# PR WATCH

Public Interest Reporting on the Public Relations Industry

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## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



# Burning Books Before They're Printed

*by John C. Stauber*

"All documents . . . are confidential," warned the September 7, 1990 memo from Ketchum PR Senior Vice President Betsy Gullickson. "Make sure that everything — even notes to yourself — are so stamped. . . . Remember that we have a shredder; give documents to Lynette for shredding. All conversations are confidential, too. Please be careful talking in the halls, in elevators, in restaurants, etc. All suppliers must sign confidentiality agreements. If you are faxing documents to the client, another office or to anyone else, call them to let them know that a fax is coming. If you are expecting a fax, you or your Account Coordinator should stand by the machine and wait for it. We don't want those documents lying around for anybody to pick up."

Gullickson, a 1969 graduate of Northwestern University's prestigious Medill School of Journalism, understood perfectly the need for secrecy. If word had leaked out, the media might have had a field day

*continued on next page*

## Flack Attack

In the "marketplace of ideas," every idea, no matter how absurd, is supposed to have its day. Turn on the TV, and you may get the impression that this is the world we actually live in. On the Sunday public affairs shows, you'll find Republicans, Democrats, Republicans who love too much, and Democrats who love Republicans. On the "Jerry Springer Show" or "Oprah Winfrey," you'll find self-proclaimed werewolves, worshippers of OJ Simpson, and doomsday prophets from the lunatic fringes of American society.

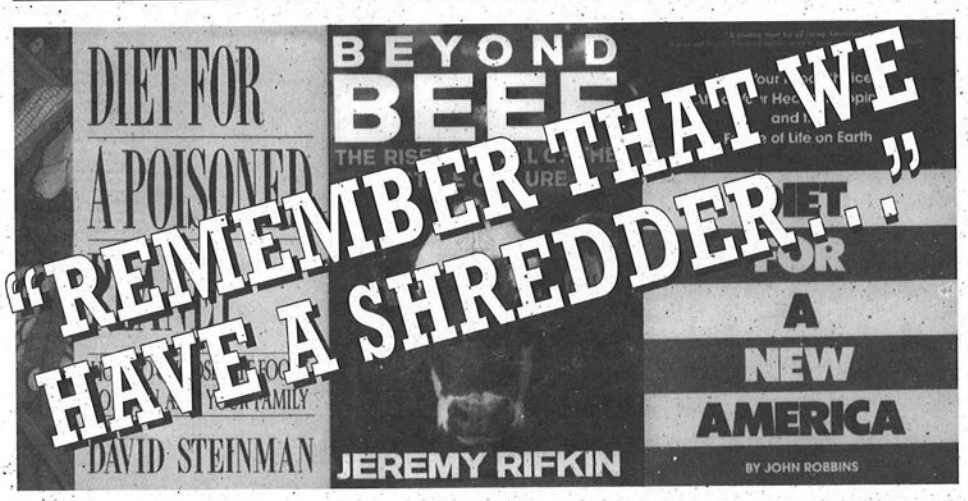
Unfortunately, what you *won't* find can kill you.

The books profiled in the cover story of this issue are serious, important contributions to the public debate over public health, the environment, and food safety. They became victims of PR campaigns designed to prevent them from ever *reaching* the "marketplace of ideas."

Access to information is only one of the democratic rights under attack from the PR industry. In *Interview with the Vampire,* writer Jon Reed documents the insidious role of PR in manipulating recent elections in Mexico to help Mexico's "Institutional Revolutionary Party" maintain the absolute grip on power that it has held through fraud and violence for 65 years. And in *The God of Mammon,* Joel Bleifuss shows how the right-wing Christian Coalition and business lobbyists are using sophisticated, computerized PR techniques to "mobilize the masses" in carefully-orchestrated political campaigns designed to advance corporate rather than public interests.

PR flacks like to pretend that their role in promoting the interests of their corporate clients is itself a contribution to democracy and public debate. But when they resort to techniques of sabotage, secrecy, propaganda and high-tech manipulation of the public, they are actually declaring *war* on democracy, and the first casualty is the public's right to know.

*—Sheldon Rampton, Associate Editor*




***If you've never heard of any of these books, you can thank the PR industry for helping keep you blissfully unaware of them or their message.***

with Ketchum's plan to scuttle a groundbreaking environmental book even before it went to press.

Thanks to an inside source, *PR Watch* has obtained Gullickson's top-secret memo, along with other details of Ketchum's campaign against David Steinman's *Diet for a Poisoned Planet.* Despite the risk of being fired for leaking this information, conscience drove this corporate whistleblower to uncover Ketchum's campaign aimed at concealing the possible health risks from high pesticide levels in California raisins and other foods.

"I find it very discouraging when I read in the paper that cancer among children has increased dramatically, and they don't know why," our source explained. "I believe that people have the right to know about the little dancing raisins and the possibility that they might be harming children. There is a new censorship in this country, based on nothing but dollars and cents."

## BIRTH OF AN ANTI-PR CAMPAIGN

*Diet for a Poisoned Planet* is David Steinman's personal story of how he found astronomical levels of the pesticide DDT in his blood and changed his diet to avoid contaminated foods. To determine which foods to avoid, Steinman obtained obscure government research reports that detail the levels of hundreds of toxic carcinogens and other contaminants, mostly pesticides, found routinely in U.S. foods from raisins to yogurt to beef.

For example, Steinman reports that government inspectors found "raisins had 110 industrial chemical and pesticide residues in sixteen samples." The book recommends avoiding any but organically-grown raisins.

By compiling this information on food contamination in book form, *Diet for a Poisoned Planet* enables readers to make safer food choices. But before shoppers can use the information, they must first hear about the book, through media reviews and interviews with the author during a publicity campaign in the weeks after the book is published.

