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## Thinking Globally, Acting Vocally: The International Conspiracy to Overheat the Earth

by Bob Burton and Sheldon Rampton

As corporations, products and issues have internationalized, the PR industry has followed. The recent negotiations over global warming in Kyoto, Japan illustrate just how high the stakes have become and how the PR industry helps broker international coalitions of corporations, think tanks and industry-funded scientists to achieve industry goals.

Among scientists, the consensus is nearly unanimous that the world's climate is suffering damage from burning oil, coal and gasoline, a consensus echoed by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences as well as the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a working group of 2,500 climate experts sponsored by the United Nations to study the problem.

In 1995, the IPCC warned bluntly that the earth has entered a period of climatic instability likely to cause "widespread economic,

## Flack Attack

The public relations industry was American-made, but now blankets the globe. This was brought home to us during a speaking tour arranged by Australian Bob Burton for our book, *Toxic Sludge Is Good For You*. Bob is sort of the Aussie version of *PR Watch*—an investigative writer and activist who reveals the lies, damn lies and deceptions behind the news down under. We asked him to reveal to our readers how Australian PR firms use the same tricks, tactics and personages developed here to spin issues there.

Global PR firms like Burson-Marsteller, Edelman, Hill & Knowlton and others get rich serving the propaganda needs of the few hundred giant industrial combines that dominate most economic activity on planet earth. Global companies may spar with one another over market share, but they unite to attack their common enemies, including scientists who warn of the biosphere's inability to handle industrial pollutants that are destroying earth's ozone layer and climate.

In order to appear "green" and "socially responsible," today's PR-savvy 21st-century capitalists often lay

low themselves while funding PR fronts to fight for business's "right" to pollute the planet. *PR Watch* has pioneered exposing such front groups and the powerful new tactic of "corporate grassroots organizing" that uses millions of dollars, slick consultants, direct marketing and captive employees to build a powerful army of support for the corporate political agenda. That's how the insurance, drug and health care industries sunk health care reform, "kicking butt" on the popular top priority of a new President.

Now the PR war over the Kyoto Treaty seems to be, in Yogi Berra's words, "deja vu all over again." Expect the professional environmentalists, the Sierra Club and Environmental Defense Fund types, to fill your mailbox with fundraising appeals to lobby the Senate to ratify the climate treaty. But don't be fooled, because—like the Clinton health care plan—the Kyoto Treaty is a flawed vehicle. Even in the unlikely chance that it is ratified by the Senate, it will be too little to have any meaningful effect on the problem at hand.

Meanwhile Clinton and Gore can have it both ways, sitting on the treaty for years and then blaming its

*continued on page 2*

social and environmental dislocation over the next century," including crop-destroying droughts, a host of new and recurring diseases, devastating hurricanes, and rising sea levels that could inundate island nations and low-lying coastal rims on the continents. To avert a catastrophe, IPCC called for policy measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 20% below 1990 levels.

Such changes, of course, would seriously alter the lucrative status quo enjoyed by big polluting industries. In order to prevent IPCC's recommendation from becoming reality, industry groups including fuel companies, automobile makers and other manufacturers have poured millions of dollars into a bewildering array of green-sounding front groups whose mission is to sow confusion about the issue.

## ICE MELTS DOWN

In 1991, a U.S. corporate coalition including the National Coal Association, the Western Fuels Association and Edison Electrical Institute created a PR front group called the "Information Council for the Environment" (ICE) and launched a \$500,000 advertising and public relations blitz as the first salvo in a campaign to, in ICE's own words, "reposition global warming as theory (not fact)."

The ICE was run by Bracy Williams & Co., a Washington-based P.R. firm. Using opinion polling, it identified "older, less-educated males from larger households

who are not typically active information-seekers" and "younger, lower-income women" as "good targets for radio advertisements" that would "directly attack the proponents of global warming . . . through comparison of global warming to historical or mythical instances of gloom and doom."

To boost its credibility, ICE created a Scientific Advisory Panel that featured Patrick Michaels from the Department of Environmental Services at the University of Virginia, Robert Balling of Arizona State University and Sherwood Idso of the U.S. Water Conservation Laboratory. Michaels has been the leading scientific sceptic of the global warming theory.

"It will be interesting to see how the science approach sells," commented an internal memo by the Edison Electric Institute's William Brier. The campaign collapsed, however, after Brier's comments and other internal memoranda were leaked to the press. An embarrassed Michaels hastily disassociated himself from ICE, citing what he called its "blatant dishonesty."

Qualms notwithstanding, Michaels continues to benefit heavily from his association with the fossil fuels industry. During an administrative hearing in Minnesota in May 1995, he testified that he had received \$165,000 in funding during the previous five years from fuel companies, including \$49,000 from the German Coals Association and funding from the Western Fuels company for his publication, *World Climate Change*.

## Flack Attack *continued from page one*

demise on a weak environmental movement and apathetic public. Industry is protected, and yet Al Gore's green credentials survive to the next election. Politicians can do what their corporate donors want and stay on the campaign-funding gravy train, while blaming environmentalists for not whipping up enough public support to pass planetary protections.

