

Born Maude Victoria McGrath during the post-war baby boom, Maude Barlow may have been marked for a life of hell-raising from the start. As her sister jokes, every childhood photo of Barlow caught the future political warrior with her mouth wide open.

Canadians have watched Barlow persistently argue against the political and economic elites that, she contends, are tearing apart Canada's social contract – and possibly Canada along with it. With little public debate, Canada's public sector has been dramatically weakened – and the process has been driven by a series of international trade deals limiting national sovereignty.

Democracy à la Maude explores the efforts of Barlow and her allies to open a debate on policy questions dominated by a chorus of pro-business opinion. We eavesdrop on behind-the-scenes strategy sessions and see her clashing publicly with the powerful. And we gain intimate insights into one woman's transformation from stay-at-home mother to influential political actor, media celebrity and best-selling author.

The clash of ideas illuminates competing visions of democracy. In one segment, Barlow confronts Joe Cobb, a Republican Party economist in Washington, DC. Cobb's vision of democracy "includes the freedom of each family to have the freedom of choice of what it wants to buy and where it wants to buy it from." To Barlow, that means curtailing democratic rights in favour of economic freedoms. In another scene, Conrad Black says of Barlow and her efforts to stop his buyout of the Southam chain, "I've never met her, but to judge from her public efforts it's hard not to impute to her the motive of regret that the Southam papers may henceforth be less absolutely reliable and predictable mouthpieces of her feminist, socialist, envious, anti-American views than they've been."

Maude Barlow's own agenda is clear – and extensive. As she's written, "fair trade, full employment, cooperation, cultural diversity, democratic control, fair taxation, environmental stewardship, community, public accountability, equality, social justice: these are the touchstones of our vision and it is within our means – it is our right – to choose them."

Democracy à la Maude is part of the NFB's *Talking Women* series, which also includes *Kathleen Shannon: On Film, Feminism and Other Dreams...* and *Listening for Something: Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation*.

Glossary

Globalization, the Global Economy: Corporations conducting business as if international borders didn't exist. Often used as a shorthand justification for eliminating "obstacles" to success (corporate taxes, social programs, protection of fragile local economic sectors) in the highly competitive trade-based global economy.

Competition Bureau: The federal tribunal which rules on whether corporate takeovers – such as the buyout that gave Hollinger ownership of 58 of Canada's 105 daily newspapers – create unacceptable monopolies. The tribunal rarely disallows mergers or takeovers.

FTA: The Free Trade Agreement to gradually eliminate tariffs and protection on most of Canada's trade with the United States went into effect January 1, 1989 after a divisive, bitterly fought election on the issue.

NAFTA: The North American Free Trade Agreement, initially negotiated by the Mulroney Conservatives. Although the Chrétien Liberals were originally opposed to NAFTA, once in power they enacted it and aggressively pursued NAFTA's expansion throughout the Americas. The Council of Canadians and others blame the FTA and NAFTA for eliminating hundreds of thousands of well-paid manufacturing jobs.

APEC: The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum's members meet annual-

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61 minutes
05 seconds



ly to promote free trade. The forums are officially referred to as a grouping of "economies" rather than nations. This means no public input is allowed – even when the resulting policies have a negative impact on social and environmental policies.

GATT: Implemented in 1947, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade set rules governing international trade, but it lacked enforcement powers and its rules were widely flouted. GATT was succeeded in 1994 by the WTO.

WTO: The World Trade Organization came into being following the Uruguay Round of GATT, completed in 1994. It emphasizes property rights (including intellectual property) and the elimination of protectionism. Its regulations are backed by legally binding enforcement procedures.

OECD: The Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development comprises the world's industrialized countries. It was founded to integrate its members' economic, environmental and social policies.

MAI: The proposed 1998 Multilateral Agreement on Investment, negotiated largely in secret by OECD members, will likely forbid discrimination against corporations wherever they invest money. Opponents point out that the MAI will provide protection for business at the expense of democracy and sovereignty.

Related Videos from the NFB

The Emperor's New Clothes (1995). A provocative documentary – filmed in Canada, the US and Mexico – on the stark realities of life before and after NAFTA. Maude Barlow calls it "terrific." 53 minutes. Order number C9195 165.

Who's Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies and Global Economics (1995). Feminist, economist, former New Zealand MP and farmer, Marilyn Waring demystifies global economics with clarity and humour, mapping out an alternative economic vision. David Suzuki calls it "magnificent." Available in the original, feature-length version and in a 3-part classroom adaptation. 94 minutes.

Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media (1992). A top-selling profile of the thinker and activist and his views on how media shape the political decision-making process. *Variety* calls it "insightful...and surprisingly entertaining." 167 minutes. Order number C9192 072.

Reckoning: The Political Economy of Canada (1986-87). A 5-part series on Canada's recent economic history.

Related Web sites

Council of Canadians. The 100,000-member group Maude Barlow heads (www.web.net/~coc).

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. An alternative social and economic think-tank: (www.policyalternatives.ca).

People Centered Development Forum. An international alliance dedicated to the creation of justice, inclusiveness, and sustainability: (iisd1.iisd.ca/pcdf).

Public Citizen. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader's US-based watchdog group (www.citizen.org).

Corporate Watch. A truly international project dedicated to greater democratic control over transnational corporations (www.corpwatch.org).

Peoples' Global Action against "Free" Trade and the World Trade Organization (www.agp.org).

OECD: (www.oecd.org).

Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade: (www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca).