

Group ends MAI alternative hearings

BY JEREMY NELSON

(CUP) — A high-profile group of Canadian writers, scientists and activists finished a cross-Canada search for sustainable alternatives to a controversial investment treaty in Halifax.

After nearly two months of hearings, the group looking into alternatives to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) now says it's ready to compile its findings in a report to present to the public and all three levels of government.

The MAI Inquiry was sponsored by the Council of Canadians, a citizen lobby group with 120,000 members.

"These hearings are a key contribution to the international movement that is now trying to find alternatives to the current, destructive form of globalization," said hearings organizer Anna Daishgard.

"People are beginning to

understand that the MAI isn't just an isolated agreement, it is part of a much broader process."

The hearings were in part a response to the federal government's refusal to hold national MAI hearings, despite the petitions of several thousand Canadians. The only public consultation that occurred on MAI was 36 hours of hearings in Ottawa last year.

Critics say a treaty with such serious implications deserves closer attention. The proposed 29-nation MAI would give corporations many of the same powers of federal governments — including greater access to the education and health sectors — and the right to sue governments that pass labour laws which infringe on their profits.

The MAI Inquiry: A Citizen's Search for Alternatives, wrapped up in Halifax last Saturday Nov. 28 after hearing from hundreds of Canadians including students,

seniors, health professionals, teachers, professors, churches, unions and social justice coalitions.

While the five national political parties were invited to make presentations, only the New Democratic Party took part in the hearings.

In Halifax Alexa McDonough, federal leader of the NDP, took part.

The panels included Pulitzer-prize winning author Carol Shields and world-renowned environmentalist David Suzuki.

The Halifax panel included Suzuki, Council of Canadians president Maude Barlow, journalist Judy Rebick, United Nations expert Dr. Krishna Ahooja-Patel, and Elizabeth May, president of the Sierra Club of Canada and a Dalhousie law school graduate. The panel was moderated by local journalist and activist Jane Kansas.

Guest speakers spoke about the effects of globalization in the

Maritimes, including the Mi'kmaq people and local arts groups.

Warren Allmand, a former Liberal member of parliament, praised the consultation process.

"These hearings have opened up the process to people who will be directly impacted by these sort of agreements," said Allmand, who now heads the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development.

And the Canadian Federation of Students, which helped organize the hearings, said students have a direct stake in whether the treaty is adopted because of its long-term consequences.

"[Students] would have to deal with this their whole lives," said federation representative Chad Samain.

"If we signed something like the MAI we would be bound for 20 years."

with files from Shelley Robinson

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Shaking hands with dictators

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criminals — Chretien shook his hand.

APEC Alert's Brooks Kind detailed the history of Suharto's political career. He says the degree of genocide exacted by Suharto in Indonesia, and the adjacent independent East Timor, is nearly twice that of former Cambodian dictator Pol Pot.

"The Liberal government

would not want such a trifle like genocide to interfere in [its] profit margins," he said.

But through it all, Singh remains hopeful.

"Change doesn't take place in the school, it takes place in the street, in communities, where people live."

At the APEC summit this November in Malaysia human rights wasn't on the agenda. Not surprisingly, APEC is still opposed.

N.S. Student loans

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more than a month late, delinquency is two or more. When CIBC pulled out, it said default and delinquency rates hovered around 32 percent.

And like CIBC, the Royal Bank says its losing money, although it won't release its figures. And it wants the province to make up for it.

Currently, the bank gets five percent of the total amount of borrowed money, known as a risk premium, from the province. It also gets all the loans' interest. It is expected that in any new contract the bank is looking for higher risk

premiums from the government.

As well, the bank will likely be looking to further limit lending risk by weeding out what it considers "bad borrowers". And one of the ways to do that is to limit which institutions are eligible for student loan money. University students, for example, are typically better loan risks than students in private career colleges.

Harrison says when banks start trying to limit who can have access to money, its dictating social policy, which isn't its job.

"It is a concern that one bank has a chance to monopolize... student loans."

20 years ago this week

Beer prices soared 5 c

Beer prices rose five cents at the Grawood after an increase in the retail price of beer. Maritime beers cost 90 cents after the hike, beers from away were 95 cents. The price of beer at the Grad House also rose to 80 cents a bottle for local brews.

Job migration good — Cape Breton bad?

A federal minister said it was "too bloody bad" high levels of regional unemployment were forcing students to move to find work. Bud Cullen, minister of employment and immigration, said the migration of jobless youths is not only necessary, but a good thing. "It's the best thing that could ever happen to this country," he said. Cullen was on television answering questions about his policies. When questioned by an unemployed Cape Breton graduate, Cullen was firm. "My goodness, if a person gets an education and cannot broaden their horizons beyond Cape Breton, [they should] try Toronto, try other parts of the world."

Dal Security charged with assault

Assault charges were laid against a Dal security officer by a union member who was on legal strike. Stephen Kelly alleged that Wilfred White choked and attacked him to remove him from a picket line so trucks could drive through. Kelly required hospital treatment. White was unavailable for comment but Physical Plant co-ordinator Roger Jollimore dismissed the charges. "It was just another situation where a young fellow acted in a manner he shouldn't have."

Radiation put computers on fritz

Radiation from naval vessels in Halifax Harbour was linked to malfunctioning computers, and worried some about human health. Nova Scotia Power had problems with its computers after moving to a waterfront office tower, and tests showed emissions from 280 class destroyers with radioactive radar equipment were probably behind the blips. Om Kamra, a Dal Biology prof, said the effects of the radar system weren't well documented enough to rule out the radar affecting people too. But Department of Defense spokesperson, Commander J. Maloney, said the radar was safe. "Even with the highest power no effect would be felt on a human being unless [they] stood directly in front of the system." Nova Scotia's radiation health officer agreed. He refuted claims, made in a local newspaper, that the radiation was "almost enough to fry a guy."

Unemployment Insurance called unfair to students

Students were among the hardest hit by changes to federal unemployment insurance, some said. Gary Burill, Halifax Coalition for Full Employment spokesperson, was at the Dal Student Union Building letting students know what he thought the problems were. "The government's... blaming the unemployed for unemployment when as everyone knows, unemployment is caused by government and business." Among the terms of the change was a proposal for new students to work 20 weeks before they could collect UI. School was out for 16 weeks. Another proposal cut off people working less than 20 hours a week, which students said shut out teaching assistants and other students with part time jobs. "If a student is unable to find a job, the government is forcing them out of school."

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