The Washington-based green lobby is a pathetically weak and ineffectual bunch. It is adept at milking hundreds of millions of dollars of funding from concerned citizens, foundations and, increasingly, businesses. But its political clout is a joke in Washington, primarily evidenced in its ability to finagle brunch invitations to the vice-presidential mansion. It is unaccountable to the millions of Americans whom it badgers for contributions, but who exercise no decision-making power and are in no way empowered locally by the over-paid elitists running groups like NRDC, EDF, NWF, WWF or, pick your favorite green initials.

The sad truth is that three decades after the first Earth Day, the powerful "astroturf grassroots" campaigns of the climate polluting industries can out-muscle, out-organize and defeat the environmental movement. The only bright spots in environmental organizing have been the scores of citizen-based do-it-yourself groups that have arisen to fight waste incinerators, sludge dumpers, hog factories, clear-cutting, mining and other visible corporate assaults on local communities. These groups could use some of the millions squandered by the national greenies in DC, but are cut out of the funding and have to fight their local battles with nickels and dimes.

Fundamental changes to protect the Earth and its people will come only from new national and international citizen movements that are, for the first time, rooted firmly at the grassroots. Until then expect more of the Washington wiggle: "You greenwash my back, I'll greenwash yours."

## JUST ANOTHER VOICE

The collapse of ICE barely dented industry's propaganda campaign, which had already created a bevy of other front groups to pump out the same message. The group currently leading the charge is the Global Climate Coalition (GCC), a creation of the Burson-Marsteller PR firm. Since its founding in 1989 until the summer of 1997, GCC operated out of the offices of the National Association of Manufacturers. Its members include Amoco, the American Forest & Paper Association, American Petroleum Institute, Shell Oil, Texaco, Chevron, Chrysler, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Exxon, General Motors, Ford Motor Company and more than 40 other corporations and trade associations.

In addition to Burson-Marsteller, GCC is represented by the E. Bruce Harrison Company, a subsidiary of PR giant Ruder Finn. Within the public relations industry, Harrison is an almost legendary figure, who is ironically considered "the founder of green PR" because of his work for the pesticide industry in the 1960s, when he helped lead the attack on author Rachel Carson and her environmental classic, *Silent Spring*. GCC also employs the Washington, DC-based EOP Group Inc., another well-connected lobby firm whose other clients include the American Petroleum Institute, the Business Roundtable, the Chlorine Chemistry Council, Edison Electric Institute, National Mining Association and the Nuclear Energy Institute.

Since 1994 GCC has spent more than \$1 million each year to downplay the threat of climate change. Its

efforts are coordinated with separate campaigns by many of its members, such as the National Coal Association, which spent more than \$700,000 on the global climate issue in 1992 and 1993. In 1993, the American Petroleum Institute paid Burson-Marsteller \$1.8 million for a successful computer-driven "grassroots" letter and phone-in campaign to stop a proposed tax on fossil fuels.

"For perspective, this is only slightly less than the combined yearly expenditures on global warming of the five major environmental groups that focus on climate issues—about \$2.1 million, according to officials of the Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the World Wildlife Fund," observes journalist Ross Gelbspan, author of *The Heat Is On*, the best book written to date on the issue.

## THE AUSTRALIAN CONNECTION

The GCC recognized early on that Australia would play a key role in its campaign against global warming reform. Rapid economic growth in the Australasian region has seen Australia emerge as an important regional staging post for the PR industry. Most major US firms—Edelman's, Burson-Marsteller, Hill & Knowlton, Ketchum, Shandwick and others—have established a presence there to work on local issues and the regional implementation of international issues.

After the Indonesian military massacred scores of supporters of the independence movement in East Timor, for example, Burson-Marsteller received a \$5 million contract from the government of Indonesia to

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help improve the country's human rights and environmental image. Australia, as East Timor's nearest neighbor, has long played a critical role in discussions on its future following the Indonesian invasion in 1975.

Australia also accounts for more than 30 percent of world trade in coal, and has major metal smelting industries which also belch out greenhouse gases. As a result, it has Asia's highest per capita emission of greenhouse gases, even though its population comprises only one percent of the region's 2.5 billion people.

In 1988, when Australia held a Greenhouse '88 conference, there was great public interest in the issue. At the time, Australia had one of the "greenest" governments in the world. Since then, however, corporations and their front groups have systematically manipulated public opinion through frequent pronouncements in the media by Michaels and other industry-funded scientists.

Part of the campaign has been managed by Noel Bushnell of the PR firm Hannagan and Bushnell, which serves as a consultant to the Australian Industry Greenhouse Network, a coalition of industry groups. Hannagan was formerly the public affairs manager for Alcoa, the giant bauxite, alumina and aluminium company which in turn is 40% owned by the Western Mining Corporation, which owns chemical plants and smelters in Australia, Guinea, Suriname, Jamaica, Brazil, Germany, India, Holland, Japan and the United States.

Australian think-tanks have also been active. The Australian Institute of Public Affairs, which gets almost one-third of its budget from mining and manufacturing companies, has produced a series of statements challenging the greenhouse consensus.

These efforts, combined with intensive mining industry lobbying aimed at Australian Prime Minister John Howard, have successfully transformed the Australian government from a green role model to a green pariah. Rather than agreeing to a call for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, Australia announced plans to *increase* its emissions by 18 percent by the year 2010.

## COUNTDOWN TO KYOTO

One of the key people building the trans-Pacific campaign was R.J. Smith, Senior Environmental Scholar with the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), an industry-funded right-wing think-tank based in Washington, DC.