PR firms, of course, are quite familiar with publicity campaigns. So who better to launch an *anti*-publicity campaign, to convince journalists to ignore the book and its author? That was the objective of the Ketchum PR firm, working on behalf of its client, the California Raisin Advisory Board (CALRAB).

Headquartered in New York City, Ketchum represents a number of corporate food clients, including Dole Foods, Wendy's, the Potato Board, Oscar Mayer Foods, Miller Brewing, Kikkoman, H.J. Heinz, the Beef Industry Council, the California Almond Board, and the California Raisin Advisory Board.

Ketchum VP Betsy Gullickson's PR expertise is in "food marketing strategic counsel." Her memo assigned "broad areas of responsibility," such as "intelligence/information gathering," to specific Ketchum employees and to Gary Obenauf of CALRAB. She suggested possible "external ambassadors" who might be recruited into the campaign, including Republican California Governor Pete Wilson, and President Clinton's new head of the Democratic Party, political fundraiser Tony Coelho.

Months before the publication of *Diet for a Poisoned Planet,* Ketchum sought to "obtain [a] copy of [the] book galleys or manuscript and publisher's tour schedule."

To "manage the crisis," Gullickson's memo recommended that spokespeople "conduct one-on-one briefings/interviews with the trade and general consumer media in the markets most acutely interested in the issue. . . . The [Ketchum] agency is currently attempting to get a tour schedule so that we can 'shadow' Steinman's appearances; best scenario: we will have our spokesman in town prior to or in conjunction with Steinman's appearances . . ."

## FOR SPIES' EYES ONLY

According to our source, Ketchum paid a "spy" to find out when and on which talk shows Steinman was booked. "They called up each and every talk show," and either said it would be unfair to allow Steinman on the show without the other side of the issue, or tried to depict him as an "off-the-wall extremist without credibility."

A "list of media to receive low key phone inquiries regarding the Steinman book" included specific jour-

nalists at the *New York Times,* the Larry King Show, and the *Washington Post.*

Ketchum is a leading advocate of so-called environmental PR, and offered the Raisin Board one inventive greenwashing suggestion: "Announce the sponsorship of a research grant to a prestigious university for research into alternatives to agrichemicals or ways to further minimize their use in raisin production."

This suggestion, according to the PR informant, was nothing but a clever ploy. "At no time during the course of this whole campaign did Ketchum or [the Raisin Board] ever consider looking into the possibility that raisins, as they are presently grown, are indeed ridden with toxicity."

***"People have the right to know about the little dancing raisins and the possibility that they might be harming children. There is a new censorship in this country, based on nothing but dollars and cents."***

Ketchum wasn't the only PR firm working to cripple Steinman's book publicity efforts. Jean Rainey of Edelman Public Relations contacted the *Today Show* on October 16, 1990, providing anti-Steinman material and offering to make available "the president of the American Dietetic Association" to counter Steinman. *Today* interviewed Steinman, but never aired the segment.

## GOVERNMENT MOVES TO SUPPRESS

The US government also launched a stealth campaign against Steinman's book, well in advance of its publication, thanks to a pesticide industry front group with deep Republican connections.

Elizabeth M. Whalen is a prominent anti-environmentalist who heads the American Council on Science and Health, a group funded largely by the chemical industry. She wrote a July 12, 1990, letter to then-White House Chief of Staff John Sununu warning that Steinman and others "who specialize in terrifying consumers" were "threatening the US standard of living and, indeed, may pose a future threat to national security."

Whalen's letter was copied to the heads of the government's Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Surgeon General.

Whalen also contacted her friend former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, whom she calls a "close colleague." The venerable Dr. Koop joined the attack against Steinman's book.

In September 1990, before Steinman's book was published, the USDA initiated its anti-book campaign through the Agriculture Extension Service. The federally-funded effort was led by government employees Kenneth Hall, Bonnie Poli, Cynthia Garman-Squier and Janet Poley.

According to a government memo leaked to *PR Watch*, the Department of Agriculture group felt that "communications with the media by concerned parties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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Erwin Knoll, friend and mentor.

have been effective in minimizing potential public concern about issues in the book." Attached to the memo is a "confidential analysis" of Steinman's book written by the National Food Processors Association, a food and pesticide trade group. The USDA memo warns recipients that this information is "for internal use and should not be released" to the news media.

Dr. William Marcus, who was then a senior science advisor to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, wrote the introduction to *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*. Marcus' views were his own, but they greatly angered Whelan. She asked White House Chief of Staff Sununu to personally investigate the matter, and exerted pressure to have the introduction removed from the book. Marcus refused, and was later fired from the EPA. Government policy has now been changed to prohibit officials from writing book forwards.

In an interview with *PR Watch*, Steinman said the extensive, secretive censorship campaign by industry and government PR flacks did damage his book sales and overall publicity: "This is outrageous; the public has an unalienable right to know whether they are being poisoned, and the public lost out." He believes, however, that the PR censorship campaign has also backfired on its perpetrators. "The vehement attacks on my book drew the attention of publishers and editors. As a result, I've signed contracts with other major publishers for three new books about the toxic contamination of our food supply. Each book will go well beyond the information in *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*. The first book will be out this summer."

## LET THEM EAT MEAT

Ketchum's anti-book campaign is not uncommon within the PR industry. Through a federal Freedom of Information Act investigation, *PR Watch* has obtained other documents revealing a similar campaign funded by the dairy industry against another food safety critic.

The Morgan & Myers PR firm of Jefferson, Wisconsin, is the nation's 42nd largest PR firm, with about sixty employees and a 1993 fee intake of $3.7 million, according to *O'Dwyer's Directory of PR Firms*. Within its field of specialization—representing agribusiness interests—Morgan & Myers ranks fifth in the United States. Its clients include Kraft, the Philip Morris subsidiary that buys and sells most of America's cheese; Upjohn, a major producer of antibiotics used on livestock; and Sandoz, a manufacturer of atrazine herbicide, a suspected carcinogen that contaminates thousands of water systems.

