



A BRITISH TRAIN DRIVER, A PHILIPPINE
MOTHER, A SOUTH AFRICAN ACTIVIST
AND THE CITIZENS OF A BOLIVIAN CITY
THEY HAVE COME TO REALISE WHAT
PRIVATISATION MEANS AND THEY ARE
ALREADY FIGHTING AGAINST IT -

THESE BIGSELLOUT

A FILM BY FLORIAN OPITZ

1. SYNOPSIS

THE BIG SELLOUT is a political film. In various episodes the abstract phenomenon of privatisation is depicted in stories about very concrete human destinies around the globe. The documentary tells tragic, tragicomic but also encouraging stories of the everyday life of people, who day by day have to deal with the effects of privatisation politics, dictated by anonymous international financial institutions in Washington D.C. and Geneva, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

In his film, author and director FLORIAN OPITZ reveals the reality of the privatised and globalised world, which is supposed to be effective and shiny. He examines the effects of THE BIG SELLOUT, the worldwide privatisation of basic public services, such as water supply, electricity, public transportation, and even public health care. In South America, Asia, Africa, but also in Europe and the United States, OPITZ meets people, for whom these promises are nothing more than hollow phrases. And what he finds is that THE BIG SELLOUT has only just begun.

FLORIAN OPITZ talks to the architects of the new economic world order, as well as to ordinary people who have to deal with the politics of the former. He tells the story of a South African activist who helps poor families in Soweto, who are disconnected from electricity by the to-be privatised electricity supplier ESKOM, because they cannot afford to pay the high electricity bills anymore. Hunted by the Police and the company's security he and his team of guerilla electricians reconnect these families back, illegally.

Another storyline is about a Philippine mother living with her family in a slum area in Metro-Manila. For years now she has been struggling to find money to pay for the dialysis, her son needs twice a week. If she doesn't succeed until the end of the week, her son will die.

A humorous British train driver and union activist is the protagonist of the third episode. Having proudly started his career in the most efficient railway system in Europe, some years later he finds himself in a privatised, totally fragmented, and run down industry whose service regularly collapses. He is constantly fighting for his colleagues who have been facing more and more pressure from their private employers over the recent years. Pressure that has already led to a numerous deadly accidents in the British railway system.

Last but not least, THE BIG SELLOUT tells us about the fight of the Bolivian citizens of Cochabamba against an US-corporation that had tried to take over the municipal water supply. The tempted takeover led to the first "water war" in human history, in which tens of thousands Bolivian citizens fought against the Bolivian police and military.

Although depicting the tragic privatisation failures all over the world there is a lot of hope in the episodes. In a desperate situation that seems to have no alternative to a "survival of the fittest" mentality, people unite and stand up against a seemingly all-powerful enemy.



|||||THE BIG SELLOUT

In the documentary, Joseph Stiglitz, one of the world's best known economists and Nobel Prize winner for economy makes the viewer understand where the dogma of privatisation came from, who profits from it, and what societies lose, when following it blindly. As refined former director of the World Bank, he comes from the world of financial institutions, but today he is fighting for the losers of the privatisation process, triggered by these same organizations.

THE BIG SELLOUT is a very special film: The different storylines of the film are not narrated one after the other, but woven together and carefully intertwined in a thrilling, episodal structure that is as compelling as truthful, and results in a film that is even more exciting than the sum of its parts.



2. DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

There is a lot of talk about globalisation and privatisation these days. Worldwide it has become an everyday issue not just in the media, but for all of us. Yet do we actually know what privatisation really means for us? For the communities we live in? For our children? What it feels like for people that are affected by it?

In recent years, a lot of films that dealt in one way or another with world-wide economic phenomenons like globalisation were produced. However, most of them tried to explain privatisation and globalisation in a very abstract way: From the western perspective of its advocates or from the perspective of experts and globalisation critics. Mostly the affected people were reduced to numbers, statistics or in the best case to victims. They weren't portrayed as active individuals, who are able to take their destinies in their own hands and change the reality they live in.

With **THE BIG SELLOUT** it is my aim to show what is behind the abstract phenomenon of privatising basic public services; what it means and what it feels like for the people affected; what a society loses by putting private enterprises in control of its basic public services; and how it looks like, when the state retreats from its responsibilities and transnational corporations take over.

