

Maude Barlow Transcript

Interviewer 1: Okay, so I'll get started. In terms of the interview format, we have framed it beginning with biographical questions, so just how you personally got involved in the free trade struggle. And then broadening out into 'organization.' So, we'd be interested in hearing about the organizations you were a part of, the Council of Canadians, the Pro-Canada Network, as well, and I know you were running for the Liberal Party, so maybe a little bit about that. And then, from organizations we're interested in like, how the infrastructure of opposing free trade was put together, right. Then 'historical'—we've been putting together a timeline of key events, of what were some of the key moments leading up to the '88 federal elections. And we're really interested there and in your debate with Tom D'Aquino and Peter Lougheed, so we thought you might want to talk about that. And then talking about the legacy of free trade, or how we're living now. So, to begin with, tell us when you first heard about free trade and what led you to get involved in the struggle against free trade?

Barlow: I came out of the women's movement. I had been the Senior Advisor on Women's Issues to Pierre Elliot Trudeau, the current [Justin] Trudeau's father. Before that, I was the Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity for Women for the City of Ottawa. And before that, I had been with a consulting firm, [...] many, many institutions working on the issues of women's equality. My concern when I first heard and read about the free trade agreement, or possible free trade agreement between Ronald Reagan and Brian Mulroney—don't forget we're talking about the Thatcher-Mulroney era, so we were all really nervous about the right-wing swing in all of these countries. And so, my original interest in the Free Trade Agreement was all around equality issues and social programs that we had—superior social security, Medicare, and so on, in this country.

And I was very worried that there would be a spillover with free trade that I saw even then, and I am more convinced than ever now, that free trade agreements are really about constraining how much governments can do, really limiting the scope of government, and this fear of government giving more and more power over to the market, to the private sector to make decisions—some of it in nice language of corporate responsibility, but always more and more over, away from government regulation. But my concern was very much around equality issues, when I first heard about it, I got a call from a guy named Mel Hurtig. And then I come to a meeting with people of like mind, and I couldn't believe it, that was just like, almost everybody famous I'd ever heard of: Bob White and Margaret Atwood and David Suzuki, and, you know, just a lot of—Pierre Berton was there—a lot of really powerful people. Paul Martin, if you can believe it, because early days, the Liberal Sheila Copps was there, front and center very, very much opposed to the Free Trade Agreement, from the culture point of view.

Then I got hooked, I started helping to put together the foundations of what became the Council of Canadians. And that was, at first really a few hundred individuals who put money into a pot to create the work that we were doing. And that led to the creation of what was first called the Pro-Canada Network then became the Action Canada Network because Pro-Canada didn't sit properly with Quebec or First Nations, so we changed the name, understandably and with happiness. And we brought in many, many other institutions and organizations from the women's movement to the Catholic Church, [the National Indian Brotherhood], the forerunner of the Assembly of First Nations, to the labour unions, social justice groups, peace groups - it was really a powerful movement that we put together. And I helped found it, I was at the founding press conference with Mel [Hurtig] and David Suzuki and a number of other people.

And we launched the Council of Canadians. And then I took over as chair in, I guess, early '88. And, you know, helped build [...] I really remember thinking it can't just be an organization of, you know, 2- or 300 sort of elites, if you want to look at it that way. I don't mean, they were all rich, but they were people who were, you know, smart and out there and thinking, and we built it into a much more of a grassroots organization with, you know, over 100,000 members, when I left it; I've retired from it now.

So, but these were just incredibly heady days. And we held rallies, we held meetings, we held public events, across the country, at the '88 election - it was only about the Canada Free Trade Agreement. I mean, there was nothing else; it was what the debate among the leaders was about. But really, it was just very, very powerful. I walked down the street, and people would say, 'Thank You, Maude,' or 'Damn You,' you know, depending on what their thinking was. 'Thank you,' or 'Saw you on television,' we were sort of on everywhere night after night after night because it became a flashpoint for 'What is Canada? Who is Canada? How are we different?' And we really did try to situate it, not in a right-wing populist nationalism that you see today, but rather in saying 'What is it in this country that we want to preserve?' We want to have an independent foreign policy, independent cultural policy, independent social security policy, we do not want it dictated by American interests and American corporate interests.

And then, as now, but even more so then, Canada was a branch-plant of corporate United States. So many, many of our companies, our industries, our factories were producing materials for the US, and they had to 'site here to sell here,' under the old investment rules. But Mulroney made a trip to New York City when he was first elected, one of the first things he did, I still have the nine-page glossy colour insert in the New York Times that they paid for us to—cost a fortune—where he basically said 'Canada is open for business. We're going to take down those investment protection rules, we're opening up our energy sector, we are open, open, open.' And that of course allowed when the trade agreement was signed for all these American companies to just shut down their Canadian operations, ended the Auto Pact, which we knew it would, all of the things.

And in fact, it was sitting reading the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, when I first discovered the big love of my life, which is water—when I was reading the annex,

The Council of Canadians: A battle for the soul of Canada

The Council of Canadians was born from a collective of influential figures who opposed the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, aiming to protect Canada's independence in various sectors. *"We brought in many, many other institutions and organizations from the women's movement to the Catholic Church, the National Indian Brotherhood [...] to the labour unions, social justice groups, peace groups - it was really a powerful movement."*

The Council of Canadians was founded by Mel Hurtig, David Suzuki, and other prominent figures, including Bob White, Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton, Paul Martin, Sheila Copps, and Maude Barlow, a diverse and eclectic group of people, including intellectuals, artists, and activists, who shared a passion for Canadian culture and social programs.

The fight against free trade was not only about economics; it aimed to preserve Canadian social programs and cultural sovereignty. *"We want to have an independent foreign policy, independent cultural policy, independent social security policy, we do not want it dictated by American interests and American corporate interests."*

"It was a real fight about the soul of Canada."

at the end of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, where they list all of the goods and services that are going to be restricted by this new free trade agreement, which means basically, government's hands off, or decisions over to the private sector. And there lo and behold, was water in all its forms, including ice and snow. And I remember thinking, 'Okay, give your head a shake. I don't understand how water can be a tradable good, determined by the market as a commodity.' But I was really aware that there were two major projects to send water commercially from Canada. One was the Grand Canal from the east, and one was the NAWAPA [North American Water and Power Alliance] from the west. And they would have established commercial water exports, for-profit water exports, mostly down to California. So, I remember thinking this trade agreement is about locking in, you know, potential water exports. In reading it then and looking back now I was absolutely right.

