

Beder, S. (1997). *Global spin: The corporate assault on environmentalism*. New York: Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Introduction

This book examines the way that corporations have used their financial resources and power to counter gains made by environmentalists, to reshape public opinion and to persuade politicians against increased environmental regulation. Corporate activism, ignited in the 1970s and rejuvenated in the 1990s, has enabled a corporate agenda to dominate most debates about the state of the environment and what should be done about it. This situation poses grave dangers to the ability of democratic societies to respond to environmental threats.

Between 1965 and 1970 environmental groups proliferated; environmental protection, especially pollution control, rose dramatically as a public priority in many countries. *Time* magazine labelled it a "national obsession" in America. A "sense of urgency—even crisis—suddenly pervaded public discussion of environmental issues. The press was filled with stories of environmental trauma. . ."¹

As environmental concern grew, so did distrust of business institutions, which were seen to be the primary cause of environmental problems such as air and water pollution. Public respect for business fell to an all-time low and "for the first time since the Great Depression, the legitimacy of big business was being called into question by large sectors of the public."² Surveys showed increasing percentages of people nominated "factories and plants" as the major source of air pollution. The distrust of business and support for environmentalism was highest amongst the young and the college or university educated.³

Governments worldwide responded with new forms of comprehensive environmental legislation, such as Clean Air Acts and Clean Water Acts and the establishment of environmental regulatory agencies. These new environmental laws were part of a general trend in legislation aimed at regulating corporate activities and constraining unwanted business activities. In the UK, new environmental legislation included a Clean Air Act in 1968, a Water Act in 1973 and the Control of Pollution Act in 1974. In the US, there was even more legislation:

From 1969 through 1972, virtually the entire American business community experienced a series of political setbacks without parallel in the post-war period. In the space of only four years, Congress enacted a significant tax-reform bill, four major environmental laws, an occupational safety and health act, and a series of additional consumer-protection statutes. The government also created a number of important new regulatory agencies, including the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), investing them with broad powers over a wide range of business decisions.⁴

Businesses found that their past ways of dealing with government no longer sufficed. The scope of political conflict widened. "For the first time since the 1930s, business found its political influence seriously challenged by a new set of interest groups."⁵ Grefe and Linsky describe the traditional business approach in their book *The New Corporate Activism*:

Back then, it was standard for organizations to conduct their government relations in accordance with a "fix-it" mentality. They had a problem. They hired a lobbyist. They said, "Fix-it!" What they meant was "Kill it or make it go away". . . It was 'influence peddling', quite simply—that is, finding the person who knew the legislator or regulator and getting him (it was always a 'him' in those days of the old-boy network) to bury the problem.⁶

The First Wave of Corporate Activism in the US

In various business meetings, corporate executives lamented their decline in influence. "The truth is that we've been clobbered", the Chief Executive Officer of General Motors told chiefs from other corporations. The Chairman of the Board of General Foods asked "How come we can't get together and make our voices heard?"⁷—which is of course what they did. Throughout the 1970s, US corporations became politically active, getting together to support a conservative anti-regulatory agenda and financing a vast public relations effort aimed at regaining public trust in corporate responsibility and freedom from government regulation. According to David Vogel in his book *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America*, "It took business about seven years to rediscover how to win in Washington." Once they realized how the political scene had changed, corporations began to adopt the strategies that public-interest activists had used so effectively against them—grassroots organising and coalition building, telephone and letter-writing campaigns, using the media, research reports and testifying at hearings, "to maximize political influence".⁸ To these strategies, corporations added huge financial resources and professional advice. "A new breed of public affairs professionals began emerging" who could service corporations in their new activism.⁹

For business, the turbulence of change was a nightmare of new regulations and increasingly vocal interest groups that needed pandering to. The rules of the game had changed, and new ways had to be found to at once get what one needed from government, shout down the opposition, and harness the power of interest groups for one's own benefit through persuasion.¹⁰

They established 'public affairs' departments, increased the funding and staffing of those departments, and allocated responsibility for public affairs to a senior company executive, such as a Vice-President. The offices of these public affairs units were increasingly sited in Washington. Chief Executive Officers also devoted increasing amounts of their time to government relations. A survey of four hundred public affairs units in large and medium-sized firms in 1981 found that most received more than half a million dollars each year in funding, and more than half had been set up after 1970.¹¹

The number of business lobbyists in Washington increased rapidly through the 1970s. By 1982, 2,445 firms "had some form of political representation in Washington" compared with 175 in 1971. Trade associations also moved to Washington, often being restructured and given increased budgets.¹²

All told, as of 1980 there were in Washington 12,000 lawyers representing business before federal regulatory agencies and the federal courts, 9,000 business lobbyists, 50,000 trade-association personnel, 8,000 public relations specialists, 1,300 public-affairs consultants, and 12,000 specialized journalists reporting to particular industries on government developments affecting them. The number of individuals employed by the 'private sector industry' exceeded the number of federal employers in the Washington metropolitan area for the first time since before the New Deal.¹³

In response to government regulations brought on by the activities of environmentalists and public interest groups, businesses began to cooperate in a way that was unprecedented, building coalitions and alliances and putting aside competitive rivalries. This was facilitated by the introduction of legislation such as the Clean Air Act that affected large numbers of industries as opposed to one industry at a time. "They learned to find people who were similarly situated and form ad hoc committees with these people and have a concerted, organized effort across the board of a number of industries who were similarly situated to fight the thing together."¹⁴

Broad coalitions of business people sought to affect "a reorientation of American politics". The Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers were resurrected and rejuvenated, and new organizations such as the Business Roundtable (for large corporations) and the Small Business Legislative Council (for small businesses) were formed to lobby government. The Business Roundtable, established in 1972, consisted of the chief executive officers of almost 200 corporations. It "cranked out smooth public-relations messages" warning of the costs of environmentalism. One of the Roundtable's early successes was its opposition to the Consumer Protection Agency in which it used strategically designed polling techniques and employed a public relations firm to distribute editorials and cartoons to thousands of papers and magazines.¹⁵

This trend towards corporate activism could be observed in other countries too. In Australia, corporations "substantially increased their level of resources and commitment to monitoring and influencing the political environment"; ensured their senior executives were effective political operatives in their dealings with politicians and bureaucrats; hired consulting firms to help with government submissions; and established government relations units within their companies with direct access to the Chief Executive Officer. Also, as in the US, "concerted efforts were made to improve and centralize business representation at the national level" so as to mobilize and increase their power.¹⁶

The Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI) was established in 1970 and the National Farmers Federation in 1977. The Australian Business Roundtable modelled on the US Business Roundtable and made up of chief executives of twenty of Australia's largest companies, was founded in 1980. The Business Council of Australia was formed in 1983 by the chief executives of sixty-six large corporations, following what they perceived as a weak showing by business at the Economic Summit organized by the newly elected Labor Government. The Business Council now represents big business in Australia.¹⁷

Rejuvenation of the activism of business in the US happened at a time that political power in Congress was becoming more decentralized and fragmented, and party loyalty was weakening. Individual politicians were increasingly susceptible to pressure from interest groups. Whereas previously business leaders could effectively lobby key people in Congress, they now had to adopt a new lobbying strategy that focused on a wide number of individual members of Congress. This required organising support in a number of electorates so that "by 1978, corporations and trade associations were spending between \$850 million and \$900 million a year on mobilizing their supporters throughout the United States."¹⁸ Trade associations did this by organising the owners of large numbers of small businesses to lobby their Congress Representative while large corporations mobilized shareholders, suppliers, customers and employees.

The War of Ideas

Far more important than the money invested in political campaigns, however, was the money invested in other forms of political influence, particularly in influencing the political agenda through the dissemination and selling of ideas:

Right-wing businessmen like Richard Mellon Scaife and Joseph Coors, and conservative treasuries like the Mobil and Olin foundations, poured money into ad campaigns, lawsuits, elections, and books and articles protesting 'Big Government' and 'strangulation by regulation', blaming environmentalists for all the nation's ills from the energy crisis to the sexual revolution."

Corporations put large amounts of money into advertising and sponsorships aimed at improving the corporate image and putting forward corporate views. Much of this advertising

was on environmental issues. One 1974 survey of 114 large companies "found that thirty to thirty-five per cent of corporate advertising addressed environmentalism, energy-related issues, or the capitalist system". During the mid-1970s over \$100 million was being spent each year on this sort of advocacy advertising, particularly by oil companies, electrical utility companies and the chemical industry.²⁰

The Advertising Council also became active: using funds from the US Department of Commerce, it attempted to educate the public about the benefits of free enterprise, distributing millions of booklets to schools, workplaces and communities. It blamed inflation on government regulation. The idea for this campaign came from the Chairman of the Board of Procter and Gamble, the largest advertiser in the US, in a speech in which he called for American people to be better educated about the free enterprise system, so that business people need not be defensive about their work.²¹

In Australia, after the election of a 'progressive' Labor government in 1972, the Australian Chamber of Commerce reacted with a nationwide 'economic education campaign' to promote free enterprise; and in 1975 Enterprise Australia was established by the Free Enterprise Association (funded by multinational companies such as Esso, Kodak, IBM and Ford Motors) to take part in the "propaganda warfare for capitalism". In 1977, the president of the Institute of Directors in Australia told his fellow directors that the Institute should, in conjunction with Enterprise Australia, "publicise and sell the benefits of the system it espouses".²²

Another area of corporate investment in the US, Britain and Australia was to support scholars whose views were compatible with the corporate view by funding them in universities or non-university research institutes, otherwise known as think-tanks. This was seen as a way of countering some of the anti-business research that was being produced in universities, particularly in the social sciences. Irving Kristol, one of those widely credited with persuading the US business community of the merits of this strategy, argued: "You can only beat an idea with another idea, and the war of ideas and ideologies will be won or lost within the 'new class', not against it."²³ The 'new class' comprised people—such as government bureaucrats, academics and journalists—who dealt in ideas rather than products.

Another person who persuasively made these arguments was William Simon, head of the Olin Foundation. He argued that rather than fight each piece of legislation as it came up, or spend money getting particular candidates elected, business people should foster a 'counterintelligentsia' "in the foundations, universities, and the media that would regain ideological dominance for business". Three of the wealthiest US foundations funded the establishment of the Institute for Educational Affairs (IEA), which was conceived by Kristol and Simon to coordinate the flow of money from corporations into the production of conservative ideas. Millions of corporate dollars was distributed each year in this way.²⁴

Corporations continued to fund the sciences and engineering, but became much more political in other university funding, endowing forty chairs of "free enterprise" between 1974 and 1978, to promote business values to undergraduate students at colleges perceived to be liberal. They also spent millions "to influence the teaching of business and economics in the nation's high schools". They sponsored or funded educational films promoting free-market economics and screened on public television, such as Milton Friedman's series *Free to Choose* and five films on American Enterprise supported by Phillips Petroleum Company. The Business Roundtable also sponsored economics courses in primary and secondary schools.²⁵

In Australia, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Enterprise Australia used surveys of school leavers to find the 'deficiencies' in their attitudes to the free enterprise system and then circulated corrective material through schools. They also produced fifteen videos and films with titles such as *Profits, Advertising and The Market Economy*. Their material was made available to school resource centres with the approval of the departments of education in each state.²⁶

Enterprise Australia produced a series of television programmes called *Making it Together*, distributed a text book by one of its directors entitled *The World of Business*, presented awards

to Young Achievers and broadcast commercials promoting the benefits of free enterprise on over one hundred radio stations. Business groups such as chambers of commerce, the Australian Bankers Association and the Australian Mining Industry Council ran conferences and made presentations to teachers, business people and school students.²⁷

Part of the aim of all this 'education' was to get people used to the idea that "it is an appropriate part of business's role in democracy to judge what beliefs we must hold in order to be 'economically educated'." They juxtaposed personal, political and economic freedom, arguing that constraints on economic freedom were tantamount to reducing personal and political freedom and that those who sought to "intervene excessively in the play of market forces", however well-intentioned they might be, posed a major threat to those freedoms. Criticism of the economic system amounted to subversion of the political system.²⁸

Think-tanks also took a leading part in the war of ideas in various countries. In the US in particular, conservative foundations and large corporations established and/or funded a new set of think-tanks which were ideologically compatible with right-wing causes and corporate interests, promoting the free market and attacking government regulation.

Funded by eccentric billionaires, conservative foundations, and politically motivated multinational corporations, right-wing policy entrepreneurs founded think-tanks, university centers, and political journals, and developed the social and political networks necessary to tie this nascent empire together. The end product was a tidal wave of money, ideas, and self-promotion that carried the Reaganites to power.²⁹

This influx of money meant not only that conservative think-tanks proliferated but that other think-tanks moved towards the right. As Jerome Himmelstein points out in his book *To the Right*. "The political mobilization of big business in the mid-1970s gave conservatives greater access to money and channels of political influence. These helped turn conservative personnel into political leaders and advisers, and conservative ideas, especially economic ones, into public policy."³⁰

In the mid-1970s the corporate-owned media announced that a conservative mood had set in. Although there was indeed a 'backlash' from conservative groups, the media exaggerated what was happening by portraying it as a widespread change in public mood. This in turn helped shape public opinion into a conservative mould. Michael Parenti, in his book on the politics of the mass media, says:

In discovering a 'conservative mood', the news media had to overlook a great deal about the 1970s and 1980s including the various polls conducted during that period—which showed a shift in a *progressive* direction (even among many who labelled themselves conservative) on issues such as military spending, environmental protection, care for the elderly, tax reform, and race relations. . . . By crediting conservative policies with a popular support they did not have, the press did its part in shifting the political agenda in a rightward direction.³¹

Robert Entman, in his book *Democracy Without Citizens*, agrees that the public's policy preferences had not changed much but "the media-fed perception that they had swung right influenced politics", legitimizing the conservatism of Reagan's administration, and allowing him to implement a policy agenda that lacked majority support.³² During the late 1970s and early 1980s, protest activities by environmental and other public interest groups were mostly either unreported or dismissively reported as being a hangover from the past.

Vogel argues that by 1978 US business had "clearly regained the political initiative" and defeated many of the regulatory measures hard won by public interest activists. They achieved the abolition of the Consumer Protection Agency, the reduction of automobile emissions standards, the deregulation of energy prices and the lowering of corporate taxes.³³ In the late

1970s US business was spending a billion dollars each year on propaganda of various sorts "aimed at persuading the American public that their interests were the same as business's interests". The result of all this expenditure showed in the polls when the percentage of people who thought that there was too much regulation soared from twenty-two per cent in 1975 to sixty per cent in 1980.³⁴

Ronald Reagan, who was elected President in 1980, owed his success partly to conservative corporate interests, which he served faithfully once in power through a combination of deregulation and political appointments and by directing funding away from agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). During the 1980s, under Reagan's administration, the numbers of trade and professional associations, corporations and interest groups with offices in Washington continued to grow. By 1985 an estimated 80,000 employees of these associations were being serviced by accountants, lobbyists, lawyers, trade paper journalists, public relations advisers, direct mail consultants, economists and think-tanks.³⁵ It was a huge information industry, and all this information was shaped and presented to promote the interests of the associations and corporations generating it.

The New Corporate Activism

Corporations managed to achieve a virtual moratorium on new environmental legislation in many countries throughout the late 1970s and most of the 1980s. However, towards the end of the 1980s public concern about the environment rose again, reinforced by scientific discoveries regarding phenomena such as ozone depletion and weather patterns that seemed to indicate that global warming had already begun. Local pollution events, such as medical waste washing up on New York beaches and sewage pollution on Sydney beaches, also contributed to the public perception of an environment in decline.

A 1989 *New York Times*/CBS poll found that eighty per cent of people surveyed agreed that "protecting the environment is so important that standards cannot be too high and continuing environmental improvements must be made regardless of cost." Green parties in Europe attracted fifteen per cent of the vote. Sixteen per cent of Canadians surveyed said the environment was the most important problem in Canada—more important even than unemployment—and most people felt that solving environmental problems required government action. An Australian survey found that fifty-nine per cent of people believed that protecting the environment was more important than other issues including the economy, and eighty-one per cent said they were prepared to pay for environmental protection.³⁶

A Saulwick Poll in 1990 also found that sixty-seven per cent of people thought Australia should "concentrate on protecting the environment even if it means some reduction in economic growth".³⁷ Similarly, a 1991 Gallup Poll found that seventy-five per cent said environmental protection should be given priority, "even at the risk of curbing economic growth". In this poll, eighty per cent of those surveyed called themselves environmentalists.³⁸

Amidst all this public concern, regulatory agencies in various countries got tougher and new laws were enacted. In the US, the highest-ever number of environmental convictions were recorded by the EPA in 1989, and half of those convicted got jail sentences. Environmental indictments by the Justice Department increased by thirty per cent in 1990 over the previous year.³⁹ In New South Wales, Australia, an Environmental Offences and Penalties Act was introduced in 1989, which provided for jail terms and million dollar fines for senior executives of polluting companies.

This heightening of public anxiety in response to scientific confirmation of environmental deterioration induced a new wave of corporate political activity. This time the corporate backlash was able to utilize the techniques and organizations that had been established in the 1970s for the same purpose. With their activist machinery already in place, corporations were able to take advantage of the new PR techniques and information technologies available for raising money,

building coalitions, manipulating public opinion and lobbying politicians. And this time, rather than focusing on defending the free enterprise system and opposing labour unions, the attack was primarily targeted at environmentalists.

For example in 1991 Bob Williams, a consultant to the oil and gas industry, wrote in his book *US Petroleum Strategies in the Decade of the Environment* that the industry needed "to put the environmental lobby out of business. . . There is no greater imperative. . . If the petroleum industry is to survive, it must render the environmental lobby superfluous, an anachronism."⁴⁰ Similarly Ron Arnold, another industry consultant, told a meeting of the Ontario Forest Industries Association: "You must turn the public against environmentalists or you will lose your environmental battle as surely as the US timber industry has lost theirs."⁴¹

Frank Mankiewicz, a senior executive at transnational PR firm Hill and Knowlton, observed:

The big corporations, our clients, are scared shitless of the environmental movement. . . They sense that there's a majority out there and that the emotions are all on the other side—if they can be heard. They think the politicians are going to yield up to the emotions. I think the corporations are wrong about that. I think the companies will have to give in only at insignificant levels. Because the companies are too strong, they're the establishment. The environmentalists are going to have to be like the mob in the square in Romania before they prevail.⁴²

Having observed the rise in environmental consciousness and the defensive-ness of US industry, C.J. Silas, Chief Executive Officer for Phillips Petroleum Company, wrote in *Public Affairs Journal* at the beginning of 1990: "There's no reason we can't make the environmental issue *our* issue. If we wait to be told what to do—if we offer no initiatives of our own and react defensively—we're playing not to lose, and that's not good enough." (his emphasis)⁴³

It has been during the 1990s that the application of public relations to environmental concerns has really come into its own. Environmentalism was labelled "the life and death PR battle of the 1990s" and "the issue of the decade" by public relations personnel. Activist Brian Tokar suggests the rise in environmental PR was because, with the collapse of communism in many parts of the world, "the growth of ecological awareness in the industrialized countries may be one of the last internal obstacles to the complete hegemony of transnational corporate capitalism."⁴⁴

The coalition building which began in the 1970s continues to grow. A survey of thirty of the largest firms in the US found that each firm was involved in an average of 5.7 coalitions, such as The Business Roundtable; most of them "formed for legislative and regulatory purposes and focused primarily on national issues" such as the environment. More than a third of the corporations surveyed spend over a million dollars each year on "coalition activity".⁴⁵

Some corporations have gone beyond their corporate allies in their organising efforts, hiring specialized public relations firms to set up front groups that promote the corporate agenda but pose as public interest groups (see Chapter Two). Public relations firms also have become adept at creating the impression of grassroots support for corporate causes so as to convince politicians to oppose environmental reforms. A 1992 survey by the US Public Affairs Council found that seventy-three per cent of the 163 large companies surveyed had a senior executive responsible for grassroots organising, a newly acquired responsibility growing at a rate second only to environmental affairs.⁴⁶ There are now also several firms in the US which specialize in creating grassroots support for industry causes.

Industry interests have been able to turn the disaffection of rural and resource industry workers, farmers and small business people into anti-environmental sentiment. Nowhere has this been more spectacularly achieved than in the US with its Wise Use Movement (see Chapter Three). The Wise Use Movement has attained grassroots support through enrolling thousands of people in the US who are worried about their future and feel individually powerless to do

anything about it. A similar coalition has been formed in Canada, called the Share movement, and elements of this type of movement are spreading to Australia.

Those who oppose undesirable developments and unfettered resource extraction are now finding that they are not only subject to the abuse of industry funded anti-environmental groups but they are also vulnerable to a new wave of law suits filed against them for exercising their democratic rights to circulate petitions, write to public officials, attend public meetings, organize boycotts and engage in peaceful demonstrations. Every year thousands of environmentalists and ordinary citizens are sued for speaking out against governments and corporations (see Chapter Four).

Corporate political donations have also increased. Organizations involved in influencing environmental legislation in the US since 1989 have included the American Farm Bureau Federation, which has contributed almost a million dollars to congressional candidates between 1989 and 1994 in its efforts to get the Clean Water Act controls on factory farms removed: the Republicans have introduced a bill that does just that. Oil corporation and land developer Chevron Corporation, which is a member of the Alliance for Reasonable Regulation, has spent over a million dollars on congressional candidates during the same period, and managed to introduce the concept of "plausible risk" into the same bill so that acceptable toxicity levels would be reduced. According to the EPA's Toxics Release Inventory, Chevron releases millions of pounds of toxic material into the environment each year.⁴⁷

Exxon, with a similar annual discharge of toxic material, has also been a member of the Alliance for Reasonable Regulation, and also spent over a million dollars in that same period on lobbying congressional candidates in its efforts to prevent the Clean Air Act being strengthened. Dow Chemical and its affiliates have also given over a million dollars and opposed the strengthening of the Clean Air Act, as well as pushing for cost-benefit analysis to be incorporated into the Clean Water Act. Chevron, Exxon and Dow Chemical all give financial support to a range of front groups including Alliance to Keep Americans Working, American Council on Science and Health and the National Wetlands Coalition.⁴⁸

In Europe, lobbyists and corporate consultants are flocking to Brussels to influence policy making by the European Parliament:

Leading the most recent wave of arrivals are large US law firms with strong Washington, DC, lobbying experience. They join an international armada of advocates already active in Brussels, including . . . public relations groups, confederations of European trade associations, representatives of US states, German lander and British municipalities, small 'boutique' consultancies, in-house representatives of individual US, European, and Japanese companies, European trade unions, agricultural groups, and a growing number of public-interest associations.⁴⁹

Conservative think-tanks, having been instrumental in bringing Ronald Reagan to power in the US and Margaret Thatcher to power in the UK, have turned their attention to environmental issues and the defeat of environmental regulations. They have sought to cast doubt on the very features of the environmental crisis that had heightened public concerns at the end of the 1980s, including ozone depletion, greenhouse warming and industrial pollution (see Chapters Five and Six).

Think-tanks have opposed environmental legislation in a variety of ways. In the US they have attempted to hamstring the regulatory process by advocating legislation which would ensure that regulatory efforts become too expensive and difficult to implement, by insisting on cost benefit analyses and risk assessments of proposed legislation and compensation to state governments and property owners for the costs of complying with the legislation. Throughout the Western world, these think-tanks have promoted free-market techniques such as tradeable property and pollution rights, pricing mechanisms, tax incentives, and voluntary agreements for

dealing with environmental degradation. These have been taken seriously by governments and in some cases accepted by environmentalists as a valid alternative to tougher legislation (see Chapter Six).

Corporations have also turned their attention to the next generation, through the development and distribution of 'educational' material to schools. The potential to shape environmental perceptions and improve corporate images at the same time has attracted many customers to the firms designing educational materials for corporations. These materials inevitably give a corporate view of environmental problems, and avoid solutions that would involve reduced consumption, increased regulation or reduced corporate profits (see Chapter Ten).

The combination of activist techniques and corporate money is a powerful weapon in the battle of ideas. In the US, opinion polling indicates corporate funded anti-environmental efforts produced a major shift in public opinion within the space of a single year. In 1992, fifty-one per cent of those surveyed agreed that environmentalists had "gone too far", compared with seventeen per cent the year before.⁵⁰

Andrew Rowell, in his book *Green Backlash*, dates the arrival of the anti-environmentalist backlash in Britain as Spring 1995, when the media took up the "anti-green tune" and a number of books were published that attacked environmentalism. These included a book by Richard North, whose research, according to Rowell, was funded by British chemical company ICI, and another published by the conservative UK think-tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs.⁵¹

The corporate muscle of multinational (also known as transnational) corporations is formidable. In 1995 the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported that these corporations—40,000 of them—controlled two-thirds of the world's trade in goods and services.⁵² According to *New Internationalist magazine* in 1993:

The combined sales of the world's largest 350 multinationals total nearly one third of the combined gross national products of all industrialized countries and exceed the individual gross national products of all Third World countries.⁵³

Many of the largest multinational corporations are headquartered in the US and it is not surprising that the strategies they have pioneered there to combat environmental regulations are now being used in other countries. This book examines this second wave of corporate activism that has emerged in the US, Canada, UK and Australia and elsewhere.

Chapter 2 Fronting for Industry

When a corporation wants to oppose environmental regulations, or support an environmentally damaging development, it may do so openly and in its own name. But it is far more effective to have a group of citizens or experts—and preferably a coalition of such groups—which can publicly promote the outcomes desired by the corporation whilst claiming to represent the public interest. When such groups do not already exist, the modern corporation can pay a public relations firm to create them.

The use of such 'front groups' enables corporations to take part in public debates and government hearings behind a cover of community concern. These front groups lobby governments to legislate in the corporate interest; to oppose environmental regulations and to introduce policies that enhance corporate profitability. Front groups also campaign to change public opinion, so that the markets for corporate goods are not threatened and the efforts of environmental groups are defused. Merrill Rose, Executive Vice-President of the public relations firm Porter/Novelli, advises companies:

Put your words in someone else's mouth. . . There will be times when the position you advocate, no matter how well framed and supported, will not be accepted by the public simply because you are who you are. Any institution with a vested commercial interest in the outcome of an issue has a natural credibility barrier to overcome with the public, and often with the media.¹

The names of corporate front groups are carefully chosen to mask the real interests behind them but they can usually be identified by their funding sources, membership and who controls them. Some front groups are quite blatant, working out of the offices of public relations firms and having staff of those firms on their boards of directors. For example, the Council for Solid Waste Solutions shares office space with the Society of the Plastic Industry, Inc and the Oregon Lands Coalition works out of the offices of the Association of Oregon Industries.²

Corporate front groups have flourished in the United States, with several large companies donating money to more than one front group. In 1991 Dow Chemical was contributing to ten front groups, including the Alliance to Keep Americans Working, the Alliance for Responsible CFC Policy, the American Council on Science and Health, Citizens for a Sound Economy and the Council for Solid Waste Solutions. According to Mark Megalli and Andy Friedman in their report on corporate front groups in America, oil companies Chevron and Exxon were each contributing to nine such groups. Other companies which donate to multiple groups include Mobil, DuPont, Amoco, Ford, Philip Morris, Pfizer, Monsanto and Proctor and Gamble.³ These large corporations "stand to profit handsomely by linking their goals with what they hope to define as a grassroots populist movement".⁴

The use of front groups to represent industry interests in the name of concerned citizens is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the past, businesses lobbied governments directly and put out press releases in their own names or those of their trade associations. The rise of citizen and public interest groups, including environmental groups, has reflected a growing scepticism amongst the public about statements made by businesses:

Thus, if Burger King were to report that a Whopper is nutritious, informed consumers would probably shrug in disbelief. . . And if the Nutrasweet Company were to insist that the artificial sweetener aspartame has no side effects, consumers might not be inclined to believe them, either. . . But if the 'American Council on Science and Health' and its panel of 200 'expert' scientists reported that Whoppers were not so bad, consumers might actually listen. . . And if the 'Calorie Control Council' reported that aspartame is not really

dangerous, weight-conscious consumers might continue dumping the artificial sweetener in their coffee every morning without concern.⁵

The American Council on Science and Health has received funds from food processing and beverage corporations including Burger King, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, NutraSweet and Nestle USA, as well as chemical, oil and pharmaceutical companies such as Monsanto, Dow USA, Exxon, Union Carbide and others. Its Executive Director, portrayed in the mass media as an independent scientist, defends petrochemical companies, the nutritional values of fast foods, and the safety of saccharin, pesticides and growth hormones for dairy cows. She claims that the US government spends far too much on investigating unproven health risks such as dioxin and pesticides because of the public's "unfounded fears of man-made chemicals and their perception of these chemicals as carcinogens".⁶

The American Council on Science and Health is one of many corporate front groups which allow industry-funded experts to pose as independent scientists to promote corporate causes. Chemical and nuclear industry front groups with scientific sounding names publish pamphlets that are 'peer reviewed' by industry scientists rather than papers in established academic journals.⁷ Megalli and Friedman point out: "Contrary to their names, these groups often disregard compelling scientific evidence to further their viewpoints, arguing that pesticides are not harmful, saccharin is not carcinogenic, or that global warming is a myth. By sounding scientific, they seek to manipulate the public's trust."⁸

The Corporate Strategies of Front Groups

Corporate front groups use various strategies to promote the corporate agenda in environmental affairs. In the case of pseudo-scientific groups, the aim is to cast doubt on the severity of the problems associated with environmental deterioration, and create confusion by magnifying uncertainties and showing that some scientists dispute the claims of the scientific community. Some groups such as the Information Council on the Environment, which is a coal industry front group, publish propaganda which argues that global warming will not happen. Other groups emphasize the uncertainty associated with global warming predictions or argue that the United States could be better off in a warmer world.

