WE DON'T HAVE TO ENGAGE IN GRAND HEROIC ACTIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE. SMALL ACTS, WHEN MULTIPLIED BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE, CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

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**Letters to the Editor**

**Tar sands too high a price to pay**

I just wanted to express my gratitude to all of those who helped to organize the tar sands action in Ottawa. I am living in B.C. at the moment and was unable to attend, but I was wishing I could have been there to be part of it!

I have sent a letter to my local MP about the issue and wanted to share a bit of what I wrote:

"Although I care deeply about many social and ecological issues, the tar sands have for many years occupied a central place in my thoughts. The tar sands cannot be part of Canada’s long-term energy strategy. As such, investments in pipelines such as the Keystone XL or the Enbridge Northern Gateway are inappropriate. As I am sure you are aware, the contribution of tar sands projects to rapid climate change is massive and unacceptable. Every time I learn about climate change–induced conflicts, displaced peoples, floods, storms and droughts, ocean acidification and species loss, I think of Canada’s tar sands. From my perspective, there are many, many victims of climate change around the world; we have a clear moral imperative to them to wean our economies off of oil.

"It is possible to transform our economies and live well without fossil fuels. Without clean, abundant water, however, health and prosperity are impossible. It makes no sense to sacrifice a major watershed in order to prolong our dependence on oil for a decade or two. The contaminants currently being discharged in high volumes into the Athabasca watershed are not only highly toxic, but also very long-lived."

*Janine MacLeod*
PhD Candidate, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University
Vancouver, British Columbia

**We need to educate about proportional representation**

In the 2007 provincial election people in Ontario went through a disappointing attempt to introduce proportional representation. There appeared to be a deliberate attempt to avoid and stifle discussion.

I think that the Council of Canadians is in a unique, non-partisan position to provide leadership on this issue. Proportional representation is a difficult concept to educate others about. The mechanics of it are quite variable and therein, in my estimation, lies the problem. The general public is justifiably suspicious of something new that they don’t entirely understand, especially when there is no provision to revert to the former format if the population is grossly dissatisfied.

*Gordon Scott*
Warsaw, Ontario

**Editor’s note:** The Council of Canadians has been an active proponent of proportional representation. As part of Democracy Week in September, we joined with Fair Vote Canada to raise awareness, arguing that proportional representation is more democratic than our current first-past-the-post electoral system. It ensures a fairer representation of votes cast, and prevents a governing party from holding total power after earning only a small percentage of the popular vote.

**Dr. O’Connor should be commended**

Thank you for the article “When the Water Changed” on Dr. John O’Connor in the summer 2011 issue of Canadian Perspectives. Dr. O’Connor did what all general practitioners should do when he spoke of the environmental effects of the Alberta tar sands and their long-term effect on the health of the people of Fort Chipewyan and the First Nations people of Lake Athabasca. Dr. O’Connor should be commended for standing up for his patients. He has advocated on their behalf despite the pressure from Alberta politicians and heavy-handed federal bureaucrats.

*Sterling Haynes, MSc, MD (retired)*
Kelowna, British Columbia

**Send us your letters!**

If you have something to say about an article you have read in Canadian Perspectives, or an issue you think would interest our readers, please write to us. We reserve the right to edit your letter for clarity and length. Letters must include your full name, address and phone number.

**Send your letter to:**
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The Council of Canadians
170 Laurier Avenue West, Suite 700
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5V5
Email: inquiries@canadians.org, Attention: Editor, Canadian Perspectives

We took the voices of 23,000 of our members with us to Parliament Hill in September as part of a mass demonstration calling on the Harper government to say “No!” to the environmentally destructive tar sands.
On the Road with Maude Barlow

Dear friends,

We have another busy fall and winter and we are working harder than ever to promote social, economic and environmental justice here in Canada and around the world.

Spring, summer and early fall have been very productive months for me personally. I have really enjoyed doing the national tour on the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Paul Moist, President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Many Canadians have never heard of CETA and do not understand the threat it poses to local communities, local democracy and public programs.

Taking this information on the road with one of our key allies has been fully rewarding and we are watching the awareness grow in communities across Canada.

In July, I had the honour of being at the United Nations to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the General Assembly’s recognition of the human right to water and sanitation. I attended a debate on the issue and was so pleased to note that there appears to be no lingering opposition to it. I also spoke on the issue to the annual convention of the Assembly of First Nations in Moncton, New Brunswick, where I urged delegates to use this new right to fight for improved water and sanitation services in Aboriginal communities.

In August, I joined many thousands of concerned North Americans in Washington seeking to block the notorious Keystone Pipeline that would carry raw bitumen from the Alberta tar sands over the Ogallala Aquifer to be refined in Texas. We presented petitions and demands to the Canadian Embassy calling for an end to the export of raw bitumen and seeking a just transition to a more sustainable energy future. In September, we helped lead a Canadian version of this event. Hundreds of people came to Parliament Hill in September to say “no” to the environmentally destructive tar sands and demand a more sustainable future for our country. As the Harper government continues to expand and promote these tar sands, our water, clean air and the health of those living nearby are at risk. I joined many who chose to stand up and say “Enough” in a mass demonstration of civil disobedience. I was one of the hundreds arrested that day and I feel privileged to have been part of a wonderful experience where people of all ages and from all over the country came together to put themselves on the line. I did it because I fear we are killing the planet and I can no longer be content to only write and speak about it.

In September I also travelled to Guatemala to a conference on women and mining and a tour of the infamous Marlin Mine, which is run by Vancouver-based Goldcorp. This trip was deeply moving as I met the victims of Canadian mining operations and heard their stories first-hand.

I was also honoured to receive the Earthcare Award – the highest international award that the Sierra Club U.S. gives – at a beautiful ceremony in Oakland, California. I accepted the award on behalf of all the activists in the Council of Canadians and around the world who give so much to the movement to protect our shared Commons.

Meanwhile, our members and chapters across the country have been tireless in their ongoing work, fighting local hospital privatizations, water-guzzling mega quarries and hydro-fracking operations, to name just a few of the struggles they are involved in.

We were also thrilled to co-host a movement-building conference in Montreal in late October in conjunction with many civil society groups and First Nations from Quebec. Our work with Quebec social justice activists, unions, health care advocates and environmentalists is crucial at this point in time if we are to build a solid front against the deep cuts to social and environmental programs by the Harper government.

Amongst all this activity, I did manage a bit of “down time” with my four gorgeous grandchildren, who are the light of my life and give me reason to keep fighting. There are many, many problems facing our country and our world today. We owe it to these and other young people, however, to keep struggling for social, economic and environmental justice by renewing our commitment to this wonderful organization.

Please watch for your membership renewal coming in the mail in January. I truly believe that when we come together as a people’s movement we can bring about the positive change this world needs.

Maude Barlow is the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians.
The year 2014 will be pivotal in setting the health care agenda as provincial and territorial governments negotiate a new health care deal with the federal government. The 2014 health accord will set funding and health care policies between the governments. While the new deal is still a few years away, the groundwork for the complicated negotiations has been laid.

Predicting expectations for these talks is challenging. With many provinces set to go to the polls, newly formed governments will bring new agendas to the table. The federal government has also been mum on its intentions, prompting some political pundits and public health care advocacy groups to question the Harper government’s plans.

What is clear is that poll after poll shows that Canadians remain fiercely committed to strengthened and enhanced public health care, and we expect our governments to deliver it.

HOW THE HEALTH ACCORD WORKS

The federal government is responsible for transferring money to provinces and territories and for enforcing the principles and provisions of the Canada Health Act (CHA). The health accord determines what percentage of federal tax revenue gets transferred each year. The negotiation of the accord provides an opportunity for the federal government to set new national standards of care by tying health care results to funding. It will also be an opportunity for the federal government to expand universal health care by creating programs such as pharmacare and setting standards for home care and long-term care.

Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for the management, organization and delivery of health services for their residents. Provincial and territorial governments can choose where most of their health care dollars are spent, except when the federal government ties those transferred dollars to particular programs and services. In the past, the practice of transferring “untied” federal dollars has led to criticism from public health care advocates after some governments chose to spend funds on private health care initiatives such as public-private partnerships rather than on public programs.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2004?

The 2004 health care accord was groundbreaking because it established financial transfers and health care targets for 10 years, and included payments that increased each year by six per cent. However, many of the programs and policies that Canadians need, such as universal pharmacare and continuing care, were left out of the 2004 deal. And programs that were included – such as the national strategy to buy top-selling pharmaceuticals in bulk and develop a catastrophic drug coverage plan – were never implemented.

The 2004 health accord was supposed to fix “health care for a generation.” But a report issued in May by the Canada Health Council concluded that the 2004 accord failed to meet more than half of its stated commitments. This failure places even more importance on getting things right in the 2014 agreement.

