

MAUDE BARLOW is the National Chairperson of the *Council of Canadians*- A citizen's watchdog organization with over 100,000 members. One of their ongoing campaigns is that water is a public trust which belongs to everyone.

She is also the co-author of **Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water**

FRESH WATER SCARCITY:

Well the world's running out of fresh water, we were all taught that can't happen back in grade one that we have this closed hydrologic system. What they didn't tell us because they didn't know is we can actually deplete divert and pollute the existing surface waters so badly that we're now mining the ground water far faster than nature can replenish it. There are parts of the world that are literally running out as we speak- in the Middle East, Mexican Valley, 22 countries in Africa, all of northern China, California. But it's going to become more exacerbated unless we dramatically change our ways to the point where the UN says by 2025 two thirds of the world's population will be living in some form of water scarcity... a third of us living with absolute water deprivation.

So it's not just an issue of access, this is really an important part of it, but it's also an issue of scarcity, it is why I call fresh water blue gold. And I think that big corporations, big bottling companies, the big service companies, the Vivendi, Suez learned this before the rest of us did. And they realized that if they could catalyze, commodify the world's water like an OPEC of water controller, put it on the open market for sale they would be very rich and they would be very powerful. And they set out to commodify water before most of us even knew there was a crisis. And this is a political issue of who's going to control the world's water sources.

PUBLIC SYSTEMS ARE SAFE FOR THE MOST PART:

In most developed countries we have very good public water systems. Now where there have been cuts yes, of course we're starting to see problems but we develop we are able to deliver water, all through Europe, most of North America, very clean very low price very, very safe water. This myth that the water you're drinking out of your tap is unsafe is mostly that, a myth, that lots of bottled water is less safe than your tap water. Now it's a different story in the third world but in the third world let's face it they can't deliver water or health or education to their people when they owe billions and billions of dollars in debt to the north.

MAKING MONEY OFF THE POOR:

If the north is really serious about equity of water access we're going to have to take the reality that these countries owe so much to us and we're going to have to forgive those debts we're going to have to increase our foreign aid and we're going to have to put World Bank funds into public delivery of water on a non profit basis. These companies don't invest in water. I really want to make this as clear as I can. They say it brings in new investment, no it doesn't, it's all paid for

either by the government in question, the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund which is public money that's all our taxpayer money. Then they go in and they bring in a private company like Vivendi or Suez or whatever. And they have to guarantee these companies are returned what they call full cost recovery which includes a return to their investors of anywhere from 15 to 25 percent.

So instead of every dollar of our public money going to delivering clean water to people who are desperate for it only maybe 80 cents of it goes to people who are desperate for it another 20 percent goes to the investors. Let's remember that these 3 big companies the 3 big ones, are among the top hundred corporations in the world, they made something close to 200 billion dollars between them last year. They're growing at 10 percent a year, some of them have more staff than many countries have in terms of government workers and so on. These are big mega corporations and I'm sorry they're not in it to deliver water to the poor they're in it to make money.

THE WORLD BANK AND PRIVATE WATER COMPANIES:

The Vivendi water, the water aspect of Vivendi is of course its backbone and they have about 295,000 people working just in their water department alone around the world. But a few years ago they were only servicing about 12 million people in a few countries now there's something like over 300 million people in over 100 companies and that's just been in the last decade.

So these companies came onto the scene first in France interestingly enough because France flirted with the privatization of water first then moved over to Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher and then with the World Bank backing them have moved all through the third world where they are failing every single solitary place that they are operating.

And it's as short a time as two years ago- their line was that they were there for the long run and they were there for the poor. Now they're saying and they're saying it absolutely openly, if you, the World Bank and other interests, don't guarantee us a return in our profit no matter what the local resistance no matter what the local political situation is, we're leaving the third world and in fact they have now set their sights on North America and Europe. They're basically saying you know we're not wanted here and they're leaving a mess behind them.

