

THIRSTING FOR JUSTICE

"DEFENDING THE GLOBAL WATER COMMONS"



© water for people

Water wars:

Exploring the 20th-century neo-liberal context and the struggle against water privatisation.

Voices of resistance:

From North and South, Latin America and Ireland.

Global challenges

Water and Gender. Water and Youth. Water and Debt.
Water and Culture. Water and Environment...



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EDITORIAL

On behalf of LASC I'm delighted to present you with the programme for Latin America Week 2007, 'Thirsting for Justice: Defending the Global Water Commons'.

Latin America Week (L.A.W.) is an annual festival of development education, campaigning solidarity and cultural events, co-ordinated by LASC but implemented by a host of organisations and individuals around the country. It focuses on a particular theme each year.

Last year's Latin America Week (L.A.W. 2006, 'Draining Away Our Wealth: Ownership of Natural Resources') kick-started Year One of a three-year period in which we would work on this theme. Last year our intention was to introduce the theme, and to research potential action points we could then focus upon. Our Latin American guests spoke of their experiences with grassroots struggles around water, oil, gas and illegal logging, which opened a debate on privatisation, particularly the privatisation of gas and water which are hugely contested here in Ireland.

In the course of our research and communications over the past year, it became clear that the greatest potential for offering our solidarity to grassroots struggles for justice in Latin America, as well as for learning from Latin America how best to fight injustice at home, lay in water.

Water is the most vital substance for all forms of life. Its ownership is a matter of vital importance for anyone concerned with the planet and with human dignity. To restrict access to water only to those who can pay represents the ultimate commodification, and has aroused fierce public resistance.

In Ireland too it is a burning issue. In Northern Ireland the 'We Won't Pay' campaign is attracting cross-community support, fighting the London government's plan to privatise Northern Irish water. Privatisation of public water was defeated in the Republic in the mid-1990's, but is believed to be re-entering via the 'back door' of water charges for commercial users (see within).

L.A.W. 2007 concentrates on the lessons that we here in Ireland can learn from the Latin American struggles for access to water. How did some of our brothers and sisters in Latin America manage to regain control of their water services in the face of neoliberalism? How did they manage to throw some of the most powerful water corporations in the world out of their cities?

These are success stories – or are they? We look forward to hearing what the situation is in Bolivia after the Water Wars and after president Evo Morales set up the Water Ministry, the first of its kind. And what the Water Referendum (organised by popular demand) has really meant for the most marginalised sectors of society in Uruguay. Or how the people of San Cristobal de Las Casas are faring after the mass mobilisations that put a stop to water privatisation in their community.

We have assembled here a collection of articles to explain why we are working on water privatisation, to give a snapshot of the global water justice movement as it stands in early 2007, and to give detailed background information on the various struggles around water about which our invited speakers will tell us.

The speakers we have invited will participate in workshops, conferences and other events all around the island of Ireland. They have all taken risks to speak out as leaders of their respective movements, and are no less than heroes of the struggle for water justice, which is no more than the latest phase of the 500-year struggle of Latin Americans to resist oppression and exploitation. You can meet them in small development education workshops during the Week, be inspired by their visionary activism, and explore and contribute your own attitudes, views and information. Please see the list of events, at the centre of this publication for a workshop near you.

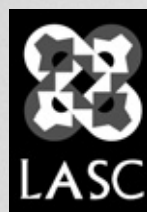
As an article in this programme states, 'the global water justice movement is young, and it is critical to share capacity, ideas, strategy and victories.' L.A.W. 2007 is a part of this global movement, and launches Year Two of our current strategic plan.

Year Three involves taking action for change, and we expect that a specific campaign will grow out of this year's Latin America Week. We hope that you can participate, and help shape our solidarity with Latin America for the years to come.

Azucena Bermúdez
 LASC Coordinator

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WATER WARS – THE NEOLIBERAL BACKGROUND

By Aidan Cahill, LASC Chairperson

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Water war in Bolivia Photo by Muireann de Barra

Why would a democratically elected government hand over public property, in the face of enormous public opposition, to a wasteful, predatory and incompetent private sector?

Globally, water wars have only been a feature of the past decade. In this article we examine the 20th-century context of a 21st-century phenomenon.

The 21st century's first great victory against corporate power was won high in the South American Andes, when the citizens of Cochabamba, Bolivia successfully resisted the privatisation of their drinking water services. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary working people battled police in the streets in early 2000, in what became known as the first Water War.

Why would a democratically elected government hand over public property, in the face of enormous public opposition, to a wasteful, predatory and incompetent private sector? Why would it, beat, imprison and even kill its own citizens for expressing this opposition?

The story stretches back to the mid-twentieth century when the dominant economic theory in those countries sometimes known as 'the West' was based on Keynesian economics, with its emphasis on taxation and redistribution of wealth from rich to poor, albeit within a capitalist framework. Unions made gains in the post World War Two decades in terms of salary and worker protections, enough to threaten established financial interests.

The doctrine of 'neoliberalism' – whose name harks back to the mid-nineteenth-century *laissez-faire* economics which led, amongst other things, to economic stagnation and famine in both Latin America and Ireland – was resurrected. It had been developed in the 1930's but was seen as unworkably right-wing in the post-fascism era.

Neoliberal policy was researched, and pushed at government level, in the USA and Europe by conservative think-tanks and powerful lobby groups, financed to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars by enormously wealthy individuals and groups, and given its first outing on Sept. 11th, 1973, in Chile. That

was the date Augusto Pinochet, backed by US companies, the CIA and Henry Kissinger, overthrew the leftist government of Salvador Allende in a bloody coup. The Chicago Boys, a group of neoliberal economists from the University of Chicago, rushed to Chile to advise the new military government.

Nationalisations were reversed, public assets were sold off, and natural resources and social security were privatised. Foreign firms were courted, indulged and guaranteed the right to repatriate profits. (Incidentally, thirty years later the same neoliberalism would be brought to Iraq, also by the gun, using the other September 11th in 2001 as a pretext.)

In the decades since, international aid donors – most importantly the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the development aid programmes of some rich countries – have insisted upon poor countries adopting 'sound' economic policies, meaning of course neoliberal ones, as a condition of vital loans and aid. This is fortunately not true of the Republic of Ireland's official aid programme, Irish Aid, which has been singled out for praise in this regard.

Thanks to the Debt Crisis – generated in no small part by World Bank policy in the 1970's – governments in the Global South have had no choice but to implement policy which is against the interests of the majority of their citizens. 'Free' trade agreements, a pillar of neoliberalism, have been forced upon them, ensuring a flow of resources from the poor to the rich at the minimum cost, as we saw in Latin America Week (L.A.W.) 2003 on the Free trade Area of the Americas.

The promise of neoliberalism is that, while there may be some economic pain in the short term – particularly for the poor, who for example may have to put up with the deaths of their children if they cannot afford to pay water charges – in the long term the rising tide of economic growth will 'lift all boats'.

Despite the many disasters neoliberal policy has visibly created, it has been relentlessly promoted by those who identify with power, and has risen to virtually unchallenged dominance in politics and economics worldwide

Even this scenario, far from desirable, has not been borne out by experience. In most regions of the world, economic growth and improvements in health and literacy have slowed to a snail's pace since the Reagan/Thatcher years. Inequalities, globally and locally, have spiralled upwards in the neoliberal decades, most of all within those countries which have applied neoliberal policies with the greatest enthusiasm. While it has brought booms to countries such as Ireland, naturally welcome to those who benefit, booms bring their own problems and leave economies vulnerable to a 'bust' when capital moves on.

Some particularly arrant examples of neoliberalism's failures (or successes, viewed from the viewpoint of the super-rich) are being played out at the moment in Ireland.

The West Link toll bridge, built for €38 million, is being bought back by the Government for €600 million, after having raised €400 million for its owners in tolls.



People marching in Bolivia to reclaim their water Photo by Muireann de Barra

The British health insurer BUPA pulled out of the lucrative Irish market when it was no longer allowed freely to cherry-pick younger, healthier clients. It may take up to €100 million in accumulated profit out of this country's economy with it. (See L.A.W. 2004, 'The Commodification of Health', on www.lasc.ie)

The controversial deal by corrupt former minister Ray Burke to exploit the Corrib gas field means the Shell-led consortium will own all the gas extracted from it, and can sell it to Bord Gáis at full market rates. The Irish state will receive no royalties and no share of the gas. (See L.A.W. 2005 on the ownership of natural resources)

Despite the many disasters neoliberal policy has visibly created, it has been relentlessly promoted by those who identify with power, and has risen to virtually unchallenged dominance in politics and economics worldwide. It is usually presented as inevitable, a force like gravity. But it is important to understand that this vast experiment we are all being forced to live under has been created by people with a purpose.

Once you grasp this, you can also understand that what some people have created, other people can change. Latin Americans have been at the forefront of this change and we hope that in this year's Latin America Week we will learn more about how we can support, and learn from, them.

How neoliberalism causes water wars will be examined more specifically in the next article, 'Enclosing the Water Commons'.

A longer version of this article can be found on www.lasc.ie



“Cartoon from the ‘No Nos Tientes’ journal, Guatemala. The figure in the middle represents the President of the country, offering telecommunications, broadcasting, rail and air transport. ‘Hey buddy! And when do we start to sell the air , too?’ The Campresino on the right thinks of milk, beans and bread: Bloody Hell! Now these idiots don’t even want us to breathe”



▲ Water is the only drink for a wise man. *Henry David Thoreau*

ENCLOSING THE WATER COMMONS

By Aidan Cahill, LASC Chariperson

* * * * *



Photo by Marco Llanos

The previous article, 'Water Wars – The Neoliberal background' explored how free-market economic theory, often referred to by its critics as neoliberalism, views almost every sphere of human life as a tradable commodity and serves primarily the super-rich. Here we examine the specific significance of the privatisation of water.

