

ON THE ROAD



I hope this edition of *Canadian Perspectives* finds you all rested and ready for a very big and important year. Major issues facing all Canadians, such as health care and missile defence, will be shaped by this minority Parliament, and the Council of Canadians has a mandate from our membership to be deeply involved.

No one can say for sure how this new Parliament will work. The Martin Liberals appear to think they have a majority and will govern on an issue-by-issue basis, turning to the NDP and the Bloc when they want to move progressive legislation like day care and pharmacare and to the Conservatives on issues such as missile defence and bank mergers. And while it has been good to hear Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh's defence of public medicare, Pierre Pettigrew and Jim Peterson's return to cabinet signals more of the same on the foreign affairs and international trade fronts.

This situation arguably offers more of a role for civil society than we have had in a number of years, as our active stance on these and other key issues will be more important to all the parties. After all, none of the parties can take a chance angering the already angered Canadian populace by ignoring our concerns. And it is in no one's interests to trigger another election too soon.

Our work will be cut out for us. At our Annual General Meeting in Winnipeg, October 29-31, we will be launching a national Citizens' Inquiry into Canada-U.S. relations. Soon after, I will be travelling to a number of your communities with other commissioners to hear the views of friends and neighbours on such crucial questions as Canada's military role, border harmonization, and our energy and water resources. We also intend to turn up the heat on the federal government as it negotiates a series of measures some are calling "NAFTA-Plus," as we know from our extensive pre-election polling that Canadians are overwhelmingly opposed to deeper ties to the Bush White House.

We will also be increasing our activity on health care. With a new health care campaigner and new materials, we're already working closely with allies such as CUPE, the Canadian Health Coalition and the provincial health coalitions across the country to stop the insidious growth of for-profit health services. This is a make or break moment for medicare. The NDP and the Bloc are clearly opposed to for-profit services (as are a majority of Canadians) while the Conservatives are in favour. We need to push the Liberals to take a clear stance with those opposed, and we will be making this a priority.

Our other campaigns are in full gear, as you will see from the reports inside. Congratulations to our Safe Food team for stopping Monsanto in its bid to introduce GE wheat in Canada. Our water campaigners are gearing up for a fight to stop the commercial water exports recently announced by the Quebec government and to build an international coalition for a binding UN Convention on water as a human right. And, just as the negotiators at the WTO and in Washington never cease, so too are we gearing up for the next round of trade talks globally and in the Americas.

My own travels in the last several months took me to Houston for a big water conference, New York for the UN's Committee on Sustainable Development, Washington for the 60th anniversary of the World Bank, Hollywood, Florida, for an American labour convention, Germany, for a five-city tour on public services, and all across Canada on the subject of deep integration. A special highlight was a trip to Yellowknife to work with great grassroots groups concerned about the pending Mackenzie Valley Pipeline and the changes to their community that have come with the diamond rush.

And always time for my precious granddaughters Maddy and Ellie and my new little grandson, Angus, who was born this August. Here's to the next generation of social justice fighters!