GOING FORWARD

The 2014 negotiations provide an opportunity for provinces/territories and the federal government to strengthen and expand public health care. In the upcoming negotiations, the Harper government must honor its election promise of a six per cent increase in health transfer payments to provincial and territorial governments for the duration of another 10-year accord.

Federal transfer payments to the provinces/territories should be tied to the principles of the Canada Health Act. Funds should be used to strengthen our public health care system, and include requirements to deliver services in publicly owned infrastructure. Provinces that allow health care privatization should be penalized, and public funding should never go to private, for-profit service providers.

The health accord should establish a universal pharmaceutical plan, which would save Canadians billions of dollars every year in prescription drug costs.

There must be commitment to long-term care. We need to ensure that our aging population has safe, appropriate and accessible care either in their homes or in long-term care facilities.

GETTING READY FOR 2014

It is important for all Canadians to be asking their provincial/territorial representatives what their commitments are for the 2014 health care accord negotiations, and how they plan to spend provincial/territorial funds to strengthen our health care system.

The Council of Canadians will be listening closely to what government officials are saying, and we’ll be working hard to ensure that this time around the health care accord does fix our health care system for a generation.
Un autre monde est possible : Un printemps canadien est nécessaire!

par Michel Lambert

Le Forum social mondial (FSM) est né au Brésil en 2001. Depuis 10 ans il s’est élargi bien au delà de sa forme « mondiale » pour créer des déclinaisons régionales, nationales, locales et thématiques. Ces forums sociaux ont permis aux mouvements sociaux de se structurer et de se renforcer, aux groupes d’échanger et de s’organiser, aux citoyens de prendre conscience des enjeux et de s’engager pour devenir eux aussi des acteurs du changement social. Entre les deux dernières éditions « mondiales », ce sont plus de 55 forums qui se sont tenus aux quatre coins de la planète.

Les défis demeurent cependant gigantesques car la crise du capitalisme a conduit l’oligarchie mondiale à un dangereux repli sur une position néoconservatrice qui permet d’imposer des plans d’austérité radicaux au nom de la lutte aux défis. Ainsi, malgré la crise multiforme qui s’approfondie, les tenants des politiques ultralibérales confortent leur pouvoir et maintiennent le cap vers davantage de répression, davantage de dérégulation au profit des transnationales, davantage de destruction des écosystèmes, davantage d’attaques aux droits.


Une nouvelle « alliance » extra-parlementaire

L’opposition parlementaire existe, mais seule dans le système archaïque qui est le nôtre son impact ne peut être que limité. Dans ce contexte, il importe de réfléchir dès maintenant à la construction d’une nouvelle alliance dont l’objectif sera à la fois d’appuyer et propulser en avant cette opposition parlementaire, mais surtout d’élargir le consensus pour le changement qui existe dans la société civile organisée et dans les communautés, tant au Québec qu’au Canada.

Cette « opposition extraparlementaire » devra être inclusive. Les organisations, groupes et individus issus des communautés les plus marginalisées devront participer activement au côté des grandes organisations. Les Nations autochtones, mais aussi les organisations d’immigrant-es, de sans emploi, et les associations locales devront trouver leur place auprès des grands groupes organisés comme les syndicats, les associations étudiantes ou de femmes.

Davantage, nous devrons aussi être à l’écoute des nouvelles formes d’organisation et de mobilisation. Depuis Tunis, le mouvement des « indignés » par exemple se propage de plus en plus. De Tel Aviv à Madrid, des centaines de milliers de personnes regroupées par le désir du changement expérimentent de nouvelles formes d’organisation et de mobilisation et forcent le compromis avec les autorités. Il va sans dire que ce n’est qu’une question de temps avant que cette « indignation » ne touche les Amériques.

La justice climatique et les alternatives écologiques

Il existe des dizaines d’enjeux sur lesquels nous pourrons informer, mobiliser et
structurer un mouvement. N’en choisir qu’un seul serait dérisoire. La thématique environnementale cependant, avec ces enjeux majeurs comme les changements climatiques, le droit à l’eau, l’agrobusiness et la souveraineté alimentaire ou d’autres questions, pourrait être un point d’ancrage primordial pour la mobilisation. Alors que l’opposition aux sables bitumineux va croissante, au Québec, la lutte contre le développement des gaz de schistes ne se fatigue pas et implique des populations qui précédemment n’étaient que peu ou pas organisées tels que des jeunes, des groupes de recherches, etc. Ces thématiques devraient être au cœur de nos mobilisations.

**Un forum social Québec/Canada/Premières Nations**

Une des grandes innovations du Forum social est l’affirmation de l’altermondialisme comme mouvement basé sur la conviction que les partis ne peuvent plus prétendre se réserver le monopole de l’action politique. Il est opportun que l’action qui se transformerait efficacement le monde devra impliquer tous les secteurs sociaux et chaque membre de la société.

Les mouvements sociaux au Québec et au Canada ont une longue expérience de mobilisations sociales. On se rappellera d’ailleurs des manifestations historiques contre l’invasion de l’Irak ou encore de celles de Québec en avril 2001 qui avaient marquées la fin du projet américain pour la mise en place d’une Zone de libre-échange des Amériques - ZLEA. Les manifestations mondiales contre la guerre en Irak avaient été lancées durant le Forum social puis, reprises ici par nos mouvements, elles avaient forcées le gouvernement canadien à se retirer de la coalition de Georges Bush.

Dans ces deux luttes, il est essentiel de noter que les mouvements sociaux, au Québec et ailleurs au Canada avait compris la nécessité de travailler ensemble, mettant l’importance des enjeux devant les autres difficultés. Nous avions aussi compris l’importance d’inscrire nos luttes locales dans des perspectives plus globales.

Il faut maintenant créer une nouvelle alliance progressiste Québec/Canada/Premières Nations. Nous espérons tenir notre propre forum social dans un proche avenir afin d’aider le développement de ce mouvement. Il est temps pour un printemps canadien!

**INDIGNEZ-VOUS! HOPE IN RESISTANCE**

Le Conseil des Canadiens renforce son partenariat avec le mouvement social fort qui existe au Québec. À la fin octobre, nous avons organisé conjointement un événement soulignant la mise sur pied d’un mouvement qui a réuni des gens afin de discuter de façons pour nous de travailler en tant que société civile pour créer des solutions de changement positives aux systèmes politique et économique actuels qui accordent plus d’importance aux profits qu’aux gens et à la planète. Des Québécois, des membres des Premières nations et d’autres personnes de partout au Canada sont venus assister à la conférence « Indignez-vous! Hope in Resistance », partageant des réflexions et des idées sur des façons de bâtir un mouvement personnellement fort. L’événement mettait en vedette des conférencières et conférenciers dynamiques et des groupes de discussion interactifs et il a exploré des moyens que nous pouvons utiliser pour mettre au défi un gouvernement fédéral qui ne reflète pas les valeurs de la majorité et un système économique qui place les intérêts des sociétés avant les préoccupations environnementales et sociales. Les conférencières et conférenciers ont traité de la menace imminente des changements climatiques et des projets d’extraction comme la fracturation, ainsi que de moyens que nous pouvons prendre pour lutter contre les mesures d’austérité qui menacent des programmes sociaux importants. Nous désirons remercier Michel Lambert, directeur général de Alternatives, une organisation de solidarité internationale dont le siège social est situé au Québec, pour avoir présenté un article bilingue qui paraît dans ce numéro de Canadian Perspectives.

**AMÉLIORATION DU SITE WEB FRANÇAIS DU CONSEIL**

Dans le cadre des préparatifs pour la conférence, nous avons amélioré notre offre de matériel en français afin de voir à ce que nous ayons une base solide d’outils de campagne comme des fiches d’information, des rapports et des renseignements de campagne importants disponibles dans les deux langues officielles du Canada. Veuillez visitez www.canadians.org/francais pour voir toutes les mises à jour.

**Indignez-vous! Hope in Resistance**

**INDIGNEZ-VOUS! HOPE IN RESISTANCE**

The Council of Canadians is strengthening its partnership with the strong social movement that exists in Quebec. In late October, we jointly hosted a movement-building event that brought people together to discuss ways we can work as civil society to create positive alternatives to the current political and economic systems that make profits more important than people and the planet. Quebeckers, First Nations and people from across Canada came to the conference “Indignez-vous! Hope in Resistance,” sharing insights and ideas on how we can build a strong people’s movement. The event featured dynamic speakers and interactive panels and explored ways we can challenge a federal government that doesn’t reflect the values of most, and an economic system that puts corporate interests ahead of environmental and social concerns. Speakers addressed the looming threat of climate change and extraction projects such as fracking, as well as ways we can fight austerity measures that are threatening important social programs. We extend our thanks to Michel Lambert, Executive Director of Alternatives, an international solidarity organization based in Quebec, for his bilingual submission to this issue of Canadian Perspectives.

