

Currents

food&waterwatch

News from Food & Water Watch's Water for All Campaign

Vol. I, Issue 6

www.foodandwaterwatch.org

July 2006

When will Suez leave Bolivia???

In January 2005 thousands of Bolivians took to the streets to protest the lack of potable water service being provided in El Alto, Bolivia by the French transnational Suez (called Aguas de Illimani in Bolivia). After weeks of protest on January 12, 2005, the Bolivian government published a Supreme Decree that initiated the termination of the concession contract with Aguas de Illimani.

Yet, the company still remains in Bolivia today.

Negotiations with the Bolivian government are stalemated. Suez is demanding compensation and threatening to take their case to the World Bank secret court (International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes-ICSID). Last week an independent audit of the operations of the company was released. The results of the audit reveal beyond a doubt that Aguas del Illimani did NOT comply with the concession contract and in order to obtain lucrative profits the company denied people access to potable water services, refused to upgrade or maintain the service, and did not comply with basic water quality standards.

The audit also shows that Bolivia does not owe Suez a cent, but rather Suez owes Bolivia approximately US\$6 million in unpaid fines and fees. Tell Suez to leave Bolivia! The Bolivian people don't owe Suez one cent! Send this message to Suez at:
<http://www.fwwatch.org/water/campaign-to-kick-suez-out-of-bolivia-and-the-americas-1>

Food & Water Watch at the Midwest Social Forum

Food & Water Watch was at the Midwest Social Forum in Milwaukee, WI in July. We met up with regional activists protecting their local water resources water from corporations at the workshop: "Celebrating Water for Life: Great Lakes Caucus on Water Privatization & Environmental Justice," and helped link local struggles with national and international campaigns for local control of water on the panel: "Grassroots Struggle against Water Privatization."

The panels provided lots of inspiring examples, including the Michigan Welfare Rights Coalition that is fighting for affordable water for people in Detroit and Highland Park, MI, and the Concerned Citizens of Newport who successfully challenged a Nestle bottling plant that wanted to tap into the wells in their pastoral Wisconsin community.

Lesson learned: the movement for local control of water is growing and we are winning!



Suez provides water "services" in El Alto, Bolivia.
Photo by Claudia Lopez.

Want to see live coverage of the struggle to get Suez out of El Alto, Bolivia? Download a 24 minute documentary made by two students in December 2005:
<http://www.salonchingon.com/cinema/fuera.php?city=ny>

Felton FLOW – en route to public ownership

The citizens of Felton, CA (population 5,000) won an important battle in June when Santa Cruz County agreed to annex Felton's water system to the nearby San Lorenzo Valley Water District. The District will soon appraise Felton's water system, which citizens say is worth about \$10 million. California-American Water (Cal-Am), the water system's current owner, has fought the Feltonians' campaign to purchase their water system by threatening elected officials, mailing expensive materials, and hiring slick lawyers. These tactics have made little difference as Felton passed a bond measure worth \$11 million to purchase the water system and oust Cal-Am. Felton's efforts, and Cal-Am's blunders, were recently profiled in a cover story in the Wall Street Journal – read it here: www.feltonflow.org/wsj.html.

Food & Water Watch has a new organizer in California. Based in San Francisco, Adam Scow will assist communities fighting against water profiteers and work to achieve strong public management and local control. Adam can be reached at ascow@fwwatch.org.

WTO to Limit Domestic Protection of Water Resources

The U.S. legal system is set up so that your right to make money and pursue life, liberty and happiness ends where your activities begin to hurt someone else. The system of requiring permits to pollute the air, discharge chemicals into water sources, or build on a wetland is based on these principles.

The Working Party on Domestic Regulation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) last month met behind closed doors (read more in last month's Currents: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/publications/newsletters/currents-may-2006/pdf>) to establish new rules which will limit the ability of local and national policy makers to issue permits or set standards.

This will limit local decision-making and regulatory power.

On July 11, the chairman of the Working Party released a draft document detailing these new standards. The draft clarifies that regulations, licensing requirements and permitting processes be "not more burdensome than necessary" and "relevant" to the services provided.

This means that before legislators and public officials make decisions about regulations to protect the environment and human health, they would first have to decide whether the regulation would effectively get in the way of trade – or risk paying penalties to be allowed to keep those regulations. Existing regulations

would also have to be evaluated according to this standard.

But who gets to decide if compliance with the water pollution controls is "relevant" to hog farming if another country chooses to challenge that permit requirement? Who gets to decide if requiring an environmental impact statement before issuing a permit to fill a wetland is "more burdensome than necessary"? Is it the U.S. Congress? EPA? The Supreme Court? The Bush administration? Nope. It's unaccountable trade experts at the WTO who make the decision.

Stay tuned for what you can do to stop this undemocratic debacle.

Defining the right to water in South Africa

Five residents of Phiri (a section of the famed Soweto township in Johannesburg) have asked the Johannesburg High Court to declare the use of prepaid water meters unconstitutional. South African's Constitution guarantees the right to water. The use of prepaid water meters in poor communities violates this right by denying water to those who are not able to pay up front. (read more about the use of prepaid water meters here: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/publications/newsletters/currents-may-2006/pdf>.)

In Phiri, residents often have no means to access water for weeks at a time. In South Africa, each household is supposed to receive a basic provision of 6,000 liters per household per month. But in many cases, the poorest households do not get even this basic provision. And 6,000 liters per household per month is far from enough for large households, mainly those who are poor. Peter Gleick, a U.S. based water expert, argued for the Phiri residents that this basic provision is insufficient.

The use of prepaid water meters is a severe setback for the country that seeks the progressive realization of socio-economic rights. A previous court case led to a ruling by a higher court that local government must prioritize fulfilling these rights for those in most need. Food & Water Watch supports the claim and is working to get residents from the area on a tour to the U.S. later this year to explain the case. Stay tuned.



Ocean desalination projects

Despite record prices for energy and continued unrest in the Middle East, energy intensive desalination projects are moving forward. While Texas and Massachusetts are considering proposals, California regulators and elected officials seem to be in a race to build the first plants. The regional water authority in Cambria, at the base of the beautiful, undeveloped Big Sur coastline and just south of the famous Hearst Castle, has pushed a piecemeal proposal for desalination through the San Luis Obispo County planning commission. Food & Water Watch, working with local activists, has filed an appeal.

From the mouth of preserved Elkhorn Slough wetlands near Monterey to the city of Carlsbad, which may end up with two large plants at one old coastal power plant, Food & Water Watch is working with groups from across the state to slow the onslaught of desalination proposals. Efforts include legal challenges as well as researching reasonable and cost effective alternatives.

On the national level, Food & Water Watch has been a leader in the fight to stop federal subsidies for desalination projects.

Read more about the pitfalls of desalination here: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/desal>.



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1400 16th St. NW, Suite 225, Washington, DC 20036
phone: (202) 797-6550 fax: (202) 797-6560
email: foodandwater@fwfwatch.org