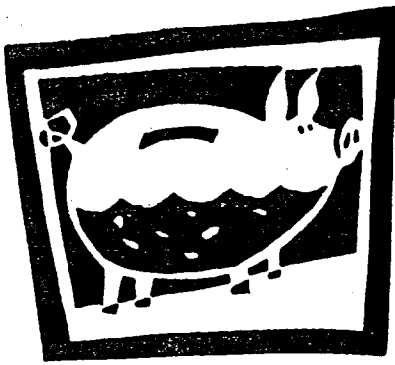




SAVE ONTARIO WATER

Media Release

For Immediate Release
December 5, 1996

SAVE ONTARIO WATER COALITION FORMED TO OPPOSE THE SALE OF PROVINCIAL WATER RESOURCES

A diverse group of concerned Ontarians have formed a new coalition to oppose plans to hand over control of Ontario's water and wastewater services to private interests. **Save Ontario Water** is a coalition of health and environmental organizations, municipal politicians and unions. It is calling on the Ontario government to hold public hearings on plans to sell the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA), a provincial Crown corporation. "The Ontario government's hasty action on this matter will profoundly affect the availability, affordability, health and safety of Ontario's most precious resource well into the next millennium," said spokesperson, Sarah Miller of the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

"Recent public opinion polls conducted by Insight Canada Research for the Ontario Municipal Water Association show that 76% of Ontarians support preserving public control of their community's drinking water systems. However, in Bill 26, this government did away with the previously existing requirement for a plebiscite on the sale of these public utilities. Today we are calling on other concerned citizens to join us in our efforts to regain public control over the fate of our water and wastewater services."

"I am very concerned about the implications of privatization for public health", said Peter Tabuns, the Chair of the City of Toronto's Board of Health. Since water was privatized in Britain in 1989, British citizens have suffered many consequences. These include water shortages, soaring water rates, a rise in dysentery and other public health problems caused by poor sanitation. The most vulnerable - the sick, elderly, mothers and children - have been affected when those in debt to the water companies had their water supply cut off for weeks at a time. Profit maximization for executives and shareholders has been given priority over pollution prevention. Funds needed for repair of aging and leaking water and sewage systems often went instead to other company ventures.

The Ontario Cabinet Committee on Privatization is considering the sale of the Ontario Clean Water Agency. A decision is apparently imminent and no public input is planned. Meanwhile, York Region, north of Toronto, has already gone the private sector route. A consortium of the British company, United Utility, and Consumer's Gas has drawn up several proposals for York Region's future water supplies. On December 19th, York Region Council will decide which multi-million dollar pipeline option - from Georgian Bay or Lake Simcoe - they will select to quench

York Region's thirst for development. "One thing is sure," said coalition member, John Jackson of Great Lakes United, "all options will result in profits flowing outside of Ontario. The environmental impacts will remain here on both ends of this pipe dream, lower water levels in Georgian Bay or Lake Simcoe and pipeline wastewater dumped into Lake Ontario. Public hearings are being circumvented as well on this project.

One third of Britain's water systems are now controlled by French water companies. "At least one of these French companies is among some 20 lining up at the Ontario Cabinet's door to buy the Ontario Clean Water Agency" said Leah Casselman, President of the Ontario Public Service Employee Union representing operators of OCWA's 77 water and 153 wastewater plants. OCWA also operates a further 116 municipally-owned plants. The Ontario government claims that this huge sell-off will result in savings for taxpayers. The experience in Britain, provides hard evidence otherwise.

Citizens expect Ontario's water resources to be responsibly managed. "Water conservation will be a concept of the past. Profits for these companies depend on promoting increased use and water wastage", said John Jackson of Great Lakes United.

"This government is guaranteeing that our water is sold" said Sid Ryan President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. "The *Who Does What Secretariat* is recommending downloading water and sewage treatment plants to municipalities. At the same time, the province is eliminating the Municipal Assistance Program for infrastructure upgrading and repair. Bereft municipalities are being forced into the short-term and short-sighted solution of selling out and turning over control to private multinationals."

The Save Ontario Water coalition urges the public to oppose the Ontario Cabinet's water privatization plans. Once the multinational corporations now jockeying for access to our water are given contracts they will be in a strategic position to export water outside Ontario. The Free Trade Agreements with the United States will facilitate their push to corner the North American water market in the next millennium. As stewards of over one fifth of the world's fresh water is this the legacy the people of Ontario want to leave for future generations?

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The current members of our Save Ontario Water coalition are:

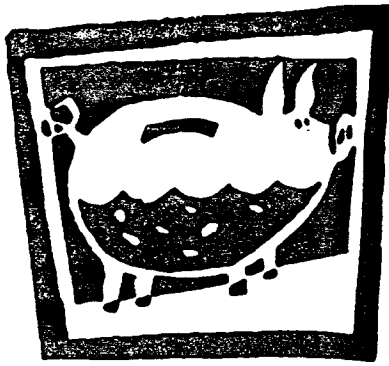
Canadian Auto Workers
Canadian Union Public Employees
Canadian Environmental Law Association
Great Lakes United
Greenpeace
Ontario Public Service Employee Union
Peterborough Eco-Council
Safe Sewage Committee
Toronto Environment Alliance
Women and Environments Education and Development (WEED)

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