A CHILD DIES EVERY 8 SECONDS OF WATER BORNE DISEASE:

Well what went wrong with that is that there are certain areas of our lives that should not be in the marketplace, and water is one of them. They ran right smack up against the reality that if they charge prices to the poor in third world countries that poor can't afford, the poor are going to die. And before they die they're going to take to the streets like they did in Cochabamba, Bolivia. There are water wars happening around the world you know over these resources. So what went wrong is that our governments and the international institutions like the World Bank and by the way like the World Trade Organization which is now attempting to categorize water as a service to be delivered by the private sector forcefully under the WTO, what went wrong is that these institutions just thought they were selling running shoes or cars or whatever, they're not. This is about the delivery of water to a people around the world who are desperate. Every 8 seconds a

child in our world dies of water borne disease. Every 8 seconds this is just...it's immoral beyond language and you cannot come in and then turn around and say you have to pay for this.

SOUTH AFRICA:

I've been in communities. I was in a place called Orange Farm, one of the townships in Johannesburg, and I saw the poverty as far as you can see the burning tires and the kids with their feet and the rats and the outdoor latrines and the water. And they have a pipe for the first time coming up to the door, and the tap for the first time but between the pipe and the tap is a state of the art water meter. Put in by Suez, the big French company, that's impregnable, I mean top technology. And they have to pay to get their electronic key charged up, touch this meter and then you see...for every drop you can see the water meter running.

Well they can't afford it. So for a day they have water. And then the women, as usual, put the buckets on their heads and they walk kilometers to find a safe supply of water but there aren't any so they're drinking water that's giving them cholera and even the plague is back in South Africa. Alone, the women will walk an average to the moon and back 16 times a day to get water. And yet they've privatized it they've brought water to people, they've cut off ten million people in the townships in the last two years because they couldn't pay for their water.

WATER SHOULD BE A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT:

There are ways to do this. We call it a water lifeline and what we believe that we should have is an international convention that water is a fundamental human right and that everyone on earth should have the right to enough to live on. And that might depend a little bit on where you live and so on but that would be negotiated and you would not pay for that.

FACTORY FARMING:

Beyond that we're going to have to think about: do we pay for certain amount of water? Do we restrict water? Do we need to change the way we farm? I mean factory farming is the single most destructive component of water devastation in our world; Flood irrigation instead of drip irrigation; the way we subsidize farmers to be growing alfalfa and cotton in the American desert...you know Las Vegas...doesn't belong there.

THE NORTH ARE THE WATER GUZZLERS:

We have to rethink our relationship to water. And I think it's very important for people in the north to understand that people in the south are not the problem in terms of water. We're the water guzzlers, we in Canada, we in the United States, we in Europe, even Australia which doesn't have any water, uses way more water per person, than people in India which has a lot of water. It's our lifestyle, it's corporate farming, it's industry, it's the fact that you can't... go home tonight and count the outlets you have in your house for water and your house and cottage.

We are running out of fresh water. We do not have enough water in the world. The demand is outstripping supply 56 percent every ten years. We don't have enough water. We are mining the

ground water too fast...don't change it's yes the people in the third world will die first. There's no question about that but there are huge parts of the United States and Europe that are already facing a water crisis as well and you can bet your bottom dollar they're going to come calling on our water which is why Canadians should be thinking about how we take care of our water, who's responsible for it are we stewards of our water, what's the future of our water.

THE PLACES SHE'S BEEN:

Me going into Buenos Aires where I've been or Uruguay or the Philippines and saying it's not working when people think it's working would be stupid. I don't have that kind of power. I go into communities where people are fighting for their lives. Their water prices have jacked up the water is coming brown out of their taps, or, not at all.

I've been in Cancun, Mexico and seen the clear water in the 5 star hotels and the filthy water the same private company is delivering to the people who work in those 5 star hotels a few kilometres away. I could not stir up that. What we are doing is that we're building an international civil society movement to take back water from those people who are stealing it whether it's these companies or the big bottling companies or those who want to ship it by pipeline to parts of the world that can afford it. This has got to stop.

