE is deeply concerned about the adverse effects of the Muskrat Falls project on the eco-system of the lower Churchill River, on the future of green energy developments in the province, and on our democracy. FANE is not only opposed to this project in principle, because of the environmental costs of hydro-electric dams and mega-projects in the north; it is opposed to the way the project railroaded every effort the democracy made to stop it, whether that was in the form of scientific recommendations, environmental assessment reports, or public protests. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador were misled about this project from its inception, and when they objected to continuing with it for environmental and economic reasons, they were ignored. The interest of the few prevailed over the concerns of the many, and the health of the ecosystems upon which all depend.*

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://foranewearth.org/category/muskrat-falls/>

## 1. Failed Scientific Credibility and Environmental Assessment

The controversy of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project flared-out into a major public outcry concerning the apparent downstream risks of methyl mercury contamination to human health. It was the apparent lack of rigorous environmental assessment that was the catalyst for this public inquiry that also has primary focus on the escalating costs of this mega project. The reality is that our environmental assessment processes are failing us because conclusions and recommendations of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Lower Churchill Project were not science-based. How was it possible for Nalcor to be released from Environmental Assessment for an EIS that ignored downstream effects when The World Commission on Dams 2000 concluded that one of the most far-reaching negative environmental effects of dams are on the downstream ecosystems?<sup>2</sup> Surely this should have been the starting point for the EIS but was intentionally overlooked. In fact, public hearings for the EIS were opened by the proponent claiming that there would be no adverse environmental impacts, a categorically false and shameful statement.

Environmental assessments evolved and were entrenched in legislation by the early 1980's in Canada. Environmental Impact Statements were meant to be some sort of 'independent' scientific approach, i.e., independent of industry and government agendas. The concept was that proposed economic projects could be evaluated by the public, the scientific community, and governments in order to determine if the risks outweigh the benefits. Recently the Alliance of Leading Environmental Scientists and Thinkers (ALERT) posted a startling article claiming that, worldwide, Environmental Impact Assessments are not worth the paper they are printed on, and increasingly EIAs are not stopping bad projects.<sup>3</sup>

The need for better consideration and mitigation of downstream effects of the LCHP was recommended by the review panel, and a scientific approach was provided to Nalcor on 17 January, 2011, yet all this was seemingly ignored or otherwise too late to shift the 'do-nothing' momentum.<sup>4</sup> We are witnessing an era where big business and governments have co-opted the Environmental Assessment process, and politicians ignore the advice of their committees.

The reality is that avoidance and mitigation of environmental impacts of economic developments have costs. With dams, there are tradeoffs to be made, such as the regular release of waters from dams to maintain minimum flows downstream, removal or capping of organic materials from the inundation zone to reduce mercury loading and/or drawdown canals to ensure prime wetlands upstream are not inundated. The World Commission on Dams emphasized that these approaches should be integrated, whereas we witness little that could be viewed as environmental engineering for the LCHP. Even the more recent recommendations to Government by the Independent Advisory Committee are apparently ignored as the reservoir continues to inundate trees and soil and the progressive flooding will not be reversible. Proponents spend billions on infrastructure yet renege spending anything on environmental design.

Dr. Ian Goudie, Scientific and Resource Management Advisor, FANE

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<sup>2</sup> *Dams and Development: A new framework for decision making* - [www.internationalrivers.org](http://www.internationalrivers.org).

<sup>3</sup> See <https://us9.campaign-archive.com/?e=7d7bc1b4ff&u=228c18608b6eb3bd8fc42327e&id=3cd2a966bf>

<sup>4</sup> See [http://foranewearth.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/SA1111\\_Downstream-Effects\\_26Jan11\\_Final.pdf](http://foranewearth.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/SA1111_Downstream-Effects_26Jan11_Final.pdf)

