



On the Road with **Maude Barlow**

Maude Barlow and the Council's Trade Campaigner Sujata Dey spoke to the Austrian Social Democrats and Trade Unions at the Austrian Parliament in Vienna as part of a 12-country tour last fall to raise awareness in Europe about the problems with trade deals that contain ISDS provisions that allow corporations to sue governments.

Dear friends,

Well, months into the Trudeau government's term, things are certainly different – and better! We are all deeply glad to be rid of the Harper government and the feeling of being under constant siege for our activism.

I am happy to report that the Trudeau government has kept many promises. It has launched a process to deal with the historic abuse of First Nations; it has welcomed Syrian refugees and ended discrimination in health care for refugees; it has engaged in a more healthy relationship with the provinces in dealing with health care and the environment; it has brought back the long-form census; it ended the bombing mission in Syria; it has ended the war on unions, charities and civil society. For all of this and more, we are supportive.

However, the Trudeau government has adopted one huge plank of the Harper Conservatives – its unquestioning support of free trade. Prime Minister Trudeau and Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland are strongly promoting the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). They also seem poised to support the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), after holding what can only be described as limited and unenthusiastic “public hearings” into this deal. They are also promoting new free trade deals with India and China, selling them all as good for the middle class, contrary to all evidence that free trade means fewer jobs in our country.

The Council of Canadians has been on the front line fighting these unfair trade deals.

It is important to note that these agreements are not really about reducing tariffs on each country's products, but about challenging non-tariff barriers that get in the way of corporate profits.

These barriers include standards and regulations that protect workers, social services and the environment. Transnational investors do not want to bump into higher standards as they cross borders. Built into these new deals is “regulatory cooperation” to harmonize – downward – standards on food safety, chemicals, financial rules, and many others. The deals also promote opening up new sectors such as health care and education to privatization and foreign investment and limit the right of local governments to use public money to promote local businesses and jobs.

Perhaps most egregiously, the deals include investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) provisions similar to NAFTA's Chapter 11 that allow foreign corporations to sue governments for introducing new rules or practices that hurt the corporations' “right to profit.” Canada is currently facing almost \$3 billion in challenges from American corporations, most of which have to do with environmental standards. Giving this same right to sue to the corporations of Europe and the 11 other countries of the TPP will increase the likelihood of corporate challenges to our laws and democracy and act as a “chill” when governments think about introducing new laws.

I have been deeply involved in the CETA struggle, travelling with other Council colleagues to 10 European countries to build and support CETA opposition. CETA and

its EU-U.S. counterpart, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, are deeply unpopular in Europe. It is possible we can stop them there.

As Canadians learn about the TPP and the threat to Canadian jobs, especially in the auto sector, they are becoming very concerned. As we did with CETA, the Council of Canadians is planning to hold public hearings in the fall on the TPP with our allies in labour to bring the details of this agreement to communities across the country.

Back in the 1980s, Canadians had a passionate debate about free trade when Canada and the U.S. were negotiating the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Then, in the mid-1990s, Canadians became passionate about another agreement, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which we defeated. It is time for a new generation of Canadians to become knowledgeable about these new trade deals – like CETA and the TPP – and for us to have a real and honest look at what they really mean.

The Council of Canadians is not opposed to trade – or even trade agreements – as long as they respect the right of a people to establish their own social and environmental standards. CETA and the TPP are far from that model and it is up to us to get this message out.

With hope and resolve,

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