***In a letter to the White House Chief of Staff, Whalen described Steinman's exposé of food contamination as a "threat to national security."***

In 1992, John Robbins was promoting his book, *Diet for a New America*, which advocates a strict vegetarian diet. He became the target of an anti-book campaign by Morgan & Myers PR, working on behalf of the world's largest milk promotion group, the National Dairy Board.

As with Ketchum's California Raisins campaign, Morgan & Myers used behind-the-scenes contacts to undermine Robbins' publicity tour, thereby limiting his book's public exposure and readership. A Morgan & Myers memo of September 17, 1992, states that "M&M currently is monitoring coverage of Robbins' media tour," to counter his advice that readers cut back their consumption of dairy products.

The memo was widely distributed to key dairy industry contacts. It contained the schedule of Robbins' book tour and provided this tactical warning: "Do not issue any news release or statement. Doing so only calls attention to his message. . . . Ideally, any response should come from a third party, uninvolved in the dairy industry."

PR firms have also campaigned against the book *Beyond Beef*, by activist Jeremy Rifkin. *Beyond Beef* recommends that people stop eating beef for ethical, health and environmental reasons. Its message has been loudly denounced by both the Beef Council and the National Dairy Board, clients of Ketchum and Morgan & Myers, respectively.

David Helvarg's new book, *The War Against The Greens*, states that Rifkin's spring 1992 national book tour "had to be canceled after it was repeatedly sabotaged. Melinda Mullin, *Beyond Beef*'s publicist at Dutton Books, says she received calls from fictitious newspaper and TV reporters trying to get Rifkin's itinerary. After someone managed to get a hold of it, radio and TV producers who'd scheduled Rifkin's appearance began receiving calls from a woman claiming to be Mullin cancelling or misrepresenting Rifkin's plans."

"Finally, Mullin had to begin using a code name with the producers. Liz Einbinder, a San Francisco-based radio producer who had had *Beyond Beef* on her desk for several weeks, was surprised to receive angry calls and an anonymous package denouncing Rifkin within hours of placing her first call to Mullin. This led to speculation that Dutton's New York phones might be tapped." ■

# Interview With the Vampire: PR Helps the PRI Drain Mexico Dry

*by Jon Reed*

Policemen toting machine guns were stationed on every street corner of the Colonia Anzures in Mexico City, the posh district of embassies, fancy restaurants and corporate offices where Burson-Marsteller (B-M) maintains its headquarters. Two armed guards gave me a suspicious once-over before letting me into the upscale office building at 13 Leibnitz Street.

There were no signs or even a building directory to confirm that this was indeed the address of Mexico's premier flack shop. B-M is the world's largest PR firm, with 63 offices in 32 countries. In Mexico, their clients include the Office of the President, the Council of Businessmen, the Secretary of Commerce and Industrial Development, and the National Stockbroker's Association. But like most PR firms, B-M prefers to stay low-profile.

Public relations and crisis management have become a multi-billion-dollar industry in Mexico, an indispensable tool in the hands of the country's business elites and the political machine which has ruled Mexico for 65 years, the *Partido Revolutionario Institutional* (PRI).

The PRI and Mexican business interests recently spent over $50 million on PR and lobbying in the US alone during their successful bid to win passage of the the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). But these expenditures are small change compared to the spending on spin control that went into the PRI's recent dubious victory in Mexico's August 21 elections.

Mexican law supposedly prohibits political parties from spending more than $42 million during a national campaign, but most analysts estimate that the PRI and its wealthy supporters spent well over $1 *billion* to win the 1994 elections, compared to only $3.6 million spent by the PRD, the left-wing opposition party. The money went not only to reel in voters, but also to reassure US and other foreign investors that this year's elections were "clean and honest" in contrast to the blatant electoral frauds of the past, and that the investment climate in Mexico will remain "favorable"—i.e., low wages, access to prime markets, no environmental restrictions, and prompt payment on the national debt.

I caught the elevator to the eighth floor and managed to arrive unannounced in Burson-Marsteller's front office. They did not seem happy to see me, especially when I announced that I was there on assignment for *PR Watch*. There was a brief panic as I began firing off questions about B-M's "crisis management" strategy for the elections, but then a well-dressed assistant manager in her mid-20s regained her composure and informed me through a forced smile that although she couldn't answer my questions, she would be happy to have me talk after lunch with Carlos Diaz, their general manager.

## MODERNIZING THE MACHINE

Until recently, the Mexican elite didn't bother much with the country's PR image abroad. The PRI and its presidents have traditionally ruled Mexico with an iron fist, repressing or co-opting opposition forces. Mexican big business and the landed gentry have prospered under their rule, gradually extending their control over the entire national economy. But as the Mexican oligarchy has grown, it has increasingly seen the need to employ the services of ad agencies and PR firms, including large transnationals such as Edelman PR Worldwide and Young & Rubicam, the parent corporation of B-M, which has yearly Mexican revenues of over $100 million.

The turn to PR has been prompted in part by a series of events during the past six years that have shaken the PRI's seemingly unshakable grip on power. In 1988, the PRI's presidential election "victory" over left-liberal opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was so fraudulent that even the US Embassy, a perennial PRI supporter, recognized Cárdenas as the true winner. This problem in perception management was followed by the near-loss of NAFTA, the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, and the assassination of the PRI's initial 1996 presidential candidate, Donaldo Colosio, in what many Mexicans believe was an inside job by the PRI itself.