## 2. Collectively Conceiving of a Future After Muskrat Falls

The economic future of Newfoundland and Labrador seems increasingly uncertain. The Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project is now far exceeding budgetary estimates and is encountering growing criticism for its transformative environmental impacts and the threat it poses to indigenous subsistence practices in Labrador. Even on the island of Newfoundland, where the direct environmental consequences of the project will not be experienced as severely, cost overruns have led many analysts to predict that near-term economic impact of the project will have a crippling effect on the local economy and could threaten the sustainability of many social services that have already experienced cutbacks, including public health for a rapidly aging population. This situation is exacerbated by a \$15.5 billion dollar provincial debt, crude prices far below provincial forecasts, a fishing industry that is employing fewer and fewer people and increasingly undeniable environmental costs associated with the rapidly expanding aquaculture sector.<sup>5</sup> In this climate, the need for a more inclusive and effective public dialogue about the province's social and environmental future has never been more pressing. What new ways of engaging with collective history, moments of societal change, and community dynamics might better enable Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to shape the future direction of their province in the wake of the Muskrat Falls controversy and its associated impacts? How can we improve the accessibility of public discussions surrounding Muskrat Falls? Is it possible for the province to unite as a single community, which nevertheless contains diverse, self-governing sub-communities, to *decide* how the majority of the populace want to move forward on this issue?

In collaboration with ongoing scientific and community work, there is a need to critically employ philosophical and historical methods, models of public engagement, and media analysis to explore ways of facilitating more inclusive and effective public dialogue and analysis of the critical socio-environmental issues facing the province of Newfoundland and Labrador at this time. While consensus may be impossible, certain philosophical tools and concepts, in combination with a rigorous commitment to facilitating accessible civic discourse, have the potential to inspire more robust public engagement about what sorts of hopes and concerns Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have for our future. For example, through an analytic, comparative, conceptual methodology, the concepts of historical change and community, and critique of the narrative of progress through struggle as it was carried out by Conservatives in Newfoundland (2003-2010) could be productively analyzed in the Muskrat Falls Project. Furthermore, critical methods applied to the relationship of individual experiences of history to the political climate from 2003-2010 could help reveal who stood to benefit versus whose subsistence practices have been threatened from the beginning of the project's sanctioning.

Newfoundland and Labrador Non-Profit organization For A New Earth (FANE) has been critically mobilizing theoretical work concretely in Newfoundland and Labrador via public events, group discussions, reports and scholarly publications, particularly on the issue of Muskrat Falls, since 2015. FANE realizes the need for public, applied, interdisciplinary critical thinking on the future of rural and urban communities, resource development, and ecological, social and political issues in Newfoundland and Labrador. The practical value of the concepts such as history, community,

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Benjamin Rigby, Reade Davis, Dean Bavington and Christopher Baird, "Industrial aquaculture and the politics of resignation," *Marine Policy* 80 (2017), 19-27.

decisive moments, and time (specifically: how does the past and present relate to how we conceive of the future?)—became clear to us as we embarked on active, local, ecological work.

For A New Earth maintains a growing commitment to bringing academic perspectives and analyses into the public sphere in Newfoundland and Labrador. Two of the Co-Directors of FANE, Sean McGrath and Kyla Bruff, work in philosophy. One of the benefits of this background in philosophy is that, due to its systematic, comparative and concept-based methodologies, philosophy inherently possesses characteristics that support interdisciplinarity and the systematizing and interpreting a broad range of social issues. We witnessed this strength of philosophy applied first-hand during the For A New Earth’s pilot project, an interdisciplinary event called “The Future of Nature” held on the West Coast of Newfoundland.

Since then, FANE has co-organized numerous other conferences and events, which have attempted to relate the philosophy—specifically the philosophy of history—to practical issues. For A New Earth thus moved from a research initiative to a community-based NPO. Building on these creative mobilizations of philosophy, McGrath, Bruff along with FANE’s third Co-Director Barry Stephenson attempted to offer a critical voice on Muskrat Falls by planning and speaking at numerous conferences and events in 2017 and 2018. All three Co-Directors have also spoken about Muskrat Falls on VOXM, CBC, and written about Muskrat Falls from a critical, philosophical perspective in the Independent Newspaper.

