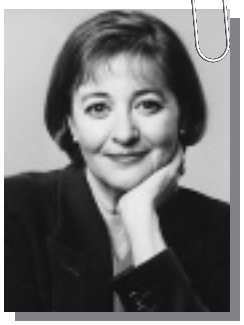
0N THE ROAD



Dear Friends,

While the whole world was affected by the terrible conflict in Iraq, there are special implications for Canada. The most obvious is the future of Canada-U.S. relations in light of Canada's stand against the war. The big business community, backed by the Alliance Party and right wing Conservative provincial governments, would have Canada make its foreign policy decisions based on business and trade, not legal or moral considerations. The divisions in Canada over whether we should have supported the U.S. will last far beyond this war; our country is in for some of the most intense soul-searching in recent history about our relationship with the U.S. An angry White House will remember what it considers to be a serious slight from its northern and southern neighbours. This in turn will affect negotiations for a hemispheric trade deal. Above all, we will all have to deal with a superpower whose unilateral judgments on other nations are inspired by a deep fear of the world and a profound belief in its moral superiority.

This year is also a crucial one for medicare. Although Canadians were inspired and excited by the long-awaited Romanow Commission Report, the federal government largely ignored its main finding and agreed to hand over substantial new funding to the provinces without setting any conditions on where it will be spent. This means that Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario can forge ahead with their plans for for-profit health services in spite of the clear wishes of the Canadian people. This is a betrayal of the process and means that Canadians are going to have to fight to stop these private incursions into medicare on a province by province basis.

As well, March 31 was the deadline for all WTO countries to list what services they will put on the trade table. We know that other countries are listing certain aspects of health services on behalf of the U.S. and that Mexico has listed hospitals. If the for-profit health industry is not confronted in Canada this year, it will be very difficult to reclaim our public system.

The future of the world's fresh-water resources is also on the table, both in the GATS negotiations (put there by the European Union on behalf of their water corporations) and at the recent Third World Water Forum in Kyoto. At the World Water Forum, civil society groups forced a showdown with the corporate-dominated World Water Council over its desire to commodify water for profit. Our modest goals of breaking the consensus, putting forth an alternative vision, and building our network were met, without question.

Fall brings the next WTO ministerial meeting, this time in Cancun, Mexico, in September, and a major hemispheric meeting of the FTAA in Miami in late November. Both of these meetings will promote an aggressive agenda of trade and investment liberalization that includes services and investment, and the pressure for countries to sign on will be intense.

Although the forces aligned against us are formidable, there are many reasons to be hopeful. For one thing, Latin America is in no mood to be pushed around and we are working closely with civil society groups there to create strong resistance to the FTAA. Our international water network was well prepared for Kyoto and the forces we found aligned there. We are working with the international network against the WTO, called "Our World Is Not for Sale," and working with groups in Europe in particular to advance our campaign against the GATS.

In fact, The Council of Canadians will be on the front line of every one of these struggles in the months ahead and will work with others to advance an alternative agenda on every front. We are thrilled to announce the launch of two new initiatives — one on factory farms and the other on GE wheat — and in both cases we are working with groups in other countries to co-ordinate campaigns and share information.

My own travels have taken me from Uruguay and Argentina in January, where I was part of a solidarity tour against privatized water, to the third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil (with over 100,000 participants!). I was in Kyoto for the World Water Summit this March, and in Germany and The Netherlands to launch *Blue Gold* in those countries. I have also been on a cross-Canada speaking tour to fight for our precious medicare. So, while we should pause to reflect on the huge challenges we face, we must also remember the wonderful allies we have and commit to our work in tough times like these.

Message from the National Chair. Message from the National Chair. Message from the National Chair. Message from the National Chair.