Advocates of privatisation argue that governments, particularly in the global South, often do not have the resources to invest in water systems or to maintain and operate them adequately

Nobody can live more than a few days without fresh water. Only 2.5% of the water on this earth is fresh, and over two-thirds of this is locked in the polar ice caps or glaciers. About 20% of the world's population now lives in 'water-stressed' regions, where fresh water is being depleted faster than it can be replaced. Water is becoming a scarce resource.

Water is of huge symbolic significance in every human culture. Our bodies are 70% water. Neoliberalism's attempt to refashion our relationship with this water has aroused huge resistance, has sparked an instinctive welling-up of the human spirit against injustice and for dignity. Nowhere is this truer than in Latin America.

Nonetheless, water costs money to treat and distribute, especially in rural areas. Someone must pay. **Advocates of privatisation argue that governments, particularly in the global South, often do not have the resources to invest in water systems or to maintain and operate them adequately.** As a result, many people are not connected to a pipe network, and they can pay 10 times more for the same amount of water.

Therefore, the argument runs, money to expand the network should be raised from the private sector. The promise of 'cost-recovery' from paying consumers will make it attractive for companies to invest, thus spreading the network and giving more people access to clean water. Competition and private-sector efficiency will keep customer costs to an acceptable level.

Cheered on by this type of rhetoric – and by the water multinationals – governments rushed to privatise public water utilities through the 1990's. In some cases, freshwater lakes were privatised, and it became illegal for citizens to drink from them. In Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2000 **it was even illegal to trap rainwater without permission from the water company. The rain had been privatised.**

But the glowing future envisaged in the neoliberal theory failed to materialise. Mass protests broke out, provoked by water rate increases of up to 500%. In some cases, cut-offs of those who could not afford to pay had resulted in disease outbreaks, while even those who did pay received a poor service often including contaminated water.

These 'water wars' have resulted in the cancellation of contracts in some cases. Many other contracts were terminated by governments after private water operators failed to deliver on promised investment to expand water pipe networks to poor areas. This was entirely predictable, since private companies only invest where they can make a profit, not where there is greatest need.

The argument that competition – one of neoliberalism's sacred cows – would bring good service and reasonable prices is seldom heard now. Even if it was correct, it has seldom been tested because Suez, Vivendi/Veolia, Thames, SAUR and Anglian – the world's largest water companies – are connected by a global web of joint ventures designed more to protect their interests than to stimulate 'market conditions'.

▲ The cycle of life is intricately tied up with the cycle of water. Jacques Cousteau

it was even illegal to trap rainwater without permission from the water company. The rain had been privatised



“People who are not connected to a pipe network can pay 10 times more for the same amount of water”

Critics of privatisation tend to favour publicly-funded water systems, with the money being raised from an equitable tax system, or from cross-subsidisation from high-volume users – mostly industry – to low-volume users, mostly domestic and the poor

The opponents of neoliberalism are starting to respond. At the World Water Forum in Mexico in 2006, an unprecedented 30,000 people marched in defence of public water as part of a global commons, rather than a commodity. There are grassroots groups of ‘water warriors’ all over the world, in varied but related struggles.

Water corporations have retrenched, toning down their rhetoric – they now tend to avoid the term ‘privatisation’, preferring instead to talk about ‘decentralisation’, ‘civil society partnership’ and ‘sustainable development’. Despite this, water privatisation is very much alive, and – despite its defeat in the Republic of Ireland in the mid 1990’s – will be tried again here long or short. It is currently being attempted in Northern Ireland.

We have assembled a collection of articles here to give a snapshot of the global water justice movement. They range from personal eye witness accounts of water struggles from participants in Latin America and Ireland to analysis of the global movement itself. The particular impacts of water injustice on women and girls, Travellers and youth are looked at, and the major relevant water corporations are examined individually.

In last year’s Latin America Week, we studied the ownership of natural resources. We invited speakers involved in grassroots struggles in Latin America and Ireland on the issues surrounding gas, oil, water and illegal logging.

These themes were worked upon in Year One of our three-year strategic plan. It became clear that working upon the ownership of water contained the most potential for offering our solidarity to grassroots struggles for justice in Latin America, as well as learning from Latin America how best to challenge the neoliberalism seeping into all aspects of our society.

Any veteran of Latin America Weeks past will not fail to notice that most of the issues we have covered in the past decade are tied in with water. This, too, influenced our decision to focus upon it as the natural resource of choice to begin Year Two of our current three-year strategic plan. Year Three involves action for change, and we expect that a specific campaign will grow out of this year’s Latin America Week. We hope that you can participate, and help shape our solidarity with Latin America for the years to come.

Alternatives to water privatisation

Critics of privatisation tend to favour publicly-funded water systems, with the money being raised from an equitable tax system, or from cross-subsidisation from high-volume users – mostly industry – to low-volume users, mostly domestic and the poor, with a set amount sufficient for basic needs supplied free of charge. They call for reform of democratically accountable, public water utilities, and point out that while some public water companies are inefficient and give a poor service, a growing number are providing a good service to their users. Latin America and Ireland are rich in examples of clean, affordable water being delivered to those in need. When given sufficient support, public utilities have demonstrated themselves to be transparent, accountable and efficient.

▲ Thousands have lived without love, not one without water. *W.H. Auden*

WATER STRUGGLES IN LATIN AMERICA * * * * *



People's Summit in Cordoba, Argentina condemns Suez. (photo from [Comisión Popular par la Recuperación del Agua](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/waterprivitization/latinamerica), published in: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/waterprivitization/latinamerica>)

ARGENTINA

Argentina has suffered for more than a decade while being used as the global guinea pig for water privatization experiments. However, after years of social turmoil surrounding these failed experiments (lack of investments in the maintenance, repairs and expansion of water utilities, rate hikes, cut-offs for those who could not afford the service; water contamination due to lack of appropriate treatment, on-going disputes regarding contractual incompliance) Suez and other major water corporations are going home.

BOLIVIA

Bolivia is one of Latin America's poorest countries, where one third of the population has no access to clean water and seventy percent of the people live below the poverty line. Yet the Bolivians are determined to reclaim their rights and their dignity. The movements to defend water, and all natural resources and public services, have grown stronger and bolder in recent years and they have even managed to end Suez's profit making activities in Bolivia.



*Water "service" provided by Suez in El Alto, Bolivia
Photo Muireann de Barra*

CHILE

Chile has been one of the most privatization-friendly countries in Latin America, privatizing its water sector in the 1990s. However, with the new centre-left president, Michelle Bachelet, elected in January 2006, there could be a shift in the neo-liberal policies of privatization that have governed Chile and allowed for the distribution of its most precious resource to be controlled by corporations for private profit.

ECUADOR

In October 2000, just months after the people of Bolivia threw Bechtel out of Cochabamba, this very same company signed a water privatization contract in Guayaquil, Ecuador, a city of almost 2 million inhabitants. After years of poor service, water cut-offs, flooding, and unsafe drinking water, the residents of Guayaquil are getting organized to demand their human rights – which include the right to clean and affordable water.

EL SALVADOR

El Salvador is a country in crisis. Ninety percent of the country's natural water is contaminated, and half the population drinks untreated water. The people of El Salvador are struggling to have their most basic needs satisfied while the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank continue pushing the disastrous recipe of privatization.

HONDURAS

In August 2003, thousands of protestors demonstrated against the policies imposed by the IMF, which included water privatization policies. Eighty percent of the 6.5 million people in Honduras live in poverty, although the country has continued repaying debt to the IMF and to other creditors at the rate of \$32 millions in 2002 and another \$16.3 millions in 2003.

MEXICO

The Fox administration is trying hard to push forward the water privatization agenda in Mexico. However, in a country that has had 20 years of failed neo-liberal policies imposed by the national government, the IMF and the World Bank, privatization is very unpopular. Communities across the country are getting organized to defend their rivers, streams, aquifers and lakes.

NICARAGUA

In Nicaragua, where serious problems in the water sanitation and supply sector are already limiting the access to clean water as a public resource, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) are promoting a water privatization policy that will make it even more difficult for Nicaraguans of all classes, but mostly the poorest among them, to have access to clean water at affordable rates.



Honduras holds National Conference in Defence of Water & Rivers (photo by Erasto Reyes, published in <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/waterprivitization/latinamerica>)

PERU

Reforms for the public water sector designed by the international financial institutions in the 1990s caused water utilities to collapse into economic and financial crisis, while workers and consumers suffered negative economic, social and public health consequences.



Unions lead protest against water privatization in Lima, March 2004
Photo www.acorn.org

PUERTO RICO

Puerto Rico has too often served as a guinea pig for corporate privatization policies. French water corporations such as Veolia and Suez both attempted to privatize water systems on this island. These companies eventually pulled out of Puerto Rico, being faced with outraged consumers and the government unwillingness to pay the bill.

