

**Show Transcript  
Deconstructing Dinner  
Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY  
Nelson, B.C. Canada**

**March 20, 2008**

**Title: Water, The Blood of the Earth And Monsanto Pays Percy Schmeiser**

**Producer/Host - Jon Steinman  
Transcript – Pat Yama**

*Maude Barlow:* "And a recent environmental protection agency report said that there are now 36 States in the United States that are going to have "serious to severe water crises." But in Arizona they just announced that they're building a water theme park in the desert called the Water Wave. It reminds me of the Farside cartoon where there's a bunch of dogs in a life raft and their ship is sinking, so that's why they're in this life raft, and one of them says – okay everybody who wants to eat all the food at once put your hands up. It's like – okay we have ten years left of water, maybe if we build a water theme park we can knock that down to five."

*Jon Steinman:* And you're tuned in to Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio CJLY in Nelson, British Columbia. I'm Jon Steinman, your host for the next hour.

On today's broadcast we will hear from two distinguished Canadians, both of whom are recipients of the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel. In the first part of the show we feature some breaking news out of Saskatchewan involving perhaps the most well-known farmer in Canada, Percy Schmeiser, who spent between 1998 and 2004 standing up to one of the most influential agricultural companies in the world - Monsanto. While it was Monsanto that took *Schmesier* to court on that occasion, on Wednesday March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008, the roles were reversed, and Monsanto found *itself* being taken to court by Schmeiser.

And taking up the larger part of today's broadcast, we listen in on segments from one of the more well-known figures fighting for the democratic rights of Canadians, Maude Barlow, the National Chairperson for the Council of Canadians. Through her Blue Planet Project, Barlow has been internationally advocating on the right to water. Just as water is the blood of the earth, so to is it the foundation of our food and agricultural systems, let alone a necessary component of any good meal. But the current and future state of water as we'll hear Barlow suggests is the greatest ecological and human rights crisis of our time. In March 2008, she spoke to a sold-out audience in

Castlegar, British Columbia and Deconstructing Dinner was on hand to record the event.

### **increase music and fade out**

*JS:* And on to the breaking news as of March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008. In an out-of-court settlement in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, agricultural giant Monsanto has agreed to pay farmer Percy Schmeiser the \$660 that it cost him to clean up the contamination of his farm by the company's product in 2005. While not a legal precedent, Schmeiser considers and believes that this case has led to a more public admission by the company that they are willing to accept the liability for the damage their plants cause other farmers. He also believes it will encourage other farmers to do the same. In just a moment we'll listen in on an interview recorded by the *one* person from the media who was at the courthouse on March 19<sup>th</sup>, but first let's look at the history of this case.

Monsanto has been a recent feature here on the program following our multi-part series back in January titled "The Colonization of the Canadian Farmer." That series shared the evolution of yet another legal battle that had been launched by *organic* farmers in Saskatchewan wishing to seek class action status against Monsanto and another influential agricultural player, Bayer.

But for most who know Monsanto, it was the original case with Percy Schmeiser that began in 1997, that not only exposed the company more than they probably would have liked, but that also led to Schmeiser receiving international recognition for the way in which he stood up to the company's aggressive tactics. It was also this case that led to Schmeiser and his wife Louise, receiving the distinguished Right Livelihood Award in December 2007. The award is often referred to as the Alternative Nobel.

Schmeiser has become such a recognized name around the world because his efforts are directly involving the controversial genetic modification and corporate control of seeds and of food. Companies like Monsanto have used the process of genetically modifying plant varieties in order to be able to patent the plant and assume greater control over who uses it, how it's grown, and how it's sold. For those unfamiliar with the first Schmeiser case, it was in 1997 that Monsanto hired a company to trespass onto Schmeiser's farm and take samples. The company had believed that Schmeiser was growing their patented RoundUp Ready variety of canola without a licence to do so. Following testing by the company, it was determined that in 1998 Schmeiser had, through the seeds he saved from 1997, planted RoundUp Ready canola on his farm. Monsanto demanded Schmeiser pay up, and Schmeiser refused as he argued that he that his fields were contaminated through uncontrollable circumstances, also known as nature, and he should maintain the right to save his seed and plant it again the following year.

I caught up with Percy Schmeiser over the phone. He spoke to me from his home in Bruno Saskatchewan, and he recalled what happened next.

*Percy Schmeiser:* They took me to court because they said we were using their GMO canola without a license from them even though they had contaminated us against our wishes. And they said because under patent law they have a patent on that gene, it doesn't matter how it gets into any farmer's seeds, plants, or any gardener's seeds or plants, they owned and control that life form and they said we ought to or should have known they had contaminated us and therefore we should have not used our own seed which we had been doing for 50 years because we were doing research in new developments or new development of seeds and plants and canola. So basically a farmer could wake up tomorrow morning whether he's an organic farmer, conventional farmer no longer have control over seeds or plants, are not allowed to use the seeds or plants again because they belong a corporation, in this case Monsanto.

*JS:* Now it was this case that led to the final 2004 Supreme Court Decision that technically ruled in favour of Monsanto, however, Schmeiser was not ordered to pay any of Monsanto's legal costs. While the Supreme Court decision assured that regardless of contamination, a farmer cannot grow patented seeds, Schmeiser recognized that if the company is indeed the owner of the plant, then they should be liable for the damages that their property causes others.

