

Deep Integration and Water

The world is running out of clean water. The American Southwest, in particular, is mining it for industrial and agricultural purposes, faster than nature can replenish it. Rather than reducing the amount of water they use, U.S. politicians and business leaders are looking north for an easy way out in the form of diversions from the Great Lakes and wholesale bulk water exports.

“Some have suggested [moving water in] abandoned pipelines that used to carry energy,” said George W. Bush, six months into his first presidency. “That’s a possibility. I would be open to any discussion.”

“[Water] wasn’t an issue when I was ambassador, but it was one that I always found puzzling that it was completely off the table,” former U.S. ambassador Paul Cellucci told a CanWest reporter in September 2006.

“It is nearly inevitable that bulk water exports from Canada ... will take place, given the political circumstances, within the next two to five years,” said Paul Michael Wihbey, president and founder of Global Water and Energy Strategy Team, during a September 2006 Business Forum in Banff, Alberta.

A Probe Research national survey released in July 2006 found that 74 per cent of Canadians are opposed to selling our water like a commodity to the U.S., but ongoing regulatory and policy harmonization between our two countries is leading us down that path. There are many reasons why this is a bad idea:

1. Water is not a renewable resource. Bulk exports and diversions remove it from the ecosystem permanently.

2. Water is a necessity of life. No one should be denied access to water because they can’t afford to pay for it.

3. Water could be threatened by trade agreements. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) defines water as a “service” and an “investment,” leaving Canadian water vulnerable to thirsty foreign investors. Once Canada allows water to be withdrawn and transported to other countries for large-scale industrial purposes, there will be no turning off the tap.

4. Water is not a commodity to be bought and sold. Bulk water exports will not address the issues of urban sprawl and wastage. It would be better to find solutions to the causes of water scarcity, instead of selling it to the highest bidder.

Canada needs a new National Water Policy that bans the export of water for profit, implements strict restrictions on water diversions, and recognizes a strong federal role in the protection of this valuable

resource. The Canadian government must also agree to enshrine the right to water in international law, ensuring that people all over the world are guaranteed access to safe water for drinking and sanitation.

Check out www.canadians.org for more information on what you can do to help save Canada’s water.