**COUNCIL’S EXPANDED FRENCH WEBSITE**

As part of the preparations for the conference, we expanded our French materials, ensuring we have a solid base of campaign tools such as fact-sheets, reports and important campaign information available in both of Canada’s official languages. Please visit www.canadians.org/francais to see all the updates.
Another World Is Possible: It is time for a Canadian Spring

by Michel Lambert

The first World Social Forum (WSF) was held in Brazil in 2001. Over the next decade, it has expanded well beyond its global form to include regional, national, local and thematic variations. These social forums have allowed social movements to structure and strengthen themselves, groups to interact and organize, and people to become aware of the issues, get involved and become agents of social change themselves. In the time between the last two WSFs, approximately 55 forums have taken place all over the world.

However, the challenges for social movements remain huge, because the capitalist crisis has led the over-arching global governance structure to take a dangerous neo-conservative position that facilitates the imposition of radical austerity plans in the name of bringing down deficits. Despite a deepening multi-faceted crisis, the advocates of ultra-liberal policies reinforce this power and continue with more repression, deregulation for the benefit of transnational corporations, ecosystem destruction, and attacks on human rights.

Canada perfectly illustrates the neo-conservative radicalization currently sweeping the dominant countries of the world. Canada is at war in Afghanistan and Libya and continues to drastically increase its military expenditures. It has reinforced its border controls and restricted immigration policies, notably with regard to refugees. It is fiercely opposed to international negotiations on climate change and subsidizes the highly polluting exploitation of the Alberta tar sands. It opposes any form of international financial regulation and does not hesitate to flout its people’s fundamental rights to protest against social struggles. In Stephen Harper’s Canada we are seeing a growing denial of environmental and societal problems and intolerance of democratic values.

A NEW EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY ALLIANCE

Parliamentary opposition to this attitude exists, but is marginalized in our archaic political system. When confronted with a new economic crisis, the Harper government will further entrench its policies and the Opposition’s impact may be limited. In that context, it is important to reflect right now on the construction of a new alliance that would have the objective of both supporting and advancing parliamentary opposition and expanding the consensus for change that exists in organized civil society and in Quebec and Canadian communities.

That extra-parliamentary alliance must be inclusive. Groups and individuals from the most marginalized communities must actively participate along with major organizations. First Nations, immigrant and poverty organizations and other local associations will have to find their place among the big organized groups such as unions, student associations and women’s associations.

We need to think about new forms of organization and mobilization. Since Tunisia, the “indignant” movement, for example, continues to spread. From Tel Aviv to Madrid, hundreds of thousands of people have united in the desire for change, experimenting with new forms of organization and mobilization, and forcing authorities to compromise. Clearly it is only a matter of time before that indignation reaches the Americas.

CLIMATE JUSTICE AND ENVIRONMENTAL ALTERNATIVES

There are many issues around which we can inform, mobilize and structure a movement. Choosing only one would be absurd, but the environmental theme, with its major issues such as climate change, the right to water, agribusiness and food sovereignty, and others could be a pivotal mobilization point. While opposition to the tar sands is increasing, in Quebec the struggle against the development of shale gas and “fracking” is continuing and now involves groups of people who did not tend to organize such as youth, research groups and others. These issues should be at the heart of our mobilization.

A QUEBEC/CANADA/FIRST NATIONS SOCIAL FORUM

One of the great innovations of the WSF is the affirmation of altermondialism as a movement based on the conviction that political parties can no longer claim a monopoly on political action. There is widespread acceptance that the action that will effectively transform the world must involve all social sectors and members of society.

Social movements in Quebec and Canada have a long history of social mobilization. Particularly memorable are the historic demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq, or even those in Quebec City in April 2001 marking the end of the U.S. plan to implement the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The worldwide demonstrations against the war in Iraq were launched during the WSF and then were carried on here by our movements, eventually forcing the Canadian government to withdraw from George Bush’s coalition.

In those two struggles, it is noteworthy that social movements in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada understood the need to work together and to focus first and foremost on the issues. We also understood the importance of including our local struggles in more global perspectives.

We now have to create a new progressive Quebec/Canada/First Nations alliance. We hope to hold our own social forum in the near future to help this movement grow. It is time for a Canadian Spring!

Michel Lambert is Executive Director of Alternatives, a solidarity organization based in Montreal.
In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historic resolution recognizing the human right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation. Two months later, the Human Rights Council adopted a second resolution affirming that drinking water and sanitation are human rights, and setting out the responsibilities all governments now carry to fulfill these rights.

Because the Human Rights Council resolution is an interpretation of two existing international treaties, it clarifies that the General Assembly resolution is legally binding in international law. Together, the two resolutions represent an extraordinary breakthrough in the international struggle for the right to safe drinking water and sanitation and a milestone in the fight for water justice.

For the past decade, Ottawa has consistently opposed recognizing the right to water and sanitation. The Harper government voted to abstain when the General Assembly vote took place, and then argued (incorrectly) that the resolution is not binding. Canada and Tonga are now the only countries in the world that have not recognized the right to water or the right to sanitation.

The only explanation the Harper government gives is that it’s concerned about Canada’s sovereignty over its water supply, an argument that’s been debunked by international legal experts who point out that a newly recognized right is a pact between a government and its own citizens and doesn’t oblige one country to fulfill that right in another. The more likely reason is that with an enforceable obligation, the government would probably face extensive liability with respect to the terrible drinking water and sanitation conditions in so many First Nations communities.

There are at least 49 “high risk” Aboriginal communities in Canada with little access to clean water, and more than 100 facing “boil water” advisories. First Nations homes are 90 per cent more likely to be without running water than the homes of other Canadians. And unlike other Canadians, whose water services are provided by the provinces, the federal government is responsible for the delivery of public services to First Nations. But the Indian Act doesn’t explicitly authorize the protection of source water and, as a consequence, says environmental lawyer David Boyd, First Nations people on reserves are without the legal guarantees of water quality enjoyed by the other 34 million Canadians.

The UN’s recognition of the human right to water and sanitation could become a powerful tool for First Nations to use to force the Canadian government to deal with this situation. Canada, like all members of the UN, must put in place an action plan and submit it to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This plan is required to address three obligations that affect Aboriginal communities.

Under the obligation to respect, water and sanitation services now delivered can’t be removed. But as local authorities move to increase water rates to pay for aging infrastructure repair, or lease their water services to for-profit companies, poorer and marginalized Canadians can expect to start seeing water cut-offs, as is happening in U.S. inner cities.

Under the obligation to protect, governments must step in to ensure that third parties such as corporations or extractive industries aren’t destroying local water systems. The Cree of Fort Chipewyan in northern Alberta could argue that their right to safe drinking water has been violated by the destruction of water sources in tar sands production, as could the Aamjiwnaang of Sarnia, Ontario, whose water supply has been so contaminated by the petrochemical industry that birth patterns are changing: two girls are now born for every boy.

And under the obligation to fulfill, the government is required to take additional measures necessary to guarantee the newly recognized right. This means it must pledge to provide safe drinking water and sanitation services to the First Nations communities that are now without.

“Do you have running water? I don’t and I live in Canada.” These words are on posters that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs took to the UN in an attempt to gain international recognition of their plight. It’s time for the Canadian government to recognize this most basic of rights, in Canada and around the world.

Why We Need “System Change Not Climate Change”

by Andrea Harden-Donahue

As the effects of climate change ravage our planet, the Council of Canadians is offering a new tool in the fight for a better, more environmentally sustainable future.

The popular slogan “system change not climate change” has become central to a growing and vibrant global movement for climate justice. But what does system change mean? And what does it have to do with the climate crisis? Inspired by this slogan, the Council of Canadians has launched an exciting new project that will help spread the word that there are other ways – better ways – to address climate change, and that the time to act is now. Systemchange.ca is a multimedia website that brings together the voices of academics, scientists, climate justice and community activists, and others to talk about why we need system change – fundamental changes in our economic and governance models – and to provide examples of new ways forward.

Systemchange.ca features more than 20 videos – from economist Peter Victor discussing no-growth economics, to author and activist Naomi Klein on climate justice, to Malik Yakini of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network on local food production, to Council of Canadians Chairperson Maude Barlow on the rights of nature.

The Council of Canadians is encouraging our chapters, members and others to organize community-based teach-ins using videos featured on the website before and after the next round of UN climate talks, which will be held in Durban, South Africa, November 28 to December 9.

