

Inside View of Extraction & Exploitation: John Perkins Speaks

Excerpts from an Interview with John Perkins, author of Confessions of an Economic Hit Man about his new book, The Secret History of the American Empire: Economic Hit Men, Jackals and the Truth about Global Corruption, on Corporations and Democracy on August 3, 2007.

The extraction economy is about the extraction of resources, labor and money. Most Americans do not realize that our lifestyles are supported by terrible exploitation around the planet including slave labor. In the last ten years more than four million people have died in Africa over either the mining of coltan or wars to keep its price low so that we can have cheap laptops and cell phones. This is also happening with the extraction of other resources like oil or in the sweatshops that companies like Nike have across the planet.

The U.S. has less than five percent of the world's population yet we consume over twenty-five percent of its resources and produce thirty percent of its pollution. That is a failed model which can't be replicated in the rest of the world. It's not something that even we can keep doing. It has become clear that we must change and devote ourselves to creating a sustainable, stable and peaceful economy, politics and world. We have to recognize that our planet is very small. We have to see that to have homeland security we have to see the homeland as the entire planet.

We have created an empire and after World War II it became systematic based around the World Bank and big corporations. The few men and women who run the biggest corporations all went to the same schools and know they have to achieve the basic goal of the corporation which is

excessive windfall profits to make a few people much richer. This is not conspiracy theory. It is not illegal. It is how they are trained

They are greedy, but deep in their hearts they don't want to see Florida sink into the ocean, or a huge hole in the ozone layer or global warming.

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Child laborers mining coltan in Africa. Slave labor and wars have killed four million people to ensure that this component of laptops and cell phones remains cheap. photo:dizolele.com

They don't want to see rivers polluted or forests destroyed. They want to see a world for their children and grandchildren. We have been successful at turning corporations around when we let them know that they can change the paradigm.

Rainforest Action Network has been very successful at convincing big corporations like Mitsubishi and Boise Cascade to revise their policies about cutting the rainforest. They did this by picketing stores and putting big ads in newspapers with pictures of the executives and accusing them of ripping off the rainforests so that their children ask, "Well Daddy, why are you doing this?"

I heard one Mitsubishi executive toasting Randy Hayes of Rainforest Action Network saying, "Randy I want to thank you. I have kids and hope to have grandchildren. Someday I want to take them to the Amazon and the great rainforests of British Columbia. I and a lot of other executives at Mitsubishi had wanted to do the right thing all along, but did not dare. We thought we would lose our jobs. So when you and your people came along and forced us to re-evaluate our policies then we were able to do the right thing." They want us to force them to do something other than destroy the planet.

We need to transform this empire into a model for a sustainable, stable and peaceful world for people all over the planet. We need to redefine the very essence of what it means to be a corporation. Let's step it up a notch. It is time to go after how corporations are chartered. Their charter should include that their primary goal is to provide a better world for their employees, all of the people around the world that provide resources for them, and the communities and environments where those people live. In other words a better world for all of us.

There is nothing more satisfying than creating a better world for our children and grandchildren. We can each do this in our own way, everyday. It is a very exciting time for change. What a wonderful time to be alive.