Muskrat Falls represents a unique turning point in Newfoundland and Labrador’s history. Historian Jerry Bannister describes it as “an important opportunity to assess the province’s political culture and the role of history in it.”<sup>6</sup> Many issues converge around this megaproject, such as public health, “community concerns, Aboriginal rights, environmental impacts, alternatives, cost, and risk.”<sup>7</sup> The possible health and financial effects of the project suggest that indifference is no longer an option. The now infamous Harvard study which demonstrated that the flooding of the areas for hydroelectric power at Muskrat falls could cause high levels of methylmercury to enter the water supply of the area, thus potentially poisoning the food supply relied upon by the Innu and Inuit, cannot be ignored.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous land protectors and allies have taken a firm stand that the project can and must still be done away with, despite considerable private and public investment. .<sup>9</sup> In opposition to these demands, however, some local economists,<sup>10</sup> politicians and journalists<sup>11</sup> have made the case that it is too late now to stop the project from proceeding.

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<sup>6</sup> Jerry Bannister, “A River Runs Through It: Churchill Falls and the End of Newfoundland History,” *Acadiensis* XLI, 1 (2012): 213.

<sup>7</sup> James P. Feehan, “Connecting to the North American Grid: Time for Newfoundland to Discontinue Inefficient Price Regulation,” *Canadian Public Policy* (Dec. 2016), 482.

<sup>8</sup> Leah Burrows, “Poison in Arctic and human cost of ‘clean’ energy,” *The Harvard Gazette*, September 7, 2015, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2015/09/poison-in-arctic-and-human-cost-of-clean-energy/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ashley Fitzpatrick, “That Dam Project: Labrador Land Protectors refuse to end the fight,” January 18, 2018, <http://www.thetelegram.com/news/that-dam-project-labrador-land-protectors-refuse-to-end-the-fight-178487/>.

<sup>10</sup> James P. Feehan thus explains, “Although it is too late to rectify the pre-Muskrat situation or stop the Muskrat Falls project, regulatory policy can be reformed so as to avoid additional costs associated with mispricing,” James P. Feehan, “Connecting to the North American Grid,” 487.

<sup>11</sup> Kenn Oliver writes, “The unforgiving reality is that the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and its taxpayers are married to the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project” (“That Dam Project: Pennies on the power,” January 22, 2018, <http://www.thetelegram.com/news/that-dam-project-pennies-on-the-power-179505/>).

Then there is the question of who is going to pay for the Muskrat falls project, the cost of which “will be substantially more than initially claimed,”<sup>12</sup> and how. As economist James Feehan explains, “Newfoundland ratepayers and taxpayers will bear the cost of the project, including all the cost over-runs.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Feehan underscores Nalcor’s admission that “once Muskrat Falls energy is integrated into the island grid in 2020, the resulting retail electricity rate for [Newfoundland Power] residential customers would more than double the 2016 rate.”<sup>14</sup> Feehan proposes an alternative, efficient electricity pricing model for electricity in Newfoundland, but the reality remains that Newfoundlanders are likely to see a significant increase in their electricity bills once the energy from Muskrat Falls is integrated into the grid.

Muskrat Falls is exemplary of the relevance of applied analyses from the sub-discipline of the philosophy of history, particularly the study of time and memory (particularly the relation of past, present and future), historical narratives and the meaning and definition of historical events. The Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project was previously justified as a secure investment of oil revenue and an environmentally positive move away from a dependency on fossil fuels. It was falsely presented as unambiguously profitable, non-problematic and environmentally safe to the public. Indeed, the 2010 statements on the partnership which marked the sanctioning of the development of Muskrat Falls by the then Premier Danny Williams (the project would provide “thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity...”)<sup>15</sup> Minister of Natural Resources Kathy Dunderdale (that Muskrat Falls “ensured the long-term stability of power rates”), and CEO of Nalcor Ed Martin (that the project is the “most economic and reliable option to meet Newfoundland and Labrador’s needs over the coming years” from which the province can “begin reaping the export benefits”) now seem preposterous in view of the financial, health-related and social consequences of the Muskrat Falls project facing us now. In view of such statements, the hope in the future, trust of politicians and the political will of people in Newfoundland and Labrador must be re-examined. Is there any hope of alleviating the burdens that Muskrat Falls presents?

