



THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS: 20 YEARS OF ACTION

Since 1985, the Council of Canadians has worked to uphold Canadian sovereignty and democracy, promoting economic justice in an inter-dependent world. Here are some of the highlights of our work over the last 20 years.

1985

On March 11, the Council of Canadians is founded, with the goals of “a new and better Canada with more and better jobs for Canadians, a higher standard of living for Canadians, and a sovereign Canada that plays an important role among the world community of nations.” Within a year, its membership grows to 3,000.



Maude Barlow with Mel Hurtig, first chairperson of The Council of Canadians

1986

The Council establishes itself as a voice for economic sovereignty, organizing protests over the sale of Canadian enterprises to offshore interests – de Havilland

to Boeing, Prentice Hall to Gulf & Western, and West Kootenay Power and Light to Utilicorp of Kansas.

1987

The Council organizes a “Canada Summit” to coincide with U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s visit to Ottawa. The Pro-Canada Network (later the Action Canada Network) is created and its members tape the Canada Summit Declaration to the front door of Parliament Hill’s Centre Block.

1988

Newly elected Council chairperson Maude Barlow, along with Canadian Auto Workers’ president Bob White, debate free trade with Alberta premier Peter Lougheed and corporate lobbyist Tom d’Aquino on national television. While Lougheed and d’Aquino speak in generalities, White and Barlow focus on the technicalities and the destructive nature of the agreement.

The Council fights the Mulroney government at every step in their plan to strip the National Energy Board of its powers to protect Canada’s energy security. The Council raises public awareness and debate on the issue, but loses the fight. The chairman of the NEB later states, “Now is not the time for energy nationalism. The NEB has become an agency that helps the market work.”

1989

The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement comes into effect on January 1. Six months later, the Council releases a “Report Card” on the deal, stating that despite government promises to the contrary, more than 33,000 jobs have already been lost due to free trade.

1990

Council chairperson Maude Barlow and former chairperson John Trent appear before the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. They ask for a reduction and monitoring of third-party advocacy and advertising during elections, to make it difficult for a group to dominate debate due to financial power.

1991

The Council, along with Friends of Canadian Broadcasting and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, forms a coalition called “100 Days of Action” to try to stop drastic cuts to the CBC. More than 1,000 employees and 11 regional production centres were to be cut in the 1991 budget. The public outcry forces the government to back off on some of the planned cuts.



1992

The Council takes over the signing ceremony for the new North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Activists hold up an American flag behind Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in a photo that is flashed around the world. Maude Barlow yells to Mulroney, “You promised to protect basic democracy. You have failed to keep your promise.”

1993

The Council brings Carlos Heredia – a former opposition leader in Mexico who had his 1988 election victory stolen by president Carlos Salinas – to Canada to “testify” against NAFTA when the CBC’s *The National* puts the deal “on trial.” Salinas steps down a year later to campaign for the position of head of the World Trade Organization.

1994

Maude Barlow writes a letter to the Council’s membership asking for their advice: “We have lost twice now (the passage of the FTA and NAFTA), and perhaps it is time to accept defeat and move on.” The response is overwhelming – members declare that the Council is needed now more than ever.

With the federal government poised to grant Monsanto the right to market bovine growth hormone in Canada, the Council builds a strong national coalition, organizes a campaign, and in 1998 wins a moratorium against the introduction of BGH in Canada.

1995

The Council gives Prime Minister Jean Chrétien a failing grade on “social policy” in a mid-term “Report Card” on his government. Chrétien receives his “F” for the Canada Health and



Social Transfer cuts of \$7 billion that put medicare, post-secondary education and vital social services at risk.

1996

The Council holds a demonstration outside of the finance ministers’ meeting in Ottawa to protest planned cuts to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Council members present Finance Minister Paul Martin and his provincial counterparts with 100,000 petitions against the cuts. The government of British Columbia agrees and blocks Martin’s plans to cut the CPP.

1997

The Council loses the first round of its fight to stop Conrad Black’s take-over of the Southam newspaper chain. The Court states that the Council isn’t entitled to appeal the government’s approval of the deal because the Council isn’t “commercially affected.”



Along with the International Forum on Globalization and the Polaris Institute, the Council hosts a global teach-in on economic globalization and corporate rule, featuring prominent activists from around the world, including Owens Wiwa, Elizabeth May, Susan George and John Cavanagh.

1998

A new global investment treaty of unprecedented power sets off a firestorm of protest, much of it led by the Council. When negotiations for the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) break down, the Council launches a coast-to-coast inquiry into what values and policies Canadians want their government to put forward in international negotiations.

With four of Canada's biggest banks set to merge, and with the loss of thousands of jobs and the closure of hundreds of local branches at stake, the Council launches a well-publicized cross-country campaign to convince

Finance Minister Paul Martin to reject their plans. By December, Martin rules against the mergers.

1999

The Council, along with its partners in the Common Front on the WTO, launches a national education and action campaign to confront the World Trade Organization's "Millennium Round" negotiations. The outbreak of democracy on the streets during the "Battle in Seattle" leads to the complete collapse of the WTO talks.

2000

The Council challenges attempts by the world's biggest water corporations to

privatize the planet's fresh water. In the process, a new international network of activists is formed – people committed to promoting universal recognition of water as a fundamental human right and to halting efforts by corporations to control and commodify it.



2001

The Council works as part of a broad-based movement to counter the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations in Quebec City. The result is one of the biggest demonstrations ever held in Canada. Committed activists with thoughtful alternatives to free trade are met by tear gas, water-cannon spray and rubber bullets.

2002

The Council gives the Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada the clear message that health care must be properly funded, that it should be expanded to include pharmacare and home care, and that it must be protected from international trade agreements. The Council holds public events in 15 cities across Canada, where it either precedes or accompanies the Romanow Commission.

2003

The Council is present at the World Trade Organization Ministerial in Cancun and the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations in Miami. Council members bring the message

that “another world is possible” and play a key role in the derailment of the WTO and FTAA talks.

2004

Bowing to pressure from consumers and organizations like the Council of Canadians, Monsanto abandons its application to produce and sell genetically engineered wheat in Canada.

The Council launches its Citizens' Inquiry on Canada-U.S. Relations to counter an all-out push by the business elite of Canada to promote deep integration with the United States. Deep integration includes a common market and border, a guaranteed and uninterrupted supply of energy to the U.S.,

Council Board member Bob Ages speaks out at a demonstration in support of U.S. war resisters. ▼



and participation in George W. Bush's defence and “security” initiatives.

2005

The Council comes full circle and renews its fight for Canadian sovereignty and democracy by focusing its energies to oppose the threat of continental integration.

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Photo: John Bonnar