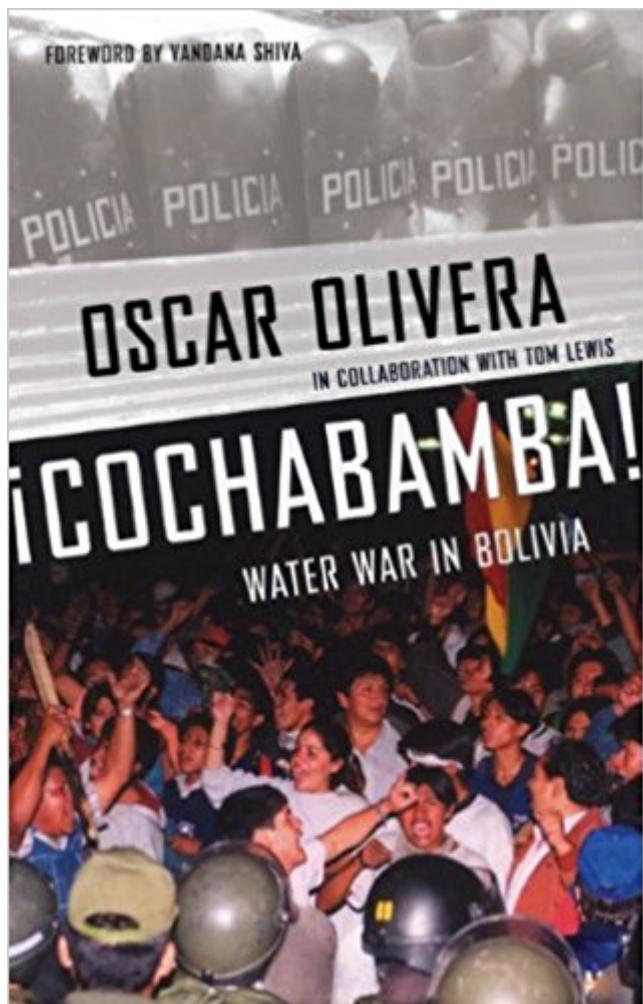


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¡Cochabamba! Water War In Bolivia



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Oscar Olivera is the executive secretary of the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers and spokesperson for the Coalition in Defense of Water and Life, known as La Coordinadora, that led demands for the water system to stay under local public control. A world-renowned environmental leader and recipient of the 1993 Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award), Shiva has authored several bestselling books, most recently *Earth Democracy*. Activist and scientist, Shiva leads, with Ralph Nader and Jeremy Rifkin, the International Forum on Globalization. Before becoming an activist, Shiva was one of India's leading physicists.

About a quarter of this book actually covers the Water War and what lead up to it. Very basic explanations of what happened and why. The eight days of chaos at the height of the Water War are left almost without description. It seems an odd thing to skimp on details of when the time was so critical. Most of the book analyzes the impact for privatization and social movements. It's more of a scholarly book than an explanation for the average person. The end of the book covers the "Gas War" (the fight against privatization of Bolivia's oil and gas reserves).

Tired of feeling helpless in the face of the institutions that try to dominate and control our lives? Reading *Cochabamba!* by Oscar Olivera may be just the tonic you've been looking for. When Bechtel--currently (re)constructing Iraq and the vastly over-budget Big Dig--tried to privatize the water supply in Cochabamba, Bolivia the people said No! And they meant it. Ordinary working people participating in assemblies and cabildos (town meetings) developed demands. They proclaimed, "The water is ours!" and stood behind those words. After a series of growing protests shut down the town and highways, Bechtel was forced to flee and the town's water regained. Due to the strength of the movement, and the connections made between different groups, the water is currently managed more democratically than it was by the government before the privatization. An essay on the challenges of administering the water supply provides further inspiration to those struggling for freedom. (Especially those of us who sometimes wonder, "What if we win?") Other essays analyze the significance of the Water War and are complemented by a selection of writings by Oscar Olivera on the imposition of neoliberalism, which created the conditions for the Water War, and what the next steps towards liberation may be. The essays "For a Constituent Assembly:

Creating Public Spaces," "Petroleum and Natural Gas: Reconquering Our Collective Patrimony," and "The Legacy of the Coordinadora" are essential to understand the current uprisings in Bolivia.

The growing water justice movement and the imminent global water crisis provide an important intersection for the power of humanity to over come the power of greed and neoliberal hegemony. Oscar Olivera and the struggle of the Cochabambinos illustrates the type of focus, passion, and urgency needed to combat egregious human rights violations and the leviathan of the World Bank and other international financial institutions.

This book is a must-read for global justice activists interested in understanding the triumphant people's movement in Bolivia to take back their water. An educational, inspirational and engaging read! Olivera's afterward, "They can't privatize our dreams" is simply breath-taking!

This book doesn't help to understand why there was a war for water and seems that it tries to layout that because of the Water War Evo Morales is President or something like that. If the author has a personal problem to be recognized for what he did, please don't write a book, go a press interview. Lost my time reading this book.

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