

Action Update

By VICTORIA GIBB-CARSLY

The New Year began with a flurry of chapter activity that shows no sign of letting up as we head into the spring.

In January, Council chapters focused most of their energy on the debate around public health care. Our activists called, faxed and even visited their premiers, asking them to support the full implementation of the Romanow Report at the First Ministers' meeting in Ottawa in February.

In addition, rallies were held outside the Prime Minister's residence as the First Ministers gathered for evening talks, and at the Old City Hall in Ottawa as the politicians continued their meetings. An intensive week of lobbying was capped by our "Prescription for Change: Securing the Future of Public Health Care in Canada" conference. Many chapter activists made their way to Ottawa for these events.

In the weeks ahead, many chapters will hold public meetings to show the video "Health for All," which was produced by Jeremy Wright of the Ottawa chapter. The video conveys a clear message about why we should keep our health care system publicly funded and publicly delivered.

Since autumn, many of our chapters have participated in anti-war demonstrations and vigils to protest the U.S.-led war against Iraq. Our chapter activists have joined with hundreds of thousands of Canadians across the country to oppose the war.

Our chapters in Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Red Deer played host to the "Planting Seeds of Doubt" tour which made its way across the prairies in late February and early March. The tour visited 11 communities and brought together wheat farmers and urban consumers in a campaign to stop the introduction of genetically engineered wheat in Canada. Monsanto recently submitted an application to introduce Roundup Ready wheat, a variety engineered to be resistant to their Roundup brand of herbicide. The government is expected to make a decision on this application within the year.

In mid-March, just prior to the GATS offers deadline, chapters across the country contacted their provincial trade ministers to alert them to the threat the GATS poses to their control of provincial services. They asked the provinces to refuse to consent to the give-away of provincially controlled public services.

This year, in solidarity with various water activist groups around the world, many Council chapters celebrated World Water Day on March 14 as a lead-up to the World Water Forum in Kyoto on March 16. Because the dates of the World Water Forum and the GATS deadline

were so close, many chapters focused their World Water Day activities on protecting water from the GATS.

In staffing news, the Council is delighted to welcome Eduard Sousa as the new Ontario Regional Organizer. Eduard has been a key member of the Toronto Chapter and brings with him a wealth of grassroots organizing experience. Please see our "Chapter Contacts" page for his contact information.

I would also like to extend many thanks to Brent Patterson, who left his position as the Ontario Regional Organizer in Toronto to become the Publications Officer in our national office in Ottawa. He did a stellar job of building and supporting our chapter base in Ontario over the past three years.

Both the BC Organizer Tara Scurr and I will be having babies in the months ahead. We like to say that we're building our activist base one baby at a time! Tara will be on maternity leave from April 2003 to April 2004, and I will be on leave starting in early July.

Finally, we would like to offer our sincere thanks to the following chapter contacts who have handed over their responsibilities in the past couple of months: Barb Berger, Comox Valley; Owen Gaskell, Powell River; Kevan Hudson, Richmond; Brigid Kemp, Penticton; Keith Sabine, Swift Current; Lorna Diggie, Rimbey; Richard McKelvie, Wolf Creek; and Roger Samson, St. John's. Best wishes to all of you and welcome to all of the new chapter contacts!

Victoria Gibb-Carsley is the Director of Organizing for The Council of Canadians. ♣



Niagara Centre MPP Peter Kormos presents Niagara Region Chapter contact William Heshka with the Queen's Jubilee Commemorative medal for his community activism.