And then even more so in NAFTA, because then they added an investor-state right for corporations to sue. But even then, I realized this proportional agreement for energy also is going to apply to water. And so just the politics clicked and that set me on a personal journey to ask, 'who owns water?', 'who's making decisions about water?', the politics of water, and that set me off on this whole journey.

But back then it was really about our social programs, our cultural programs - we supported Canadian books and magazines and so on, and the Americans wanted that gone. You know, it was a real fight about the soul of Canada. And it was very passionate, and people were deeply, deeply moved by the arguments. And you could get into any taxi in Canada and ask them what they thought about it, then they would have an opinion. You could go to a teller in the bank and ask them about it. And they would know about it and have an opinion. It was just one of those issues that just touched everybody and committed everybody. And by the way, the group I was thinking about the National Indian Brotherhood, that's what it was called before the Assembly of First Nations.

Free Trade's hidden threat: Water as a commodifiable resource

Barlow's discovery that water was classified as a tradable commodity under the Free Trade Agreement sparked her advocacy against the commercialization and commodification of Canada's water resources. *"And there lo and behold, was water in all its forms, including ice and snow. And I remember thinking, 'Okay, give your head a shake. I don't understand how water can be a tradable good, determined by the market as a commodity.'"*

"I realized this proportional agreement for energy also is going to apply to water."

Interviewer 1: Yeah, we need to talk to someone from that group at some point.

Barlow: Ovide Mercredi would be good for you for that.

Interviewer 2: Okay, taking a step back here, I have two questions. What do you think motivated Mel Hurtig to reach out to you? You did describe some of your background, but just interested in why he reached out to you, to get you involved with the establishment of the Council of Canadians. And what were some of the ideas that you were talking about? That this was about the soul of Canada? And what was informing your ideas in terms of how you were envisioning Canada? Were you motivated by any kind of particularly intellectual debates happening, or kind of just a general sense of like democracy and sovereignty? Maybe if you can just speak to that a little bit?

Barlow: Well, I think the reason he came to me was that I was becoming a well-known public figure, feminist on the issues of violence against women. I'd set up, when I was at the City of Ottawa, running the Office of Equal Opportunity, I set up the first task force on what was then called "wife assault," and came up with a really wonderful model that then morphed into a working network in Ottawa around family violence.

So, I think I was out there having made a name for myself on that and Mel knew that he had to put together an eclectic group, intellectuals and artists and labour and teachers, and you know, that he really had to go to a variety of people and pull in—it was just that was a gift that he had, he just knew how to kind of reach out to this person and pull this person in. Meeting all those people who had such passion for Canadian culture, for Canadian history, for being proud of Tommy Douglas and having Medicare, having a separate foreign policy. Not always, but often enough, anyway, we could say we did have a separate foreign policy - all of this really spoke to me very, very strongly.

And when I heard people that I deeply admired, like Pierre Berton and so on, speaking so passionately about what their vision of the country is, and what the worry was around Ronald Reagan, you have to remember this is the days of Margaret Thatcher who brought in, by the way on water, the first water privatization, she and dictator Pinochet in Chile were the two who brought us privatized, commodified water policy. You know, we were nervous about this neoliberal authoritarian movement, these were the heady days of economic globalization.

Out of the Second World War, of course, came the creation of the framework for social justice, the framework for human rights, the 1948 Declaration on Human Rights at the UN, here in Canada, all of the framework for our social security—old age, pensions, all of that—protection of our culture, all of that came out. In fact, I wrote a book about it, just listing all of this. When people came back from the Second World War, the polls were incredibly clear, they didn't want to go back to what they had before—the same government that didn't have enough money to feed, house, cloth or employ Canadians suddenly had all the money to send them to war. They weren't going back to that. So that was just the golden period of creating what my dad called a social nation state. My father, who not only

Defending Canada's post-war social contract against neoliberalism, economic globalization, and corporate control

Barlow expresses a deep personal conviction, emphasizing how World War II veterans, including her own father, fought for a better society. As her father said: *'We didn't go over there... We came back to build something different.'*

"Out of the Second World War, of course, came the creation of the framework for social justice, the framework for human rights... old age pensions, protection of our culture... they weren't going back to what they had before."

At that time, Barlow saw corporate-driven globalization threatening the progress made. She believed free trade agreements were eroding national sovereignty and dismantling public services. *"We thought these free trade agreements, it wasn't just the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, then it was NAFTA... But free trade, we understood was an absolutely key tool of those who were wanting to move into this brave new world."*

"We were fighting this juggernaut that said, 'Well, that was all very cute to have all these social programs, and all these national protections and regulations. But those days are over, the corporate world is going to come in now, thank you very much. We're going to come in and take over'"

fought five hard years in the war, he led the fight against capital and corporeal punishment in Canada, and was a very wonderful role model.

My father, Bill McGrath, he said, 'We didn't go over there, where my best friend is shot out beside me' and you know, he was hurt and had a bullet to the head and so he said 'We didn't go there to come back to that. We came back to build something different.' And something different they built. But there's always a backlash. There's always a backlash to any kind of progress. And you could see it from the Macdonald Commission in the early '80s - they called 'economic globalization' that every country is going to do the thing it does best. So, if you do better widget A and this country does widget B, whether you will make all the A's and they'll make all the B's and that's when corporations started saying, 'Hey, we've outgrown the country of origin, we really want to go multinational or even transnational' you know, above countries.