The opportunity to test such liability came in October 2005 when Schmeiser's farm was visited yet again by Monsanto, and again, in the form of their RoundUp Ready canola.

*PS:* Yes it happened in the October of 2005. We were preparing some land to develop new varieties of yellow mustard and we grew no crop on 50 acres on this particular piece to get weed control and also not use any chemicals on it. So, what happened in October we noticed there were canola plants growing where there should have been nothing growing on it and we did some testing. We found that it did not die when we sprayed on the leaves of 10 plants - we staked out 10 plants - had not died after being sprayed with RoundUp - Monsanto's chemical herbicide RoundUp.

We notified Monsanto and indeed within a couple of days or three or four days they came and did testing and found out and verified it by a letter to us that indeed it was their RoundUp Ready canola plants growing on our land. And there had been no canola growing on that land for many, many years, at least for eight years. They asked us what we then wanted to have done and we said we wanted the plants to be removed because you cannot separate mustard and canola. And they agreed to do that but then all of a sudden they came back to us and they said before they would do that we had to sign a release document that we could never take them to court again for the rest of our lives, no matter how much they contaminated that land in the future. And also a gag order that we could not talk to the press or to neighbours for

the terms of settlement was. And we said no way would we ever give our freedom of speech away.

So they refused to remove it unless we signed the document and so then we said finally, we're going to remove the plants, which we did and we sent the bill to Monsanto. They refused to pay it because they said that we didn't agree to their terms of conditions. And we told them – you have your property on our property, you're trespassing, you're violating our rights and we want it out of here. So when they didn't pay finally we sent them a bill; they didn't pay it and then we took them to court. Now it has become basically a very important case to them because it's a liability issue. And so, that's why it's being watched closely, I think not only here in Canada but all over the world. Because if we win, it could cost Monsanto hundreds of millions of dollars around the world on the liability issue.

*JS:* Now it's this, that will form the basis for an upcoming show, perhaps even as early as next week while the necessary information is gathered. Because as many of us living in cities and even many farmers would likely not know, Monsanto has accepted liability for the damages their plants cause others - just not legally, yet. You see Monsanto maintains a program within the company that upon request, sees the company come to a farm and clean up the damages that their plants may inflict upon other farmers. When such unwanted plants begin to grow on a farm, they're referred to as volunteers. And it's the willingness of the company to literally come and pick out the plants by hand, that seems to suggest that Monsanto is trying to protect itself from any legal avenues that farmers may choose to take. Now as you can imagine, a company like Monsanto would not be so keen to employ an army of people to go to farms and pick out plants with their own hands – it certainly isn't the so called modern technology that such a company tries to promote. So while they insist that they're happy to help farmers, some farmers aren't so happy with the way the company deals with such issues. One of these farmers was Robert Stevenson, a Manitoba farmer who, in 2001, found these volunteer canola plants growing in *his* fields, which he said, in an interview with *The Western Producer* were, "thick enough to produce a crop."

Now the problem most farmers have with such unwanted crops, is that they don't easily die with chemical pesticides. Monsanto did financially compensate Stevenson for his efforts to rid his farm of the plants, however, Stevenson believes the process to not be farmer-friendly. In that same interview he called the program "unrealistic" and that the program is on a field-by-field basis, and who has time to argue on every field. He further added that the company also comes out to the farm and "questions the farmers farm-management practices and they question your ability to keep your seed clean." He further added that it's "a very confrontational approach, then they say they'd like to assist you."

**soundbite**

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner. With such a heated history between Percy Schmeiser and Monsanto, I did ask Percy if he believed that he was treated any differently than any other farmer in this case.

*PS:* They send some more letters back and they said we treat all farmers the same. And they said they're not going to make an exception for anybody. So that told me right away – this is what they were getting farmers to do – sign gag orders so then they could say – well there's just a few cases. Well, we don't know how many hundreds of cases there's been, but that's how they maintain their secrecy.

*JS:* Now if the seeming fear by the company isn't evident in the way they operate their unexpected canola volunteer program, perhaps a letter the company sent to Percy following his refusal to sign their release form will better suggest that the company is getting worried.

*PS:* Monsanto's lawyer, back when they refused to remove the plants unless I signed the gag order, they also wrote me a letter and said we'd wish to remind you that that is our property that is on your land and you're not free to use it or do whatever you want with it, it's our property. Then they also said in that same letter – we would advise you that it would be in the best interest for you not to seed canola or mustard into that land next year, which would have been 2006, because of the contamination of their GMO canola. So now, and I told them – now you're even telling me that what I can seed next year and what I cannot seed and I said we own that land. We pay taxes on the land and now you want to take ownership in regards to what we can or cannot grow on it. You know they're telling farmers now what you can grow or cannot grow because they have contaminated it. And they want to dictate the orders. I said you people have done the damage to me; I dictate to you what I want done, not you because you've done the damage.

*JS:* As has been done in the past here on Deconstructing Dinner when it comes to this topic of genetic modification and farmers rights, it's always important to look at the media coverage that surrounds these stories. There was very little mention of this case leading up to the March 19<sup>th</sup> court date and sure enough, only *one* representative of the media was there at the courthouse, and that was Don Kossick whom I spoke with prior to the date to ensure that *someone* would be on hand to interview Percy in this morally-precedent-setting case.