The protagonists of **THE BIG SELLOUT** have got to realise today what it means when the supply of water and energy, public transport or health care are privatised. And they are not accepting their fate, but opposing the mechanisms of total capitalism in their communities. The worldwide retreat of the state and the privatisation of basic public services is pushed forward behind closed doors by corporations and anonymous financial institutions as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), whereas the broad public doesn't really take notice of this development:

Nearly all spheres of society are to be submitted to the rules of the market. Nothing is sacrosanct. That means nothing less than that in the future, not the public hand will be responsible for basic public services, but transnational corporations. And they will have the power to decide who will have access to these services. Who will have access to drinking water, to energy, to public transport, and health care: Only those who can afford it.

Most people have no idea of the quiet takeover of the corporations, which has already started long ago. It is the ambition of this film to change that. This documentary wants to make the public aware of a development that can change all our lives. The strong stories of the protagonists only depict pars pro toto what can happen to all of us.

Florian Opitz, Cologne, March 2006



3. ABOUT FLORIAN OPITZ

Florian Opitz is a freelance documentary filmmaker, author and journalist. He was born in Saarbruecken, Germany 1973. Florian studied history, psychology and English at the universities of Cologne and Heidelberg and graduated as M.A.

Since 1998 Florian has been working as a freelance filmmaker and journalist for several European TV stations, amongst others, for ARD, ARTE and ZDF. Florian so far has made SEVERAL political documentaries, mainly about globalisation related subjects, and historical documentaries, next to films about Jack Kerouac, Charles de Gaulle, Naomi Klein, the history of the skinhead-movement and several more. Since 2000 he is working on a doctors thesis in German History. Florian has been teaching documentary film classes in different German universities.



4. FILMOGRAPHY (SELECTED FILMS)

The hunt for the killer virus

45', Video, 2005

Broadcast on ARD, 3sat, Phoenix, SWR, BR

The last days on the Western Front (2 Miniseries)

3 x 45', Video, 2005 and 3 x 30'

Broadcast on WDR, ARD

The hunt for the killer virus

45', Video, 2005

Broadcast on ARD, 3sat, Phoenix, SWR, BR

The Arabs - Concept of an Enemy

45', Video, 2003

With Heinrich Billstein and Werner Biermann

Broadcast on WDR, ARD

Blood for Oil. The Wars for the Black Gold

45', Video, 2003

With Heinrich Billstein and Mathias Haentjes

Broadcast on WDR

Goliath's Nightmare. Protest against Globalisation since Genua 2001

45', Video, 2002

Broadcast on WDR, 3sat, Phoenix

The Sixties. (Miniseries)

2x 45', Video, 2001

Broadcast on WDR, 3sat, Phoenix

ARTE-Metropolis: The new Anti-Globalisation Movement in France and the USA

10', Video, 2001

Broadcast on ARTE

ARTE-Metropolis: Tibet - Myth And Reality. The human rights situation in Tibet

12', Video, 2001

Broadcast on ARTE

Baden 68. De Gaulle escape from the Paris student riots.



10', Video, 2001
Broadcast on WDR
(Nominated for the French-German Journalist Award)

Adenauer. The Life of Western Germanys first Chancellor
45', Video, 2000
Broadcast on WDR

Women in Hitlers Army
15', Video, 1999
Broadcast on WDR, NDR, SWR, BR and 3sat

The Second World War. A Concise History
45', Video, 1999
With Heinrich Billstein and Mathias Haentjes
Broadcast on WDR and 3sat

Jack Kerouac - The Life of the Writer
15', Video, 1999
Broadcast on WDR, NDR, SWR, BR and 3sat

German Soldiers against Hitler
45', Video, 1998
co-author
Broadcast on ARD and 3sat



5. CREDITS

Director	Florian Opitz
Producers	Felix Blum Arne Ludwig
Cinematographer	Andy Lehmann
Sound Recording & Additional Camera	Christoph Mohr
Editor	Niko Remus
Post Production Supervisor	Niko Remus
Music	Pluramon
Commissioning Editors	Dr. Sabine Rollberg (Arte/WDR) Dr. Renate Stegmüller (Bayerischer Rundfunk)
Research Assistant	Julia Meyer
Field Producer South America	Sebastian Roetters
Graphics & Titles	Viola Schmieskors, Inga Zwick
Controlling	Antje Paul
Assistants to producer	Marie Baer Lars Lucas Christine Krause Emma Salomon Judith Winter