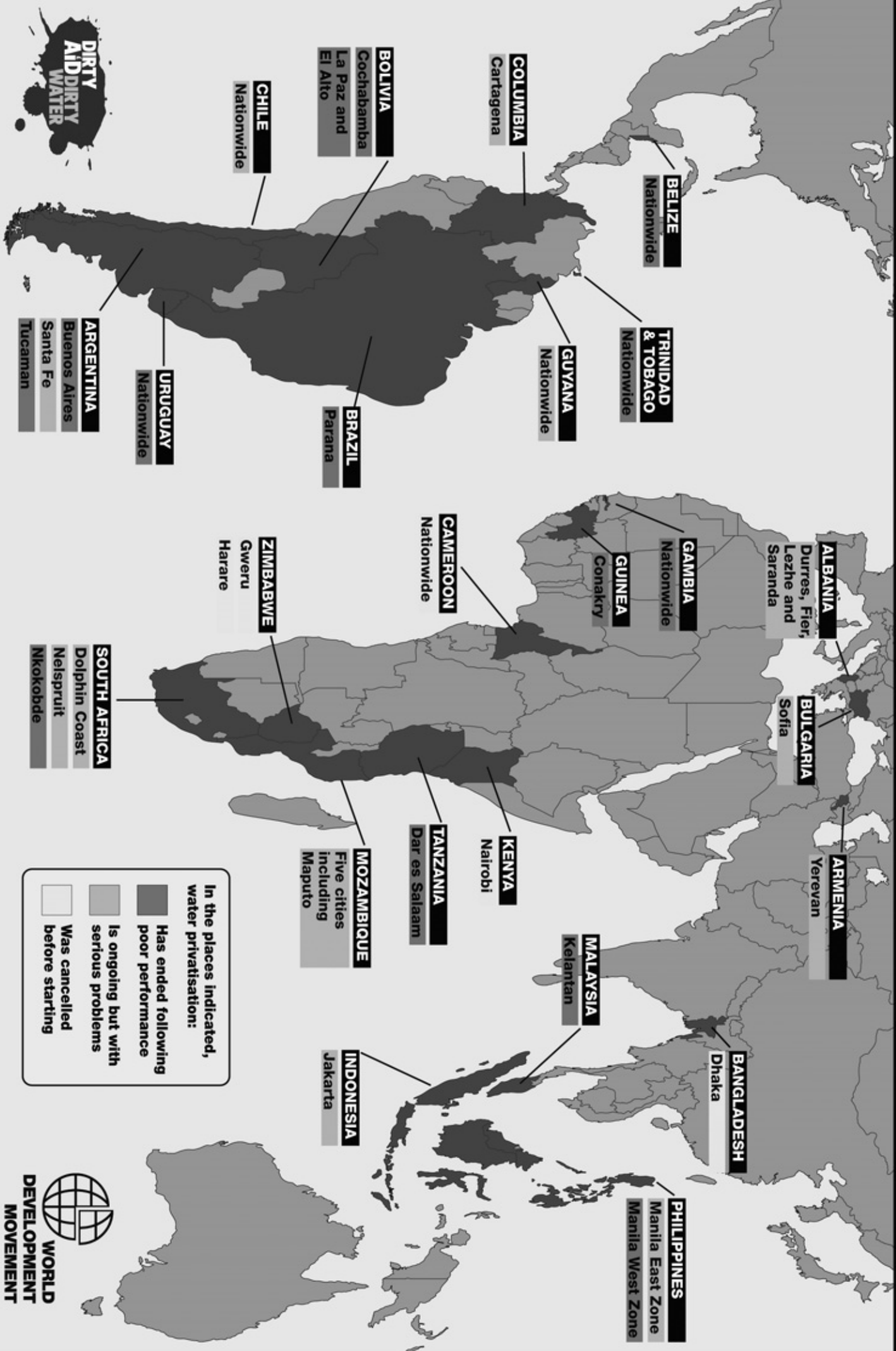
URUGUAY

Uruguay has gained a landmark victory in the struggle to defend water as a public good and a human right. In 2005 a constitutional reform was approved via popular referendum. This reform banned any privatization of water and defined water as a human right and a public natural resource. It remains now to be seen how the government will proceed to implement this constitutional reform through its policies.



1,500,000 Uruguayans said YES. Picture: RealWorldRadio

▲ By means of water, we give life to everything. *Koran, 21:30*



WATER STRUGGLES IN IRELAND * * * * *

the introduction of a charge was seen as the stalking horse by which privatisation of the service would be introduced

BEATING THE WATER CHARGES IN DUBLIN

By Gregor Kerr, member Workers Solidarity Movement and former Secretary of Federation of Dublin Anti Water Charge Campaigns

The mid 1990s saw a titanic battle between Dublin communities and the local authorities over attempts by the Councils to impose a water charge. People power, a mass refusal to pay and strong community resistance were successful in forcing the Councils to back down. For example, when the Council cut off people's water for non-payment, plumbers would clandestinely reconnect them.

When the charges were initially mooted, opposition came for two reasons. Firstly, ordinary workers were fed up with the inequities in the taxation system. While big business and the wealthy availed of tax breaks and evaded paying their share of the tax bill, it was seen that yet again working class people were being asked to foot the bill.

Secondly, and just as importantly, **the introduction of a charge was seen as the stalking horse by which privatisation of the service would be introduced.**

Campaigners looked to what had already happened in Britain in terms of the privatisation of a service that was seen as a basic right and determined not to allow things to go in the same direction.

As communities in Northern Ireland gear up for the battle against water charges, they can take heart from the successful campaign in the South a decade ago. That campaign proved that people power and a mass refusal to pay were tactics that the authorities were unable to defeat.

An account of the anti-water charge campaign can be found at http://www.wsm.ie/news_viewer/1690

OPPOSITION TO WATER CHARGES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

By Gary Mulcahy, Secretary, We Won't Pay Campaign

No other issue in recent memory has done more to unite Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland than the British Government's plans to introduce water charges.

This April over 700,000 water bills will be delivered to homes in the North. The average charge will initially be in the region of £314 per year, but in an attempt to soften their impact on people the Government has decided to phase the introduction of the charges over two years. In 2009 a price review will see further increases.

Householders in Northern Ireland already pay for water and sewerage services through the rates system and general taxation. The combined increase in rates and the introduction of water charges will mean increases in expenditure in excess of £1,000 every year for tens of thousands of families. According to official Government statistics over 500,000 people are currently living below the poverty line. The introduction of water charges will push many more into poverty and will financially cripple entire communities.

In April, the water service will be transferred into a Go-Co or Government-owned company called Northern Ireland Water Ltd. (NIWL). A Go-Co is described by the Government as 'an intermediate step towards privatisation'. The plan is to introduce water charges to secure a reliable secure source of revenue to NIWL so it can then be given away to private companies who are out to make as much profit as they wish.

The We Won't Pay Campaign has succeeded in defeating the Government's arguments and has built almost universal opposition to their plans. A mass boycott of the charges would make it impossible for the Government to proceed with full-scale privatisation. Movements against the poll tax in Britain and water charges in the south of Ireland have shown that mass non-payment, through a membership-based campaign democratically organised in the communities, can defeat unjust taxes and charges. The local politicians cannot be trusted. Even though they claim to oppose water charges, in the previous Assembly the four ruling parties agreed to introduce water charges.



The aim of the We Won't Pay Campaign is to organise people in the communities to stand together in solidarity and refuse to pay the charges. Over 80,000 people have so far signed the campaigns non-payment pledge, but this is the mere tip of the iceberg.

The We Won't Pay Campaign is confident we can force the British Government or Northern Ireland Assembly to scrap water charges. If you are interested in joining the campaign then contact us at 028 90 311778 or visit our website at www.wewontpaycampaign.com

No other issue in recent memory has done more to unite Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland than the British Government's plans to introduce water charges

▲ Throughout the history of literature, the guy who poisons the well has been the worst of all villains. *Anonymous*

Water privatization

in Sligo?

THE introduction of water metering and charging saw for the first time in Sligo a private company, in this case the multi-national water company Veolia (see Veolia box in “Water Wars – Why?” article) placed between the citizen and a fresh clean water supply. So far, the vast majority of citizens receive their water through a publicly owned and managed system. While it appears that Veolia’s involvement in water supply in Sligo at present is confined to meter reading and billing, members of Community-Alliance Sligo are worried that this role will grow over time and will lead to the full privatisation of water in the future.

There is also discontent in the small businesses sector in Sligo. The County Council recently increased the cost of water services to €5.68 per 1,000 gallons. Water charges in Sligo have increased by 162% between 2002 and 2006. Pdraig O’Grady, regional director, IBEC North West, fears that the cost of these charges and the expense of the water metering process for businesses in Sligo are putting jobs at risk. He pointed out that many companies in Sligo are indigenous family owned businesses employing less than twenty people and as such are unable to absorb further cost increases. For further information, please see:

<http://www.sligococo.ie/Services/WaterServices/Downloads/TheFile,1750,en.pdf>

Water

protest

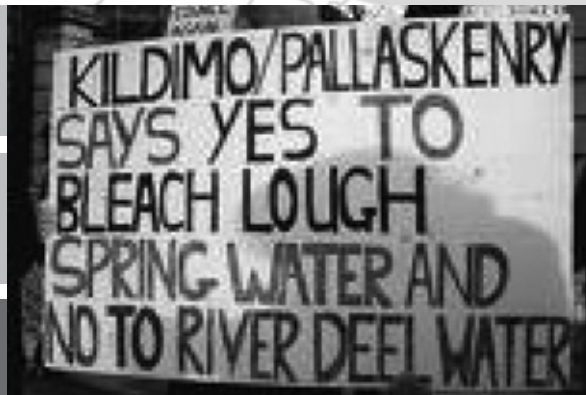
in Limerick

The residents of Pallaskenry and Kildimo, West Limerick, are protesting against the planned replacement of the community water source, which started in June 2006. The Limerick County Council wants to replace the present water supply, which is currently sourced from a local lake named Bleach Lough, with the water from the River Deel, which locals say is badly polluted.

The long running dispute over the Pallaskenry and Kildimo water supply is due to move to Brussels at the end of February. The Petitions Committee of the European Parliament has invited representatives from the group that wants to retain the supply from Bleach Lough, to make their case before the Committee. This comes after written submissions were accepted last summer.