Don is the host of Making the Links Radio a weekly show based at CFCR Saskatoon – an independent community station. And bringing you this exclusive interview, here's Don Kossick speaking with a very happy Percy Schmeiser as he walked out of the Saskatoon courthouse.

CFCR Interview:

*Don Kossick:* Percy, this is a momentous day. Can you tell us what's happening because a lot of people are waiting to hear. They know you've gone into Small Claims Court and they're really interested in knowing what happened.

*PS:* Well what happened today is that Monsanto settled out of court on the issues that were very important to me. That first of all I can maintain my freedom of speech. I could disclose the terms of the settlement and also that if that I was contaminated in the future on that same field I could take them to court also. So that to me was a great victory now that they're settling my claim, my lawsuit against them out of court.

*DK:* What does this mean for farmers in North America or anywhere where they're having to deal with Monsanto GMO products?

*PS:* Well, I think to some degree it sets a precedent. I don't know at this time how much, I think every case could be different. But in my case I'll always maintain that a farmer should never give up his rights to his freedom of speech. And a farmer if he's contaminated should have the legal recourse to have damages paid to him or to clean up.

*DK:* How do you view this in terms of you've been locked in a struggle with Monsanto over many years, so how do you view this day today?

*PS:* Well I really feel delighted and I think for my family the pressure that has been on us and fighting a multinational corporation and now it has come almost full circle that the shoe was on the other foot and they've settled with us now.

*DK:* And how do you think other farmers should be organizing themselves? Clearly you're one person who took on the behemoth but how should other farmers be dealing with this issue?

*PS:* I really believe that farmers should go together, stand together and maintain their freedom of speech, freedom that they obviously use their own seed and also continue fighting that patents should never be put on life. Life is sacred and no one should have the right to control life. And in my case where my fields were contaminated they are now paying for the damage to clean it up.

*DK:* You've had a long walk and you're wife has been a real partner to you but how have you managed to maintain the energy to keep going, to get to a day like today?

*PS:* I think it was, I not only had my family support but I think I often say I had a world army of people supporting me for the rights of people and I think that's what kept us going is to maintain and to give me energy when I hear and I see how people have been controlled, especially in Third World nations,

how their rights are taken away in regards to use of their own seed. And I think seeing that has really given us the incentive because we still have the chance here in our country to stand up and fight for our rights.

*DK:* Do you think that the thing today, what you won today will give more energy then to the organic farm movement, to people who are really trying to preserve and control their seed production and seed use.

*PS:* I think very much so because they were contaminated the same as I was. And I'm sure that if I was successful and my wife was successful, they can also be now successful and that they are reimbursed on the economic issue, lots of biodiversity and also the rights of organic farmers not being able to grow the crops that they so desired to grow. So I think it's a real important issue that organic should give an incentive to the organic farmers to take a stand now and go the same way as I did to stand up on the liability issue as this is what it's all about – liability.

*DK:* This will be going on radio and will be picked up in many places – can you give a message to both farmers and consumers and people who are trying to deal with having some kind of control over this, the food they produce.

*PS:* Well I think there's a number of issues here. First of all the one that was most dear to our hearts, my wife and myself was that there never should be patents on life. And life should not become a commodity where it's bought and sold – that's number one. And the rights of farmers all should be maintained to use your own seeds and plants if they so desire. That right should never ever be taken away. Because if that right is taken away from a farmer then we will be back to the feudal system and we'll just become serfs of the land. So farmers have to stand up, consumers have to stand up for their rights to know what's in their food, what they're eating, what they're feeding to their children and to their grandchildren. I think it's a fundamental basic violation of human rights in Canada when we do not know what's in our food and all of us should have that right. And it's a violation of human rights when farmers cannot use their seed grown on their land from year to year. So I think there's a lot more to this than just the patents of seeds and plants. It's all about human rights in Canada.

*DK:* You've been an apostle in a way to take this issue on and you've got a lot of support around the world, in Europe and you've travelled through Africa and many places so will this have resonance there as well?

*PS:* I believe it would because it will give encouragement that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that you can stand up to a multibillion dollar corporation in court and that there is justice.

*DK:* Thank you Percy Schmeiser.

PS: Thank you very much.

JS: And this is Deconstructing Dinner and that was Saskatchewan Farmer Percy Schmeiser interviewed immediately after an out-of-court settlement with Monsanto at a Saskatoon court house on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Interviewing Percy was Don Kossick of Making the Links Radio, which airs weekly at CFR Saskatchewan.

Now it only took a few hours before Monsanto issued a press release to address the outcomes of the settlement. After the press release was issued by Monsanto's Trish Jordan, I engaged in an ongoing dialogue with her over e-mail and telephone to clarify items stated in that release that did not correspond with what we just heard Schmeiser say unfolded since 2005. Now it is important to note that there were a few mentions in Canadian media about this case including The Globe and Mail and Saskatoon's Star-Phoenix, and in both cases, they simply quoted Trish Jordan from the press release itself. Now I mention this, because clearly, following my dialogue with Jordan, there are some highly questionable statements made in that release.

First off, I will say that Jordan expressed a very clear frustration with my ongoing questions over e-mail, and when we finally decided to pick up the phone and talk about it, I insisted that she understand that my ongoing questioning is because Monsanto's story and Schmeiser's stories were completely different and that as a journalist, I want to report both sides of the story in this particular case. And her response was this, "both sides of the story don't need to be presented."

