

## Book Review

*The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, by John Perkins. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2016, ISBN: 978-1-62656-674-3, 353 pp. \$12.20, paperback.

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Author John Perkins writes a bold, yet compelling, account of his personal experiences as an economic hit man (EHM), involving manipulating data and foreign government officials, deception, lies, sex, assassinations, and attempted murder. His true story recounted in the book *The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* is an eye-opener for those who are unaware of the underpinnings of the government's ability to bully other countries into large debt to benefit American multinational corporations and secure our place as the sole superpower.

Dodging the Vietnam draft, Perkins took an opportunity with the Peace Corps where he and his wife Ann were placed in Ecuador to help local Incan brick makers improve their rudimentary methods and sales. Due to his sympathies with the indigenous people, John helped them to do whatever it took in order to prosper. This led to the forming of a co-op, enabling the brick makers to work together to make money. While in Ecuador, he met a businessman from an international consulting company called MAIN who saw John's ability to understand the natives and probed John on his thoughts regarding whether or not he thought the World Bank, which funded MAIN, should lend Ecuador billions of dollars for infrastructure projects. About a year later, as John's work in the Peace Corps was complete, he was invited to interview with MAIN as an economist. The man discussed helping Indonesia resist communism by developing an electrical power system, which he presented to John as the key element that would help allow capitalism and democracy to flourish within the country. Although there was doubt in his mind about the self-serving reasons for the MAIN job, and the money was irresistibly alluring, his Peace Corps sympathies led John to take the job, believing he could help Indonesia's economy. His decision to join MAIN started his journey to become an EHM, manipulating other countries to succumb to the pressures of large loans they could not pay off and, thus, are forced to work with the United States in bartering oil for their debts. All the while, John knew that he would eventually expose the truth, which led to his original 2004 book. The 2016 version of the book includes current information on how EHMs have spread in the world, how the role of an EHM is more treacherous, and potential actions to take.

It is clear throughout the book that the author was torn between comprehending the distinction of the ideals of the American republic and the new global empire that has been created. The American republic offered hope and moral promise, while the global empire offered only a self-centered, greedy, and materialistic domination of weaker but resource-rich countries. Throughout his work in various countries, learning from the natives' experiences, he got a clearer sense of the actual impact of his job and struggled with whether or not to continue working for MAIN. Although his conscience wanted him to quit, his business-school persona was not quite convinced, as the monetary seduction and a lucrative business-class lifestyle fed his ego and pocketbook.

The goal of the U.S. government's foreign aid, including that of U.S.-dominated international lending bodies, U.S. Agency for International Development projects, and loans and its funding of major infrastructure projects through various semiautonomous consulting companies was quite simply

economic world dominance by making countries economically dependent to increase bargaining power for oil. For example, one such deal, known to the EHMs as the Saudi Arabian Money-Laundering Affair, was a result of Saudi Arabia taking advantage of the United States in supplying oil while increasing oil prices. One deal resulted from the author's creativity in his forecasts for and acquisitions of hundreds of millions of dollars of Saudi Arabian money to be invested in U.S. engineering and construction companies for infrastructure projects. The objective of the project was to maximize U.S. profits while making Saudi Arabia dependent on the United States through ongoing maintenance agreements. EHMs flew in first class all over the world, were put up in the best hotels, ate at the finest restaurants, and were treated like royalty, because the countries they visited desperately wanted the consulting company to make their local economies soar. The EHMs would communicate directly with leaders of target countries for the purpose of manipulating data and coercing them to allow the international engineering company (MAIN) to build dams, bridges, and any other large infrastructure projects for billions of dollars. One contract that MAIN presented to the Indonesian government, the Asian Development Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development required someone from MAIN to visit these countries for 2 or 3 days, meeting with the leaders, presenting the objectives and contracts, and then leaving. The author found it deeply disturbing that not a single person questioned his data and compared the meeting to a game of poker, where the cards were left hidden and each player bet on his hand. This type of game was more serious than poker, as it affected millions of lives for decades afterward.

