



Public services or 'social hell'

Without public sector work, "we would descend into a social hell," Murray Dobbin, journalist, author and social activist, told Convention delegates.

"If intelligent life came from another planet, it would conclude we were in a state of advanced collective dementia. Nurses have six minutes to bathe patients. Water companies cut out pipes for non-payment. Doctors get bonuses for denying medical services to patients. Corporations see pupils as 'emerging consumers.' It's insanity and it's what we're fighting."

Dobbin, guest speaker for the 2000 Convention, said corporations have turned their backs on society.

Corporations used to see democracy – including unions, health and safety, welfare and a healthy environment – as part of the cost of doing business, in return for reasonable profits.

In the mid-70s, they balked. Now they want out of health care, education, environmental regulations, labour standards, zoning bylaws and other regulations that protect citizens.

Corporations decided citizens should expect less, and campaigned for that objective starting with free trade. They moved on to privatization and deregulation, and followed that up with 'debt terrorism,' Dobbin said. They claimed there was no alternative.

Then they attacked public sector workers as overpaid lazy bureaucrats – completely

separate from the rest of society – and tried to make citizens hate the people who work for them.

Governments, manipulated by the corporations, cut health care and education until they were failing – then proclaimed the private sector as the only salvation. The global scale of the assault is designed to make people feel it is inevitable and natural, Dobbin said.

Corporations are circling like vultures around public services. They see health care and municipal services as new sources for profit, secure there will always be tax dollars to pay for them.

International treaties are giving corporations control over governments. Trade treaties overrule national laws. That's in large part what the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks in Seattle were all about.

The WTO is likely to become more powerful than any institution in history, Dobbin said. "It's a terrible threat to democracy." Governments won't even try to pass some laws because of the "chill effect."

Despite the relentless campaign, Canadians tell pollsters they want services. Progressive forces must "revisit our vision of a just and equal future so expectations will begin to rise," he said.

"You must see yourselves as citizens and not as customers. We will lose Medicare if we don't redouble our efforts."

He asked delegates to commit three hours a week to being better informed, and to contribute to organizations that are fighting for social change.

"We've lost sight of the truly just and equal society we want and we need to re-imagine the role of government as an advocate for citizens.

"Harris has turned social workers into policeman and Medicare into a business." ▲

Bill Majesky photo



**"Mike Harris
has turned
social workers
into policemen
and Medicare into
a business."**

– Murray Dobbin