Mayor Katz and members of the Executive Policy Committee, I am presenting the views of the Labour Election Committee, a progressive urban reform party dedicated to ending the domination of big business and developers in civic politics and to supporting the interests of labour and small businesses who make up the large majority of Winnipeg.

Last year we made a presentation to you that rejected the neo-liberal cuts and privatizations that were steadily impoverishing Winnipeg, creating injustice and inequality.

We see nothing new in this budget. It is a budget that will still make our city a place where the wealthy few can enjoy swimming pools in their back yards but the majority of youth in the inner city get spray pads and fewer swimming hours in the endangered public pools.

While we are on the topic of water, the Labour Election Committee would like to emphasize that we see no need to establish a new water authority. The only reason to establish a new water authority, in our view, is so that it can be removed from public scrutiny and control.

The water utility must be under full democratic control and completely transparent and accountable to City Council, the way it is right now as a department. We don't want to see a situation where, because a tiny portion of the utility is privatized – for example, its payroll department like in the Winnipeg Health Authority – then finding information about the utility becomes impossible because of so-called privacy issues – information like an intention to sell even more of the utility to private interests.

Last year we said that "...the Labour Election Committee believes ... if Canada or Manitoba experiences an economic slowdown as many expect could happen, that is all the more reason for spending to be maintained and even increased by and for cities.

"Winnipeg should expect more, not less, funding during an economic slowdown as a way to compensate for the failures of the private sector; the public sector can help maintain jobs and consumer spending during an economic crisis."

The federal budget presented in January is a huge failure from this standpoint, since it makes new spending dependent on shared funding from municipalities. How cities that are already operating on a break-even basis with an eroding tax base during a crisis can afford such spending has not been addressed.

I don't think that the Harper Conservative government proposes that we raise new money by taxing the wealthy in Winnipeg. But **we** do. The wealthy and big businesses are the ones with money, and the Labour Elections Committee therefore thanks the Harper Conservatives for their budget measure that points directly to the only solution that can make their budget work: fair taxation.

The only other solution is that the Manitoba budget must provide more to Winnipeg and other municipalities so that they can accept the Harper Conservative government's offer.

It is no good to throw your hands up and say you can't do anything – it is your job to make noise for the City of Winnipeg. If you go quietly, where is our leadership?

It is clear enough that we are well into a very serious economic crisis, a crisis which is multi-dimensional in scope. It is a crisis which has not just one ten trillion dollar-problem but several concerning the environment, expensive and dangerous military preparations, and the core problem of world hunger, impoverishment and unemployment.

We have to adopt policies that are fundamentally different than those that have brought us to this debacle. I don't want that to be the quote that we bring from our presentation to you next year, without any action being taken on your part.

There are two basic questions that the Labour Election Committee understands need to be addressed.

Firstly, will Winnipeg's budget prolong the agony of the present economic crisis and stall action on the complex and serious problems confronting us, or will the budget help to shorten the economic crisis?

The measures in the proposed budget are a total failure in this regard. The layoffs and spending freezes will only prolong the agony of the crisis. It is another stop-gap budget, a budget with no vision except possibly to help the big developers who own or have options on the few remaining parcels of land available for suburban development.

It is a budget that is only good in one aspect, that it does not carry out the full, reactionary promises of the majority of City Council; for example, by eliminating the business tax and shifting the tax burden on to working people and small businesses, or by privatizing even more operations or selling public assets.

Maybe the protests and presentations around last year's budget did some good after all.

It is a budget that will continue to gut the City's inner core of services that people need and to impose hardship on people in the suburbs because of the unsustainable model of urban development that has been led by the big developers and who still dominate City Hall.

It is a budget that fails on several measures. There is no change of course to create affordable mass and rapid transit in a timely manner, to improve housing, to increase library hours, to improve parks and recreation facilities and access, to create a system of affordable, universal child-care. All these measures would create jobs and make Winnipeg a better city.

Secondly, for how long will Winnipeg and along with it Manitoba remain a low wage, racist backwater? And what is this City Council going to do about it?

You are so quick to pass resolutions decrying racism but do nothing to change the system that has used racism to flourish for two centuries.

The facts about the average weekly wage in Manitoba are known to all and need not be dwelled on this presentation.

But there is a long way to go in Manitoba to end racism. and Winnipeg must do its part. This province was established through the unequal negotiation with the Métis people who resisted losing their land and rights, and has continued to operate in the interest of the non-Aboriginal business elite ever since, including the large Eastern business big shots who still dominate the Canadian economy.

Racism plays a big role in driving down the wages of all workers in the province, especially anti-Aboriginal racism. It acts like a giant anchor on the wages of all workers.

Winnipeg has privatized many hundreds of jobs, such as garbage collection. We argue that if we are to be a truly just society in Winnipeg with full pay and job equity, surveys of who is hired and paid by this City budget must take into account all the jobs that have been contracted out, all the workers who are hired by contracts extended to your corporate pals in places like garbage collection.

If there is a giant difference in the workforce who is hired in garbage collection and in the rest of the workforce, especially in management positions – data about which I find are hard to understand in your annual reports about job equity – if there is a significant difference. then the Labour Election Committee would end the contracts with any contracted out service on the basis of violating the human rights of Winnipeg citizens, on the basis of committing a terrible racist crime against the people.

(We don't care about what free trade deals may say about your inability to reverse privatizations and rather admire the example of what Danny Williams in Newfoundland and Labrador did with the property of Abitibi-Bowwater.)

The Labour Election Committee gives notice that it wants this data for garbage collection and other contracted out services gathered and made available to the public before next year's budget.

Finally, we hope that after this budget is passed that you'll join us in the celebrations to mark the 90th anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike over the next few months. It would be a positive step to see members of City Council participate in the annual May Day parade and help celebrate the Strike which was one of the greatest working class struggles in Canadian history.

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In the moment I have left, I want to close on a personal note. My whole being tells me that Labour is entitled to all it creates.

I was brought up in poverty in a time of relative prosperity, when fewer people teetered on the brink of personal bankruptcy. If not for medicare, student loans, the daycare subsidy and the rent subsidy I could never have gotten an education or raised my six children. Now that they are grown and looking to make a life, there is far less for them in a time of unprecedented, critical problems.

We will never make Winnipeg a better place by every year putting more police officers on the streets, but by giving everyone a good-paying job, and full access to education and quality housing and child-care. That is the only way to make people secure. That is the exact opposite of what we see today, building more jails and hiring more police officers.

Presented on behalf of the Labour Election Committee
March 11, 2009
Cheryl-Anne Carr