For more information please see:

<http://www.friendsoftheireishenvironment.net/papers/categories.php?op=newindex&catid=16>



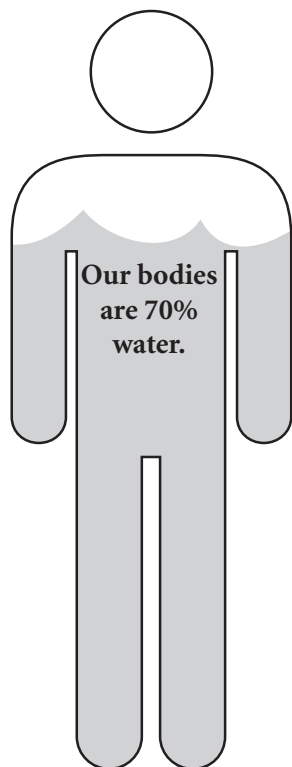
*Protest in Limerick
Indymedia®*

▲ Water is a moving, wandering thing, and must of necessity continue to be common by the law of nature. *William Blackstone*

WATER FACTS¹

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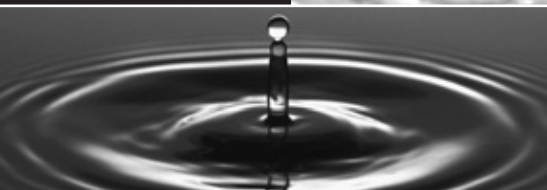
Every 8 seconds a child dies from contaminated water



USE OF WATER

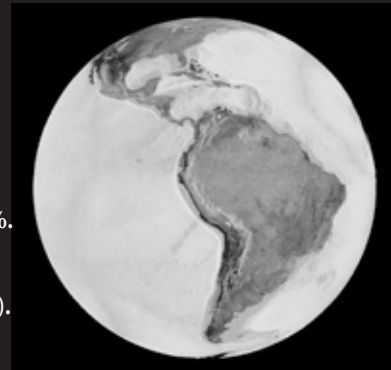
- ~ Without water we would die within three days
- ~ Every 8 seconds a child dies from contaminated water
- ~ City dwellers in the Majority World may pay up to 50 times as much for water as city dwellers in Europe and America
- ~ 25 million people die each year from contaminated water. That's equivalent to the entire population of Canada.

~ A leaky faucet that loses a drop per second loses 16 bathtubs full a month, and 10,000 litres a year.



The surface of our plane is 70% water.

- **Total water:** 1,386 million km³.
- **Salt water:** 1,351 million km³, 97.5%.
- **Fresh water:** 35 million km³, 2.5% (30.5% available, 69.5% unavailable).



Salt water: 97.5%

Fresh water: 2.5%

- ~ 40% The increase in global water use expected by 2020 (United Nations Environment Programme, GEO-Global Environment Outlook 3, Past, Present and Future Perspectives)
- ~ The average amount of water used by 60,000 Thai villagers per day: 6,500 cubic meters. The average amount of water used by one golf course in Thailand per day: 6,500 cubic meters
- ~ The degree of consumption of this scarce resource mirrors the gross inequalities of today's world:
 - An Australian uses on average a 1,000 litres a day
 - A USA citizen uses 300-400 litres
 - A European uses 100-200 litres
 - A Sub-Saharan African 10-20 litres
- ~ As the world's population increased three-fold in the 20th century, water consumption increased seven-fold due to increased need for industry and commercialised agriculture:

~ It is estimated that only 55% of the water that is available is used; 45% is wasted through evaporation during irrigation, leakages, and inefficient distribution

~ Twice as much water was used worldwide in 2000 as in 1960

~ 60% of the worlds rivers have been dammed

BOTTLED WATER

~ Average consumption of bottled water per person per year 2002 or latest available:

🍷 Asia: 7 litres

🍷 East Europe: 20 litres

🍷 West Europe: 101 litres

🍷 USA: 75 litres

~ Sales of bottled water in the USA leapt by 11% in one year between 2000 and 2001.

~ The World Bank estimates the global trade in water to be US\$1,000 trillion in 2001

~ Americans empty 2.5 million plastic water bottles an hour. Each one takes 500 years to decompose.

~ 125 of all cases of food poisoning in Britain are caused by bottled water

ACCESS TO WATER

~ **One billion.** The number of people worldwide who do not have any water within a 15 minute walk of their home

~ **1.4 billion.** The estimated number of people worldwide who lack access to clean drinking water.

~ **2.4 billion.** The estimated number of people who lack access to sanitation. Most are in Africa and Asia.

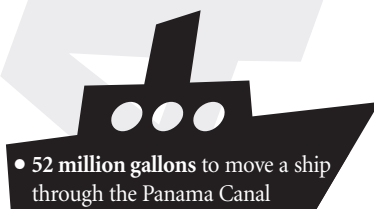
~ **\$30 billion.** The projected cost per year of bringing universal access to water by 2015 to those living in poverty



• It takes **400,000 litres** to manufacture a car



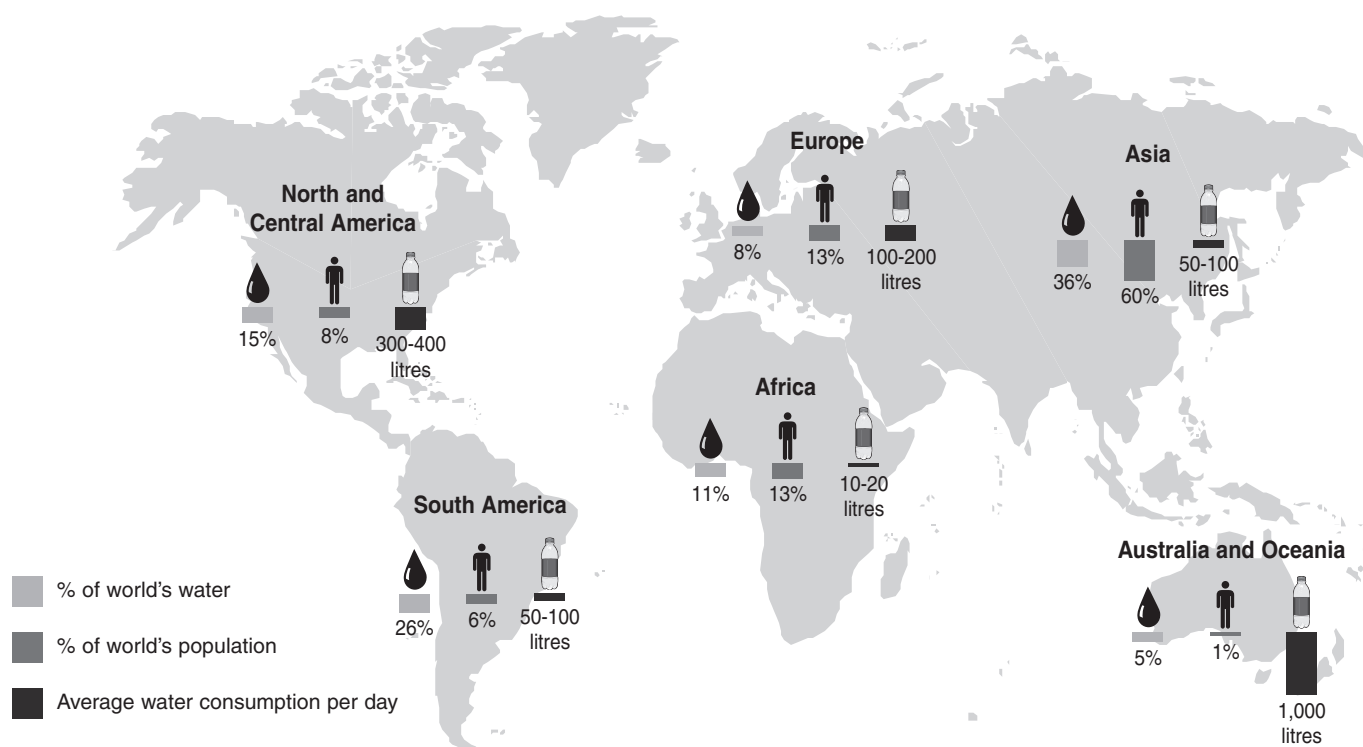
• **42,500 litres** to produce a kilo of beef



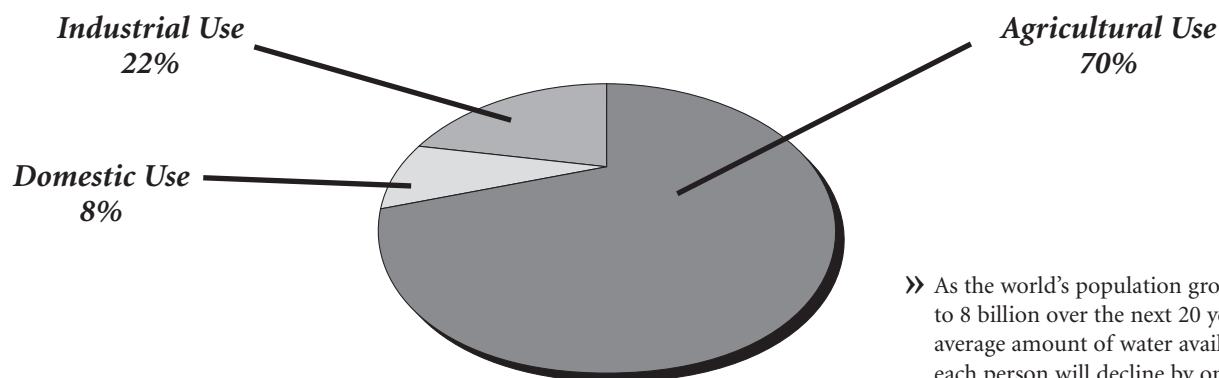
• **52 million gallons** to move a ship through the Panama Canal

¹ From Black, Maggie, *The no-nonsense guide to water*, New Internationalist Publications, 2004, UK. Roddick, Anita: *Troubled Water*, Anita Roddick Books, 2004, UK. Clarke, Robin and King, Jannet: *The Water Atlas*, The New Press, 2004, UK.

*** Access to water per % of world population ***



Competing water uses:



SALES OF GROUPS AND WATER DIVISIONS, 2001

Water division	Water sales (euros m)	Worldwide costumers (millions)
Ondeo	10,088	115
Veolia (formerly Vivendi)	13,640	110
Thames	2,746	37
SAUR	2,494	36
Anglian	936	5
Cascal	181	6.7
IWL	100	10
Suez	42359	115

H2O, Guardian special supplement, August 2003

Suez number from: <http://www.psiru.org/reports/2002-08-W-MNCs.doc>

▲ You could not step twice into the same rivers; for other waters are ever flowing on to you. *Heraclitus of Ephesus*

WATER: A GLOBAL CHALLENGE - A VIEW BY PROGRESSIO IRELAND

By Peadar Kirby.

