

# ON THE ROAD

## WITH MAUDE BARLOW



Leo Broderick

**Maude Barlow speaks out against Coca-Cola at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, in January.**

I hope you were able to rest and celebrate during the holiday season. As we are likely looking at a federal election in the near future, the Council of Canadians is gearing up to put the message to the politicians at all-candidates meetings and in the media.

There is so much to say to those who would represent us at this crucial time. Our public health care system is being slowly but surely privatized in several provinces. But citizens scored some notable health care wins recently. Council activists worked with Friends of Medicare to stop former Alberta Premier Ralph Klein's "Third Way" privatization plan. And pressure from patients convinced British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell to tell the first for-profit emergency room in Canada that it cannot charge fees for its ER services.

However, we need a clear commitment at the federal level to stop this death by a thousand cuts to our public system, and everyone who wants our vote must make this promise.

Our water resources are at increasing risk as the U.S. Southwest becomes parched. A prominent American think tank predicts that Canada's water will be exported like oil to the U.S. within five years. Not only does Canada not have a national water policy to protect our water sources ecologically, there is no policy to protect it politically, from privatization, commercial export or groundwater exploitation. And Canada continues to oppose the right to water at the United Nations, to our collective shame.

What will our aspiring political leaders do to protect Canada's water?

Massive investments in the Athabasca tar sands are leading to foreign (mostly U.S.) control of Alberta's energy and creating huge greenhouse gas emissions. This is the real reason the Harper government backed out of Canada's Kyoto commitment. To honour such a commitment, Canada would have to curtail the free-for-all now taking place in Alberta and elsewhere in a relent-

less search for new energy sources. This issue and the need for a Canadian energy security policy must be debated in the next election.

Of course, we will continue to call for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Afghanistan and the return to a peace-keeping role for our armed forces as well as an independent Canadian foreign policy.

Finally, we will challenge the Harper government on its misguided commitment to create a "Fortress North America" with its continued support of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America – a "partnership" that threatens Canada's control over foreign policy, security, immigration, health and safety, environmental standards and resources such as water, energy and hydro-electricity.

The "deep integration" of our continent, based on the political and economic ideology of George W. Bush and Stephen Harper, is not one Canadians would choose on their own. But there has been so little debate and public scrutiny of this project that most Canadians still know little about it. Only through hard work and lots of communication will we get the word out in time for this crucial election.

Rest assured that the terrific team at the Council of Canadians has been hard at work on these and other issues, as have our fabulous and tireless chapter activists.

The next election matters very much. Let's get out there and remind our politicians about the Canada we want and the Canada we intend to leave for future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maude Barlow".

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