In 1996, Smith said, "right after Tim Wirth of the U.S. State Department announced they were going to call for mandatory controls in Kyoto, we said, 'What do we do? How do we stop this?'"

The answer was developed in a strategy meeting held in November 1996 at CEI headquarters. Participants included Ray Evans from Australia's Western Mining

Corporation, along with a senior world vice-president for Ford Motors, American Petroleum Institute Executive Director Bill O'Keefe, and Dick Lawson, the executive director of the U.S. National Mining Association.

"It was clear that Australia if possible would be a key player in this," Smith said, "so we decided to see if we could plan a series of conferences before Kyoto and had the first one on July 15, 1997 in Washington, DC."

The Washington conference, titled "The Costs of Kyoto," offered blanket dismissals of the scientific evidence for climate change and predicted staggering economic costs for any policies aimed at restricting emissions. Speakers included Fran Smith from Consumer Alert, an industry-funded front group; Patrick Michaels and fellow contrarian Wilfred Beckerman from Oxford University; Australian Embassy Chief of Mission Paul O'Sullivan and Brian Fisher from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARE).

ABARE is an Australian government-funded economic forecasting agency that has become highly influential in the international debate over the costs of greenhouse gas abatement, with Fisher criss-crossing the globe to tout an ABARE analysis that predicts huge costs in jobs and income if emission reduction targets are met.

What Fisher prefers not to discuss, however, are the funding sources behind that research. For a contribution of \$50,000, corporations buy a seat on the steering committee overseeing its work. "By becoming a member of the consortium, you will have an influence on the direction of the model development," ABARE states in promotional material to potential sponsors.

Contributors to ABARE's global warming modeling work include Rio Tinto, the world's largest mining company; Texaco; Mobil Oil; Exxon; the Australian Coal Association; the Australian Aluminum Council; and Statoil, the Norwegian oil company. All told, ABARE receives \$500,000 a year from the fossil fuel industry.

ABARE's contribution to the global warming debate has been to advocate "differentiation." Rather than setting a uniform target for all nations to lower their greenhouse emissions by equal proportions, Fisher advocates "differentiated" goals tailored to the economic characteristics of each country—an approach that abandons the agreement reached at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. According to environmentalists, "differentiation" would make negotiations between nations so difficult that it would basically scuttle any hope of effectively capping worldwide emissions.

In August 1997, the CEI sponsored another major conference, this time in Australia's capital, Canberra. Australia's position on global warming had made it a

target of public humiliation at the recent New York Earth summit, leaving the government wounded domestically and wavering in its diplomatic strategy. According to Smith, the purpose of the Canberra conference was to “try and buck [Prime Minister John Howard] up a little more and let him know that there is support of the American people” for his government’s obstructionist stance.

“This conference is the first shot across the bow of those who expect to champion the Kyoto Treaty,” explained former U.S. Senator Malcolm Wallop, who chairs the Frontiers of Freedom Institute, another corporate-funded U.S. think-tank. Other U.S. speakers included the omnipresent Patrick Michaels, along with U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel, U.S. Congressman John Dingell, and Richard Lawson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the US National Mining Association.

Addressing conference participants, Australian Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fisher claimed that tough emission reduction targets could put 90,000 jobs at risk in Australia and cost more than \$150 million.

#### U.S. SMOKE AND MIRRORS

In the United States, the countdown to Kyoto saw a dizzying array of activity from industry front groups:

The **Global Climate Information Project** (GCIP), launched on September 9, 1997 by some of the nation’s most powerful trade associations, spent more than \$3 million in newspaper and television advertising, using ads produced by Goddard\*Claussen/First Tuesday, a California-based PR firm whose clients include the Chlorine Chemistry Council, the Chemical Manufacturers Association, Dupont Merck Pharmaceuticals and the Vinyl Siding Institute. Goddard\*Claussen is also notorious for its “Harry and Louise” advertisement that helped derail President Clinton’s health reform proposal. Its global warming ads used a similar fear-mongering strategy by claiming that a Kyoto treaty would mean a “50-cent-per-gallon gasoline tax” and higher prices on everything from “heat to food to clothing.”

The GCIP is represented by Richard Pollock, former director of the Naderite group Critical Mass who now works as a senior vice president for Shandwick Public Affairs, the second largest PR firm in the United States. Shandwick clients include Browning-Ferris Industries, Central Maine Power, Georgia-Pacific Corp., Monsanto Chemical Co., New York State Electric and Gas Co., Ciba-Geigy, Ford Motor Company, Hydro-Quebec, Pfizer, and Proctor & Gamble.

The **Coalition for Vehicle Choice** (CVC), a front group for automobile manufacturers, launched its own advertising campaign, including a three-page ad in the *Washington Post* which blasted the climate agreement as



***This website by the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition, an industry front group run by the APCO PR firm and the EOP Group, used subtle bribery when it attempted to encourage email letters to President Clinton against a global warming treaty by offering to enroll letter writers in a \$1,000 sweepstakes. “Citizenship Pays!” it promised.***

an assault on the US economy. Sponsors for the ad included hundreds of oil and gas companies, auto dealers, parts stores and other groups, along with a number of far-right anti-environmental organizations such as the American Land Rights Association and Sovereignty International, which claims that international environmental treaties are part of a United Nations conspiracy to establish a “new world order” that will abolish private property and personal freedoms.

