

forth—and yet none of those titles indicated that every one of them was, in his or her own way, an EHM, that every one of them was serving the interests of global empire.

Nor did the fact of those titles among my staff suggest that we were just the tip of the iceberg. Every major international company—from ones that marketed shoes and sporting goods to those that manufactured heavy equipment—had its own EHM equivalents. The march had begun and it was rapidly encircling the planet. The hoods had discarded their leather jackets, dressed up in business suits, and taken on an air of respectability. Men and women were descending from corporate headquarters in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, London, and Tokyo, streaming across every continent to convince corrupt politicians to allow their countries to be shackled to the corporatocracy, and to induce desperate people to sell their bodies to sweatshops and assembly lines.

It was disturbing to understand that the unspoken details behind the written words of my résumé and of that article defined a world of smoke and mirrors intended to keep us all shackled to a system that is morally repugnant and ultimately self-destructive. By getting me to read between the lines, Paula had nudged me to take one more step along a path that would ultimately transform my life.

🌐 CHAPTER 24

Ecuador's President Battles Big Oil

My work in Colombia and Panama gave me many opportunities to stay in touch with and to visit the first country to be my home away from home. Ecuador had suffered under a long line of dictators and right-wing oligarchies manipulated by U.S. political and commercial interests. In a way, the country was the quintessential banana republic, and the corporatocracy had made major inroads there.

The serious exploitation of oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon basin began in the late 1960s, and it resulted in a buying spree in which the small club of families who ran Ecuador played into the hands of the international banks. They saddled their country with huge amounts of debt, backed by the promise of oil revenues. Roads and industrial parks, hydroelectric dams, transmission and distribution systems, and other power projects sprang up all over the country. International engineering and construction companies struck it rich—once again.

One man whose star was rising over this Andean country was the exception to the rule of political corruption and complicity with the corporatocracy. Jaime Roldós was a university professor

and attorney in his late thirties, whom I had met on several occasions. He was charismatic and charming. Once, I impetuously offered to fly to Quito and provide free consulting services any time he asked. I said it partially in jest, but also because I would gladly have done it on my own vacation time—I liked him and, as I was quick to tell him, was always looking for a good excuse to visit his country. He laughed and offered me a similar deal, saying that whenever I needed to negotiate my oil bill, I could call on him.

He had established a reputation as a populist and a nationalist, a person who believed strongly in the rights of the poor and in the responsibility of politicians to use a country's natural resources prudently. When he began campaigning for the presidency in 1978, he captured the attention of his countrymen and of citizens in every nation where foreign interests exploited oil—or where people desired independence from the influences of powerful outside forces. Roldós was the rare modern politician who was not afraid to oppose the status quo. He went after the oil companies and the not-so-subtle system that supported them.

For instance, I heard that he accused the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an evangelical missionary group from the United States, of sinister collusion with the oil companies. I was familiar with SIL missionaries from my Peace Corps days. The organization had entered Ecuador, as it had so many other countries, with the professed goal of studying, recording, and translating indigenous languages.

SIL had been working extensively with the Huaorani tribe in the Amazon basin area, during the early years of oil exploration, when a disturbing pattern appeared to emerge. While it might have been a coincidence (and no link was ever proved), stories were told in many Amazonian communities that when seismologists reported to corporate headquarters that a certain region had characteristics indicating a high probability of oil beneath the surface, some SIL members went in and encouraged the indigenous people to move from that land, onto missionary reservations; there

they would receive free food, shelter, clothes, medical treatment, and missionary-style education. The condition was that, according to these stories, they had to deed their lands to the oil companies.

Rumors abounded that SIL missionaries used an assortment of underhanded techniques to persuade the tribes to abandon their homes and move to the missions. A frequently repeated story was that they had donated food heavily laced with laxatives—then offered medicines to cure the diarrhea epidemic. Throughout Huaorani territory, SIL airdropped false-bottomed food baskets containing tiny radio transmitters; the rumor was that receivers at highly sophisticated communications stations, manned by U.S. military personnel at the army base in Shell, tuned in to these transmitters. Whenever a member of the tribe was bitten by a poisonous snake or became seriously ill, an SIL representative arrived with antivenom or the proper medicines—often in oil company helicopters.

