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August 19 Canadian Medical Association Annual General meeting; negligence if inaction. _

PEJ news- Joan Russow - Global Compliance Research Project

The Canadian Medical Association must not only oppose any undermining of Canada's publicly funded, not for profit, non-two tier, universally accessible health care system but also lobby for the re-adjustment of federal spending priorities, for elimination of environmentally induced diseases, and for the eradication of poverty related health problems.

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PROMOTING THE REALLOCATION OF FEDERAL SPENDING PRIORITIES

The pressure for privatization of the health care system comes from the Federal government's misplaced funding priorities. While the health of Canadian citizens has been compromised, the Federal Government continues to support increased funding for the ill-conceived invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. This increased expenditure since 2001 is part of long standing Federal government priorities in the form of subsidies to corporations such as the nuclear, chemical, agribusiness, arms, and fossil fuel dependent industries; to institutions, such as the military and its international intervention bodies (NATO, NORAD); to the "free trade" organizations (APEC, WTO, NAFTA, OECD, SPP), and to financial institutions (World Bank and IMF).

Billions of dollars which have contributed to the compromising of the health of Canadian citizens, from the annual Federal budget must be redirected (from the departments of Agriculture, Environment, Natural Resources and Transport) relocated from Department of Defence, and Foreign Affairs and realigned from the Department of Industry into promoting accessible and universal health care, into actively promoting environmentally sound practices, into instituting a fair and just transition program for affected workers and communities, and into removing poverty

Canadian governments have devolved power to corporations, and have not only permitted deregulation, privatization and voluntary compliance but also subsidized the production of

substances and activities that are harmful to human health and the environment. Concurrently, in proportion to individual taxation, corporate taxation has decreased from 50% in the 1950's, and should be increased to assist in ensuring the sustainability of the publicly funded health care system

COUNTERING THE RELAXING OF STANDARDS THROUGH HARMONIZATION UNDER THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP (SPP)

While, Canadian environmental standards, are lower in many areas than international standards, the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP), through the plan to harmonize standards with the United States, will lead to a further privatization of health care system and to the further reduction of standards related to the environment, and food security. The insatiable US demand for what is described, under the SSP, as "ensuring a reliable source of energy" will result in further pressure to exploit Canadian natural resources and to overlook environment and health standards.

ADVOCATING OF ELIMINATING THE MAJOR SOCIAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH PROBLEMS

Poverty is one of the major determinants of health problems, and, sadly, governments in Canada have failed to ensure the right to unadulterated food- without pesticides and not genetically engineered, the right to safe affordable housing, the right to safe drinking water, and the right to social security. Furthermore, Canada is obliged under the International Covenant of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights to prevent poverty through ensuring these rights. Canada has signed and ratified the International Covenant of Social, Economic and Cultural Rights but failed to include the provisions under the covenant in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The United States on the other hands has refused to ratify this covenant, and with the SPP there will be more pressure from the US to consider the entrenchment of these rights in the Canadian Constitution as a barrier to trade.

ADVANCING THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF HEALTH RELATED ISSUES

In 1992, member states, including Canada, Mexico and the United States [all currently involved with the negotiating the SPP], of the United Nations all recognized the interdependence of health, environment and poverty:

"We are confronted with the perpetuation of disparities between nations, and a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystem on which we depend for our well being." (Agenda 21, UNCED, 1992).

And subsequently in 1994:

"the growing awareness that population, poverty, patterns of production and consumption and other threats to the environment are so closely interconnected that none of them can be considered in isolation."(Preamble, 1.5., International Conference on Population and Development, 1994)

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Written by

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At the Canadian Medical Association Annual General Meeting, the emphasis must be on ensuring that standards embrace the highest tenable principles, not the lowest common denominator, on demanding the necessary resources to be reallocated to the preservation of the publicly funded, universally accessible, non two-tier, not for profit health care system.