Through all these crises, Burson-Marsteller and other Mexican and transnational PR firms have demonstrated their effectiveness by working behind the scenes—gauging public opinion, counseling government and corporate leaders, shaping media coverage, and facilitating elite-to-elite communications—in short, guaranteeing that the inevitable upheavals in an authoritarian and unjust society do not interrupt business as usual.

## THE RICH GET FILTHY; THE POOR GET DIRT

During the past six years alone, Mexico's 200 most powerful families have exponentially increased their wealth, thanks to lucrative government contracts, insider trading on Mexico's stock market, and bargain-basement purchases of over 900 formerly state-owned enterprises.

According to *Forbes* magazine, Mexico now ranks fourth in the world in the number of billionaires—24 men who together control over 12% of the country's gross national product. According to *The Whalen Report*, a respected newsletter on Mexico put out by the Whalen Company PR firm, Mexico has also become the habitat for a number of extremely influential behind-the-scenes billionaires who do not appear on *Forbes'* official list—cocaine and heroin kingpins such as Carillo Fuentes (with a reported net worth of $25 billion) and Garcia Abrego (with holdings of $15 billion). By way of compar-

ison, New York's Rockefeller family has assets of $5.5 billion, while Ross Perot is only worth a paltry $2.4 billion.

The Forbes 24 and the drug cartels add up to a group of less than three dozen men—all strong PRI supporters—who control over one-quarter of the country's total $361 billion GNP. The government's own statistics indicate that the top 10 percent of Mexico's population controls 60% of the country's wealth. According to the World Bank, Mexico now has the most unequal system of income distribution of any industrialized country.

But while "*los ricos*" have grown richer during the past decade, real wages for the majority of Mexicans have decreased by 50%, and an increasing number of small farmers and Indians have been forced to abandon their subsistence landholdings. The minimum wage in Mexico is now $4.60 a *day*. As social scientists and government critics point out, this is the real reason why Zapatista rebels rose up against the Mexican government on New Year's day, the day that NAFTA went into effect.

In the space of the last nine months alone, a series of new incidents has shown that Mexico continues to face unprecedent economic and political instability. A Catholic Cardinal was killed by drug traffickers in the Guadalajara airport, apparently with collusion from police and government officials. Several billionaire businessmen were kidnapped for ransom of up to $100 million. Recently, President Zedillo's successor as head of the PRI was also assassinated, possibly by other PRI leaders.

In response to these developments, foreign investment has slumped and the peso has lost value. The Mexican elite have begun transferring billions of dollars out of the country.

## FIX THE FOCUS, NOT THE PROBLEM

As B-M's publications point out, US and other foreign investors are increasingly looking toward Mexico. Currently, 66% of Mexico's foreign investment comes from the US. To keep this money flowing, along with sufficient international loans to prevent Mexico from defaulting on its $120 billion foreign debt, investors demand guaranteed profits and political stability.

In the face of these economic realities, the PRI's spin doctors have been called in to popularize the myth in the US that the current regime is a "kinder, gentler" version of the old PRI. As a Burson-Marsteller official in Mexico euphemistically put it, "our job is to build up the level of confidence of foreign investors, to spotlight the positive economic developments in the country."

The 1994 elections were an important focus of the PRI's image-building campaign. A fundraising banquet for the PRI last year drew Mexico's 25 richest men,


***An election campaign rally for the PRD, leftist opponents of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Mexico's governing party. (photo by Jon Reed)***

including several clients of B-M or Edelman PR. Each was asked to contribute $25 million apiece to guarantee a PRI electoral victory. The request prompted Emilio Azcarraga Milmo, the billionaire CEO of Televisa, the nation's TV monopoly, to suggest that a donation of $50-75 million per person might be more appropriate.

During the campaign, Azcarraga's media repeatedly pounded home the major PR message of the election: A vote for the PRI means stability and continuity. A vote for the opposition PRD means chaos and civil war.

According to a study by the independent Mexican Academy for Human Rights, Televisa gave three to four times more coverage to the PRI's candidates than to the PRD and other opposition parties, a blatant violation of the country's new electoral law. Televisa's heavy promotion of the PRI was particularly influential in light of the fact that only 10 percent of the Mexican population reads newspapers, and 75% rely on TV for their information.

## SELLING THE ELECTIONS

In addition to saturating the Mexican media with propaganda, the Mexican government worked on election spin-control in the US. On August 12, B-M client Santiago Oñate, representing the Mexican Office of the President, met with several of President Clinton's closest advisors, including Cabinet Chief Leon Panetta and National Security Council Director Anthony Lake. At the end of the meeting, Clinton's advisors reassured Oñate that the White House didn't believe that there was "any crisis in Mexico, but rather just the normal anxiety that represents the transition to a competitive democracy."

Meanwhile, the Mexican Businessmen's Council, another B-M client, was reassuring US investors that the PRI would cleanly win the elections—just as the polls indicated—and that Mexico's investment climate would remain stable. Back in Mexico City another B-M client, the Secretary for Commerce and Industrial Development, worked with Salinas to arrange a press conference featuring "Indian leaders" from Chiapas who denounced the Zapatista rebels as "violent radicals" and asked the Mexican president to protect and support them.

The elections were held on August 21, and as expected, the PRI swept the field, gaining the presidency and retaining overwhelming control over the national legislature. The US government and international press described the elections as the "cleanest in Mexico's history," ignoring widespread evidence of voter fraud, registration manipulation, intimidation, bribery, illegal financial donations, partisan misuse of government resources, distorted media coverage, and misleading polling techniques. As in 1988, the PRI and government-appointed election officials refused to allow outside observors to compare computer tallies with the actual packets of marked ballots from the country's 90,000 voter precincts.