CVC was originally founded in 1991 to fight higher fuel economy standards. From the beginning, it has been represented by Ron DeFore, a former vice president of E. Bruce Harrison’s PR firm. Its budget in 1993 was \$2.2 million, all of which came from the big three automakers—Ford, GM and Chrysler.

The **National Center for Public Policy Research**, an industry-funded think-tank, established the Kyoto Earth Summit Information Center, issued an “Earth Summit Fact Sheet” and fed anti-treaty quotes to the media through a “free interview locator service” that offered “assistance to journalists seeking interviews with leading scientists, economists and public policy experts on global warming.”

The **Advancement of Sound Science Coalition (TASSC)** attempted to stimulate anti-treaty email to President Clinton by promising to enter writers’ names in a \$1,000 sweepstakes drawing. On the eve of the Kyoto Conference, TASSC executive director Steven Milloy announced that more than 500 physicians and scientists have signed an open letter to world leaders opposing any climate change treaty. Asked by *PR Watch* to provide the

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signers' names and credentials, Milloy replied that he had not yet had time to "compile" the "hard copy list."

Milloy is a self-styled critic of "junk science," actually a lobbyist for the EOP Group, which also helps run the Global Climate Coalition. TASSC's funders include 3M, Amoco, Chevron, Dow Chemical, Exxon, General Motors, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Lorillard Tobacco, Louisiana Chemical Association, National Pest Control Association, Occidental Petroleum, Philip Morris Companies, Procter & Gamble, Santa Fe Pacific Gold, and W.R. Grace.

The **American Policy Center (APC)**, another far-right, industry-funded "nonprofit organization" based in Washington, DC, worked to mobilize a "Strike for Liberty," calling on truckers to pull over to the side of the road for an hour and for farmers to drive tractors into key cities to "shut down the nation" as a protest against any Kyoto treaty. Signing the treaty, APC warned, would mean that "with a single stroke of the pen, our nation as we built it, as we have known it and as we have loved it will begin to disappear." APC also appealed to anti-abortion activists with the claim that "Al Gore has said abortion should be used to reduce global warming."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Clinton-bashing was a common theme in industry's grassroots appeals, using the usual argument that the global warming issue is another Clinton attempt to replace private property with "socialism," "bureaucracy" and "big government."

Ultimately, however, the orchestrated wrath of the right wing's minions was a diversionary tactic which effectively concealed Clinton's complicity in the effort to prevent any effective regulations on global warming.

In April 1993, on the eve of Earth Day, Clinton announced his intention to sign a treaty on global warming, but ever since then he has played the game of perpetually watering down the content of any such treaty. In October 1993, Clinton's "Climate Change Action Plan" turned out to be a "voluntary effort" depending entirely on the goodwill of industry for implementation. By early 1996, he was forced to admit that the plan was off track and would not come even close to meeting its goal for greenhouse gas reductions by the year 2000.

In 1997, Clinton provided further stunning examples of his legendary ability to talk out of both sides of his mouth. In June, he addressed the United Nations Earth Summit and pledged a sustained U.S. commitment to stop global warming. Painting a near-apocalyptic picture

of encroaching seas and killer heat, he acknowledged that America's record over the past five years was "not sufficient. . . . We must do better and we will."

In October 1997, however, Clinton announced that realistic targets and timetables for cutting greenhouse gas emissions should be put off for 20 years, prompting the *London Guardian* to editorialize that "champagne corks are popping in the boardrooms of BP, Shell, Esso, Mobil, Ford, General Motors, and the coal, steel and aluminium corporations of the US, Australia and Europe. . . . In a stunning example of raw backroom power and political manipulation, the 'death-row' industries showed who rules the economic world by effectively killing any hope of combatting global warming at the Kyoto climate conference in December. . . . The new limits are so weak, compared with even the most pessimistic predictions of what the US would offer in the current negotiations, that two years of hard work by 150 countries towards reaching an agreement in December are now irrelevant."

The treaty that emerged from Kyoto proposed a reduction of only 7% in global greenhouse emissions by the year 2012, far below the 20% cut proposed by European nations or the 30% reduction demanded by low-lying island nations that fear massive flooding as melting polar ice leads to rising sea levels. The US successfully won a provision that will allow countries to exceed their emission targets by buying right-to-pollute credits from nations that achieve better-than-targeted reductions.

Greenpeace called the treaty "a tragedy and a farce." It was condemned as "too extreme" by U.S. industry, declared dead-on-arrival by Senate Republicans, praised by some mainstream environmental groups, and luckily for the presidential aspirations of Al Gore, provided all the wiggle room he and Bill Clinton needed to have their cake and eat it too. Clinton embraced the agreement but simultaneously said he would not submit it to the Senate until impoverished nations agreed to their own cutbacks in greenhouse gas emissions.

According to the December 12 *New York Times*, Clinton "is in the risk-free position of being able to make a strong pro-environmental political pitch while not having to face a damaging vote in the Senate. . . . One senior White House official . . . said it was possible that the treaty would not be ready for submission . . . during the remainder of Mr. Clinton's term in office." And, noted the *Times*, even in the unlikely event that the treaty were adopted and strictly observed by all the participating nations, "many experts believe that it may already be too late to avoid serious climatic disruption." ■

# Wise Guys Down Under: PR's Eco-front Moves on Australia

by Bob Burton

The public relations industry which began in the United States has spread to other countries, but the US continues to be an innovator and leader in the industry.

