



## Celebrating **30** Years of Acting for **Social Justice**

In 1985, with a Mulroney government that had declared Canada “open for business” and the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement looming, the Council of Canadians formed to give Canadians a voice. As corporations grew in power, and governments – federal and provincial – focused more on the interests of big business and resource extractions, the Council of Canadians found creative ways to highlight social, economic and environmental injustices. Over the past 30 years we have been a part of many creative and inspiring actions and, most importantly, we have been supported by people who truly believe a better Canada – and a better world – is possible.

### Here are some highlights:

**1985** On March 11, the Council of Canadians is founded by publisher, author and political activist Mel Hurtig 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.” In August, the Council makes a bold statement by renting a plane and dropping a Canadian flag on the bow of an American icebreaker after it entered Canadian waters without permission.

**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 march down to Parliament Hill and post the Canada Summit Declaration on the front door of Centre Block.

**1988** Newly elected Council of Canadians 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.

**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 federal 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.”

**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 (BGH) 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.

**1996** The Council holds a demonstration outside 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.

**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 the merger plans. By December, Martin rules against the mergers. The International Monetary Fund has said recently that stopping these bank mergers helped Canada decades later during the most recent economic downturn.

**1999** With international partners, the Council launches a national education and action campaign to confront the "Millennium Round" negotiations of the World Trade Organization (WTO). 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 composed of 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 homecare, and that it must be protected from international trade agreements. The Council holds public events in 15 cities across Canada where Romanow Commission hearings are being held.

**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., 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 opposing the threat of deeper economic integration with the United States. We centre our fight on the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), signed this year between Canada, the United States and Mexico, and question why the expansive deal never makes it to Parliament for public debate.

**2007** Thousands of people converge in Montebello, Quebec, to protest the SPP as Prime Minister Stephen Harper meets behind closed doors with U.S. President George Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderón. A teach-in organized by the Council draws more than 1,500 people from across Canada and around the world.

**2008** Along with First Nations communities, the Council raises awareness about the devastating impacts of the Alberta- and Saskatchewan-based tar sands. Witnessing the destruction of massive areas of ravaged earth and vast amounts of water turned into toxic tailing ponds first-hand, Maude Barlow calls the tar sands "Canada's Mordor," referring to Tolkien's vision of a barren wasteland in Lord of the Rings.

**2009** The Council celebrates two major victories: The secretive SPP deal is defeated and plans for Site 41, a landfill proposed in Simcoe County, Ontario, on top of an aquifer containing "some of the purest water in the world," are abandoned following a long fight for the protection of this water source by community residents, First Nations, Council supporters and chapter activists.

**2010** After years of work to build an international water movement, on July 28, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly agrees to a resolution declaring the human right to "safe

and clean drinking water and sanitation." The resolution, presented by the Bolivian government, has 122 countries vote in its favour, while 41 countries – including Canada – abstain.

**2011** The Council fights to protect healthy lakes and rivers from "Schedule 2," a legal loophole that allows mining companies dump toxic waste into a body of water and permanently destroy it.

**2012** The Council supports a Federal Court legal challenge by eight Canadians to overturn 2011 federal election results in six ridings following the "robocall" scandal, which saw misleading phone calls directing some voters to the wrong polling station address.

**2013** Through "Common Causes" the Council joins with other groups to support First Nations' Idle No More movement in protest against federal government omnibus budget bills that gut key parts of Canada's environmental legislation.

In May, a Federal Court judge rules that election fraud occurred in the 2011 federal election and the most likely source of the fraud was the Conservative party's database.

**2014** The Council of Canadians galvanizes communities that would be impacted by the Energy East pipeline project, which would convert a natural gas pipeline – parts of which are up to 40 years old – to carry crude oil from Saskatchewan to Ontario, connecting it with new pipeline through Quebec and on to Saint John, New Brunswick. If approved, it would be the largest oil pipeline in North America, transporting 1.1 million barrels of oil every day. The Council continues to challenge massive pipeline projects that would lead to the expansion of the tar sands and more fracking.

**2015** This year, the Council of Canadians celebrates 30 years of bringing Canadians together to act for social justice. With the generous help of our supporters, we maintain a strong commitment to protecting our fresh water, strengthening public health care, fighting for fair trade deals, and working for climate justice. Our campaigns come to life thanks to the generous donations and actions of our supporters and the volunteer efforts of our chapter activists.