Teach-ins allow people to share knowledge and information, have discussions and plan actions to address the growing effects of climate change. They can be held in a variety of settings, including workplaces, classrooms, community centres, conference meeting rooms and even your living room. To find out more about organizing a teach-in, visit the “organize a teach-in” section on systemchange.ca.

The following texts are excerpts from videos available at www.systemchange.ca:

“Doing something about this is hard. Getting off coal, gas, and oil is hard. It’s hard because we’re all used to using it, it’s hard because it’s the easiest route out of poverty for poor nations. It’s hard most of all because it is well-defended by the most profitable enterprise on Earth, the fossil fuel industry, whose lobby so far has been able to block any real change. We’re never going to have as much money as the fossil fuel industry, so we’re going to have to find another currency to work in, and that currency is bodies and spirit and creativity.”

Bill McKibben, Environmentalist and founder of the 350.org movement

“The kind of heat [generated by climate change] obviously causes big things to start to happen. For instance, the Arctic is melting at an enormously rapid rate. But it’s also things very close to home. Place after place after place now is seeing enormous swings in extreme weather and the reason for that is this extra heat that we put into the atmosphere. . . .”
buildings were really energy pigs and when energy costs were irrelevant. Those built and designed in the 50s and 60s for existing highrise commercial build was doing providing retrofit programs for existing highrise commercial buildings where they would go in and offer an energy retrofit for buildings that were built and designed in the 50s and 60s when energy costs were irrelevant. Those buildings were really energy pigs and the costs had gone through the roof. He offered a package to the owners of coming in and retrofitting the building and not costing the owner a penny, but rather taking the savings in utility costs for a number of years, and at the end of it he would walk away. The owner would then realize the savings of energy costs, which in some cases were as high as $1 million a year.

“That program – we took the concept of that and went to the City of Toronto. We asked the City of Toronto to help create a publicly-run program that would put that concept into place in both public and private sector buildings. And in doing that, not only were they able to continue their trade or finish their apprenticeship, but we resulted in saving hundreds of thousands of tonnes of CO2 emissions into the atmosphere.

“It taught us as a labour movement that we needed to explore the opportunities in a green jobs agenda.”

Patrick Bond, Director of the Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

“There will be a strong unity call [in Durban] that says ‘keep the oil in the soil, and the coal in the hole, and the tar sand in the land.’

The Harper government has:

• failed to invest in a green economy and cut funding to an important program for renewable energy, while subsidizing the oil and gas industry by $1.4 billion a year.
• failed to meaningfully regulate the fastest-growing source of emissions in Canada – the tar sands in Alberta – while actively lobbying against climate policies in the U.S. and Europe that would penalize the tar sands as a high-carbon fuel.
• cut hundreds of Environment Canada jobs.
• walked away from our commitments to the Kyoto Protocol, the international agreement on climate change that will expire in 2012.

“The big question is will governments like Canada send delegates – the officials and the delegates that come to these things who will invariably sabotage it – Canada especially for its role in the Kyoto Protocol and dropping out. And that means that the question many people in South Africa will ask to Canadians is: should those delegates come to South Africa where they will simply make it a conference of polluters? Or will we be able to ask Canadians and South Africans and all of the world’s peoples to work together to ensure that the kind of people doing climate deals are those that are really committed to the planet, not to continuing the emissions.”

The Council of Canadians will be in Durban for COP17, the UN climate negotiations. The conference will bring together representatives of the world’s governments, international organizations and civil society. We will be there to monitor and report back on the talks and to organize and participate in climate justice movement activities.

The Canadian government has played a negative and obstructionist role at the last two rounds of climate talks. We know that the Canadian government is also failing to address climate change at home. In the lead-up to the Durban talks, we will send a clear message to the Harper government to “stay home.” These talks should be about global action to equitably reduce carbon emissions. If our government isn’t willing to contribute positively, it should stay out of the way of other nations moving forward.

Andrea Harden-Donahue is the Climate Justice Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.
Mega Quarry Would Be a Mega Mistake

by Mark Calzavara

A proposal to dig a massive limestone quarry just north of Toronto, Ontario – known simply as the Melancthon Quarry – has turned into a battle that encompasses issues of water protection, food production, First Nations rights, urban sprawl, free trade and deregulation. People in surrounding communities and from across the province are waging a fundamental fight over what we value, what we destroy, and what we will protect for future generations. The Council of Canadians is working closely with the communities in an effort to stop what could become the largest quarry in the country.

How it started

The Highland Companies began buying farms in the Melancthon area four years ago, claiming it wanted to be the biggest potato producer in the province. When the company started drilling holes and taking deep core samples from all over their 9,000-acre holding, community members began to suspect that something else was in the works. Highland Companies is owned by the Baupost Group, a Boston-based hedge fund with assets exceeding $20 billion.

Earlier this year, Highland applied to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for a licence under the province’s Aggregate Resources Act to turn 2,316 acres of their 9,000 acres into a mega quarry. If approved, the open pit would be deeper than Niagara Falls and lie more than 200 feet below the water table. It would destroy the rich farmland that exists there now. The company would use up to 50 tonnes of toxic chemicals per day to blast the limestone out of the ground. Three thousand dump trucks would haul aggregate each day along what are now quiet country roads.

What is aggregate?

Aggregate is a class of natural materials such as gravel and crushed stone used in construction. Below Melancthon’s potato fields lie several billion tonnes of amabel limestone valued at between $20 billion and $80 billion dollars. The largest consumer of aggregate in Ontario is the Ministry of Transport, which uses it to build highways.

In Ontario, the Aggregate Resources Act legislates the licensing and operation of quarries. Originally written in the 1960s, the Act favours industry interests over the protection of water and land. Many communities have opposed quarry licensing and expansion, but they have almost always lost their battles.

What is at stake

The mega quarry would destroy prime farmland in the heart of Ontario’s potato-growing region. The area is known for its honeywood silt loam, a type of soil that is particularly suited to potato cultivation, and not found in such abundance anywhere else. Melancthon Township is seeking a heritage designation for this soil, which is currently used to grow about half of all the potatoes consumed in Toronto.

The Melancthon area is referred to as the “rooftop of Ontario” as rain falling there forms the headwaters of five major river systems that feed the Great Lakes. The area contains so many interconnected sinkholes and underground rivers that fish have been found in local wells. The mega-quarry proposal includes a plan to remove 600 million litres of water per day from the quarry floor in perpetuity to prevent catastrophic flooding. This will mean that the equivalent of one-quarter of the entire province’s water consumption will be collected and re-injected into the quarry every day until the end of time.

Being close to Toronto, the Melancthon area has attracted many retirees and weekenders in recent years, but still remains fundamentally rural in nature. Long-time Council of Canadians members Ralph and Mary Lynne Armstrong farm on land adjacent to the proposed quarry site. The land has been in their family for six generations. They have refused to sell their property to Highland for any price and have joined – along with many other Council members – the local campaign to stop the mega quarry.

Both the Melancthon area and the rivers that originate there are subject to unresolved land claims by Haudenosaunee and Anishinabe First Nations, who say Highland representatives have not attempted any consultation with them about the proposal, as required by federal law. First Nations activists have played a critical role in bringing attention to the issue, and are providing both moral and spiritual support to the local community.

Victory!

Under enormous pressure from Council of Canadians members, local groups and community residents, on the eve of the provincial election, the Ontario government ordered the Highland Companies to perform an environmental assessment for the mega quarry. The assessment places the onus on the company to prove the project will not be environmentally damaging. We will continue to push for a complete rejection of this quarry and work with others to demand regulations that provide meaningful protection for the Commons – our shared land, air and water – in Ontario and across Canada.

Mark Calzavara is the Ontario-Quebec Regional Organizer for the Council of Canadians.
Should Nature Have Rights?

The effects of climate change and the global water crisis continue to wreak havoc around the world, causing droughts, famine, floods, forest fires and ravages that indicate Mother Nature is fighting back against humanity’s carelessness with the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the Earth on which we live and depend.

As humans continue to take this world for granted, with a global economic system that is based on growth and consumption no matter what the price to nature, we are now faced with the question: should nature have rights?

The rights of nature – also referred to as the rights of Mother Earth – is a concept embraced by a growing movement of people and organizations that are fighting for binding legal instruments that recognize and protect the Earth as a living entity, giving it rights to ensure its protection from pollution, damaging extraction and resource plundering.

In 2009, countries came together for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark (COP15). It was clear during this Copenhagen Summit that governments were not willing to make the difficult, binding commitments needed to halt and reverse the devastating effects of climate change. Feeling the urgent need for change, more than 52,000 people converged in Bolivia the following April for the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth. They sent a clear message that there is an urgent need for a new way forward if humanity is going to move towards a safer, sustainable future. At the People’s Conference, activists drafted “The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth” recognizing that our planet is a living being and a source of life, and that humankind cannot exist without acknowledging the interrelated bond between ourselves and the Earth we live on.