And economic globalization was the sweet thing, right? I mean, it was taught in all the business schools—deregulation, free trade, 'free the market from government regulation', privatization of social services—that's when you started getting the backlash around public education and public health care, public water services, and so on. So these were really heady days for that side of the equation, and those of us who really deeply believed in our balance, we're not saying and I've never said there's no place for the private sector, but they're balanced between the public and the private, you know, rendering on to Caesar that which is Caesar's and saying that there is a huge role for the public sector, especially in a country as big and geographically difficult as Canada—we had to have a railway; we had to have public postal services; we had, you know, public support for public culture, and healthcare and so on.

But we could see the backlash coming. And you could watch it through the years of Pierre Trudeau, who started off as really basically an NDP or, you know, in his thinking very much, if not a socialist, a Social Democrat. But you could see the movement over the years as he allowed—and then subsequently other Liberal leaders—but as he allowed this market thinking to take over, and basically said, 'This is the way of the world, this is the way it's going.'

And then you had, of course, John Turner, and then you had Paul Martin and Jean Chretien and they all took it a bit more right-wing and a bit more right-wing and a bit more right-wing. You can see, in fact, I wrote a book after Chretien wrote the book *Straight from the Heart*, Bruce Campbell and I wrote a book called *Straight Through the Heart: How the Liberals Abandoned the Just Society*. So, you could see it coming. And we thought these free trade agreements, it wasn't just the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, then it was NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, then it was the creation of the World Trade Organization, then it was the creation of the Multilateral Agreement, or the Proposal of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI)—which we won, which was a huge victory and we won it because we learned so much from the fights against these other free trade agreements. But free trade, we understood was an absolutely key tool of those who were wanting to move into this brave new world. And until, I'd say, 10 years ago, it was still 'economic globalization', you know, market liberalism. Market liberalization was the accepted economic and social model for the world.

Now, not so much at all. Even the World Bank, even the International Monetary Fund are now saying through COVID that, you know, the supply chains failed us, the vaccine process failed us. Even the IMF is saying, 'governments have to come back, we need strong governments, we need strong regulation' like the pendulum is swinging back. And that's interesting, where it's going to go, but you have to remember those days, we were still living with that wave from the Second World War, but it was being met by these enormous corporate lobbies that had been created. It used to be that they were just industries represented, they were powerful industries, but then they decided not to think about themselves as individual industries, but to come together as corporate lobbies.

And when I wrote this book, *Parcel of Rogues* back published in 1990, I sat down and I can remember on my living room floor with all—because computers weren't that sophisticated, and so I did this by hand—a list of all of the companies that made up the pro-free trade corporate lobby in Canada, the Business Council on National Issues, it was then called, and its counterpart in the United States, and they were all the same corporations. It was all the branch-plants of the American corporations with a few smatterings of Canadian corporations, but you could see it was the creation of a North American economic grid, led by Corporate America. I mean, it was as clear as day. And I thought they—we had a cartoon we used, it's a cow over North America, and it's eating Canadian grass. It's being milked in the United States, and its defecating in Mexico, but that was our image, right. And I'm telling you, there is a new report just out in *La Jornada* about two weeks ago now, this connects the dumping of industrial waste, and the industrial pollution in the waters in Mexico directly to NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement.

But that image of the cow, I mean, it captured it. So, a lot of us just saw this, it was kind of like a movie, you know, in front of us. And it was very, very clear that we were going to be fighting much more than just a free trade agreement. We were fighting this juggernaut that said, 'Well, that was all very cute to have all these social programs, and all these national protections and regulations. But those days are over, the corporate world is going to come in now, thank you very much. We're going to come in and take over'. And I think we saw that. I can tell you at a personal level, that's very much how it felt to me. And the assault on the human rights that I had fought for, and many of us had fought for in different areas. We saw that coming too, because you know, where there was good human rights legislation, in the United States they have huge problems, as we know now.

Corporate lobbies unite to amplify industry influence on policy making

Corporations have shifted from being individual industries to forming collective lobbies that work together to shape policies in their favor, particularly through free trade agreements: *"It used to be that they were just industries represented, they were powerful industries, but then they decided not to think about themselves as individual industries, but to come together as corporate lobbies."*

Barlow highlighted how Canadian corporations in the late 1980s were largely dominated by American interests, as the pro-free trade corporate lobby was primarily composed of U.S. branch plants: *"...it was all the branch-plants of the American corporations with a few smatterings of Canadian corporations."*

Interviewer 1: Can you talk a little bit more about your experience with the Liberal Party, because at the time you were running as a Liberal candidate, right?

Barlow: Well, it's very interesting. I was never a Liberal. I was never anything, but I voted NDP. John Turner was terrific on the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. And frankly Broadbent was not. Broadbent is so great on it now, but he was wary of that fight. You could see it and I knew people in the NDP in the labour movement at the time, who said, 'Where's Ed Broadbent? Why isn't he doing the fight that Turner's putting up?' I had been an advisor to Trudeau on women's issues, but then he took his walk in the snow and left, so I didn't have time to complete what I had wanted to do had he stayed, and then I backed out. But then when Turner put up such a brilliant fight around the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, I wanted to be part of that. So, I ran, lost too, in the nomination battle, which is a blessing, I promise you, I would never have lasted in the Liberal party and what it became. But it was a really interesting

experience to be inside at that point. And then, as I say, I wrote a book with Bruce Campbell, after Paul Martin and Jean Chretien got their claws on the Liberal Party. You could just see them picking up all of the language, all of the policies, all of the philosophy with Tony Blair, in Great Britain and Clinton in the United States, that Third Way - you could just watch the Liberal Party moving in that direction.

But we did get rid of the investor-state dispute system in the new, post- NAFTA, the Canada-US-Mexico Free Trade Agreement. But we did get rid of that, and we were supported in getting rid of it by the Trudeau Government, a number of quite negative things that were in that original NAFTA are gone in its replacement. So, we have had some success even with the Liberals, current Liberals. But yeah, at the time, I just was totally caught up in this passionate fight around the future of the country and the person who was saying the things that I needed to hear was Turner.

Despite his elite background, Turner became an advocate against the American economic influence on Canada

Turner's strong and passionate opposition resonated with many, as he understood the potential economic consequences of the agreement and expressed concern about Canada's increasing absorption into the American economic sphere. "John Turner was terrific on the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement... He realized that something was not right about this agreement."