THE PROFIT MODEL SIMPLY DOESN'T WORK:

And so we are building a movement but I could not cause people to say it's not working if they desperately needed water and it was working. The simple fact is, this model doesn't work. You cannot marry the profit motive to something like water or air, which people need to survive. And we have to take this notion of fresh water and take it out of the marketplace and say that it belongs to the earth, it belongs to all species, it belongs to future generations and no one has the right to commodify it for personal gain.

And that's what they learned in those third world countries not from me. And by the way from places like Atlanta, Georgia, where the city council said efficiency, private sector, bring it on the public private partnership two years into a 20 year contract they kicked Suez and say get out, you're the water's disgusting the prices are too high and we want our water back so it's not just in developing countries, this model is failing.

WHAT MONCTON'S MAYOR BRIAN MURPHY SHOULD DO:

He's supposed to join those of us around the country and around the world who are demanding that we have a fair economic system. There is money in this world, okay. When you have a world in which the 3 wealthiest people have a greater income than the bottom half of humanity, something is profoundly wrong.

INVEST IN INFRASTRUCTURE:

We need to reinvest in this country, in infrastructure. We have to upgrade our infrastructure, we have to go back more sane farming practices and we have to be very stern with industry where industry is polluting our precious water sources, which it is or which much of it is.

And when we do this- and these are not radical steps- we will take back control not only of our public infrastructure, but the fundamental right of all Canadians, and frankly I think all peoples around the world, to fresh water as a fundamental human right. It is cheaper, to run it this way, it is more practical to run it on a not for profit public basis.

THE PRIVATE COMPANIES DO NOT PUT UP THE RISK IN THE 3RD WORLD:

They were not giving private capital, I've really got to challenge that. They were not putting private capital into these projects. The vast majority of the money in the third world comes from the World Bank, while the other regional development banks which is public money, your tax payers dollars and mine that goes into the banks for these projects.

They do not put the risk up, that's what a public private partnership is which is totally different from a private initiative where they put the money in and they take the risk and if it fails they fail. This is a fool proof system for these corporations because the public puts up the money, guarantees them a profit, and if they don't make it they're gone- you know Bob's your uncle, they're out of here and they don't walk away, they fail because the model failed.

THEY FAILED BECAUSE THEY ARE GREEDY:

They failed because they were greedy. They failed because they thought they could make money from something that people need for their lives and people stood up and said no. There have been deaths over this, there have been people who stood up to the point where they've been shot there have been that kind of conflict, they failed because they shouldn't have been there in the first place. They should be helping us to build public water systems so that we don't have a situation where every 8 seconds a child dies of water borne disease.

FULL PRIVATIZATION MORE HONEST THAN PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP:

Full privatization's more honest. You put up your big bucks, you go into that community and you do the work, you put in the money and you build the infrastructure, and you take the chance. You're not going to be able to collect from these people. You know why? They don't have any money. They're poor.

THE WORLD WATER COUNCIL AND CIDA:

The only way these companies can get any funding is through the World Bank. And the only way the World Bank is funding them is kind of you grease my palm and I'll grease your palm and it all it all becomes this incestuous for profit situation.

The World Water Council is the World Bank, the IMF, sorry to say the UN or parts of the UN and these big water companies and agencies like CIDA, Canadian International Development Agency, that's what it is, it is a...they try to act like they're a UN agency, but they're not. It's a private agency, to promote private interests and private corporations in the water business.

THE COMPANIES ARE CRYING THE BLUES BUT MAKING BILLIONS:

And even when they cry the blues, and they're crying the blues, they're making a ton of money. Two hundred billion dollars last year these 3 companies alone make so don't let them call don't let them make you feel sorry for them because they're... they're laughing all the way to the bank. They want out of the third world, because they're not making it on the third world because they can't deliver what they promised.

