



## WATER WARS

Thirst Gushes With Warnings About Multinationals

by Phil Busse

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Thirst

dir. Snitow and Kaufman

Opens Fri June 18

Clinton Street Theater

Think water rates in Portland are obscene? Over the past decade, our city's water and sewage rates have doubled--but our mini-drama is a molehill compared to the three stories documented in *Thirst*, a surprisingly captivating film about the privatization of water suppliers.

The film braids three stories together: a violent fight in Bolivia to kick out a multinational which purchased control of the water supply from the government; a similar national movement in India; and, most compellingly, a political battle in Stockton, California, where citizens recently tried to stop the mayor from selling control of the water bureau to a private corporation.

To set the temperature for the heated debate, *Thirst* begins with violent footage in Bolivia. When the government there sold control of the water supply to Bechtel, a two trillion-dollar company, residents rioted. Those demonstrations culminated when a police sniper shot a 17-year-old boy and tens of thousands of workers went on strike.

But, unlike so many other documentaries about multinationals--documentaries that tend to be overbearingly supercilious and contemptuous--*Thirst* simply lets the story tell itself. In Stockton, the directors show the mayor arguing that turning over the water bureau to a private company will provide long-term savings. His rationale sounds benign enough--until a union worker protesting outside City Hall calmly explains, "Wait until multinationals own the water. Be prepared to pay gas prices."

*Thirst* is like a message in a bottle sent from the future. It tells the beginning of what could be one of the major political and economic issues to shape the next century. Don't say they didn't warn you.