"In terms of the economics, I mean, we're—I think it's something like 42,000 American companies operating in Canada; we just are pretty seamless, now. Part of the American economic empire."

Despite his elite background, Turner was disturbed by the implications for Canadian sovereignty and economic independence. *"You would think that he would be the last person on earth to get it, but he got it. I am telling you in the bottom of his soul, he got it. And it upset him."*

Interviewer 1: What kind of forces within the Liberal party were enabling him to take such a strong stance?

Barlow: It's a party whose leader has a lot of power [...] I was going to some of the meetings and there were Liberals on both sides. There were lots of business Liberals who wanted the free trade agreement, and now of course, the Liberal Party is totally free trade. So actually, it was always the other way around. It was Conservatives that were against free trade agreements, and Liberals who were open to it. Turner, of all the people to have taken this position, because he kind of came from royalty, you know, and he had that lovely bearing, and he was very handsome, and he danced with Princess Margaret, and he married into a wealthy family and all of that, you would think that he would be the last person on earth to get it, but he got it. I am telling you in the bottom of his soul, he got it. And it upset him. And he realized that something was not right about this agreement. I remember the ad that showed the line being erased between Canada and the United States. That didn't happen, no. And nobody ever meant that literally. But in many ways that line, he was right, that line has been erased. In terms of the economics, I mean, we're—I think it's something like 42,000 American companies operating in Canada; we just are pretty seamless, now. Part of the American economic empire. And we saw that coming. And we saw how hard it was going to be to hold onto things like the Auto Pact, where in order for American cars to sell here, duty free, they had to create jobs here. And so that's how the auto parts sector got set up. All those things had to go.

And, you know, I didn't know the details of that; it didn't come out of the labour movement, but I could feel what was coming. And you could see what was coming was Margaret Thatcher, my goodness, you could see it, there's the blueprint. And Pinochet, you could see the right-wing governments around the world, and they were slashing social programs and putting their health care on the market and so on. You could see what was happening. And we had this guy called Brian Mulroney, who flies off to New York and speaks to a blue-chip business group before he even announces any of this in Canada and says we're open for business. For a whole lot of us it was a wakeup call. And it hit a nerve within that part of the Liberal Party, maybe I'd put it that way. And he was so passionate and so articulate that I think that he just pulled everyone along with him.

The Manifesto Moment: how the Pro-Canada Network was created in Ottawa

The Council of Canadians played a central role in organizing the Pro-Canada Network's creation. Barlow explains that the Council brought various groups and institutions together at the Chateau Laurier and organized the initial meeting, where they developed a manifesto and came up with the name "Pro-Canada Network."

"the Council of Canadians, organized the founding creation, but then I mean, the minute that that happens, you know, you had the Canadian Labour Congress, you had the then CAW [...] and the CUPE -Canadian Union of Public Employees-, the Catholic Church, the social justice groups, peace groups, and so on - everybody coming together, so it was no longer controlled, it was never controlled by one group. It's just that we did we organized the original."

Interviewer 2: Maybe we can go back to Council of Canadians, and how that led to the creation of the Pro-Canada Network. Was the PCN the child of the Council of Canadians?

Barlow: We organized it, we brought people together in the Chateau Laurier—I'm pointing to it because I live in Ottawa and there it is, down there—to this beautiful railway committee room, and we invited all of the groups and institutions we thought should be there. And we came up with a manifesto, which we took over to the parlor, the beautiful big wooden gates at the parliament building, but instead of hammering it in, like Luther did, we took scotch taped our manifesto. But that's when we came up with the name at the time Pro-Canada Network. And then we started meeting as a network, so that all these institutions came together at a table. So we, the Council of Canadians, organized the founding creation, but then I mean, the minute that that happens, you know, you had the Canadian Labour Congress, you had the then CAW [...] and the CUPE -Canadian Union of Public Employees-, the Catholic Church, the social justice groups, peace groups, and so on - everybody coming together, so it was no longer controlled, it was never controlled by one group. It's just that we did we organized the original.

Interviewer 2: You catalyzed it, and was that at the Canada Summit where you talked about Scotch taping up your manifesto?

Barlow: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Do you still have access to the manifesto? Could we read it somewhere?

Barlow: I will have to try to see if I can find it. I've written so much about it, I have to go back and think where did I say that? I just published my 20th book, so— no, these were heady days, I mean, when I tell you,

we marched over from the Chateau Laurier to the beautiful Parliament buildings, we had the entire national media with us, like, cameras, cameras, like it was a big deal. So it was, yeah, it was a defining moment in our in our work. And of course, we changed the polls—when free trade was first announced, the majority of Canadians were for it, ‘How could you be against it? It’s trade and it’s free’. But by the time our movement got finished with it, we were close to the ‘88 election, it was swung around, and the majority of Canadians were opposed. But as you know, in the ‘88 election, there were two parties opposing the Free Trade Agreement and one party in power or the party that became in power, the Conservatives, were in favour, and the negative the anti-free trade vote split between the Liberals and the NDP.

So, when NAFTA came along, you’ll remember that Jean Chretien promised there would be six fundamental changes would have to have taken place for NAFTA, or he would not sign it. And the first thing he did when he became prime minister was sign NAFTA with none of those changes met. He did get an aside agreement on water, saying that they hadn’t intended for water to be endangered or something like that, but it was a side letter or something. It wasn’t in the body of the agreement. I remember watching him and I remember when Chretien signed the NAFTA agreement, he looked down. He didn’t look up into camera. I can remember thinking he knows he made a promise, and he knows he’s breaking it, but better to break your promise early on in your mandate, rather than later.