The Global Climate Coalition, a coalition of fifty US trade associations and private companies representing oil, gas, coal, automobile and chemical interests, uses these sorts of arguments to fight restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions. Its tactics have included distributing to hundreds of journalists a video which claims that increased levels of carbon dioxide will increase crop production and help to feed the hungry people of the world. In the lead-up to the Rio Summit the Coalition successfully lobbied the US government to avoid mandatory emissions controls; and in 1994 it called for the Clinton government to resist international agreements to reduce greenhouse emissions because they "would damage the US economy and the competitiveness of American business in the global marketplace". The chair of the Coalition at the time was also president of the National Association of Manufacturers.⁹

Some corporate front groups acknowledge environmental problems but argue that the solutions being promoted are too expensive, cost jobs, and would have detrimental economic consequences. For example the Alliance for Responsible CFC Policy, representing chemical companies, argued that the substitution of hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) for chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) would not be in the public interest because of the costs.¹⁰ They were thinking of course, of the costs to the chemical companies.

Such front groups tend to portray themselves as moderate and representing the middle ground; they therefore often use words like 'reasonable', 'sensible' and 'sound'. The use of these words is a way of implicitly saying that environmentalists are extremists—whilst hiding their own extreme positions. They downplay the dangers posed by environmental problems whilst

emphasising the costs of solving them. Examples include the Coalition for Sensible Regulation, which is a coalition of developers and corporate farmers in the West, and the Alliance for Sensible Environmental Reform, which represents polluting industries. The Citizens for Sensible Control of Acid Rain operated between 1983 and 1991 to oppose amendments to the Clean Air Act which threatened stricter standards on electricity generating emissions. It did not have a membership of individual citizens yet spent more money lobbying in Washington in 1986 (thanks to funds from coal and electric-utility companies) than any other lobby group.¹¹

Another strategy used by corporate front groups is to recognize environmental problems that are caused by corporations, but to promote superficial solutions that prevent and pre-empt the sorts of changes that are really necessary to solve the problems. Sometimes they shift the blame from corporations to the individual citizen. The Keep America Beautiful Campaign focuses on anti-litter campaigns but ignores the potential of recycling legislation and changes to packaging. It seeks to attribute litter and waste disposal problems to the irresponsible actions of individuals and admits no corporate responsibility for such problems. In the 1970s Keep America Beautiful opposed bottle deposit legislation, and more recently it has sought to discredit recycling with television advertisements, reports and brochures which emphasize the cost and limits of recycling.¹²

The Keep America Beautiful Campaign receives approximately \$2 million per year from "some 200 companies that manufacture and distribute the aluminum cans, paper products, glass bottles and plastics that account for about a third of the material in US landfills", including Coca-Cola, McDonald's, 3M and Scott Paper. It is also funded by waste companies that landfill and incinerate hazardous wastes and prefer waste disposal to be focused on the tidy disposal of litter. The Campaign's directors include representatives of Philip Morris, Mobil Chemical, Procter and Gamble, and PR giant Burson-Marsteller. In the past it has been coordinated by the Public Relations Director of Union Carbide.¹³

Perhaps the most common strategy of corporate front groups is to portray themselves as environmentalists, and the views they are promoting as those of environmentalists. In this way, corporate interests appear to have environmental support. The names of groups are chosen because they sound as if they are grassroots community and environmental groups, such as the Environmental Conservation Organisation, founded by the Land Improvement Contractors of America; the Sea Lion Defense Fund, a legal arm of the Alaska fishing industry fighting limits on fishing; and the Coalition for a Reasonable Environment (CARE) which consists mainly of developers, builders, lawyers and investors.¹⁴

The National Wetlands Coalition, which has a logo that shows a duck flying over a wetland, is not, despite its name, campaigning to protect wetlands. The group was formed in response to a policy statement made in 1989 by President George Bush that his government's aim was to have no net loss of wetlands. The Coalition, which is largely made up of oil and gas companies including Exxon, Shell and Mobil, was formed to protect the right of its members to build and drill in wetlands without impediment.¹⁵

Consumer Alert, another group which has been supported by corporations like Exxon, Eli-Lilly, Chevron, Estee Lauder and Philip Morris, campaigns against safety regulations for consumer products. It has fought against such measures as mandatory air bags in cars, safety seats for babies in aeroplanes and acid rain regulations, as well as filing a law suit against protesters at a Californian nuclear reactor.¹⁶

Pacific Lumber/Maxxam have hired a PR firm to put together a coalition to obstruct environmentalists wanting to save the 60,000-acre Headwaters Forest in Humboldt County, California. A coalition called the "Headwaters Consensus Council" was put together by the Sacramento PR firm. It says it too wants to save the old growth redwoods of the Headwaters, but is campaigning to preserve only "the 3,000-acre headwaters grove of virgin old growth redwoods"; and it wants to do this by getting the Californian government to acquire the 3,000 acres from Pacific Lumber/Maxxam for about \$500,000 "or a swap of like value".¹⁷ This would

be an ideal solution for the corporations which could go ahead and log most of the forest whilst being paid handsomely for that small portion that they almost certainly wouldn't be permitted to log anyway.

Some groups are formed purely to oppose a particular piece of legislation, such as the Clean Air Working Group which was formed by coal companies—who invested millions of dollars in the campaign—to fight the Clean Air Act of 1990. The group Nevadans for Fair Fuel Economy Standards was formed in 1990 by car manufacturers who wanted to put pressure on a Nevada Senator to oppose a Federal fuel-economy bill. It employed consultants to get members by writing to "Nevadans who owned taxis, recreational vehicles, pickup trucks, and other gas guzzlers", telling them the new bill would make running their vehicles very expensive. The letters did not mention that the group was a car industry front group; some people who had acted on the letters felt deceived when they later found out.¹⁸

Similarly, the Coalition for Vehicle Choice was established in 1991 by the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers of America, with a \$500,000 grant and the help of public relations firm E. Bruce Harrison, to fight standards for fuel consumption in new cars. Its members include a variety of automobile manufacturers' associations, motorists' associations and business groups. Behind the facade of the front group, these organizations argue that fuel efficiency means smaller, less safe cars—a claim that is hotly denied by non-industry groups such as the Center for Auto Safety.¹⁹

Corporate front groups are less well documented outside the United States, although it is reasonable to assume that wherever the multinational corporations who support them operate, they do also. Bob Burton, who has been investigating front groups in Australia, believes that the Forest Protection Society is one such group. It was established in 1987 with the support of the Forest Industry Campaign Association, whose Executive Officer claimed the funds were just to get it started but that it would be an independent community group. Some years later about eighty per cent of the Society's funding was still coming from the Association.²⁰

The Forest Protection Society shares the same postal address as the National Association of Forest Industries, uses an industry spokesperson as a contact for job advertisements and uses the services of Burson-Marsteller. Yet the Forest Protection Society is listed as an 'Environmental Protection Organisation' in the 1994 Directory of Australian Associations. Its fact sheets promote logging in rainforests as "one of the best ways to ensure that the rain-forests are not destroyed". Burton claims to have uncovered minutes of a Forest Protection Society meeting where ways to take over meetings of local environment groups and distract them from their campaigning were discussed.²¹

Mothers Opposing Pollution (MOP) is another Australian front group which has been exposed. Its prime purpose seems to have been to champion cardboard milk cartons against plastic milk bottles. A report in the *Courier Mail* informed readers that MOP's sole spokeswoman not only owned her own public relations company but also co-directed another company with a consultant to the Association of Liquid Paperboard Carton Manufacturers.²²

Manufacturing Grass Roots

Front groups are not the only way in which corporate interests can be portrayed as coinciding with a greater public interest. Public relations firms are becoming proficient at helping their corporate clients convince key politicians that there is broad support for their environmentally damaging activities or their demands for looser environmental regulations. Using specially tailored mailing lists, field officers, telephone banks and the latest in information technology, these firms are able to generate hundreds of telephone calls and/or thousands of pieces of mail to key politicians, creating the impression of wide public support for their client's position.

This sort of operation was almost unheard of ten years ago, yet in the US today, where "technology makes building volunteer organizations as simple as writing a check", it has become "one of the hottest trends in politics" and an \$800 million industry. It is now a part of normal business for corporations and trade associations to employ one of the dozens of companies that specialize in these strategies to run grassroots campaigns for them. Firms and associations utilising such services include Philip Morris, Georgia Pacific, the Chemical Manufacturers Association, General Electric, American Forest & Paper Association, Chevron, Union Carbide, Procter & Gamble, American Chemical Society, American Plastics Association, Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association, WMX Technologies, Browning Ferris Industries and the Nuclear Energy Institute.²³

When a group of US electric utility companies wanted to influence the Endangered Species Act, which was being re-authorized to ensure that economic factors were considered when species were listed as endangered, their lawyers advised them to form a broad-based coalition with a grassroots orientation: "Incorporate as a non-profit, develop easy-to-read information packets for Congress and the news media and woo members from virtually all walks of life. Members should include Native American entities, county and local governments, universities, school boards. . ." As a result of this advice the National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition was formed, one of a "growing roster of industry groups that have discovered grassroots lobbying as a way to influence environmental debates".²⁴

Artificially created grassroots coalitions are referred to in the industry as 'astroturf (after a synthetic grass product). Astroturf is a "grassroots program that involves the instant manufacturing of public support for a point of view in which either uninformed activists are recruited or means of deception are used to recruit them."²⁵ According to *Consumer Reports* magazine, those engaging in this sort of work can earn up to \$500 "for every citizen they mobilize for a corporate client's

Mario Cooper, senior vice president of PR firm Porter/Novelli, says that the challenge for a grassroots specialists is to create the impression that millions of people support their client's view of a particular issue, so that a politician can't ignore it; this means targeting potential supporters and targeting 'persuadable' politicians. He advises: "Database management companies can provide you with incredibly detailed mailing lists segmented by almost any factor you can imagine."²⁷ Once identified, potential supporters have to be persuaded to agree to endorse the corporate view being promoted.

Specialists in this form of organising use opinion research data to "identify the kinds of themes most likely to arouse key constituent groups, then gear their telemarketing pitches around those themes."²⁸ Telephone polls, in particular, enable rapid feedback so that the pitch can be refined: "With phones you're on the phones today, you analyze your results, you can change your script and try a new thing tomorrow. In a three-day program you can make four or five different changes, find out what's really working, what messages really motivate people, and improve your response rates."²⁹ Focus groups also help with targeting messages.

Demographic information, election results, polling results and lifestyle clusters can all be combined to identify potential supporters by giving information about people's age, income, marital status, gender, ethnic background, the type of car they drive and the type of music they like. These techniques, which were originally developed for marketing products to selected audiences, are now used to identify likely political attitudes and opinions. In this way the coalition builders don't have to waste their time on people who are unlikely to be persuaded, and at the same time can use different arguments for different types of people.

Jack Bonner of Bonner & Associates is one of the leading specialists providing grassroots support for his clients, who include the Association of International Auto Manufacturers, Chrysler, Dow Chemical, Edison Electric Institute, Ford, General Motors, Exxon, McDonnell Douglas, Monsanto, Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, Philip Morris, US Tobacco Co. and Westinghouse.³⁰ When the amendments to the Clean Air Act were being debated in 1990,

Bonner managed to get some large citizen groups, who had no financial interest in the matter, to lobby against amendments which would have required car manufacturers to make their cars more fuel efficient.

Bonner's firm, working on behalf of the automobile industry, persuaded these citizen groups that the legislation would have meant that large vehicles would not be manufactured. "Bonner's fee, which he coyly described as somewhere between \$500,000 and \$1 million, was for scouring six states for potential grassroots voices, coaching them on the 'facts' of the issue, paying for the phone calls and plane fares to Washington and hiring the hall for a joint press conference."³¹

The Society for the Plastics Industry hired Bonner after a law was passed in 1987 in Suffolk County, New York, banning some plastic products which were filling up landfills. The law was expected to be the first of many in other parts of the US. The Society also challenged the law in the courts. Subsequently the law, which had been approved with a twelve to six vote, was suspended with a twelve to six vote by the same body.³²

Bonner's Washington DC office has three hundred phone lines and a sophisticated computer system. His staff phone people all over the country, looking for citizens who will support corporate agendas. He targets members of Congress who are unsure of how to vote or who need a justification for voting with industry against measures that will protect the environment.

Imagine Dormer's technique multiplied and elaborated in different ways across hundreds of public issues and you may begin to envision the girth of this industry. Some firms produce artfully designed opinion polls, more or less guaranteed to yield results that suggest public support for the industry's position. Some firms specialize in coalition building—assembling dozens of hundreds of civic organisations and interest groups in behalf of lobbying goals. . . This is democracy and it costs a fortune.³³

Another expert in creating grassroots support for corporations is John Davies, who features a picture of an old lady carrying a sign "Not in my backyard" in his advertisements. The picture is captioned:

Don't leave your future in her hands.

Traditional lobbying is no longer enough. Today numbers count. To win in the hearing room, you must reach out to create grassroots support. To outnumber your opponents, call the leading grassroots public affairs communications specialists.³⁴

In his promotion, Davies explains that he will use mailing lists and computer databases to identify potential supporters and telemarketers to persuade them to agree to have letters written on their behalf. In this way he is able to create the impression of a "spontaneous explosion of community support for needy corporations".³⁵

The practical objective of letter-writing campaigns is not actually to get a majority of the people behind a position and to express themselves on it—for it would be virtually impossible to whip up that much enthusiasm—but to get such a heavy, sudden outpouring of sentiment that lawmakers feel they are being besieged by a majority. The true situation may be quite the contrary.³⁶

Other less specialist firms also create such coalitions for their clients. Edelman PR Worldwide has created such a coalition for Monsanto to oppose the labelling of genetically engineered food. Burson-Marsteller, one of the world's largest public relations firms, also organizes grassroots coalitions and corporate front groups for many of its clients. Since 1985 it has had a team of people in its Washington, DC office specialising in designing coalitions to

build allies and neutralize opponents. In 1992 Burson-Marsteller created an independent grassroots lobbying unit, Advocacy Communications Team, to counter activists that threaten corporations by organising "rallies, boycotts and demonstrations outside your plant".³⁷

Burson-Marsteller used their grassroots lobbying unit to create the National Smokers Alliance in 1993 on behalf of Philip Morris, The millions supplied by Philip Morris and the advice supplied by Burson-Marsteller's Advocacy Communications Team allowed this 'grassroots' alliance to use full-page advertisements, direct telemarketing and other high-tech campaign techniques to build its membership to a claimed three million by 1995, and to disseminate its pro-smoking message. The Alliance's president is the Vice-President of Burson-Marsteller, and other Burson-Marsteller executives are actively involved in the Alliance.³⁸

Burson-Marsteller is heavily involved in similar activities on behalf of clients who have been threatened by the rise of environmentalist!! It helped create the Coalition for Clean and Renewable Energy, organized to support its client Hydro Quebec, which was embroiled in controversy with environmentalists over its dams, both existing and proposed.

The masquerade is part of the game. B-M and companies like it have become masters of manipulation. If a pro-utility group calls itself by a nice, green-sounding name, if speakers at public forums are not identified as being on the Hydro Quebec payroll, and if supposed activists are really moles for the opposition, image triumphs and truth becomes a casualty.³⁹

A new coalition, The Foundation for Clean Air Progress, is currently operating out of Burson-Marsteller's offices. According to CLEAR, an organization which monitors anti-environmental activities in the US, the Foundation is "in reality a front for transportation, energy, manufacturing and agricultural groups". It is attempting to influence the re-authorization of the Clean Air Act due in 1997 by setting up chapters in various cities and 'educating' the public about the progress made in air quality over the past twenty-five years. Its focus is on individual responsibility for pollution, as opposed to the regulation of industry to achieve further improvements.⁴⁰

Influence on Politicians

According to the people who staff congressional offices, grassroots campaigns are far more effective than traditional lobbying—or even monetary contributions—in persuading politicians to vote in a particular way. One survey, by a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina Business School, found that 'grassroots activism' was ranked as the most effective strategy by fifty-seven per cent of respondents, compared with twenty-eight per cent who said 'lobbying by company executives' and five per cent who said 'political donations'.⁴¹ The rationale for this is that politicians have to worry about being re-elected, so they care what voters think.

Environmental and public interest groups pioneered the use of printed postcards as an effective means of grassroots campaigning, but as this method was adopted by corporations, and as competition between various interest groups increased, politicians become more cynical of these grassroots lobbying techniques. They realized that "10,000 pre-printed postcards arriving within five days of one another may not be a unilateral groundswell of democracy."⁴² Postcards were soon replaced by form letters and then telegrams, faxes and phone calls.

As a result of advances in technology, the realization on the part of elected officials that form letters were merely a product of a relentless coordinated campaign (it only took Washington half-a-decade to figure this out), and because the public is demanding a more responsive government, the art of grassroots campaigning has advanced to a science.⁴³

The more personalized the communications, the harder it is for the targeted politician to tell if it is a genuine, spontaneous expression of voter sentiment or an organized push by a corporation. And public relations people have become expert at faking the real thing. Davies, speaking at a conference in Chicago on *Shaping Public Opinion: If You Don't Do It, Somebody Else Will*, explained how his firm creates 'personal' letters for his clients, after gaining agreement from the person on the telephone:

If they're close by we hand-deliver it. We hand-write it out on 'little kitty cat stationery' if it's a little old lady. If it's a business we take it over to be photocopied on someone's letterhead. [We] use different stamps, different envelopes. . . Getting a pile of personalized letters that have a different look to them is what you want to strive for.⁴⁴

Telephone calls also tend to be more personal and, according to public relations people, the staff in politicians' offices often keep a tally of calls in favour of and opposed to particular bills. "Some even get callers' names and addresses and add them to their database."⁴⁵ Companies such as Optima Direct have sophisticated telephone communication equipment that enables them to redirect calls directly to politicians. Employees of Optima Direct contact potential supporters by telephone, talk to them, and suggest they talk to their representative. If they agree, they are connected straight through before they change their mind. In this way politicians can be flooded with calls from their local constituents on an issue and get the impressions that these calls are manifestations of a vast groundswell of opinion out there on that issue. Such calls can be spaced out through the day and each week to further increase the apparent realism of the groundswell.⁴⁶

This telephone connection technique (called 'patch-through') has also been used in conjunction with talk-back radio shows to give the impression of mass opposition to government reforms. For example, a conservative radio host such as Rush Limbaugh, whose show is broadcast to twenty million people via 650 stations across the USA, will argue against health reforms and work people up about them; then a commercial during the next break, paid for by the health insurance industry, will give listeners a free phone number to call for more information. These calls will be put through to a telemarketer who will talk to the callers and put them through to their representative in Congress.⁴⁷ Similar techniques have been used against environmental reforms and regulations: a "massive phone patch campaign was credited with defeating the corporate average fuel economy standards provision of the energy bill in the Senate in 1992".⁴⁸

Television advertisements have been used in a similar way. A free call number, given in the ad, can generate thousands of callers who are then recruited to lobby their local politicians. The advertisements are carefully targeted to reach those most likely to do this, being shown on news and public affairs programmes on particular cable channels and CNN, rather than in prime time on entertainment channels.⁴⁹

Randy Haynie, whose firm represents corporations such as Philip Morris and WMI (formerly known as Waste Management Inc), explains how they categorize politicians according to their past votes and other factors into those likely to support a bill, those likely to oppose it and those who could go either way. It is this last category that is targeted by grassroots campaigns. Corporate lobbying now commonly includes a grassroots component.⁵⁰

The letters and telephone calls resulting from these PR efforts tend to have an exaggerated effect on politicians, because most operate under the traditional assumption that a letter writer or caller is extremely committed and motivated; and that for every letter that the politician receives, there are hundreds or thousands of citizens who feel the same way but who lacked the time, resources, skills or motivation to write a similar letter. Someone who goes to the trouble of writing a letter is likely to feel strongly enough to actually monitor how the politician votes on the issue and decide their own vote accordingly when he comes up for re-election.

With grassroots organising, however, these assumptions about letter writers and callers are totally invalid because of the way the lobbying is engineered by the PR companies.

According to Edward Grefe and Marty Linsky in their book *The New Corporate Activism*, letters, particularly to state, county and city legislators, are especially influential because people at these levels seldom get more than one or two letters on any subject.⁵¹ Even at the national level letters are important. A 1992 Gallup Poll found that over seventy per cent of members of Congress said that they paid "a great deal of attention to (a) personally written letters from constituents, (b) meetings with heads of groups, (c) CEO visits representing companies with a job presence in the district, (d) personally written letters from heads of groups in the district or from company officials with a job presence in the district, and (e) phone calls from constituents."⁵²

Another study of congressional staff found that seventy-nine per cent said that individually written letters were most effective form of grassroots campaigning; sixty-four per cent said phone calls were most effective; and letters and phone calls were more effective than public demonstrations and petitions, which in turn were more effective than mass mail responses. When their estimates were averaged, respondents said that it would take 2,035 mass mail responses to get a legislator to place a high priority on an issue, compared with 156 individually written letters and 188 phone calls. In order to change their position on an issue, staff suggested it would take almost 20,000 mass mail responses compared to about 700 letters and 1,500 phone calls.⁵³

Front groups and PR-generated grassroots responses also help politicians who want to vote for or against a piece of legislation because of corporate inducements, but also want to be seen to be responsive to voters. According to Michael Pertschuk, co-director of the Advocacy Institute: "Fronts are useful for politicians who essentially want to do industry's bidding but are reluctant to be seen as tools of industry."⁵⁴

These methods are not confined to the US: they are also available in Canada. In his speech to the 1993 Wise Use Conference entitled *How to use communications technology to compete with radical environmentalists*, Ross Irvine, President of the Canadian firm Public Relations Management Ltd, explained to the audience the value of computer-generated letters as a powerful way of influencing Canadian politicians. "Politicians feel compelled to respond to letters, and for each letter they receive politicians believe there are 10, 100, 1,000 or 10,000 voters who feel the same way as the letter writer."⁵⁵

How about if you make a few copies of the computerized list of law makers and prepare form letters which can be merged with your list of names. . . Then you give copies of these computer disks to all your members, to all your friends, to all your neighbours,—to everyone you know—and ask them to send letters to the law makers.⁵⁶

James Gardner, author of *Effective Lobbying in the European Community*, has described "the soaring growth in transnational lobbying by giant global corporations" and contended that in future grassroots lobbying is likely to be used widely in many countries. He notes, for example, that there is provision for citizens to petition the European Parliament and that this "furnishes a framework for a grassroots lobbying campaign aimed at the Parliament and indirectly at the Commission and the Council".⁵⁷

Grassroots firms also specialize in generating attendance at town hall meetings and public hearings, as well as signatures on petitions and attendance at rallies. National Grassroots and Communications sets up local organizations to support their clients, using selected individuals from the local community who are paid and supervised by their own staff.⁵⁸ The business of collecting signatures for petitions has also become a professional activity that corporations can pay for.

In California, where bills can be initiated through petitions, the use of professional petitioners seems to be the way to ensure success. Two companies have been responsible for seventy-five per cent of the 65 initiatives that qualified for the California ballot in the decade from 1982 to 1992. These companies also operate in Oregon, Nevada, Washington, Michigan, Ohio, Oklahoma and Colorado. The people who collect the signatures get paid 25 to 35 cents per name. Often they have several petitions going at a time, which makes the operation more efficient. Increasingly it is only the well-financed who can afford to get such an initiative qualified.⁵⁹

Grassroots: Mobilising Family, Friends and Neighbours

Consultant John Brady concentrates on what is known in the business as 'tree-tops' lobbying, which involves activating smaller numbers of more influential citizens to contact their local government representative. He has over a hundred 'field operatives' working for him throughout the country. These are people with contacts and political savvy who can identify twenty to sixty business people or respected citizens able to clearly present the client's viewpoint on an issue. These people are then asked to contact the targeted politician, preferably with a visit or phone call.⁶⁰

Some firms run their own version of this sort of programme, known in the business as a 'key contact approach': "Each member of management is assigned one or more legislators or administrators—members of Congress, state legislators, governors or regulators—with whom they are expected to develop a relationship."⁶¹ This personal relationship gives the firm access to government and sometimes influence in times of need.

Large corporations are increasingly turning to their own business networks for grassroots support. Such organizations have access to many potential allies through their own employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers and vendors. One of Burson-Marsteller's directors told a gathering of British chemical industry leaders:

Don't forget that the chemical industry has many friends and allies that can be mobilized. . . employees, shareholders, and retirees. . . The industry needs an army of spokespeople speaking on its behalf. . . Give them the songsheets and let them help industry carry the tune.⁶²

Edward Grefe and Marty Linsky, in their handbook on 'Harnessing the Power of Grassroots Tactics for Your Organization', point out that any corporation will have three potential constituencies for its grassroots efforts: 'family', 'friends' and 'strangers'. 'Family' are employees and shareholders, and perhaps their close families, "whose livelihoods depend on the organization's success"; as a result they have a strong economic interest in—and emotional commitment to—the company. 'Friends' are people who have less direct connections to the company but still have some sort of economic tie or common interest. These people would include customers, suppliers and trade associations.⁶³

'Strangers' are those who have no connection to the company, are not aware of the issue being debated, and yet can be influential in its outcome. They include the media, politicians, the business community, opinion leaders, scientists and academics; the key is to find those who "may have an intellectual or philosophical perspective that puts them into alignment with your organization". Grefe and Linsky recommend that family should be mobilized first: "Once involved, family are the best ambassadors, not only for reaching out to the friends but more importantly for reaching out to strangers as well."⁶⁴

Grefe and Linsky argue that getting employees on side is not enough. They have to be activated—involved in political activity on the company's behalf: "People on the assembly line are always more credible spokespersons than people in sterile corporate offices." The model

they refer to is that of the Nationwide Insurance Company, which has set up a Civic Action Program (CAP) for employees and agents. Volunteers are offered "speaker training, drills on how to make a call to a legislator or write him or her a letter, and information on the importance of being present at hearings at which issues are being debated. . . Trips to Washington or a state capital are planned."⁶⁵

CAP volunteers are also asked to fill out cards that indicate who they know among the political leadership and how well they know that person, what community-based associations they are members of, whether they have ever held office or are active in a political party, and other information that would prove helpful in the development of coalition grassroots activities.⁶⁶

Grefe and Linsky don't question the infringement of privacy this may involve, nor how voluntary such activities can be for people dependent on their employers for a livelihood, promotion prospects and references. However, in *Toxic Sludge is Good For You!*, their book on the PR industry, Stauber and Rampton argue that this sort of employee mobilization "is in fact a top-down command system, under which employees are expected to vote and agitate not for what they as free citizens consider politically good or desirable but for the political interests of the company that employs them."⁶⁷

Public affairs consultant Gerry Keim points out that companies that direct their employees to write letters and lobby on their behalf are far less successful than those that give their employees a "deeper education. . . it is easy to induce employees to take political action with education".⁶⁸ Persuasion is better than coercion, and that persuasion is much easier in a situation where the persuader is able to offer substantial rewards to those who will be persuaded. Grefe and Linsky note that a major key to the success of Nationwide's programme—forty-six per cent of its 5,000 agents and fifty per cent of its 15,000 employees are actively involved in the CAP—is the 'reinforcement' that Volunteers' get.

Keim notes that with the increasing use of grassroots campaigns, and the growing cynicism about them on the part of politicians, the use of employees is particularly effective in ensuring that grassroots efforts have a genuine appearance. In fact, knowing that the employees are part of a grassroots programme can have even more impact on a politician, because he or she knows that these voters will be kept informed of how the issue is progressing and reminded of how the politician voted when it comes to re-election time. One company sends politicians copies of the newsletters it distributes to employees to show that "educated and politically informed constituents are working for it".⁶⁹

Nationwide pass on names of employees and agents willing to work on campaigns to local legislators: "a particularly powerful message when the candidate is an incumbent legislator seeking re-election. It's a reminder that among the legislator's constituents are many who also happen to be Nationwide employees or agents."⁷⁰ Such tactics are particularly effective in influencing politicians. As one politician said:

You can give me \$1,000. That helps. But stimulate a number of your employees to volunteer for my campaign and, following my election, I'll remember those who stuffed envelopes or walked precincts in my behalf long after I've filed the report on the contribution from your PAC.⁷¹

Some companies also encourage their employees to attend 'town hall' and other meetings organized by politicians and to join local civic organizations that have influence in the community, and they subsidize their membership of them. This enables the company to give presentations and discuss issues informally with other influential members of the community and thereby foster the support of 'strangers'.⁷²

Grefe and Linsky surveyed 119 companies, finding that thirteen per cent had a key contact programme, thirty-one per cent put together grassroots coalitions "only on an ad hoc or as-needed basis" and thirty-six per cent had an ongoing grassroots coalition with "activities in which their employees or members were involved in specific public affairs efforts". Only twenty per cent did no grassroots coalition work at all. Some corporations, such as Glaxo Pharmaceutical, have even utilized their sales forces in a political "outreach effort".⁷³

By getting together in trade associations and federations, smaller businesses can help each other in the same way. The US Chamber of Commerce has 220,000 member businesses, trade associations, and local and state chambers of commerce; in 1993 it established its "Grassroots Action Information Network (GAIN) with state-of-the-art technology and networking capabilities".⁷⁴ The National Federation of Independent Businesses has 617,000 members, and from these members it is able to construct a database of members classified into categories which include political backgrounds, position on particular issues and the extent to which they have been 'activated' in the past by direct mail approaches. The computer database is connected to laser printers and broadcast faxes. When an issue comes up, the Federation can instantly contact and activate thousands of specially selected members, or alternatively space out the contacts over a number of weeks to give the impression of a spontaneously growing public reaction.⁷⁵

Workers who can be persuaded that their jobs are at risk from some government action such as environmental regulation are an obvious source of grassroots support for corporations, and indeed for whole industry sectors. In a speech to the American Mining Congress, Tamara Johnson of the Citizens United for a Realistic Environment, a mining workers group, said:

An inferno is advancing toward us at an alarming rate. It is primarily in the form of the preservationist movement and the political ramifications it brings with it. . . Why have mining companies been losing the battle against this blaze? Because historically you have counted only on slick lobbyists in three-piece suits and upper-echelon management to get the message delivered. . . We have discovered that by forming grassroots groups such as ours and then linking up with other groups which have similar goals and forming multi-sector coalitions, we indeed can become a force to be reckoned with.⁷⁶

One of the most successful grassroots campaigns utilising these multi-sector coalitions mobilized farmers, coal-miners, aluminum manufacturers, the natural gas industry and others to oppose President Clinton's proposed energy tax.⁷⁷

Successful grassroots campaigns go beyond employees and 'family' to activate potential allies. Bruce Harrison, who specializes in environmental public relations, recommends to companies who have been attacked by an activist group that they encourage their allies to speak to the press and the activist group on their behalf. For this to be effective, these allies—who might be business associates, friendly politicians or academics—need to be armed with the right information. "Put them on a mailing list and service them aggressively."

The critical point is to immediately reduce or remove the 'us vs. them' element, the polarity of the one-on-one relationship. You'll lose if it's like this, because press and politicians will not get into the act unless they see others take your side.⁷⁸

It is important to enrol strangers because their views will have more weight with the general community since they are not seen as self-interested—as employees and others may be—and so they can "offer to the uncommitted community an endorsement that is seen as pure", a third party endorsement.⁷⁹ Phil Lesly, author of a handbook on public relations and communications, advises organizations facing opposition to identify those whose viewpoints are different from those of their opposition—both those who share the views of the organization and those who don't agree with the opposition for other reasons. "Both can become your allies," he says.⁸⁰ The

aim in fostering allies is to give an impression that there is strong support for both sides of a controversy.

Chris Crowley, of the Seattle-based Crowley/Ballentine public affairs consulting firm, wrote in *Oil & Gas Journal* that grassroots organising "may just prove to be industry's best weapon" for countering environmentalists who oppose resource developments. He describes the success of Citizens for Full Evaluation, formed as a front group to support Trans Mountain Pipe Line Company's plans to construct an oil tanker terminal and underground pipeline in Washington state. Polls commissioned by the company had found that sixty-five per cent of local people were concerned about an oil spill in Puget Sound, but also that some people supported the development. Trans Mountain sought to activate these unknown allies.

Citizens for Full Evaluation (CFE) was built primarily through the mail. More than 200,000 issue-oriented brochures and letters were mailed to registered voters along the proposed route, sounding themes developed from the poll. Supporters were quickly and cost-effectively identified where no organized support had existed before. . . CFE's mailing list grew to more than 5,000 in six largely rural counties. Entered into a computer database, the list could be broken down geographically, by level of support or by what members were willing to do.⁸¹

Using this mailing list, supporters could be mustered for public meetings and meet in advance to be briefed. Letters to newspapers by opponents could be answered by CFE members with more credibility than the company. A county commissioner was targeted, as was a congressman with "more than 1,000 post cards to his office. He got the message and remained neutral on the project. . ." In the end the project did not go ahead for "economic reasons" but Crowley argues that CFE managed to redefine the debate: "The group was critically important in helping to shift the focus of the debate from 'David vs. Goliath' or, 'people vs. big oil' to opponents vs. supporters of the project."⁸²

A variation on this theme is for PR firms to set up 'Community Advisory Panels' for their clients. These panels have about a dozen people from the community and the corporation, especially those who are respected or opinion leaders. The aim is to improve the image and credibility of a corporation in the region and foster community support by creating a forum for "carefully modulated" dialogue that engenders trust and avoids embarrassing issues. One PR professional explained: "People in a community are usually more concerned about such issues as trust, credibility, competence, fairness, caring and compassion than about mortality statistics and the details of quantitative risk assessment".⁸³

Community Advisory Panels were first established by chemical companies, which formed hundreds of such panels around the US; waste management, car manufacturing and oil companies have followed suit. Members of these panels are generally chosen by the companies or their consultants and environmental activists are often excluded. The panels tend to be dependent on the company for technical information and expertise; or academic experts who are dependent on the company for research funding are included. The resulting panel begins with little knowledge of the environmental problems and the politics of the issues surrounding those problems. They learn only what the company tells them in closed meetings or gives them to read (which they are not supposed to show to others). This information is explained and interpreted by company officers or those sympathetic to the company. It is not surprising that the panels often become great supporters and advocates for the company.⁸⁴

Examples of such compliant panels are given in the Chemical Manufacturers Association's Handbook. They include the Citizen's Advisory Council, set up by Rohm and Haas when it wanted to build a hazardous waste incinerator in Kentucky. Members of this Council got company paid trips to Germany and New York to learn more about incinerators. The advisory panel set up by Syntex Chemicals in Colorado helped the company put its views on a local

zoning issue. Another set up by Kerr-McGee Chemical "had become staunch supporters" within two years.⁸⁵

In 1990 the embattled Sydney Water Board decided to form a number of community advisory panels, which it called community consultation forums. Those wishing to be on these panels had to apply or be nominated by groups such as local councils, and the Board hired consultants to screen the applicants and nominees and choose suitable people. It soon became evident however that environmentalists who had been active in the issue of sewage pollution had been screened out of these forums. Richard Gosden of Stop the Ocean Pollution (STOP), one of the Board's main adversaries,⁸⁶ had been nominated by Randwick Council but had been left out of the local forum (no reason given) whereas an executive of ICI, the multinational chemical company and major user of the Board's sewers for disposal of trade waste, was put on one of the panels as a local resident. When environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth, STOP and Greenpeace, complained about the exclusion of environmentalists, the Board offered to have a consultation forum of environmentalists, but this was rejected as a way of separating the environmentalists from the community groups so that environmentalists would not be able to influence the community representatives.

Community advisory panels can also serve another purpose. Susan Schaefer Vandervoort advises companies wanting to engage in green marketing campaigns to assemble an environmental team then invite "opposition representatives, such as community action groups, environmental activists, political or regulatory officials, and academics" to join the team to help the firm "broaden their strategy and hone their tactics".⁸⁷

Manufacturing a Mass Movement

Ron Arnold is another of the new breed of public opinion entrepreneurs who have advised industry about the need for front groups and the manufacture of grassroots coalitions to successfully counter environmentalism. Throughout the 1980s he was advising the timber industry that its arguments would always be seen to be self-interested unless it could get citizen action groups to give the same arguments:

The public is completely convinced that when you speak as an industry, you are speaking out of nothing but self-interest. The pro-industry citizen activist group is the answer to these problems. It can be an effective and convincing advocate for your industry. It can utilize powerful archetypes such as the sanctity of the family, the virtue of the close-knit community, the natural wisdom of the rural dweller. . . And it can turn the public against your enemies. . . I think you'll find it one of your wisest investments over time.⁸⁸

Long experience has shown that it is the plain, unvarnished truth spoken by plain, unvarnished citizens, not statements by full-time lobbyists or public communicators, that is most persuasive in shaping public opinion."⁸⁹

In 1989 he recommended to Canadian timber executives that they organize grassroots organizations that could be "an effective and convincing advocate for your industry".⁹⁰ But Arnold has gone far beyond the front groups and grassroots alliances of ordinary public relations firms. With the help of Alan Gottlieb, a direct mail fund-raising specialist and founder of the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, Arnold has managed to engineer a whole movement of hundreds of groups in the US with an anti-environmental, pro-development, right-wing agenda.

During the late 1970s and 1980s Ron Arnold, acting as a consultant to industry, was helping to publicize a number of these pro-industry citizen groups. He realized that each group was being treated in the media as an isolated phenomenon, and that for these groups to have any influence they needed to be linked together in some way so that each group would seem to be

part of something larger. He became convinced that if industry was to successfully counter the environmental movement it needed its own activist movement.⁹¹ To do this he needed a label that would connect these groups and imply that they were part of a trend—a movement.

We called it the pro-industry movement for a long time. . . The major response we got from that was, well that's just old gut rock to protect his ill gotten gains. So that sunk. . . And I wanted to use conservation, because that's really my favorite label. But it had already been coopted by the preservationists that mean preservation, no use. And so it had been corrupted beyond thinking. "We couldn't use it. And one day it hit me. . ."⁹²

On that day Arnold noticed a saying on a calendar which said: "Conservation is the wise use of resources." The saying came from Gifford Pinchot, an early twentieth century conservationist and head of the US Forest Service. Gifford argued for the 'wise use' of natural resources and promoted principles of multiple use, scientific management and sustained yield. For him natural resources, like time and money, were limited and therefore should be used wisely. This was in contrast to his friend the preservationist John Muir, who founded the Sierra Club. Muir didn't view nature as something to be used, rather held nature as sacred, having inherent value outside of its commercial potential. The two men parted ways over plans to flood the scenic Hetch-Hetchy Valley to supply water and electricity to San Francisco. For Pinchot the scheme was a wise use, for Muir it was sacrilege.⁹³

Arnold liked 'Wise Use' as a name because it was short and would fit neatly into newspaper headlines, and because it was ambiguous: "It was symbolic, it has no exact definition, anymore than environmentalism or the environment. . . It can mean anything."⁹⁴

In 1988 Arnold and Gottlieb organized a conference of over 200 groups for the purpose of starting a movement that would oppose the environmental movement. Groups attending the conference included the American Mining Congress, the National Rifle Association, the American Motorcyclists Association and the National Cattlemen's Association, as well as corporations such as Exxon, DuPont, Macmillan Bloedel, Louisiana-Pacific, Georgia Pacific and Weyerhaeuser. At the time Congress was about to consider renewal of the Endangered Species Act, renewal of the Clean Waters Act, and repeal of the 1872 Mining Law which enables mining companies to buy public land very cheaply; the organisers felt it was time to flex their collective muscle. The possibility of environmental reforms galvanized all those who believed they would be worse off into a liaison against environmentalism, and marked the beginning of the Wise Use Movement and its Canadian equivalent, the Share Movement.⁹⁵

Chapter 7

The Public Relations Industry

Modern public relations dates back to at least the 1930s, when Edward Bernays "convinced corporate America that changing the public's opinion—using PR techniques—about troublesome social movements and labour unions, was far more effective than hiring goons to club people."¹ Bernays had worked for the wartime propaganda commission in the US, and wrote up his ideas in articles with titles like *Manipulating Public Opinion* and *The Engineering of Consent*, which described the "application of scientific principles and tried practices in the task of getting people to support ideas and programs".²

Bernays argued that the essence of democracy was "the freedom to persuade and suggest". He explained that experience during the first World War had shown business people that "the great public could now be harnessed to their cause as it had been harnessed during the war to the national cause, and the same methods could do the job."³

One of the early organizations to take advantage of these methods was the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the leading US business organization in the earlier part of this century. NAM had already been investigated by a committee of Congress in 1913 for mass dissemination of propaganda aimed at "influencing legislation by influencing public opinion". By the end of the second world war, NAM was able to boast that every day "one or more news stories about NAM appears in newspapers in some part of the country and often in all newspapers in all parts of the country. . ." NAM also spread its pro-business, anti-union and anti-reform message through advertisements and talks, and by the distribution of millions of pamphlets to employees, students and community leaders.⁴

These techniques were also used by individual firms and trade associations; by 1949 *Fortune* magazine was moved to observe: "The daily tonnage output of propaganda and publicity. . . has become an important force in American life. Nearly half of the contents of the best newspapers is derived from publicity releases; nearly all the contents of the lesser papers are directly or indirectly the work of PR departments."⁵

Today public relations is a multi-billion dollar industry. In 1991 the top fifty US-based public relations companies charged over \$1,700,000,000 in fees. The industry employs almost 200,000 people in the US; there are more public relations personnel than news reporters. More than 5,400 companies and 500 trade associations have public relations departments, and there are over 5,000 PR agencies in the US alone. The government also employs thousands of people in Public Affairs. PR has gradually replaced advertising in the corporate marketing budget: advertising now makes up less than a third of the money spent on marketing in the US, compared with two-thirds in 1980.⁶

Public relations has also boomed elsewhere in the English-speaking world. The PR industry in the UK, one of the largest outside the US, employs more than 48,000 people, most of them in London. The boundaries between the US and the UK are not clear as some major American PR companies are owned by British companies, and there is increasing partnership between firms in each country. In Australia there are now 2,400 full members of the Public Relations Institute of Australia, membership having increased rapidly over the last three years.⁷

In recent years PR firms have increasingly turned their attention to environmental affairs. Environmental public relations or 'greenwash', as environmentalists call it, dates back to the 1960s. When Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published in 1962, Monsanto responded by distributing to assorted media outlets a parody of Carson's book entitled *The Desolate Year*. Velsicol Chemical Company, manufacturer of DDT, sued Carson's publisher and Bruce Harrison, now owner of a major environmental PR firm with clients such as Monsanto and Dow Chemicals, helped distribute thousands of damning book reviews on behalf of the Agricultural Chemical Association.⁸

By 1990 US firms were spending about \$500 million a year on PR advice about how to green their images and deal with environmental opposition. By 1995 that figure had increased to a spend of about \$1 billion per year on environmental PR activities. There are now at least forty-two firms in the US specialising in environmental PR, the top fifteen of which collected about \$90 million in fees in 1993 for their environmental work.' The top seven firms providing environmental PR are shown below:

Net income from environmental PR in 1993

Burson-Marsteller	\$17,959,000
Ketchum PR	15,300,000
Hill and Knowlton	10,000,000
Fleishman-Hillard	9,125,000
Shandwick	6,689,000
E. Bruce Harrison Co.	6,550,991
Edelman PR Worldwide	5,501,000

Source: Bleifuss 1995, p. 4

A survey conducted in 1993 by the Opinion Research Corporation, asking US executives what the key public relations challenges for 1994 would be, found that twenty-three per cent of the 248 respondents named environmental issues (more than any other topic), whereas only twenty-one per cent named the promoting of the company image.¹⁰

Bruce Harrison, who runs a firm specialising in environmental PR, suggests three reasons for the rise of environmental PR. Firstly he says that "negative images of industrial accidents and environmental disasters coupled with the media's bias toward green advocacy are shaping public perceptions." Secondly, information about companies that used to be kept secret, including emissions data, is now legally required to be made public, which can damage a corporation's reputation. Thirdly, polls show that three-quarters of the population in the US consider themselves environmentalists, and most of these self-proclaimed environmentalists are not prepared to trust business to protect the environment."

PR professionals are being used to counter these negative perceptions of business, caused in most cases by their poor environmental performance. Rather than substantially change business practices so as to earn a better reputation, many firms are turning to PR professionals to create one for them. After all, "It is easier and less costly to change the way people think about reality than it is to change reality."¹²

Good PR can forestall the demand for tough regulation of corporations. An internal General Motors document stated that "GM Public Relations helps to make GM so well-accepted by its various publics that it may pursue its corporate mission unencumbered by public-imposed limitations or regulations," Similarly, Jeff and Marie Blyskal point out in their book on PR that, "because of good image PR, a new DuPont chemical plant would probably be welcomed into a community more warmly than, say, a new plant for Hooker Chemical, whose dark Love Canal reputation precedes it."¹³

The shallowness of green PR became evident when PR professionals rejoiced at the Republicans' gaining control of the US Congress at the end of 1994. The trade publication *O'Dwyer's* suggested that relief was in sight "on the environmental front". One PR expert reportedly said: "There is a new contract on the street. And although the word 'environment' is never mentioned, many observers believe it's less a contract with America than a 'contract on environmental busy-bodies'." *O'Dwyer's* advised environmental PR people to "ride the Republican-fueled anti-environmental backlash wave as far as possible" but not to overdo it in case the "greenies are again on the rise".¹⁴

Environmental PR involves the use of the media, educational institutions, community forums, conferences and talk-back radio. These more traditional forums are also being supplemented with many more made possible by emerging technologies:

Satellite feeds, customized and localized 800-numbers and telemarketing capabilities, computer bulletin boards, advanced mail list merge/purge capabilities, CD ROM publishing, simultaneous multi-location fax transmission, videobrochures, interactive video, electronic couponing, and home shopping networks didn't exist a decade ago. All these technologies represent ways to reach audiences more directly and efficiently than ever before.¹⁵

Whereas in the past PR used to be mainly about publicity, about a third of environmental PR is nowadays about strategic counselling—shaping public and government perceptions of environmental problems and finding ways to counter environmentalists and environmental regulations. These days, public relations firms perform such diverse tasks as forming grassroots organizations for their clients (see Chapter Two) and gathering information on activists and journalists (see next chapter).

Large Public Relations Firms

Hill and Knowlton and Burson-Marsteller are perhaps the two largest and most influential public relations firms in the world. Hill and Knowlton, with fifty offices in twenty countries, has more than 1,200 employees and works with more than seventy associate companies.¹⁶ Burson-Marsteller has sixty-three offices in thirty-two countries and 1,700 employees worldwide. The services each offers range from public relations to political lobbying, grassroots organising and gathering intelligence on environmental activists. For work such as this they make hundreds of millions of dollars each year.¹⁷

Hill and Knowlton's clients have included governments from all over the world including Turkey, Peru, Israel, Egypt, Indonesia, Slovenia, the Czech Government, the Duvalier regime in Haiti and the People's Republic of China after Tiananmen Square.¹⁸ Burson-Marsteller has represented national governments including Nigeria during the Biafran War, Romania during the reign of Nicolae Ceausescu, the ruling military junta of Argentina in the late 1970s and the South Korean government.¹⁹

Each firm advises Wise Use groups in the US and Canada, as well as a range of transnational corporations. Both have been involved in protecting some of the worst industries of our times, downplaying the health effects of smoking on behalf of the Tobacco Institute, keeping public concern at a minimum after the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, and helping to clean up Exxon's image after the Exxon Valdez oil spill.²⁰

Hill and Knowlton have helped to keep petrol taxes low on behalf of the American Petroleum Institute, have campaigned for deregulation for the American Truckers Association, been retained by apple growers to fight claims about Alar, worked with the American Association of Advertising Agencies to clean up the image of advertising, helped the National Conference of Catholic Bishops oppose abortion, and advised supporters of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.²¹ Burson-Marsteller has helped corporations out of crises such as the Bhopal disaster (Union Carbide) and the Dalkon Shield IUD controversy (A.H.Robins).²²

Hill and Knowlton tells potential clients: "If your company or organisation faces a challenge from central, state or local government, you will need to campaign. Hill and Knowlton's worldwide Public Affairs practice organizes campaigns which draw on professional expertise in policy forecasting, media relations, grassroots communications and direct political advocacy." Additionally, Hill and Knowlton helps companies to identify and create sponsorship opportunities in areas such as education, conservation and charity.²³

Burson-Marsteller claims to be able to help clients all over the world to counteract activist groups. In Australia, its work on behalf of clients such as the National Association of Forest Industries and various developers has raised the ire of environmental activists. Protesters representing several environmental groups occupied their offices at the end of 1995 to draw attention to their "dealings with woodchipping and freeway-building clients".²⁴

In preparation for the Earth Summit in 1992, the newly formed Business Council for Sustainable Development (BCSD), a coalition of about fifty multinational corporations, hired Burson-Marsteller to "make sure the corporate viewpoint was well-stated and well received" at the Summit. Burson-Marsteller issued a press release for the BCSD, announcing that the Business Council would be playing a key role in the Rio Summit. It explained that the head of the Council, Stephan Schmidheiny, had been appointed principal adviser for business and industry to Maurice Strong, the Summit's organizer. Strong had no other special advisers and other interest groups had to submit proposals using formal channels.²⁵ Joyce Nelson, author of the book *Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media*, observes:

With the able assistance of public relations giant Burson-Marsteller, a very elite group of business people (including B-M itself) was seemingly able to plan the agenda for the Earth Summit with little interference from NGOs or government leaders.²⁶

Organized business interests such as the Business Council, Burson-Marsteller and the dozens of business lobbyists and trade associations that registered for the summit's preparatory conferences were able to influence the outcomes of the Earth Summit and avoid effective environmental reforms. The Earth Summit agreements support free trade; avoid specific measures such as greenhouse gas emission reductions; avoid any reference to overconsumption by affluent nations; and perhaps of most relevance, avoid mentioning transnational companies, let alone controls over them.²⁷

The Earth Summit was a follow-up to the World Commission on Environment and Development, referred to as the Brundtland Commission after its chair Gro Harlem Brundtland. Nelson has pointed to the connections between Burson-Marsteller and the Trilateral Commission, a sort of top level international think-tank founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller and Zbigniew Brzezinski. It has more than 300 elite members made up of former, present and future national leaders including George Bush, and corporation heads, bankers and politicians from the US, Canada, Europe and Japan. Holly Sklar, in her book on Trilateralism, says its purpose is to protect the power of the international ruling class "whose locus of power is the global corporation"; to co-opt the Third World; and to reintegrate communist countries.²⁸

Nelson claims that the Trilateral Commission had at least four members in common with the Brundtland Commission, including Maurice Strong, organizer of the Earth Summit, and Jim MacNeill, the principal author of *Our Common Future*, the Brundtland Commission's report on sustainable development. Also, according to Nelson, many transnational corporations that are members of the Business Council for Sustainable Development are also represented on the Trilateral Commission, including Dow, DuPont, Royal Dutch Shell, Browning-Ferris Industries, Mitsubishi, Nippon Steel, Nissan Motor and 3M. Similarly, many of Burson-Marsteller's clients are represented on the Trilateral Commission, and the North American chair of the Trilateral Commission heads up Burson-Marsteller's Canadian operations.²⁹

The interest of the Trilateral Commission in sustainable development and the Earth Summit is clarified in a book published by the Trilateral Commission and written by Jim MacNeill of the Brundtland Commission. In it, MacNeill explains how most urban/industrial regions depend on environmental resources in other places, such as developing countries.

In essence, the ecological shadow of a country is the environmental resources it draws from other countries and the global commons. If a nation without much geographical resilience had to do without its shadow ecology, even for a short period, its people and economy would suffocate.

. . . Western nations heavily engaged in global sourcing should be aware of their shadow ecologies and the need to pursue policies that will sustain them.³⁰

Nelson also connects the Trilateral Commission with the Wise Use Movement in the US and the Share movement in Canada. She says that Laurance Rockefeller, brother of the founder of the Trilateral Commission David Rockefeller, promoted the multiple-use movement from the early 1960s when he inducted business leaders into it. Some of the key funders of the modern Wise Use Movement are members of the Trilateral Commission and also clients of Burson-Marsteller."

Public Relations and the Media

One of the oldest and most used public relations tools, despite changes in technologies, is still the press release or the news release. These include news, feature stories, bulletins and other announcements which flood media offices. Their purpose is to develop and maintain public goodwill, as well as favourable government policies, for the organization that issues them. The press release was invented by Ivy Lee, one of the earliest of modern public relations experts, whose clients included the Pennsylvania Railway. When there was an accident, instead of trying to cover it up he issued a press release as a way to keep the media on side and to influence the way the accident was reported.³²

Such press releases were so successful that other railways soon followed suit. By the late 1940s almost half the news was based on press releases from public relations departments and firms. After the war, Bernays supplemented the press release with press conferences, press tours, photo opportunities and pre-arranged interviews, all staged to provide reportable events for the media. These 'pseudo events' make up an increasing proportion of the news today.³³

Although many news releases do not result in a news story, enough succeed to ensure that much of the news people read or watch on television is manufactured by PR firms rather than discovered by journalists. Most journalists rely on these sources to supply the "raw material of their craft, regular, reliable and useable information".³⁴ This flow of 'free' information saves the journalist time and effort finding stories to write about. Yet it is very difficult for the public to be able to distinguish real news from PR-generated news.

News stories are frequently copied straight from news releases; at other times they are rephrased and sometimes augmented with additional material. A study of the *Wall Street Journal* found that more than half the *Journals* news stories were based entirely on press releases. These stories appeared to be written by their own journalists but were hardly changed from the press releases.³⁵ This practice does not vary much between large and small papers, as larger papers need more stories and smaller papers have fewer staff to write stories. According to various studies, press releases are the basis for forty to fifty per cent of the news content of US newspapers.³⁶

The art of PR is to 'create news'; to turn what are essentially advertisements into a form that fits news coverage and makes a journalist's job easier while at the same time promoting the interests of the client. Ironically, this is often far cheaper than paying for expensive television advertisements—that many people 'zap' with their remote controls anyway. Public relations people, many of whom started their careers as journalists, are able to turn their promotional material into a news story that is of interest to journalists, to time it so that it has most impact, and to target it at appropriate journalists. "In other words, behind the media gatekeepers is another whole level of information gatekeepers who are skilled in that most modern of projects, media relations and the making of 'reportable events'".³⁷

The reporting of news releases and pre-planned events by the media has three significant advantages to public relations firms. Firstly, it gives credibility and legitimacy to what might otherwise be seen as self-serving publicity or advertising, by giving it the appearance of being news delivered through the agency of an 'independent' third party—the media. While the public

will be cautious about what they hear in an advertisement, they put more faith in a news broadcast. In this case the media, with its profile of truth-seeker, serves the role that corporate front groups or think-tanks fulfil for corporations; they put the corporate view while appearing to be independent of the corporations that will gain from it.

Secondly, news releases and packaged news events are advantageous for PR because they displace investigative reporting. The reliance of journalists on sources such as PR personnel and government officials is referred to as source journalism, as opposed to investigative journalism. By providing the news feedstock, they cause reporters to react rather than initiate. Journalists who are fed news stories are less likely to go looking for their own stories, which could bring negative publicity. Even the minority of newspaper stories that are the outcome of investigative journalism are often based on interviews which rely on access to important persons arranged through PR people.

Thirdly, public information officers, corporate spokespeople and PR firms appreciate that "the media set the public agenda of issues by filtering and shaping reality rather than by simply reflecting it."³⁸ By being the primary source of a journalist's information on a particular story, PR people can influence the way the story is told and who tells it. They also put journalists in touch with 'selected' experts to ensure their viewpoint is backed up by an 'impartial' authority in the news story. PR advice to corporations and industry associations is usually to develop, train and even put on retainer, "credible outside experts to act as 'news sources' for journalists".³⁹

What the press release does is to establish lines of control regarding information. It initiates the news-making process, and sets ideal boundaries around what is to be known by emphasizing some information and leaving out other information. . . what the public-relations practitioner must do is establish the framework for the event, the language by which it will be discussed and reported, and the emphasis to be maintained.⁴⁰

Public relations-based news stories are "more likely to reflect positively on the organization providing the information and to reflect its issue agenda" than non PR-based stories.⁴¹ Jeff and Marie Blyskal, in their book *PR: How the Public Relations Industry Writes the News*, explain why:

Good PR is rather like the placement of a fish-eye lens in front of the reporter. The facts the PR man wants the reporter to see front and center through the lens appear bigger than normal. Other facts, perhaps opposing ones, are pushed to the side by the PR fish-eye lens and appear crowded together, confused, obscured. The reporter's entire field of vision is distorted by the PR lens.⁴²

News releases do not necessarily go directly to newspapers. Often a PR service will place it with a wire service first. (Some large agencies have their own wire services.) By 1985, PR Newswire was transmitting 150 stories a day from a pool of 10,000 companies directly into 600 newsrooms belonging to newspapers, radio and television stations. Such stories may be picked up by newsrooms or rewritten by wire services such as AP, Reuters and Dow Jones. In this way the news release becomes a 'legitimate' news story and will be more likely to be taken up by journalists on the newspapers.⁴³

An example of a successful public relations campaign conducted largely in the media was that of the aerosol industry which, during the 1970s, managed to forestall a ban on the use of CFC gases for several years. The \$3 billion industry sought PR advice after the *New York Times* published an article putting forward the theory that aerosol use could deplete the ozone layer, causing serious public health and environmental impacts.⁴⁴

The PR response began with a press release emphasising that the theory was just a hypothesis and not fact, which was reprinted with little change in the *New York Times*. In the ensuing campaign, many more 'news stories' were 'generated' which were favourable to the

industry, in papers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Business Week*, *Fortune* magazine and the *Observer* in London. Briefing papers, press releases, transcripts of industry testimony and successfully placed news stories were distributed to aerosol industry people all over the country so they were able to answer media questions. They were also sent a guidebook for testifying at hearings and answering media questions.⁴⁵ For example, in answer to a question suggesting the aerosols be banned because there was a chance they would damage the stratosphere, the following answer was suggested:

There is a slight risk that thousands of different products could be modifying the atmosphere to one degree or another. I do not think it is reasonable or proper to ban products at random to eliminate a threat that many qualified people doubt even exists.⁴⁶

The symbol of children's story book character Chicken Little exclaiming that "The sky is falling!" was used to great effect as part of the PR campaign and reproduced in various newspaper headlines. And the industry front group, the Council on Atmospheric Sciences, retained 'independent' scientists to present their point of view in the media. CFC propellants were eventually banned in the US in 1977. Ken Makovsky, the PR man at the centre of the campaign says: "If we had not taken the offensive in this situation, the ban would have come a lot sooner, and the industry itself would have been unprepared to face market realities. . .,"⁴⁷ However, in many countries the aerosol industries managed to postpone a ban for several years after this, allowing US and other manufacturers to continue putting CFCs in aerosol cans for non-US markets.