* * * * *

This growing shortage of water has occurred not so much because of any absolute shortage but more because of the ways in which people in the richer parts of the world consume it



© 2004 Copyright Water For People.

One of the great paradoxes of our age is that, in a world of such technical advances and superabundance, more and more of humanity is facing the most basic shortage of all – water.

This growing shortage of water has occurred not so much because of any absolute shortage but more because of the ways in which people in the richer parts of the world consume it. Added to this is a major problem of the pollution of water supplies: in developing countries 90 per cent of used domestic water and 70 per cent of industrial waste water are recycled back into the water supply without treatment.

This shortage is a reflection of the scandalous inequalities that characterise today's world. This is illustrated in the figures for who uses most water: an Australian uses on average 1,000 litres a day, a North American uses 300-400 litres, a European 100-200 litres and a Sub-Saharan African 10-20 litres.

What, then, are the solutions? Two dominant approaches characterise today's agenda. The first is privatisation as countries sell their water distribution systems to private companies.

This may bring badly needed investment into these systems but almost always does so at the cost to the poor who cannot afford to pay the higher prices these companies charge. Furthermore, treating water as a marketable commodity offends many people's deeply held values as water is widely seen as a common resource for all.

A second approach, often in opposition to privatisation, treats water as a human right. While this is an advance, it faces a major problem. This is that it avoids the challenge of ensuring that it is available to people – simply defining it as a right may in fact lead people to use the courts as a way of trying to force governments to supply them with water. This route is costly and not at all assured of success.

Unfortunately, these approaches have tended to distract attention from the sustained investment that is required throughout the world to develop efficient systems of water distribution, eliminating wastage and avoiding pollution. But it would also require a change in consumption patterns, particularly in the most developed parts of the world where most water is used. Addressing these challenges is going to loom ever larger on the global agenda.

VOICES FROM BOLIVIA

Water Privatization in Bolivia and the Struggle of the People.
By Marco Llanos



In Bolivia, important milestones have been reached in the struggle for the right to water. The first was reached in the city of Cochabamba in the year 2000. The second struggle began to be organised in mid-2004 in the city of El Alto.

I am involved in the 'Development of Local Power', a project of the UNITAS (Bolivian Health Workers Trade Unions' Association) network. My work consists of supporting the development of popular organisations by helping them access information so that they can demand their rights.

In September 2004, the tariffs and services of the private Company *Aguas del Illimani* which supplied El Alto were analysed.

This analysis was carried out jointly with some of the members of the Federation of Neighbourhood Associations (FEJUVE 2004-2006) and local leaders and residents of the 4th District. The company was made up mostly of the Suez trans-national.

One of the problems was to obtain the 'Concession Contract'. Not even the Agency for the Supervision of Basic Sanitation, which is the fiscal arm of the State, was willing to give us this information. Protests were organised and FEJUVE issued an ultimatum to the government demanding the revision of the contract with *Aguas del Illimani*. The deadline was December 20th 2004.

The government prolonged the negotiations and launched a media campaign against local leaders. We recorded and filmed the government's proposals.

The analysis was finalized and it concluded that the contract contained a number of irregularities as well as clauses which were not fulfilled. In March, people of El Alto mobilised in order to expel *Aguas del Illimani*.

A photographer, Juan Carlos Candia, joined our group. Juan Carlos, Alfredo Cahuaya, Carlos Revilla and myself, closely followed the mobilisations. In this context we decided to publish *Protesta Alteña (El Alto Protest)*, a bulletin that was distributed at the protests and which contained the demands of the people and data on the irregularities of *Aguas del Illimani*.



Water protest in Bolivia. Photo by Marco Llanos

The voice of a Cochabamba Water Warrior

By Banderas

The water war is the most important experience that might have happened to our community. We fought against a corrupt government, against a transnational corporation and above all, against imperialism. We defended what is ours: the water company SEMAPA¹, which is of the people and for the people and it is under the control of the workers.

During the conflicts of February and April 2000, we clashed with the police and the military in order to defend our water. There were two dead and hundreds wounded.

An anecdote: when the policemen grabbed me, they started hitting me. As they saw that I was laughing heartily, they hit me harder.

They would have wanted only one thing: for me to beg 'don't hit me anymore!' Or for me to ask them for forgiveness. I did not do it though, because of my dignity and because I

feel proud to be a water warrior; because of the lives dedicated to the struggle to defend our water, and because of the injustices carried out by the government and by the transnational Bechtel.

My mouth and eyebrows started bleeding and I said to them 'You might take away my life and my freedom but you will never - ever - take away the soul of my revolutionary heart!' They stopped hitting me and they cleaned my face.

The water war has been an historical moment for the world at large because for the first time ever in Cochabamba, in Bolivia and in the whole world has a transnational corporation been thrown out of a community.

The blood keeps running but the people keep living and most importantly, they keep fighting. Only people can save the people. The struggle has just started though, because **the next world war will not be over oil or gold, but over water.**



Bolivian Water Warriors Photo Muireann de Barra

They would have wanted only one thing: for me to beg 'don't hit me anymore!'

the next world war will not be over oil or gold, but over water

Water and solidarity:

By Muireann de Barra²

reflections on a community's struggle for water.

My first visit to *Barrio Solidaridad* was made in Spring 2005. From Bolivia's capital, La Paz, the highway climbs the steep hillsides to the congested hub of El Alto. This indigenous city is perched at 4,500m and is home to 800,000 people living on US\$1 per day. Rougher, unpaved roads lead to a small community of some 30 families, who since their collective occupation of the land in 2000, have developed El Alto's youngest community- *Barrio Solidaridad* or Solidarity Quarter.

Curiously, this Barrio is overlooked by a private water treatment plant-source of the 2005 water war- which pitted mobilised citizens against the multinational water company, *Aguas del Illimani* and its majority stakeholder *Suez*. The eventual ouster of *Suez* was celebrated in January 2007 with the promise of a reversal to public control by Evo Morales' *Water Ministry*. Prior to the popular protests, residents were charged US\$450 for a water connection- the equivalent of nine months salary of the average household.

During my frequent visits to *Barrio Solidaridad*, over a two-year period, I witnessed families consume water from shallow trenches of turbid water and untreated water leaking from the plant- all within view of *Aguas del Illimani*'s security and management personnel. **I also witnessed the silent funeral procession of a family burying their child, whose death was caused by contaminated water.**



Photo Muireann de Barra

In Spring 2006, I observed the empowering results of a private donation from Canadian water activist, Maude Barlowe to *Barrio Solidaridad*- a gesture which *Aguas del Illimani* attempted to claim responsibility for in the local press. With this financial support, the entire community pitched in to lay water pipes beneath their simple adobe homes. It's now Spring 2007 and families in *Barrio Solidaridad* wait to hear water racing through the earth's new veins and quench their long thirst.

Women as powerful protesters in the Bolivian Water War

¹ Municipal Water Company, Cochabamba, Bolivia

² Muireann de Barra is co-creator of *Water Rising*, a documentary film work in progress about Bolivia's water struggles. A short pilot by Muireann de Barra and Aisling Crudden (2005) will be screened during LAW.

THE WATER JUSTICE MOVEMENT

NORTH AND SOUTH, 'IT'S OUR WATER DAMMIT!'

By Holly Wren Spaulding¹, Sweetwater Alliance, USA

* * * * *

to truly address the challenges of water in this century, it must remain a commons; the rights of people, the land and all other species, shall not be usurped by market ideologues and profiteers

The acuteness of our growing demand for safe, affordable drinking water brings people's needs face to face with corporate greed. As our population grows, and as existing water supplies are diverted, contaminated or privatized, ordinary people throughout the world are getting organized. As such, a movement for water justice is a relatively recent phenomenon. This is true where I live—in the Great Lakes along the border of Canada and the U.S. — and in the global south where my counterparts fight to retain water as a commons in their own home places.

In the water struggle, everything we'd learned about the ruthlessness of

corporations and capitalisms' exploitation of the earth is brought into bright focus. Following Nestlé's diversion of local groundwater for its booming bottled water business, my own politics became that much more personal. The battles are local, stakes are high, and every day there seems to be a new front.

Without a doubt, I've taken courage from the water warriors of Latin America in their varied, but related struggles. We all know the story of Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the fearless resistance they gave Bechtel when suddenly water rates rose by 200% following privatization of the water system in early 2000. Declaring "it's our water dammit!" those women, men and small children who took to the streets for water captivated so many of us, showing us how it must be done: with guts. Every water struggle since that prophetic victory in 2001 has been in some way, an homage to those tide-turning defenders of water.

Now there are grassroots groups throughout Latin America, united by the Red-Vida Network. In the U.S. and Canada, The Water Allies are the sister network. We all believe that **to truly address the challenges of water in this century, it must remain a commons; the rights of people, the land and all other species, shall not be usurped by market ideologues and profiteers.**

To make our position clear, we have organized alternative conferences to counter the corporate agenda of the World Water Forum, which in 2006 was hosted in Mexico City. In these settings, large demonstrations and very often, civil disobedience are tactics we use to make our voices heard as much to each other, as to the powerbrokers.

The water industry is a multi-billion dollar business, and we are up against an incredible PR machine, political connections, and the predisposition of many national governments to defer to



Photo courtesy of www.waterissweet.org

the private sector to fix failed policy, aged infrastructure, and the vexing social problems that come with both. Much work remains to be done before we can safely say that citizens of the north and south understand what is at stake when neoliberalism refashions our relationship to the water which sustains us. For this reason, some of the best water work is not about protest or movement building, as much as the continued, appropriate use of the resource for community building and self-help. This principle is exemplified by people who persist in practicing traditional methods of water management, whether by harvesting rainwater in arid regions of Honduras, or maintaining the communal irrigation ditches—acequias—in northern New Mexico, thus supporting subsistence farming appropriate to the landscape.

Being a young movement, it has been critical to share capacity, ideas, strategies and victories. In the global north we are learning from our compañeros to the south that we must be bold, tireless, and undeterred by the power structures that aim to take control of the water that rightfully belongs to all of us.

