

On the Road

with Maude Barlow

Dear Friends,

As I write to you, I am all too aware of the pain being felt by many people in our country. As the financial crisis grows and the recession deepens, job losses and uncertainty face many Canadians. Lay-offs in manufacturing, autos, forestry and many other sectors have devastated many Canadian families; others face a future without pensions after a lifetime of hard work. This pain is felt around the world. The International Labour Organization (ILO) says that as many as 51 million workers could lose their jobs around the world this year, and as many next year. This means 51 million families will lose a breadwinner, spreading the pain to even more people.

While it must be clear to anyone with any kind of open mind that the mantra of economic globalization, unregulated free trade, massive privatization and the

deregulation of financial markets has been a terrible mistake (just go to the website of the ILO and watch the steady report of job losses from failed transnational corporations), amazingly, there are still hard-liners in government, media and academia who insist that more of the same is the ticket out of the crisis.

We hear from the Harper government and mainstream newspapers renewed calls to resuscitate the dying World Trade Organization; a proposal for a new Canada-E.U. free trade agreement that will put our public services and public resources at risk; support for interprovincial free trade deals that would give private companies the right to sue governments when health, environmental and safety standards infringe on their profits; and initiatives to beef up NAFTA at the very time when we should be demanding its demise.

For my part, I have been on the road fighting the forces of globalization and privatization and promoting our alternatives of social security, equity, diversity and justice. My recent travels have been extensive. In March, I attended the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, Turkey, where civil society groups confronted the corporate sponsorship of this event. In April I was in Australia, where I spoke at a big conference, criticizing the government's adoption of a water trading scheme to deal with its water crisis. I attended the founding of the Australia Water Network, a network of groups across the country dedicated to safeguarding Australia's water as a public trust.


On April 22 as part of an Earth Day celebration, I spoke before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly with UN President Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, liberation theologian icon Leonardo Boff

and Bolivian President Evo Morales, and later briefed UN agencies and many country delegates on the right to water. My UN duties also took me to Geneva in May to brief a high-level meeting of the World Health Organization on the need for a right to water covenant.

The spring months were also filled with many Canadian trips, including the six-city tour of Northern Ontario with CUPE Ontario to complete the 21-city Ontario Unbottle It! tour. This incredibly successful tour culminated in a report and speech to the CUPE Ontario convention in May and was received with great enthusiasm by the 1,000-plus delegates. In June, I appeared at Moses Znaimer's 2009 ideaCity and gave a speech to Rotary International in Birmingham, England, on the global water crisis.

Everyone at the Council of Canadians has been equally busy working on the issues that matter to all of us. In the wake of the financial meltdown, there is a renewed opportunity for our critique of unregulated free trade, of privatization of social services, water and hydro-electricity, and of deregulation of environmental, health and safety rules – which are all underpinnings of economic globalization. We warned that building a global economic plan based on the ideology of unlimited growth would create massive inequality and threaten the finite resources of the earth, and sadly, these warnings have come true. If there ever was a moment for new thinking and new values, this is it.

That is why the work of the Council of Canadians and all the other civil society and labour groups must continue. I thank and salute all the terrific members and activists in the Council and wish you a safe and peaceful summer.



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



Douglas Glynn

Maude Barlow stands with Stephen Ogden, one of many community members fighting "Dump Site 41" during a recent rally and march at the site. Located in Simcoe County in Ontario, the proposed landfill is a home to a pristine watershed.