But jumping back to the press release issued by the company, the paragraph in question read this, "although we are pleased Mr. Schmeiser finally approached us and agreed to settlement terms, it is frustrating that he essentially accepted the same offer we put before him in 2005."

This is the statement that made its way into both The Globe and Mail and The Star-Phoenix, but according to Schmeiser, and as we just heard him explain, the initial release form that Monsanto asked him to sign, was *significantly* different than the one agreed upon this week, and for two critical reasons. The first, is in reference to the confidentiality clause. Schmeiser had refused to sign the initial release, because he didn't want to sign away his right to freedom of speech.

The second issue that encouraged Percy to not sign the release form was that located within the standard release that the company issued to him, was a clause that would have required Percy to agree that they never bring the company to court for any future contamination of their farm. And because of timing, I wasn't able to verify the legal wording of this document, but you can expect more on this on next week's show when we will determine if that release form did indeed suggest this, because if it did, then clearly this statement in Monsanto's press release is even more misleading than it

already seems. Regardless, in the settlement reached on March 19<sup>th</sup> 2008, Percy will be allowed to challenge the company in the future for any further contamination of his farm.

### **soundbite**

*JS:* In seeking clarification on this, I contacted the author of the release Trish Jordan who is Monsanto Canada's Public Affairs Director. Now I'll first state that this response will be posted word for word on the Deconstructing Dinner website. But of interest was at the beginning of her response she wrote, "Not sure what the point in debating this is." and it continues, "We had previously offered to amend the release to something that would be suitable for Mr. Schmeiser in 2005 and again at a mediated case management hearing over a year ago. He again refused at that time and said he would never sign a release. Our offer was always open to rework our standard release."

I called up Schmeiser and asked if this was true, and he was deeply upset to hear this statement, because as he says, the company never made *any* effort to change the release to his liking. And so, I followed up with Trish Jordan over the phone to ask her to expand on their so-called offer in 2005 to revise the release form, and she said that there was "never any discussion." A marked difference to her original e-mail.

### **soundbite**

*JS:* Now to conclude my phone conversation with Jordan I did ask how the initial form and the one settled on on March 19<sup>th</sup> were anyway close to being the same. And she responded by denying that any similarities were ever implied and told me in a rather aggravated way, "why don't you read my press release." Well, here's Jordan's press release again and it says this, "he essentially accepted the same offer we put before him in 2005." And you can read this release on Monsanto's website at [monsanto.ca](http://monsanto.ca).

You can expect more on this story on future broadcasts, because while the case does not set a legal precedent, it became clear to me that Monsanto is very worried about what the exposure of this case will do to the company. It's now clear that farmers across North America can challenge one of the most influential multi-national companies in the world, and insist that they pay for the damages caused by the company's products. Or at the very least, insist that the company clean up the damages and not require the farmers to restrict their right to take legal action or to speak about the terms to others. And you can stay tuned for that.

### **soundbite**

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner, a weekly one-hour radio show and podcast produced at Kootenay Co-op Radio in Nelson, British Columbia. This show is heard on radio stations around the world and is available as a

podcast. My name's Jon Steinman. Today's show is archived on our website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner) and is titled, "Water, The Blood of the Earth and Monsanto Pays Percy Schmeiser."

For the remainder of today's broadcast, we will visit with another recipient to the Right Livelihood Award, and that is Maude Barlow. Barlow is the National Chairperson for the Council of Canadians - Canada's largest citizens' organization with members and chapters across the country. The council works to protect Canadian independence by promoting progressive policies on fair trade, clean water, energy security, public health care, and other issues of social and economic concern to Canadians.

Maude Barlow is the co-founder of the Blue Planet Project, which has been working internationally to advocate the human right to water. It has been a failing of Deconstructing Dinner to *not* cover water issues as in depth as they deserve, and today's foray into the world of water will mark the beginning of a much more concentrated effort into the many issues facing the global supply of water. Barlow insists that water is the greatest ecological and human rights crisis of our time, and certainly water is absolutely fundamental to our food and to life itself.

In March 2008, Maude Barlow spoke in Castlegar, British Columbia to a sold-out audience of approximately 900 people – a staggering turn out given the population of Castlegar and neighbouring Nelson is around 20,000 people.

I was in attendance to record Maude speak and we'll hear segments from her talk in just a moment, but I first want to share with you the significance of the location in which she spoke. The event took place at the Brilliant Cultural Centre – Brilliant is the area in which the centre is located. Now it's the very land on which the centre is built that was the location of a community of the original inhabitants of the area – the Sinixt People also known as the Lakes People. The last known Sinixt resident of the land was Alex Christian, who in 1914 pleaded unsuccessfully to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs to be allowed to remain on the land. And he said this to the Commission, "I wish to state that I was born there and have made that place my headquarters during my entire life. Also my ancestors have belonged to that place as far back as I can trace. Both of my parents were born there and three of my grandparents. I want to stay in the home where I have always been and want to have a piece of land made secure for me. I also ask that the graveyards of my people be fenced and preserved from desecration." It was only years later that Christian was murdered while trying to protect his home. And no one was ever brought to justice and archeological evidence on the site does indeed date back 5,000 years.