The author compared the dealings and power of the EHMs as similar to the Mafia, in which their job titles and deceptive resumes are as sketchy as the legitimacy of the economic deals made with the other country. For instance, Columbia was looked at by the United States as a key area to promote political and commercial interests. Huge investments in electrical power grids, highways, and telecommunications would open up Columbia's gas and oil resources. The author's job was, once again, to go to Columbia, present an argument for its accepting an exceedingly large loan for inflated economic and electric forecasts under the guise of development. Just like the Mob, EHMs are offered a significant amount of money for a simple job—for example, creating a fake economic plan stating that over the next 25 years, a country would see a 17–20% increase in economic growth. What country can deny the numbers of an economic specialist and potentially miss such a too-good-to-be-true deal?

The geopolitics involved in the MAIN deals were earth shattering, as it involved not only the United States and Ecuador, but also others such as the Saudi Arabian Money-Laundering Affair, financing over \$3 billion USD to Osama Bin Laden in the Afghan War against the Soviet Union during the 1980s; negotiations around the Panama Canal; hits on former Ecuadorian President Jaime Roldós; drone bombings; and the rise of China. The government has a taskforce of assassins, known as jackals, to take care of business (e.g., quietly assassinate the target) if the results are not going according to the economic plan agreed upon. After a few plane bombings with Ecuadorian presidential figures involved, many fear the jackals, and rightfully so. They are flown in to do the job, get out, and if caught, are released with an easy bribe by one of the allied governments. The media never reports the news about this, as the public is never to know the truth.

Although the author made a valiant effort to become friends with many locals in the countries he travels to, including enduring a puppet show in Indonesia that mocked the U.S. president and the work he himself was doing in the country, he was ridden with guilt. He characterized himself in the book as a person truly trying to understand the countries' perspective of dependencies, political upheavals that happened along the way, and their ultimate fear of death caused by their economic and political decisions. Reading through the book that continually described his ongoing deceit as standard operating procedure in the highest echelons, and his internal moral conflict because of his

actions, the reader is left to think it is just a matter of time before John will be the target of a jackal himself for publishing this information in book form. Although the author continued to work as an EHM for well over 10 years, he did finally come to the realization that he needed to follow his compassionate heart to help the countries and friends he had made along the way. His passion for helping those he once snubbed overcame his greed for money and the globetrotting lifestyle. He finally decided to focus his efforts on the greater good for a better world, which did not involve MAIN, the U.S. government, or any other EHM consulting firm, but rather involved speaking at international conferences to educate future leaders about the environmental and social costs affecting their countries and how to solve them through green efforts and regenerating agriculture.

To think that this type of secret governmental manipulation does not exist among countries today would be naïve. To believe that the news media correctly communicates the truth to the public about such geopolitical situations and covert assassinations is lunacy. One must wonder how many jackals are out there and what the government is actually monitoring, as Edward Snowden has shown. As the author wrote, the government is probably monitoring his every keystroke. What can be done about the espionage and subversive acts against other countries? Will it eventually lead to a war, economic defaults, or will it lead to actions against the United States? Will we be able to stop the desecration of the Earth due to big corporations killing forests to drill for oil and other resources? Is there any way to learn from this tale to foster positive social change? The author believes so.

*The New Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* is not just about the author's life events as an EHM and the missions he was sent on. It was written with the purpose of infuriating the reader about what is being done to destroy parts of the Earth in order for countries like the United States to financially gain from it. Since turning a new leaf, the author concluded his book with little steps that anyone can take in their local communities to help improve the Earth. The author proposed a list of things that anyone, including students, retirees, entrepreneurs, and corporations, can do to contribute to positive social, environmental, and economic change. After reading this book, I was left with the sinking feeling that the major catastrophes the geopolitical wars are creating cannot possibly solve the Earth's problem. However, the author pointed out that this is not true. Each little act we do contributes to the big purpose of saving the environment. The author leaves us with the message that there are no excuses. It is our turn to act. In order to stop the EHM phenomenon, society should change the mechanics of economics and come together to create communities to take small strides in the right direction for positive social change. Pay it forward, because if you don't, then the future of our children's world will be dismal.

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