PPPs ARE FOOLPROOF WAY FOR PRIVATE SECTOR TO MAKE MONEY OFF PUBLIC SECTOR:

A public private partnership is a relationship between the public sector and a private company where the public sector puts up the money- be it government or a school board or whatever. The private company builds the facility perhaps a hospital whatever. And leases it back on a for profit basis. Very often it's a 99-year lease so they not only make the money to build the facility in the first place, then they get to make money forever and ever just by delivering or not even delivering. Perhaps even turning some of it back to the running by the public sector.

It's a fail proof mechanism by the private sector to make money from the public sector because they know if they have to leave...if they make the wrong investment they're going to be left holding the bag.

PPPs ARE WRONG BECAUSE EVERY DOLLAR OF PUBLIC MONEY SHOULD GO TO WATER:

Even if this PPP and water were absolutely properly policed, open and transparent, which by the way it never is but even if it were, it's still wrong. It's still wrong because every single dollar of public money, your money and my money should be going on a not for profit basis to deliver water to people who need it. Not one cent of it should be going to an investor and usually it's an investor outside the country.

Why should an investor sitting in New York or Toronto or Paris be making money on the poorest people in the world? Why are we not putting that public money of the World Bank and these other development banks into helping build public infrastructures so that water is delivered clean, on a for profit basis, either free or at a very low cost to the people who need it. That's the model.

Go make your money on Cadillacs or running shoes or something, but stay out of water. Water-they're running out of it, there are people dying as we speak because they don't have access to it and it is morally economically socially wrong for corporations to come in and make money, from people who can't afford to buy water.

HER RESPONSE TO FREROT – ABSOLUTE HUBRIS:

Well he just, just absolute hubris. If they really cared about water and they really cared about poor people the way they say they do they should be encouraging their friends at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, and in Washington and in Ottawa, to go out and help build public infrastructures to deliver water to the poor.

Their policies, by the way, are helping displace people from the land all over the world or crowding into these huge mega cities in absolute slum conditions where there is no capacity for anybody to deliver water. They have promoted a new liberal agenda that has divided this world into winners and losers and I'm sorry, I don't think they care one bit about the poor.

I was at a World Water Council meeting and there were a bunch of suits up there, heads of these corporations, with their beautiful suits and their designer boutique water and one woman from Africa said well you know what will you do in my community? I'll teach you people, you people he said, how to take care of your water and she stood up, I thought she was going to come at him on the stage. She was a great tall woman, she said, every single day I have to walk miles to get water for my family and I have to carry it on my head. And if I drop any of it that's water lost to my family and you're sitting up there with your boutique water and you haven't even had any of it or one sip and you're going to throw it out and you tell me I don't know how to take care of water.

... CONTINUES "HUBRIS" THOUGHT:

It's the image that we can destroy something the way we're destroying the world's fresh water sources and somehow technologically or with money or through capitalism we'll be able to go out and reproduce it or buy it somewhere else. It's hubris. And the worst front line of this hubris are the corporations making money from people's desperate need for water.

THE BARE SOLUTION IS CONSERVATION:

Massive conservation. We absolutely have to treat water differently, we have to use every drop of water twice. So in the privacy of your home- how often you use the dishwasher, washing your lawn, washing your car, something small like that because that is a drop in the bucket...to the way we waste water growing certain crops in the deserts or using ancient aquifer water to pump oil out of the ground in Alberta which is becoming a huge issue there.

You know you can make cars using a great deal less water, but we don't care. Because we can afford it and we think water is free. We have to shift from industrial agriculture to sustainable agriculture, that is the practice of agriculture using water, reusing it, watch water sharing instead of flood irrigation and the massive devastation of our water using pesticides and herbicides and so on. It's got to stop. We are destroying our water tables.

CANCEL FOREIGN DEBT, INCREASE FOREIGN AID:

So we are conserving water. We also determine that no one should be dying of lack of water. So together with this conservation, massive conservation movement, goes the... the notion that water's a fundamental human right and that's our next project is to get the United Nations to pass a convention or a treaty guaranteeing water as a fundamental right to all because it's not in any treaty anywhere in the World by the way.