During the early days of oil exploration, five missionaries were found dead with Huaorani spears protruding from their bodies. Later, the Huaoranis claimed they did this to send a message to keep missionaries out. The message went unheeded. In fact, it ultimately had the opposite effect. Rachel Saint, the sister of one of the murdered men, toured the United States, appearing on national television in order to raise money and support for SIL and the oil companies, who she claimed were helping the “savages” become civilized and educated.

According to some sources, SIL received funding from the Rockefeller charities. Family scion John D. Rockefeller had founded Standard Oil—which later divested into the majors, including Chevron, Exxon, and Mobil.¹

Roldós struck me as a man who walked the path blazed by Torrijos. Both stood up to the world's strongest superpower. Torrijos wanted to take back the Canal, while Roldós's strongly nationalistic position on oil threatened the world's most influential companies. Like Torrijos, Roldós was not a Communist, but rather stood for the right of his country to determine its own destiny. And as

they had with Torrijos, pundits predicted that big business and Washington would never tolerate Roldós as president, that if elected he would meet a fate similar to that of Guatemala's Arbenz or Chile's Allende.

It seemed to me that the two men together might spearhead a new movement in Latin American politics and that this movement might form the foundation of changes that could affect every nation on the planet. These men were not Castros or Gadhafis. They were not associated with Russia or China or, as in Allende's case, with the international Socialist movement. They were popular, intelligent, charismatic leaders who were pragmatic instead of dogmatic. They were nationalistic but not anti-American. If corporatocracy was built on three pillars—major corporations, international banks, and colluding governments—Roldós and Torrijos held out the possibility of removing the pillar of government collusion.

A major part of the Roldós platform was what came to be known as the Hydrocarbons Policy. This policy was based on the premise that Ecuador's greatest potential resource was petroleum and that all future exploitation of that resource should be done in a manner that would bring the greatest benefit to the largest percentage of the population. Roldós was a firm believer in the state's obligation to assist the poor and disenfranchised. He expressed hope that the Hydrocarbons Policy could in fact be used as a vehicle for bringing about social reform. He had to walk a fine line, however, because he knew that in Ecuador, as in so many other countries, he could not be elected without the support of at least some of the most influential families, and that even if he should manage to win without them, he would never see his programs implemented without their support.

I was personally relieved that Carter was in the White House during this crucial time. Despite pressures from Texaco and other oil interests, Washington stayed pretty much out of the picture. I knew this would not have been the case under most other administrations—Republican or Democrat.

More than any other issue, I believe it was the Hydrocarbons Pol-

icy that convinced Ecuadorians to send Jaime Roldós to the Presidential Palace in Quito—their first democratically elected president after a long line of dictators. He outlined the basis of this policy in his August 10, 1979, inaugural address:

We must take effective measures to defend the energy resources of the nation. The State (must) maintain the diversification of its exports and not lose its economic independence . . . Our decisions will be inspired solely by national interests and in the unrestricted defense of our sovereign rights.²

Once in office, Roldós had to focus on Texaco, since by that time it had become the main player in the oil game. It was an extremely rocky relationship. The oil giant did not trust the new president and did not want to be part of any policy that would set new precedents. It was very aware that such policies might serve as models in other countries.

A speech delivered by a key adviser to Roldós, José Carvajal, summed up the new administration's attitude:

If a partner [Texaco] does not want to take risks, to make investments for exploration, or to exploit the areas of an oil concession, the other partner has the right to make those investments and then to take over as the owner . . .

We believe our relations with foreign companies have to be just; we have to be tough in the struggle; we have to be prepared for all kinds of pressures, but we should not display fear or an inferiority complex in negotiating with those foreigners.³

On New Year's Day, 1980, I made a resolution. It was the beginning of a new decade. In twenty-eight days, I would turn

thirty-five. I resolved that during the next year I would make a major change in my life and that in the future I would try to model myself after modern heroes like Jaime Roldós and Omar Torrijos.

In addition, something shocking had happened months earlier. From a profitability standpoint, Bruno had been the most successful president in MAIN's history. Nonetheless, suddenly and without warning, Mac Hall had fired him.

CHAPTER 25

I Quit

Mac Hall's firing of Bruno hit MAIN like an earthquake. It caused turmoil and dissension throughout the company. Bruno had his share of enemies, but even some of them were dismayed. To many employees it was obvious that the motive had been jealousy. During discussions across the lunch table or around the coffee wagon, people often confided that they thought Hall felt threatened by this man who was more than fifteen years his junior and who had taken the firm to new levels of profitability.