During the past decade, one of PR's most insidious inventions—the anti-environmental, self-named “Wise Use” movement—has gained momentum in Australia, with the assistance of corporations and PR firms that operate on both sides of the Pacific.

In 1986, the chemical industry sponsored a tour of New Zealand by Wise Use co-founder Ron Arnold. Describing himself as the “Darth Vader for the capitalist revolution,” he defended the use of the Agent Orange herbicide 2,4,5-T, and claimed that environmentalists were inundating the US with a wave of eco-terrorism.

In 1987, Dick Darnoc assumed the leadership of the Australian timber industry's leading lobby group, known today as the National Association of Forest Industries (NAFI). Darnoc was managing director of Weyerhaeuser Australia Pty Ltd., a subsidiary of the \$6-billion-a-year US-based forestry firm which has been involved in funding Wise Use groups in the US such as the Oregon Lands Coalition, Oregonians for Food and Shelter and the right-wing legal group, the Pacific Legal Foundation.

Under Darnoc's leadership, the Australian timber industry launched the Forest Protection Society (FPS), a deceptively-named organization whose true purpose was to counter the growing success of environmentalists in protecting native forests from logging operations.

According to NAFI Executive Director Paul Edwards, the plan was for the timber industry to provide FPS with funding to get it off the ground, but ten years later it still has not been weaned from industry money. Approximately 80% of its budget comes from NAFI, which has provided it with \$3.6 million in funding during the last five years alone. “We could not function without that (financial) support from the companies and the industry,” admits FPS Director Barry Chipman.

The FPS is advised by the Burson-Marsteller mega-PR firm, which also works for Wise Use Groups in the United States. Not surprisingly, it uses very similar tactics, in particular the tactic of mobilizing independent-seeming “third parties” to advocate for corporate causes.

“For the media and for the public, the corporation will be one of the least credible sources of information on its own product, environmental and safety risks,” explained an Australian representative of Burson-Marsteller. For that reason, “developing third party support and validation for the basic risk messages of the corporation is essential. This support should ideally come from . . . political leaders, union officials, relevant



***On the job in Australia, PR Watch scouts out the Canberra headquarters of the Burson-Marsteller PR firm.***

academics, fire and police officials, environmentalists, regulators.”

Just as Wise Use has organized log truck blockades in the Pacific Northwest US to oppose protection of the spotted owl habitat, the FPS mobilizes timber workers in rural Australian towns to defend the industry agenda. On two occasions FPS has organized log truck blockades of Australia's Parliament House in Canberra.

In 1988, the Network Communications PR firm distributed FPS strategy meeting notes which contained a revealing glimpse at the group's organizing tactics. Under the heading, “long term program,” the minutes recorded that FPS National Director “Robyn Loydell discussed activities by her group which involved taking over local environmentalist meetings, with the result that they became distracted from their ongoing campaign. Robyn's group actually controls the voting on several groups and could therefore vote to have them join the Forest Protection Society.”

It was a boast that backfired when the minutes were leaked, and Loydell's gloating was quoted in newspapers around the country .

## FORMAL TIES

Beginning in the 1990s, the FPS began establishing formal links with Wise Use groups in North America. The US-based Western States Public Land Coalition (WSPLC) became its first international member. Ties were also established with like-minded groups including Canadian Women in Timber, the Forestry Alliance of British Columbia (Canada) and Share Canada.

In May 1994, Robyn Loydell and Barry Chipman attended a conference in Glorieta, Colorado which was sponsored by People for the West, another US-based Wise Use group. "We share a lot of common ground with the US organization and the conference is a great opportunity to exchange ideas and reinforce with the politicians present that the movement against excessive government pandering to minority groups is international and growing," Chipman wrote upon his return.

Two Australian mining companies, the Western Mining Corporation (WMC) and BHP, have also played a critical role in fostering links with US anti-environmental groups. According to RJ Smith of the Washington, DC-based Competitive Enterprise Institute, Ray Evans from WMC "originally heard about us and . . . set it up with some of our good friends at BHP, Roger Nelson in San Francisco, Nick Allen in Melbourne and others to bring me down, I think in 1993. I came out for the first time and spent a month at Tasman Institute (a conservative think tank) . . . and they put me on a tour all around the country to lecture."

Ironically, WMC has recently sought to reposition itself as a "leader in environmental management." To accomplish this task, former Burson-Marsteller managing director Geoff Kelly joined WMC as Group Manager of Corporate Communications. Under his leadership the company released an environment policy, a code of conduct for employees and an annual environment report. WMC also sought to court critical activists and recruited former Greenpeace Executive Director Paul Gilding as a consultant. These face-saving measures occurred while WMC was simultaneously supporting Wise Use groups and playing a critical role in organizing the Canberra conference against global climate reform (see cover story in this issue).

The New South Wales based Public Land Users Alliance (PLUA), with close associations with the mining industry, has been campaigning against the protection of wilderness areas. In 1995 it announced that it proposed to launch the Australian Wise Use movement at a three day rally "with our friends from the mining, forestry and agricultural industries. We'll fly Ron Arnold

out from the States for a public address and a series of meetings with organizers from all our affiliated groups. Representatives of our parallel organisations in Victoria, Queensland and other states . . . to exchange information and set up national networks."