But the reason why the area was such an ideal place for the Sinixt, was that it was situated on the forks of the Kootenay River and Arrow Lakes, both of which are part of the Columbia River system. Before the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in 1933, the river system thrived with salmon that would

swim all the way up into the interior of British Columbia from the Pacific Ocean. This was a primary food source of native communities up and down the river system, and the construction of the dam marked the end to this way of life and contributed to the end of many of these communities themselves. It's also interesting to note that there also was a time when White Sturgeon could be fished out of the Kootenay River not far from the Brilliant Cultural Centre, with some fish having been over 10 feet in length and weighing up to 750 pounds.

The Columbia River system today represents the largest hydroelectric system in the world, but also represents, one of the most environmentally and socially destructive projects to ever have been constructed in North America.

Making up part of this system that contributed to the demise of the region's indigenous populations, was The Brilliant Dam just steps away from where Maude Barlow was speaking. The dam was constructed in 1944.

When first addressing the audience in March of 2008 at the Brilliant Cultural Centre, Maude referred to the significance of the site on which her talk on water issues was taking place. She first spoke of the absolute irresponsible managing of water by the western world.

Brilliant Cultural Centre:

*Announcer:* Please give a welcome to Maude Barlow. (applause)

*Maude Barlow:* Thank you very, very, very much for your gorgeous welcome here tonight. I cannot believe how many of you have come out tonight to this fabulous hall. It's my second time to be honoured to speak in this beautiful hall in Brilliant and I just feel that we're here in the most important place, steeped in history and challenged by the social justice ghosts in this room. I'm just thrilled to be here.

I've actually been in the United States a fair bit in the last month and a half. This book "Blue Covenant" came out here in Canada in the fall. I did a pretty extensive tour and now I'm in the belly of the beast touring in Washington and New York and Boston and Miami and through California and you name it so I'm very filled with these stories of a superpower to the south of us, let me tell you that is going dry in some very important places. A recent Environmental Protection Agency report said that there are now 36 States in the United States that are going to have "from serious to severe water crises in the next five to ten years." There are seven states actually facing the end of water kind of right now – Colorado and Utah, and California, New Mexico and Arizona. But in Arizona they just announced that they're building a water theme park in the desert called the Water Wave. And they're going to have waves so high that you can surf on them. And they're going to have rivers that run so fast that they're going to have white water rafting on this place in the desert. It reminds me of the Farside cartoon where there's a bunch of

dogs in a life raft and their ship is sinking, so that's why they're in this life raft, and one of them says – okay everybody who wants to eat all the food at once put your hands up. It's like – okay we have ten years left of water, maybe if we build a water theme park we can knock that down to five (audience laughter).

I was in Utah for the Sundance Film Festival because there's a film, a lovely film that I'm urging everyone to see when it's available called, "Flow For Love of Water" which I'm in quite a bit so they asked me to come to Utah for this wonderful Sundance Film Festival. And you know I just wandered around in awe. This is a state that totally completely depends on this snowmelt from the mountains and they are cutting down the trees and the shrubs that protect that snow so fast it kind of reminded me of the dogs in the life raft. And they're building new ski runs and they're building these great big resorts and they're building in the summer these all terrain vehicle trails so they're just cutting everything down. And I was telling folks today that I stayed in one of these tacky little condos, they're putting thousands of them up, just kind of boxes on top of each other. And there was no sort of awareness of water, no notes about it, no "please save our water." The shower in my condo had two speeds - off and hurt (audience laughter), like it went so fast it kind of hurt. And I thought this is the problem that we are facing. It's not that we don't have enough water in the world it is that we are, particularly we in the global west, global north have taken water for granted. We have what I call a myth of abundance that we just have used water terribly. But in the United States it's a crisis and let me tell you, the American government, for the first time in the last two years is finally beginning to see that this is a problem. The Colorado is, "in catastrophic decline." When I was in California two weeks ago, a study came out that said that Lake Mead and Lake Powell which are the big backup reservoirs for Las Vegas, for Nevada, for so many of the communities there may be actually empty within 10 to 13 years. Now you can imagine what we're dealing with. It's like all of California waking up the way Atlanta did one day a few months ago and finding out that you're out of water.

*JS:* You're listening to Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians speaking in March 2008 in Castlegar, British Columbia. Now our food system here in Canada is currently very dependent on the supply of water in California. Looking at statistics from a few years ago, of the \$20 billion in food that is imported into Canada each year, a little over 4% of that value comes from the State of California alone. That's \$835 million. I imagine I don't speak for myself when I say that I would cringe at the idea of exporting water to California so that they could grow food to then ship back to Canada. But when we hear of the absolute absurdity of building water parks in Arizona and housing developments in the middle of the desert, I think it would be foolish to think that the United States would be incapable of orchestrating such a scenario. Such a prospect leads Maude Barlow to caution Canadians, however, she does remain hopeful.

*MB:* And I just wanted to start off with this caution for Canadians because I do believe that there is going to come a time in the not too distant future when we're going to be looked to for that water. But I want to start off really with just a description of the international situation of the global crisis or the Earth's crisis around water. And I want to say first of all that I'm actually very hopeful. I'm going to give you some tough statistics tonight and I'm going to tell you a tough story but then I'm going to tell you that we have all the knowledge that we need in terms of fixing this. All we have to do is be sensible and conserve and protect source water and bring back water into watersheds that are not longer able to retain water because we have abused it. We know all the things we have to do. What we're lacking is political will and we're going to have to find that. And I don't think it's going to come from the top, I think it's going to come from the bottom – from communities like this, from young people, from poor people, from farmers, from peasants and indigenous communities. It's going to come up off the ground because that's where this movement is going.