Cormac Cullinan, an environmental lawyer from South Africa, describes it this way: “The Declaration recognises that all natural entities that exist as part of Mother Earth, including plants, animals, rivers and ecosystems, are subjects that have the inherent and inalienable right to exist and to play their role within the community of beings. The international community and most countries recognise and defend human rights, but do not recognise that other beings also have inherent rights that humans must respect. This has created an imbalance in the relationships.”

The movement for the rights of nature is making strides internationally. On April 22, 2010, the entire United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the day “Mother Earth Day.” One year later, Bolivia led a United Nations dialogue on the topic of “Harmony with Nature,” bringing activists, advocates and others involved in the movement for the rights of nature – including the Council of Canadians – to speak to UN delegations. Demands to recognize the rights of nature will be central to upcoming UN climate talks in Durban, South Africa, and at the Rio +20 Earth Summit in 2012.

Actions for the rights of nature are also taking place in communities. There have been 125 municipal ordinances recognizing the rights of nature that have enabled communities to stand up to the corporate destruction of their land, air and water. The most recent example is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which became the first U.S. city to recognize the legally enforceable rights of nature. When passing an ordinance banning hydraulic fracturing, city council members included the following statements: “Natural communities and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, wetlands, streams, rivers, aquifers, and other water systems, possess inalienable and fundamental rights to exist and flourish within the City of Pittsburgh. Residents of the City shall possess legal standing to enforce those rights on behalf of those natural communities and ecosystems.”

The Council of Canadians is part of the growing movement for the rights of nature. This April, along with Global Exchange and Fundación Pachamama, we launched the book Rights of Nature: The Case for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth as a tool to help educate and encourage discussions and actions for the rights of nature. (See the back cover of this issue of Canadian Perspectives for more information.) The book brings together the voices of acclaimed authors, progressive thinkers, political leaders, and environmental and community activists from around the world, who share their passion and insights about the Declaration, the rights of nature and the urgent need to recognize the unbreakable link between respecting ourselves and respecting the planet. The authors all reflect on the important question: What would our world look like if nature had rights?

It’s a question we should all be thinking about.
Foreign Trade Zones Are Corporate Paradises

by Harjap Grewal

The Canadian and B.C. governments are currently exploring the development of Foreign Trade Zones (FTZs) around the province with a specific proposal for a zone at Deltaport, a terminal port located on the mainland coastline of the Georgia Strait just south of Ladner, British Columbia. There has been very little public information provided about this proposed zone, or discussion and debate about its potential social, environmental and economic impacts.

WHAT IS A FOREIGN TRADE ZONE?

Foreign Trade Zones have existed since the 1970s. Tariffs are reduced or eliminated in these import/export zones and goods can be stored duty- or tax-free. The recent proliferation of these zones has been focused on attracting investment by creating an ideal climate for manufacturing and export in order to maximize profits for the corporations hosted within the zone. These new zones are also called “free trade zones” or “special economic zones.”

In the Global South there has been a great deal of opposition to these zones due to their highly exploitive labour practices, land expropriations, lower environmental standards, and negative economic impacts on neighbouring communities. Some of the most notorious examples are the many trade zones that have been established in China and India, the maquiladoras in Mexico, and the Jamaican Free Zones.

WHAT WOULD AN FTZ AT DELTAPORT LOOK LIKE?

Michael E. Moore, CEO of Global Container Terminals, is lobbying for the proposed Deltaport zone. He has served as a vice president at the Jebel Ali Free Zone, located at the port of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The set-up of the Jebel Ali Free Zone could provide some insight into what we might expect if an FTZ is established locally. This could include the following priorities:

- 100 per cent foreign ownership,
- the removal of import duties, and no corporate taxes,
- the removal of environmental standards,
- a one-stop development approval process,
- a reduction of employment standards,
- the establishment of industry-friendly labour law,
- the use of highly exploitive temporary worker programs.

The Canadian government’s own Foreign Trade Zone study has proposed the establishment of “a single source service provider in order to obtain the necessary permits” and asserted that “legislation governing the day-to-day operations of firms operating within the FTZ (labour law, for example) is usually more flexible relative to the laws applicable in the host country outside the FTZ.” The report suggests the zone can also provide “exemption and/or deferral of customs duties” as well as “lower Corporate Income Tax than the rest of the host country.”

Essentially the proposal is to provide corporations with their own sub-state where they have complete control to create an investment paradise that benefits corporations at the expense of workers, the environment and the local community. The corporate-friendly federal government is moving ahead with plans for FTZs. In 2009, the Canadian government launched pilot projects “to promote the use of Canada’s foreign trade zone–type programs.”

While Foreign Trade Zones appeal to business-friendly governments and corporations, there are social and environmental concerns that come with fewer restrictions for big business. These include exploitation of migrant workers and disregard for the environmental crisis.

THE EXPLOITATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

As the Canadian government has been expanding its troubling temporary workers program, unions and community groups, in contrast, have been fighting to obtain fair wages and employment standards for migrant workers. Since fair wages and employment standards impact corporations’ profits, an FTZ would provide a sanctioned zone where employment standards cannot be enforced or monitored by the public or by local governments. The working conditions in other free trade zones, such as the Jebel Ali Free Zone, have become notorious for worker abuse.

DISREGARD FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

While there is an environmental necessity to begin shifting to local diets and economies, the developments at Deltaport are moving in the opposite direction. Already, mass imports from North America produce large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. An FTZ would introduce mass exports from the region, producing even more trade-related emissions. This commercial hub is already the largest coal exporting port in North America and the large-scale freeway expansion planned for the area will bring more cars to the region rather than trains and buses. The proposed “single window” approval process would also undermine environmental regulation of operations within the zone.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Take action and say “no!” to the corporate paradise. If you live in the Delta area, talk to your neighbours, hold public meetings, and start to organize in your community to oppose this FTZ. People across the country can apply pressure to all levels of government (municipal, provincial/territorial and federal) to reject the introduction of FTZs. Keep up to date on the latest developments by visiting our website at www.canadians.org.

Harjap Grewal is the British Columbia-Yukon Regional Organizer for the Council of Canadians.
By late October, the ninth and possibly final negotiating round of trade talks between Canada and the European Union will have taken place in Ottawa. But the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) is far from a done deal. It’s creating bad vibes in Canada and the EU, especially amongst those who are taking a closer look at how the deal will affect procurement, the provision and regulation of public services, and the rights of corporations to challenge government policy.

We’ll need to turn up the heat and keep those embers of discontent glowing, or better yet strike a fire on this side of the Atlantic before Harper can sign a final deal, which he hopes to do early in the new year. There are some very easy ways you can help make this happen. Let’s look at what they are, and at the problem areas haunting CETA negotiations.

**Government procurement**

This summer, Council of Canadians chapters, our Trade Justice Network allies, and dedicated individuals took the campaign against CETA to their municipalities. People presented to municipal councils on the threats that CETA’s procurement restrictions pose to job creation and sustainability policies linked to public spending.

The result of their hard work was that more than a dozen new municipal resolutions against CETA were passed, the majority of them in Ontario. In total, over 20 cities, towns, school boards and municipal associations in five provinces have demanded transparency on CETA negotiations from the Harper government. In many cases, they are demanding a total exemption for municipalities from the deal.

Responding to pressure from member cities and the public, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has issued a set of conditions it feels must be met in CETA’s procurement chapter. These include reasonable procurement thresholds (though without specifying a value) and “progressive enforcement,” meaning cities would get a verbal warning before financial penalties are imposed in the event a public tender is found to have violated the agreement.

In general, the FCM position is not very strong. The organization’s seven conditions do not address the fundamental question of why our cities, towns, school boards and hospitals would want to give up the right to buy locally. But they do show how controversial CETA has become among Canadian municipalities.

You can help us keep the pressure on the Harper government by speaking to your local councillor today about CETA negotiations. You will find a municipal resolution toolkit on our website at www.canadians.org/CETA, or call us at 1-800-387-7177 for a copy.

**Water, health care and public services**

In June, the EU Parliament passed a resolution on CETA that challenged the way public services might be addressed under CETA’s investment rules. European public sector unions are very concerned that unless public services – broadly understood to include present and future social services delivered publicly and in the public interest – are carved out of the agreement, CETA will be yet another tool the European
Commission can use to push the privatization of water, health care and other services onto EU member states.