## THE ROUGH GET GOING

As in the US, Australian PR people have attempted to "position" community groups as dangerous radicals. One fax from the Forest Industry Association of Tasmania's PR officer suggested describing environmentalists in public statements as "conservation extremists, environmental fanatics." The FPS has repeatedly accused environmentalists of being terrorists.

Australia's timber industry has openly boasted about how it has worked closely with police. On two occasions the timber industry has succeeded in having an anti-terrorist intelligence officer from Victoria Police appear at joint press conferences branding environmentalists as eco-terrorists.

Recently it was revealed that Victoria Police have routinely infiltrated a wide range of community groups, including environmental groups. At one PR conference, NAFI head Robert Bain boasted that Victorian Special Branch "anti-terrorist" police had infiltrated environment groups and passed information to the timber industry about the movements of protesters.

In reality, it is the timber industry which has used violence, a fact which was revealed when an amateur video operator recorded environmentalists being assaulted by loggers.

"If we have to have a fight, if we have to physically confront those people who have opposed us for so long, then so be it," said Col Dorber, an ex-policeman who serves as executive director of the New South Wales Forest Products Association. Speaking on national TV, Dorber added, "I also say to people in the industry, if you are going to do that, use your common sense and make sure it's not being filmed when you do it."

The Wise Use movement suffered a setback, however, when a lone gunman went berserk and shot 35 people in Australia's Port Arthur massacre on April 28, 1996.

The shooting sparked a broadly-supported movement for stricter controls on gun ownership, and the public was shocked to learn that the New South Wales timber industry had funded the state's pro-gun Shooters Party.

"We both have the same enemy basically," explained Shooters Party leader Ted Orr, a former policeman. "We don't need a bunch of long-haired unwashed gits up trees . . . trying to tell us how to run a forest." ■

## Please Consider Us in Your Will

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# Sometimes The Truth Leaks Out: Failed PR Stunts “Down Under”

by Bob Burton

As in the US, the Australian PR industry woos potential clients with promises of campaigns that can't fail. Rarely do they admit to plans that have gone wrong, let alone at the hands of small, low-budget community groups. But the industry's facade of omnipotence can be eroded with the assistance of a little understanding of the PR industry's tactics.

Understanding some basic elements of how industry plans and executes campaigns can assist community groups. As these examples illustrate, research into the background of a PR campaign can help bring information to light that may cause the campaign to unravel.

## “PEOPLE GET KILLED EVERYWHERE”

Former Greenpeace Canada activist Patrick Moore is now making a living for himself working as a consultant to industry. In 1991 Moore was appointed as a director of the British Columbia Forest Alliance.

According to *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report*, the Alliance is “a Burson-Marsteller created group, bankrolled by large timber companies,” which “is waging a PR war with environmentalists upset with the logging of rainforests in western Canada.” Moore's status as a former leader in Greenpeace made him an ideal candidate for the PR strategy of “cooptation.”

Figures like Moore, of course, crop up in any movement—people who, for a variety of reasons, turn against their former colleagues in the cause. He now seems to believe that his attacks on Greenpeace and other environmental groups are necessary to save environmentalism from its own “extremism.”

Moore's background sheds some light on the evolution of his thinking. Following his stint with Greenpeace, he became a fish farmer. In his new role as self-styled “upwardly mobile rural professional,” he ran afoul of coastal homeowners who complained of odors and fouled beaches, as well as traditional fishermen who complained that fish farmers were poisoning the oceans with algicides and fouling the waters for wild salmon.

These experiences, combined with Moore's background—his family has been involved in forestry for three generations—contributed to an acrimonious separation from Greenpeace when Moore endorsed clearcutting and other logging practices that Greenpeace opposes.

One of Moore's frequent accusations against environmentalists is that they have become too “confrontational,” whereas he now recognizes the importance of a “community-based, consensus approach” to dealing with environmental issues. But Moore's own attacks on his former colleagues reveal a pugnacious personality that seems to revel in confrontation and controversy.

Moore lost his cool, for example, when a Canadian journalist asked him about Burson-Marsteller's role in conducting a public relations campaign for Argentina when the Argentinian military's death squads were murdering thousands of citizens and political dissidents. Moore rose to the bait by responding that “people get killed everywhere.”

In Australia, the National Association of Forest Industries and its front group, the Forest Protection Society, sponsored a tour by Moore, hoping again to play on his credentials as an ex-Greenpeace activist who endorsed logging practices and attacked activist groups as being extreme. What they didn't count on was that Moore's statements for industry in North America would be gathered as background information for activists and journalists.

Once a two-page summary of Moore's past statements was circulated to the media, his enthusiasm for debates evaporated. He withdrew from three debates, insisting that he would only participate in interviews that allowed him to appear separately from his critics.

Moore attempted to lambaste Australian environmentalists as being anti-science. In one interview he was told that the National Biodiversity Council, comprising leading Australian scientists, criticized logging practices for leading to local extinctions. To the stunned amazement of the interviewer, he attacked the scientists as “just a group of self-appointed green academics.”

In Tasmania, Moore finally showed up for a radio debate. He demanded a retraction of the briefing materials that cited his defense of Burson-Marsteller in Argentina. His demand was refused, and instead his statement about Argentina ended up being broadcast to a statewide audience. At the end of the debate Moore stormed from the studio, leaving journalists bemused.