But just to situate it globally, in my opinion, the global water crisis is the greatest ecological and human rights crisis of our time. And I'm not competing with climate change, I think this is the face of climate change. It's the first and most devastating face of climate change. There are close to two billion people in the world who are living in areas that do not have enough water and the numbers are getting worse not better. By the year 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will be living with some level of scarcity again, some that you can manage, some where people are going to die in increasing numbers. In Africa alone, one in three people now are living without adequate access to water and in ten years that will be one in two so you can see that we are going in entirely the wrong direction. And the lack of water is perhaps the most profound and visual signal of the inequality between rich and poor in our world and it is the first face of this kind of de-poverty, this kind of economic apartheid that we have created in this world. More children die every day of water borne disease than of HIV Aids, traffic accidents, war, and malaria all put together. It's the number one killer. Half the hospital beds in the world are filled with people who would not be there if they could afford clean water so it literally is an issue of life and death for people around the world.

And I won't forget, it's many years now but since the first time I was in a very poor community and understood that a bucket of water had to do for the whole family for washing, for cooking, for cleaning the clothes and came home to my house which is a modest home. I'm not a rich person, and counted I think six different places where I could turn the water off or turn the water on if you include the hose out front and back and the kitchen and laundry room and two bathrooms and so on and realize that we take water so for granted. And in most of the world that's no longer possible but it's increasingly not going to be possible here. This is the true meaning behind William Greider's wonderful title of his book "One World Ready or Not."

*JS:* Now well the many concerns facing the global supply of water would very easily be passed off as one face of climate change, Maude Barlow does believe that *how we manage* our water, is very much a *cause* of climate change. In one case, she refers to surface water pollution, which in the case of food, is very much a result of poor agricultural practices, most often through the industrial systems dominating our food supply.

*MB:* And I am trying with the book and with my work and with some scientists I'm working with, to introduce the notion that water is not just a result or a victim of greenhouse gases and climate change but actually one of the causes. And here's how it goes very briefly. We are polluting surface waters so extensively around the world that in many, many, many countries and communities people cannot use that water anymore to live on, to cook, to even to drink for sure but even to water their vegetables and their crops and their animals. So what happens is that we have started to take water from where nature put it to serve ourselves and in doing so we've interrupted the hydrologic cycle.

Now you'll all remember around grade six you learned about the hydrologic cycle and you learned that the water cycle is finite and it can't go anywhere and it goes round and round in this loop of being evaporated, coming back down as rain or snow or whatever. But actually our teachers didn't, weren't lying to us but they didn't know that we would be capable of such massive displacement of those resources, that water resource that we're actually interrupting the hydrologic cycle itself. And we're now creating less water, where the hydrologic cycle is now producing less water in parts of the world that use to have it because we're creating desert as we move water away from where it was put. We're massively, massively pumping ground water. In India alone there are 23 million borewells going 24/7.

A group of scientists in the U.K. last year said there is coming anarchy in India over this exponential over-pumping because what may seem limitless of course is not. And so one night you go to bed in this valley or this community and there's water and the next morning you wake up and it's all gone. Around the Great Lakes there are borewells going deep into the springs that feed the Great Lakes that go as deep into the ground as a Chicago skyscrapers go into the sky. And they're pumping the water so hard that last year for the first time they reversed the flow of water in Lake Michigan and they're now drinking in Lake Michigan water, which is one of the reasons of course that the lakes are declining.

*JS:* As mentioned earlier, water will become more of an ongoing focus here on Deconstructing Dinner as this show evolves, and one topic to narrow in on is what is known as virtual water. While Canadians may feel assured that our water is not yet being exported in bulk quantities, when paying closer attention, it is. Whether it be the water fed to the cattle that get exported, or the water used to grow grains or fruit for export, or perhaps the water used to wash the floors of the industrial hog factories producing the pork that gets

shipped off to the many eager Asian markets, Canada ships away this virtual water every day. And Maude Barlow explains.

*MB:* We're also doing something called virtual water trade - you're going to hear a lot more about this in the next few years. Virtual water trade is the water that's embedded in something you export so what you needed to grow - a commodity or crop or to produce something that you then export. And we haven't been taking it into account but it turns out that about almost a quarter of all the water in the world every single day is exported out of a watershed or out of a country in the form of virtual water. Very often to satisfy the needs of great big transnational corporations whether they're bottling companies, whether they big agri-business companies who come in and use this water and then ship it away.