So that we then say with that right in hand, peoples everywhere saying to their governments it is your job, it is your responsibility to deliver fresh water to me. How do we do that? Well if we in the north care about it we cancel the debt or most of the third world debt or we renegotiate it. We increase our foreign aid the way we have promised for years and years and Canada's rock bottom- we haven't been this low in many years.

We place a tax on financial speculation, if you think that's Utopia, remember that what passed unanimously through the Parliament of this country about 5 years ago. So we tax financial speculation we could pay for every water infrastructure project in the world. We take World Bank money and instead of giving it to these private corporations we have them give it to local communities. You bring in the expertise...it's their private sector that's fine...pay them to share their expertise, I've no problem with that.

COCHABAMBA:

But don't hand the running of these systems over to these people. Put it in the hands of local public officials who can then deliver water on a not for profit basis. I've seen miracles, I've been in Cochabamba, Bolivia where they kicked the big water company out, and the... the government was so mad it said to the people we washed our hands of it you run the water company and these community people were left deciding what to do. Not only are they running the water but they actually made a decision to get it to the poorest people first and I was actually standing on a hillside as the first tap water was turned on in a community that had never had running water and it was the most moving event you can imagine. It doesn't have to be high technology. They don't all need 5 outlets in their homes, they need one community outlet which they'll share. We don't have to have that high tech model that we have in our own in our own minds as the only model. There are other models and there are people working with other models around the world. Low technology, conservation, sustainable farming, these are the answers.

CORPORATE VS PUBLIC PRICING:

I think we're going to have to talk about water pricing, once we've got that basic lifeline so that no one is being denied water anywhere in the world. But yes I do think we're going to have to talk about pricing but this is another argument for keeping water in public hands, because if you price water, and it's controlled by corporations, then that pricing is just extracted and sent off to investors and to the CEO to give him another ten million dollars this year. If it's held in public hands and you are taxing that water pricing, then it goes back into cleaning up your infrastructure.

You asked me earlier what Moncton is to do. That's where you get the money, you make sure everyone who's poor is getting access to water. You know you use it to clean up your local river system which is where you get your water in the first place. So in other words you use the money that you get from selling water to those of us who can afford it, or above a certain line and you use it to conserve, to build that water equity and that water access.

But if it's allowed to move into corporate hands and believe me there are people in this world who want every single drop of water owned by somebody sometime. If you allow that to happen then you will never take that pricing back to be in any way accessible or of service to the public sector. It will all go into somebody's pockets. And it's wrong. And it can't happen.

THE GRASSROOTS PEOPLE WON'T TOLERATE PRIVATIZATION:

The people are demanding and will get good public services, and that's what I'm seeing. I travel all over the world and I've been in communities where people are fighting these water companies. And they are not going to come on their knees back to Suez, there's just no way. They know what it looks like when a big private transnational that doesn't care about your community and is taking all the investment out of your community, looks like and they're not going for that again. As not people like me from the so called north, who are stirring up a hornet's nest. The answer to these companies from the communities is go away, we don't want you here. And it's happening in the most amazing ways in the most grassroots movement I've seen anywhere on any issue is around this issue.

So they can sit back all they want and wait for people to come begging but it ain't gonna happen. The only people begging are the World Bank and the IMF saying, well please go back into these communities we'll give you more money. We'll give you more of a guarantee. The World Bank just increased its funding for water privatization from about a third of a billion dollars to four billion this year. They've just jacked it right up because they know these companies are saying the only condition under which we'll go in is if you guarantee us profit whether or not we succeed in delivering water in that community. People should be outraged. That's our taxpayer money.

THE WASHINGTON CONSENSUS IS FAILING:

The Washington consensus model is failing. Economic globalization is destroying communities, ecosystems are crashing, it isn't working. That's not to say there aren't parts of globalization that aren't wonderful and that we don't all embrace. But this Washington consensus model, privatization, deregulation, hand it all over to the private sector...oh except the responsibility. And the funding, leave that with the public sector. It ain't working. And people know it's not working and they're not buying it anymore.