## TRAPPED IN DECEPTION

In 1995 one of Australia's largest woodchipping companies, Boral Timber, distributed a memo purporting to be an authoritative summary of events at the 1995 “Wild Agendas” conference of Australia's Wilderness Society.\* The memo contained outlandish claims designed to discredit environmentalists and was distributed to politicians, police and media. For example, one suggestion made during the conference was that environmentalists should consider establishing a 1-800 phone support service for victims of harassment. The memo translated this as a plan to *engage* in harassment: “Home telephone

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\* The Wilderness Society of Australia is a completely separate organization from the U.S. Wilderness Society.

numbers of politicians, senior police, local government leaders etc will be circulated so that direct complaints can be made at any time of day or night.”

“Stealth” memos are written with an element of plausibility in the hope that they will be used unquestioningly by third parties such as journalists or politicians. However, one recipient of Boral’s memo was appalled and provided a copy to The Wilderness Society. When challenged, the head of Boral sheepishly claimed that it done by an employee acting in a private capacity even though it was circulated on letterhead—a claim which few people took seriously either as an excuse or as an apology.

At the time, Boral was seeking to position itself as an environmentally responsible corporate citizen. Its defamatory memorandum demonstrated the opposite. Environmentalists circulated the Boral memo to media and activists around the country, along with a detailed, point-by-point critique of its distortions as an example of corporate PR trickery.

#### OPPOSING MOTHERS OPPOSING POLLUTION

Sometimes PR firms set up phony activist groups to create confusion as they attempt to attack real activists. Other times, the ploy is used simply to sell a client’s product. Either way, the tactic cheapens and dilutes the message of real citizen-based activism, and should be vigorously challenged.

In late 1993, a group called Mothers Opposing Pollution (MOP) burst onto the scene, calling itself “the largest women’s environmental group in Australia with thousands of supporters across the country . . . The group comprises mainly mothers and other women concerned with the welfare and rights of Australian women.”

MOP’s cause? A campaign against plastic milk bottles, which centered on the issues of waste disposal, the carcinogenic risks of milk in contact with plastic, and reduction in the quality of milk as a result of exposure to light. “The message to the consumer is never buy milk in plastic containers,” said spokesperson Alana Maloney. MOP also campaigned in New Zealand, where it issued a “world wide warning” about the cancer link to plastic milk bottles and urged consumers to stop “buying milk in plastic bottles because we believe there is a very real and deadly risk of innocent consumers contracting cancer.”

At first, membership of MOP was free, which prompted questions about how the group could afford to carry out expensive publicity in support of its cause. And although MOP claimed branches across Australia, Alana Maloney seemed to be its only spokesperson. Searches of basic public records such as voting rolls could



***Writer and activist Bob Burton has been investigating manipulative public relations practices in Australia.***

find no such person. MOP’s letterhead listed three addresses, in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Each turned out to be a post office box.

In February 1995, MOP’s luck ran out. Following persistent criticisms from environment groups, the *Courier Mail*, a newspaper in Queensland, discovered that “Mrs Alana Maloney” was in fact Janet Rundle, who heads a public relations company called J.R. and Associates. Rundle is also a co-director, along with Trevor Munnery, of a company called Vita Snax, and Munnery has his own PR firm called Unlimited Public Relations, which works for the Association of Liquidpaperboard Carton Manufacturers (ALC)—the makers of *paper* milk cartons.

Questioned by phone, Munnery denied any links with MOP or Alana Maloney, refused to talk about his links with Janet Rundle, and hung up on the reporter. Rundle claimed that she didn’t know Mr Munnery.

ALC Executive Director Gerard van Rijswijk threatened to sue the *Courier Mail* for alleging a link between his organization and MOP. “We follow the group’s activities, but know nothing about how it operates,” Van Rijswijk claimed. He also denied any knowledge of links between UPR, Munnery and Maloney/Rundle.

In the wake of these revelations, MOP sank from public view and has since disappeared. ■

# Welcome to the Jungle: Shell invades the Peruvian Amazon

by Tom Wheeler

"This is not something we are trying to PR away," claims Martin Christie of Shell International. "This is a measured and considerate management tactic. We are working very hard to manage the situation."

Speaking at the Issues Management Conference, a November 1997 gathering of top corporate PR executives, Christie was there to unveil Shell's new model of environmental management and local participation for its latest gas-drilling project in Peru, which seeks to position Shell as a fierce protector of the rainforest.

Titled "Creating Sustainable Development in a Jungle of Stakeholder Demands," Christie's presentation promised to explain "the intricacies of what is an extremely complex issue management process in Peru."

Shell plans to drill for natural gas as part of a 40-year, \$3 billion project in what was originally set aside as a homeland for uncontacted indigenous peoples in the jungles of Peru. The project is hailed as one of the most ambitious and largest gas operations in South America.

The company hopes to exploit a gas field that is believed to contain 11 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 600 million barrels of natural gas liquids.

Although Christie chose not to discuss Shell's scandal-ridden history, recent bad publicity is the

obvious driving force behind its new-found emphasis on what Christie described as "building, nurturing, maintaining and enhancing partnerships" in order to achieve better "management of perceptions internationally."

The best-publicized recent scandal occurred in late 1995 when the Nigerian government executed Nobel Peace Prize nominee and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with eight other Ogoni tribesmen, for opposing Shell's Niger Delta operations.