There is still significant concern that the provinces are going to include drinking water and sanitation services in their offers to the EU, and that health services (including health insurance) may also be added to the deal, which would lead to increased private, for-profit delivery. These offers were to be exchanged with the EU during the October negotiations, but we have no idea what is in them because provincial governments are keeping the offers secret, even from opposition parties, municipalities and other groups that would be affected by new trade commitments in the area of services.

There are also continuing threats to Canada’s public health care system from drug patent term extensions and other intellectual property regime changes that are desperately being sought by the EU (with added pressure from the United States). Big Pharma is waging a massive campaign in favour of these extra protections for brand name drugs. Rx&D, the lobby group representing global pharmaceutical companies such as GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer and others, has created a website called “Protect Healthcare” to try to create the illusion of public support for these terrible changes to Canada’s drug regime.

Meanwhile, a study by Paul Grootendorst of the University of Toronto and Aidan Hollis of the University of Calgary on the matter shows that patent changes would increase drug costs by nearly $3 billion in Canada and delay the introduction of cheaper generic drug versions. The Council of Canadians is demanding that the provincial and territorial governments release their list of offers to the EU, and resist calls to protect brand name drugs at the expense of public health. You can send a letter to your provincial government using an action alert on our website.

**More investor rights?**

Throughout the CETA negotiations, we have been told in briefings by Canada’s lead negotiator that the investment chapter will look different from the NAFTA model. That model, in particular its investor-to-state dispute process, has been a disaster because it has exposed many public policies and public health or environmental regulations to corporate lawsuits.

This year alone we’ve seen two challenges to environmental policy in Ontario: one by U.S. investor T. Boone Pickens to the province’s Green Energy Act, and another from St. Mary’s Cement, a Brazilian firm registered in the U.S., against a decision by the Ontario government to block a quarry that would have threatened water and farmland. Last year, the Harper government settled a NAFTA investor challenge by AbitibiBowater for $130 million. The process is excessive and expensive, and there is no evidence these so-called investment protections actually attract foreign investment to the countries that provide them.

So we were surprised to see in September the Council of the EU has agreed to give the European Commission the mandate to negotiate an investor-to-state dispute process in CETA that could be even more permissive than the NAFTA model. The rights CETA would give EU firms to sue the federal government for provincial, municipal or federal policies that interfere with their profits could surpass those given to U.S. and Mexican firms in NAFTA.

European social justice, environmental, labour and other groups are mobilizing against this new mandate. They will be meeting in November in Brussels, along with representatives from Latin America, Canada, the U.S., India and elsewhere to develop an alternative investment model, and to meet with EU decision makers. We must continue to put pressure on Canadian politicians to dispense with the investor-to-state dispute process, and to remove it from existing bilateral and regional trade agreements.

**The road ahead**

Though the Harper government claims it will have a deal with the EU by next year, the fate of CETA is not decided. Anything could happen between now and then, including a collapse in the negotiations, position changes by provincial governments, many of which recently faced or are facing elections, or even a second overshadowing global financial crisis.

There will be opportunities over the coming months for us to challenge the ideological free trade agenda of the Harper government. Other trade deals will come to the House of Commons for ratification, including ones with Panama and Honduras. Neither makes economic sense but both highlight the incongruity between free trade and other social priorities such as environmental protection, human rights and international labour laws.

Like these trade deals, CETA elevates the protection of investment and corporate profits above all other protections. It will not create jobs, as Harper claims. In fact, it may cost us jobs by increasing Canada’s trade deficit with the EU. And with each negotiating round it becomes more apparent that CETA poses significant threats to our democratic options at home.

Visit www.canadians.org/CETA for updates and more actions you can take to raise important questions about CETA in these next critical months.

Stuart Trew is the Trade Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.

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**Tour helps in fight against CETA**

With the generous support of our members, the Council of Canadians was able to visit cities across Canada, educating and informing people about CETA and the devastating impacts it could have on our communities.

During the spring and fall of 2011, Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow joined with representatives of the Canadian Union of Public Employees to say “our communities are not for sale” in this far-reaching free trade deal. We visited 13 Canadian cities from coast to coast, raising awareness and encouraging people to take action against CETA, which is set to deregulate and privatize our drinking water, push drug costs higher, and erase municipal “hire and buy local” policies.

The tour reached thousands of people, bringing together concerned community residents, farmers, health care and municipal workers, policy makers and public officials. It inspired actions such as letters to elected officials and municipal resolutions against CETA, and garnered local and national media attention.

Thank you to our members for your strong support, and for helping us wage the ongoing fight against this unfair trade deal.
How did the chapter get started?

In the mid-1990s two activists, Kel Kelly and Wayne Bradley, arranged a visit by Maude, and following that a decision was made to form a chapter. Barb Berger, who currently chairs our meetings, remembers that there were rich discussions on how the chapter would be run, what the goals were, and who would be in charge.

The chapter has been doing a lot of work to stop the Raven Underground Coal Project – tell us about this.

Coal Watch, the main activist group opposing the Raven Coal Mine, which is slated to be built within the Comox Valley just south of Courtenay, asked our chapter to support them. We have gone to all the hearings and made submissions to the environmental assessment process, urged all our members to write letters to the editor, and gone on protest marches. We also gave Coal Watch our chapter’s Annual Award for Community Action.

At a huge town hall meeting about the coal mine, many people said that for the first time in their lives, they felt the need to protest. When our chapter offered to put on a civil disobedience workshop (led by the Council’s BC-Yukon Regional Organizer Harjap Grewal), 50 people signed up! The workshop brought together people from most of the activist groups in our area. There was so much motivation to organize and stop the coal mine that a Peaceful Direct Action Coalition was formed. In September we held a big town hall meeting with Maude as the featured speaker, and the next day the coalition hosted several workshops. We are all gearing up for direct action if the coal mine is approved – and we’re getting ready with help from the Council.

What other issues is the chapter working on?

Our chapter has been the driving force behind various issues that are now being carried on by other groups. For example, we worked on GE-Free Foods and supported the local farmers’ market. The local GE-free group then morphed into the Friends of Farming, which we still try to support.

We were active in starting up the Comox Valley Water Watch, since protecting our water is a major federal, provincial and local issue, and we have always worked on public health. We were part of the initial group that fought the closure of two hospitals in our area, along with the Campbell River chapter. We were very happy when we won that battle! We have an active SOS (Support Our Seniors) Comox Valley group which is focusing on seniors’ health issues and the fact that all senior resources in our area are now privatized.

We have put on many large town halls, usually with other groups co-sponsoring them. Because the federal and provincial governments are off-loading problems to the local areas, some of us are involved in a Citizen Voice Project, which is trying to educate and animate more progressive municipally.

The Comox Valley chapter has a strong local presence. How do you encourage participation and build excitement about the campaigns you work on?

People rally around issues of a local nature. The Raven Coal Mine has affected so many people in a negative way that it has brought people out of the woodwork. We think that taking larger issues and applying them to local ones is the key to getting people interested. What the chapter does has to be relevant. The Council brings many important issues together – democracy, sovereignty, social justice, public health care and water – and Maude’s commitment inspires us all to keep on with our struggles and issues.

What advice would you give to people interested in starting up a new Council chapter?

Make the chapter relevant to your community as much as possible; take something specific and connect the dots to the global picture. Find existing groups and work with them when you can.

For more information about how to join a chapter in your area, visit our website at www.canadians.org or call us at 1-800-387-7177.
Chapter Action Updates

by Brent Patterson

Challenging the destructive tar sands

Council of Canadians staff, board members, chapter activists and members joined with hundreds of people on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on September 26 to say “No!” to the environmentally destructive tar sands. Chapter activists from Quebec, Ontario and Alberta waved Council banners and signs, delivering a strong message to Prime Minister Harper that the tar sands operations are poisoning local waterways, land and air. Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow, Council staff and several chapter activists were among the 200 arrested that day in a peaceful showing of mass civil disobedience.

Chapters secure CETA resolutions

Months of diligent work by our chapters and allies has resulted in a wave of municipal councils, school boards and other organizations passing resolutions demanding public transparency about what the federal and provincial governments are putting on the table in negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the EU. Resolutions questioning and opposing CETA are being passed across Canada.

Over the past several months, 13 municipal resolutions have been passed in Nova Scotia ( Lunenburg), in Ontario (Brantford, Alnwick/Haldimand, Trent Hills, Asphodel-Norwood, Tecumseh, Windsor-Essex, Brockville and London), and in British Columbia (Logan Lake, Burnaby, North Vancouver and Trail), thanks in large part to the grassroots efforts of chapter activists and Council members.

