



**CUPE LOCAL 500
PRESENTATION TO
WINNIPEG CITY COUNCIL
EPC PUBLIC HEARINGS**

**RE: PROPOSED WINNIPEG WATER
TREATMENT PLANT**

**CUPE Local 500
October 28, 1999**

INTRODUCTION

CUPE Local 500 is pleased to have the opportunity to appear before these public hearings on the question of a Water Treatment Plant for our City.

On February 1, 1999 we appeared before EPC on this subject matter (copy of presentation appended). Our concern at that time was with the scope of the review panel, particularly the inclusion of “alternative deliver (ASD) methods/concepts” in the scope of review.

While the ASD question is not part of these hearings we believe it is essential for City Council to be aware and mindful of the significant public policy questions surrounding water that are emerging in Canada and around the globe.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The United Nations estimates that one-half billion people today lack adequate access to fresh water.

The worldwide demand for water tripled between 1950 and 1990 and continues to grow exponentially. With world population at (6 billion today) expected to grow by 2.6 billion people by 2025, it is estimated that two-thirds of the population will be living in regions with serious water shortages.

While Canada has almost 25% of the world’s fresh water, there exists many threats to our water systems. The current debate regarding bulk exports of water is but one of a host of water management issues facing Canadians.

These issues formed a large part of those considered at a National Water Watch Summit held in Ottawa in September 1999. The Conference unanimously endorsed a resolution calling upon the federal and provincial governments to:

Adopt a strategy to conserve and protect water ecosystems and human life;

Pass legislation banning the bulk removal and export of water;

Work with municipalities to prevent the privatization of water and waste water services and fund much-needed upgrades and expansion of water infrastructure.

Note: Copy of the Summit’s Principles and Policies for Water in Canada is appended.

Also, appended please find a copy of the Statement of Principles of the Winnipeg Water Watch Committee, a coalition formed in early 1999 around the water issue.

With respect to municipal water infrastructure systems it is estimated that \$80 to \$90 billion in public investment will be required over the next 15 years to maintain present water infrastructure to build new infrastructure.

The proposed Winnipeg Water Treatment Plant is an example of this new infrastructure.

PROPOSED WINNIPEG WATER TREATMENT PLANT

Local 500 does not purport to have the expertise to speak to the questions surrounding water borne disease outbreak caused by chlorine resistant microorganisms.

Having said this, we believe there are a number of important questions for Council to consider, including:

While apparently not yet a legislative requirement, water treatment plants exist, or are being planned in most large Canadian cities. There is also a growing list of cities that have experienced public health risks by parasites entering their freshwater systems (ie. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Kelowna, BC and Dauphin, MB).

In light of the above points, should our City proceed with construction of a water treatment plant for both public health reasons and in anticipation of expected future legislative requirements.

In light of the fact that less than 3% of the water produced at large municipal water treatment plants is used for drinking, have we fully considered other options to meet public health requirements apart from a water treatment plant estimated to cost just over \$200 million.

Coincident with considering the question regarding construction of a water treatment plant should we not be formulating a campaign to ensure that senior levels of government assume an appropriate share of the capital costs of the new plant.

PUBLIC CONTROL OF WATER

Winnipeg's water system (fresh water supply, distribution, quality testing, waste water treatment and sewer systems) remains under public control and are operated by civic staff.

The proposed water treatment plant, in our view, must as well be operated by water and waste staff, and we urge Council to support this principle at the outset, assuming you proceed with construction of the water treatment plant.

Our recently concluded CUPE National Convention adopted a policy statement on water (copy appended) which outlines the many pitfalls associated with relinquishing control over our water systems.

There are countless examples throughout the world of bad experiences with private for-profit corporations operating municipal water systems. Closer to home, the Hamilton-Wentworth experience with privatizing management, operation and maintenance of its water system has been a disaster from a public policy perspective.

From both a financial and operational perspective the Hamilton-Wentworth experience has been a disaster (see appended summary of a 1999 study by John Anderson of McMaster University).

CONCLUSION

The proposed Winnipeg water treatment plant raises many complex financial and public health questions for City Council. We want to assure Council that Local 500 will work with you and the Water Waste Department to take all necessary steps to ensure that Winnipeggers continue to have access to safe and efficient water services.

Poll after poll confirms the public support for safe water systems. A 1998 poll conducted by the Toronto Environmental Alliance found that 72% of Toronto citizens supported the statement "it is important for our municipal water and sewer system to be publicly-owned and operated" (only 11% of respondents disagreed with this statement).

In summary, we urge Council to carefully consider all aspects of this important question and we pledge our Local to work with you to continue to serve our citizens' water needs.

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