In the 1980s Hill & Knowlton gave their client US Gypsum, which was being sued for installing asbestos in public buildings in Baltimore, advice about how to deal with the media. Its strategy included planting stories in newspapers which were written "by experts sympathetic to the company's point of view", as well as news articles about how safe asbestos was. A company memo following publication of such articles in the *Detroit News* said: "Our consultant, Jack Kinney, very actively fed much of this information to the special writer, Michael Bennet."⁴⁸

Hill & Knowlton also advised Gypsum to set up an industry group to field media inquiries, so that Gypsum wouldn't be immediately associated with media statements and criticism. It suggested that by enlisting 'independent experts' the issue of asbestos, instead of being a public health problem, could be redefined as "a side issue that is being seized on by special interests and those out to further their own causes. . . The media and other audiences important to US Gypsum should ideally say, 'Why is all this furore being raised about this product? We have a non-story here!'"⁴⁹

Modern Media Techniques

Satellite connections that enable PR people to arrange live interviews with a client all around the country or even the world are one example of the expanding technological repertoire of public relations firms. Referred to as 'satellite media tours', these enable a person to do interviews with television stations around the country without having to actually travel anywhere. The cost of satellite time used in this way can be cheaper than the cost of travel and accommodation, and TV news directors at local stations like satellite media tours because their own journalists can conduct a one-on-one interview that they can control rather than broadcasting a network distributed interview. It also means that PR firms can go direct to local stations and bypass the national networks.⁵⁰

During the 1980s PR firms began sending out video news releases (VNRs)— fully edited news segments for broadcast as part of television news. Hill and Knowlton established its own fully staffed television production facilities (as did Burson-Marsteller) and by 1985 was already sending video news releases via satellite all over the USA, rather than relying solely on the old-

fashioned press release.⁵¹ It is popular nowadays to accompany the fully edited piece ready to be broadcast (A-roll) with unedited footage (B-roll) and a script so the television station crew can put together and edit the story as if they had shot it themselves, inserting their own journalist's voice over, or adding their own material.

Studies showing that the vast majority of Americans get most of their news from television (81% in a 1992 poll) have ensured that VNRs are now widely used by PR companies. They were used by all the presidential candidates in the 1992 elections, but are mainly used by private companies to promote a corporate point of view. Specialists in this area advise customers that a VNR "can help position your company as the authority on a certain topic, issue or industry" and allow them to "take a stance on a controversial issue". Making a VNR is cheaper than making an advertisement—\$15,000-\$80,000 to produce and distribute, compared with \$250,000 for an advertisement—yet like other media releases, they result in news stories that are more credible than commercials because they become part of the news broadcast and are not sourced back to the company that paid for them.⁵²

According to *Public Relations Journal*, "VNRs have gone beyond simply selling products and services. They're now about selling ideas, changing and influencing viewer behaviour, and shaping public opinion." Similarly a Hill & Knowlton executive said in 1994 that "We're seeing more people who have a message to get across rather than just selling a product."⁵³ Lee and Solomon, in their book, *Unreliable Sources*, claim that:

Every week, hundreds of local TV stations, beset by budget and staff cutbacks, air these free, ready-made news releases, which look increasingly realistic. Even veteran media observers often fail to distinguish between video PR spots and station-produced news.⁵⁴

The production quality of VNRs is now as good as or even better than that of local television stations and most news directors see them as a source of information rather than as a form of propaganda. One of the main distributors of video news releases, MediaLink, found in 1991 that all ninety-two newsrooms it surveyed had used VNRs from PR firms. This was confirmed by a 1993 Nielson study. Another survey in 1992 found that eighty per cent of US news directors use VNRs a few times each month.⁵⁵

VNRs have been slower getting to other countries. At the end of 1991, Adam Shell discussed in *Public Relations Journal* whether Europe would be the next frontier for VNRs. Distribution costs were the main barrier, although even then European television producers were using them occasionally. By 1994, however, a MediaLink survey found that eighty-seven per cent of European broadcasters thought VNRs helpful, and thirty per cent broadcast more than ten per month; in addition, sixty per cent of European PR people wanted pan-European VNRs and thirty per cent wanted US distribution.⁵⁶

When the Australian Liberal Party used them for regional television stations in its 1996 election campaign, they were fairly new to Australia. Jonathan Raymond from MediaLink in Australia told ABC Radio that there was already a tradition of sending background video information to television stations and that video news releases merely took this one step further. He explained that with the intense competition for groups to get media attention, video news releases gave his corporate customers extra leverage.⁵⁷

As far as the television viewer is concerned, a VNR piece is done by the station's reporters and is no different from the rest of the news. However there are important differences. Pre-packaged interviews can be edited to give the best possible impression, and they avoid the possibility of probing or follow-up questions from a journalist, or impromptu and perhaps more frank responses from the interviewee. With a video release, the person being interviewed can be coached to give the 'best' answers and any 'mistakes' can be edited out before the news room sees it.

VNRs allow the corporation to influence the agenda of the news by providing footage that may otherwise be difficult to obtain (including archival, on-location and aerial footage), and all free of charge. Even if the station doesn't use the footage it is a powerful way of suggesting how the story could be put together. Stephen Clane from the Australian company Interface argues that his company assists newsrooms overcome logistical problems. He says of one instance when he sent a video news release containing interview footage:

The newsroom simply went and re-interviewed the person, asked similar questions to ours, and then ran it in the story, using our overlay footage. So we assisted them in constructing the story, we gave them an example of someone who was worth speaking to, and showed them how it could be used. And I think that's a great result all around.⁵⁸

However, according to Granville Williams in *Journalist*, it was the use of VNRs by Greenpeace in its campaign against the ocean disposal of the Brent Spar, Shell's oil drilling platform, that prompted British journalists to question the way that VNRs might be manipulating them. He quotes the BBC News Editor as admitting that Greenpeace was able to provide "better, more compelling and more frequent footage than we can ourselves" but that "Greenpeace exploit our thirst for a good story (particularly in the summer) and for dramatic pictures, and they play on the traditional news values of conflict and confrontation."⁵⁹

The BBC has guidelines on use of VNRs which include the following:

- Use of material shot or supplied by a pressure group must be clearly labelled and if it is supplied in an edited form we should consider making that clear
- We should not broadcast interviews from VNRs
- We must avoid promoting a particular product or supplier⁶⁰

Both the BBC and its rival network ITN subsequently labelled Greenpeace VNRs covering their Mururoa campaign against French nuclear testing. Yet ITN and Burson-Marsteller jointly own Corporate Television Networks (CTN), which produces VNRs for corporate and government clients such as Glaxo, Unilever and the Department of Transport.⁶¹

Corporate videos are seldom labelled, for example by an on-screen credit to the effect that "this video footage has been provided by company X." Such labelling has been rejected by PR people, who say their clients would not like it because they would lose the "third party endorsement a news report normally carries". Says one VNR producer, "The public could possibly misconstrue the VNR as an infomercial."⁶²

Public Relations and Government

Public relations can be aimed at the general public (grassroots propaganda) or at influential members of the society such as politicians, top bureaucrats, media executives and commentators (treetops propaganda). It is the latter group which sets the terms of the debate and the political agenda. Treetops propaganda has been important in ensuring that the debate over pollution, for example, is not discussed in terms of rights to clean air, but rather in terms of the costs to the polluters of cleaning up the air and, given these costs, how clean we can reasonably expect the air to be.⁶³

Government relations or lobbying is a form of PR targeted at politicians and/or bureaucrats which aims to influence the passing of legislation, its implementation, and the setting of public policy. Lobbyists can influence decision-makers by making themselves useful to them as a reliable source of information, by being the conduit for donations and favours (referred to colloquially as 'booze, blondes and bribes') or as a result of past working relationships and friendships.

In the 1970s, US public relations firms started to move into lobbying, which had previously been the province of Washington law firms. In order to do so they hired people on the basis of their political connections—who they knew and who their friends were. For this reason we find the same revolving door pattern between public relations and lobbying firms and government as we found between think-tanks and government in Chapter Five.

When the Republicans lost office in 1992 there was a mass movement of government officials to the lobbying and PR firms. Ralph Nader's group, Congress Watch, tracked 300 of them: over half moved to Washington DC lobbying and PR firms.⁶⁴ The door swings both ways, and former lobbyists often become part of government, where they have a unique opportunity to help their former clients.

Hill and Knowlton's lobbying efforts are aided by its employment of former government officials who have good access to government. Frank Mankiewicz of Hill and Knowlton says that one of his firm's strengths is being able to "get half an hour of somebody's time". One of the best known Washington lobbyists, Robert Gray, was Appointment Secretary and subsequently Cabinet Secretary for President Eisenhower before being hired by Hill and Knowlton. There he established Hill and Knowlton's lobbying operations in the 1960s at a time when public relations was seen as quite a separate activity to lobbying.⁶⁵

When Ronald Reagan was campaigning for the Presidency in 1980, Hill and Knowlton paid Gray while he took part in the campaign, in the hope that this would provide invaluable lobbying access if Reagan was elected. As it happened Gray did not go back to work for Hill and Knowlton, but set up his own PR and lobbying firm to take advantage of the access he now had to the Reagan government. Later his firm was integrated into Hill and Knowlton's operations. It was Gray who rehabilitated Richard Nixon from disgrace to respected 'Elder Statesman'.⁶⁶

Apart from Gray, Hill and Knowlton is full of former government officials. A former chief of staff to George Bush was appointed head of Hill and Knowlton's US operations before leaving to become Senior Vice-President of Philip Morris. One of Hill and Knowlton's vice presidents had been a general policy adviser to Bill Clinton. Sir Bernard Ingham, Margaret Thatcher's Press Secretary from 1979-1990, is now a director of Hill and Knowlton UK. When Hill and Knowlton established a European affairs senior adviser they hired Stanley Clinton Davis, who had been a member of both the European Commission and the British Parliament.⁶⁷

Howard Paster, who was head of Hill and Knowlton's Washington office, became one of Bill Clinton's top appointments as Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for the White House. Paster was replaced in Hill and Knowlton by Thomas Hood, one of Clinton's aides.⁶⁸ Less than a year later Paster went back to work for Hill and Knowlton as Chairman, at twice his original salary. Clinton replaced Paster with a former employee of Griffin Johnson and Associates, whose clients include the American Nuclear Council, the American Petroleum Institute, CBS, Waste Management Inc (now WMI) and the Tobacco Institute.⁶⁹ In Australia, one of former Prime Minister Bob Hawke's advisers was appointed to head Hill 8c Knowlton's Canberra office.⁷⁰

Burson-Marsteller's offices, like Hill and Knowlton's, are full of ex-government officials who now lobby their former colleagues. In the 1980s they hired a number of such people, including a former press secretary to Nancy Reagan, a former press secretary to the Carter White House and a former secretary to the Senate's Democratic minority. In its publicity material, Burson-Marsteller boasts that it can target decision-makers and ensure that they are "aware not only of the *logic* in a client's point of view, but also the *political power* behind the client's position" [emphasis in original].⁷¹

As can be seen by Burson-Marsteller's claim, lobbying and public relations are not separate activities. Generating community support can put pressure on an undecided politician. Gray has described how he would send his people to a politician's home districts to generate public support that would influence their vote. "We can land in Topeka, Kansas, and in thirty minutes we'd be able to find and make contact with the key media people there: editors, talkback show

producers, TV and radio news directors."⁷² A series of newspaper editorials and statements by opinion leaders has an impact, even if the politician suspects it is generated by public relations.

Well-placed 'news' stories in the right papers such as the *Washington Post* also influence Congress. Says one PR expert: "It makes them aware of an issue. It sensitizes them to the importance of an issue, so when a PR person or lobbyist calls upon them, the Congressman knows he's being called upon for something important enough to be in the newspaper."⁷³

Another means of influencing a politician, as described by John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton in their book *Toxic Sludge is Good for You!*, is to "create an artificial bubble of peer influence surrounding the targeted politician, so that the 'legislator will get the feel of total community support for an issue'." This is done by hiring one of his friends or business colleagues, someone with media contacts who is influential in the politician's electorate, to gather together a group of key business and community leaders well-connected to the politician. These people, chosen because they are sympathetic to the goals of the client for business or other reasons, then lobby the politician who gets the impression that anyone who is anyone must favour this outcome.⁷⁴

If a politician has been persuaded in some other way to vote in a corporation's interests, he or she may still need to have some public support or at least seem to be acting in the public interest, rather than be seen to be voting on the basis of campaign donations. "You have to give your guy the ammunition to show the press that the issue he's backing is inherently something the public—specifically your target's constituents—wants," says Frank Mankiewicz from Hill & Knowlton. He suggests the easiest way to do this is with a favourable poll.⁷⁵ As shown in Chapter Two, grassroots organising can also achieve this.

And just as public relations is an important element of lobbying, lobbying is an increasingly important element of public relations.

"The real work today is done behind the scenes on issues," says a former H&K executive. "You have people of substance going to regulators and assistant secretaries," he explains. "Then you notify the press in advance that the government is taking a certain action, and why, and who you represent, and why your client deserved to have this regulation changed. . . You make your client's story a government story, showing how the government action—by now a quiet fait accompli—has not only helped your client, but is good for the people. That's how you get the story out the right way in the media," he says smiling. . .⁷⁶

One example of a large, concerted public relations/lobbying campaign was that conducted by the Mexican Government and US businesses to get approval for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These groups spent well over \$25 million to promote NAFTA, "hiring a phalanx of Washington law firms, lobbyists, public relations companies and consultants" such as Burson-Marsteller. They were aided by the conservative think-tanks, the Business Roundtable, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as major and regional media outlets. Opponents included environmental groups such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Sierra Club, who were concerned that US corporations would move to Mexico to avoid US environmental regulations.⁷⁷ Yet the opposition was never taken very seriously by the US government in the face of such well-financed and coordinated lobbying.

Another example was the campaign waged against President Clinton's health care plan by health insurance firms, conservative think-tanks and others. Between \$100 million and \$300 million was spent opposing the reforms to a health care system which is one of the most inequitable and wasteful in the industrialized world. This was far more money than the total spent by all the presidential candidates in 1992 in the US (or in any previous year), and in many ways resembled a presidential campaign. It was spent on lobbyists, television advertisements

and a massive grassroots effort which "generated more than 450,000 personal contacts with Congress—phone calls, visits or letters—more than a thousand for every member of the House."⁷⁸

When environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight fellow Ogoni activists were hanged by the Nigerian government in 1995, the Nigerian government launched a public relations/lobbying campaign in the US to avoid sanctions being applied. One of the major issues about which the Ogonis were protesting was the environmental degradation caused by Shell Oil's activities in their country, which they claimed had ruined their land. According to Ron Nixon in the *Nation*, Maurice Dawkins, a paid lobbyist for the Nigerian government, played a key role in the formation and organization of three US front groups formed to support the Nigerian government—the National Coalition for Fairness to Nigeria, the National Coalition for Fairness in African Policy and Americans for Democracy in Africa. These groups paid for 'advertisements' in key newspapers such as the *New York Times* and courted the black American press.⁷⁹

Public Relations or Propaganda?

Propaganda is often associated with dictatorships. However in a 'free society', where official bans on free speech are not tolerated, it is necessary for those who would rule to use subtle means to silence threatening ideas and suppress inconvenient facts. Public relations and propaganda play a "more covert and sophisticated role" in technologically advanced democratic countries "where the maintenance of the existing power and privileges are vulnerable to popular opinion".⁸⁰ These activities are most advanced in the United States, where advertising and manipulation of public opinion has been researched and practised more than anywhere else.

The public relations industry describes its own activities as being based on two premises:

- That in a modern democracy every organisation, from the national government to the corner store, survives ultimately only by public consent
- That the consent of the public cannot exist in a communications vacuum⁸¹

Early PR experts were not afraid to use the term propaganda to describe what they did. George Fitzpatrick, thought to be the first Australian PR professional, was listed in the Sydney telephone directory before the second World War as "Registered practitioner in Public persuasion, propaganda, publicity".⁸²

Alex Carey, author of *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*, defines propaganda as communications aimed at getting a target audience to adopt particular attitudes and beliefs. Nowadays such activities are referred to as public relations, although even that term is becoming tarnished and some practitioners prefer to refer to their jobs using labels such as public affairs, corporate communications, media relations, issues management or even public education. But the aims have not changed. Fraser P. Seitel, in his textbook on Public Relations, says that "much more than customers for their products, managers today desperately need constituents for their beliefs and values." Public relations provides publicity for products and services but it also sells corporate images, goals and philosophies, political programmes, and social ideas.⁸³

Propaganda aims to "persuade not through the give-and-take of argument and debate, but through the manipulation of symbols and of our most basic human emotions".⁸⁴ There are a number of basic propaganda techniques identified by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis, many of which are used in public relations. Two examples of these are 'name-calling' and 'glittering generalities'.⁸⁵

'Name-calling' involves labelling an idea or group of people so as to get others to *reject* them or treat them negatively without evidence being put forward to support such a label. For example, labelling radical environmentalists as 'ecoterrorists' or environmental ideas as

'communist inspired'. Alternatively, negatively charged words like 'coercion', 'waste' or 'radical' are used to describe an idea. A classic name-calling device used against residents protesting about the siting of an unwanted facility in their neighbourhood is to call them NIMBY's—Not In My Back Yard, thereby labelling them as merely self-interested. A newer acronym used against environmental activists is Going BANANA—Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything.⁸⁶

Such labels not only seek to harm the reputation and therefore the effectiveness of opponents but they also "may convince local citizens, who fear being stigmatized, to refrain from asking any questions. Moreover, labelling long-time residents and neighbours who pose questions makes them appear as outsiders, lacking authority, and easy to marginalize."⁸⁷

'Glittering generalities' involve the use of "vague, abstract, positive terms" such as 'common sense', 'commitment', 'democracy' and 'scientific' to win approval for something without recourse to any evidence. It is the reverse of name-calling. For example, the identification of the market with 'freedom of choice' and polluting activities with 'job creation'.

Labelling and stereotyping is part of the art of propaganda, which works at a subconscious level through symbols and dichotomies of good and evil, sacred and satanic. Terms such as the American Way of Life come to symbolize the sacred; propaganda seeks to associate ideas such as free enterprise with the American Way of Life whilst labels such as communist and radical are used to conjure up notions of evil and threats to the American Way of Life.

In an article on the internet from Public Relations Management Ltd, those doing battle with environmentalists are advised to "find symbols around which to wrap the message. . . The value and power of symbols can't be overstated." Symbols suggested include "more government, higher taxes, lost jobs, ghost towns, abandoned farmers, less individual freedom, family breakdowns, disintegrating social values".⁸⁸

In Newt Gingrich's pamphlet *Language, A Key Mechanism of Control*, he advises Republican candidates to use "positive, governing words" for themselves and negative words for their opponents and he gives lists of such words. Positive words include: challenge, choice, dream, family, hard work, incentive, initiative, pride, reform, vision etc. Name-calling words include: betray, collapse, crisis, decay endanger, greed, hypocrisy, incompetent, self-serving, shallow etc.⁸⁹

The use of propaganda techniques such as these by PR people will be discussed in the next chapter, which outlines some of the strategies that are used to improve the environmental credentials and public image of corporations whilst discrediting environmentalists and environmental regulations.

Chapter 8 Public Relations Strategies

In an article addressed to the chemical industry, James Lindheim, director of Public Affairs Worldwide at Burson-Marsteller in London, described how various industries such as oil and forestry had suffered major declines in public opinion but had successfully managed to remedy them through public relations. In the 1970s, environmentalists drew public attention to the clear-cut forests and the image of environmental degradation was a compelling one. In response, the forest products industry launched a massive PR campaign (\$7-10 million million per year for five years) promoting the message that "We love the forest and protect it. When we cut trees, we plant them. We are not rapers of the hillside, we are farmers of trees; we grow them and reap them and plant them." ¹ Lindheim pointed out that:

The forest products industry could have tried to explain clear-cutting for its economic efficiency, and pointed out that the prices of paper and houses would go up if they were not allowed to continue to cut ugly swatches out of the forest. But they didn't try to explain what they were doing in their own terms. They explained it in the public's terms, and connected themselves to powerful positive images in the public's mind: protection of the forests and farming. ²

Lindheim explained the rationale behind this sort of strategy in terms of a psychiatrist's relationship with an irrational patient:

There is, for instance, a very interesting technique that psychiatrists use to deal with irrational and distressed patients. They call it the therapeutic alliance. When an anxious patient first arrives, the psychiatrist will be a very sympathetic listener. The whole time that his mind is telling him that he has a raving lunatic on his hands, his mouth will be telling the patient that his problems are indeed quite impressive, and that he the psychiatrist is amazed at how well the patient is coping, given the enormity of the situation. . . Once that bond of trust is established, true therapy can begin and factual information can be transmitted. ³

Lindheim advised the chemical industry to do the same: to build a therapeutic alliance with the public, which has an irrational and emotion-based reaction to chemical risks. He said that scientists and engineers should avoid the temptation to try to explain to the public how safe pesticides and plastics and food additives are. "Obviously, people don't understand. If they did, they wouldn't worry and they certainly wouldn't be hostile."⁴ Since the public is so concerned with protecting the environment, the chemical industry "must use its communications resources to demonstrate its commitment to solving environmental problems, and making environmental improvements."

The industry must convince people that it cares, not by giving them facts about the true risks and benefits of chemical products but by creating a therapeutic alliance. It must accept the legitimacy of their concern, although some may see these concerns as misguided and irrational. . . The industry must be like the psychiatrist: rationally figuring out how it can help the public put things in perspective. . . ⁵

What is essential for good public relations, according to Lindheim, is trust. But trust "is built on emotion, not on facts" so increasing public understanding will not be helpful. Similarly, Bill Brody, Professor of Public Relations at Memphis State University, argues that "people are likely to respond to ideas, objects, persons, and events as much by what they think and feel about them as by what they know about them." ⁶

Communicating and Cultivating Trust

There is a growing literature on risk communications, much of which is aimed at advising corporations on how to deal with the fears that their operations engender in the community. In the magazine *Cash Flow*, David Katz writes that risk communication consultants are increasingly needed by companies with "existing or potential pollution liabilities. . . to help cool down the furor and thus curb their risks." The risks he is talking about here are not the health and environmental risks to the community, but the risks to the company of regulation and law suits. He suggests that risk communicators could help such companies "to communicate with the press and public to sway the government and to develop strategic plans to deal with pollution regulators".⁷

Many risk communicators concentrate on developing ways to effectively explain findings of the risk assessments done by company experts, and therefore to reassure the public:

The self-imposed task of risk communicators is to disseminate various truths to an audience that is deficient in some fundamental and obstructive way, beyond 'ignorance of the facts'. Those to whom risk assessments need to be communicated are perceived to lack reason or be hampered by an assortment of psychological and political disabilities—bias, special interest, ideological commitment, and so forth.⁸

Joe Epley, past president of the Public Relations Society of America, writes of the need for international public relations because "public opinion, fueled by hysteria, a desire to live in a risk-free environment, and unfounded perceptions of the industrial world, is making it difficult for many manufacturers to operate on either a local or global basis."⁹

Risk communication aims to correct the public's 'false' view of risk. Some risk communicators acknowledge that many of the factors influencing a person's perception of risk are quite rational, for example whether the risk is imposed or voluntary. Nonetheless they seek to change perceptions rather than reduce risks. For example, Peter Sandman's well-used formula, Risk = Hazard + Outrage, is used by companies and government agencies trying to get community acceptance for hazardous facilities to work out ways to reduce outrage rather than to reduce the hazard. This is done by concentrating on communicating the concern, honesty and trustworthiness of the organization proposing the additional risks.

Stuart Price, a communications consultant who has worked for Westinghouse Electric Corporation, advises in an article on *Learning to Remove Fear from Radioactive Waste* that "bringing concerned citizens into the decision-making process, rather than just launching one-way information packets in their direction, is a technique that can build good will and resolve many fears". He recommends the use of advisory boards with local residents, environmentalists and workers on them, and regulators and waste generators present to provide expert advice and explain the 'reality' behind the newspaper headlines.¹⁰

These are all suggestions that have been taken up by the Responsible Care programme which was thought up by the Canadian Chemical Producers Association and is now subscribed to by chemical industries in many countries including the UK, USA and Australia. Responsible Care is aimed at restoring the declining image of the chemical industry, rebuilding trust and avoiding more regulation. It uses voluntary codes of practice, open days and public advisory panels to achieve these ends.¹¹

Of course, when something does go wrong there is a whole new generation of public relations experts, called 'crisis communicators', ready to swing into action. Crisis PR manages public perception following industrial accidents, the public uncovering of adverse effects of a product, and corporate mistakes. In their literature, these crisis experts frequently cite the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez shipwreck, which spewed tons of oil over pristine arctic wilderness, as a prime example of PR gone wrong. The aftermath they refer to is Exxon's fallen

reputation rather than the oil-soaked coastline and damage to marine life. In the world of PR, problems arise from the failure to communicate strategically, not from wrongful activity. The hundreds of articles in PR magazines and books that cover the Exxon Valdez accident almost invariably focus on how Exxon could have handled their PR better. However, as journalist Craig Mellow points out; "For all the stress on strategic counseling, no one talked about whether Exxon should have had better hiring or emergency-response policies beforehand."¹²

The advice that crisis communicators give is therefore aimed at restoring reputation rather than preventing reoccurrences or fixing the physical consequences of the disaster: the problem is not reality but the perception of reality. The sort of advice that is given to companies for dealing with a major incident includes firstly ensuring the top company executive goes to the scene of the accident immediately to show that she or he cares: "Images of strong emotional responses must be captured (for which the chief will be trained by a crisis communicator). Executive hands and shoes must be soiled for the camera."¹³

Corporations are also advised that television cameras should be kept away from meetings between the company and the aggrieved community, to avoid mass broadcasts of angry citizens. Company representatives should dress to identify with the community and, if at all possible, the company should be portrayed as a victim, suffering as a result of an accident it could not prevent.¹⁴ Harold Burson of Burson-Marsteller also advises that is important to 'control' media coverage and arrange employee interviews: "Failing to make witnesses available will lead to media efforts to obtain interviews on their own, either outside the gates or at the local watering hole. Control is the important element here."¹⁵

Emphasising the Positive

One of the ways PR experts enhance the image of their clients and show that they care is by emphasising their positive actions, no matter how trivial, and downplaying any negative aspects, no matter how significant. According to Robert Gray, former chairman of Hill and Knowlton Worldwide, "Our job is not to make white black or to cover the truth, but to tell the positive side regardless of who the client is."¹⁶ Sometimes this involves putting a positive spin or interpretation on the available information:

Did this year's fines levied by the Environmental Protection Agency (or the state equivalent) drop to 'only' \$5 million? Then celebrate the company's 'continued positive trend in compliance.' Was there no improvement from last year's release of toxic chemicals? Then report on the 'levelling off of emissions.'¹⁷

One public relations expert advised companies in *Public Relations Journal*: "To report bad news, state the problem, then focus on the actions you are taking to reduce the risk and improve the situation."¹⁸ She also advised that it is important to get in first, "in hostile situations" in order to "shape the message". One firm that was required by Californian regulations to disclose their emissions and their health effects (including cancer risks) sent a letter to local residents in advance.

By getting their letter to residents prior to the agency letter [containing their emissions details], the company was able to take control of the message and reinforce its proactive stance. . . . Opening a dialogue with the neighbourhood gave the manufacturer a forum to communicate the positive elements of the plant.¹⁹

Some companies make the most out of measures they have been forced to take by the government, making it seem that they have undertaken the improvements because they care about the environment. Companies that have poor environmental records can also improve their

image and increase their sales merely by using recycled paper in their products or making similar token adjustments. Peter Dykstra, media director of Greenpeace USA, says, "They depict five per cent of environmental virtue to mask the ninety-five per cent of environmental vice."²⁰

Jolyon Jenkins, writing in the *New Statesman and Society*, claimed that BP, a company responsible for the clearing of large areas of rainforest in Brazil, responded to the rise in environmental consciousness in the late 1980s with "a £20 million 're-imaging campaign' in which it daubed all its property in green paint, and advertised its annual report under the slogan 'Now We're Greener Than Ever'."²¹ Greenpeace campaigners Dadd and Carothers claim that the multinational oil company Chevron spends about five times as much publicising its environmental actions as it does on the actions themselves.²²

The nuclear industry has stressed its lack of air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions as an environmental benefit, whilst not discussing the environmental and health problems surrounding extraction of uranium, nuclear accidents or disposal of nuclear wastes. Hill and Knowlton has helped the nuclear industry to come up with statements such as "Nuclear protects the public against an unacceptable level of peril from air pollution." The American Nuclear Society's Publicity Director argued that the nuclear industry needed to "paint itself green" and try to be identified with the environmental movement. The Canadian Nuclear Association also launched a three year, C\$6 million campaign in the late 1980s which portrayed nuclear energy as 'clean' and 'safe' and the solution to global warming and acid rain problems.²³ In the UK, the name of the location of a nuclear reprocessing plant was changed from Windscale to Sellafield in an obvious attempt to acquire a better public image.

