

Imagining *Another* World

BY BILL MOORE-KILGANNON

**REMEMBER THIS: WE BE MANY AND THEY BE FEW.
THEY NEED US MORE THAN WE NEED THEM. ANOTHER
WORLD IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE; SHE IS ON HER WAY.
ON A QUIET DAY, I CAN HEAR HER BREATHING.**

— ARUNDHATI ROY IN PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL, ON JANUARY 27, 2003



Maude Barlow speaks against the corporate control of water to thousands at the World Social Forum.

As Arundhati Roy finishes her speech, the 20,000 people who are packed into the overheated stadium at the World Social Forum rise up in thunderous applause. With such inspiration and energy in the air, one can only feel optimistic that another world truly is possible.

And indeed the third annual World Social Forum that took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January was an important historical moment that reflected both the challenges we face and the growing power and interconnectedness of the global citizens' movement.

In five days of workshops, seminars, meetings and plenary sessions, 100,000 forum participants delved into the issues of war in the Middle East, American imperialism, corporate trade agreements, the take-over of the world's water resources, genetically modified foods, the struggle and resistance of Aboriginal peoples and much more. But the forum did not just focus on the world's problems. Rather, we were there to build alternatives and join with others to work out strategies to win these vital struggles.

The Council of Canadians plays an important role in this growing global movement. Maude Barlow, one of the forum's keynote speakers, gave an impassioned speech about the battle against the corporate control of the world's water. In meetings and workshops with our partners from around the world, organizations are joining with us in a global strategy to keep water as a basic human right. While in Porto Alegre, Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke launched the Portuguese version of their book *Blue Gold* (now translated into over 10 languages and published in 15 countries).

Similarly, the Council is a leader in fighting corporate trade agreements. Thousands of people throughout the Americas were at the forum discussing strategy to subvert the trade agendas of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Tony Clarke, the Council's vice-chair, spoke in a number of plenary sessions about the links between corporations and the negotiations at the WTO and the FTAA. I presented in a workshop the lessons other countries can take from Canada's experience with Chapter 11 of NAFTA. Grassroots organizations throughout the world

also look to the Council to see how we are working as a growing citizens' movement capable of clearly articulating the fundamental issues and challenges.

With the recent election of the Brazilian president Lula da Silva, there is a real sense of optimism in Brazil. But it was evident that nobody was going to sit back and expect that Lula would simply change everything for the better. The Brazilian participants at the World Social Forum were clear that they would have to continue to build the strength of their civil society movement to push back against the power of global capital and truly transform Brazilian society.

While the Canadian delegation could not bring back the warmth of Brazil to the stark cold of a Canadian winter, many delegates returned from Porto Alegre committed to bringing the inspiration, spirit and energy of the World Social Forum to Canada. Already groups in cities across Canada have held forums that have brought together the various social movements to learn, strategize and celebrate. The Council of Canadians has participated in these forums across the country and will be involved in organizing a proposed national forum.

In the end, perhaps the World Social Forum's greatest impact is the powerful energy that is created when people come together to simply imagine that another world is possible. One of the most powerful moments for me came when, in the same session where people had come to hear Arundhati Roy and Noam Chomsky, a Palestinian-Jewish peace commission launched its program to build a lasting peace settlement. When they finished their presentation, John Lennon's song *Imagine* came on and 20,000 people stood and sang out ...

*Imagine all the people living life in peace,
You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one,
I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live
as one.*

To see a 30-second video clip of this moment, go to www.canadians.org, click on *Resources*, and then *Audio & Video*.

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