By using philosophical, social scientific and historical methods and concepts to organize and analyze the responses of different communities and groups to Muskrat Falls, FANE has been able, through our public engagement events (such as the Muskrat Falls Symposium in Happy-Valley Goose Bay, 21-23 February 2018, co-organized with the Royal Society of Canada and the Labrador Institute), to show how this project is being positioned in and through public discourses. The goal of the event was to give all voices a structured space to be heard and to tell the story of Muskrat Falls in all of its economic, social and political complexity. This was an opportunity for researchers, Land Protectors, community members, industry representatives and the general public to hear each other, and for the active facilitation of a critical, organized discussion. The results of the symposium were disseminated by FANE on our website ([www.foranewearth.org](http://www.foranewearth.org)), and also at various public events (e.g., “What’s Next For Muskrat Falls?,” Peter Easton Pub, March 1, 2018;

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<sup>12</sup> Feehan, “Connecting to the North American Grid,” 482.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 490.

<sup>15</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Government of Nova Scotia, Nalcor Energy, Emera Inc., “News Release: Lower Churchill Project to Become a Reality; Province Signs Partnership Agreement with Emera Inc. for Development of Muskrat Falls,” November 18, <https://www.gov.nl.ca/lowerchurchillproject/release.htm>.

Memorial University's Aldrich Conference, March 22, 2018; The Muskrat Falls Symposium, organized by Memorial University's Sociology Department, September 29, 2018).

The theoretical ground of the claim that this is a critical moment of possible change in Newfoundland and Labrador's history to which the philosophy of history could productively speak, lies in the work of Jerry Bannister, who was the keynote Speaker at the Muskrat Falls Symposium in Happy-Valley Goose Bay. Bannister invokes a surprising number of philosophical concepts in his work on Newfoundland and Labrador history (particularly the notion of an "end to history," teleology, narrativity, political mythology and times of "rational irrationality"<sup>16</sup>). He applies the main question around which most debates in the philosophy of history gravitate—namely does history have a purpose or guiding principle, and if so, what is it—directly to the Newfoundland and Labrador case after Muskrat Falls.

Philosophical analyses can be conducted negatively, in the form of critique and deconstruction, or positively, through the creation and exploration of concepts and their relevance. My thus project first critiques a long lineage of thinkers who have described history as a progressive teleology of history. For these thinkers (such as Francis Fukuyama and Charles Taylor), most of whom found their theories in Hegel's philosophy, history is the progressive realization of a final purpose, such as human emancipation or a state of affairs in which all beings are free to use their ability to reason to determine their own lives. In this sense, history is teleological.

Bannister claims that Fukuyama's "ideas on the potential linearity of history and the myopia this creates are useful tools for understanding the political culture of Newfoundland and Labrador," as Danny Williams' Conservative Party made many "emancipation proclamations."<sup>17</sup> Bannister focuses on how Williams built on a "Newfoundland nationalism" that "was a throwback to the optimistic provincial nationalism of the Smallwood era."<sup>18</sup> However, this narrative only works if you see history *without* loss<sup>19</sup> and a faith in the means of the inevitable delivery of progress (Bannister describes this as an "unquestioning faith in industrial modernity" and a measure of heritage by "material progress").<sup>20</sup> It also serves to justify the mistakes and even terrors of history as necessary stages in the overcoming of past struggles towards the realization of freedom.

Bannister explains that in the transition to the age of Newfoundland and Labrador's history marked by Muskrat Falls, what changed is *not* the problems and concrete conditions of people in the province, but rather "the history of those problems and those debates." He continues, "the history predicated on struggle—is over because that struggle is over. . . history ends when its dominant narrative ends. A new narrative will no doubt emerge in Newfoundland and Labrador from the unending dialogue between the past and the present, but it is not here yet."<sup>21</sup> One of the goals of my project is to integrate the aforementioned positive concepts into collective discussions surrounding a possible "new narrative" of the province.