In the aftermath of the elections, civil unrest has intensified, with street demonstrations, riots, strikes, road blockades, seizures of city halls, and even armed conflicts. Leaders of the Zapatista guerrillas and the PRD have vowed to continue civil resistance, to literally make the country ungovernable until new, democratic elections are held under a National Constituent Assembly.

## FACE TO FACE ANSWERS

After lunch, I returned to B-M's offices to meet Diaz, who was nervously cordial but admitted he was somewhat afraid to talk to *PR Watch.* Instead, he called Miami and put me on the line with Jeff Hunt, B-M's executive vice president and managing director for Latin America.

"Business has been good, very good," Hunt readily acknowledged, "especially since NAFTA was approved." He said B-M's specialty is "preparedness training, getting our clients prepared for confronting a crisis." When asked about B-M's role in the elections, he said B-M "never gets involved in politics. . . . We're not working for the government."

I reminded him that the Office of the President and the Secretary for Industrial Development are publicly listed as B-M clients. He responded with no comment, and refused also to comment on whether the 1988 or 1994 elections were rigged, or even to confirm a recent statement by the Mexican Embassy in Washington, which told *O'Dwyer's Washington Report,* "If we need Burson-Marsteller's help in a specific area, we always feel free to ask them for it."

I was getting nowhere fast with this line of questioning, so I decided to shift the topic to some of B-M's own image problems. They represent some of the most unsavory corporations in the world. I listed some to Hunt: Savimbi's mercenaries in Angola; the government of Indonesia (responsible for genocide in East Timor, and global leaders in rainforest destruction); Union Carbide (notorious in Bhopal, India, for the toxic leak that killed 8,000 people and injured 600,000); Monsanto (toxic PCBs, herbicides and bovine growth hormone); Phillip Morris (tobacco); the former military junta in Argentina.

This seemed to unsettle Hunt momentarily. He mumbled something about how "Mexico is a model for how other countries would like their economies to be," and went on to quote the company's founder, Harold Burson, who says, "everyone deserves to be represented."

"Tell me, Jeff," I replied, "does this mean B-M will represent anyone, as long as they pay you enough?"

"Of course not," Hunt replied. "Burson-Marsteller is very selective about the clients that we represent."

"Can you name one client that B-M has ever rejected on ethical or political grounds?"

There was a pregnant silence, and I realized that our interview was just about to end. "I'm not at liberty," he said finally, "to disclose the names of any prospective clients that we've previously rejected. . . ." ■

## Body Shop Flexes Its Muscle

The British cosmetics firm, Body Shop has used favorable PR to build its image of "corporate social responsibility." Founder and boss Anita Roddick, dubbed by some "the Mother Theresa of capitalism," has built her company into a $700 million-a-year enterprise, with over 1,050 stores in 45 countries.

Recent investigative articles in *Business Ethics* and *In These Times* have dug beneath the hype to reveal that Body Shop has misled customers about the safety and purity of its products, and the extent to which its sales benefit indigenous cultures.

Rather than admit error, Body Shop hired Frank Mankiewicz of Hill and Knowlton. A former president of National Public Radio, Mankiewicz assailed his former NPR colleagues for running a piece critical of the Body Shop. Incredibly, NPR responded by pulling all records of the story from public-accessible databanks, and removed the original NPR reporter and editor from the story. ■

# The God of Mammon: Christian Coalition Makes Corporate Allies

*by Joel Bleifuss*

"Grassroots organizing" was the buzzword of choice when Ralph Reed, Jr., the 33-year-old executive director of the Christian Coalition, joined corporate PR executives Michael Dunn and Neal Cohen as featured speakers at an expensive and exclusive conference held February 7–10 in Sarasota, FL. The annual training session was organized by a nonprofit arm of the Public Affairs Council, a network of corporate public affairs and PR officers that is funded by an array of hundreds of major US companies and industry associations.

Behind the swelling tide of far-right politics in recent US elections, an ungodly alliance of right-wing Christians and corporate America is organized, active and efficiently building. The alliance literally plans to take over the United States, and so far, its plan is proceeding on schedule.

Former felon Oliver North, who narrowly missed his bid to become Virginia's next US senator, was one of the few candidates supported by the right-wing Christian Coalition who failed to win office this fall, despite massive financing, energetic, mobilized Christian troops, and an angry message that speaks to the bitter mood of American voters.

The Christian Coalition is helping big business augment its traditional tools for controlling the political process—campaign donations and lobbying—with a new and more powerful form of direct action, a high-tech version of the organizing tactics pioneered in the 1960s by the New Left.

Corporate PR experts are adopting and adapting the Christian Coalition's organizing tactics, designed to mobilize the masses in political campaigns while keeping effective control of actual political debates concentrates in the hands of a select few.

## THE SAINTS COME MARCHING IN

Currently the Christian Coalition, founded in 1990, has more than 1.5 million members and 1,200 chapters that are supported by an annual budget of $20 million. According to Reed, the coalition has been growing by 10,000 members a week since Clinton's election. "By about the year 1996 or '97 the size of our annual budget and the size of our mailing list will exceed that of the Republican Party," he said.

The Coalition plans to build that base by reaching out to two demographic groups: pro-life Catholics and the 24 percent of the electorate who define themselves as born-again evangelicals.

"You're beginning to see the emergence of genuine grassroots citizen-based movements that I think are going to be the future of American politics in the '90s and into the next century," Reed told the conference participants, public relations executives of America's biggest companies. He pointed out that both political parties are "in irreversible, precipitous decline." In Florida, for instance, 40 percent of the precincts lack a Republican precinct captain.

The Christian Coalition is preparing to fill that void, not with a party, but with what Reed calls "a civic league." By the millenium, the Christian Coalition plans to establish 3,300 county chapters and 175,000 precinct organizations, one for each county and precinct in the United States.