Bit by bit the movement swells and like the hydrological cycle, everything is connected. Fighting the enclosure of our water commons must be a priority. For those of us in the North, and in the 'Belly of the Beast' as I am, a powerful form of solidarity is to defend the right to water where we are, in the places we call home.

¹ Holly Wren Spaulding is a writer, teacher and community activist based in Northern Michigan. She co-founded Sweetwater Alliance (www.waterissweet.org) a grassroots citizen movement dedicated to the defence and liberation of essential resources and services from corporate control. Organized around the principle that the commons must be protected for the benefit of all, members have been especially active in efforts to prevent Nestle Corporation from mining groundwater in Michigan.

▲ We never know the worth of water till the well is dry. *France*

THE LATIN AMERICAN WATER TRIBUNAL PUTS “WATER POLLUTERS ON TRIAL”

The Latin American Water Tribunal (LAWT) is an international and autonomous body, set up to evaluate cases of environmental damages to water resources. The water tribunal was first established in the Central American region in 1998 and expanded to cover whole Latin America in 2004¹.

Supported by European non-governmental organisations (NGOs), it was created to confront the “crisis of legality and the diminished effectiveness of laws on issues related to water resources,” according to Javier Bogantes, director of the non-governmental Latin American Water Tribunal, based in Costa Rica.

The initiative aims to facilitate the creation of control mechanisms to defend the continent’s water resources. It is an ethical tribunal and its resolutions are not legally binding, but they act as guidelines for the resolution of water-related conflicts in the region.

A panel of eight legal and water experts from Brazil, Cuba, France, Guatemala and Mexico is putting water polluting governments and private companies from 10 Latin American countries on trial. Crimes they are accused of are: polluting rivers and lakes, building harmful dams, providing overpriced and bad water management systems, etc. **Their verdicts might have moral force only, but are intended to raise awareness of the unjust water management by governments and transnational companies.**

The idea of a water tribunal is not a recent one. The first water tribunal goes back to the 1980s, when a hearing was held in the Dutch city of Rotterdam to adjudge the damage caused by pollution in the Rhine river basin.

Since 1998, the Water Tribunal has investigated 30 cases and it is currently working on 13 water “lawsuits” in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru.

The Latin American Water Tribunal stands for vigilance, coordination and agreement for the protection of the water resources in Latin America.



Photo courtesy of <http://agua.ecoportel.net>

Sources:

<http://www.tragua.com/>
<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=32515>

¹ <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=32515>

“Their verdicts might have moral force only, but are intended to raise awareness of the unjust water management by governments and transnational companies”

“SUSTAINABLE ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER” A MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL

In September 2000, all 191 United Nations member countries agreed a set of goals: to bring sustainable development and the elimination of poverty to the top of the international community’s agenda. The 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are based on agreements and resolutions reached in world conferences organised by the United Nations in the 1990s and they are commonly accepted as a framework for measuring “development” progress. The goals set benchmarks for measuring results, for both developing countries and rich countries.

Goal 7 focuses on ensuring environmental sustainability and sets as target for the world community “to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water”. According to UNICEF and WHO¹ Joint Monitoring Programme report, *The Millennium Development Goals’ water and sanitation target*² 1.1 billion people live without access to clean water and a further 2.6 billion live without adequate sanitation.

The world’s leaders solemnly declared they would take action to change these catastrophic living conditions. But their commitments to the

millennium targets lose any credibility when we think of the little progress made. According to Dóchas³ “at current rates of progress, 1 billion people will still have no access to clean water and [...] 83 countries will miss the goal altogether”⁴ by 2015. To get this figure back on track and achieve the MDG on drinking water it is necessary to have a one third increase in efforts⁵.

In most world regions the international target to provide ‘sustainable access to safe drinking water’ is far off track. “A child dies every 15 seconds from water-related diseases. These diseases are very easily prevented. If this was going on in a small town in the UK or anywhere else in the developed world the international community would be horrified and they’d be doing something about it” says Stephen Turner, Water Aid’s Director of Public Policy and Education⁶. Was the agreement just lip service?

The Irish government declared ‘environment’ as one of four cross-cutting issues which are mainstreamed throughout Ireland’s development programme. It is up to us to monitor the effort Ireland and the world community puts into providing clean water and sanitation in developing countries.



Photo courtesy of www.swissinfo.org

See the Millennium Report under:
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

Ireland’s first MDG report:
http://www.dochas.ie/resources01_irecon.htm
 European Commission’s first MDGs report - November 2004 http://www.dochas.ie/documents/EC_on_MDGs.pdf

“at current rates of progress, 1 billion people will still have no access to clean water and [...] 83 countries will miss the goal altogether by 2015”

¹ World Health Organisation ² <http://www.wssinfo.org/en/welcome.html> ³ Irish Association of Non Governmental Development Organisation

⁴ http://www.dochas.ie/resources01_graph.htm ⁵ http://www.wateraid.org/international/about_us/newsroom/4914.asp

⁶ http://www.wateraid.org/international/about_us/newsroom/4914.asp

LACK OF ACCESS TO WATER IN MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES: IRELAND AND MEXICO

SELLING THE WATER COMMONS FROM RIGHT UNDER OUR NOSES

- A MEXICAN REALITY *By Ramor Ryan*



10 years ago the *barrio* where I live was a swamp on the outskirts of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, populated by a herd of scrawny cows. Migrants and refugees from the countryside arrived *en masse* – like any rapidly urbanizing centre in the Developing World - and now it's a teeming *barrio* of cement, home to thousands of mostly indigenous families. Prosperity has come to some: a few cars in the street, some fancy houses, and progress to all in the form of electricity, TV cable and internet. But nevertheless, despite this small prosperity there is one vital element consistently lacking in the peoples' lives: water. Sometimes it comes for an hour a day; sometimes it doesn't come all week.

Why is there no water? The tropical state of Chiapas is known as Mexico's water bank, with the greatest mean average rainfall annually. Its huge dammed rivers export hydroelectric power to other states.

"The water crisis is a result of the way it is consumed," explains local water activist Cacho, part of the strong *barrio* anti-privatisation movement. **"The problem is the excessive consumption of water and the unequal access among the different sectors of the population. There is no water rationing or shortage for the business and tourist centre of town."**

Currently, the local municipal government controls the water supply. "And the local water authorities are running down the service in the barrios in order to open the way for privatisation," explains Cacho. "Meanwhile they are selling off concessions to private interests to exploit the water"

In the ultimate irony, Coca Cola 'won' a concession to build a factory on top of San Cristobal's aquifer. Exploiting the water resources at a monthly rate of 3.5 million litres, Coca Cola pays the municipality a measly \$500 annually. (Incidentally, the director of the National Water Commission, Señor Jactes, was ex-director of Coca Cola.)

And it becomes clear from the abundant litter strewn around this poor *barrio* – predominantly plastic soda and water bottles – that the water is directly being taken from the aquifer, bottled, and sold to the people at a profit for Coca Cola.

At base, the struggle over the water is a clash of two visions: those who see it as an economic good to be sold on the market to the highest bidder, and those who view it as part of the common good, to be distributed equally amongst the people who use it.



Photo Water for People

The campaign against privatisation in Chiapas is gaining ground, led by the example of the Zapatista and other indigenous communities to hold the water resources as part of the community patrimony. "In the most democratic way the people have said the water is public property", says writer Eduardo Galeano. "And this is a way of saying to the owners of the world, the gentlemen of the market- we are not for sale!"

WATER AND TRAVELLERS

- AN IRISH REALITY *By Martha Fabregat*

Travellers have always been part of Irish Society, but the reality is that the majority of Travellers have not benefited from the economic growth that Irish society has experienced in the past 20 years. Many Travellers are still at the end of the line, queuing to get a tap of clean water! Travellers and Traveller organizations have been pointing out the similarities between Travellers living without

basic facilities like water and some communities in the south, the so called "third world countries". The UN has proclaimed the years 2005 to 2015 as the decade of water for life and yet, according to the last survey in 2006, there are 101 Traveller families without access to water in Ireland. This is a clear violation of Travellers' human rights, and one of the best-hidden issues Irish society and politics.

The problem is the unequal access among the different sectors of the population. There is no water rationing or shortage for the business and tourist centre of town

▲ "If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water". LORAN EISELY, *The Immense Journey*, 1957

GENDER AND WATER

By Maeve Taylor, Banulacht



© Swiss info

When water is scarce, polluted, or unaffordable, women suffer most acutely

MORE than half of the 1.2 billion people who do not have access to water are women and girls. Research by UNIFEM¹ highlights that in most countries of the South women are responsible for water management at the domestic and community level; women and girls use more than 8 hours a day travelling from 10 to 15 km. to transport between 20 and 15 litres of water in each trip. Men's role tends to be related more with agricultural work, selling water for domestic consumption and with the storage of water. This gender inequality has implications in women's daily life: carrying water not only has impacts on women's physical health, but is a huge burden in terms of women's time.

When water is scarce, polluted, or unaffordable, women suffer most acutely. As economic providers, caregivers, and household managers, women are responsible for ensuring that their families have water for daily living. Where privatisation means that water is subject to user fees, women

sometimes have to choose between eating and being able to rely on having water for daily chores.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) established that rural women's health depends on adequate and non-discriminatory access to water. Other rights not usually associated with the right to water, but

that directly affect women and girls, are the equal right to education and to political participation. Time invested on securing water excludes them from participating in decision-making processes, education, income generation, politics, leisure and recreation, advocating against poverty and improving their quality of life.

Participation of women in the Water War, Cochabamba, Bolivia

"The participation at the "water wars" helped us to believe in ourselves". We are not fighting for something that makes no sense; we are fighting for the truth; we are fighting for access to water for all, and one day, this will be recognised..."

"Even though we (women) participated at the water struggles in Cochabamba we were not considered to be part of the commission representing the Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y la Vida (the Coordinating Organisation for the Defence of Water and Life)... only men were involved in its organisation.

"Now I don't want to continue to stay at home; I want to participate, because I have the same rights... because of this it is important to get organised, to train and to gain strength to participate and learn more.