Every year Earth Day provides another opportunity for firms to get environmental credentials, deserved or otherwise. One US PR consultant observed: "There's a virtual feeding frenzy among corporations about what roles they will play on Earth Day." On the same topic, the Public Affairs Director for the Monsanto Chemical Company has said: "There's a mad scramble for many companies to project an 'I am greener than thou' attitude." The Chemical Manufacturers Association encourages its members to get involved, and public relations firms help their clients to "shape and publicize their pro-environment messages."²⁴ Corporate funding and sponsorship has turned Earth Day into a multi-million dollar event that is marketed with slick glossy brochures and Earth Day merchandise. It provides corporations with a means to green their image and, according to *Public Relations Journal*, to play "a key role in defining the future direction of the environmental movement".²⁵ Associated events, such as fairs where firms can showcase their 'green' credentials and Clean Up campaigns are common in the mid-nineties. These clean-ups "offer a chance to 'bond' with the community over an environmental cause and to foster 'camaraderie among employees' who are often compensated for their time."²⁶

The attempt to provide a 'green' and caring persona for a corporation is a public relations strategy aimed at promising reform and heading off demands for more substantial and fundamental changes.²⁷ A PR expert advised in *Public Relations Journal*:

There really are no solid solutions to many environmental problems other than ceasing to partake in the activity that causes the environmental hazard. Therefore, the key to devising successful solution ideas is to show that your client cares about the environmental issue at hand.²⁸

The Council on Economic Priorities has studied the environmental claims of a large number of corporations and found that "many of them are using 'green' public relations programs as a pro-environmental smokescreen while they continue to pollute." Examples they gave in 1992 included Dow Chemical, which "received favorable publicity for a \$3 million wetlands protection program, while downstream from its factories birds were turning up with dioxin-related deformities"; and Mobil, which claimed that "so-called biodegradable plastic bags would not

disintegrate in landfills and that their use should not be encouraged. Then they went ahead and introduced biodegradable plastics with an enormous advertising campaign."²⁹

3M is perhaps one of the most successful companies when it comes to attaining a green image. Although it is the 13th-worst US corporation when it comes to emissions of toxic chemicals into the environment,³⁰ the name 3M is almost synonymous with the idea of pollution prevention through its much-publicized 3P (Pollution Prevention Pays) scheme. Indeed 3M's 3P programme, implemented in the 1970s by two engineers and an 'environmental communications specialist', has saved \$500 million for a very small monetary expenditure, earned a Silver Anvil Award from the Public Relations Society of America, brought much welcome media publicity and helped "soften regulatory attitudes toward the industry".³¹

Corporate philanthropy is another means of showing that a company cares. The Puget Sound Bank found that it increased its number of customers by setting up the Puget Sound Fund. The name of the fund was chosen purposely to "cement the identification" between the bank and the environmental fund. Each time a customer made a transaction at one of their automatic teller machines the bank would donate a small amount of money to the Fund, which would be used to give grants to environmental groups. Cheques were produced with scenes of Puget Sound on them. The aim was to make the public feel that in supporting the bank they were also supporting an environmental cause.³²

The strategy worked better than the bank had hoped. Between 1988 and 1990 cash withdrawals through the machines increased fifty-six per cent and the bank retained its market share despite increased competition. The fund raised \$30,000 in 1990, which was dispersed to thirty-two environmental groups. It was far cheaper than an advertising campaign, and attracted favourable media coverage worth more than could have been bought with conventional publicity. "It's free advertising and of the best type. That's press you can't buy!" The bank's marketing director pointed out that "Banking is a business in which the perception is often the reality."³³

Getting Environmentalists on Side

One way for corporations to show they care about the environment, even if they don't care enough to make major changes to their business practices, is for them to donate money to an environmental group or sponsor an environmental project. Companies which fund cash-starved environmental groups believe "the imprimatur of activists will go a long way in improving their reputation among environmentally aware consumers."³⁴ However they do not necessarily support the aims of the groups they fund.

Companies which have sponsored US environmental groups such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Nature Conservancy, Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, Audubon Society and the National Wildlife Federation have also been sponsoring several anti-environmental groups.³⁵ The mining multinational RTZ, which operates polluting mines in Third World countries, donates money to the National Trust, the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, and the Council for Environmental Conservation (the Environment Council). Shell, which manufactured the pesticide Aldrin that is now banned in the US, was subject to an international boycott when it planned to dump the Brent Spar oil drilling platform into the sea, and which has operated controversial oil operations in Nigeria, gives about £200,000 to environmental organizations each year.³⁶

Many environmental groups accept the money because they believe that "private sector cash can increase an organization's clout and bankroll membership building programs."³⁷ However, such arrangements also enable corporations to get valuable information about environmental groups and how they work and think; information that will help them oppose the environmental groups' goals.³⁸

Such donations can also have the additional benefit of co-opting and corrupting environmentalists. Public relations practitioners have observed that environmental groups are "favoring cooperation rather than confrontation" more and more.³⁹ *O'Dwyer's PR Service Report* explains how wealthy companies can co-opt environmental groups with donations and job offers. Corporations can win approval from environmental organizations, or at the very least a blind eye, through donations to these organizations.

Consultancies and perks for individual environmentalists also work wonders for getting a favourable hearing. In 1993 *Public Relations Journal* reported how Ciba-Geigy had arranged a tour of Europe for US environmentalists, academics, journalists and others to study European industrial waste management programmes. Environmentalists were recruited from the ten largest environmental groups in the US as well as from state and grassroots groups. The stated aim of the study tour was to bring together the various stakeholders, provide them with up-to-date information and encourage a dialogue between them and Ciba-Geigy. "To avoid the perception that the tour was biased in any way", Ciba arranged for it to be funded by non-industry sources as well as itself, and for others to be involved in its organising and planning. For Ciba-Geigy the tour successfully improved relations with the environmentalists and others.⁴⁰

In Sydney Australia, a besieged water and sewerage authority attempted to improve its image by funding environmentalists to review its operations and plans. The funds were sufficient to employ a number of people full-time, and it even paid these groups to prepare a formal application for the funds. Four groups were funded: Friends of the Earth, the National Parks Association, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, and the Total Environment Centre.

The groups involved were assured that they were free to say whatever they wanted in their reports and that they would have free access to Water Board documents. In October 1994 the groups, under the umbrella name of The Sydney Water Project, published a series of leaflets for comment by the public. These leaflets had a striking resemblance to Water Board fact sheets (produced in earlier years) in tone and style, albeit that they were now printed on recycled paper. They were bland, and criticisms of the Board were weak and tentative.

Increasingly, business people are seeing the advantages of working out deals with environmental groups. James Harris, a Vice-President of Hill and Knowlton and also a member of the Sierra Club's national Public Affairs Advisory Committee puts it this way:

For the environmental groups, working with corporations offers a ready source of funds and a chance to influence their behaviour. For corporations, environmental groups offer the opportunity to obtain positive publicity and gain access to group members, who tend to be better educated and more affluent than the general public. They also provide credibility, which can be particularly valuable. . . In political coalitions, environmental groups can provide substantial clout, with their large memberships and lobbying expertise.⁴¹

Bruce Harrison, in his book *Going Green: How to Communicate your Company's Environmental Commitment*, advises companies that "choosing green partners at the community level is without doubt the best strategy to improve your standing."⁴² Such relationships certainly pay off for industry. McDonald's now has one of the best environmental 'images' of any US corporation after forming a partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund. The Audubon Society approved of Mobil drilling for oil under an Audubon bird sanctuary, their representative explaining: "Conservationists have just got to learn to work with industry."⁴³

One employee of Hill and Knowlton gives advice to corporations: "Help them raise money. . . Offer to sit on their board of directors". He also suggests hiring staff from environmental groups, who are available "at very reasonable rates". Top environmentalists may be more expensive. When Burson-Marsteller hired Des Wilson, former chairman of Friends of the Earth in the UK,

as director of public affairs and crisis management, he was "reckoned to be one of the highest paid people in PR".⁴⁴

PR consultant Philip Lesly argues that activists are people who are "disappointed with their small roles [in society]; so they have the time, the inclination and the opportunity to attack the structure."⁴⁵ He suggests that the best way to deal with such people is to give them a role:

If a group has legitimate arguments and shows it has a sound approach, enlist its leaders. Often they will make great contributions as employees. They might be retained as consultants. Or they may become active in a new working group you set up jointly.⁴⁶

Stauber and Rampton, who edit *PR Watch*, point out that hiring activists is a "crude but effective way to derail potentially meddlesome activists".⁴⁷ There are numerous examples of activists who now work for the industries they once opposed. For example Paul Gilding, formerly executive director of Greenpeace International, does consultancy work for big business and bodies such as the Queensland Timber Board.⁴⁸

Another tactic, called 'cross-pollination', enables PR firms to get strategic alliances going between different clients who might otherwise be opposed to each other. This can be done by donating public relations work to charities in order to be able to pressure them into supporting other clients later on. An example is where the PR firm Porter/Novelli, which represented a number of produce growers and pesticide manufacturers, was able to call in favours from the American Cancer Society, to which it had provided free services for decades (presumably to enhance its own reputation). When a documentary claiming that pesticides caused cancer in children was about to be screened, the PR firm managed to get the Cancer Society to issue a memo criticising the documentary, which was then used by the pesticide industry to lobby against the broadcasting of the documentary.⁴⁹

Porter/Novelli seems to have made an art form of this sort of cross-pollination. Many of its early clients were government departments; this made Porter/Novelli attractive to corporate clients who wanted to lobby these departments. The firm soon had a long list of corporate clients as well as its government clients. "We began to see that there were synergies and opportunities to bring these two together," says Novelli. One example is that its previous PR work for a government department puts Porter/Novelli in a good position to represent the interests of a corporate client to that same government department.⁵⁰

Porter/Novelli also specializes in providing "*pro bono* work for health-related charities whose endorsements can help its corporate clients". Its brochure reads:

One of our specialties is aligning our clients with diet, health, and consumer groups to create dynamic partnerships for public education, cause-related marketing. . . and corporate-image enhancement.⁵¹

Another example of cross-pollination is the way Hill and Knowlton set up a coalition of environmental groups to publicize the dangers of unprotected sun exposure resulting from ozone layer depletion. Unbeknownst to at least some of the environmentalists, this was funded by one of Hill and Knowlton's clients, which produced sun screen lotion.⁵²

In some cases cross-pollination happens through membership of boards. For example Frank Boren, a board member of ARCO Petroleum, served as president of the Nature Conservancy. He argued that such cooperation was advantageous for industry: "One good thing about that is that while we're working with them, they don't have time to sue us."⁵³

Dealing with Uncooperative Environmentalists

Not all environmentalists are so willing to capitulate to corporate agendas; it is usually the more conservative groups that will cooperate. In dealing with activists, public relations firms generally employ a 'divide and conquer' strategy which exploits differences in the environment movement between moderates and radicals.⁵⁴ Various public relations experts have attempted to categorize environmentalists in order to devise a strategy to deal with them.

Lesly divides activists into five personality classifications:

- advocates who argue for what they believe in
- dissidents who are against many things because of their character
- activists who want to get something done or changed
- zealots who are overridingly singleminded, and
- fanatics who are "zealots with their stabilizers removed"⁵⁵

He suggests that reasonable people can be dealt with using reason, but zealots and fanatics have to be dealt with by withering away their power base and support.⁵⁶

Ronald Duchin, from the PR firm Mongoven, Biscoe and Duchin, categorizes activists as either radicals, opportunists, idealists or realists:

[The] activists we are concerned about here are the ones who want to change the way your industry does business—either for good or bad reasons: environmentalists, churches, Public Interest Research Groups, campus organizations, civic groups, teachers unions, and 'Naderites'.⁵⁷

Duchin describes 'radicals' as those who want to change the system and have underlying socio-economic/political motives. They are anti-corporations and multinationals and are the hardest to deal with because they won't compromise. 'Opportunists', according to Duchin, are activists who oppose corporations because they want power, attention, and employment. The key to dealing with them is to offer them the appearance of a victory.⁵⁸

'Idealists' are altruistic, highly credible, with a sense of justice. "They must be educated. Once the idealist is made fully aware of the long-term consequences or the wide ranging ramifications of his/her position in terms of other issues of justice and society, she/he can be made into a realist."⁵⁹ 'Realists' are pragmatic and willing to compromise and work within the system. Duchin recommends concentrating any public relations activities on realists and seeking to cooperate with them. A solution forged with the realists will generally become the accepted solution, he says.

Duchin's formula is therefore to isolate the radicals, turn the idealists into realists, co-opt the realists to support industry solutions and the opportunists will go along with the final agreement. The radicals, he says, need the support of the idealists and realists to have credibility. Without them they are marginalized and "seen to be shallow and self-serving".⁶⁰

The isolation of radicals was also the strategy of Ketchum Communications Public Relations when it was advising its client Clorox Corporation in 1991 on how to deal with an expected anti-chlorine campaign. It recommended labelling protesters as 'terrorists' and suing critical journalists for defamation.⁶¹ Labels such as 'extremist' and 'terrorist' are an example of the propaganda technique of name-calling described in the previous chapter. It is, according to Penny Cass, an attempt to activate preconceptions and stereotypes already held by the public. "Category-based expectancies define a group in such a way as to predict future behaviour and to interpret ambiguous information in the shadow of pre-existing stereotypes."⁶²

Cass argues that this is particularly effective in environmental disputes, where people are willing to believe such things of people they disagree with and where environmentalists are

often bearers of bad news. People who tell of extreme consequences are more easily labelled as extreme. Thus if a NASA scientist concludes that global warming is underway and another scientist questions this, the NASA scientist is seen to be the more extreme of the two, even if her assumptions are more conservative, because her conclusion "deviates from normative expectancies".⁶³

This attempt to brand environmentalists as extremists and terrorists has been aided by various dirty tricks campaigns that have attempted to falsely pin violent actions on environmentalists. David Helvarg cites an example where Hill and Knowlton, on behalf of their clients Pacific Lumber, distributed fake photocopies of material purportedly produced by the group Earth First! calling for violence.⁶⁴

Isolating radicals also requires managing the media and ensuring the radicals don't get much coverage. Lesly outlines various strategies for this, including:

- becoming "the key reliable source on the subject"
- holding media people responsible for what they report
- providing information early before an issue takes off
- preventing the opposition from setting the agenda
- "innoculat[ing] the channels of influence against readily accepting what the activists will charge", and
- "spelling] out the consequences of allowing the activists' position to prevail"⁶⁵

Gathering Intelligence

Techniques for dealing with environmental activists and the media depend on knowing who they are and how they operate. Several public relations firms specialize in supplying this sort of information. The firm Mongoven, Biscoe and Duchin (MBD) maintains extensive files on organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, which detail their strategies, methods and priorities. This information is used to assist their corporate clients, who are almost all members of the Fortune 100, to resolve "public policy conflicts between corporations and activist groups". Activist groups are characterized as radical, realistic or idealistic and assessments made of their potential impact, anticipated initiatives, relations with other groups and potential for industry relationships. Profiles of key staff are included.⁶⁶

The services that MBD provides for clients include the reviewing of lists of those registered to attend a company's annual meeting so as to anticipate possible disruptions; analysing the public record of a leading activist to anticipate style and content of the campaign he or she will conduct against the client; and proposing environmentalists who would be suitable candidates for corporate Boards of Directors and advisory boards.⁶⁷

This sort of information is sometimes gathered through misrepresentation by staff who pose as journalists or friends of friends. Journalist John Dillon has documented two cases where Burson-Marsteller employees have disguised themselves, one as working for a consumer council and the other as an employee of a television programme, in order to get information for a client. Staff from another firm, National Grassroots and Communications, pretending to be the executors of an old lady's estate who wanted to find a suitable organization to donate money to, obtained the financial records of an activist group and then used those records to oppose that group.⁶⁸

PR Watch alleges that MBD has spied on and undermined consumer activists and family dairy farmers opposing Monsanto's bovine growth hormone (BGH) on behalf of clients Monsanto and Philip Morris/Kraft/General Foods. Kaufman Public Relations also resorted to spy tactics when it was hired by the National Dairy Board to promote BGH. It put together a team that recruited local residents to attend a New York city activist conference posing as housewives.⁶⁹ Their brief was to:

attend the event, monitor developments, ask questions, and provide other support as appropriate. Each attendee must be able to articulate the basic [pro-BGH] arguments on the issue and cite one or more substantive reasons for supporting the Dairy Board's position.⁷⁰

Kaufman PR was caught out after a Freedom of Information inquiry, and the National Dairy Board severed its contract with them following the bad publicity.

Another organization which gathers 'intelligence' on activists is the Foundation for Public Affairs, which is funded by hundreds of corporations such as Dow Chemical, Exxon, Philip Morris, Mobil and Shell Oil. This foundation monitors over seventy-five activist publications and compiles information on over 1,300 groups and organizations. It publishes *Public Interest Profiles*, a directory of 250 major US public interest groups which includes funding sources, methods of operation, budgets and boards of directors.⁷¹

Public relations firms also collect information about journalists. One boasts:

Let us be your eyes and ears when the environmental media convene. . . Gather vital information on key journalists. . . Who's the boss? . . . Age and Tenure. . . How do you break the ice? . . . Not only will you find news on journalists, we'll tell you what they want from you and what strategies you can employ with them to generate more positive stories and better manage negative situations.⁷²

Another, TJFR Publishing, has biographical data on about 6,000 journalists which enables it to offer useful information to clients when they are approached by a journalist. It can provide the client with background information on the journalist, and advise them on strategies to use with that particular individual to ensure a positive story or at least to minimize negative reporting.⁷³

PR firms also employ devices such as experiments involving reporters to see how they think. One journalist, Vicky Hutchings, wrote about her experience in a strange meeting with assorted other people invited by a PR consultant representing a multinational oil company. During this meeting they took part in various brainstorming and word association exercises, for which Hutchings got paid \$50.⁷⁴ Another journalist outlined in *Environment Writer* the way DuPont's PR people invited journalists to take part in an exercise during which they were asked to develop storylines based on various sentences such as "DuPont makes very wonderful chemicals, and no one needs to worry." The journalists were watched by hidden DuPont researchers and paid \$250 for their participation.⁷⁵

Polling is an important public relations tool for researching public opinion: finding out who is opposed to a company and who are potential allies. It is also a way of testing what will work in a PR campaign. Questions are given such as "If you knew such and such, how would you feel about X company?", with follow-up questions depending on the answers. In this way the company can work out what are the right triggers to get people on their side. And in a similar vein, they can test public opinion before a trial or some event and get it postponed, for example, if they find that they are unlikely to win over a jury in the prevailing social climate.⁷⁶

A Hill & Knowlton subsidiary, Group Attitudes Corporation, conducts opinion research surveys for its clients but also uses researchers who "infiltrate a community and live there undercover for a week or so" so that they can "identify leaders, assess the scope of a particular problem and find out who is creating the problem". Where a client is trying to site an unwanted facility, such researchers can work out what compromises the community is willing to make before any formal community consultation begins.⁷⁷

Prior to the Gulf War, Hill & Knowlton used opinion polling to work out its strategy for persuading the American people, on behalf of a Kuwaiti coalition, that the US should go to war to defend Kuwait. It commissioned a million-dollar public survey, finding out that Iraqi atrocities against Kuwaitis would be an effective way to achieve this. Hill and Knowlton then produced

commercials, radio shows and video news releases designed to convince people that Iraqis were committing such atrocities.⁷⁸

Dealing with Local Residents

Public relations firms often classify local residents, as they do environmentalists, into various publics so that they can concentrate on targeting those likely to be persuaded of the benefits of a proposed project and marginalizing those who are likely to oppose it. Desmond Connor, a Canadian PR consultant, advises against holding a public meeting early on before the various publics can be approached separately. He says:

The proponent typically calls a public meeting in order to explain the project to them, confident that their opposition will then disappear. In fact, the public meeting usually crystallizes a more informed, organized and articulate opposition and generates widespread negative publicity for the proponent and the project.⁷⁹

Instead, he advises companies to identify "the latent and secondary beneficiaries of the project (the five volt positive people, compared with the 220 volt negative opponents)". These are people who "stand to benefit in small and indirect ways" from the project. These people should be kept informed and involved in a "joint problem solving process. As people work together, informed peer group pressure usually results in workable compromise solutions—not ideal from anyone's point of view, but acceptable to all or nearly all."⁸⁰ :

In 1989 an Australian joint Taskforce on Intractable Waste engaged the public relations firm Community Projects Ltd to develop a community consultation strategy to prepare the way for the establishment of a high temperature incinerator in Australia to burn hazardous wastes.⁸¹ Several attempts had already been made to site an incinerator for hazardous wastes but none had been successful, usually because of the strength of local opposition to such a facility.

With the help of Community Projects Ltd, the Taskforce attempted to get broad 'in principle' acceptance for the high temperature incinerator before a location for it was chosen. The aim was to ensure that a detached, 'rational' debate took place before the emotions of concerned local residents clouded the issue and before the community living near the proposed incinerator site could muster support from the broader community. Environmental groups were contacted to procure their commitment to the project before they could be approached and influenced by the local community once the site had been chosen. Some environmental groups supported the incinerator, while others opposed it.

The consultation process did not seek to find out what the community wanted done with hazardous wastes, as that had been decided even before the Taskforce was appointed. Its aim was to win acceptance for a high-temperature incinerator. The Taskforce and their PR consultants sought to "achieve active public recognition that the proposal is in the public interest".⁸² Having studied various technological controversies, Dorothy Nelkin and Michael Pollak found this was a typical approach:

Mechanisms for public involvement may increase direct public influence on the formation of policy, or may merely inform policy-makers about public concerns. More often they are a means to manipulate public opinion, to win acceptance of decisions already made, and to facilitate the implementation of these decisions.⁸³

Like others involved in such siting controversies, the Taskforce assumed that most opposition "is based upon ignorance that can be overcome" if the appropriate information is

supplied. It therefore supplied reassuring information to the groups whose support it sought. However the most fervent opponents to the incinerator were among the best informed about the issue, a point the Taskforce admitted in one of its reports, stating that supporters or potential supporters "tend to be less well-informed on the issues involved than are the opponents".

The Task Force was advised not to waste its persuasive efforts on that part of the environment movement opposed to the incinerator because they were unlikely to change their position. Community Projects interviewed opposition groups in order to distinguish "opposition likely to thwart a desired outcome ('effect') from that which is likely to be ineffective even if it is discomforting ('noise')." ⁸⁵ The reason for needing to do this was that the Taskforce wanted to manage and control the debate or, as it put it, "limit destructive conflict". It stated:

Unstructured public involvement is likely to be chaotic and potentially destructive to a proposal. In the absence of a structure for public involvement, individuals and groups will create their own mechanisms. . . By providing a framework for public involvement, the form and direction of this involvement can be managed in the public interest. Under these circumstances public involvement in the development of a proposal is more likely to be productive and creative, and the scope for destructive conflict is significantly reduced. ⁸⁶

Of course the terms 'productive', 'creative' and 'destructive' are all defined in terms of achieving the goal of establishing a hazardous waste facility.

Allies from within the environment movement were enlisted to help get the incinerator accepted in Australia. Remaining opponents were categorized and dismissed as either ignorant, having vested interests, or, in the case of those stubborn yet well-informed environmentalists who could not be co-opted, the Taskforce stated that they showed "clear signs of wishing to assume the role of champions". ⁸⁷ The use of the term 'champions' was a way of implying that opponents are not concerned about the public interest. The Taskforce stated:

Champions are those who see some benefits for themselves in adopting one position or another in a potential conflict. They are sometimes more concerned with the opportunity to enhance their reputation than with the details of the case. ⁸⁸

The Taskforce was unsuccessful in its efforts ⁸⁹ and to date no hazardous waste incinerator has been established in Australia. Instead, various parts of the waste stream are to be treated with more specific technologies, some currently being developed for the purpose.

Often a public consultation exercise is little more than a public relations exercise, undertaken for the primary purpose of winning public acceptance for an unwanted facility. The process of consultation provides an opportunity for the developer to show a caring, open approach and to cultivate trust in the face of community concerns. Yet more often than not corporations (and governments) are unwilling to reduce or eliminate the hazards that give rise to those concerns; their public relations advisers help them to mould and manage public opinion instead of responding to it.

Public relations shapes the interaction between corporations and their 'publics' in a way that is designed to mould public opinion and win acceptance of corporate goals and ideologies. Yet that influence only works while it is hidden. The exposure of public relations strategies, their messages and sources undermines their strength and persuasive power.

Chapter 10

Advertisers: Getting Them Young

Our enormously productive economy. . . demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction, in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate.

Victor Lebow, Retailing Analyst¹

Advertisers spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year worldwide encouraging, persuading and manipulating people into a consumer lifestyle that has devastating consequences for the environment through its extravagance and wastefulness.² In his book *Earth in the Balance*, Vice-President Al Gore wrote:

Our civilization is holding ever more tightly to its habit of consuming larger and larger quantities every year of coal, oil, fresh air and water, trees, topsoil, and the thousand other substances we rip from the crust of the earth, transforming them into not just the sustenance and shelter we need but much more that we don't need: huge quantities of pollution, products for which we spend billions on advertising to convince ourselves we want, massive surpluses of products that depress prices while the products themselves go to waste, and diversions and distractions of every kind.³

Advertising expenditure has multiplied seven times since the 1950s. It has grown faster than the world economy and three times faster than global population. And almost half of that expenditure is targeted at Americans: the average American is exposed to about three thousand advertisements each day. More money is spent persuading Americans to be consumers than is spent on higher education or Medicare.⁴

Whilst each advertisement may be outwardly aimed at selling a particular product, it is also promoting "the interests and ideology of its corporate sponsors".⁵ And the persistent avalanche of advertisements that television watchers and others are exposed to sells a consumerist way of life that offers personal fulfilment through the acquisition and accumulation of commodities.

Even if they fail to sell a particular product, they sell consumerism itself by ceaselessly reiterating the idea that there is a product to solve each of life's problems, indeed that existence would be satisfying and complete if only we bought the right things. Advertisers thus cultivate needs by hitching their wares to the infinite existential yearnings of the human soul.⁶

Most advertisements tell little about the product they are selling; rather, they seek to create an impression. They attempt to associate their product with the unarticulated desires of their audience. Advertising exploits individual insecurities, creates false needs and offers counterfeit solutions. It fosters dissatisfaction that leads to consumption: "Consumers are taught personal incompetence and dependence on mass-market producers." They are taught that being a citizen "means no more than being a consumer".⁷

Targeting Children

By the time most US children start school they will have spent more hours watching television than they will spend in class for their entire schooling. Television tends to be used as a *de facto* babysitter and is often a focal point for family life. But a child's exposure to the consumer ethic does not stop at the school gates: a massive infusion of corporate messages bombards school students everyday. Billboards in school hallways carry advertisements, sports

events are sponsored, commercial radio is piped in and an 'educational' television channel carries commercial advertisements. Corporate logos and advertisements appear on buses, scoreboards, posters, book covers and videos, and corporations sponsor contests, literacy programmes, reading projects and communications skills training which use their products.⁸

The phenomenon of corporate sponsorship permeates the English-speaking world. In Australia it is a growing but contentious area and "sponsorship is being actively sought as a replacement for Government funding and support."⁹ Currently, less is spent on school education in Australia than any other OECD country. Corporate logos are appearing on school reports and letterheads—even McDonald's logos on school uniforms in one school.¹⁰ A number of US-style advertising and sales promotion schemes have already infected the Australian schools system, including:

- Apple providing schools with computers in exchange for numbers of receipts from the Coles supermarket chain. This turned children into promoters for Coles and resulted in them harassing shoppers for their dockets in the stores and their car parks: "We are making beggars of our children," noted an official of the NSW Teachers Federation. Nevertheless this scheme was so successful for Coles sales (with over 6,000 schools taking part) that five other Australian companies have introduced similar schemes."

- McDonald's and Domino's Pizzas giving schools a portion of profits from fast food sales thereby encouraging students to coerce parents and others to buy pizzas or hamburgers in order to raise money for their schools.¹²

- Pizza Hut's 'Book It' program where free pizzas are provided as learning incentives. Winning a free pizza usually means the whole family has to go to Pizza Hut and buy pizzas to keep the child company. Moreover, instead of teaching children the joy of reading they are being bribed to read: "Perhaps we are giving a subliminal message to children that these things are not worth doing for their own sakes. . .?" (In 1992 over 400,000 primary school students took part in this scheme in Australia; 58,000 schools in the US also participate in this scheme, and it also operates in Canada.)¹³

Public relations firms and advertisers have targeted school education in a big way. They recognize that brand loyalties and consumer habits formed when children are young and vulnerable will be carried through to adulthood. According to a senior vice president of Grey Advertising: "It isn't enough to just advertise on television. . . You've got to reach kids throughout their day—in school, as they're shopping at the mall. . . or at the movies. You've got to become part of the fabric of their lives."¹⁴ The British advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi formed a Kids division in 1992 to sell products to children between two and fourteen years of age. In 1995 it was paid over \$100 million for this service.¹⁵

Children are increasingly the target of advertisements because of the amount of money they spend themselves, the influence they have on their parents' spending (the nag factor) and because they are trainee consumers. According to the CEO of Prism Communications, "They aren't children so much as what I like to call 'evolving consumers'."¹⁶ In the US there are over fifty-seven million school age children and teenagers who spend about \$100 billion each year on sweets, food, drinks, video and electronic products, toys, games, movies, sports, clothes and shoes. Additionally they influence family spending decisions worth another \$130 billion on food, vacations, the family car and other spending.¹⁷

Similar trends are evident in Canada, where 4.4 million children up to twelve years of age spend \$1.5 billion dollars annually and influence a further \$15 billion spending.¹⁸ In Australia, advertisers attending a conference on *Marketing to Kids and Youth* were told that children and teenagers between the ages of ten and seventeen spent \$3.3 billion every year. Another conference, on the subject of *Consumer Kids*, was told that Australian children under eighteen

had an average A\$31.60 to spend each week and that they influenced more than seventy per cent of their parents' clothes and fast food purchases."