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<sup>16</sup> Bannister, "A River Runs," 213; Jerry Bannister, "Whigs and Nationalists: The Legacy of Judge Prowse's History of Newfoundland." *Acadiensis*, 32.1 (2002): 3, Bannister, "A River Runs," 213; 225; 224, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> Bannister, "A River Runs," 214. For example, Bannister quotes Williams' position that "Newfoundlanders were now going to break free from the shackles of federalist oppression" ("A River Runs," 214).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 221

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

Walter Benjamin describes that when history is at a point that it can be considered as a “configuration pregnant with tension,” it can be shocked and crystallize into something new. After Muskrat Falls, we are in such a scenario, during which a cultural shift is possible regarding how we understand our history and future.<sup>22</sup>

FANE has identified the need to encourage, strengthen and listen attentively to the resilient communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, in order to enter into a productive dialogue all the different voices expressing concern about Muskrat Falls. Of particular importance are the voices opposing the release of the methylmercury into the water supply of the Lake Melville region. In listening to these responses to Muskrat Falls, FANE attempts to identify the crucial, argumentative points of difference between the official stance of Nalcor or the province on Muskrat Falls, and the concerns of the indigenous and land protectors. This discussion is informed by what James Feehan describes as the “institutional inertia” in Newfoundland and Labrador, which prohibits reform in electricity pricing.<sup>23</sup>

In short, the government in Newfoundland and Labrador is not currently meeting the needs of the people, and political and institutional change is needed. Such a cultural and political shift begins with the will to follow the imperative—laid out by Max Horkheimer—to listen and disseminate the point of views of the victims and people whose lives have been forever changed by the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project:

The real individuals of our time are the martyrs who have gone through infernos of suffering and degradation in their resistance to conquest and oppression, not the inflated personalities of popular culture, the conventional dignitaries. These unsung heroes consciously exposed their existence as individuals to the terroristic annihilation that others undergo unconsciously through the social process. The anonymous martyrs of the concentration camps are the symbols of the humanity that is striving to be born. The task of philosophy is to translate what they have done into language that will be heard, even though their finite voices have been silenced by tyranny.<sup>24</sup>

How we conceive of our collective past shapes what we can envisage for the future. Fundamental theoretical tasks at this crucial point in Newfoundland and Labrador’s history should therefore be to critique teleology, the end of history, and a certain form of Newfoundland nationalism. This could help restore some faith in the province’s democratic institutions. Throughout the process of positively changing and developing these institutions on both the theoretical and practical levels—along with fighting for increased public accountability—we should also seek to empower local communities, encourage innovation, and to ultimately diversify the economy, thereby rewriting Newfoundland and Labrador’s dominant narrative.

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<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 262.

<sup>23</sup> Feehan, “Connecting to the North American Grid,” 485.

<sup>24</sup> Max Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason*, Bloomsbury: Oxford University Press, 1947, 161.

### 3. Score One for Democracy<sup>25</sup>

It is always a surprise to see Newfoundland and Labrador in the *Globe and Mail*. The editorial in the *Globe* of Friday, Oct. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016, was entitled “A victory for science and simple decency at Muskrat Falls.”

In it, the government of Dwight Ball was properly excoriated for even thinking about flooding the reservoir without removing the topsoil, and forcing the Innu and Inuit who hunt and fish in the region to change their diet or be poisoned or—as St. John’s Liberal MP Nick Whalen instructed them (with unfathomable vulgarity)—to “eat less fish.”

One thing deserves comment. In both the editorial and the press conference that preceded it from St. John’s, we were told that this is a victory for science, or even that science will henceforth decide how to proceed.