"Hall couldn't allow Bruno to go on looking so good," one man said. "Hall had to know that it was just a matter of time before Bruno would take over and the old man would be out to pasture."

As if to prove such theories, Hall appointed Paul Priddy as the new president. Paul had been a vice president at MAIN for years and was an amiable, nuts-and-bolts engineer. In my opinion, he was also lackluster, a yes-man who would bow to the chairman's whims and would never threaten him with stellar profits. My opinion was shared by many others.

For me, Bruno's departure was devastating. He had been a personal mentor and a key factor in our international work. Priddy,

Ecuador's Presidential Death

Leaving MAIN was no easy matter; Paul Priddy refused to believe me. "April Fool's," he winked.

I assured him that I was serious. Recalling Paula's advice that I should do nothing to antagonize anyone or to give cause for suspicion that I might expose my EHM work, I emphasized that I appreciated everything MAIN had done for me but that I needed to move on. I had always wanted to write about the people that MAIN had introduced me to around the world, but nothing political. I said I wanted to freelance for *National Geographic* and other magazines, and to continue to travel. I declared my loyalty to MAIN and swore that I would sing its praises at every opportunity. Finally, Paul gave in.

After that, everyone else tried to talk me out of resigning. I was reminded frequently about how good I had it, and I was even accused of insanity. I came to understand that no one wanted to accept the fact that I was leaving voluntarily, at least in part, because it forced them to look at themselves. If I were not crazy for leaving, then they might have to consider their own sanity in staying. It was easier to see me as a person who had departed from his senses.

Particularly disturbing were the reactions of my staff. In their eyes, I was deserting them, and there was no strong heir apparent. However, I had made up my mind. After all those years of vacillation, I now was determined to make a clean sweep.

Unfortunately, it did not quite work out that way. True, I no longer had a job, but since I had been far from a fully vested partner, the cash-out of my stock was not sufficient for retirement. Had I stayed at MAIN another few years, I might have become the forty-year-old millionaire I had once envisioned; however, at thirty-five I had a long way to go to accomplish that objective. It was a cold and dreary April in Boston.

Then one day Paul Priddy called and pleaded with me to come to his office. "One of our clients is threatening to drop us," he said. "They hired us because they wanted you to represent them on the expert witness stand."

I thought a lot about it. By the time I sat across the desk from Paul, I had made my decision. I named my price—a retainer that was more than three times what my MAIN salary had been. To my surprise, he agreed, and that started me on a new career.

For the next several years, I was employed as a highly paid expert witness—primarily for U.S. electric utility companies seeking to have new power plants approved for construction by public utilities commissions. One of my clients was the Public Service Company of New Hampshire. My job was to justify, under oath, the economic feasibility of the highly controversial Seabrook nuclear power plant.

Although I was no longer directly involved with Latin America, I continued to follow events there. As an expert witness, I had lots of time between appearances on the stand. I kept in touch with Paula and renewed old friendships from my Peace Corps days in Ecuador—a country that had suddenly jumped to center stage in the world of international oil politics.

Jaime Roldós was moving forward. He took his campaign promises seriously and he was launching an all-out attack on the

oil companies. He seemed to see clearly the things that many others on both sides of the Panama Canal either missed or chose to ignore. He understood the underlying currents that threatened to turn the world into a global empire and to relegate the citizens of his country to a very minor role, bordering on servitude. As I read the newspaper articles about him, I was impressed not only by his commitment, but also by his ability to perceive the deeper issues. And the deeper issues pointed to the fact that we were entering a new epoch of world politics.

In November 1980, Carter lost the U.S. presidential election to Ronald Reagan. The Panama Canal Treaty he had negotiated with Torrijos, and the situation in Iran, especially the hostages held at the U.S. Embassy and the failed rescue attempt, were major factors. However, something subtler was also happening. A president whose greatest goal was world peace and who was dedicated to reducing U.S. dependence on oil was replaced by a man who believed that the United States' rightful place was at the top of a world pyramid held up by military muscle, and that controlling oil fields wherever they existed was part of our Manifest Destiny. A president who installed solar panels on White House roofs was replaced by one who, immediately upon occupying the Oval Office, had them removed.