IT'S OUR WATER:

And if you think people of the third world are a bunch of gullible passive people, you got another thing coming. I mean these people I work with are so powerful and they are so sure of what they want and they have such a different model in mind and nor by the way are they going to turn it back to the state to run either, in communities around Latin America, and in Asia they're saying

excuse us we'd like to manage this with you because we know a lot now and so instead of a PPP we talk about a PCP, a public community public partnership. What would it look like if the communities are part of deciding on what their water future is? Because after all it's our water, I'm sorry it doesn't belong to our government. Our government's only us anyway and it sure as hell doesn't belong to a trans national based in another country. No way.

JAPAN: THE BEST EXPERTISE AND IT'S PUBLIC

The expertise absolutely does exist in the public sector. This notion that it only exists in the private sector is not true. The public system in Japan is amazing, this is an island and you can turn the taps on and you can drink water out of the taps anywhere in Japan, and it's all publicly run and let me tell you they are top engineers, top, top, top quality professionals so this notion that somehow the public sector's all bumbling guy next door in overalls, and the private sector has all the expertise is not true.

USING PRIVATE SECTOR EXPERTISE IS OKAY:

However if there is private sector expertise it needs to be shared. I have no problem with that. And I've no problem with paying them. It's the difference between using them as consultants to train people or to set up a system and giving it over to them to make money on a 99 year lease. That's... that's wrong. One is fine and the other is not. So we're, nobody's saying there shouldn't be a transfer of expertise from the private to the public nor that the public should not act as a totally professional entity.

WORLD WATER COUNCIL: WHAT IT REALLY IS

The World Water Council is a new institution that is made up of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, all the big water companies, and some of the development agencies in developed countries. And they've set themselves up as a kind of global high command of water. They look like the UN agency, they act like a UN agency they have a huge forum every 3 years. The last one was in Kyoto, a lot of us were there making a lot of noise. But they act as if they are going to establish the institutions and political and economic systems for water for the world and governments are listening to them. Nobody gave them this authority they just kind of set themselves up, but they have become very powerful. So it's very important for people to know who they are and whose interests they serve.

RESPONDS TO TENIERE BUCHOT's claim that they pulled out of water because they weren't making a profit

Well it's the same argument, we've always said you can't make money off something people can't pay you for and you can't make money off the poor and it's wrong. So they learned their lesson and they're backing out. Only way they're going to be able to stay in which is the distressing reality is if the World Bank and the under funds underwrite them which they're doing... That's the only way they can make money. They shouldn't be in the business in the first place and I'm glad they're learning.

WORLD BANK'S PPP MODEL (MORE PUBLIC CONTROL) IS NO BETTER:

What they're basically saying is that they were so arrogant, which they were, that they didn't even have to tell the local people what they were doing. They signed private contracts with the World Bank, they were totally untransparent, there was a lot of corruption and that's not a light charge, there has been and it's documented. Now they're saying okay we're sorry, we shouldn't have done that now we're gonna be more transparent and the control will still stay in the public. It's a little better, yes but the essential reason that it's wrong still exists. And that is that they're going to be using public taxpayers money to pay their investors to deliver water which could be delivered on a not for profit basis by a good public service and delivered well and cheaply and not pay any investor and therefore every cent of that public money goes into delivering what they're supposed to be delivering: Clean safe water to people who need it.

THERE IS NO PLACE FOR THE PROFIT MOTIVE IN THE DELIVERY OF WATER:

There's no place for the profit motive in the delivery of water. It's that simple. And it may take them another 20 years to figure it out but they will get out of the business, because we're going to be sure they do.

I've worked with the grassroots in communities...try to picture a computer held together by duct tape. In Montevideo, Uruguay and they're getting together a referendum that involves a third of the people of their city, you know. And they're going to be successful. You can't fight that. I'm sorry...you can have all the power and money that you want in the world, but there's a movement out there, that the New York Times calls it the other superpower. And its time has come. And we found each other, and we're using that technology and those computers to work with each other. And we don't want them to own our public services, not just water. And it is a huge fight and we're going to win it.