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Progressive Ponderings
Privatizing Aquifers

As the supply of water decreases - with pollution, waste, extravagant use, channeling runoff for quick retrieval - and the demand increases - with increased population, agricultural and industrial uses - privatizing water is becoming part of the international trade and loan agreements. Lakes, streams and aquifers have already been "on the table." Atlanta, GA, experimented with privatizing its water system in 1999. After four years of poor quality, infrastructure neglect, demands for more city money and consumer complaints, the city rescinded the agreement in 2003.

In developing countries especially, tremendous pressure is being used to privatize water as well as other natural resources. This pressure usually comes from organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which act in accord with corporatized First World governments. As water replaces oil as the world's most sought after commodity, expect future wars over this necessity. If profits through privatization are added to this increasing demand, international violent conflicts will be multiplied.

The corporatized free market has professed that government (people working together for the good of all) is inefficient compared with business acting strictly with a profit motive. Numerous experiences have debunked this claim, but it continues to be made. Besides Atlanta, other cities and even countries of the world have experienced disaster with privatized water systems.

Water is only one example of this corporate trend towards privatization. Privatizing nature's gifts and life's necessities creates a monopoly- controlling who lives well, who live in hardship and who dies. Can a way be found to monopolize air? In one way it is already happening; by using air as a sink for pollution, corporatized government grants pollution "credits." Doesn't this imply some right of ownership?

For a long time, intellectual property has justly claimed a right to the fruits (patents and copyrights) of one's labor and artistic creation. Often, disputes over this involve the duration of the right and what might be a legitimate competitor.

Today is different. Today creation is being successfully claimed as intellectual property. Examples:

- Agriculture is being reshaped as seeds are altered so that the fruit will not regenerate itself. Thus, farmers cannot save and use part of their crop for reseeding the following year. The effect on small and subsistence farming is devastating.
- Pharmaceutical companies are attempting to patent, or slightly alter and patent, the genetic makeup of plants and claim all property rights to the use of these naturally occurring healing remedies. The U.S. patent office is approving what previous cultures often used as medicine.

Order #39 by Paul Bremer of the Coalition Provisional Authority recommended and approved the privatizing of nearly everything in Iraq.

Slavery is the privatizing of humans. It continues to this day in the form of child labor, long work days, inadequate pay, people regarded as commodities in a corporate system.

While privatizing property has led to many improvements in human subsistence and comfort it has also caused much human suffering, violence, and death. Selling off everything on this planet to the "owners of the world" is not the answer to human survival or the world's problems. Privatizing and monopolizing is another "free market" myth that progressives need to recognize and bring to citizens' attention. Contrary to privatization, holding water and other resources for the good of all by the whole community - managing resources for the governed by the governed - is the way to peace and justice.

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