Carter may have been an ineffective politician, but he had a vision for America that was consistent with the one defined in our Declaration of Independence. In retrospect, he now seems naively archaic, a throwback to the ideals that molded this nation and drew so many of our grandparents to her shores. When we compare him to his immediate predecessors and successors, he is an anomaly. His worldview was inconsistent with that of the EHMs.

Reagan, on the other hand, was most definitely a global empire builder, a servant of the corporatocracy. At the time of his election, I found it fitting that he was a Hollywood actor, a man who had followed orders passed down from moguls, who knew how to take

direction. That would be his signature. He would cater to the men who shuttled back and forth from corporate CEO offices to bank boards and into the halls of government. He would serve the men who appeared to serve him but who in fact ran the government—men like Vice President George H. W. Bush, Secretary of State George Shultz, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, Richard Cheney, Richard Helms, and Robert McNamara. He would advocate what those men wanted: an America that controlled the world and all its resources, a world that answered to the commands of that America, a U.S. military that would enforce the rules as they were written by America, and an international trade and banking system that supported America as CEO of the global empire.

As I looked into the future, it seemed we were entering a period that would be very good to the EHMs. It was another twist of fate that I had chosen this moment in history to drop out. The more I reflected on it, however, the better I felt about it. I knew that my timing was right.

As for what this meant in the long term, I had no crystal ball; however, I knew from history that empires do not endure and that the pendulum always swings in both directions. From my perspective, men like Roldós offered hope. I was certain that Ecuador's new president understood many of the subtleties of the current situation. I knew that he had been a Torrijos admirer and had applauded Carter for his courageous stand on the Panama Canal issue. I felt certain that Roldós would not falter. I could only hope that his fortitude would light a candle for the leaders of other countries, who needed the type of inspiration he and Torrijos could provide.

Early in 1981, the Roldós administration formally presented his new hydrocarbons law to the Ecuadorian Congress. If implemented, it would reform the country's relationship to oil companies. By many standards, it was considered revolutionary and even radical. It certainly aimed to change the way business was con-

ducted. Its influence would stretch far beyond Ecuador, into much of Latin America and throughout the world.¹

The oil companies reacted predictably—they pulled out all the stops. Their public relations people went to work to vilify Jaime Roldós, and their lobbyists swept into Quito and Washington, briefcases full of threats and payoffs. They tried to paint the first democratically elected president of Ecuador in modern times as another Castro. But Roldós would not cave in to intimidation. He responded by denouncing the conspiracy between politics and oil—and religion. Although he offered no tangible proof, he openly accused the Summer Institute of Linguistics of colluding with the oil companies and then, in an extremely bold move, he ordered SIL out of the country.²

Only weeks after sending his legislative package to Congress and a couple of days after expelling the SIL missionaries, Roldós warned all foreign interests, including but not limited to oil companies, that unless they implemented plans that would help Ecuador's people, they would be forced to leave his country. He delivered a major speech at the Atahualpa Olympic Stadium in Quito and then headed off to a small community in southern Ecuador.

He died there in a fiery airplane crash, on May 24, 1981.³

The world was shocked. Latin Americans were outraged. Newspapers throughout the hemisphere blazed, "CIA Assassination!" In addition to the fact that Washington and the oil companies hated him, many circumstances appeared to support these allegations, and such suspicions were heightened as more facts became known. Nothing was ever proven, but eyewitnesses claimed that Roldós, forewarned about an attempt on his life, had taken precautions, including traveling in two airplanes. At the last moment, it was said, one of his security officers had convinced him to board the decoy airplane. It had blown up.

Despite world reaction, the news hardly made the U.S. press.

Oswaldo Hurtado took over as Ecuador's president. Under his administration, the Summer Institute of Linguistics continued working in Ecuador, and SIL members were granted special visas. By the end of the year, he had launched an ambitious program to increase oil drilling by Texaco and other foreign companies in the Gulf of Guayaquil and the Amazon basin.⁴

Omar Torrijos, in eulogizing Roldós, referred to him as "brother." He also confessed to having nightmares about his own assassination; he saw himself dropping from the sky in a gigantic fireball. It was prophetic.