The US Consumers Union estimates that 30,000 commercial messages are targeted at American children each year. By the age of seventeen, each teenager will have been exposed to hundreds of thousands of advertisements. Increasingly, younger children are being targeted. Advertisers spent \$500 million in 1990 on marketing aimed at US children under twelve years compared with \$100 million in 1980.²⁰

According to *Direct Marketing* magazine, by the age of eight children make most of their own buying decisions: "Children start at a very early age to develop brand loyalty."²¹ Indeed, advertising research indicates that children as young as three or four years old recognize and ask for particular brands. Selina Guber from Children's Market Research says that children brought up since 1980 "are aware of brands and status items even before they can read." Kids 'R' Us president, Mike Searles, says "If you own this child at an early age. . . you can own this child for years to come."²²

Yet there are questions about the ability of children so young to understand advertising and its intent, and not be deceived and manipulated by it. Experts say that children don't understand persuasive intent until they are eight or nine years old and that it is unethical to advertise to them before then.²³ According to Karpatkin and Holmes from the Consumers Union, "Young children, in particular, have difficulty in distinguishing between advertising and reality in ads, and ads can distort their view of the world."²⁴ At the same time, Richard Mizerski, an Australian professor of marketing, observes: "Their cognitive structures are beginning to form and they are most sensitive to external influences."²⁵ This is especially a problem when advertisements appear on school walls, posters and book covers, and gain legitimacy from the supposed endorsement of the school such that children think they must be true.

Older children pay less attention to advertisements and are more able to differentiate between the ads and TV programmes, but they are still easy prey for advertisers. Around puberty, in their early teens, children are forming their own identities and they are "highly vulnerable to pressure to conform to group standards and mores". At this age they feel insecure and want to feel that they belong to their peer group. Advertising manipulates them through their insecurities, seeking to define normality for them, influencing the way they "view and obtain appropriate models for the adult world", and undermining "fundamental human values in the development of the identity of children". Advertisements actively encourage them to seek happiness and esteem through consumption.²⁶

The British Code of Advertising and Sales Promotion recognizes that children are more vulnerable than adults to the hidden messages of advertising and states that advertisements aimed at children "should not exploit their credulity, loyalty, vulnerability or lack of experience". In particular, "they should not be made to feel inferior or unpopular for not buying the advertised product" nor to be "lacking in courage, duty or loyalty". In 1995 the UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) received 175 complaints about advertisements aimed at children and upheld sixteen of these.

In the late 1980s Chris Whittle realized that teenagers were "the new pipeline into American households". To take advantage of this, Whittle Communications founded Channel One. From 1990 it loaned schools VCRs, televisions and a satellite dish "in exchange for students' minds for twelve minutes each day". Today, 350,000 classrooms (forty per cent of classrooms in the US) with eight million students between the ages of thirteen and eighteen have accepted the Channel One deal. It requires ninety per cent of the students at a school to watch the twelve-minute program ninety per cent of the time, from beginning to end and without interruption.²⁷

That twelve minutes includes two minutes of advertising in the middle of it, paid for by companies selling products like snack and fast foods, who are eager to reach the children at a formative age when brand loyalty and consumer habits can be established. These advertisements are thought to be so effective that Channel One is able to charge twice as much

for an advertisement as a network television station charges for a prime-time news spot—in 1994, about \$200,000 for thirty seconds.²⁸

Students in schools with *Channel One* are required to attend to the television screen in a fashion unprecedented in the history of the medium, they watch ads in a structured environment with an authority figure demanding their attention. They watch in an environment of peer influence.²⁹

The deal is quite coercive for schools that sign up for a three-year contract. If they break the contract, for example by not requiring ninety per cent of students to watch the twelve-minute broadcast, then they are "financially liable for the cost of cabling school buildings and for the removal of video equipment".³⁰ Teachers are not supposed to interrupt or turn off the broadcast whilst it is being aired."

Channel One facilities are found mainly in poorer areas where schools cannot afford to buy the equipment themselves. A study by researchers at the University of Massachusetts found that the schools that spent least on educational materials were most likely to receive Channel One, whilst those that could afford their own video equipment tended to reject the deal. Channel One has been banned in high schools in the states of California and New York.³²

In a study investigating the effects of advertising on Channel One, researchers at Michigan State University found that children exposed to Channel One "expressed more consumer-oriented attitudes than non-viewers" and had more materialistic attitudes. Whilst children often watch ads on television at home it has been found that discussing the ads with parents negates the effect of the ads to some extent, and reduces the subsequent materialism in children, whereas Channel One precludes that. The researchers concluded that "advertising to school students is harmful to their value system."³³

Another study, by a researcher at the University of Missouri-Columbia, found that most teenagers were quite naive about the advertisements they saw on Channel One and did not view them as an attempt to sell a product or service. They were not always able to distinguish between advertisements and news items. One Pepsi advertisement, which less than half the students identified as a real advertisement, even confused the student teacher. A study of 3,000 Channel One viewing students in North Carolina found that most of them thought the products advertised would be good for them because they were being shown the advertisements at school.³⁴

Other researchers have found that the news content of Channel One's broadcast also leaves a lot to be desired. It is made up of three minutes of world and national news and seven minutes of "news magazine features of interest to adolescents". It is "too fast-paced and fragmented to deepen students' understanding of current events", and many of the news features promote the interests of the owners of the Channel, including Phillips and Time Warner; for example stories on a new light bulb and on Warner Brothers' movies. Other features promote products such as an item on how Nike shoes are made or one on the popularity of Ninja Turtles.³⁵

The whole broadcast is produced with techniques normally used for video clips. Speech is twice as fast as normal for both news and advertisements, and news items are very short—in fact shorter than the advertisements. Mark Crispin Miller, a professor of journalism, observed: "I found that the outright commercials were less worrisome than the so-called news segments themselves, which were more often than not pro-business propaganda."³⁶

A new arena for advertising is the internet. It is estimated that about a million children are using the internet world-wide, a figure that is bound to increase dramatically over the next few years.³⁷ According to the Director of Saatchi & C Saatchi Interactive, "This is a medium for advertisers that is unprecedented. . . there's probably no other product or service that we can

think of that is like it in terms of capturing kids' interest."³⁸ In their advertising material Saatchi and Saatchi explain their Kid Connection service:

We at KID CONNECTION are committed to understanding kids: their motivations, their feelings, and their influences. In keeping with our mission to connect our clients to the kid market with programs that match our clients' business objectives with the needs, drives and desires of kids. . . Interactive technology is at the forefront of kid culture, allowing us to enter into contemporary kid life and communicate with them in an environment they call their own.³⁹

Children as young as four are being targeted by advertisers on the internet, and often these interactions with children are unmediated by parents or teachers. These advertisers elicit personal information from the children by getting them to fill out surveys before they can play and offering prizes such as T-shirts for filling in "lengthy profiles that ask for purchasing behavior, preferences and information on other family members". Advertisers then use this information to "craft individualized messages and ads" targeted at each child. The ads are integrated with the other content of the internet site, which is designed to keep the children engrossed in play for hours at a time. There are even product "spokescharacters" to interact with the children and develop relationships with them so that long-lasting brand loyalties can be developed.⁴⁰

Targeting Education: Infiltrating School Lessons

Teachers are being overwhelmed with free and unsolicited curriculum material from public relations firms, corporations and industry associations. The corporate stampede to get their messages into schools through 'educational' resources whilst their customers are very young is a recent phenomenon. In 1993 corporations spent \$381 million in the US on school education, which accounted for 15% of all corporate donations.⁴¹

Lifetime Learning Systems is one of the companies which compiles educational materials on behalf of corporations and trade associations. It services more than 350 corporations in the US alone, as well as associations such as the American Nuclear Society, and claims to reach almost one hundred per cent of US schools—sixty-three million young people every year.⁴² According to Lifetime Learning Systems' promotional literature:

Kids spend forty per cent of each day in the classroom where traditional advertising can't reach them. . . Now you can enter the classroom through custom-made learning materials created with your specific marketing objectives in mind. Communicate with young spenders directly and, through them, their teachers and families as well.⁴³

Let Lifetime Learning Systems bring your message to the classroom, where young people are forming attitudes that will last a lifetime.⁴⁴

Coming from school, all these materials carry an extra measure of credibility that gives your message added weight.⁴⁵

IMAGINE millions of students discussing your product in class. IMAGINE their teachers presenting your organization's point of view.⁴⁶

The great advantage of embedding corporate messages in sponsored learning materials over more direct means of advertising is that any residual scepticism with which conventional advertisements might be treated disappears altogether when it comes to advertisements and public relations material secreted within school lessons. As one writer points out: "Imagine—

your target market not only reads your ads—they get tested on them."⁴⁷ One kit put out by Teacher Support Software, which is used in many kindergartens in Texas, includes test questions such as "Taco Bell has [blank] and burritos."⁴⁸

More often the corporate message is more subtle—sometimes so subtle that the teachers don't even notice it. If they do, they may turn a blind eye so that they can use the materials, which are hard for them to resist, particularly for teachers in poorly resourced schools. The materials, professionally produced with lots of colour and games, prepared homework assignments and even computers that automatically grade the students' work, are generally offered for free.⁴⁹

In the US, as in Australia and Canada, school education receives inadequate government funding and teachers have inadequate teaching resources available to help them. In Canada, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation has prepared and distributed a pamphlet on the commercialisation of schools in Canada, noting that budget cuts by provincial governments in the 1990s have made the school system a major target for business interests, who seek to fill the resource gap.⁵⁰

Some say that corporations are "taking advantage of schools short on funds by feeding them materials, filled with company logos, that are designed to encourage consumption."⁵¹ It is almost as if underfunding of schools is part of a corporate strategy to enable advertisers better access. At the very least, corporate sponsorship of school resources enables the underfunding of schools by governments to continue.⁵²

Corporations eager to enhance their public image, increase product visibility and establish consumer lifestyles are responding to America's education crisis *en masse*. Just about every major company or trade association now markets flashy, bright education books, brochures, posters and videos, many of which focus on the environment. Curricula, product logos and even advertisements on subjects ranging from recycling and math to financial planning and poetry have found their way into most public school systems across the country.⁵³

In most cases, the so-called educational materials give students a distorted picture of environmental issues and other problems, social choices and tradeoffs. They present a corporate view as 'fact' and report the results of corporate-funded studies without saying who financed them. They often fail to "acknowledge the sponsor's own financial interest, or to disclose conditions and information that affect the accuracy of what they teach".⁵⁴

There is not really any competition from non-corporate views, because environmental groups and others don't have the funding that is necessary to develop and distribute such an array of professionally produced materials and distribute them widely. And teachers do not have the resources or knowledge to balance the material with differing viewpoints.

Corporate influence on what children learn doesn't end with ads for products and services. American students are introduced to environmental issues as they use materials supplied by corporations who pollute the soil, air, and water. . . . And there is a good chance that they'll be taught the virtues of corporate-supported economic initiatives, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, with handouts on "critical thinking" bankrolled by Mobil Oil, a supporter of the pact.⁵⁵

Sometimes teachers are trained to use these materials. Every year hundreds of thousands of teachers in the US attend workshops run by corporations in conjunction with their educational materials. These materials are sent directly to teachers, bypassing official curriculum review committees, so that they are not subject to any scrutiny apart from that of the teachers themselves, who may not be able to judge the accuracy or bias in the materials. Advertisers at a Toronto conference on "Kid Power: Creative Kid-Targeted Marketing Strategies" were told how

to bypass the 'gate-keepers' so that their messages could be transmitted directly to the children.⁵⁶

Environmental Education

Project Learning Tree is an environmental educational programme for schools sponsored by the Forestry industry. It claims to be "one of the premier environmental education programs in the world". It is used in the US, Canada, Mexico, Japan, Sweden, Finland and Brazil, and has been going for over twenty years, during which time it has reached about twenty million students. In the US alone about 60,000 teachers attend its workshops each year where they learn how to "use the program with young people".⁵⁷

The programme claims to train children from kindergarten through to 8th grade how to "investigate environmental issues, and encourages them to make informed, responsible decisions".⁵⁸ According to one of its critics, the Institute for Earth Education, *Project Learning Tree* promotes "the idea that the forest's primary purpose is that of a resource for human use, not a community of life for a variety of plants and animals."⁵⁹

Project Learning Tree says that its goal is "helping students to learn HOW to think, not WHAT to think."⁶⁰ It follows in the tradition of earlier efforts by industrialists to train the masses to be consumers. Edward Filene, a spokesperson for industrialists in the 1920s and 30s, spoke frankly about the need to create a consumer culture where industry could "sell to the masses all that it employs the masses to create". "The time has come," he argued, "when all our educational institutions. . . must concentrate on the great social task of teaching the masses not what to think but *how to think*, and thus to find out how to behave like human beings in the machine age."⁶¹

Many corporate-sponsored packages seek to teach children to be consumers and to passively accept the corporate viewpoint on environmental issues. Public relations professionals have recognized that environmental education in schools can lead to children who campaign against polluters and influence decisions made by their parents about environmental matters. Most children are interested in the environment: research undertaken by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which has formed a partnership with Eastman Kodak to produce educational materials on biodiversity, found that seventy-one per cent of children were interested in the environment and seventy-four per cent of those would willingly spend an hour outside school hours each week to learn more about it.⁶²

The potential to shape environmental perceptions and improve corporate images at the same time has attracted many customers to the firms designing educational materials for corporations. The American Nuclear Society has a kit which tells children about the beneficial uses of nuclear technology and attempts to describe the problem of waste disposal in harmless terms: "Anything we produce results in some 'leftovers' that are either recycled or disposed of—whether we're making electricity from coal or nuclear, or making scrambled eggs!"⁶³

Caretakers All, curriculum material designed by the Beef Industry Council, was developed for PR purposes to reverse a trend of declining meat consumption. The package, which won a Public Relations award at the 1993 National Agri-Marketing Association's advertising and communications competition, aimed to marry "the concepts of agriculture and environmental stewardship in students' minds". It set out to show how farmers and ranchers look after the environment, and to counter what environmentalists were saying about how farmers and ranchers cause erosion and habitat destruction through overgrazing, as well as polluting waterways above and below ground with manure from feed lots.⁶⁴

The kits consist of study prints depicting farming scenes, such as bedding for dairy cattle made of shredded newspaper, and also a clean-up day in a park. Each print has activities associated with it, such as experiments with salt water and plants and helping to clean up the

school. The US Consumers Union describes *Caretakers All* as "pure one-sided image-building for farmers and ranchers, disguised as lessons on land conservation".⁶⁵

Twenty thousand kits were distributed free to teachers. Barbara Selover, Director of the Meat Board Education Programs, says that for an investment of \$425,000 those kits will reach about two million young children over the next few years: "That comes to about 21 cents per child, which we feel is a pretty cost-effective investment."⁶⁶ She is reported in the journal *Agri-Marketings* citing four reasons why the kit worked well as a public relations tool for the beef industry:

First, the subject matter—taking care of the environment is a serious issue that merits attention in schools. Next, the materials reach children at an age when they are very impressionable. It also is an in-depth learning tool that delivers a consistent message over a period of time from a trusted source—their teacher. Finally it reaches large numbers of teachers and students directly.⁶⁷

Georgia-Pacific, a corporation with forestry interests, produces elementary school materials that claim that forestry saves forests because: "When no one harvests, trees grow old and are more likely to be killed by disease rot, and the elements. Very old trees will not support many kinds of wildlife because the forest floor is too shaded to grow the ground plants animals need."⁶⁸

The American Coal Foundation's materials manage to avoid mention of global warming and acid rain when they claim, in the module on *Coal and Our Environment*, that "To keep coal from harming our land, air and water: coal is cleaned before it's burned. 'Scrubbers' take out most of the harmful gases; Soil is replaced. Grass and trees are planted after surface mining." Exxon has also produced a kit that portrays fossil fuels as being environmentally friendly and having no practical rivals. The Council for Wildlife Conservation & Education, an affiliate of the National Shooting Sports Association, has produced *Wildlife for Tomorrow: The Story of Our Un-Endangered Species*,^{69*}

The chemical industry has concentrated on science education. It has expanded its role to an active one of "helping to train teachers, encouraging employee volunteers to teach courses, and guiding school curricula" with the stated aim of improving science comprehension, giving "kids a balanced view of how science improves our daily lives", producing "well-rounded students, who, one day, may be decision makers affecting industry policy". The chemical industry has also targeted university students, science and non-science, with its Responsible Care Curriculum Program. Responsible Care, a code of practice for the chemical industry, was introduced to improve the public image of the chemical industry and to promote self-regulation as an alternative to increased government regulation of the industry. The Curriculum Program aims to "increase university faculties' awareness of Responsible Care, as well as to erode stereotypes of the industry".⁷⁰

The chemical industry, including companies such as ICI, which operates in the UK and Australia, has been active in providing curriculum materials outside the US—as has the mining industry. The petroleum industry has also been active in both Australia and New Zealand, hoping to "provide a more balanced account" of their operations. BP Oil New Zealand provides various curriculum materials to New Zealand schools on issues ranging from dealing with oil spills to global warming and ozone depletion. The Australian Institute of Petroleum and the Australian Petroleum Exploration Association provide project materials, classroom speakers, and site visits for Australian schools. Also glass, aluminium and plastics companies and industry groupings provide materials to both Australian and New Zealand schools.⁷¹

In Australia, state government education departments have worked together with business groups. In Western Australia the Ministry of Education has prepared curriculum materials sponsored by Woodside Petroleum, BHP, BP, Shell, Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Cal Asiatic for all

secondary schools in the state. The Employer's Education Consortium of Victoria, a coalition of nine of Victoria's largest companies, has had a major input into the state's high school curriculum with the introduction of a compulsory Australian studies unit on the *World of Work*.⁷²

In Canada, corporate-sponsored teaching materials have also been a cause for concern, and in 1995 the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation did a study of commercialization in Ontario schools which raised a number of questions about the alliance between business and schools in the light of funding cutbacks by government. Examples of this sort of relationship in Canada include the provision of educational materials and speakers by the Canadian Nuclear Association, Ontario Hydro and the BC Council of Forest Industries. The latter ran an essay competition for high school students on 'Why Clearcut Logging is Beneficial for British Columbia'.⁷³

In a report entitled *Captive Kids*, the US Consumers Union analysed 111 different sets of educational materials sponsored by commercial enterprises, trade organizations and corporate-backed nonprofit organizations, twenty-one of which were on environmental topics. It found that the four sets of materials on energy issues presented "lopsided views" and six of the eight sets of materials on solid waste issues were sponsored by companies that "produce disposable products, make packaging or packaging materials, use a great deal of packaging, or are providers of recycling services". As a result of the sponsor's vested interests in how solid waste problems are resolved, these learning materials tended to avoid discussion of reduced consumption or product reuse as serious alternatives, instead emphasising recycling. They presented "a distorted picture of the problems, choices, and trade-offs". The Consumers Union described a McDonald's package called *The Rain Forest Imperative* as "self-serving" and one by the Polystyrene Packaging Council, *The Plastics and the Environment Sourcebook*, as "highly commercial and incomplete with strong bias toward polystyrene packaging".⁷⁴

The Consumers Union found that nearly eighty per cent of the sponsored educational materials it analysed "contained biased or incomplete information, promoting a viewpoint that favors consumption of the sponsor's product or service or a position that favors the company or its economic agenda". It concluded that the commercialisation of education, arising from advertisements and sponsored educational material containing "biased, self-serving and promotional information" posed a "significant and growing threat to the integrity of education in America".⁷⁵

In-school commercialism is at its worst, we believe, when it masquerades as educational materials or programs and offers half-truths or misstatements that favor the sponsor of the materials. It may be difficult if not impossible for most teachers to correctly judge the objectivity and accuracy of such materials. . . Unfortunately, a teacher's use of a sponsor's materials or products implies an endorsement, and any benefits of such use may come at the cost of teaching children to scrutinize marketing messages objectively.⁷⁶

At the same time as corporate materials are flooding schools and bypassing curriculum review committees, non-corporate environmental education materials are coming under attack from communities dependent on the extraction industries, conservative Christian groups and conservative think-tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the Competitive Enterprise Institute.⁷⁷

Conservatives recognize the power of genuine environmental education to foster environmental concern and values in the next generation, and are threatened by it. Some conservative Christians have even labelled non-corporate environmental education materials as paganistic, satanistic, anti-Christian and anti-business: "The growing 'environmental education' movement is a recruitment drive intended to conscript young students into a pagan children's campaign."⁷⁸ They argue that "the constant depiction of a planet on the brink of environmental

catastrophe is frightening children and turning them into eco-warriors at home."⁷⁹ According to one Republican State politician:

This cloudy mixture of New Age mysticism, Native American folklore and primitive Earth worship is being promoted and enforced by the Clinton administration. It is driving the nation's regulatory scheme, and workers, small businessmen and property owners are becoming [its] victims.⁸⁰

Each year the group People for the American Way reports on hundreds of attempts to restrict books in schools, and the numbers of such attempts are increasing each year. For example, a high school text entitled *Environmental Science: Ecology and Human Impact* was withdrawn from one school after a manager of a Monsanto chemical plant, an employer in the area, called for it to be banned as the book was said to be anti-industry. Dr Seuss's *The Lorax* was subjected to a parents' campaign in the timber town of Laytonville, California, because it depicts a character that defends the trees. Another book, *Earth Child*, which uses activities to help students appreciate the beauty of nature and learn about the stars, has also come under attack as satanic and containing "subliminal messages to brainwash our children".⁸¹

Conservatives are concerned about text books that teach about global warming, acid rain and ozone depletion—all theories they dispute—or which promote activism such as letter-writing and petition-signing. Jonathan Adler from the Competitive Enterprise Institute, who argues that acid rain is beneficial for the eastern forests because it provides nitrogen which is a nutrient, was one of a team who put together *A Parent's Primer on the Environment*, which critiques environmental textbooks.⁸²

Environmental education is a required part of the curriculum in public primary and secondary schools in thirty states in the US, but in Arizona this was reversed in 1990 after a campaign led by a State Republican who labelled the curriculum guide as "ecocultism". In Meridian, Idaho, the school board issued teaching guidelines which stated: "Discussion should not reflect negative attitudes against business or industry who do the best job under present regulations considering economic realities."⁸³

In Boise, Idaho, fish and game biologist Jon Rachael used to visit schools to present wildlife programs. State law, however, forbids him to discuss a topic that's anathema to the state's powerful ranchers: reintroduction of the wolf into Idaho and Yellowstone National Park.⁸⁴

Clearly the infiltration of school curricula through banning some texts and offering corporate-based curriculum material and lesson plans in their place can conflict with educational objectives, and also with the attainment of an undistorted understanding of environmental problems. Unfortunately children are usually not able to discriminate between genuine education and the manipulative messages of corporations. Many assume that what they are taught in the classroom must be the truth.⁸⁵

Commercialism in Education

Chris Whittle intended to extend his Channel One concept much further, with the opening of hundreds of profit-making schools in partnership with Time Warner and UK-based Associated Newspapers. The schools would charge fees, offer scholarships and reduce the need for teachers by using computerized instruction and classroom helpers. Although this project has not gone ahead, Burger King has established 'Burger King Academies' in fourteen cities in the US and they are intending to expand into the UK. These schools are "fully accredited quasi-private high schools". IBM and Apple are also considering getting into the market of for-profit schools.⁸⁶

In Baltimore, the management of nine public schools has been handed over to a private company, Educational Alternatives Inc, which is receiving \$27 million of public funds over five years for the task. Similar schemes have been promoted in Australia for "poorly-performing public schools", and 'partnerships' between business and schools have been growing. The international marketing company Amway offers work experience to students of an Australian high school and gives lectures in subjects including agriculture, history and business studies. Petroleum industry personnel give lectures in Australian schools, and teachers are invited to gain experience of the petroleum industry through secondment for twenty or forty weeks, with the hope that they will take back what they have learnt to the classroom.⁸⁷

Jane Coulter, from the University of New South Wales Public Sector Research Centre, notes that Australian schools "are being actively canvassed by corporate and multinational organisations to enter into sponsorship arrangements where the distinction between pedagogy, promotion, and marketing is not clear."⁸⁸ The International Organization of Consumers Unions says the corporate sector is using education to:

- counter perceived anti-business culture (particularly in response to political pressure groups)
- privatize public education systems by stealth
- promote free-market ideology
- use schools as a market for their commercial activities and propaganda⁸⁹

Educators worldwide are concerned that "corporate involvement supplants public schools' mission of preparing students for participation in civic life with that of preparing students for life as workers in the free-market enterprise system."⁹⁰ Or, as Marianne Manilov of UNPLUG!, a youth group that campaigns against commercialized education, says: "Students aren't learning how to be thinkers or citizens, but rather consumers,"⁹¹ Writing in *New Internationalist*, Jonathan Kozol says: "When business enters education, therefore, it sells something more important than the brand names of its products. It sells a way of looking at the world and at oneself. It sells predictability instead of critical capacities. It sells a circumscribed, job-specific utility."⁹²

In any curriculum, the more business- or consumer-oriented material there is, the less alternative material there will be. Moreover, the more dependent a school is on corporate funds the less likely it will be to teach students "to question the means and motivations of business".⁹³ Alex Molnar, professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, who has written a book on the commercialisation of US schools, says that unless current trends change, "by the end of the century, the link between public education and school's ability to deliver corporate profits may be impossible to sever. And if that happens, the substitution of market values for democratic values in public education will largely be accomplished."⁹⁴

There is some evidence that this is already happening. Surveys show that high school students are less interested in a meaningful life and more interested in making money, when compared with those of previous generations. Alan Durning reports that "Between 1967 and 1990, the share of Americans entering college who believed it essential to be Very well-off financially' rose from forty-four per cent to seventy-four per cent. The share who believed it essential to develop a meaningful philosophy of life dropped from eighty-three per cent to forty-three per cent."⁹⁵

Chapter 12

The Media: Corporate Influences

Corporate executives and conservative leaders attributed the surge of regulation and the distrust of business of the late 1960s and early 1970s in part to the media and what they perceived as its liberal bias. As part of the political resurgence of conservative ideas, they sought to build their own reliable media outlets and to have more influence over existing media organizations. Robert Parry, author of *Fooling America*, a book about the Reagan/Bush era, describes a well-financed plan to build a conservative press, conceived by Richard Nixon:

In the twenty-five years since Nixon started 'pushing' this project, the conservatives have constructed a truly intimidating media machine. It ranges from nationwide radio talkshows by Rush Limbaugh and scores of Limbaugh-wannabes, to dozens of attack magazines, newspapers, newsletters and right-wing opinion columns, to national cable television networks propagating hard-line conservative values and viewpoints, to documentary producers who specialize in slick character assassination, to mega-buck publishing houses that add footnotes to white-supremacist theories and a veneer of respectability to journalistic fabrications, and even to narrowly focused organizations that exist simply to hurt the surviving mainstream journalists who still won't toe the line.¹

Every conservative organization, from think-tank to front group, had its own publication or media programme. The Wise Use Movement's Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise owns radio stations and interests in television stations. Think-tanks and PR firms recruited journalists from the mainstream media to their own staffs. Conservative student newspapers were financed, as was conservative television programming such as Milton Friedman's series *Free to Choose*, which was broadcast on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). So much oil company money went into sponsoring PBS programmes that it was nicknamed the Petroleum Broadcasting Service.²

Many conservative journals have benefited from the millions of dollars ploughed into them by wealthy conservative foundations and corporations. In contrast, progressive publications have to survive on readers' subscriptions and donations. Beth Schulman, associate publisher of *In These Times*, documents the \$2.7 million in grants going to the conservative magazines *The American Spectator*, *The National Interest*, *The Public Interest* and *The New Criterion*, whilst the top progressive magazines *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *The Progressive* and *In These Times* received a total of \$269,500 in grants over the same period.³

Conservative columnists were encouraged and nurtured, while progressive journalists and their editors were pestered and subjected to complaints. Various conservative media-watch organizations were set up for this purpose, such as Accuracy in Media (AIM), founded to "expose liberal bias in the media", and the Media Institute, which included executives from major corporations such as Procter and Gamble and Mobil Oil on its national advisory board.⁴

Perhaps the most significant development, however, was the rise of the conservative talk show. Since the early 1980s the number of talk radio stations in the US has quadrupled to over 800. The abolition of the 'fairness doctrine' in 1987, which "required broadcasters to present fair coverage of opposing views on major public issues", helped in the evolution of the more strident, right-wing stations.⁵ "Talk radio has become a potent conservative marketing tool," says Howard Kurtz, author of *Hot Air*, a book on talk shows.⁶

