

# Members Create 25 Years of Meaningful Change by Acting for Social Justice

Start your own personal membership drive today

by Jamian Logue

It has been said that the highest office in a democracy is that of citizen; that people have the right to be informed and the responsibility to be engaged in the political life of their country. After 25 years, these principles remain the driving force behind the Council of Canadians. It is members like you who keep us going, and members like you who will lead us to an even brighter future.

In August 1985, the normally quiet skies above the Northwest Passage thundered from the sound of propellers of a de Havilland Twin Otter. The crew of the U.S. icebreaker *Polar Sea* navigating the ice floes below was not expecting a welcome party as it entered Canadian waters without permission, let alone the air mail that landed on the ship's deck.

Wrapped in a Canadian flag was a clear message, sent by the Council of Canadians on behalf of the Canadian people: Return to international waters and respect Canadian sovereignty in the future.

This wasn't simply the first political action of the Council of Canadians; it marked the rise of a new citizens' advocacy movement on the Canadian landscape committed to filling the void left by a government that had failed its country and its people.

The newly elected Mulroney government was in the throes of free trade talks with the United States that would see much more than Arctic sovereignty at stake. The government was dismantling and selling off the country in the name of trade and prosperity. Little did Mr. Mulroney and corporate Canada expect that its agenda would be met head-on — not by the opposition parties, but by a feisty new organization made up of ordinary Canadians.

Outraged at the direction in which its government was taking the country and the increasing erosion of democracy,

Canadians turned to this new organization for a different kind of future for their country, for themselves and for the next generations. Within a year, membership in the Council had reached 3,000. By the 1988 federal election membership had exploded to more than 10,000 people, with volunteer chapters opening across the country.

As the Council's membership has grown over these past 25 years, so has our ability to run more sophisticated and long-term campaigns, leading to important victories such as protecting the Canada Pension Plan from cuts, blocking the merger of Canada's big banks, winning bottled water bans and, most recently, helping to save the Alliston Aquifer from contamination. These are just a few concrete examples that show the power we hold to achieve extraordinary things.

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Informed and committed members have always been our greatest strength. By harnessing the power of our collective voices and the volunteer energy of our chapter activists across the country, together we are able to bring about meaningful change. It is this power in numbers that led *The Globe and Mail* to declare the Council of Canadians "Canada's unofficial opposition," a label we wear proudly!

So to all of you who have renewed your membership in the Council for 2010 we say a big "thank you" for your continuing support. If you haven't renewed yet, or want to join for the first time, please do. We need your voice now more than ever in order to continue defending the public interest and upholding social justice here in Canada and around the world.

To keep building on this power in numbers we must also look beyond ourselves — and this is where you can help the Council in an exciting new way. This year is the Council's 25th anniversary, and in celebration, we are calling on you



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Membership

and every member across the country to launch your own personal membership drive: we are asking each member to sign up one new member this year.

Do you know someone who isn't a Council member but should be? We all have people in our lives who feel their voice isn't heard and who are genuinely concerned about where Canada is headed. These are the people who need to know about the Council of Canadians. And what better way than to hear about it from someone they know?

We can help. Simply call or write our membership department and we will happily send you materials to help with your personal membership drive. There's also a membership form right at your fingertips — flip to the back cover of *Canadian Perspectives* and you'll find one ready to be filled out!

Real change in this country will come from the bottom, up. The more voices we can unite in the public interest, the more faces we can put to social justice, the more effective we'll be at ushering in positive change — and ensuring a better Canada for everyone.

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