"Our people of Bolivia have learned the importance of gender equality as a result of the right of access to water"

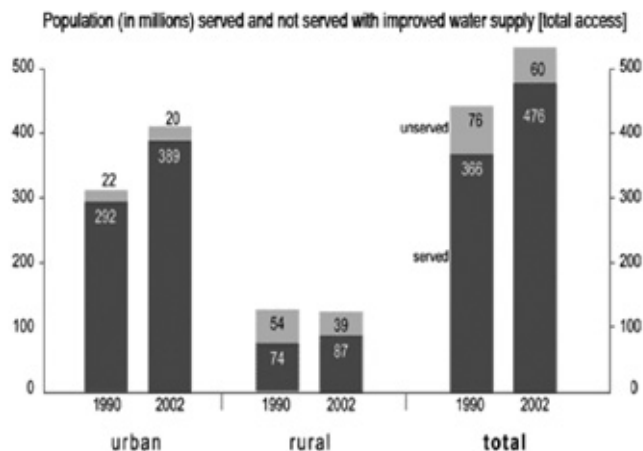
Testimonies from the Workshop in 2001 y Fundación Solón and Water Centre at the University of Mayor de San Simón (Bolivia)

¹ United Nations Development Fund for Women

▲ "All the water that will ever be is, right now", *National Geographic*, October 1993

FACTS ABOUT WATER AND YOUTH

* * * * *



Source: <http://www.unicef.org/wes/files/TACROCWWFFactsheet.doc>



Girl getting water in Nicaragua

More than 2.6 billion people – forty per cent of the world’s population – lack basic sanitation facilities, and over one billion people still use unsafe drinking water sources. In Latin America 60 million people still lack access to safe water and 134 million lack access to basic sanitation services. Children constitute almost half of those excluded, living in a reality which contributes to a deterioration of their health status, thus impinging on their rights to survival and development.

What does that mean for youth and children?

- 1. The toll on children is especially high.** About 4,500 children die each day worldwide from unsafe water and lack of basic sanitation facilities. Countless others suffer from poor health, diminished productivity and missed opportunities for education.
- 2. The young and the old are particularly vulnerable.** Over 90 per cent of deaths from diarrhoeal diseases due to unsafe water and sanitation in the developing world occur in children below 5 years old.
- 3. The poor are especially hard hit.** A child born in Europe or the United States is 520 times less likely to die from diarrhoeal disease than an infant in sub-Saharan Africa, where only 36 per cent of the population can access hygienic sanitation.
- 4. Women and girls are the “water haulers” of the world.** On average, women and girls in developing countries walk 6 kilometres a day, carrying 20 litres of water, greatly reducing the time they have for other productive work or for girls to attend school.
- 5. Waterborne illnesses & lack of access to clean water keep children out of school.** Children suffering from trichuriasis (a water-borne disease) were in classes only half as much as their uninfected peers. And when schools lack toilets, girls will often not attend. Lots of children and youth can’t attend school, because they have to collect water for their family.

Source: <http://www.unicef.org/>

1st International Meeting Water and Youth

When we talk about defending the right to water, we can’t forget the new initiatives that young people around the world are bringing together. This is the case of the First International Meeting for Water and Youth that takes place in Buenos Aires the 12th and 14th of April, where hundreds of young people around the world meet to launch projects linked to water, whether they be to guarantee the right to access to safe water, promote integrated management of basins, affect public policy, to promote a new water culture, etc.

After the meeting, the participants have the great challenge of bringing to their communities lessons, tools, ideas, inspirations and commitment to work together for the right to water.

For further information, please visit <http://waterandyouth.org/>

Young Links: from Ballyfermot to Brazil

By Sally Flynn.

In July 2006 four groups of young people from different parts of the world travelled to Iguape in Brazil to participate in a Youth Exchange programme funded through Leargas¹. On this trip, lifelong friends were made and the kindness and hospitality experienced was like nothing we experienced before. During the exchange we visited a community facing issues in terms of water and a large company wanting to build a dam in place of the community which would cause thousands of people to leave their homes. This particular community was opposing this development in fear that people could actually die during the process of the Dam being built. We are looking forward to our friends from Brazil visiting Ireland in August 2007 to inform us of developments in terms of this issue.

¹ Ireland’s National Agency for the management of transnational programmes in the areas of Youth Work, Primary and Secondary Education, Vocational Education and Training, and LifeLong Learning.

▲ “If you gave me several million years, there would be nothing that did not grow in beauty if it were surrounded by water”,
JAN ERIK VOLD, *What All The World Knows*, 1970

WATER AND DEBT

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK!

Anne Reilly of Debt and Development Coalition Ireland examines how the World Bank and the Debt Crisis has contributed to turning off the public water supply in Bolivia.

At least 1.1 billion people do not have access to a supply of clean water and 2.3 billion do not have access to adequate sanitation.

Five thousand people die every day because they lack clean water or adequate sanitation – WHY?

In many countries around the world, **the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have made loans and debt cancellation conditional to the privatisation of water and other basic services.**

The country of Bolivia is a painful illustration of this problem. Over recent years, Bolivian communities have undergone an accelerated process of privatisation relating to many public services such as gas, electricity, telecommunications and water.

Resistance from the people of Bolivia to the impact of water privatisation in their lives has been very strong. The so-called 'Water Wars' of Cochabamba in the year 2000 ended a 30 year private water contract between the Bolivian government and the huge US engineering Bechtel Corporation.

More recently, the people of the city of El Alto in Bolivia have risen up against the privatisation of their water system, which the World Bank made a condition of a loan to their government.

the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have made loans and debt cancellation conditional to the privatisation of water and other basic services

Resistance in

El Alto * * * * *

In 1997, a private company, Aguas del Illimani – belonging to a consortium led by the French giant Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux de France – was granted a 30 year contract to supply water to the city of El Alto by the Bolivian government, as a result of a World Bank loan condition. Citizens of El Alto saw the price of water increase by 35%, while connection costs for water and sewage rose to more than US\$445. This is more than six months salary for people on the national minimum wage. The result of the privatisation deal was that tens of thousands of families were excluded from receiving water.

The people of El Alto fought back, demanding the termination of the water contract. The government of the time promised to take action but backtracked once the water company threatened to bring a multi-million dollar law suit against the Bolivian government.

So who is really in charge in Bolivia? What happened at El Alto shows the massive influence of the World Bank on the lives of Bolivians.

100% DEBT CANCELLATION AT WHAT COST? - WATER PRIVATISATION

DEBT CANCELLATION but at what price?

Water Privatisation



Liquid Gold for Multinational Corporations
Unaffordable for the poor!



There are other dangerous implications of World Bank and IMF control as well. For example, in an effort to avoid World Bank and IMF conditions, successive Bolivian governments have chosen to take loans from other, more expensive, domestic lenders instead. This has resulted in an increased level of domestic debts which the people of Bolivia are now being forced to repay.

The recent election of the new indigenous Bolivian president, Evo Morales is giving some cause for hope. Morales has promised to create a more independent Bolivia. Time will tell if his work results in building an economy that truly serves the needs of the people of Bolivia.

www.debtireland.org

▲ "Water has no taste, no color, no odor; it cannot be defined, art relished while ever mysterious. Not necessary to life, but rather life itself. It fills us with a gratification that exceeds the delight of the senses", ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY (1900-1944), *Wind, Sand, and Stars*, 1939

WATER AND CULTURE IN LATIN AMERICA

By Rachel Dempsey



Culture is at the heart of the battle for water in Latin America. As 'culture' frames the way we make sense of the world around us, it is central to the way we conceive and make use of, vital elements such as water. Thus the fight against water privatization in Latin America has also been a reassertion and expression of centuries old cultural values around water.

Latin American culture is hugely influenced by indigenous American and African worldviews. Both of these, unlike scientific thought, do not necessarily separate the rational from the spiritual. People, plants and animals and elements such as water are interconnected by webs of relations and obligations that are both ecological and social.

These values have fuelled and inspired the movement against water privatization in Latin America. In January 2000, the popular protests in Cochabamba, Bolivia were not only directed against the act of water privatization, but against its *logic*.

To sell water is seen as not only illogical; it is also something that will upset the harmony and balance vital for life itself. The Kogi in Northern Colombia, for example, use the lack of frozen water at

the peaks of their mountain home as an indicator of **the serious sickness that threatens Mother Earth, caused by the Western man or younger brothers' failure to appreciate and respect this subtle balance.**

The centrality and sacredness of water is reflected in rituals, stories, rites and artistic expression from all over the region. In Inka mythology for example, Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, children of the Sun, emerged from the deep, shimmering waters of Lake Titicaca to found their empire.

The Bolivian community theatre 'Teatro Trono' tackles the question "water for profit" or "water as spirit of life" through a dramatic mythology of water, a community-based performance piece called "La Asamblea de Los Dioses de Agua" (The Meeting of the Water Gods).

To a large extent, the future of water depends on whose world view, or culture, predominates. While science and technology can help harness and distribute water to many, it is the holistic approach which will ensure sustainability and prevent water scarcity from lining the pockets of a wealthy minority.



Photo by Eve Tulbert

From "La Asamblea de Los Dioses de Agua" (The Meeting of the Water Gods), a community-based performance piece by Teatro Trono in the El Alto barrio of La Paz, Bolivia.
http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2004/05/just_a_little_d.php

“the serious sickness that threatens Mother Earth, caused by the Western man or younger brothers' failure to appreciate and respect this subtle balance”

“To a large extent, the future of water depends on whose world view, or culture, predominates”

Ownership of water has been contentious for time immemorial.

The idea that water should be freely available to all, it, is encapsulated in this myth of the Juruna indigenous group.

The origin of the Amazon

The Juruna Indians lived close to the forest where there was no river. A bird called Juriti owned the drinking water, which she kept in three barrels. One day, the children of chief Cinaã were thirsty. They went to Juriti and asked her for water.

