

## **S.O.S. Medicare 2: Looking Forward**

**S.O.S. Medicare 2: Looking Forward:** two-day conference on Thursday May 3 to Friday May 4 in Regina, Saskatchewan at the Queensbury Convention Centre.

*The conference, hosted by the University of Regina Graduate School of Public Policy and the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, explored the future of Canada's health care system as envisioned by Tommy Douglas. The speakers at the conference included Maude Barlow, Stephen Lewis, Roy Romanow, and Monique Bégin.*

*The Canadian Health Coalition, the Douglas-Coldwell Foundation, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives were major sponsors of the event. Other sponsors included the Council of Canadians, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour.*

*Below is Maude Barlow's speech "Profit is not the cure, committing to health care for all", which was presented during Session #6 on Friday May 4.*

### **Profit is not the cure, committing to health care for all**

It is a great honour to be part of this historic gathering, which represents a revitalizing of our collective will to stand on guard for medicare, the jewel in the crown of our social legacy. Never has the danger to public health care been greater. Not only are several major provinces openly courting private service delivery, we have a Prime Minister in Ottawa who was once head of the National Citizens Coalition, an organization founded to fight public health care and which predicted that thousands of Canadians would die if we adopted a public system.

We at the Council of Canadians will now work with increased intensity in coalition with others in this room and across the country to preserve and expand medicare. We are also launching a campaign called *Best Kept Secret: The Public Healthcare Competitive Advantage* to reach out to small and medium sized business in Canada with the message of the business advantage to a publicly funded system.

But I want to take my few minutes today to say a few words about the political moment in which we find ourselves and the increasing pressure to create a Fortress North America, led by the big business community on both sides of the border, against the perceived threats that George Bush and Stephen Harper see to our current "way of life." In a reaction to American security concerns post 9/11, the big business lobby in Canada, led by Tom d'Aquino and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, convinced the Paul Martin government to undertake an extensive project of deep continental integration with the United States in order to keep the border open for Canadian exports.

#### *The SPP*

What the both CCCE and the Task Force on the Future of North America recommended was the eventual creation of a North American common market; common immigration and refugee policies; a North American security perimeter; one passport for the bloc; harmonized defence operations and policy; a harmonized regulatory framework for food, health and safety rules and environmental standards; a North American resource pact which is to include energy, hydroelectricity and water; and to negotiate within the WTO as one trade bloc. (The latter would mean negotiating the General Agreement on Services with the very country that wants to use the WTO to force open Canada's health care services to American corporations.)

While the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) signed in Waco Texas by the governments of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico in March 2005 did not go as far as this corporate blueprint for the

continent, it did set out to begin the process on many of these fronts, co-governed by the North American Competitiveness Council which was set up at the second "Three Amigos" summit held in Cancun Mexico the next year, this time attended by Stephen Harper. The NACC is represented by the CEOs of 30 major North American corporations, including Wal-Mart and Lockheed Martin and is the only sector of society consulted by the three governments in the whole process. Already dozens of cross-border government working groups have laid out a far-reaching program for continental harmonization and integration and the U.S. government has hired the right wing Center for Strategic and International Studies, to prepare a policy blueprint for the bloc called *North American Future 2025*. The Fraser Institute recently called for a shared border security and defence pact between Canada and the U.S. and David Doge, governor of the Bank of Canada has speculated favourably on a North American currency.

The Security and Prosperity Partnership has potentially more far-reaching ramifications for Canada than NAFTA, yet it has not come back to the legislatures of the three countries. When I asked senior officials from the American Embassy (who had requested a meeting with us after seeing media criticism of the SPP from our March 2007 teach-in on deep integration called *Integrate This!*) why the SPP was not being ratified in each country, they said that the three governments and the business community didn't want "another bruising NAFTA battle." This attitude speaks volumes to this profoundly undemocratic process. No doubt the political and business elite in the three countries know that the SPP would not gain popular support if it were to be put to the people and their elected representatives; instead, a small cadre of mostly unelected insiders is designing a new competitive global bloc based on the worst values and policies of the Bush administration.

Internally, Canada is being prepared for this bloc by a series of initiatives that have had very little public debate.

#### *SMART Regulations*

Every federal government department has gone through an exercise called Smart Regulation, which stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely, and is a WTO trade tool favoured by big corporations to harmonize (almost always downward) global regulatory standards. In 2006, the federal government went through a massive review of all current regulatory practices and policies in order to set the stage for North American regulatory harmonization to eliminate different (that is, higher) domestic regulations - what the business community calls the "tyranny of small differences." Every area of public policy has gone through this review and is now with cross-border committees for further harmonization. As one example, Canada has recently moved to lower its standards on pesticide residues on food to reduce the "tyranny" of our former higher standards under this process.

#### *TILMA*

Other provinces are lining up to join a new trade and investment treaty that Alberta and British Columbia have signed, which gives private companies operating in one province the right to challenge higher regulations in the other as an unfair barrier to trade. The Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement is a mini MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment) which civil society around the world defeated a decade ago as the most anti-democratic global tool ever devised. TILMA places the responsibility on provincial governments to ensure that "all government measures, laws, acts, regulations, standards, requirements, guidelines, programs and policies" are not a restriction on trade and investment and gives governments, companies and individuals the right to sue for up to \$5 million for existing or future regulations that "restrict or impair" trade. Unlike NAFTA, public health care is not exempt from TILMA.

### *Atlantica, Cascadia, The Pacific Gateway and NAFTA Corridors*

The stage is being set to create North American regional free trade zones, as well as super-conductor NAFTA highways from Canada's far North to the Southern tip of Mexico. Led by the North American SuperCorridor Coalition, plans are afoot to build several massive multifunctional corridors to move goods, services, temporary workers, and resources along North-South lines. At their heaviest, the corridors will house six passenger vehicle lanes, four truck lanes, six rail lines and utility and pipeline capacities as well. Already talks are underway to harmonize labour, health and safety rules throughout the continental system.

The Atlantic Institute for Market Studies has joined business groups in the Northeastern states to promote Atlantica, a free trade zone that would harmonize labour, health and safety standards of the Atlantic provinces and the Northeastern states to the lowest common denominator (including minimum wage) and touts economic and political integration of the region. Halifax will be an expanded port of entry for goods and resources bound for the U.S. and the Canadian section of this free trade zone will house LNGs – Liquefied Natural Gas Terminals – all likely to have very serious environmental consequences for the region. Atlantica proponents want to adopt a TILMA deal among the Atlantic provinces and the Northeastern states.

British Columbia's Gordon Campbell is promoting a similar western zone dubbed Cascadia, with joint entry policies, harmonized trade practices and a common ports authority. Working with the Harper government, the B.C. Liberals and the big business community are behind the \$1 billion Pacific Gateway Project that will see a massive expansion of the port of Vancouver to move Asia's goods not through Canada, but through a super-corridor to the U.S.

### *Public Health Threatened*

While none of this may seem to threaten public health care at first glance, collectively, these undertakings pose a very serious threat to any universal Canadian program. The free trade zones and SMART regulations pose a direct threat to higher health and safety standards in Canada and TILMA poses a threat to higher standards in any given provinces. The SPP, if successful, would eliminate the ability of Canada to withstand the invasion of U.S. health care corporations. The merging of all other economic, regulatory, tax and environmental policy will render a separate social infrastructure very hard to maintain over the long haul. To protect Canada's public health care system requires an all out fight against the Security and Prosperity Partnership and all of its manifestations in Canada.