It is not a victory for science at all. It is a victory for democracy. Science decides nothing; people do. Premier Ball and Nalcor had decided that the Innu and Inuit concerns were not significant enough to warrant slowing down the process of flooding the reservoir, and increasing the cost of the project even more.

Democracy, this time, in the form of political protest such as has never before been seen in the province, forced him to rethink the issue.

Sean McGrath, Professor of Philosophy (MUN), Director, For a New Earth Research Initiative

### 4. Newfoundland and Labrador Should be Leading the Way to a Green Economy<sup>26</sup>

It is good to see common sense creep into the conversation about the future of the Newfoundland economy. I don’t mean Premier Dwight Ball’s ill-advised austerity measures, but Beothuk Energy’s success at finding a European funder for their wind energy project in St. George’s Bay.

One of the reasons long-awaited wind farming in Newfoundland is beginning offshore rather than inland, where construction would be less costly and more environmentally friendly (no seabeds to tear up) is that Nalcor is not interested in developing wind energy. The biggest obstacle to converting to clean energy in Newfoundland and Labrador is our dogged commitment to developing fossil fuels (including fracking) in spite of the increasing global consensus on climate change.

Nalcor, of course, has their renewable energy file: the great red herring, Muskrat Falls. A Harvard study has reminded us that while hydroelectric plants do not emit significant greenhouse gasses, the construction of the dam on the Lower Churchill could poison and destroy Innu and Inuit hunting and fishing grounds. The protests this week in Labrador and St. John’s demonstrate that not everyone sees this as a reasonable price to pay for renewable energy.

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<sup>25</sup> Published in *The Telegram*, St. John’s, November 7, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Published in *The Telegram*, St. John’s, October 18, 2016.

This past spring, our research group, For a New Earth, in collaboration with the faculty of humanities and social sciences, brought Innu elder Elizabeth Penashue to St. John's, where she made a desperate plea to a hundred or so people assembled in the Rocket Bakery to do something to save the Innu from cultural genocide at the hands of the provincial and federal governments. As she wept openly over the fate of her people, I surveyed the crowd. I have never seen so many guilty faces in one room. The feeling was tragic.

No one said what everyone felt: in the face of the push to develop the economy at any and all cost, the Innu don't stand a chance.

Two stories about the future of the human race are repeated wherever the facts of climate change are taken seriously. The first story is pessimistic. It foresees human civilization inevitably regressing to a pre-industrial economy at the expense of countless millions of lives as the irreversible effects of climate change take hold (desertification, food shortages, swamped coastal cities, armies of refugees). The other story is optimistic and sees us transit from a fossil-fuel based economy to renewables in the next decade, thereby averting total ecological collapse. It is hard to know who to believe.

Perhaps Al Gore is right and we can rebuild our consumer economy on more sustainable terrain. Or it might be that this vision of green consumerism is the noble lie we need to tell ourselves to prepare for "the ecological conversion," necessary according to Pope Francis if we are to save the planet and ourselves.

What the pessimists and the optimists have in common is their insistence that climate change is not a political fable concocted by the left; it is the most serious threat to human civilization we have ever faced. This is more than can be said for many in our province, who still dream of a resource-based economy that will make us all rich.

We should be leading the pack in greening the global economy but instead we are lagging behind in another century. With our small and affluent population, our largely uninhabited wilderness (so much to lose), our relatively healthy seas, and our recent experience of the eco-collapse of the fishery, we are well-positioned to join countries such as Iceland and Germany in positively responding to the reality of climate change.

Wind farms are a good start, but we need to talk about much more: renewing rural communities, jump-starting agriculture, economic diversification, and above all, the end of consumerism. In recent memory many Newfoundlanders lived in largely self-sufficient non-consumerist communities. Today, I sometimes hear people smugly talk of how climate change is great for Newfoundland and Labrador: longer summers, more tourists, etc.

Maybe, but say goodbye to the picturesque outports and take seriously the prospects of a world without fish. It has been proven: cod and most other species of cold-water fish stocks cannot survive a warmer and CO<sub>2</sub> salinized North Atlantic. It is time for us to own the challenges of climate change, and take the lead in shaping the green economy of the future.