An example of their use to defeat a bill occurred at the end of 1994. A bill to prevent politicians from accepting perks and gifts from paid lobbyists, and requiring paid lobbyists to disclose activities such as organising 'grassroots' protests, passed in the House. But then, according to Kurtz, Newt Gingrich managed to get well-known radio host Rush Limbaugh to oppose the bill in his shows, labelling the bill as 'anti-American' and 'unconstitutional'. He told his listeners the bill would require citizen groups to disclose membership lists (which the bill's

sponsors denied). The members of the Senate were swamped with phone calls, and forty-four senators changed their votes, defeating the bill.⁷

Talk radio has been used in this way to defeat other regulatory measures:

There was no easy antidote to the misinformation and distortion that often accompanied lobbying campaigns and could now be broadcast coast to coast. The creaky machinery of Congress always made it easier to block some piece of legislation than to forge a consensus, and the conservatives now had a powerful weapon at their disposal. When enough radio hosts lined up behind them, they could talk a bill to death.⁸

Recently in *Rolling Stone* Eric Alterman revealed a 1991 'Communications Plan' by Newt Gingrich and his colleagues to "create our own propaganda machine for the widespread distribution of broadcast, print and computer communications to supply our activists and potential followers with ideas, information and rhetoric."⁹ According to Robert Parry, this has become a "right-wing media machine" which sets the agenda for much of the national media "deciding which ideas and individuals are accepted and which are marginalized". This media machine is credited with playing a major role in the 1994 Republican takeover in Congress.¹⁰

Becoming the Major Source of the News

While the conservatives have been building their own media machine they have also been honing their skills at influencing the mainstream media, which is also corporate-owned (see next chapter). In previous chapters we saw that the majority of news items are based on information provided by PR people via press releases, news conferences and staged events. News is also shaped by the choice of people whom journalists interview for research, quotes and on-air appearances. A major focus of the new corporate activism has been to ensure that corporate-funded people are the ones that the media turn to for comment, be they scientists, think-tank 'experts' or front group spokespeople. Corporations have become especially adept at making the best use of television talk shows:

In recent years, the dramatic growth of talk radio has been accompanied by an increasingly elaborate and sophisticated apparatus aimed at influencing what is said on the air. Political parties, think-tanks, and advocacy groups use so-called burst fax technology to inundate hosts with their talking points. Savvy publicists steer prominent guests to the most sympathetic shows.¹¹

The success of this strategy can be seen in the wide use of conservative think-tank personnel by the mass media. In 1995 a study of major newspapers, radio and television transcripts found that the media referred to the Heritage Foundation more than any other think-tank. Altogether there were 7,792 citations of conservative think-tanks, 6,361 of centrist think-tanks and 1,152 of progressive or left-leaning think-tanks. Often think-tanks are cited without any indication of their ideological basis or funding sources and their personnel are treated as independent experts. The think-tanks themselves are seldom investigated by the media.¹²

Most cited think-tanks in 1995, by media¹³

<i>Think-Tank</i>	<i>Political Orientation</i>	<i>No. of Citations</i>
Heritage Foundation	conservative	2,268
Brookings Institution	centrist	2,192
American Enterprise Institute	conservative	1,163
Cato Institute	conservative/libertarian	1,163
RAND Corporation	centre-right	795

The editor of the Heritage Foundation's journal observed that by the end of the 1980s, editorial pages were dominated by conservatives. Media commentator and progressive

columnist Norman Solomon also notes that the mainstream media in the 1990s tends to offer either experts who support the status quo or "populists of the right-wing variety". He points out that nowadays it is unusual for media forums to include "unabashedly progressive critiques of the negative effects of corporate power".¹⁴

A study by Lawrence Soley in his book *The News Shapers* found that the evening news broadcasts by the three major television networks tended to have a centre-right bias—using ex-government officials, conservative think-tank experts and corporate consultants as analysts rather than left-wing activists or progressive think-tank experts. Economist Dean Baker says news stories on trade, for example, almost always rely on sources in government and business, without questioning the vested interests that these sources might have in the issues. This is supported by a 1993 study, which found that "leading newspapers overwhelmingly used pro-NAFTA sources" when reporting on the North American Free Trade Agreement. This was despite the opposition to the Agreement from environmental and labour groups.¹⁵

A 1989 study of the highly regarded US ABC television current affairs show *Nightline*, conducted by media monitoring group Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), found that eighty per cent of its US guests were professionals, government officials or corporate representatives. Five per cent represented public interest groups and less than two per cent represented labour or ethnic groups; eighty-nine per cent were male and ninety-two per cent were white. The study concluded that "*Nightline* serves as an electronic soapbox from which white, male, elite representatives of the status quo can present their case."¹⁶ (*Nightline* also influences who is used as a source by other journalists.¹⁷)

FAIR's study of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), often criticized by conservatives for its liberal bias, also found that the majority of programming on PBS stations used conservative sources (mainly corporate) and government spokespersons, and rarely used activists such as environmentalists.¹⁸

The leading talkshows on public TV are either hosted by conservatives. . . or feature inside-the-Beltway centrists. . . Most public TV stations feature one daily . . . and two weekly. . . programs that serve a business/investor audience, while most stations lack a regular series on labor or consumer issues.¹⁹

Even on public television, experts used for economic coverage were mainly corporate representatives. For all public television coverage, eighteen per cent of sources were corporate representatives, compared with six per cent who were activists of all persuasions. Environmentalists made up 0.6 per cent of sources. The researchers concluded: "While there were exceptions. . . public television did little to highlight the voices of organized citizens, relegating activists along with members of the general public to the margins of political discourse." Even the documentaries, although having more diversity of voices, still relied on the usual news sources. Nevertheless, the constant complaints from conservatives about the liberal bias of public broadcasting tends to exert an ongoing pressure towards conservatism.²⁰

FAIR also studied US media coverage of environmental issues from April 1990 to April 1991, including the three main television networks, seven major newspapers and three national newsweeklies—in all almost 900 print articles and over 100 network news stories. It concluded: "Mainstream environmental reporting took its cue not from press-hungry environmentalists, but from the government, corporate and (often non-science) academic establishments."²¹

The increasing trend for corporations to use front groups and friendly scientists as their mouthpieces has further distorted media reporting on environmental issues, since the media often do not differentiate between corporate front groups and genuine citizen groups, and industry-funded scientists are often treated as independent scientists. Because of the myth of scientific objectivity journalists tend to have an uncritical trust in scientists; few "question the

motivation of the scientists whose research is quoted, rarely attributing a study's funding source or institution's political slant."²² Nor do the mainstream media generally cover the phenomenon of front groups, think-tanks and artificially generated grassroots campaigns, which would serve to undermine their operation by exposing the manipulation and propaganda on which they depend.

Corporations are aided in their bid to dominate news sources by the tendency of most journalists to use, as sources, people from the mainstream establishment, whom they believe have more credibility with their audience. Highly placed government and corporate spokespeople are the safest and easiest sources, in terms of giving stories legitimacy. When environmentalists are used as sources, they tend to be leaders of the 'mainstream' environmental groups, which are regarded as more moderate. Those without power, prestige and position have difficulty establishing their credibility as a source of news, and tend to be marginalized.²³ According to Charlotte Ryan, in her book *Prime Time Activism*:

Using institutional affiliation and famous faces to measure an issue's importance has an interesting overall effect: the criteria implicitly reinforce the stability of government or other powerful institutions while at the same time providing spice via the drama of shifting faces and activities. This is truly novelty without change.²⁴

Journalists who have access to highly placed government and corporate sources have to keep them on side by not reporting anything adverse about them or their organizations, as otherwise they risk losing them as sources of information. In return for this loyalty, their sources occasionally give them good stories, leaks and access to special interviews. Unofficial information, or leaks, give the impression of investigative journalism, but are often strategic manoeuvres on the part of those with position or power.²⁵ "It is a bitter irony of source journalism . . . that the most esteemed journalists are precisely the most servile. For it is by making themselves useful to the powerful that they gain access to the 'best' sources."²⁶

Contrary to all the hype, journalists who gain renown for breaking torrid stories about the federal government may be among those most enmeshed in a mutually-reinforcing web connecting them with power brokers on the inside.²⁷

Winning Over the Journalists

Corporations, and the conservative organizations they fund, have employed a deliberate policy of nurturing and rewarding conservative journalists. In the US, promising journalists have been provided with internships by the Institute for Educational Affairs, which is funded by conservative foundations. Corporations offer awards and prizes to journalists who report business in the way they like; these rewards are sought by journalists, who want the prestige and career enhancement they offer.²⁸ Corporations also offer perks such as meals, gifts, and travel to seduce journalists and ensure favourable stories. Howard Kurtz describes how, when he was with the *Washington Post*, he "was inundated with mail dangling the prospect of freebies" such as hotel stays, meals, entertainment and cruises on ships.²⁹

Journalists who can internalize the value system of their employers will climb the career ladder.³⁰ Top reporters are wooed by those with money and powerful connections. In recent years, high-profile journalists have been getting lecture fees of up to \$50,000 for a single speech to a business audience. And, according to Kurtz, "the bulk of that money comes from corporations and lobbying organizations with more than a passing interest in the issues the journalists write about and yak about for a living."³¹

Since 1990, US politicians have been unable to accept speaking fees from interest groups because of the clear conflict of interest, but journalists are often unable to recognize that their

own situation is similarly compromised, arguing that it does not mean they would give favourable coverage to the corporation providing the fees. However Alan Murray, *Wall Street Journal* bureau chief, pointed out:

You tell me what is the difference between somebody who works full time for the National Association of Realtors and somebody who takes \$40,000 a year in speaking fees from realtor groups. It's not clear to me there's a big distinction.³²

Journalists are generally prohibited by their employers from giving paid speeches to groups they are likely to be covering directly,³³ and controversy over speaking fees has led the three major television networks to impose restrictions on when their journalists can accept them. But influence is often more subtle than favourable reporting to a particular corporation or association that has paid the fees. It may subconsciously influence the way journalists report on corporate affairs in general and on matters that affect corporate interests, especially since they may be earning as much from such fees as they do from their salary.

From the point of view of corporations and trade associations paying these fees, what they are getting for their money, apart from the entertainment and glamour that television 'celebrities' offer, is the establishment of a good relationship. They figure that by the time the journalist has supped and socialized with their executives and their wives, they are less likely to be subject to hostile reporting and more likely to gain access to the journalist to put their side of a story.³⁴

Such fees also provide an example to all journalists of how profitable reporting that is favourable to corporations can be. Bud Ward, in *American Journalism Review*, described how John Stossel, once "the scourge of US corporations when he worked as a TV consumer reporter" is now "winning an ardent following in these same circles" doing television programmes such as a special on *Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?* (watched by sixteen million people), which downplayed environmental and health risks and questioned efforts to regulate those risks. Stossel, who now advocates the elimination of agencies such as the EPA "because they interfere with the market", has become a star speaker, receiving large speaking fees from organisations such as the American Industrial Health Council.³⁵

Indeed, paying a trusted journalist to narrate a documentary that promotes a corporate view point is a means of buying credibility for it. Walter Cronkite from the CBS network, once labelled 'the most trusted man in America', accepted a fee of \$25,000 from the industry front group American Council on Science and Health to narrate a documentary entitled *Big Fears, Little Risks* which dismissed fears about pesticides.³⁶

Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon write in their book *Through the Media Looking Glass* that before becoming White House counselor to President Clinton in 1993; "pundit David Gergen dispensed pro-corporate views on PBS's *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*. Most of Gergen's income came from speeches— \$700,000 from 171 talks in sixteen months."³⁷ Gergen is one of many examples of the revolving door between government and the media. Earlier in his career Gergen had written speeches for Nixon, been Director of Communications for Gerald Ford, and helped with the Reagan election campaign.³⁸ "The well-oiled revolving door between the news business and the political world enables reporters to become press secretaries and political hacks to be reborn as enlightened pundits", says Kurtz.³⁹

In other instances, Pat Buchanan used the US television programme *Crossfire* as a refuelling stop between his Republican presidential campaigns; Ross Perot became a radio talk show host after his presidential campaign; John Sununu made the transition from being George Bush's chief of staff to being simultaneously a lobbyist and consultant to the multinational chemical company W.R. Grace & Co. and host of CNN's *Crossfire* program.⁴⁰ Ronald Reagan's White House spokesperson became an editor of *US News & World Report*, and various speech writers and press secretaries for past presidents have moved into the media. George Will, a member of Reagan's campaign team who helped Reagan prepare for his debates with Carter in

1980, went on to praise Reagan's performance in the debates when he was subsequently an ABC News commentator and columnist for *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*.⁴¹

In Australia there is also a long tradition of journalists becoming press secretaries to politicians, and various members of the former Labour government have gone into media jobs, including John Button, former Industry Minister, and Graham Richardson. Richardson, who once held the posts of Environment Minister and Communications Minister, drawing up the rules for Pay TV, is now a newspaper columnist, Channel 9 executive and top level advisor to media mogul Kerry Packer. Even former Prime Minister Bob Hawke has tried his hand with guest spots on the Australian *60 Minutes* programme.⁴²

As a result of this revolving door between the media and government and also between the media and public relations firms, the elite journalists and frontpeople in the media are often drawn from the ranks of those whose previous jobs were to present the best possible image of corporations, politicians and past presidents. How critical can we expect them to be of the establishment?¹³ Yet when the media broadcasts its news it rarely reveals its own interests, nor the backgrounds or even the current connections of its journalists, reporters and supposedly objective commentators.

Former US Vice-President Dan Quayle claims: "One of the strengths of democracy is diversity, but there is an amazing lack of it at the top levels of the national media. The best-known journalists are rich, travel in elite circles and share a common ideology. They are far removed from the great working-class traditions of American political journalism."⁴⁴ Top journalists receive very high salaries—television news personalities get millions of dollars per year and network correspondents get over \$100,000—which gives them a very privileged view of the world: "They are part of the moneyed class, just like the people they report on." They are happy to support the status quo, because they themselves are doing well out of it.⁴⁵

Many of those who haven't reached the top yet are also fairly well-off. Big city reporters have incomes only "slightly lower than those of their neighbours the lawyers and corporate middle managers".⁴⁶ Modern journalists are fed a continual diet of corporate ideology from their college days, where courses in journalism schools are now endowed by corporations and foundations, and in their jobs they are bombarded daily with propaganda from conservative think-tanks.⁴⁷

Some commentators have suggested that journalists have a social bias arising from their middle-class background, which manifests in the sorts of topics they are interested in and therefore report on. For example, Elizabeth Martinez and Louis Head argue that the media have neglected the issue of environmental racism. Environmental racism is a term that describes the tendency to site hazardous and undesirable facilities in Latino, African, Asian, Native American and other 'minority' communities; Martinez and Head suggest journalists are not generally interested in such communities. Environmental racism was nominated as one of the top twenty-five censored stories in 1991 by the staff of Project Censored at Sonoma State University in California.⁴⁸

Similarly, academic Dorothy Nelkin notes that, despite all its coverage of chemical carcinogens and contaminated sites, journalists have seldom covered the workers in the chemical industry and how they are affected. Occupational health is generally avoided by journalists, and when they do cover it they tend to use official sources rather than workers themselves.⁴⁹

Journalistic Objectivity

Journalists often claim that their own biases and the pressures from advertisers and media owners do not affect their work, because of their professional norm of 'objectivity'. Journalistic objectivity has two components. The first is 'depersonalisation', which means that journalists should not overtly express their own views, evaluations, or beliefs. The second is 'balance',

which involves presenting the views of representatives of both sides of a controversy without favouring one side.⁵⁰ Associated conventions include:

Authoritative sources, such as politicians, must be quoted (in this way the journalist is seen to distance him- or herself from the views reported, by establishing that they are someone else's opinions); 'Tact' must be separated from 'opinion', and 'hard news' from 'editorial comment'; and the presentation of information must be structured pyramidally, with the most important bits coming first, at the 'top' of the story.⁵¹

Any journalistic comment comes from 'specialist' correspondents who are quoted as experts by the reporter, in the same way that a scientist might be. The news reporter refrains from such comment.⁵² These conventions perpetuate the impression that reporters are simply conveying the 'facts' and not trying to influence how people interpret them. The ideal of objectivity gives journalists legitimacy as independent and credible sources of information.

The rhetoric of journalistic objectivity supplies a mask for the inevitable subjectivity that is involved in news reporting, and reassures audiences who might otherwise be wary of the power of the media. It also ensures a certain degree of autonomy to journalists, and freedom from regulation to media corporations.⁵³ However, news reporting involves judgements about what is a good story, who will be interviewed for it, what questions will be asked, which parts of those interviews will be printed or broadcast, what facts are relevant and how the story is written.

Value judgements infuse everything in the news media. . . Which of the infinite observations confronting the reporter will be ignored? Which of the facts noted will be included in the story? Which of the reported events will become the first paragraph? Which story will be prominently displayed on page 1 and which buried inside or discarded? . . . Mass media not only report the news—they also literally *make* the news.⁵⁴

Objectivity in journalism has nothing to do with seeking out the truth, except in so much as truth is a matter of accurately reporting what others have said. This contrasts with the concept of scientific objectivity, where views are supposed to be verified with empirical evidence in a search for the truth.⁵⁵ Ironically, journalistic objectivity discourages a search for evidence: the balancing of opinions often replaces journalistic investigation altogether. FAIR's survey of environmental reporting found that it tended to be "limited to discussion of clashing opinions, rather than facts gathered by the reporters themselves".⁵⁶

1. Balance

The conventions of objectivity, depersonalisation and balance tend to transform the news into a series of quotes and comments from a remarkably small number of sources. Balance means ensuring that statements by those challenging the establishment are balanced with statements by those whom they are criticising, though not necessarily the other way round." For example, despite claims by the nuclear industry of anti-nuclear media bias, a FAIR study of news clippings collected by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission over a five-month period found that no news articles cited anti-nuclear views without also citing a pro-nuclear response, whereas twenty-seven per cent of articles cited only pro-nuclear views. (It also found that seventy-two per cent of editorials and fifty-six per cent of opinion columns were pro-nuclear.)⁵⁸

Balance means getting opinions from both sides (where the journalist recognizes that there are two sides) but not necessarily covering the spectrum of opinion. More radical opinions are generally left out. The US EPA is sometimes used as an environmental source in one story and as an anti-environmentalist source in another. Nor are opposing opinions always treated equally in terms of space, positioning and framing.⁵⁹ Balance does not guarantee neutrality even when sources are treated fairly, since the choice of balancing sources can be distorted. FAIR gives the example of a *Nightline* show where radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh argued that

volcanoes are the main cause of ozone depletion. (This is an example of a growing talk show tradition of featuring right-wing ideologues as experts on scientific questions.) Limbaugh was 'balanced' with then Senator Al Gore "who argued that the answer to ecological problems was more 'capitalism'".⁶⁰

In practice, objectivity means journalists have to interview legitimate elites on all major sides of a dispute, and this gives the powerful guaranteed access to the media no matter how flimsy their argument or how transparently self-interested. In their attempts to be balanced on a scientific story, journalists may use any opposing view "no matter how little credence it may get from the larger scientific community".⁶¹ But giving equal treatment to two sides of an argument can often provide a misleading impression. Phil Shabecoff, former environment reporter for the *New York Times*, gives the example of views on climate change:

The findings of the International Panel on Climate Change—a body of some 200 eminent scientists named by the World Meteorological Organization of the United Nations Environment Program—is generally considered to be the consensus position. But I have seen a number of stories where its conclusions are given equal or less weight than those of a single scientist who has done little or no significant peer-review research in the field, is rarely, if ever, cited on those issues in the scientific literature, and whose publication is funded by a fossil-fuel industry group with an obvious axe to grind. . . for a reporter, at this stage of the debate, to give equal or even more weight to that lonely scientist with suspect credentials is, in my view, taking sides in the debate.⁶²

In the environmental magazine, *Sierra*, Paul Rauber gave another example of how equal treatment can give a misleading impression:

Hundreds, maybe thousands of people gather to call for the factory to stop polluting or for the clearcutting to end. In one little corner, half a dozen loggers or millwork-ers hold a counter-demonstration on company time. That night on the evening news, both sides get equal coverage.⁶³

2. Depersonalisation

The requirements of objectivity often lead journalists to leave out interpretations and analysis which might be construed as personal views, to play it safe by reporting events without explaining their meaning, and to keep stories light and superficial so as not to offend anyone.⁶¹ Bagdikian relates how:

News became neutralized both in selection of items and in nature of writing. American journalism began to strain out ideas and ideology from public affairs, except for the safest and most stereotyped assumptions about patriotism and business enterprise. It adopted what two generations of newspeople have incorrectly called 'objectivity'.⁶⁵

Journalists who accurately report what their sources say can effectively remove responsibility for their stories onto their sources. The ideal of objectivity therefore encourages uncritical reporting of official statements and those of authority figures. In this way, the individual biases of individual journalists are avoided but institutional biases are reinforced.⁶⁶

Professional codes ensure that what is considered important is that which is said and done by important people. And important people are people in power. TV news thus privileges holders of power. . . Its focus on individual authority figures as privileged spokespersons reflects the ideologies of individualism and elite authority.⁶⁷

The occasional environmental journalist finds the pretence of objectivity goes against their conscience. Teya Ryan, producer of CNN's program *Network Earth*, wrote: "As the air in Los

Angeles grew browner, more debilitating. . . as the destruction of the world's rain forests became widely known; and as everyone wondered where to put the trash—particularly the plutonium—I wondered if 'balanced' reporting was still appropriate."⁶⁸ Others see it as necessary for their credibility: "The peril is that if readers perceive journalists as having become advocates rather than reporters, then they won't trust anything they read or say."⁶⁹

The appearance of objectivity is so important that some media outlets don't even let their journalists take part in public political activity, such as marches and demonstrations, even as individual citizens in their own time. Journalists at the *Washington Post*, for example, received a memo stating: "It is unprofessional for you. . . to take part in political or issue demonstrations, no matter on which side or how seemingly worthy the cause."⁷⁰

3. Sphere of Objectivity

The rules of objectivity only apply to a recognized sphere of controversy. If two sides are not recognized, there is no perceived need for balance. Some ideological assumptions are "so taken for granted" by the mainstream media that they don't even recognize them as being ideological.⁷¹ Jeff Cohen, executive director of FAIR, points out that journalists recognize a propaganda of the left and a propaganda of the right but not a propaganda of the centre. "Being in the center— being a centrist—is somehow not having an ideology at all. Somehow centrism is not an "ism" carrying with it values, opinions and beliefs."⁷² Michael Parent!, author of *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media*, says:

Journalists (like social scientists and others) rarely doubt their own objectivity even as they faithfully echo the established political vocabularies and the prevailing politico-economic orthodoxy. Since they do not cross any forbidden lines, they are not reined in. So they are likely to have no awareness they are on an ideological leash.⁷³

Journalists are free to write what they like if they produce well-written stories "free of any politically discordant tones"; that is, if what they write fits the ideology of those above them in the hierarchy. A story that supports the status quo is generally considered to be neutral and is not questioned in terms of its objectivity, while one that challenges the status quo tends to be perceived as having a "point of view" and therefore biased. Statements and assumptions that support the existing power structure are regarded as 'facts' whilst those that are critical of it tend to be rejected as 'opinions'.⁷⁴ For example, one study of environmental stories found that: "While the media were willing to dispute dire environmental predictions, they were more accepting of dire economic projections—citing enormous anticipated job losses while rarely asking how the figures were derived, or if plant closings and layoffs were the only options."⁷⁵

Some questions also remain outside the realm of contested territory. *Village Voice* journalist Daniel Lazare points out that media reports on energy consumption in the US consistently ignore the cheap and easy availability of fuel, and the subsidies and tax concessions supporting oil production and energy consumption in the US as being a factor that encourages wasteful consumption. Lazare blames this on the fact that "taxes remain a dirty word inside Washington" and also on "political conformism and cultural insularity" in most newsrooms: "Cheap gas, cars and highways are—unquestionably—the American way."⁷⁶

Objectivity not only stops short of the centre; it also doesn't go too far away from the centre. Although the media in countries such as Britain and the US are fairly impartial when it comes to the spectrum covered by the established political parties they have been much less fair to views outside this establishment consensus: "Impartiality and objectivity, in this sense, stop at the point where political consensus ends—and the more radical the dissent, the less impartial and objective the media."⁷⁷

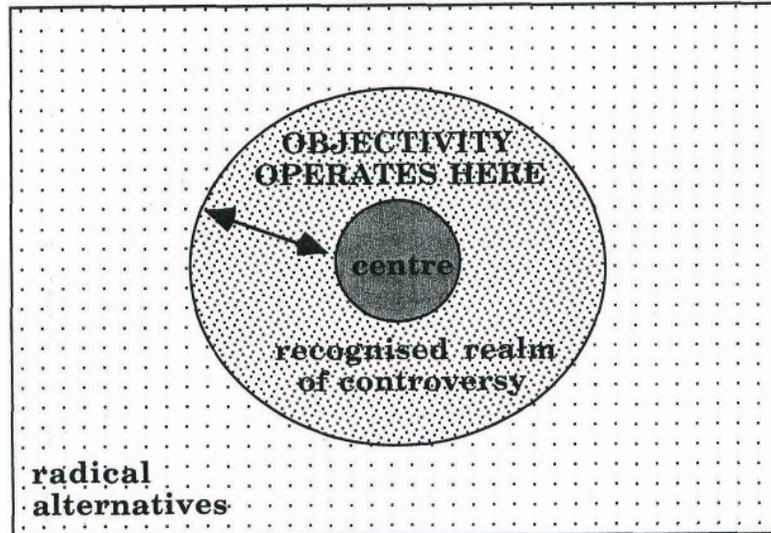


Figure 1: Limited Operation of Objectivity Conventions

Framing and Presenting the News

The environmental movement relies extensively on the mass media to get its message across to the general public, but doing so has its costs.

In the late twentieth century, political movements feel called upon to rely on large-scale communications in order to *matter*, to say who they are and what they intend to publics they want to sway; but in the process they become 'newsworthy' only by submitting to the implicit rules of newsmaking, by conforming to journalistic notions (themselves embedded in history) of what a 'story' is, what an 'event' is, what a 'protest' is. The processed image then tends to become 'the movement' for wider publics. . .⁷⁸

In his analysis of how the media treated the new left student movement of the 1960s and 70s, Todd Gitlin observes that the movement was at first trivialized and marginalized through images that emphasized frivolity, youth, outlandish-ness, militancy and deviance whilst understating numbers and effectiveness, and neglecting the content of the movement's statements and the causes of the students' protests.⁷⁹ "Thus the protesters were made the issue rather than the things about which they were protesting."⁸⁰ Such media images and symbols are powerful, not only in shaping the public perception of a movement but also the movement's perception of itself.

The media tends to present images and style, rather than meaning and content: "The media intervene to label these activities as deviant or illegitimate, marginalizing them and diverting public attention away from the root causes of social conflict towards its epiphenomenal forms."⁸¹ Protest actions and events are described as theatre spectacles rather than as "part of a democratic struggle over vital issues".⁸² It is the style that is copied and multiplied, whilst the radical message of the protesters is diluted and ignored. Kellner argues that "when television portrays social change or oppositional movements, it often blunts the radical edge of new social forces, values, or changes. Moreover, it tries to absorb, co-opt, and defuse any challenges to the existing organization of society."⁸³

Environmental problems are poorly reported in the media because of the need to provide entertainment rather than political awareness, to attract audiences for advertisers, even in news and current affairs programmes. This occasionally affects a specific item of news but more

generally affects the kinds of stories that are covered and the way they are covered. News editors are reluctant to deal with controversial political and social issues that might alienate potential consumers. As a result news has become bland and neutral, and ignores issues that concern large portions of the population who are not considered to have or exercise much buying power (see Chapter One).⁸¹

Yet bland news can be boring, so the lack of controversy and social significance is made up for by making the news entertaining and interesting. Intellectual and political interest is replaced by 'human interest', conflict, novelty, emotion and drama, or as one feature writer put it "currency, celebrity, proximity, impact and oddity"—the elements of newsworthiness.⁸⁵ In his book *The Media*, Keith Windschuttle claims that each news outlet has a 'news formula' which aims to attract a loyal, predictable audience for advertisers. The 'news formula is a way of selecting 'good stories' for this purpose; an "unwritten hierarchy of favoured news". He says that "the formula of the popular, or down-market, press [is] based on stories about celebrities, disasters, monsters, politics and deviance".⁸⁶

Another way of maintaining interest on television is to have constantly changing images. Academic Kiko Adatto has documented in her book *Picture Perfect* the decreasing length of the sound bite in the US, which had fallen from 42.3 seconds in 1968 to 9.8 seconds in 1988. "Politics, in other words, was being shot and edited to the rhythms of a Coca-Cola advertisement. Forget about hearing a whole paragraph on a policy decision; a politician was now lucky to finish a sentence." This trend has also been observed in Australia, where John Henningham, a Professor of Journalism, has studied news bulletins on Channel 9. He found that each shot lasts an average of less than five seconds, and that there are up to thirty-three shots in reports that last little more than a minute. He agrees that "news bulletins are striving for the visual excitement of the commercial or rock clip."⁸⁷

Entertainment merges with current affairs, producing 'infotainment' which, as Philip Gold notes in the conservative magazine *Insight on the News*, blends "trivial amusement with the address of serious issues", reduces "serious reportage into fragmented coverage of the latest 'shocking developments'" and squeezes out "more serious discourse". Television news producers prefer very short stories with good visuals, and action stories that add excitement to the news. They are very good at providing drama and emotion but poor at giving in-depth information on complex issues.⁸⁸ News stories are presented very quickly, in rapid succession and with little explanation. "The typical anchor delivers more than two hundred words a minute." As a result, people who rely on television to get their news tend to be "the least-informed members of the public".⁸⁹

The need to entertain turns social processes and events into stories, "with some unfolding built into the action, starting somewhere and leading to somewhere else".⁹⁰ Stories that "elicit strong emotions" are best:

Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, or drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end.⁹¹

Stories that take longer than a day to unfold are told as a series of climaxes.⁹² Says one editor: "Acid rain, hazardous waste. . . they're the kind of big bureaucratic stories that make people's eyes glaze over. There's no clear solution, no clear impact. They're not sexy."⁹³ The news media are poor at dealing with slow-moving changes and "indeterminate or fluid situations". The news "is characteristically about events rather than processes, and effects rather than causes". As a result, environmental reporting tends to concentrate on events such as the Earth Summit or various Earth Days, accidents and disasters such as oil tanker spills, and official announcements.⁹⁴

Media outlets stress immediate events; they do not back track on past events because they want their audiences to tune in or buy their newspapers every day. They want to give the impression that they will miss out on something if they don't. "The focus on what just happened, the emphasis on getting scoops and beating the opposition to a story that everyone would have reported anyway in a day, says that knowing what just happened is the crucial thing." This means journalists have to work to very tight deadlines and don't have the time to investigate properly and consult a wide range of sources.⁹⁵ Each story competes for priority and an emphasis on 'breaking news' doesn't encourage coverage of long-term issues.