When Mulroney signed FTA, we took over the railway committee rooms, it was a technical signature, it was just really for the media. But you had all the media there. You had all the senators and the MPs and everything was a big deal. Same was happening in the United States at that day. Same was happening in Mexico City. So, it was being beamed all over North America, in fact, around the world, and we took over. There were five of us; one after another stood up [and] we got ourselves inside. I say to people, ‘I wore my pearls, I’ve got to get in.’ We sat in the audience and then we, one after another interrupted and a guy named Mike McBain, who was in with the Pro-Canada network, got up and he went behind Mulroney just as Mulroney was signing and pulled out the American flag behind Mulroney so that the image was of Mulroney signing NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, an American flag. Oh, they were not happy. Mulroney yelled at us. ‘Youuu!’ You know how he does. And then Steve Shellhorn, I remember, from Greenpeace, I think he was with them, stood up and he said, ‘I’ve listened. And you’ve not convinced me’ and he was, we all were led out by guards. My mother was so proud of me that night. ‘Good for you, you got kicked out by that Mulroney.’

Creative resistance: the American flag behind Mulroney at the FTA signing

Barlow highlights the powerful activism that shifted public opinion against the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) by the 1988 election. She recalls protests, creative media disruptions, and key symbolic moments, such as an American flag being displayed behind Mulroney during the FTA signing: *“Mike McBain, who was in with the Pro-Canada network, got up and he went behind Mulroney just as Mulroney was signing and pulled out the American flag behind Mulroney so that the image was of Mulroney signing NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, an American flag.”*

“We followed them around, the negotiators, we would protest, we would take over press conferences. We were really cheeky and came out. You had to come up with really interesting things to do because, you know, you’re speaking to the hearts and minds of people, and you have to be creative, and you have to be there.”

Anyway, we were really everywhere. We followed them around, the negotiators, we would protest, we would take over press conferences. We were really cheeky and came out. You had to come up with really interesting things to do because, you know, you're speaking to the hearts and minds of people, and you have to be creative, and you have to be there.

Key players at the scotch taping of the Manifesto

In the meeting where the manifesto was taped to Parliament's doors, Barlow mentions key figures:

- **Mel Hurtig:** a passionate cultural nationalist and book publisher dedicated to promoting Canadian culture and institutions amid globalization.
 - **Remi De Roo:** A Catholic bishop involved in social justice.
 - **Tony Clarke:** Also from the Catholic Church, known for his activism.
 - **Bob White:** The head of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), who later became the president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).
 - **Canadian Teachers Federation Head**
 - **CUPE Representatives:** Part of the broad union support.
- Barlow and Mel Hurtig were the ones who taped their demands to the door of parliament.

Interviewer 1: Do you remember who the key players were at that first scotch taping of the manifesto? Who are some of the people that were there for that?

Barlow: I know it was, well, you mean at the whole meeting? It was well, all of the institutions, all of the organizations. I'm pretty sure Remi De Roo, from the Catholic Church, Tony Clarke from the Catholic Church were there with the Catholic bishops, the head of the Canadian Teachers Federation at the time was there. I know Bob White was there, he was with the CAW at the time, the head of the Canadian Labour Congress was there. CUPE was there. Anyway, I should go back and refresh my memory, just who the people were. Who taped that - it was me and Mel. I think Tony Clarke was there. And I think Bob White, I think those are the people that taped our demands to the door of parliament. Yeah, it was [...] you know, we really did challenge this juggernaut of economic globalization, or I wouldn't have used those words at the time, but that's what it was.

Interviewer 1: Can you talk a bit about Mel Hurtig? Like, who was he and what led him to be such an important figure in this struggle.

Barlow: He was a book publisher. And so very, very passionate about culture, Canadian culture, and he was a very serious book publisher, and he's had his own publishing company in Edmonton. And so, he was a cultural nationalist, and part of that Pierre Berton, Margaret Atwood, you know, that whole group of writers and so on, who worked very hard to get government policy that promoted Canadian cultural institutions, from television to newspapers, to books, and so on. All of the institutions that got so challenged over the years, and some of which were ended under Harper. But so, this was what was his motivation at the time. I think he also had his eye on foreign policy, I remember when he used to first talk about it, it would be the cultural issues, less the social justice issues, but he had other people speaking to that and foreign policy.

Interviewer 1: Right, and the other line of analysis I had was timeline. So, we've talked a about a lot of events and I'm wondering, so when do you get started in this, what year and kind of moving from there to the '88 elections - I'm just trying to pin down what some of the key events.

Barlow: Yeah, me too, I know it's hard, you know, it's hard to remember sometimes, this is a long time ago. And I mean, I could go back and write it out, and I can do that for you. But I first I finished with Pierre Elliot Trudeau's, my advisory position with him, I was once introduced as his advisor on women's affairs.

And I said, 'Well, actually, I'm his advisor on women's issues, he looks after his affairs all by himself.' And I remember looking down and there was a Globe and Mail reporter, and I thought 'I got to learn not to do things like that.' Anyways, I was just finished with that when he had just taken his walk in the snow.

Interviewer 1: What year was that?

Barlow: Well, that was '84.

Interviewer 1: Okay.

Barlow: '83?

Interviewer 1: '83-84ish

Barlow: '83. Yeah. Then John Turner took over the Liberal Party. So, I guess it would have been the election where Mulroney became the Prime Minister and announced his free trade agreement. That's when I got a call from Mel Hurtig. So, it would have been just the first maybe two months into Mulroney's tenure as prime minister.

Interviewer 1: Okay. And then, the Council of Canadians gets established in '85

Barlow: We were founded on March 11, 1985. We held a press conference and announced the creation of this movement. And then, within a year we put together - I can get you these dates, just I'm not going to remember the actual month or anything - but within a year we convened the Pro-Canada Network meeting at the Chateau Laurier.

Interviewer 1: Okay,

Interviewer 2: So that would have been all happening in Ottawa?

Barlow: All of this happened in Ottawa. Now Mel fanned out across the country and held meetings in city after city, I guess he did it on his own money. I've never asked; I don't know who funded it. But I, I think there's a guy named Bill Layvin, who is a businessman in Winnipeg. And he and Mel knew each other, and I think that he helped finance that original trip across the country. They ended up setting up the National Party and ended up fighting with each other, and it ended but that was years later. But Mel went to all the major cities in Canada and brought together the people he felt should be concerned about this thing called free trade and brought us together. So, I was introduced first in Ottawa, but then I went to the Toronto meeting as well. And then with time, I started doing some traveling as well and speaking on it, so we just built it one person at a time, and it was hard work.