CHAPTER 27

Panama: Another Presidential Death

I was stunned by Roldós's death, but perhaps I should not have been. I was anything but naive. I knew about Arbenz, Mossadegh, Allende—and about many other people whose names never made the newspapers or history books but whose lives were destroyed and sometimes cut short because they stood up to the corporatocracy. Nevertheless, I was shocked. It was just so very blatant.

I had concluded, after our phenomenal success in Saudi Arabia, that such wantonly overt actions were things of the past. I thought the jackals had been relegated to zoos. Now I saw that I was wrong. I had no doubt that Roldós's death had not been an accident. It had all the markings of a CIA-orchestrated assassination. I understood that it had been executed so blatantly in order to send a message. The new Reagan administration, complete with its fast-draw Hollywood cowboy image, was the ideal vehicle for delivering such a message. The jackals were back, and they wanted Omar Torrijos and everyone else who might consider joining an anti-corporatocracy crusade to know it.

But Torrijos was not buckling. Like Roldós, he refused to be intimidated. He, too, expelled the Summer Institute of Linguistics,

It was obvious that not only had the EHMs failed, but so had the jackals. Venezuela in 2003 turned out to be very different from Iran in 1953. I wondered if this was a harbinger or simply an anomaly—and what Washington would do next.

At least for the time being, I believe a serious crisis was averted in Venezuela—and Chávez was saved—by Saddam Hussein. The Bush administration could not take on Afghanistan, Iraq, and Venezuela all at once. At the moment, it had neither the military muscle nor the political support to do so. I knew, however, that such circumstances could change quickly, and that President Chávez was likely to face fierce opposition in the near future. Nonetheless, Venezuela was a reminder that not much had changed in fifty years—except the outcome.

Ecuador Revisited

Venezuela was a classic case. However, as I watched events unfolding there, I was struck by the fact that the truly significant battle lines were being drawn in yet another country. They were significant not because they represented more in terms of dollars or human lives, but because they involved issues that went far beyond the materialistic goals that generally define empires. These battle lines extended beyond the armies of bankers, business executives, and politicians, deep into the soul of modern civilization. And they were being established in a country I had come to know and love, the one where I had first worked as a Peace Corps volunteer: Ecuador.

In the years since I first went there, in 1968, this tiny country had evolved into the quintessential victim of the corporatocracy. My contemporaries and I, and our modern corporate equivalents, had managed to bring it to virtual bankruptcy. We loaned it billions of dollars so it could hire our engineering and construction firms to build projects that would help its richest families. As a result, in those three decades, the official poverty level grew from 50 to 70 percent, under- or unemployment increased from 15 to 70

percent, public debt increased from \$240 million to \$16 billion, and the share of national resources allocated to the poorest citizens declined from 20 percent to 6 percent. Today, Ecuador must devote nearly 50 percent of its national budget simply to paying off its debts—instead of to helping the millions of its citizens who are officially classified as dangerously impoverished.¹

The situation in Ecuador clearly demonstrates that this was not the result of a conspiracy; it was a process that had occurred during both Democratic and Republican administrations, a process that had involved all the major multinational banks, many corporations, and foreign aid missions from a multitude of countries. The United States played the lead role, but we had not acted alone.

During those three decades, thousands of men and women participated in bringing Ecuador to the tenuous position it found itself in at the beginning of the millennium. Some of them, like me, had been aware of what they were doing, but the vast majority had merely performed the tasks they had been taught in business, engineering, and law schools, or had followed the lead of bosses in my mold, who demonstrated the system by their own greedy example and through rewards and punishments calculated to perpetuate it. Such participants saw the parts they played as benign, at worst; in the most optimistic view, they were helping an impoverished nation.

Although unconscious, deceived, and—in many cases—self-deluded, these players were not members of any clandestine conspiracy; rather, they were the product of a system that promotes the most subtle and effective form of imperialism the world has ever witnessed. No one had to go out and seek men and women who could be bribed or threatened—they had already been recruited by companies, banks, and government agencies. The bribes consisted of salaries, bonuses, pensions, and insurance policies; the threats were based on social mores, peer pressure, and unspoken questions about the future of their children's education.

The system had succeeded spectacularly. By the time the new millennium rolled in, Ecuador was thoroughly entrapped. We had her, just as a Mafia don has the man whose daughter's wedding and small business he has financed and then refinanced. Like any good Mafiosi, we had taken our time. We could afford to be patient, knowing that beneath Ecuador's rain forests lies a sea of oil, knowing that the proper day would come.

