

TARGET EARTH

EAST MICHIGAN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION COUNCIL

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EMEAC's mission is to protect and restore land, air, water, and diversity of life through informed personal and public action.

Volume 36, Issue No. 2

Spring, 2006

Thirst

Is Water A Human Right For All People, Or A Commodity Global Corporations Can Sell For Profit?

When: May 9, 6:00 PM

Where: Southfield Public Library Auditorium 26300 Evergreen Road, Southfield (see directions below)

Speaker/Moderator: Jack Lessenberry, Michigan Public Radio Policy Analyst

In the opening scene of the documentary *Thirst*, John Briscoe, the Senior Water Advisor to The World Bank, asks: "What does it mean to say that water is a human right?" The consensus of the politicians, international bankers and corporate executives at the 2003 World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan is that global corporations should control fresh water systems.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank often require indebted countries to pursue privatization as a condition of getting loans. "Thirst" documents how the IMF pressured Bolivia to put international giant Bechtel in charge of the water system in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba. When water rates rose by 300 percent, the people took to the streets. The Bolivian government was unable to quell the rebellion and terminated the Bechtel contract. Now Bechtel is suing Bolivia to recoup its investment.

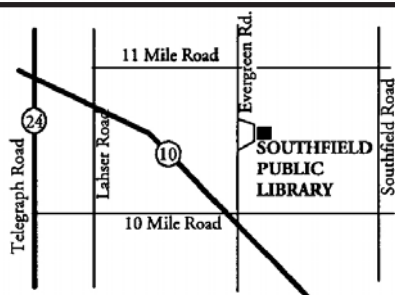
"Thirst" moves from Bolivia to arid Indian farmlands where a grassroots movement for conservation has enabled peasants to meet their water needs. The movements accomplishments are undermined by the Indian government's sale of water sources to Coke and Pepsi for their soft drink operations.

Lest American viewers feel complacent that corporate take-overs of fresh water can't happen here, "Thirst" focuses on Stockton, California where Mayor Gary Podesto is persuaded that a global water consortium will be more effective than city employees at managing Stockton's water and sewer system. Podesto opposes a public vote to let the people decide, and invites the Thames/OMI consortium to take over. Litigation ensues.

Is there reason to worry about access to fresh water for those of us living in the Great Lakes Basin? Nestle bottles and sells Michigan groundwater. Huge

plans to divert water through pipes out of the Great Lakes Basin for sale to the parched American Southwest or in tankers to Asia have been and continue to be proposed. Detroit's water supply system is old and in need of repair. In other cities including Atlanta, New Orleans, Lexington and Indianapolis, private corporations have presented attractive financing proposals and have taken over public systems.

If we treat water as a commodity, by buying it in bottles, by selling to other regions, or by allowing private corporations to take over public water systems, do we give away power we cannot reclaim? How can the needs of poor people for access to water be met if control of water is held by profit-motivated private companies rather than local governments? "Thirst" tells how the privatization of water is occurring, and how it can happen anywhere if people are not informed and prepared.



EMEAC presentation of *Thirst* Southfield Public Library Auditorium

26300 Evergreen Road, Southfield, between 10 and 11 Mile Roads

* From **696** take the Evergreen exit and go south on Evergreen.

* From **the Lodge (10)** take the Evergreen exit and go north.

<http://www.sfldlib.org>

Water, Globalization, Poverty and Terrorism

“In the third world, ecology movements are not a luxury of the rich; they are a survival imperative for the majority of people whose life is at risk by the market economy and threatened by its expansion.” -Vandana Shiva

How does the privatization of water fit into corporate globalization and the rise of terrorism? In her book, *Earth Democracy*, Indian physicist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva claims that corporate privatization of water, like the patenting of seeds, deprives the world's poor access to a necessity of life. The urban poor are unable to pay for drinking water when privatization increases water rates. Rural peasants are unable to farm when global corporations divert water away from their land, and patent and charge for seeds. People in sustenance economies are cast outside the world economy and are made to feel that they are disposable.

“The privatization of public goods and services and the commoditization of the life support systems of the poor is a double theft which robs people of both economic and cultural security. Millions deprived of a secure living and identity, are driven toward extremist, terrorist, fundamentalist movements.”¹

The author of *Earth Democracy* places the privatization of water in a continuum that began with the enclosure of the commons.² Shiva traces how the practice of enclosing the commons, begun in England, was replicated in the

Americas, Africa and Asia as commercial entities drove native peoples off of vast stretches of land. Corporate rule, through globalization, continues to build upon the foundation that colonialism created except that globalization expands the use of the term commons to include patents on life forms and biodiversity, public services like health, water systems, education and information.

There are five global giants seeking to privatize water systems: Suez, Vivendi, Bechtel, Thames, and RWE. They argue that capital investment in transporting water makes it private property. Shiva points out that the argument for privatization ignores that nature moves water down from the mountains, transports it through thousands of miles to the sea, evaporates it and returns it back to earth. Categorizing water as private property creates the possibility of excluding others from access.

Shiva claims that water privatization projects have a poor record. In Manila, Suez privatized the system but pulled out leaving the public utility to supply the water, pay a debt to the World Bank and guarantee payment to the corporation.