Interviewer 2: When the Pro-Canada Network, when that meeting was convened, was the thinking at the Council of Canadians like, 'We need a specific coalition focused specifically on free trade and we need to bring in more people in'?

Barlow: What it was, the Council of Canadians was an organization of individuals. And we realized that we needed to get a network of institutions, so that we would have both the organization that hundreds of people, thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people could join as individuals. And people say, 'What can I do?' You can join our organization, form a chapter. But we also wanted to get the Canadian Teachers Federation and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, and all of the Canadian Union of

Public Employees we wanted to get these institutions thinking about this agreement, and what it meant for their people and their workers. We wanted to get the environmental movement in. And Steven Shrybman, who's somebody you should speak to, Steven is a lawyer, was on our board for many years, Steven was, I think he wrote the first analysis of trade before the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, when it was the old GATT, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, wrote the first analysis that I know about, about the environmental impacts of free trade.

And so, with him and others, we brought in all of the major environmental organizations, we brought in all of the women's movement - the National Action Committee on the Status of Women was very powerful then. So, we brought in the women's movement, the National Indian Brotherhood that I spoke of earlier, we brought in the leadership from the First Nations communities. And in fact, we used to meet in there, the Pro-Canada Network used to meet at the headquarters of the National Indian Brotherhood. So, this was very important to have, and this was a vision that I was very, I had very strongly in my mind that there needed to be a grassroots organization for people, but then there needed to be a network of institutions, and that we knew that they would fund something like this, right. We didn't have the money to fund the kind of work that had to be done. We had to get the groups with funding to put money in and build it from there.

Timeline from the announcement of the Free Trade Agreement to the 1998 elections

1984: John Turner takes over the Liberal Party, coinciding with the emergence of Brian Mulroney as Prime Minister, who announces the Free Trade Agreement.

March 11, 1985: The Council of Canadians is founded, with Barlow highlighting the organization's mission to mobilize public opinion against free trade.

1985: The Pro-Canada Network meeting is convened at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, bringing together various organizations concerned about the implications of free trade.

Key figures present included:

- **Mel Hurtig:** pivotal organizer and advocate in the Pro-Canada Network.
- **Maude Barlow:** instrumental in uniting diverse groups within the Coalition.
- **Remi De Roo:** A Catholic bishop involved in social justice.
- **Tony Clarke:** Activist from the Catholic Church.
- **Bob White:** Head of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), who later became the president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

1985 Onward: Mel Hurtig travels across Canada to gather support against the Free Trade Agreement, meeting with individuals and institutions to discuss their concerns and mobilize activism.

March 30, 1992: D'Aquino-Barlow Debate at Old City Hall

Interviewer 2: One thing that's come out of some of our interviews is that kind of coalition building was relatively novel at that time as a political structure. Is this something that was top of mind for you? Or were you just really responding to the context, and this made the most sense?

Barlow: I was driven. I hated this Canada-US Free Trade Agreement; I thought it was a terrible mistake. And I wanted to go to every route that I could [...] go to the municipalities and talk to them about it, what it's going to do to municipal services. I would speak to city councils; I would speak to any organization or group that wanted to learn more about it. But it was clear to me that we needed the institutional support of the leadership, the elected or appointed leadership of these institutions, if we were going to form anything powerful enough to counter this corporate lobby, which was already building in this country. I mean, the Business Council on National Issues had come together, and I think they were like 600—I'd have to go back and get my numbers—corporations that belong to this new network on the right. And we didn't have anything similar, any counterpart on the left or the center left.

And so, just instinctively, I knew that if we didn't go to those institutions and get their leadership onboard, but more importantly, get them around the central table, we were not going to beat this juggernaut.

As I said earlier, you have to remember that economic globalization, free trade, deregulation, privatization was the flavour of the time. Everybody was into it. Everybody was going over there. All the leaders, you know, all the corporations had so much power that corporate lobbies were growing. As it is today, of the world's 100 leading economies, 69 are corporations and 31 are countries. In many ways they won that fight. We fought back, and we kept a lot of it, but if you look at a number like that, that's astounding. We saw that coming. I saw that coming. And so, it seemed to me that the only thing that could counter that corporate juggernaut that was working with its counterpart in the United States—and it turns out, they were working with their counterparts all over the world—building this new corporate model, was to build something powerful on the other side. And if we weren't going to do it with 300 people belonging to the Council of Canadians, that isn't going to do it, we had to do something different. So, it was a really, really important part of the struggle too. And then we put out the 'No, eh?' booklet, because we had the money coming from all these institutions. So, we printed these 'No, eh?' booklets, we had the buttons, 'free trade, no, eh?' We put up fact sheets, we had great materials that our Council of Canadians could not have afforded to have printed. But when we brought these groups together, and they put in money we were able to do what needed to be done.

Interviewer 1: Can you talk a little bit more about the founding of the Council of Canadians and your mandate when you got established and also how the organization changed from '85 to '88? And what the key challenges and dilemmas you guys faced in building up your organization through that time?

Barlow: Well, at first, we were only about the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement that was it, period, full stop. But all the implications of that started to become very clear. And I think right away, the big issue for us was energy, because the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement included what's called 'a proportional sharing arrangement.' That means that whatever percentage of our natural gas and oil we are sending to the United States, or were at the time, that's been taken out in the new post-NAFTA NAFTA. But at the time, all of the energy we were sending to the United States technically had to stay. You could not say, 'Well, we're running out of gas,' and 'this was a mistake,' and 'we want to cut our natural gas exports to the States.' At that time, the Americans were very dependent on our energy, that's not so now but it was at the time. But Canadians had the right to cap that, if they wanted to, they had the right and did set a two-price system, for instance, they had very strict environmental rules, potentially to use around these exports.