But Juriti wouldn't give them any. 'Go back to your father', she said, 'after all, he is the Pagé, the big chief. Why doesn't he get water for his own children?'

The children went home crying from thirst and told their father what had happened. 'Don't ever go to Juriti again,' said the chief to his children, 'Her water barrels are full of fish. It's too dangerous.'

But they were tempted by this story and a while later they went back. When Juriti was not looking, they broke the barrels so that the water flowed out. When Juriti realised what had happened, she got very mad. The children were afraid and jumped back, but for one of the brothers, Rubiatá, it was too late. A big fish flowing out of one of the barrels swallowed him.

Although it was a big fish, Rubiatá's legs stuck out of its mouth. Meanwhile the other brothers started to run away carrying the open barrels. The water that spilled from the barrels turned into rivers and water falls. The big fish with two legs still sticking out of its mouth formed the Xingú river.

The two other brothers kept on running, all the water now spilling from the barrels. That is how the Amazon river started. In that big new river they found the fish and their brother, Rubiatá, already dead. But, when they cut out his legs and blew air into them, Rubiatá became human again. The children went back home after their adventure, and triumphantly told their father: 'We broke the barrels and from now on we will have water and we will drink for the rest of our lives.'

http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=6419&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Extracted from *Water Stories*, © IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, 2003

▲ "The crisis of our diminishing water resources is just as severe (if less obviously immediate) as any wartime crisis we have ever faced. Our survival is just as much at stake as it was at the time of Pearl Harbor, or the Argonne, or Gettysburg, or Saratoga", JIM WRIGHT, U.S. Representative, *The Coming Water Famine*, 1966

WATER, NEOLIBERALISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The struggles of the 21st century show that water “is essential for life, crucial for relieving poverty, hunger and disease and critical for economic development” (UN Department of Technical Cooperation for Development). It is one of the most vital issues facing future human use of the environment. Climate change, deforestation, protection of biodiversity and desertification, are all connected to water resource management.

Water is the key to sustainable development. Caught between growing demands for freshwater on one hand and limited and increasingly polluted water supplies on the other, many developing countries face difficult choices.

Populations continue to grow rapidly. Yet there is no more water on earth now than there was 2000 years ago, when the population was less than 3% of its current size. Rising demands for water for irrigated agriculture, domestic consumption, and industry are forcing hard competition over the allocation of scarce water resources among both areas and types of use.

* * * * *

In much of the world polluted water, improper waste disposal, and poor water management cause serious public health problems. Such water-related diseases as malaria, cholera, typhoid, and schistosomiasis harm or kill millions of people every year. Overuse and pollution of water supplies also are taking a heavy toll on the natural environment and pose increasing risks for many species of life.

Years of rapid population growth and increasing water consumption for agriculture, industry, and municipalities have strained the world’s freshwater resources. In some areas the demand for water already exceeds nature’s supply, and a growing number of countries are expected to face water shortages in the near future. We can avoid the coming crisis if appropriate policies and strategies are formulated and acted on soon. Whether water is used for agriculture, industry, or municipalities, there is much room for conservation and better management. Effective strategies must consider not only managing the water supply better but also managing demand better.

Source: ‘Neoliberalism and the environment in Latin America’ (Diana M. Liverman and Silvina Vilas) and ‘The Human Right to Water: Necessity for Action and Discourse’ (Dr. D Roy Laifungbam)



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“In much of the world polluted water, improper waste disposal, and poor water management cause serious public health problems”

USE AND ABUSE OF WATER FOR GOLD MINING IN CAJAMARCA

By Nilton Deza¹, President of ECOVIDA

Not only fish and amphibians have disappeared from the Cajamarca rivers, in the Peruvian Andes, because of toxic waste from the Yanacocha Mine. Also agriculture and livestock, activities of this poor area of the country, are being depleted. Even the water for human consumption is threatened.

Globalisation and the emergence of new economies have increased the price of metals to unprecedented levels. In addition, the transnationals cast their eyes to Latin American economies searching for cheap resources. One ounce of extracted gold costs US\$100 in Cajamarca, while its world price is US\$665, at 2007 prices.

The latest evaluation of the extracting industries of the World Bank Group, revealed:

- 1) that the “activities of the World Bank negatively affect local communities, the poor, the atmosphere and individual rights” and
- 2) that “the international agreements related to the rights of indigenous peoples must be recognised and respected.”

Despite this, **channels for irrigation, lakes and streams have disappeared in the area surrounding Yanacocha**, a mine owned by Newmount (American), Buenaventura (Peruvian) and the World Bank. Without water, indigenous communities are dead communities. For them, water is health, food, drink. It is life.

The gases that are emitted when removing gold form sulphuric acid, which causes damage to the environment which survives for millennia.

The acidity, thus formed, extracts toxic metals and incorporates them into the rivers, killing all life and rendering them useless to the country people. Even the price of drinking water has increased for this reason.

For more information see:
<http://www.mineralresourcesforum.org/incidents/Cajamarca> Ecovida (www.ecovida.org) works on sustainable development of communities which are close to mines, environmental monitoring, environmental education and produces news bulletins and flora and fauna inventories.

¹ Nilton Deza was a keynote speaker in Latin American Week 2004 when he spoke about the health effects of mining activities in Cajamarca, Peru and the struggle to hold mining multinationals for damage to environment and health. He is an academic, director of Ecovida and community activist representing the community of Choropampa, affected by mercury poisoning in Cajamarca, Peru in 2000.



Choropampa residents rally to demand compensation and clean-up following a mercury spill.

Credit: Guarango Cine y Video
Curtesy of <http://www.nodirtygold.org>

“channels for irrigation, lakes and streams have disappeared in the area surrounding Yanacocha”

▲ “High quality water is more than the dream of the conservationists, more than a political slogan; high quality water, in the right quantity at the right place at the right time, is essential to health, recreation, and economic growth”, EDMUND S. MUSKIE, U.S. Senator, speech, 1 March 1966

FURTHER READING



1. Books available from LASC's library and Bookshop

- AA. VV., *Reclaiming Public Water*, CEO
Barlow M., Clarke T., *Blue gold*, The New Press
Black Maggie, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Water*, New Internationalist- Verso
Olivera Oscar, *Cochabamba! The Water War in Bolivia*, South End Press
Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars*, South End Press
AA.VV., *Testing the Water*, CIIR Progressio
Robin Clarke, *The Water Atlas*, The New Press
Black, Maggie, *The no-nonsense guide to water*, New Internationalist Publications, 2004, UK.
Roddick, Anita: *Troubled Water*, Anita Roddick Books, 2004, UK.
Clarke, Robin and King, Jannet: *The Water Atlas*, The New Press, 2004, UK.

2. Websites:

- <http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/>
<http://www.waternoteforsale.org/>
<http://www.waterjustice.org>
http://www.tni-archives.org/detail_page.phtml?page=altreg-docs_water
<http://www.worldwatercontract.org/public/journal/index.php?newLang=en>
http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1035.html#Water%20corporations
<http://www.wdm.org.uk/campaigns/water/>
<http://www.tapwaterawards.org/>
<http://www.wateraid.org/uk/default.asp>
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http://www.citizen.org/cmep/Water/cmep_Water/wbimf/articles.cfm?ID=7807
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<http://www.waterandyouth.org/english/index.htm>
http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/student/2005/plan_action.asp
<http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/>
<http://www.undp.org/water/crosscutting/genderguide/index.html>
<http://www.un.org/events/water/> <http://www.gwpforum.org/servlet/PSP?iNodeID=2903>
<http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/ecology/water/index.asp>
<http://www.wewontpaycampaign.com/>
<http://archives.tcm.ie/westernpeople/2004/09/01/story21289.asp>
<http://www.tragua.com/>
<http://laredvida.org/modules/news/>
<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/>
www.stopcorporateabuse.org
<http://www.wdm.org.uk/>
www.monitoringglobalisation.org
www.isf.es
<http://www.ecofondo.org.co/>
<http://www.accionecologica.org/webae/index.php>



The Latin America Solidarity Centre (LASC), founded in 1996, is an initiative for development education, campaigning solidarity and cultural action, linking Ireland and Latin America.

LASC VISION

LASC believes in a Latin America and an Ireland based on equality, social justice and an equal expression of cultural, social, political and economic rights for all human beings.

LASC MISSION

LASC's mission is to expose and challenge the current economic, social and cultural injustices in Latin America and Ireland, through public awareness raising, education, information exchanges and campaigns in solidarity with the people of Latin America who resist oppression and struggle to create a fair and inclusive society.

LASC WORK

Campaigning Solidarity

LASC is primarily a campaigning organisation aimed at organising solidarity in Ireland with the people of Latin America and the Caribbean in their struggle for independent development and control of their resources. With its campaigning work, LASC hopes to bring about changes in the attitudes, policies and practices of individuals and institutions.

LASC is committed to stand together with the popular movements that struggle for social justice. Our actions must be led by them, responding to needs identified by individuals and communities, especially ones that experience poverty and marginalisation.

Development Education

LASC realises that development education is essential for effective campaigning and awareness raising. Through participatory methodologies, LASC provides the tools for analysis of the development issues raised, and encourages learners to participate in finding solutions to them, including the possibility of participating in LASC campaigns.

Cultural Action

LASC values cultural diversity and engages in activities and actions which raise real awareness of Latin American cultures. LASC wishes to reflect the true multi-faceted nature of human experience in Latin America and celebrates the expression of the resilience and survival of its peoples.

******* JOIN LASC! *******

MEMBERSHIP PER CALENDAR YEAR: Waged €25 Unwaged €10

Name:

Address:

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If you would like to be notified of LASC's events, please tick the box below to subscribe to our weekly electronic bulletin

PAYMENT METHODS:

- 1. **Cheque / postal order.** Please send us a crossed cheque payable to the Latin America Solidarity Centre at the address below. Please do not send cash.
- 2. **Standing Order.** We would prefer payment by Standing Order as it would give us an indication of future income with which to plan our activities. Also, payment by cheque through the Post has lead to loss in the past.

STANDING ORDER FORM

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