Today, Christie says, Shell is "not trying to take people on." Instead, it is trying to "look at the issues more broadly," to "revisit human rights principles," and to be "open and transparent" by assuming that "all documents will be considered public."

## KINDER, GENTLER DRILLING

As part of this retooling, Shell now welcomes input from observers and experts, has actively sought "external verification," and aggressively promotes Shell's efforts to "save the rainforest."

Under its "Camisea Community Strategy," Christie says that the company will obtain permission from local people before doing any work. It has also promised not to build roads to the site and developed what it calls an

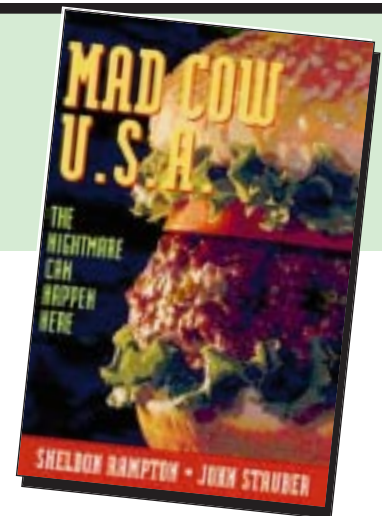
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by Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber

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“offshore concept.” All materials are to be brought in by helicopter. Shell will forbid hunting and fishing by staff, personnel are not allowed to wander off the worksite, and it will ensure minimal pollution and clean up all waste.

Shell is also allowing third-party monitoring and is actively “looking for partnerships” by inviting 35 non-governmental organizations to “monitor the project from an environmental and social standpoint.”

“Some of my business colleagues ask, are we going to have to do this on every project?” said Christie. He responded in the affirmative and reasoned that image-conscious industries have an opportunity “to capture the learning from this type of approach” and to break from the past “when we were control freaks.”

During the early stages of the Peru project, he said, Shell “shared the project guidelines with people seeking input and advice. . . . We were trying very hard.”

Apparently, not hard enough. Despite all these efforts, the Peruvian gas operation has already drawn charges of environmental destruction. Peruvian activists have complained that the local people have little idea what is happening at the drilling site or what future operations might involve.

Complaints have surfaced blaming Shell for causing the Cashiriari River to turn a dark color, and local villagers have complained about the decline of wildlife. Shell has been blamed because it has no erosion controls on its operations, which are situated in the headwaters of the Cashiriari and Camisea rivers. The constant noise from helicopters delivering workers and materials is also having an impact.

And environmentalists claim the current problems are minor compared to what will occur when Shell begins the actual extraction of natural gas, which has not yet commenced. Waste material from the wells could contain heavy metals such as arsenic, lead, and mercury, which are highly toxic.

Christie also claims Shell will compensate the local people for the use of the land. In exchange for two hectares of land for the first well in Armihuari, Shell promised the village of Cashiriari that it would supply electricity for three communal houses, as well as tin roofs and medicines. However, Shell admits that it exceeded the amount of land it could use by 50%, and local communities charge that Shell has paid little in compensation and funded only token community programs.

Another problem is the land-use agreement does not guarantee any compensation for accidents, contamination of local rivers, or destruction of the forests. Agreements with other communities have been criticized, and Shell has been accused of creating divisions and prob-

lems for the indigenous peoples without offering much in the way of compensation or security against pollution.

When someone in the audience asked Christie if there was any opposition to the project, he admitted that some international environmental groups were opposed but the local populations were “exceedingly positive.” When the questioner pressed further, Christie hesitated for a moment, then meekly changed his story, admitting that not all the locals were “supportive of the project.”

Apparently, many locals remember an oil drilling project Shell launched a decade ago. According to environmentalists and human rights activists, that project disrupted the economy and undermined the culture. Shell workers abused local women and brought diseases that killed a major part of another indigenous community of Nahua peoples who have lived in isolation for centuries.

### TOKENS OF APPRECIATION

There is no denying that Shell has worked very hard to shine its tarnished image. Last year the Shandwick PR firm helped Shell create a website at <[www.shell.com](http://www.shell.com)>, which showcases its “hard work” to improve its environmental record.

In 1996, Shell pledged with great fanfare to sponsor a hospital in Nigeria with a \$250,000 donation in the hopes of starting a “better relationship based on trust and respect.” Unfortunately, the gesture wasn’t well received, and Ogoni activists angrily denounced the move as a “public relations gimmick.”

Environmentalists and activists have charged that Shell’s self-congratulatory rhetoric has not produced real improvements in how the company does business.

In January 1997, the World Council of Churches (WCC) released a 106-page report that called Shell’s environmental record in Nigeria “distasteful.” The report accused Shell of not working in the interests of the local people. The report claims the Ogoni people in Nigeria do not benefit from the oil industry and end up suffering the brunt of environmental devastation, military repression, judicial as well as extra-judicial murder.

In May 1997, the Rainforest Action Network released a separate report accusing the company of spilling oil in Peruvian rivers, ignoring the views of the indigenous population and also colluding with the Nigerian Army.

For the corporate media, however, a few buzzwords about “sustainable development” seem to go a long way. Christie bragged about a Shell-sponsored tour in which journalists were invited to inspect its facilities in Peru. The trip, he said, led to “some good press coverage” in the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, which ran a glowing story titled, “Oil Companies Strive to Turn a New Leaf to Save Rain Forest.” ■