Sean McGrath, Professor of Philosophy (MUN), Director, For a New Earth Research Initiative

## 5. The Ongoing Muskrat Falls Debacle: How to Develop the North<sup>27</sup>

On the 22nd and 23rd of February 2018, the College of New Scholars of the Royal Society of Canada, in collaboration with Memorial's Department of Philosophy and the Labrador Institute, will host a public symposium dedicated to an interdisciplinary discussion of the scientific, cultural, and social-political dimensions of the controversial Muskrat Falls hydro-electrical project on the lower Churchill River in Labrador. Our proximate objective is to offer a venue for all of the voices and to give as generous a hearing to the various positions on the issue as possible. The intention is not protest but knowledge dissemination. We are proposing to bring together an interdisciplinary team of researchers, some of whom have dedicated their careers to studying Muskrat, to tell the story in all of its scientific, economic, social and political-ecological complexity. The following op ed is written by one of the organizers and does not necessarily represent the views of the RSC, Memorial University, the organizing committee or anyone else involved in this event.

The massive hydro-electric project on the lower Churchill River in Labrador is expected to go online in 2019. Described as a “boondoggle” by policy makers and at 12.7 billion dollars—over double the anticipated budget—the Muskrat Falls project emerged into international attention in the fall of 2016 when protesters occupied the Labrador premises of the Newfoundland and Labrador energy corporation, Nalcor. The protesters demanded that the company and the government of Newfoundland heed a joint MUN/Harvard study that proved that if the flood basin was not cleaned of vegetation prior to flooding, the surrounding lands would be poisoned with methylmercury for years to come, endangering the lives of Innu and Inuit who depended upon the fish and game to survive. At the zero hour, and with an unprecedented hunger strike threatening the lives of protesters, the government relented and agreed to clear the basin. But problems continue to this day, with Nalcor refusing to produce documentation to satisfy local concerns that the builders of the dam have reckoned with the seasonal instability of the river bank (particularly the north spur), and also denying, against local knowledge, that spawning salmon populations are at risk due to low water levels. The protest has never in fact stopped, as this writer learned recently on a visit to the site.

Economically, no one denies that Muskrat is a fiscal disaster. Nalcor CEO, Stan Marshall, sees little prospects for the province to recoup its losses. “I think this project is a hell of a lot worse...deal than the Upper Churchill,” Marshall said in recent interview. Memorial University of Newfoundland economist Dr. James Feehan has proven that it is virtually impossible for the project to break even. Moreover, by flooding the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador with hydro-electric energy for generations, Muskrat Falls has doomed the development of other sustainable energy in the province, such as wind and solar. The project is called “green” but when one considers the transformation of the Churchill river, the flooding of indigenous ancestral lands, and the adverse effect on human and non-human communities, the descriptor is dubious at best.

Historian Dr. Jerry Bannister at Dalhousie University has argued that the 20th century political history of Newfoundland is key to understanding why the project goes ahead, despite its unprofitability. In the early 2000, former Newfoundland and Labrador premier Danny Williams

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<sup>27</sup> Originally published in the Memorial Gazette. Reprinted on the website of the Royal Society of Canada. See <http://rsc-src-college.ca/voices/voices-of-the-college-the-ongoing-muskrat-falls-debacle-how-not-to-develop-the-north/>

promised to make right the infamous bad deal signed by Premier Joey Smallwood in the late 1960s to export hydro-electric power through Quebec from the dam on the upper Churchill River in Labrador. The Churchill Falls dam is an infamous economic failure for the province. Under the terms of the original deal, Newfoundland and Labrador must sell the power to Quebec at 1969 rates, while Quebec resells the energy at current rates. According to conservative estimates, Newfoundland and Labrador has lost billions of dollars on Churchill Falls. Muskrat Falls has been pushed ahead, not by economic interests, but by Newfoundland nationalism.

Sean McGrath, Professor of Philosophy (MUN), Director, For a New Earth Research Initiative