***The Christian Coalition is developing computerized files on every voter in the United States.***

The Coalition's success is based partly on technological wizardry. The group's Chesapeake, VA, headquarters are equipped with a phone system capable of generating 100,000 calls in a single weekend. Aided by a sophisticated computer system, the Coalition is in the process of obtaining the public voting records from every precinct in the United States—records that often include a history of which elections a voter has participated in and, if they voted in a primary, whether they picked up a Democratic or Republican ballot.

The Coalition provides each of its 1,200 chapters with the computerized voter rolls for their county. Using those lists the chapters build what Reed calls "a voter ID file." Volunteers and hired workers (who are paid $5 per hour and must meet a quota) call each voter in the county and ask three questions. First, the voter is asked whether or not they are in favor of raising taxes, a question that identifies economic conservatives. Next they are asked about abortion—this identifies who is pro-life or pro-choice. Third, the voter is asked what is the most important issue facing their community, and that response is coded as belonging to one of 43 identified hot-button issues, such as crime, homosexuality and humanism. As of February, the Coalition had created voter files on 1.7 million Americans.

Reed explained that the Coalition's success is based on the group's realization that its potential supporters are not a monolithic voting bloc. For example, many evangelicals will not respond to an anti-abortion argument, but can be reached with an anti-tax message. Armed with these ideological IDs on each voter, Christian Coalition-backed candidates can generate elaborate direct-mail campaign appeals. "There is no replacement for knowing what somebody cares about," said Reed.

As an example, Reed told his classroom of PR executives how the Christian Coalition had success in targeting Sonny Stallings, an up-and-coming Democratic state legislator from Virginia Beach. "In 1991 there was a state senator [Stallings] that we did not care for, the business community did not care for and the National Rifle Association did not care for. . . . [He] was positioning himself to run for attorney general in Virginia two years hence," said Reed. "None of us together could afford to take the chance that he might be elected because in Virginia attorney general is a nice stepping stone to governor. So we figured it would be a lot cheaper to move him back to his law practice in a state senate race than it would be to do it in a statewide race."

So Reed and company, working stealthily, nipped Stallings' political ambitions in the bud and helped a Christian Republican, Ken Stolle, capture his seat. First, the Coalition surveyed the electorate and discovered that the No. 1 issue concerning district voters was the city's inadequate water supply. Second, the Coalition helped Stolle, who "represented the more conservative pro-family and pro-business viewpoint," send out personalized letters to potential voters.

The letters arrived the Saturday before the election. To those who had voiced concern about water, Stolle declared himself to be the "water candidate." To those voters who said crime was the most important issue, Stolle was packaged as the "crime candidate," and so on. Consequently the Coalition, by picking and then exploiting the right issues, was able to elect Stolle, a right-thinking Republican, to a seat that Democrats had held since Reconstruction.

## COALITION WITH BUSINESS

According to Reed, the people who run America's corporations lack training in the "direct response" technologies that can mobilize citizens quickly. He is offering his Coalition's services to provide that training, and to mobilize citizens on issues that go beyond the Christian Coalition's litany of evils: abortion, condoms and creeping secularism.

Reed acknowledged that many of the businesspeople gathered to learn from him in Sarasota didn't share the Coalition's views on these subjects. He recognized, as did other conference participants, that they could agree to disagree. Still, there were areas of common ground. Take the health care debate. The Christian Coalition did its part to defeat Clinton's health care plan. Reed told of plans to "drop into 60,000 evangelical churches 32 million postcards that have a picture of a 4-year-old child getting a shot." The caption under the picture read, "Don't let a government bureaucrat in this picture."

Another area where Reed suggested that the Christian Coalition could ally itself with the business community was around "environmental issues," especially "if a corporation is involved in getting a lot of harassment."

***"When the local general manager wants employees to write letters to their legislators, it's done right there at work. The employees are given the paper, pens, stamps and envelopes."***

Following Reed's lead, corporations are learning quickly to organize at the grassroots, beginning with their own employees. At the same conference where Reed spoke, Michael Dunn of the Washington-based PR firm Michael E. Dunn and Associates explained how PR executives are translating Reed's tactics into corporate strategies.

"The purpose of the grassroots program is not to get more Americans involved in the political system," Dunn explained. "The purpose of a grassroots program is one purpose period, and that is to influence legislative policy. . . . The reality is you are going to be involved in this political process whether you want to or not. The only real question is whether or not you are going to win. And if you do not have a grass-roots program your odds of winning have seriously diminished."

Fortunately, Dunn said, corporations can use the same technology as that deployed by the Christian Coalition. "Almost anybody can put together a grassroots effort to influence a single issue," he said. "But to put together a program that is capable of doing that on a variety of issues over a period of 5 or 10 or 15 years is an entirely different game."

First, he explained, companies must systematically build a "broad-based program," a political propaganda effort targeted at its employees, retirees, vendors and customers. The aim of this indoctrination is to make the majority of employees at each corporate outpost "sensitive to the impact government has on what they are trying to do and to realize they've got to play a role in that whole program."

## LEADERS LEAD, EMPLOYEES FOLLOW

It is a mistake to think that "broad-based membership" in these programs involves "broad-based leadership."

Neal Cohen, the director of political support services at APCO Associates in Washington, explained the concept to the conference participants: "Broad-based membership is: What does the public see? What do the

legislators see? Decision-making is: a core group of three or so people who have similar interests and who are going to get the job done and not veer off."

Dunn likewise advocates a consolidation of power. He explained that a "broad-based program" that indoctrinates all members of a corporation's extended family must be accompanied by a "key contact program." Under this program, companies recruit "key contacts" from each corporate outpost. This corporate cadre then develops a "personal relationship with the elected official to whom they are assigned."