Fracking fights across Canada

Council chapters have been active in the fight against fracking, a controversial drilling process used to extract natural gas from shale, coal beds and “tight sands” with vertical and horizontal drilling. In Lethbridge, Alberta, chapter members joined a protest calling on the provincial government to ban fracking in the province. Fracking operations contaminate water and have been linked to serious health concerns. Protesters supported calls from First Nations Blood tribe members to stop fracking projects on their lands.

Members of the Inverness County chapter brought their concerns about fracking to Nova Scotia’s Environment Minister after the province’s Department of Energy gave PetroWorth Resources the green light to drill an exploratory well in West Lake Ainslie. They also presented to their municipal council, opposing a proposal to sell city water to PetroWorth for drilling operations.

In New Brunswick, chapter members from Moncton, Saint John and Tantamar marched to city hall chanting “No!” to hydro-fracking and shale gas exploration in the province. Chapters are part of a growing movement trying to stop the invasive and polluting drilling practice.

Celebrating Blue Communities

Communities are turning “blue” right across Canada. Chapters have been promoting the Blue Communities Project in their hometowns, encouraging municipalities to recognize water as a human right, ban the sales of bottled water in public facilities and at municipal events, and commit to promoting publicly financed, owned and operated water and wastewater services.

The Blue Communities initiative is a joint venture between the Council of Canadians and CUPE and, in Quebec, Eau Secours, and is aimed at strengthening public water use. The initiative was supported in British Columbia recently, as municipal leaders from across the province voted overwhelmingly in favour of a Blue Communities resolution at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities conference. The resolution shows strong support across B.C. for the idea of developing more Blue Communities.

With strong lobbying from local chapter members, four B.C. communities – Burnaby, Victoria, Port Alberni and Mission – have already become Blue Communities. Tiny Township in Ontario is now a Blue Community and Kingston, Ontario, and Pointe Claire, Quebec, are also on their way to becoming “blue.”

Chapter joins coalition for direct action conference

More than 600 people filled the gymnasium at the Isfeld Secondary School in Courtenay, British Columbia, to hear Council of Canadians Chairperson Maude Barlow and lawyer and author Leo McGrady speak about peaceful direct action in Canada. The two-day event was meant to encourage ordinary citizens to fulfill their responsibility to get up and act when governments fail to listen.

The coalition, which was formed by local groups, including the Council’s Comox Valley chapter, brought together people who are interested in building more awareness about the benefits of peaceful direct action. The coalition used the event to educate the public on its rights and responsibilities during peaceful protests and direct actions. Workshops gave people tools, ideas and information to organize their own actions.

Brent Patterson is the Political Director of the Council of Canadians.
Many now know me as the Senate Page who held up a stop sign against Prime Minister Stephen Harper. But when I first moved to Ottawa to attend university, my aspirations were very different. I had no thoughts about turning Parliament into a site of protest. Instead, I wanted to take a comfortable place at its centre.

When I left my hometown of Winnipeg for Canada’s capital, I came in part to join the Parliamentary Page Program. Back then, I saw Parliament as a means of bringing about much-needed social and political change. But living in Ottawa and working on the Hill, I began to understand our parliamentary system very differently. Far from serving to remedy injustice, it often seemed only to perpetuate it.

I was working as a page in the Senate when Harper secured his majority government with only 39.6 per cent of the popular vote. It had been difficult for me to watch the Conservative agenda move forward in a majority Conservative Senate. With a majority in the House of Commons as well, I knew it was about to get much worse. How could I continue to sit idly by as Harper pushed through a destructive agenda? I could no longer stay silent, so during the Speech from the Throne, I held up a bright red sign that read “Stop Harper.”

I am moved by the thousands of people who were excited by my action. It shows that people in Canada are burning for change.

Harper will not be stopped within Parliament. With a Conservative majority in the House and in the Senate, he is free to implement the most damaging parts of his renegade program. For the next four years, we can expect corporate tax cuts, cuts to public services and pensions, erosion of health care, free trade agreements that undermine sovereignty and labour standards, environmental degradation, and the expansion of the military and prisons. Even if all members of the opposition vote against Conservative policies, the policies will still pass.

I have come to realize that the only way to stop Harper is through grassroots activism. I have always been active in my community, but it was not until recently, and especially since my action in the Senate, that I have begun to discover the power of social movements and direct action.

“ACTION IS THE ANTIDOTE FOR DESPAIR”

Some people asked me if my being fired from my Senate job left me worried about my future. Actually, I have never been more hopeful. Working on the Hill, I felt trapped in an agenda and a system that I did not believe in. But as human rights activist and songwriter Joan Baez said, “Action is the antidote for despair.” Now, working with social movements, I am more optimistic than ever about tomorrow. While the Conservative government tries to make a mess of our country, social movements are working tirelessly to stop it. They are the hope for real change in Canada.

I am guided by the words of Council of Canadians National Chairperson Maude Barlow. Following the election of a Harper majority government, she referenced an old union saying about facing adversity and advised: “Don’t mourn, organize!”

I used to be afraid to question, to challenge, to dream, to experiment, but no longer. I am beginning to discover the power of dreaming seriously about a better Canada and working with others to create it. I once shared in the misconception that Harper has been given free rein to do as he pleases. But now I realize that he hasn’t – all Canadians have a hold on the reins too and we can help steer our country on a better course. We are united through the Commons – through water, democracy, the economy and our health needs. Hope for Canada over the next four years and beyond lies not with government, but with the rest of us, organizing together for a country based on our own voices, values and vision.

Brigette DePape is a former Senate Page who is burning for positive social change. The preceding text is excerpted from her recently released paper Thinking Outside the Ballot Box: How people power can stop Harper’s agenda and create fundamental change, which is available at www.canadians.org/democracy.
Sandy Pond Alliance Fights “Schedule 2” Loophole

by Angela Giles

The Sandy Pond Alliance to Protect Canadian Waters (SPA) is a coalition of local groups – including the Council of Canadians – activists, scientists and concerned local residents that are fighting to save Sandy Pond in Newfoundland and Labrador and other bodies of water from destruction under a legal loophole in the federal Fisheries Act.

Schedule 2 is part of the Metal Mining Effluent Regulation (MMER) of the federal Fisheries Act which allows metal mining corporations to use lakes and rivers as toxic dumpsites. Once added to Schedule 2, healthy fresh-water lakes lose all environmental protections. According to Mining Watch Canada there are now more than 20 natural water bodies slated for destruction.

Ken Kavanagh chairs the St. John’s Council of Canadians chapter and also heads the SPA’s Board of Directors. He recently spoke with Angela Giles, the Council’s Atlantic Regional Organizer, about the alliance’s work, the lawsuit it has launched to challenge the legality of Schedule 2, and why people are passionate about protecting Sandy Pond.

Can you bring us up to speed on the court challenge?

Vale [the mining company seeking to use Sandy Pond as a dumpsite for mining waste] and the Mining Associations of Canada and B.C. applied for intervener status [in the court case] in the summer of 2010. A hearing last September led to a decision in February 2011 allowing for very restricted participation from the parties. A subsequent appeal led to a slightly increased participation for Vale and the mining associations.

I had expected the case would be much like a criminal trial, with witnesses taking the stand, evidence being presented and cross-examinations, all taking place in a public court hearing. But this federal court process has been very paper-heavy. All parties submit affidavits from expert witnesses, and then a series of counter-affidavits and paper cross-examinations ensues. We’re expecting a public hearing to happen sometime in late October or early November, when the lawyers for all three parties will present and summarize the evidence to a Federal Court judge.

What has the mood been like locally around the case and the work of the SPA?

Since the closure of the phosphorus plant in 1989, Long Harbour has seen a declining population (especially young people), major job losses and very little job creation, and aging/failing infrastructure. It’s a common story: a rural community in desperate need of jobs and economic development being courted by a large development project with a significant environmental downside. Given all of this, what would you expect the people to do if presented with an opportunity to have a job?

It’s important to point out that the SPA is not opposed to this development. We are vehemently opposed to the destruction of a beautiful, pristine lake. But the people of Long Harbour are scared to speak out against this aspect of the development for fear of being blacklisted, along with their friends and families. Only a few individuals have been vocal in opposition to the dumping of toxic waste in Sandy Pond.

In the broader community, there has been a lot of support for our position; people are really having a hard time with the destruction of the lake. We’re getting new members and emails of support too.

Tell us about the people involved in the SPA and their motivation for keeping up this work.

The people involved are very genuine, forthright and passionate individuals who care deeply about the environmental legacy we will leave the next generation. I think they are a courageous group of people, taking an unsafe and unpopular position because their conscience said “this is not right!”

How has the alliance been successful so far?

We’ve been really successful with bringing the media on board, and have been getting a lot of attention. There was a series in The Telegram about the project. A fundraiser was also organized by several folks in the SPA recently, which was a great success in terms of raising money as well as awareness of the issue.