All that was gone in the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, so energy became a huge issue. And we took the lead, the Council of Canadians took the lead on speaking to that—we would hold press conferences, we would get maybe on the front page of the national newspapers, definitely on the CBC, with our information that we would get, again, working with the right environmental and trade groups, getting the information we needed.

And then we lost, because the election happened in '88. And I sat down, and I remember writing to every single member of the Council of Canadians saying 'We fought the Canada US Free Trade Agreement. It was a valiant fight, and we lost. So now we have to make a decision. Do we continue? Or do we—because Mel Hurtig could only stay as chair for two years, I took over after him and I stayed for 32 years as chair. I wrote them all and I said, 'Do you want to continue to exist? Or should we say we put up the good fight?'

And then we knew NAFTA was coming because it was already being talked about in Mexico, the next iteration of this thing. I said, 'Do you want to do that, or do you want to continue and if you want to continue, we don't have any money. How do we do that?' And the money just came in; people would send \$1,000; others would pledge \$100 a month kind of thing. It was just an amazing, it was an amazing response. People said we lost because the vote split, we didn't lose because we lost, we were right on the argument and it's going to get worse, and these issues are going to be more important than they've been in the past. And NAFTA became a huge—not as big as the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, but a big issue. And we decided to stay and grow.

But clearly, to me, two things had to happen for the council to survive. One was that we would expand in our membership, and not be this [group of] 300 people putting in money, but to really expand. And so, I started traveling across the country, sometimes I would be brought in to do a speech, say by a Teachers Federation [in] Vancouver. And while I was there, I would do organizing to set up a local chapter. And we built it around local grassroots chapters, we had, at one-point 70 [chapters] across the country doing the on- the-groundwork. So, I really realized that we needed to do that. And the second thing I realized is that we had to expand our interest issues, it couldn't just be trade,

The Council of Canadians' evolution post-1988: from trade opposition to building a broader movement

Barlow described the Council of Canadians' evolution as initially focused solely on opposing the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, particularly on the energy issue: *"All of the energy we were sending to the United States technically had to stay. You could not say, 'Well, we're running out of gas,' and 'this was a mistake,' and 'we want to cut our natural gas exports to the States.' At that time, the Americans were very dependent on our energy, that's not so now but it was at the time."*

After losing the 1988 election, the Council evolved from two sides. First, they shifted from a small, notable group to a larger, grassroots, chapter-based membership model. *"One was that we would expand in our membership, and not be this [group of] 300 people putting in money, but to really expand... we had, at one-point 70 [chapters] across the country doing the on-the-groundwork."*

Second, they expanded their focus to include environmental, healthcare, and education issues, reflecting globalization's broader impacts, emphasizing the need to build a movement. *"We would have a lot of public events, we had a big public AGM every year, in the fall, and we would have hundreds and hundreds of people come, and we'd give our Activist of the Year Award, and we would celebrate our movement."*

narrowly, that it had to be the areas that the trade is going to impact. So, we'd have to be looking at the environment, we'd have to be looking at water, we got very involved in the water issue, right, early on, we had a healthcare campaign, we were looking at the issues around privatization of education, and so on—all of the areas that economic globalization and free trade agreements were going to impact, we started saying we need to bring those people in, we need to build a movement.

And so, we would have a lot of public events, we had a big public AGM every year, in the fall, and we would have hundreds and hundreds of people come, and we'd give our Activist of the Year Award, and we would celebrate our movement, because it just struck me as being so important. So yeah, it was, I realized that what came together to fight the original Canada-US Free Trade Agreement wasn't a model that was sustainable, it had to be changed. And, by the way, we never had charitable status, ever. We didn't seek it, because we knew that it would be too difficult to be able to do our political advocacy if we had those constraints upon us. So, we never, we never sought it. And we never had it. And people gave us money anyway. And they gave us money, sometimes, because we couldn't get charitable status. And they said, 'We'll give you a double because you need it.' So yeah, it was a labour of love, a lot of work.

Interviewer 1: So, post '88, then you moved from, like you mentioned, the founding - it was like 300 notable people. And then post '88 it moved towards this more membership driven, chapter-based model, is that correct?

Barlow: That's correct.

Interviewer 1: And then the other thing I find interesting with the Council of Canadians is it sounds like it starts out very nationalist, right? In its orientation. But then, as long as I've known the Council of Canadians, it's very internationalist. You are organizing around a lot of international kinds of issues, like water becomes an international struggle, the privatization of water. So, I'm wondering about the trajectory there too, in terms of the changing relationship with nationalism.

Barlow: Yeah, at the time, you would have found all the people part of this nationalist thing, you know, the NDP, all the labour people, everybody because it wasn't nationalist in the right-wing sense. And it wasn't the populist nationalism that we see today. It really was a movement about values. If I were to look back now, I wouldn't use that word "nationalism" because it's so tainted now, and it was so tainted before too. But the way we all came at it at the time, there was very little critique of that notion, we had something in Canada, we weren't perfect, but we were trying to do something different than the United States.

And we saw the threat to our ability to do that in this trade agreement. And so, the language was around protecting Canada, protecting Canadian culture, protecting independent Canadian foreign policy, protecting our social programs. So, it became about protectionism, and that was seen as a form of nationalism. But I think most of us were internationalists by nature. We saw that it became very clear it wasn't Canadian corporations that were the problem - they were part of the problem - it was economic globalization and the corporate power and where was it coming from? Everywhere. So yes, very, very soon we—and we worked really closely with Americans against the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, and then we worked really closely with Mexicans against NAFTA, which expanded our movement.

And then we stopped the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, people don't know that. NAFTA was supposed to extend to the other countries of Latin America or South America. And it didn't; it was defeated. And a lot of that was because we just flooded, put tremendous material to our allies through another group called Common Frontiers that got set up to do some of this international anti-Free Trade movement in North America and the Americas. And we just got [information together], you know, 'What did NAFTA do for teachers or to teachers?'; 'What did it do to health care?'; 'What did it do to environmental regulations?', and we just flooded the movements in the global south to say don't buy it. And by then, with NAFTA, we had the investor-state provisions, the Chapter 11, we could point to what

was going to happen, corporations are going to have the right to sue your government if they don't like your laws. So, we built a case, and the more we built a case, the more international it became.

