"Oil and Indians Don't Mix" and Other Observations

Contributed by Culture Change / Greg Palast
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When I used to serve the major oil companies, I had the sincere notion that they consisted of honorable gentlemen. I anticipated and received good treatment for our family business that served the marketing end of the oil industry. If there was sharp practice or chiseling, the guilty ones were usually independent oil companies. The cheapskate among the majors was Texaco.

Upon leaving the industry in 1988, I had just learned that my good service was barely appreciated, and there was no concern over the "OPEC takeover" of my former firm (I had a brother-in-law who was an OPEC official, and his wife managed to grab our company). After of the loss to the nation of an important public service known for its integrity, I set out to fight pollution, not oil people. I was not very surprised or upset about Exxon in particular for their Exxon Valdez spill; rather I felt there was an overall ongoing disaster of oil: for example, much more oil was spilled deliberately by ships at sea when regularly emptying bilges. This was one of my big turn-offs for globalized world trade.

It was when Shell Oil was tainted by the Ken Saro-Wiwa execution in the 1990s that I began to revise my view of the genteel, honest oil industry people. Since then, many instances of violence, corruption and environmental harm have become commonplace or better known, in part because of the rising competition for megabucks. Just think of the oil wars, The Gulf War, the Iraq/Afghanistan Wars, Bush, Cheney, Rice, and Halliburton.

Culture Change has monitored the recent news stories on Big Oil's overstepping itself. In the following report and links, we see non-major oil company crimes as well, which were carried out as part of the "oil fraternity" I used to know. Oil exporting countries, independent oil companies, and Big Oil are one trade group that cooperates across borders on a daily basis. - Jan Lundberg, Editor/Publisher

We present a lively new rundown by Greg Palast, Oil and Indians Don't Mix:

There's an easy way to find oil. Go to some remote and gorgeous natural sanctuary, say Alaska or the Amazon, find some Indians, then drill down under them.

If the indigenous folk complain, well, just shoo-them away. Shoo-ing methods include: bulldozers, bullets, crooked politicians and fake land sales.

But be aware. Lately the Natives are shoo-ing back. Last week, indigenous Peruvians seized an oil pumping station, grabbed the nine policemen guarding it and, say reports, executed them. This followed the government's murder of more than a dozen rainforest residents who had protested the seizure of their property for oil drilling.

Again and again I see it in my line of work of investigating fraud. Here are a few pit-stops on the oily trail of tears:

In the 1980s, Charles Koch was found to have pilfered about $3 worth of crude from Stanlee Ann Mattingly's oil tank in Oklahoma. Here's the weird part. Koch was (and remains) the 14th richest man on the planet, worth about $14 billion. Stanlee Ann was a dirt-poor Osage Indian.

Stanlee Ann wasn't Koch's only victim. According to secret tape recordings of a former top executive of his company, Koch Industries, the billionaire demanded that oil tanker drivers secretly siphon a few bucks worth of oil from every tank

attached to a stripper well on the Osage Reservation where Koch had a contract to retrieve crude.

Koch, according to the tape, would, "giggle" with joy over the records of the theft. Koch's own younger brother Bill ratted him out, complaining that, in effect, brothers Charles and David cheated him out of his fair share of the looting which totaled over three-quarters of a billion dollars from the Native lands.

The FBI filmed the siphoning with hidden cameras, but criminal charges were quashed after quiet objections from Republican senators.

Then there are the Chugach Natives of Alaska. The Port of Valdez, Alaska, is arguably one of the most valuable pieces of real estate on Earth, the only earthquake-safe ice-free port in Alaska that could load oil from the giant North Slope field. In 1969, Exxon and British Petroleum companies took the land from the Chugach paid them one dollar. I kid you not.

Wally Hickel, the former Governor of Alaska, dismissed my suggestion that the Chugach deserved a bit more respect (and cash) for their property. "Land ownership comes in two ways, Mr. Palast." explained the governor and pipeline magnate, "Purchase or conquest. The fact that your granddaddy chased a caribou across the land doesn't make it yours." The Chugach had lived there for 3,000 years.

