

ON THE ROAD

with Maude Barlow



Photo: Murray Mosher

Welcome to a very special edition of *Canadian Perspectives*. This year, we celebrate our 20th anniversary. The Council of Canadians was launched at a press conference on March 11, 1985, with Mel Hurtig (our first chairperson), Marion Dewar, John Trent and me. I can hardly believe it has been 20 years and that at our November annual general meeting, we will be remembering so much activism and preparing for another 20 years of fighting for Canada.

As I write this, I am putting finishing touches on a new book about the push for deeper integration with the United States. As always, writing offers the opportunity to contemplate our lives and our work. In so many ways, there is great reason to be hopeful and grateful for recent events. Because of the hard work of many groups in Canada, the federal government was forced to say no to George Bush's ballistic missile defence plan, even though Prime Minister Paul Martin fully intended to say yes. With help from the smart work of the NDP, Parliament passed a good budget. And of course, we had the historic vote on equal marriage that extended Charter rights to a whole new group of Canadians who had been denied them. I have seldom been so proud to be a Canadian.

There are, of course, huge challenges ahead. We also had the devastating Supreme Court ruling on health care, which will open the door to other challenges and demands from for-

profit American corporations to come to Canada and set up shop. The Task Force on the Future of North America and the Waco, Texas meeting of the leaders of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico both moved the process of deep integration further down the road. And the Smart Regulation initiative, which requires all federal government departments to put their regulatory regimes under the microscope in anticipation of harmonization with the U.S., is a particularly disturbing development.

I deeply believe that if the Council of Canadians had not been here for the last 20 years, Canada would be a different place. We have not won every fight – far from it. But we have kept alive a dream of a Canada that is just and safe and fair and that wants to project those values to the world. We have also worked hard to help build a movement in Canada for social, economic and environmental justice. I do believe that the movement collectively has held back the ferocious assaults on our rights from the forces of economic globalization, market liberalization, free trade and deregulation, all of which have since been discredited. Country after country in Latin America is rejecting this model and returning to a social model of government. The people of Europe said no to a corporate model of unification. It is very important in Canada that we reject it too. Therein lies our great challenge in the foreseeable future.

I want to say – and I mean this from the bottom of my heart – that it is you, the grassroots members of this organization, who are its real heroes. You worked tirelessly to fight for public health care, good social programs, safe food and fair trade. You fought to stop Great Lakes diversions and privatized water services. You fought big-box retailers and the crackdown on civil rights. You marched in anti-war rallies and at international trade meetings. I had the honour of being your chairperson for 18 of these 20 years, but the 20th anniversary of the Council of Canadians belongs to you, and I thank you very, very much.

**Maude Barlow is the National
Chairperson of The Council of
Canadians**