I was in Lake Naivasha in Kenya just about a year ago now. We've launched a campaign to save this lake and this is the most exquisite lake in the Rift Valley in Kenya, the home of the last wild hippopotamus herd in East Africa. And we were out on this gorgeous lake and we saw flamingos and pelicans and the hippopotamus in the water and they're mean creatures you don't want to get too close to them - they hiss at you and they kind of peer at you like they would like to eat you which they would. And I looked at this island with zebra and wildebeest and so on and I said to the boatmen - my God it looks just like where *Out of Africa* was filmed and he said - well that would be because that's where *Out of Africa* was filmed (audience laughter) right on that island. Exquisite beyond language. But the lake's dying and it's dying with this virtual water trade because the Rose Company - Rose as in flowers, agri-business Rose Corporations from Europe which don't want to use up water in Europe because they're running out too are surrounding lakes like Lake Naivasha using their water to grow roses which they then export to Great Britain, Holland, and so on, the places that use to grow those gorgeous roses. And the lake is dying; the lake will be a, "putrid puddle in five to ten years" quoting one group of scientists. And the hippopotamus herd is literally baking to death in the sun. I mean this is just one example of the abuse of water in one country to service the needs of the water footprint in another country. And in North America, we're huge water exporters. We don't call it that because it's this embedded water; we're going to have to know a lot more about it.

*JS:* This is Deconstructing Dinner. We're listening to segments of a talk given in March 2008 in Castlegar, British Columbia by the Council of Canadians Maude Barlow. Deconstructing Dinner recorded the event.

Now one focus on water that this program has tackled on previous shows, has been bottled water. This too will be the topic yet again for an upcoming show, and Maude Barlow was rather direct in what she considers bottled water to represent - and that is our collective insanity.

*MB:* Last year we put something like 200 billion litres of water in plastic bottles around the world. About 95% of that is not recycled so it goes into our watersheds and into great big mountains of garbage. It's a form of collective insanity to take a precious gift like water that flows and then encapsulate it in plastic and create mountains of garbage and fossil fuel, emissions making this stuff (audience clapping); it is a form of insanity.

But the fastest growing area of corporate control of water, which interested me in which I really learned about as I was writing the book is new technologies. And I want to tell you about this because I think it's very important for us to understand because we in the global North have this hubris that we are above nature instead of fitting into nature – we're designing technology to conquer nature and now we're doing it with water. So the American government in particular in putting billions and billions and billions of dollars into desalination plants which are polluting, intensively fossil fuel using. Now they are talking about nuclear power desal, there's a tripling of desalination plants planned for the world in the next ten years; 25 to 30 on the California coast alone. A terrible technology. A technology that really says we've tried everything else when that is not true. It's a sign of failure. Now a technology which is totally deregulated which is the workings of the molecule – you know our playing with the molecules of life, the molecular structures of life. Toilet to tap recycling, a literally toilet to tap. I am working with friends in Australia who bought a group called CADS, Citizens Against Drinking Sewage (audience laughter) while their best water is being used to ship, well to make all the wine that everybody loves and all the stuff that goes around the world. They're being told that they have to drink sewage water.

But the biggest companies in the world, General Electric, Dow Chemical, they're all getting into water recycling. And of course, water recycling is a piece of the answer but my concern is that I can see these corporations moving in to take control of the process, owning the water they recycle and then being able to say - well this is what we're going to charge for it. And if you think the problem for not having access to water is only in the global South – wrong. In Detroit three years ago the water authority cut off water to 82,000 families, sorry, 42,000 families in that city and then sent Social Security in to take the kids away because there was not water for the children. So it's not just going to be an issue of the global South.

As water becomes more and more and more expensive and more corporately controlled, it is going to become an issue of equity in the so-called First World because guess what, we have a Third World here too and they're going to be hit dramatically when we start to put this corporate-for-profit price on water.

*JS:* Maude Barlow has long been fighting to wake Canadians up to the siphoning off of our natural resources by the hungry appetite to the South,

and she does have a number of suggestions as to what Canada needs to do to protect our water now and into the future.

*MB:* I think that we should be very nervous in this country frankly, about a country that is (a) a superpower; (b) running out of water; (c) has an agreement called NAFTA with us in which water is both a tradable good and an investment; and (d) that is not curbing its water wastage whatsoever. The U.S. by far is the biggest water waster in the world.

So we have some things to think about in this country. We have no national water legislation to protect our source water, to protect drinking water standards, we have no idea where our ground water is. We keep being told we have 20% of the world's fresh water, that's nonsense. You have to drain every lake and river in the country to have access to that - we have about 6.5% of the available fresh water. But most of that water isn't ours either and I keep saying this to my American friends. It's in mighty rivers running north, in the north and to get at it, either for those of us living in the south of Canada or in the United States, we'd have to reverse the flow of that water and send it through great big pipelines probably fueled by nuclear power and send it down to the United States. It would go to Las Vegas, it would go to California, it would go to Nevada, it would go to those developments. It would go to GE, it would go to Dow Chemical - the nice folks who brought us Bhopal and now want to clean up our water. It would not go to the children who are so desperately needing it, so it's not a case of not sharing. We have water in ecosystems and watersheds that need to be there to protect the ecosystem health of that region. And we all have to adapt our ways to live within the water reality that we've been allocated and we're going to have to change our ways of living.

Oh, I just want to say one thing before I say that - I do want to mention the Security and Prosperity Partnership for North America. Though it's very hard getting this subject even raised south of the border although we've got a coalition of groups now beginning to work with us. Security and Prosperity Partnership is a deal that was signed in Waco Texas in March of 2005 between the heads of the three governments of North America - literally the prime ministers and presidents. And basically it was an initiative of the big business community in Canada that was worried that with the post 9/11 fear of terrorism in the United States, the border would thicken, this is the term they used.