That day had already arrived when, in early 2003, I wound my way from Quito to the jungle town of Shell in my Subaru Outback. Chávez had reestablished himself in Venezuela. He had defied George W. Bush and had won. Saddam was standing his ground and was preparing to be invaded. Oil supplies were depleted to their lowest level in nearly three decades, and the prospects of taking more from our prime sources looked bleak—and therefore, so did the health of the corporatocracy's balance sheets. We needed an ace in the hole. It was time to cut away our Ecuadorian pound of flesh.

As I drove past the monster dam on the Pastaza River, I realized that here in Ecuador the battle was not simply the classic struggle between the rich of the world and the impoverished, between those who exploit and the exploited. These battle lines would ultimately define who we are as a civilization. We were poised to force this tiny country to open its Amazon rain forests to our oil companies. The devastation that would result was immeasurable.

If we insisted on collecting the debt, the repercussions would go far beyond our abilities to quantify them. It was not just about the destruction of indigenous cultures, human lives, and hundreds of thousands of species of animals, reptiles, fish, insects, and plants, some of which might contain the undiscovered cures to any number of diseases. It was not just that rain forests absorb the deadly greenhouse gases produced by our industries, give off the oxygen that is essential to our lives, and seed the clouds that ultimately create a large percentage of the world's fresh water. It went

beyond all the standard arguments made by ecologists for saving such places, and reached deep into our souls.

If we pursued this strategy, we would continue an imperialist pattern that had begun long before the Roman Empire. We decry slavery, but our global empire enslaves more people than the Romans and all the other colonial powers before us. I wondered how we could execute such a shortsighted policy in Ecuador and still live with our collective conscience.

Peering through the window of the Subaru at the deforested slopes of the Andes, an area that during my Peace Corps days had been lush with tropical growth, I was suddenly surprised by another realization. It dawned on me that this view of Ecuador as a significant battle line was purely personal, that in fact every country where I had worked, every country with resources coveted by the empire, was equally significant. I had my own attachment to this one, which stemmed from those days back in the late 1960s when I lost my innocence here. However, it was subjective, my personal bias.

Though the Ecuadorian rain forests are precious, as are the indigenous people and all the other life forms that inhabit them, they are no more precious than the deserts of Iran and the Bedouins of Yamin's heritage. No more precious than the mountains of Java, the seas off the coast of the Philippines, the steppes of Asia, the savannas of Africa, the forests of North America, the icecaps of the Arctic, or hundreds of other threatened places. Every one of these represents a battle line, and every one of them forces us to search the depths of our individual and collective souls.

I was reminded of a statistic that sums it all up: The income ratio of the one-fifth of the world's population in the wealthiest countries to the one-fifth in the poorest countries went from 30 to 1 in 1960 to 74 to 1 in 1995.² And the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the IMF, and the rest of the banks, corporations, and governments involved in international

"aid" continue to tell us that they are doing their jobs, that progress has been made.

So here I was in Ecuador again, in the country that was just one of many battle lines but that holds a special place in my heart. It was 2003, thirty-five years after I had first arrived as a member of a U.S. organization that bears the word *peace* in its name. This time, I had come in order to try to prevent a war that for three decades I had helped to provoke.

It would seem that events in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Venezuela might be enough to deter us from another conflict; yet, in Ecuador the situation was very different. This war would not require the U.S. Army, for it would be fought by a few thousand indigenous warriors equipped only with spears, machetes, and single-shot, muzzle-loaded rifles. They would face off against a modern Ecuadorian army, a handful of U.S. Special Forces advisers, and jackal-trained mercenaries hired by the oil companies. This would be a war, like the 1995 conflict between Ecuador and Peru, that most people in the United States would never hear about, and recent events had escalated the probability of such a war.

In December 2002, oil company representatives accused an indigenous community of taking a team of its workers hostage; they suggested that the warriors involved were members of a terrorist group, with implications of possible ties to al-Qaeda. It was an issue made especially complicated because the oil company had not received government permission to begin drilling. However, the company claimed its workers had the right to perform preliminary, nondrilling investigations—a claim vehemently disputed by the indigenous groups a few days later, when they shared their side of the story.