You know, people here are busy with their lives, struggling making a living, raising their families – who has time to worry about a development that’s going to destroy a pond on the other side of the province? But people do care. This is one of the great successes of the alliance: we’ve made the personal connection for people.

For all the latest updates on the SPA’s court challenge and other ways we are taking action against Schedule 2, visit our website at www.canadians.org/schedule2.

Angela Giles is the Atlantic Regional Organizer for the Council of Canadians.
Long-time Council Member Helps Students Work Towards Bottled Water Ban in Schools

by Jan Malek

Gwen McConkey, a World Studies teacher at East Northumberland Secondary School in Brighton, Ontario, is always on the lookout for new teaching tools.

“I think the Council [of Canadians’] materials are great. I read every issue of Canadian Perspectives from cover-to-cover, and I’m always sharing Council materials with other teachers. They are really helpful in the classroom.”

A long-time Council member and Citizen’s Agenda Fund donor, McConkey has always had a strong interest in environmental and social justice issues. Last year when she was teaching a Grade 12 Global Issues class about global water concerns the question of bottled water came up. McConkey knew of the Council’s involvement in the issue. She had attended a meeting in Cobourg, Ontario, as part of the “Unbottle It!” tour, where she picked up copies of the Unbottle It! booklet. The booklet explains how bottling puts a price on water and sends millions of environmentally damaging empty plastic containers into landfills. It also provides tips and information about how to take action locally.

“Unbottle It! was a terrific publication. I picked up a class set and I gave it to the kids to go home and read, and when they came back the next day a number of them said we should do something about this,” said McConkey.

The students began meeting at lunch time to make plans. Municipal elections were coming up so they drafted an email to candidates running for mayor and school board trustee positions asking candidates what they would do to support getting a bottled water ban in municipal buildings and in schools. The trustee who was elected, Cyndi Dickson, agreed to support them.

“It was great – the students had another voice to help move this forward. We were making progress,” said McConkey.

The students decided to make a presentation to the school board. They wanted to push for the removal of bottled water from vending machines and cafeterias, replacing the bottles with either real fruit juice or milk. They also wanted the school board to install filler stations at water fountains so students could use refillable water containers.

Students connected with other school environmental clubs in the area and shared the information. Two more schools joined the cause. Through her union, McConkey was able to get the name of another teacher in a different part of the board who was also interested in the issue. Students in that school had worked on a campaign to phase out the use of plastic water bottles. Over a six-week period, they collected bottles people had thrown in recycling containers and created a huge statue, which they put outside the school. The students spent two weeks collecting signatures on a petition asking “Would you support a ban on plastic water bottles?” In the end, 98 per cent of their classmates agreed.

The students in Gwen’s school decided to try a petition as well. When their principal would not agree to let them collect signatures, they enlisted yet another school to start a petition drive. They spent the next several months researching and creating a presentation for school board trustees. In March they made their case.

But not everyone agreed with what the students were proposing. When an article in a local paper featured a story about the students’ request and presentation to the school board, the Director of Corporate Affairs for Nestlé Canada (a bottled water company) wrote a letter to the editor discounting the students’ arguments against bottled water.

“It was really amazing to see. For the next two to three weeks, people in the community wrote letters to the editor countering what Nestlé had said,” recalls McConkey. “It was like the community had gathered around the issue and was supporting it.”

In June students learned their efforts had paid off. The school board agreed to install filler stations at every school in the board. The board also mandated all school principals to promote the use of refillable water containers in schools.

McConkey says it was a valuable lesson for students.

“They didn’t get everything, but that’s okay. We really moved the political process,” she explained. “They learned how to stand up for something they believed in. If something got in their way, they learned to go around the problem. Every one of those students was so proud of what they accomplished.”

“It takes a village,” she added. “Once we started working together we made connections with other groups and other people and it all just fell into place.”

Jan Malek is the Publications Officer for the Council of Canadians.
Feds Need to Face the Facts about Fracking

by Emma Lui

More and more communities across Canada are confronting questions about a natural gas drilling process called “fracking” and calling for stronger federal government oversight of this growing industry.

Hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as “fracking,” is a controversial drilling process used to extract natural gas from shale, coal beds and “tight sands” with vertical and horizontal drilling. Sand, water and chemicals are blasted at high pressure to fracture rock where natural gas is trapped.

Communities all over Canada, the U.S. and other countries are fighting against fracking because it pollutes water, harms human health and produces high carbon emissions. Some municipalities are imposing bans or halting projects. Quebec is the only province that has implemented a limited moratorium.

CONCERNS WITH FRACKING

Fracking poses a significant threat to Canada’s water sources. The fracking process uses vast and unsustainable amounts of water. Approximately 2 to 9 million gallons of water are required for a single fracking job. This is equivalent to the water used by as many as 100,000 people per day (based on use of 329 litres per day, the estimated average use per person per day in Canada).

Toxic chemicals used in the fracking process can also pollute local water sources. The investigative report Fracking Hell: The Untold Story by Earth Focus and the U.K.’s Ecologist Film Unit noted that the chemicals found in fracking fluids used in the U.S. include ethylhexanol, formaldehyde, glutaraldehyde, boric acid, ethylene glycol, methanol, monoethanolamine, dazomet, acetic anhydride, isopropanol, propargyl alcohol and diesel. The fluid contents are considered proprietary information, so their full contents are not disclosed to the public regardless of the risks they pose.

People living near fracking operations have reported developing rashes and skin irritations, nosebleeds and other symptoms from contaminated water. The long-term health effects from fracking are not known, but fracking chemicals have been linked to significant health problems including bone, liver and breast cancers as well as developmental, gastrointestinal, circulatory, respiratory, brain and nervous system disorders.

With the serious risks fracking poses to people’s health and water and its impacts on climate change, along with a new binding UN resolution protecting the human right to water and sanitation that places an obligation on countries to protect water from contamination, you can’t help but wonder, “What is the federal government doing to legislate this growing industry?”

WHO’S IN CHARGE?

In June 2011, federal Environment Minister Peter Kent responded to NDP Environment Critic Megan Leslie’s questions in the House of Commons about fracking’s dangers by saying, “The federal government has an interest and can involve itself when a threat is perceived and reported. Environment Canada is responsible for regulating toxic substances under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and where required, we will intervene.” But in the same media report, he downplayed the federal government’s role, saying responsibility for monitoring and intervening belongs with the provinces and territories.

Despite Minister Kent’s contradictions, there are several laws that put the onus on the federal government to act. The following legislation, compiled in the report Duty Calls: Federal responsibility in Canada’s oil sands by the Pembina Institute, can be applied to fracking, and oil and gas mining broadly:

- Under the Fisheries Act, the “federal government has the power and authority to protect the unobstructed passage of fish, provide sufficient water flow for fish, prevent fish mortality and prohibit harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat.”
- The Canadian Environmental Protection Act “gives the federal government the authority to prevent and manage the risks posed by harmful substances, and to assess the environmental and human health impacts of new and existing substances.”
- The Species at Risk Act “provides the federal government with the authority to identify species at risk and their critical habitat,” and creates a safety net provision for the federal government to step in to protect a species if a province is failing to do so.
- An environmental assessment, under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, should be required for fracking projects based on their effects on fish and fish habitat.
- In addition, Canada’s National Pollutant Release Inventory, which tracks the use and disposal of toxic chemicals, should be revised to include reporting requirements for fracking operations.

Based on these pieces of legislation the federal government has a clear and pressing responsibility to intervene in fracking projects across the country. The impacts of fracking are already being seen, and will continue to be seen for many years to come. The federal government needs to step into a leadership role and ensure that our water sources, people’s health and the environment are protected from unnecessary and dangerous pollution.

Don’t frack with our water – there is too much at risk.

Emma Lui is the Water Campaigner for the Council of Canadians.
The Council of Canadians, Global Exchange and Fundación Pachamama have joined together to publish a ground-breaking new book titled The Rights of Nature: The Case for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.

The book brings together the voices of acclaimed authors, progressive thinkers, political leaders and environmental and community activists from around the world who share their passion and insights about the growing global movement for the rights of nature and the urgent need to recognize the unbreakable link between respecting ourselves and respecting the planet – Mother Earth – on which we all live and depend.

With distinguished contributors such as Maude Barlow, David Suzuki, Margaret Atwood, Eduardo Galeano, Nimmo Bassey, Pat Mooney, Shekhar Kapur, Susan George, Dr. Vandana Shiva and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and more, The Rights of Nature: The Case for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth is meant to inform and inspire others about the need to create and ratify a binding instrument to protect the rights of the Earth and all living things upon it.

Order your copy today at www.canadians.org/rightsofnature

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