So they proposed the Security and Prosperity Partnership to the Martin government who jumped on it, proposed it to the Americans and away we all went. And basically Canada and Mexico have agreed to adopt U.S. security measures the war on terror including merging our no fly lists and all sort of things. We're in Afghanistan so the U.S. can be in Iraq and so on. We agreed to do that in exchange for keeping this border open which hasn't particularly happened so we haven't even gotten that from it.

Then there are 21 working groups right across the board harmonizing every single area of life in North America down to the lowest standards from food safety and pesticides and environmental rules and so on. There's also a resource pact. And at first they just talked about energy but last May I got in a brown paper bag the agenda for an upcoming closed door meeting in Calgary which basically was going to discuss Canada's water. And it said very clearly that Canada has 20% of the world's water and the United States is in trouble and that we would have to start thinking about Canada's water the way we now see Canada's energy which it's not Canada's energy, it's North American energy. And when we gave this to the media everybody backed down. The Canadian delegation turned around at the airport and got on the plane and went back – did not go to the meeting (applause).

But that does not mean, that does not mean that the story is over and we need in this country not only legislation to protect our ground water, map our ground water, set environmental standards, bring the rule of law to protect our water sources, we need to have a ban on the commercial export of water and we need to say yes to Hillary and Obama when they introduce the concept of reopening NAFTA and take water out (applause).

And you should know that water is also an investment under NAFTA which means that the big American energy companies operating in the Alberta Tar Sands would have the right to sue all Canadians for billions of dollars of compensation if the government of Alberta at any point said you've got to stop destroying our water table, you've got to conserve, you've got to use gray water, we're going to limit the water. They could say this is a change of the rules, which under NAFTA your companies have to live with but we don't. And that's called Chapter 11 of NAFTA. It's the clause that gives corporations of one country the right to sue a government of another NAFTA country if it changes the rules even for environmental reasons or health and safety reasons.

*JS:* And this is Deconstructing Dinner. In closing out today's broadcast, I'll leave you with this final segment of Maude Barlow's talk in which she introduces her "Blue Covenant" the title of her most recent book.

*MB:* And so I'm calling for what I call a blue covenant. A blue covenant with the earth to say to our Mother Earth you gave us life, you protected us. This water that you gave us is the life blood of the earth and if we destroy the life blood of the earth it's like destroying the blood in our veins, it's a form of suicide. This notion of unlimited growth, this notion of that we can keep exporting and keep trading and keep being competitive and this market-based capitalism driving everything is fundamentally wrong. And the earth has hit its limits; it has hit its caring capacity; it can't do it anymore. And it is telling us that it has to stop and that we have to stop.

As one American environmentalist said unlimited growth has the same ideology as the cancer cell. It has to turn on its host in order to survive and

that's what's happening now. We are killing the earth in order to continue to have this notion that's there no limit to what we can have. We need a blue covenant between rich and poor not to charity, right. It's fine to go dig wells in Africa but that's not the answer in the end. We need an international system based on justice and based on solidarity (applause) and based on the reality that everyone in the world has a fundamental right to water. And that no one has the right to abrogate it for private profit while other people are dying because they cannot pay and only because they cannot pay. This absolutely has to change and it won't change until we deal with the incredibly unfair situation of the debt of the global South to the global North in which they send more money north in debt relief every year than we send in aid and trade together. Until we deal with that fundamental reality the poor countries in the global South will have no ability to provide clean water or healthcare or education for their people.

And finally we're calling for a blue covenant to declare water to be a fundamental right. A right of people, a right of other species, a right of the earth. We have to protect water for the earth and if you hand it over to private companies who's going to do that. We're fighting for a right to water covenant at the UN. You will be unhappy but not surprised perhaps to know Canada has not been supporting this measure nor has the U.S. but we are going to keep fighting. We have a group called the Canadian Friends of the Right to Water and we aren't going to give up. But I know perfectly well that our government knows that it's pretty hard to say that water is a human right over here when you've said that it's a tradable good in NAFTA. And that conflict is something they're extremely well aware of whether they're willing to admit it or not. We need to say that water does not belong to anyone. It belongs to the earth; it belongs to all species; it belongs to future generations; it is a public trust; it is part of our global commons and we have to fiercely protect it. (applause)

JS: And that was Maude Barlow speaking in March 2008 in Castlegar, British Columbia. Maude is the National Chair Person of the Council of Canadians and the co-founder of the Blue Planet Project. And you can learn more about the project by visiting [blueplanetproject.net](http://blueplanetproject.net).

And you can expect to hear more on this all-important topic of water on future broadcasts of Deconstructing Dinner. Our negligent and irresponsible managing of water over the past century is an incredible window into how disconnected we have all become from not only our surroundings but from ourselves. Poet and essayist Wendell Berry perhaps said it best, "If there is any truth to the cliché *you are what you eat*, then we should be honest about the fact that most of us do not have the slightest idea what we are."

**ending theme**

*JS:* That was this week's edition of Deconstructing Dinner, produced and recorded at Nelson, British Columbia's Kootenay Co-op Radio. I've been your host Jon Steinman. I thank my technical assistant John Ryan.

The theme music for Deconstructing Dinner is courtesy of Nelson-area resident Adham Shaikh.

This radio program is provided free of charge to campus/community radio stations across the country, and relies on the financial support from you the listener.

Support for the program can be donated through our website at [cjly.net/deconstructingdinner](http://cjly.net/deconstructingdinner) or by dialing 250-352-9600.