The oil workers, tribal representatives insisted, had trespassed on lands where they were not allowed; the warriors had carried no weapons, nor had they threatened the oil workers with violence of any sort. In fact, they had escorted the workers to their village, where they offered them food and *chicha*, a local beer.

While their visitors feasted, the warriors persuaded the workers' guides to paddle away. However, the tribe claimed, the workers were never held against their will; they were free to go wherever they pleased.³

Driving down that road, I remembered what the Shuars had told me in 1990 when, after selling IPS, I returned to offer to help them save their forests. "The world is as you dream it," they had said, and then pointed out that we in the North had dreamed of huge industries, lots of cars, and gigantic skyscrapers. Now we had discovered that our vision had in fact been a nightmare that would ultimately destroy us all.

"Change that dream," the Shuars had advised me. Yet here it was, more than a decade later, and despite the work of many people and nonprofit organizations, including the ones I had worked with, the nightmare had reached new and horrifying proportions.

When my Outback finally pulled into the jungle town of Shell, I was hustled off to a meeting. The men and women who attended represented many tribes: Kichwa, Shuar, Achuar, Shiwiar, and Zaparo. Some had walked for days through the jungle, others had flown in on small planes, funded by nonprofits. A few wore their traditional kilts, face paint, and feathered headbands, though most attempted to emulate the townspeople, wearing slacks, T-shirts, and shoes.

Representatives from the community accused of taking hostages spoke first. They told us that shortly after the workers returned to the oil company, over a hundred Ecuadorian soldiers arrived in their small community. They reminded us that this was at the beginning of a special season in the rain forests, the fruiting of the *chonta*. A tree sacred to indigenous cultures, its fruit comes but once a year and signals the start of the mating season for many of the region's birds, including rare and endangered species. As they flock to it, the birds are extremely vulnerable. The tribes enforce strict policies forbidding the hunting of these birds during chonta season.

"The timing of the soldiers couldn't have been worse," a woman explained. I felt her pain and that of her companions as they told their tragic stories about how the soldiers ignored the prohibitions. They shot down the birds for sport and for food. In addition, they raided family gardens, banana groves, and manioc fields, often irreparably destroying the sparse topsoil. They used explosives in the rivers for fishing, and they ate family pets. They confiscated the local hunters' guns and blowguns, dug improper latrines, polluted the rivers with fuel oil and solvents, sexually molested women, and neglected to properly dispose of garbage, which attracted insects and vermin.

"We had two choices," a man said. "We could fight, or we could swallow our pride and do our best to repair the damage. We decided it was not yet the time to fight." He described how they had attempted to compensate for the military's abuses by encouraging their own people to go without food. He called it a fast, but in fact it sounded closer to voluntary starvation. Old people and children became malnourished and grew sick.

They spoke about threats and bribes. "My son," a woman said, "speaks English as well as Spanish and several indigenous dialects. He worked as a guide and translator for an ecotourist company. They paid him a decent salary. The oil company offered him ten times as much. What could he do? Now he writes letters denouncing his old company and all the others who come to help us, and in his letters calls the oil companies our friends." She shook her body, like a dog shaking off water. "He is no longer one of us. My son . . ."

An elderly man wearing the traditional toucan-feather head-dress of a shaman stood up. "You know about those three we elected to represent us against the oil companies, who died in that plane crash? Well, I'm not going to stand here and tell you what so many say, that the oil companies caused the crash. But I can tell you that those three deaths dug a big hole in our organization. The oil companies lost no time filling that hole with their people."

Another man produced a contract and read it. In exchange for three hundred thousand dollars, it ceded a vast territory over to a lumber company. It was signed by three tribal officials.

"These aren't their real signatures," he said. "I ought to know; one is my brother. It's another type of assassination. To discredit our leaders."

It seemed ironic and strangely appropriate that this was taking place in a region of Ecuador where the oil companies had not yet been given permission to drill. They had drilled in many areas around this one, and the indigenous people had seen the results, had witnessed the destruction of their neighbors. As I sat there listening, I asked myself how the citizens of my country would react if gatherings like this were featured on CNN or the evening news.

