



¡Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia

Oscar Olivera, Tom Lewis

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Historically a common trust, water is now bought and sold as a private commodity. With billions at the mercy of an unrestrained marketplace, it is easy to understand why this precious resource is at the center of the international movement working to turn back the rising tide of corporate globalization.

The triumphant struggle of grassroots activists in Cochabamba, Bolivia, sounded a significant opening salvo in the water wars. In 2001, water warriors there regained control of their water supply and defied all odds by driving out the transnational corporation that had stolen their water in the first place.

¡Cochabamba! is the story of the first great victory against corporate globalization in Latin America. Oscar Olivera, a 45-year-old machinist who helped shape and lead a movement that brought thousands of ordinary people to the streets, powerfully conveys the perspective of a committed participant in a victorious and inspirational rebellion.

The beloved and highly respected Olivera relates the selling of the city's water supply to Aguas del Tunari—a subsidiary of US-based Bechtel—the subsequent astronomical rise in water prices, and the refusal of poverty-strapped Bolivians to pay them. Olivera brings us to the front lines of a movement, chronicling how the people organized an opposition and the dramatic struggles that eventually defeated the privatizers.

With hard-won political savvy, Olivera reflects on major themes that emerged from the war over water: the fear and isolation that Cochabambinos faced with a spirit of solidarity and mutual aid; the challenges of democratically administering the city's water supply; and the impact of the water wars on subsequent resistance.

Oscar Olivera is president of the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers and 2001 winner of the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. **Tom Lewis** is Latin America editor for the *International Socialist Review* and professor of Spanish at the University of Iowa.

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