"In order to have a quality relationship that key contact has to basically be willing to integrate into that lawmaker's political organization, and become part of their political campaign apparatus, be a part of the social circle of which that lawmaker is a part," said Dunn.

Employees are being told, in short, that to keep their jobs and rise within the company, they should become political operatives for the company, befriending candidates and becoming the grassroots eyes and ears for the corporation in local politics. Dunn even advocated putting this "key contact responsibility into a job description."

He didn't discuss, however, how the company should deal with those employees who fail to get with the "program." But such a possibility touches on issues of political liberties and the integrity of democratic institutions. Dunn's system of "grassroots mobilization" is in fact a top-down command system, under which employees are expected to vote and agitate not for what they as individuals see as politically good or desirable but for the political interests of the company that employs them.

## CAMPAIGN FODDER

Dunn sees these "grassroots agents" as corporate soldiers, whose loyalty is essential for victory in today's competitive environment. "This is a battle, folks. There is a German general who once said politics is war without bullets. And if you think you are not in a war right now, you have not been in the trenches yet. This is a war," he thundered. "Ultimately, every organization in America has to move to a broad-based program. Until we get all of our people involved in understanding, we are going to continually lose the political marketplace."

Barbara Bey, for one, is girded for battle. She is the managing director of public affairs at the American Council of Life Insurance in Washington. And she is also the Public Affairs Council's chairman-elect for 1995. Bey told *Impact,* the Council's monthly newsletter, how the American Council of Life Insurance is preparing for action. "Technology is what allows us to do it and do it efficiently, and do it well," Bey said. "We're building an interactive database for grassroots use in explaining concerns to members, legislators and other stakeholders before these concerns escalate into issues. We are also developing a key contact program to expand and take the grassroots program to 'the next step.' "

***"The purpose of the grassroots program is not to get more Americans involved in the political system," Dunn said. "The purpose of a grassroots program is one purpose period, and that is . . . to win."***

IBM, another member of the Public Affairs Council, is also buying into the program. In August, IBM vice chairman Paul Rizzo wrote a letter to the company's 110,000 employees, urging them to join a grassroots campaign to defeat the Democrats' health care legislation.

There is just no substitute for grassroots campaigns, according to Eric Rennie, the director of public policy communication at the ITT-Hartford Insurance Group. Rennie told *Impact:* "In a top-down organization such as ours, when the local general manager wants employees to sit down and write letters to their legislators, it's often done right there at work. The employees are given the paper, the pens, the stamps and the envelopes. Afterwards, copies are made so we know what kind of response we have achieved. Because we don't feel comfortable doing that with our customers, we don't know what proportion of them actually responded or along what lines." And that is where grassroots mobilization comes in. "These days," Rennie continued, "corporate grassroots campaigns require that we knock on more and more doors, the doors of our customers, distributors, suppliers, related industries and other members of our 'extended family.' "

Robert C. Kirkwood, the director of government affairs at Hewlett-Packard, is another true believer. He told *Impact:* "We had an epiphany . . . in the NAFTA effort. For the first time, we went to a widespread grassroots program that involved employees throughout the country. My sense is that we will use that as a part of our regular arsenal. . . . The environmental movement will be upset, labor will be troubled. Everyone hasn't tooled up yet, but they will." ■

# GW Associates Uses Public Relations for Social Change

Most of the articles in *PR Watch* are dedicated, unfortunately, to exposing the amoral excesses of a "communications industry" that worships money over principle and enables corporations to deceive and manipulate the public agenda. But what happens when the tools of public relations are put to work empowering citizen activists to become their own media experts? After 14 years of social activism, Peter Wirth decided to put this idea to the test by launching a public relations and marketing business called GW Associates.

"Too many activists bitch and moan about news coverage and how it's impossible to work with the media," Wirth says. "They talk about educating the public and changing society, while using methodologies that reach small, self-selecting audiences. For example, 99% of the people in any community will never come to a public presentation to hear a speaker. They get their news from radio, TV and print media. Unless activists learn to work with the media, our messages will reach only a small audience."

The problem in reaching that audience, he says, is not cost but attitude. "Many activists don't even try to work with the media because they don't believe its possible. They don't learn the necessary media skills and stick with them long enough to see results. The difference between reaching fifty people and five hundred thousand may literally be the cost of some postage stamps for a news release, and some follow-up phone calls."

In addition to teaching and training people to integrate a media strategy into their grassroots work, GW Associates has already logged several successful campaigns to educate the public about a variety of social change issues:

- Marketing *Lines in the Sand*, a twelve-minute, independently-produced video essay critiquing media coverage of the Gulf War. More than 1,800 schools, libraries and religious groups have purchased the video, which has also reached millions of viewers on PBS TV stations.
- Producing *Living Media*, a 60-minute audio instruction tape that trains travelers to third world countries to use the media to share their experiences. Thousands of people are using the training tape. They range from student environmentalists back from the rainforest, to observers of the election process in El Salvador.
- GW has worked with Pastors for Peace to arrange scores of interviews for returnees from Cuba, and consulted for labor unions on raising occupational safety and health issues and media coverage of strikes.

GW's prices are designed to make their services accessible to grassroots organizations. If you're anxious to take your message to a wider audience but aren't sure you know how, contact GW Associates, 702 S. Beech, Syracuse, NY 13210; phone (315) 476-3396. ■

## Joe Bast Bombs in Peoria

Fleishman Hillard's anti-Green PR efforts didn't play well in Peoria, IL. F-H is promoting Joe Bast's book, *Eco-Sanity*. Although Blast claims to be "a very deep shade of green," his book champions an *anti*-environmental perspective. That's not surprising, since Bast and co-author Peter J. Hill are associated with business-funded groups, respectively the Heartland Institute and the Political Economy Research Center.