In South Africa, 10 million people were unable to pay for privatized water service. In India, Delhi's privatization led to a 10 fold increase in water tariffs even though investments were made in public funds. In Cochabamba, Bolivia, Bechtel interpreted its agreement to provide water to Cochabamba, Bolivia, to mean corporate ownership of every drop of water in the region. As the film “Thirst” shows, the people of Cochabamba rioted against corporate takeover of their water supply.

Earth Democracy is the name Vandana Shiva has given to the struggles to restore the rights of all beings to food, seed and water. She predicts that the most vigorous political battles of this century will be to determine whether these necessities of life, and in the case of seeds, life itself, can be enclosed. She believes that the role of governments will be key.

“The state can either facilitate enclosures and privatization..., or by creating public systems and social welfare structures, it can uphold the commons... It is this ambivalent role of the state that makes it a zone of contest in conflicts between enclosures and reclamation of the commons.”³

Footnotes

1. Shiva, V, *Earth Democracy*, South End Press 2005, p. 3.

2. In pre-industrial England, land called the commons was owned by the lord but rights to its use belonged to the commoners. With the birth of the textile industry, the landlord could get a higher return for his land by raising sheep for wool than he could by collecting rent from tenants. Backed by commercial interests, the landed gentry pressured Parliament to enclose the commons, enabling the landlords to force peasants off the land.

3. Shiva, V, *Earth Democracy*, South End Press 2005, p.40.





Photo credit: Aerial photo taken by 4 Town Citizen Action Team, a westward view across Union Lake and the Village

“Smart Growth”: Myths and Controversies

“We have found the enemy” stated Dr. Richard Norton during his keynote speech at the *Healthy Roads, Healthy Communities* forum, “and the enemy is us, or so the saying goes”. Dr. Norton, Professor of Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, spoke to 50 attendees on April 1st at the Highlands Lake campus of Oakland Community College to address the problems and complaints of sprawl in the Oakland County 4-Towns area.

In communities across the nation, there is a growing concern that current development patterns — called sprawl — are not in the long-term interest of cities, existing suburbs, small towns, rural communities or wilderness areas. There are extensive public costs involved with abandoning infrastructure in the cities, only to rebuild it further out.

Norton spoke to the myths of sprawl saying, “Sprawl is not something that was done to us. When we believe it is our right to live where we want, in the type of homes we want, consequences follow. All rights bring with them responsibilities. The asserted right to live wherever I want is a myth because it only gives half of the equation; it fails to acknowledge that one’s choice of where and how one lives has larger implications for one’s community.”

The *Healthy Roads* forum presented smart growth experts, township planning directors, and environmental and economic development organizations.

A primary concern in the 4 Towns area and discussed at the forum is the proposed M-5 connector that has been proposed by the Commerce Township Downtown Development

Authority. Community residents worry that the connector would destroy the 100 acres of wetlands and many lakes and streams including the precious spawning areas along the corridor; increase drive-through traffic in the area and attract additional commuters from other areas.

These concerns are all symptoms of sprawl. But, just as sprawl is a hot topic all over Michigan so is “smart growth”. Smart Growth is environmentally-sensitive land development. Its goals are: minimizing dependence on auto transportation, reducing air pollution, and making infrastructure investments more efficient. Smart Growth is not about, Norton points out, picking and choosing what you don’t want in your community after it has been proposed. He recommends develop-

ing and keeping current a plan for how you want your community to develop, protecting environmental values and providing opportunities to people of diverse economic and ethnic backgrounds.

There is a growing movement in Oakland County around smart growth and development. It is up to all of us to come together to discuss and create a new definition of ‘what we want’. We need to clearly outline a set of

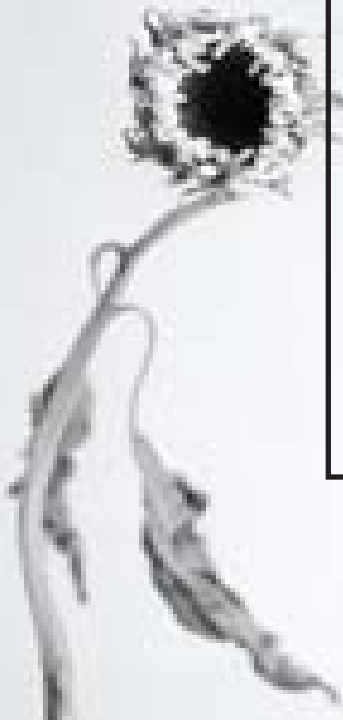
goals for land use that will enable each municipality to make better decisions about its investment and the activities that impact open space preservation and urban revitalization choices.

For more information on how to become involved in Smart Growth in Oakland County, contact Diana Seales at director@emeac.org or 248-258-5188.



Photo credit: SUV traffic, cbc online Aug 2003

EMEAC relies upon friends and donors for financial support.



Event Reminder!

Annual Meeting - **Movie *Thirst*** and discussion with **Jack Lessenberry**

When: May 9th, 6:00 pm

Where: **Southfield Library** on Evergreen.

More on the event inside this issue!

VOTE! for EMEAC board members and offices. Ballots will be arriving in your mailbox soon.

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Sunflower: Micah Beree black and white photography

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