No oil company would dream of digging on the Bush family properties in Midland, Texas, without paying a royalty. Or drilling near Malibu without the latest in environmental protections. But when Natives are on top of Exxon's or BP's glory hole, suddenly, the great defenders of private property rights turn quite Bolshevik: lands can be seized for The Public's Need for Oil.

Some Natives are "re-located" through legal flim-flam, some at gunpoint. The less lucky are left to wallow, literally, in the gunk left by the drilling process.

Take a look at this photo here, taken in the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador. It's from an investigation that I conducted for BBC TV, now in the film "Palast Investigates." I'm holding up a stinking, black glop of crude oil residue pulled from an abandoned Chevron-Texaco waste pit. A pipe runs from the toxic pit right into the water supply of Cofan Indians.

Chief Emergildo Criollo told me how oil company executives helicoptered into his remote village and, speaking in Spanish - which the Cofan didn't understand - "purchased" drilling rights with trinkets and cheese. The Natives had never seen cheese. ("The cheese smelled funny, so we threw it in the jungle.")

After drilling began, Criollo's son went swimming in his usual watering hole, came up vomiting blood, and died.

I asked Chevron about the wave of poisonings and deaths. According to an independent report, 1,401 deaths, mostly of children, mostly from cancers, can be traced to Chevron's toxic dumping.

Chevron's lawyer told me, "And it's the only case of cancer in the world? How many cases of children with cancer do you have in the States? ... They have to prove that it is our crude," which, he noted with glee, "is absolutely impossible."

Big Oil treats indigenous blood like a cheap gasoline additive. That's why the Peruvians are up in arms. The Cofan of Ecuador, unlike their brothers in Peru, have taken no hostages. Rather, they have heavily armed themselves with lawyers.

But Chevron and its Big Oil brethren remain dismissive of the law. This week, Shell Oil, to get rid of a nasty PR problem by paying $15 million to the Ogoni people and the family of Ken Saro-Wiwa for the oil giant's alleged role in the killing of Wiwa and his associates, activists who had defended these Nigeria Delta people against drilling contamination. Shell pocketed $31 billion last year in profits and hopes the payoff will clear the way for a drilling partnership with Nigeria's government.

Congratulations, Shell. $15 million: For a license to kill and drill, that's a quite a bargain.

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This report was produced for Air America Radio's Ring of Fire: this weekend catch Greg Palast on the oil wars, hosted by Mike Papantonio and Bobby Kennedy Jr.

Father's Day is coming up... Get dad a signed copy of Greg's new DVD, Palast Investigates: From 8-Mile to the Amazon, for a minimum tax-deductible donation of $40 to the Palast Investigative Fund, a 501c3 educational foundation. Include your dad's name, and Greg will personalize it.

The film gives you Palast's latest reports for BBC Television and Democracy Now! - including a ride up the Amazon to the Cofan village...

GregPalast.com

First photo from "ChevronToxico: Crude Reflections":

Luz Maria Marin holds the head of her husband Angel Toala the day before he died of stomach cancer in his home in Shushufindi - © 2004 Lou Dematteis

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60 Killed in Peru Rainforest Protest:

Peruvian authorities have declared a military curfew, and troops are patrolling towns in the Amazon jungle.

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'Police Are Throwing Bodies in the River,' Say Native Protesters:

Foreign activists on the scene in the town of Bagua, in the northern province of Amazonas, report that the police opened fire early in the morning on the unarmed protesters, some of whom were still sleeping, and deliberately mowed them down as they held up their arms or attempted to flee.

ipsnews.net

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Peruvian indigenous leader seeks asylum in Nicaragua's embassy:

Meanwhile in the jungle hundreds and possibly thousands of Awajun and Wambis Indians hid from security forces who were retaking control after two days of mayhem which left dozens dead, including 23 police. Dodging a military curfew and round-ups, many protesters trekked back to remote villages.

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"Suffering Escalated by Oil Companies" by Culture Change, June 2, 2009:

culturechange.org