So yes, and the Council would never use that [‘nationalism’, today]. I'm retired. So, I shouldn't say ‘we’ because it's different management, in some ways, different direction right now. But when I was there, we were very clear not to use that language. Because it became very clear it was a global struggle, an international struggle for human rights, for environmental stewardship for a planet that we could live on, for democracy, and for social justice. And the more we worked, the more we worked internationally. Absolutely.

The Council of Canadians' evolution into an international movement

While the Council began with a focus on protecting Canadian interests, it quickly evolved into an international movement addressing global issues like environmental and social justice.

"It really was a movement about values... If I were to look back now, I wouldn't use that word "nationalism" ... the language was around protecting Canada, protecting Canadian culture, protecting independent Canadian foreign policy, protecting our social programs. But I think most of us were internationalists by nature... it was economic globalization and the corporate power and where was it coming from? Everywhere."

"We worked really closely with Americans against the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, and then we worked really closely with Mexicans against NAFTA, which expanded our movement."

"It became very clear it was a global struggle, an international struggle for human rights, for environmental stewardship for a planet that we could live on, for democracy, and for social justice, and the more we worked, the more we worked internationally."

Interviewer 1: Who did you connect with in the United States? Were you connecting with them for the '88 election?

Barlow: Oh, yeah. Lori Wallach and the Citizens Trade campaign at Ralph Nader's group, [...] I connected with them closer to NAFTA, like we all met. But really, the movement came together post '88. Because most Americans didn't even know about the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement. Like it didn't matter to them. They had their own fights with Ronald Reagan, and the fact that he was off doing bad stuff in Canada didn't terribly interest them. And it wasn't until NAFTA that they realized that it could impact them—that famous line, ‘the great sucking sound of the jobs going to go south,’ which did in fact happen. So, I would be less, when I think of it, it was probably less in those days. Although IATP, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, we worked with them during the Canada-US Trade Agreement, and that was a lot of the issues around foreign policy, agriculture policy. I just need to ask you about time because I've got something soon.

Interviewer 1: Oh yeah, we could wrap up. I was thinking before we do, but it would be nice to just hear a little bit about your famous debate with Thomas D'Aquino.

Interviewer 2: Yeah, that was going to be my last question.

Barlow: So, it was an incredible evening. Two evenings, actually. It was Tom D'Aquino who is head of the Business Council on National Issues, and Peter Lougheed, who was then Premier of Alberta, and Bob White, who was then with the Canadian Auto Workers and myself with the Council of Canadians. And it was held in the Old City Hall, and Barbara Frum who chaired it. It was

live over two nights and everybody in Canada watched it. I'm telling you everybody in Canada watched it and, on each side, would be the elites, if you will, or the friends of one side or the other. So, on the corporate side, on their side, were all big companies and people who wanted free trade and on ours were union people and cultural people and so on. But it was live, and I was nervous. Now they didn't let us come out and meet the other guys beforehand, because they didn't want us to have many exchanges, so they kept us in separate rooms.

And I remember saying to Bob White, 'I'm really nervous', what do you do? Would you give me some advice?' And he looked at me and he said, 'You're the good guys. They're the bad guys. They're trying to hurt your country, try to remember that.' And I thought, 'Okay, I can process that'. And so, we come out and the cameras are all there before we walk into the big room. And my heart is going pit-a-pat, right. The cameras are all there. We meet each other, and I said to—I'd met D'Aquino, I debated him, so I think we shook hands, but I'd never met Peter Lougheed, so shook his hand, and he said, 'Maude, how are you?' And I meant to say, 'I'm fine,' and I said, 'I'm nice.' And then I knew that it was in my head that they're bad. And I'm not.

And I said, I'm nice. And then I just thought I should go home now because I'm going to blow this.

The interesting thing is that we took it seriously, Bob and I, and we had rehearsed for days. We had our thing down pat. And we decided to come in the first night with technical stuff, what it was going to do to jobs and environmental regulations, like we were specific, right. These two on the other side, never [...] They clearly breezed in, one just got off a plane, they hadn't spoken to each other. It was like nothing. And they were awful. I mean, not just because I thought we were right. They were awful. They wrap themselves in the Canadian flag type of thing, and D'Aquino sweated so hard.

This is a true story. He was dripping; like you can see it on television, right. The makeup person the next night told me that she like shellacked him. So, the word was that the PMO, Mulroney's PMO sent some people the next day to get them online. They came in armed with really technical arguments. They were boring. And Bob and I were already with almost poetic positions. It was lovely. I mean, we were universally acknowledged as being the winners. It didn't help in the election in the end,

The historic debate with Thomas D'Aquino that captured Canada's attention

Barlow's debate with Thomas D'Aquino was a significant two-night event at Old City Hall, moderated by Barbara Frum. It garnered national attention, featuring Barlow and Bob White on the anti-free-trade side against D'Aquino and Peter Lougheed.

Barlow recalls that, although they were very prepared, they were also extremely nervous before the debate, but White reassured her by reminding her that '*You're the good guys. They're the bad guys. They're trying to hurt your country, try to remember that.*'

The opposition, however, seemed underprepared, with D'Aquino sweating visibly on live TV. Barlow and White had rehearsed thoroughly, presenting specific, technical arguments about jobs and environmental regulations, which made their side stand out. "*So, the word was that the PMO, Mulroney's PMO sent some people the next day to get them online. They came in armed with really technical arguments. They were boring. And Bob and I were already with almost poetic positions. It was lovely. I mean, we were universally acknowledged as being the winners.*"

but it was just an historic thing to be in the Old City Hall - Barbara Frum started off saying this is where Confederation was debated. And I thought 'No, no, I don't belong here,' somebody else should be doing this. But anyway, that hubris of youth, eh. It was marvelous. And everybody saw it. Like I could walk down the street and people would say, 'Maude, I saw you on television'. Everybody, it was a moment of real thinking about who we were as a people, those years leading up to the election.