The meetings were fascinating and the revelations deeply disturbing. But something else also happened, outside the formal setting of those sessions. During breaks, at lunch, and in the evening, when I talked with people privately, I frequently was asked why the United States was threatening Iraq. The impending war was discussed on the front pages of Ecuadorian newspapers that made their way into this jungle town, and the coverage was very different from coverage in the States. It included references to the Bush family's ownership of oil companies, and to Vice President Cheney's role as former CEO of Halliburton.

These newspapers were read to men and women who had never attended school. Everyone seemed to take an interest in this issue. Here I was, in the Amazon rain forest, among illiterate people many in North America consider "backward," even "savages," and yet probing questions were being asked that struck at the heart of the global empire.

Driving out of Shell, back past the hydroelectric dam and high into the Andes, I kept thinking about the difference between what I had seen and heard during this visit to Ecuador and what I had become accustomed to in the United States. It seemed that Amazonian tribes had a great deal to teach us, that despite all our

schooling and our many hours reading magazines and watching television news, we lacked an awareness they had somehow found. This line of thinking made me think of "The Prophecy of the Condor and Eagle," which I have heard many times throughout Latin America, and of similar prophecies I have encountered around the world.

Nearly every culture I know prophesies that in the late 1990s we entered a period of remarkable transition. At monasteries in the Himalayas, ceremonial sites in Indonesia, and indigenous reservations in North America, from the depths of the Amazon to the peaks of the Andes and into the ancient Mayan cities of Central America, I have heard that ours is a special moment in human history, and that each of us was born at this time because we have a mission to accomplish.

The titles and words of the prophecies differ slightly. They tell variously of a New Age, the Third Millennium, the Age of Aquarius, the Beginning of the Fifth Sun, or the end of old calendars and the commencement of new ones. Despite the varying terminologies, however, they have a great deal in common, and "The Prophecy of the Condor and Eagle" is typical. It states that back in the mists of history, human societies divided and took two different paths: that of the condor (representing the heart, intuitive and mystical) and that of the eagle (representing the brain, rational and material). In the 1490s, the prophecy said, the two paths would converge and the eagle would drive the condor to the verge of extinction. Then, five hundred years later, in the 1990s, a new epoch would begin, one in which the condor and eagle will have the opportunity to reunite and fly together in the same sky, along the same path. If the condor and eagle accept this opportunity, they will create a most remarkable offspring, unlike any ever seen before.

"The Prophecy of the Condor and Eagle" can be taken at many levels—the standard interpretation is that it foretells the sharing of indigenous knowledge with the technologies of science, the bal-

ancing of yin and yang, and the bridging of northern and southern cultures. However, most powerful is the message it offers about consciousness; it says that we have entered a time when we can benefit from the many diverse ways of seeing ourselves and the world, and that we can use these as a springboard to higher levels of awareness. As human beings, we can truly wake up and evolve into a more conscious species.

The condor people of the Amazon make it seem so obvious that if we are to address questions about the nature of what it is to be human in this new millennium, and about our commitment to evaluating our intentions for the next several decades, then we need to open our eyes and see the consequences of our actions—the actions of the eagle—in places like Iraq and Ecuador. We must shake ourselves awake. We who live in the most powerful nation history has ever known must stop worrying so much about the outcome of soap operas, football games, quarterly balance sheets, and the daily Dow Jones averages, and must instead reevaluate who we are and where we want our children to end up. The alternative to stopping to ask ourselves the important questions is simply too dangerous.

CHAPTER 35

Piercing the Veneer

Shortly after I returned home from Ecuador in 2003, the United States invaded Iraq for the second time in a little over a decade. The EHMs had failed. The jackals had failed. So young men and women were sent to kill and die among the desert sands. One important question the invasion raised, but one that I figured few Americans would be in a position to consider, was what this would mean for the royal House of Saud. If the United States took over Iraq, which according to many estimates has more oil than Saudi Arabia, there would seem to be little need to continue honoring the pact we struck with the Saudi royal family in the 1970s, the deal that originated with the Saudi Arabian Money-laundering Affair.

The end of Saddam, like the end of Noriega in Panama, would change the formula. In the case of Panama, once we had reinstated our puppets, we controlled the Canal, regardless of the terms of the treaty Torrijos and Carter had negotiated. Once we controlled Iraq, then, could we break OPEC? Would the Saudi royal family become irrelevant in the arena of global oil politics? A few pundits were already questioning why Bush attacked Iraq