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EXCLUSIVE BOOK EXCERPT

Boiling Point: Government neglect, corporate abuse and Canada's water crisis

by Maude Barlow

For over three decades, I have travelled the world, learning about water, learning that abundance is not a given, and that the future of the human race and the species with whom we share this planet is literally dependent upon it. I have stood in solidarity with those fighting for water justice in their communities or trying to save endangered lakes and rivers from contamination, overextraction and corporate malfeasance, and I am always amazed at how far away these struggles appear to be to most Canadians when I return home.

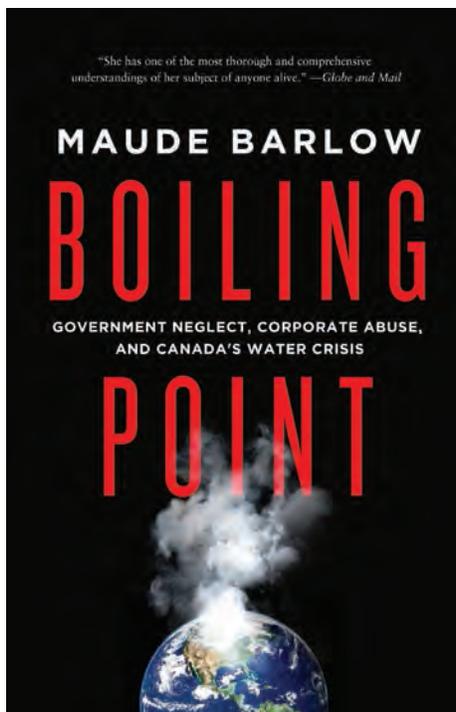
For make no mistake, the world is running out of accessible water. On World Water Day 2015, the UN reported that demand for water will increase by 55 per cent over the next 15 years. By that time global water resources will meet only 60 per cent of the world's demand. A 2016 report from leading scientists warned that two-thirds of the global population currently lives with severe water scarcity for at least one month of every year and almost 2 billion suffer severe water scarcity for at least half of every year. The water crisis could affect as many as 7 billion

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people by 2075. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gathered 500 scientists together who concluded that our global abuse of water has caused the planet to enter a “new geologic age” akin to the retreat of the glaciers over 11,000 years ago.

It is no surprise that some parts of the world, such as Australia, many countries in Africa and all of the Middle East, are in water crisis as they had few water resources to begin with. But the crisis has suddenly moved well beyond the expected. Canadians would be wise to look at other traditionally water-rich countries for insight into what could happen to us if we do not plan – if we do not hold our governments accountable to build a coherent water strategy for the future.

Brazil, listed by the UN as the most water-rich country in the world, is experiencing such devastating drought in its southern region that 20 million people are at risk, and the city of São Paulo almost ran its reservoir dry last year. Muddy sludge clogged municipal pipes as residents turned on their taps. In China, over half the rivers have disappeared in just 25 years. The United States, listed as the eighth water-richest country in the world, has been experiencing a multi-year drought rivalling the Dust Bowl of the 1930s throughout large swaths of its south and west. In 2015, California had to impose strict water rationing in many communities, and neighbour turned against neighbour as people battled over compliance. While it is true that El Niño-driven rains have provided some relief to the most drought-stricken parts of the United States, scientists believe that it is short-lived and that droughts in the arid parts of the U.S. will become both more frequent and longer lasting.



A perfect storm of declining water supplies, rising poverty levels and climbing water rates has brought what we have always thought of as Third World issues to our own doorstep.

Despite our shared mythology of limitless water, Canada is not immune to this, the world's most pressing problem. We face serious issues of water contamination, eutrophication, overextraction, glacial melt and climate change. Extractive energy and mining projects endanger our waterways. Corporations are eyeing Canada's water, setting up bottled water operations and bidding to run water services on a for-profit basis. There are even renewed calls to allow bulk commercial water exports to drought-stricken states.

Water protection regulations across the country are uneven and generally inadequate, and federal rules are

almost non-existent. They are a patchwork of outdated, vague and even conflicting regulations with no coherent overarching principles or rational planning. Many of our laws were originally enacted well over a century ago for a country that was still largely rural and agrarian and whose population mostly extracted water for their own use. As our economy grew and industrialized, our governments updated laws, enacted new ones and set regulations piecemeal as situations and need arose. There was little understanding, among either the general population or elected officials, of the consequences of pollution, overuse or overextraction. Our forebears genuinely believed that clean water would always be available and that there was more than enough for every purpose.

We have only recently begun to realize how mistaken that belief was.

This book is a cry from the heart. It is time to abandon our erroneous beliefs that Canada has unlimited supplies of water, that Canadians have taken care of this water heritage, or that we still have lots of time to do so. We need a strong, national plan of action based on a new water ethic that puts water protection and water justice at the heart of all our policies and laws. The path forward is clear, if not simple.

Maude Barlow is the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians and author of 18 books. This text is an excerpt of her recently received book *Boiling Point: Government neglect, corporate abuse and Canada's water crisis*.

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