Elaine Hopkins, a reporter with Peoria's *Journal Star*, was surprised when Bast arrived with a Fleishman-Hillard publicist. "Environmentalists rarely arrive at the *Journal Star* accompanied by PR reps," Hopkins wrote. " 'Whoa, I thought. Who's paying for this, and why?' "

Hopkins' article concludes, "The authors say they are environmentalists, but they're backed by corporations who will profit from fewer environmental regulations. We need honest debate about the future of our planet, debate free of hidden agendas or secret spins. . . . The Heartland's association with 'greenwashing' casts a shadow over the ideas presented in *Eco-Sanity*. Let's hope the book is ignored." ■

## "Plutonium Is Our Friend"

Woodsy Owl, take a hike. The newest 'green' cartoon celebrity is Mr. Pluto. That's 'Pluto' as in plutonium, the world's deadliest element. Mr. Pluto is sort of a toxic Nerf-like creature, designed and promoted by the Japanese Power Reactor and Nuclear Development Corporation. His job is to convince school children that plutonium is wonderful stuff. In one TV spot the cute Mr. Pluto says, "If everybody treats me with a peaceful and warm heart, I'll never be scary or dangerous. Its really too bad that I was first used as a tool of war in atomic weapons. But I really don't like war. In fact, what I do like is to work peacefully." ■

# Sound Bites Back

### Tobacco Front Group Loses California Referendum

"Californians for Statewide Smoking Restrictions" is not what it seems. The PRO-smoking group tried to fool California voters into voting to weaken smoking restrictions. But, after anti-smoking activists exposed the group's real agenda and source of funding, the pro-tobacco referendum was soundly defeated.

Two PR firms—The Dolphin Group and Burson-Marsteller—are using millions of dollars from Philip Morris to organize stealth pro-smoking campaigns. In the California campaign they put up billboards reading, "Yes on 188—Tough Statewide Smoking Restrictions—The Right Choice."

In fact, a yes vote would have undermined hundreds of existing local anti-smoking ordinances in California cities, and the state's new statewide smokefree workplace law. The American Cancer Society said, "The $25 million smokescreen the tobacco industry created to dupe Californians into voting for Proposition 188 has cleared, and the voters have spoken."

Meanwhile Lee Stitzenberger, the PR executive behind the stealth pro-tobacco campaign, blamed his defeat on the media and activists for focusing so much attention on "the funding of the initiative." He promised a continued fight for smokers rights.

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### The GreenWash Channel: Viewer Discretion Advised

Don't expect hard-hitting reportage from "The Ecology Channel," the new 24-hour cable TV channel that will go fully operational in early 1995. Instead, anticipate a lot of pollyanna-ish fluff and avoidance of investigative reporting.

The Ecology Channel is closely tied to the world's premier PR greenwashing firm, E. Bruce Harrison Company (see *PR Watch*, 2nd Quarter 1994). Harrison vice president Donald L. Rheem is on the company's Board of Directors, and he's behind its publicity campaign. The channel will hit the airwaves just before Earth Day's twenty-fifth anniversary, and is sure to soak up millions of advertising dollars from corporate polluters "going green" for Earth Day.

The Ecology Channel describes itself as "entertainment driven," and promises an "upbeat format". The show will avoid investigating corporations and policies responsible for environmental crises, and instead will focus on "people and how they relate to their world", while promoting "partnerships" between businesses and "public and private educational organizations."

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### Earth Day USA Muddles Forward

After *PR Watch* (Second Quarter 1994) exposed Earth Day USA's hiring of the Dorf & Stanton PR firm, and its acceptance of "unscreened" money from corporate polluters, half of Earth Day's board resigned. Denis Hayes, who as a student founded the original Earth Day, was invited in to try to redirect the group, but declined. Bruce Anderson, president of Earth Day USA, is keeping the group alive and stepping up its efforts to haul in major corporate dollars.

### Same Old Poisons, New PR Campaign

The National Agriculture Chemical Association is composed of the companies that manufacture, formulate and sell the billions of pounds of toxic pesticides and herbicides sprayed on food crops. The group, realizing that people are "outraged by pesticides", is changing .... its name. It is now called the American Crop Protection Association.

Watch for their slick new advertising campaign using actors portraying farmers and mothers to allay fears about agri-poisons. Consultant Michael Moore says the new PR/ad barrage "is not about facts. . . . We are talking to adults, but we must talk to them as children as well," Moore explained.

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### Clinton Names BGH Advocate 'Science Advisor'

The Clinton Administration is a strong advocate of Monsanto's genetically engineered bovine growth hormone (BGH), and has denied consumers any right to know if their milk is from hormone-injected cows. In August Clinton named Dr. Virginia Weldon, Monsanto's main PR flack for BGH, to Clinton's new Committee of Advisers on Science.

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### Clean Up the Neighborhood—Spray it With Chemicals

For fifty years the Monsanto chemical company manufactured most PCBs, chemicals which cause cancer and birth defects. In June, 1994, their PR "SWAT" teams gave away hundreds of gallons of the company's Round-Up™ herbicide to community groups that would spray weeds in their neighborhoods, making them "cleaner and safer places to live." Monsanto has also hired Seattle's Cole and Weber firm to develop an ad campaign for their new line of Ortho lawn chemicals—watch for a major Earth Day tie-in.

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### No One Reads Those Books, Anyway

"It's amazing how many of the books, articles and speeches on crisis management recommend that anyone involved in a crisis be open with the news media. Who's kidding whom?" Robert Irvine, president of the Institute for Crisis Management, speaking June 14, 1994, to the International Association of Business Communicators

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### Real Reporters for Practice Disasters

ARCO oil company is sharpening its crisis management skills by simulating an oil spill and inviting real reporters to help ARCO role-play at a news conference. Practicing for PR disasters is cheaper than using double-hulled tankers.

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