The journalistic tendency to balance stories with two opposing views leads to a tendency to "build stories around a confrontation between protagonists and antagonists".⁹⁶ Despite their importance, issues such as garbage and sewage sludge only get coverage when there is a fight over the siting of a landfill or incinerator, and then the coverage is on the "anger and anguish of affected citizens, or the conflicting claims of corporate spokesmen, government regulators and environmental activists" rather than the issues and technical background to them. A survey of media coverage in the US in 1991 commissioned by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers found that independent experts were seldom used as sources: "The news was not oriented toward describing or explaining the problem, but rather toward disputes over what should be done about it."⁹⁷

In one story by ABC's *Nightline*, for example, Nebraskan residents opposing a 'low-level' radioactive waste dump in their neighbourhood attempted to present, with the help of an EPA expert Hugh Kaufman, rational arguments involving discussion of various technical issues. However, according to Kaufman, the TV crew wanted emotional material and in the end used archive footage of heated meetings to get the emotional content they wanted:

They defined the issue this way: The public are a bunch of emotional misfits who think about Chernobyl and aren't doing their homework, while proponents are these brilliant technical experts. In other words they walked in with a predetermined story when, in fact, what they had seen in Nebraska was just the opposite.⁹⁸

This is a feature of many news stories about local controversies. The intelligence and research of local residents is downplayed, and they are presented as passionate, self-interested and inexperienced. This tends to discourage wider support for their cause from the viewing public and to disempower other citizens by depriving them of attractive models of political activism.

Stories need characters, so personalities become important in television news and celebrities are created. The focus on individuals also means that the way that individual examples and actions fit into a broader social context is left out.⁹⁹ David Ricci, in his book *The Transformation of American Politics*, says:

In the case of politics, it is usually a tale of individuals. . . where one dramatic persona struggles against another for power and personal gain. Such 'horse race' journalism tends to slight the importance of political parties and social issues because, after all, they are less exciting, more difficult to film, and almost impossible to describe without longer verbal expositions than television ordinarily cares to provide.¹⁰⁰

Having to fit with media imperatives also influences politicians and the policies they pursue: policies that can be explained in simple terms and converted into positive media symbols are preferred. As journalist Howard Kurtz points out, the television format, with its need to keep things moving and avoid the audience becoming bored and switching channels, favours the status quo because "the case for reform is always more complicated" and takes time to explain.¹⁰¹

Talk show campaign spots have revealed that the questions that ordinary callers ask of politicians are quite different from those asked by reporters. Citizens are interested in policies

and how they will be affected by them, whereas reporters want to know about political strategies and power plays. Media coverage of politics tends to focus on strategies rather than issues, and avoids discussion of policies which would require journalists having to actually read legislation and analyse its implications. "Since each question tends to be framed around the never-ending battles between the White House and Congress," writes Kurtz, "the debate is circumscribed in a way that excludes unorthodox or unpopular notions."¹⁰²

This is by no means a unique feature of US politics. Writing in the British magazine *New Statesman & Society*, Steven Barnett observes: "It is now universally acknowledged that the conduct of politics is increasingly dictated by modern techniques of publicity and media exploitation. Proper political dialogue takes second place to the sharpness of the suit, the succinctness of the sound-bite, the control of interviews and the use of advertising techniques."¹⁰³

Similarly Warwick Beutler, a former political reporter for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ABC, says that until the mid-1980s journalists focused much more on the substance of parliamentary bills, but now they report the power struggles. Former Labor MP Fred Daly agreed, saying that most media coverage concentrates on the mistakes and manoeuvres of politicians rather than the parliamentary debate.¹⁰⁴

James Fallows, the Washington editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, says in his book *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine Democracy* that in their efforts to entertain, journalists have been "concentrating on conflict and spectacle, building up celebrities and tearing them down, presenting a crisis or issue with the volume turned all the way up, only to drop that issue and turn to the next emergency".¹⁰⁵ And Simon Hoggart, writing in *New Statesman & Society*, observes that the tendency of some US newspapers and tabloid TV shows to offer "'News McNuggets', events chopped up, stuffed with artificial flavouring, and served in bite-sized portions", is heading towards Britain, where "news is becoming increasingly a ready-processed product designed to make no call on understanding or imagination." Hoggart describes the tendency to turn all news into a human interest story, and if it is not amenable to that, not to cover it. This involves picturing victims and heroes, and not bothering with the social analysis and historical background.¹⁰⁶

News stories are told as "self-contained, isolated happenings". Events from wars to union strikes are presented without historical or social context, which would take too much time or space. Reporting of environmental problems tends to be superficial, narrowing the focus to specific events in isolation rather than looking at systemic problems that caused them, such as the international monetary system or the unregulated power of corporations, and concentrating on the costs of environmental measures. Environmental problems become a series of events that emphasize individual action rather than social forces and issues.¹⁰⁷

Current affairs programmes do expose corporate misdeeds, accidents and environmental and health problems resulting from unsafe products and production processes, but in a way that does not call into question "fundamental political or economic structures and institutions".¹⁰⁸

By treating business wrongdoings as isolated deviations from the socially beneficial system of 'responsible capitalism', the media overlook the systemic features that produce such abuses and the regularity with which they occur. Business 'abuse' is presented in the national press as an occasional aberration, rather than as a predictable and common outcome of corporate power and the business system. The expose *that treats the event as an isolated and atypical incident implicitly affirms the legitimacy of the system.* . . .¹⁰⁹

Environmental disasters are rarely followed up, and environmental revelations that are uncovered by journalists are "seldom incorporated into the body of knowledge and perspective" that environmental journalists draw on in their work. Miranda Spencer, writing in *Extra'*, gives the example of the expose in *Christian Science Monitor* that air pollution reductions reported by

corporations were "based on paperwork tricks" which failed to inform later reporting of the Clean Air Act.¹¹⁰

Former *Boston Globe* journalist Dianne Dumanoski admits, with reference to environmental reporting, "Our coverage is all too often driven by our business's appetite for novelty and conflict. We often don't do a good job of reporting on the science of complicated issues, and we generally do a lousy job of helping our audience understand uncertainty, which is the central dilemma faced in making environmental policy."¹¹¹

Lack of Diversity in News Reporting

Clearly journalists and their editors are only one of the filters through which news stories must pass. While individual journalists may have left leanings, this is not reflected in national news coverage. This is because "the news is not what reporters report but what editors and owners decide to print" or broadcast.¹¹² Editors are free to cut, edit or drop stories without consulting the journalists who wrote them. There is seldom a need for direct intervention by owners to ensure a corporate or conservative slant to the news. "Rather, managers in business, government, and the media share a common mindset which informs and prioritizes news coverage."¹¹³

Most journalists learn which stories are likely to be run and which are not, and internalize this so it becomes a form of self-censorship that many are unaware of.¹¹⁴ Those that don't self-censor do not get very far. Anthony Bevins, who worked on a number of 'quality' British papers, wrote in the *British Journalism Review*.

It is daft to suggest that individuals can buck the system, ignore the pre-set 'taste' of their newspapers, use their own news sense in reporting the truth of any event, and survive. Dissident reporters who do not deliver the goods suffer professional death. They are ridden by newsdesks and backbench executives, they have their stories spiked on a systematic basis, they face the worst sort of newspaper punishment— byline deprivation.¹¹⁵

Indeed, various former environmental writers claim to have been victimized or lost their jobs for investigating stories that their employers would rather not have investigated or for their perceived environmental bias. Bruce Selcraig, in *Sierra*, gives examples of several environmental journalists in the West of the US who "were reassigned or simply made so miserable they left". He quotes Jim Detjen, President of the rapidly growing Society of Environmental Journalists: "Virtually every veteran environmental writer I know, has been threatened with the loss of his or her job at one time or another."¹¹⁶

The influence of editors, owners and advertisers as well as journalistic conventions are clearly more important to the final result of journalism than the differences between individual journalists, as otherwise there would be more difference between the way various media outlets report the news. The mass media are extremely homogenous in the news it delivers. In the US, most national news is reported from Washington, DC by an ever-increasing number of journalists (more than 10,000 in the 1990s) who "track the same individuals, institutions, and events" in a similar way.¹¹⁷ Kurtz claims that the chorus of voices fails to "challenge the underlying assumptions of official Washington" so that "any argument that lacks significant support in Congress is blown off the radar screen as irrelevant."¹¹⁸ Even reporting of local happenings tends to be shaped by a general approach and framework set at a national level and local newspapers often take their lead from national newspapers.¹¹⁹

As mainstream journalism has centralized its focus and its personnel, it has developed a commonality in perspective that reinforces its own dominant beliefs and messages, in sharp contrast to the older system of competition among newspapers of differing

ideologies. By and large, those journalists who remain geographically outside Washington look to their on-scene counterparts for raw information and, increasingly, opinion and analysis, . . . it is not so very misleading to speak of the news media' as a singular entity, replete with its own rules, norms, beliefs, leaders, and its own independent ability to shape events.¹²⁰

The difference between network television stations is minimal. Well-known media critic Edward Herman explains the reason that the news is reported the same way on every channel, and indeed all over the English-speaking world:

The media's frequently homogenous behaviour arises 'naturally' out of industry structure, common sources, ideology, patriotism and the power of the government and top media sources to define newsworthiness and frameworks of discourse. Self-censorship, market forces, and the norms of news practices may produce and maintain a particular viewpoint as effectively as formal state censorship.¹²¹

Chapter 14

Conclusion: Declining Democracy

Surveys show that the majority of people in most countries are not only concerned about the environment: they think environmental protection should be regulated by governments and given priority over economic growth.¹ Yet this widespread public concern is not translating into government action because of the activities of large corporations that are seeking to subvert or manipulate the popular will.

A recent *ABC News/ Washington Post* survey, for instance, found that nearly three-quarters of people in the US didn't think government was doing enough to protect the environment; an *NEC News/ Wall Street Journal* survey found that a majority of respondents wanted environmental regulations strengthened (compared to less than one in five people who thought they should be weakened). Similarly, a *Time/CNN* poll found that a majority of people wanted environmental expenditure by government increased, with only sixteen per cent wanting it reduced. A Harris survey found that most people would be willing to pay more taxes and higher prices if the money was spent "to protect and restore endangered species". And a Gallup poll in 1995 found that two-thirds of people agreed that "protection of the environment should be given a priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth", a result mirrored in a 1994 *Times Mirror* Magazines survey.²

Despite such public opinion, the Republican-dominated Congress has actually been dismantling and weakening existing environmental regulations, with devastating consequences for the environment. *The Economist* recently reported an OECD study that found the environment was deteriorating in the US:

Wetlands, good for wildlife, are being mopped up by developers; extinctions are increasing. . . Municipal waste accumulates: each American now jettisons 2kg of rubbish a day, more than any other people on earth. Nuclear waste and used nuclear fuel pile up in temporary stores. The number of vehicles on the roads has doubled since 1970, and drivers cover twice as many miles. . . Some 15% of rivers and 10% of lakes are still too gubby for people to swim or fish in. Some 59m people still live in areas where the air is dirtier than the government thinks safe. And the United States remains the world's largest producer of carbon dioxide, which may be causing global warming.³

Yet the corporate-generated Congressional attack on environmental legislation goes on relentlessly. Industry groups have used their lobbyists, their political contributions, their coalitions and front groups to achieve this result.

Lobbyists for the coalitions have provided staff to Republican lawmakers, drafted parts of bills, and sat on the dais with congressmembers during committee meetings; they even set up an office adjacent to the House floor to write amendments during the floor debate last March. . . 267 political action committees (dubbed the Dirty Water PACs because of their anti-environmental agenda) contributed \$57 million to political candidates between 1989 and 1994.⁴

The pattern of public concern and government inaction is repeated in other countries. For example, whilst Australians are amongst the world's most environmentally concerned people, their government's environmental record is one of the worst for OECD countries. A 1994 *Sydney Morning Herald* Saulwick poll found that fifty-seven per cent of people surveyed thought environmental protection should have a higher priority than economic growth,⁵ while a NSW EPA survey, which also found high levels of environmental concern, discovered a "strong community perception that the politicians are out of touch with voters on environmental issues".⁶

The London-based New Economics Foundation, in comparing the environmental performance of twenty-one OECD countries, found that Australia, Canada and the US were at the bottom of the list, with Australia at number eighteen, Canada at twenty and the US last at twenty-one (the UK was at number ten). Australians rivalled Americans in terms of garbage production and carbon dioxide emissions per head. Australia also scored badly, as did the US, on energy efficiency, species extinctions and private vehicle use.⁷ The influence of the industrial lobby in Australia is clearest on the greenhouse issue, where the government relies on coal and mining industry-funded studies in its decision-making. This led to the situation where the Australian government lobbied (unsuccessfully) to obstruct an international climate agreement in Berlin in 1995, even after the US supported it.⁸ In 1997 Australia continued to lobby Japan and other countries to oppose European proposals for uniform international greenhouse gas reductions,

The media can give a distorted impression of public opinion on environmental and other issues. Michael Parent!, in his book *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media*, argues:

Public opinion is not just an expression of sentiment; it is a democratic power resource that sometimes constrains and directs policymakers who otherwise spend their time responding to the demands and enticements of moneyed interests. . . The media short-circuit the process by which public preference may otherwise be translated into government policy.⁹

The gap between what the majority wants and what government delivers would seem to indicate a failure of democracy. Yet, ironically, the corporate subversion of the green movement described in this book has been a response to the effective exercise of democratic power by citizen and environmental activists two decades earlier. Although robber barons of a much earlier era like William Vanderbilt could declare "The public be damned!",¹⁰ modern corporate executives cannot afford to take this attitude.

Alex Carey, author of *Taking the Risk out of Democracy*, argued that the twentieth century has seen three related developments: "the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy."¹¹ Similarly, Noam Chomsky argued in his book *Necessary Illusions*:

In the democratic system, the necessary illusions cannot be imposed by force. Rather, they must be instilled in the public mind by more subtle means. A totalitarian state can be satisfied with lesser degrees of allegiance to required truths. It is sufficient that people obey; what they think is of secondary concern. But in a democratic political order, there is always the danger that independent thought might be translated into political action, so it is important to eliminate the threat at its root.¹²

Corporate Power

Corporate power has various dimensions. Traditionally, it has been institutionalized in government decision-making structures as a result of the importance of corporate investment to economic growth and the provision of employment. Individual companies can threaten to withdraw that investment if they do not get their way. It is therefore in the interests of government to negotiate and consult extensively with corporate representatives on all policy matters that may affect them. This gives corporations privileged access to government policy-making. In many countries, such as Britain and Australia, "policy-making occurs not so much in parliament or indeed even in cabinet, but in a more decentralized pattern of *policy communities* involving institutionalized interaction between key departments, relevant statutory authorities, advisory committees and a range of select, client interest groups."¹³

Clearly the bargaining power that any particular company can exercise will depend on its size, the number of people it employs, its ability to move offshore and the state of the economy in the country where the company is exercising that power.¹⁴ The more that corporations can cooperate and present a coherent and united political agenda, the more power they will have. The degree of corporate influence can fluctuate over time, and in the late 1960s and 1970s corporate power was particularly weak. However since that time corporations have consciously built coalitions, set aside individual differences and become more politically active and consequently more powerful.

Another traditional form of influence has been through financial contributions to parties and candidates; it costs millions of dollars just to run for office in the USA, and most of that comes from corporations, including seventy per cent of contributions to the Democrat and the Republican parties.¹⁵ In the UK, corporate donations seem to account for over half of all donations to the Conservative Party (£4.3 million out of £7.3 million in 1992/3). But donations don't have to be made public; almost two-thirds of donations received between 1987 and 1991 cannot be traced to their donors by outsiders to the Party. According to Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann in *The New Statesman & Society* in 1994:

The Tories' finances are one of the great unsolved mysteries of British politics. . . . What is known about the Tories is that they have received substantial sums from companies and individuals with commercial interests in government spending and policy decisions. The big corporate donors of the past fifteen years include defence, engineering and construction companies that have benefited from large government contracts, tobacco companies that want to prevent legal constraints on advertising their products, and privatized utilities.¹⁶

In Australia, business directly sponsors political party campaigns rather than individual candidates, and the major parties, Labor, Liberal and National, receive the majority of their financial support in this way.¹⁷

However, politicians are concerned with getting re-elected, and this means that public opinion matters. Citizens generally do not like the idea that government is run to suit those with economic power and resources. With the rise of public interest groups in the 1960s and 70s, the closed policy-making arrangements between industry and government were 'forced open' and governments had to listen to other voices. Environmental groups and others gathered their own information, some of it from government files using Freedom of Information Acts. This information could be effectively used in hearings and in the media, and decision-makers learned to take account of a greater range of interests and to justify their decisions on rational grounds.¹⁸

This need for 'rational' decisions meant bureaucrats "churned out an endless stream of statistics, reports, hearings, bulletins, journals, rulings, proposals, statements, press reports, and other forms of information" on every issue.¹⁹ Politicians were now exposed to a far greater range of information from more sources and had to appear to be making informed decisions. A new market was thus created for a particular kind of information which enabled politicians to justify decisions that were often still being influenced by financial donations and corporate pressure.²⁰

In response, the major corporations opened up public affairs offices. Public relations firms, lobbyists and think-tanks proliferated, shaping and moulding information and manufacturing expertise on behalf of their clients and offering it to the politicians. Although caught somewhat off-guard at first, in many ways the move towards information-based decisions has suited business interests because of their ability to hire experts—scientists, economists and statisticians— and their fear of losing the 'emotional' battle.

Clearly not all interest groups have equal resources at their disposal, and in their efforts to persuade government some groups have more bargaining power, time, resources and energy.²¹ As William Greider asks in his book *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*: "Who can afford to show up at all these public hearings? Who will be able to deploy their own lawyers or scientists or economists to testify expertly on behalf of their agenda? Who is going to hire the lobbyists to track the legislative debate at every laborious stage? Most citizens do not qualify."²² Public-interest groups, such as environmental groups, find it impossible to keep up with all the public hearings and submissions.

Corporations clearly have far greater financial resources at their disposal. As pressure groups, they can invest millions of dollars into grassroots organising, polls, lawyers, computer and satellite technology, video news releases, and professional advice to put their case directly to politicians and government officials and to garner public support.

The greater power of corporations in a democratic system has long been recognized. In 1978 an effort to regulate the amount of money that corporations could spend on propaganda was defeated in the US Supreme Court. A dissenting judge observed:

Corporations are artificial entities created by law for the purpose of furthering certain economic goals. It has long been recognized, however, that the special status of corporations has placed them in a position to control vast amounts of economic power which may, if not regulated, dominate not only the economy but also the very heart of our democracy, the electoral process.²³

Since that time, corporations have indeed set out to use their economic power to dominate the machinery of democracy. Greider argues that a new industry has emerged in Washington that he calls "democracy for hire". He says this involves the packaging and sale of democratic expression, and "guarantees the exclusion of most Americans from the debate."²⁴ He points out that:

Only those who have accumulated lots of money are free to play in this version of democracy. . . Modern methodologies of persuasion have created a new hierarchy of influence over government decisions—a new way in which organized money dominates the action while the unorganized voices of citizens are inhibited from speaking.²⁵

The traditional pluralist account of competing interest groups gives a veneer of democratic respectability to what is in reality a corporate rout: "The steady diffusion of authority has simply multiplied the opportunities for power to work its will. . . pluralist deal-making continues in the guise of governing—but now the entrenched monied interests are back in charge of the marketplace, running the tables in the grand bazaar."²⁶ Governments, rather than weighing the demands of various interests, are less and less responsive to public opinion and more and more influenced by these corporations and monied interests.

A primary assumption of democracy is that there is no collusion of interests between government and the groups trying to lobby them, but in practice this is not the case. During the 1980s a close and at times unethical relationship developed in the US between lobbyists and the Reagan administration:

Members of Congress worked in tandem with lobbyists to generate 'grassroots' support for pet issues. Lobbyists formed coalitions to support the White House's favorite issues. The White House recruited lobbyists to help with controversial appointees needing Senate confirmation. The Congressional committees or the White House Commissions that were supposed to be looking out for the people's interests, who were to oversee the agencies, who were to clean up the 'messes' when discovered, worked with and were

often comprised of lobbyists and publicists. The very organizations designed to protect America from an abusive system had become part of the system.²⁷

Yet despite their huge influence, or perhaps because of it, there is almost no government scrutiny or regulation of lobbying activities.²⁸ John Stauber, editor of *PR Watch*, says; "The corporate flacks, hacks, lobbyists and influence peddlers, the practitioners of modern PR... have become a kind of occupation army in our democracy."²⁹

The revolving door syndrome further weakens the separation between government and corporate interests. The creation of a senior executive service in the US and in countries like Australia has enabled business people and those whom they have funded in think-tanks to penetrate the top layers of government bureaucracy. Each new administration appoints the top levels of the agencies and departments such as State, Defense and Treasury. These appointments often come from the corporate sector, "corporate leaders who sever their numerous directorships to serve in government for two or three years, then return to the corporate community in a same or different capacity."³⁰ In Australia they retain their corporate shareholdings whilst in government unless there is an obvious conflict of interest with their ministerial duties. In any case, it is unlikely that they lose their corporate perspective during their period of office.

Similarly, senior bureaucrats and politicians are often employed by corporations, think-tanks, the media and lobbying firms when they lose office or retire from it. In Australia, key politicians from the previous Labor Government have moved into organizations such as the Plastics Industry trade association, and into consultancies which help developers gain government approval for environmentally damaging projects. To have this opportunity, these former government officials need to service corporate interests whilst in office. The same is true of top public servants. Similarly, in the US, as has been documented earlier in this book, there is a regular flow of personnel between government administrations and think-tanks, the media and public relations firms. Some think-tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, actively select and train young people with this in mind. Robert Sherrill, in the fifth edition of his well-used university text *Why They Call it Politics: A Guide to America's Government*, points out:

The revolving door between government and industry is oiled by money. Former high-level bureaucrats and politicians leave government to become well-paid lobbyists for big business—often the same big-business elements that they were allegedly regulating when they entered government. (Many were alumni of big business at the time they entered government; revolving doors, after all, do go in a circle.)³¹

The shareholdings of politicians provide another mechanism by which corporate interests are protected. In 1996 there was a major controversy in Australia over the shareholdings of the newly elected Liberal government³² and their potential to create conflicts of interest. However this seems to be accepted practice in the UK where, in 1995, 389 out of 566 MPs had registered financial interests "in outside bodies, directly related to being an MP".³³ Liberal Democrat MP David Alton noted:

Prime Ministers soon find solace in directorships and consultancies outside government. On the backbenches the same holds true. One hundred and thirty-five Conservative MPs hold 287 directorships and 146 consultancies between them, and the other parties are not immune. Twenty-nine Labour members share sixty directorships and forty-three consultancies; while Liberal Democrats hold a total of fifteen.³⁴

The UK adds another dimension to the relationship between business and government by enabling big corporate donors to have their directors knighted; they may subsequently be placed in the House of Lords, where they become part of the legislative system. According to

Alton, a donation of more than £500,000 has a fifty per cent chance of earning a knighthood for a company director.³⁵

Close relationships between politicians and industry executives can affect environmental legislation in other ways. Not only do politicians find their way onto corporate boards during and after their terms in government, but industry executives are also often placed on government committees, where they can help make and implement government policy. In 1995 Sir Ron Dearing, director of the corporation IMI, which donated £30,000 to the Tories in 1993, was appointed chairman of the National Curriculum Council; he was recently responsible for a report into higher education in the UK.³⁶

In 1995 the UK committee which set pollution limits for the cement industry had a membership that included people from the British Cement Association, the British Association of Cement Manufacturers, British Pre-Cast Concrete Federation, ARC Southern, Castle Cement, Pioneer Aggregates and the British Ready Mixed Concrete Association.³⁷ Two years later a House of Commons Select Committee, set up following public concerns about the increased use by cement kilns of industrial waste as a fuel source, found that the control of cement kiln emissions by the Environment Agency had been, according to *New Scientist*, "lax and secretive".³⁸

The close relationship between corporations and governments is especially important when it comes to the implementation of laws. Once a law is enacted, politicians feel satisfied that they have been seen to be doing something, and the media spotlight tends to be removed. Yet it is then that the real negotiations begin. In Washington, for example, tens of thousands of lawyers, lobbyists, trade associations, consultants and business people then engage in a struggle "over the content of federal regulations—the precise meaning that will flow from the laws that Congress has enacted."³⁹

Covert Power

The structural power of corporations through their ownership and control of a large part of any modern nation's economy, and their power as a highly resourced and powerful pressure group with close ties to government, are supplemented by a third form of power which is far more covert: the power to set the political agenda and shape perceptions.⁴⁰ Corporations seek not only to influence legislation and regulation but also to define the agenda—what it is legitimate for government to consider and what can be discussed in the political arena—thereby rendering those groups who have other agendas ineffective. "Everybody is compelled to work within a system of values and institutional rules which restricts the formal political process to making the current system work, even though the system only benefits the few."⁴¹ Even the defeats suffered by individual corporations can be seen as "set within a wider political context—an outer framework— which invariably serves the system needs of capitalism."⁴²

Setting the agenda means deciding not only what will be discussed but also what won't be. Covert power covers the area of 'non-decisions' as well as decisions.⁴³ For example, environmental issues can be debated so long as the system of decision-making that gives autonomy to corporations to decide what they produce and how they produce it is maintained. Decision-making and political debate is therefore confined to the relatively safe areas of waste discharge, packaging, and product safety. So effective is the manufacture of the new corporate consensus that many have accepted the assumption that unless corporations are happy then the economy will suffer and the working and the poor will be worse off. "For the homeless in the streets, then, the highest priority must be to ensure that the dwellers in the mansions are reasonably content."⁴⁴

Corporations use their economic power and resources to shape public opinion through the think-tanks, public relations and propaganda. But this shaping is designed to go unnoticed, "to alter perception, reshape reality and manufacture consent"⁴⁵ without their targets being even

aware that it is happening. Says one PR executive: "You never know when a PR agency is being effective; you'll just find your views slowly shifting."⁴⁶

Corporations also use institutions such as the media to shape cultural understandings, meanings and values and "if not usurping the whole of ideological space, still significantly limiting what is thought throughout the society."⁴⁷ True democracy would require easy access for all points of view to be communicated with mass audiences on topics of debate, but the media portrays a very restricted range of views. 'Photo opportunities' and spectacles replace lively political debate.⁴⁸ Education is another obvious arena in which to shape public perceptions and cultural expectations. Through pervasive advertising on television and in schools, and through specially designed educational materials distributed to schools, corporations have quite consciously set about ensuring that future generations are big consumers, share corporate values and view environmental problems from a corporate point of view. Advertising and the television programming it supports also reinforce the idea that personal, social and environmental problems can be solved through purchasing corporate products and services.

Democracy has become dominated by a vast information industry aimed at attaining the consent of the public to the goals and values of those who can best afford the experts.

The ascendancy of the PR industry and the collapse of American participatory democracy are the same phenomenon. The growing concentration of economic power in fewer and fewer hands, combined with sophisticated marketing techniques and radical new electronic technologies, have come together in the past decade to fundamentally reshape our social and political landscape. . .⁴⁹

The aim is not to eliminate debate or prevent controversy, because controversy reinforces the perception of a healthy democracy. What is important is the power to limit the subject, scope and boundaries of the controversy.⁵⁰

This results in—and is reinforced by—minimal differences between major political parties. In the US, Britain and Australia there has been a merging of agendas and a decline in difference between parties.⁵¹ The sameness of the parties, the emptiness of the campaign rituals and commercials, and the feeling that their votes don't count for much, has contributed to massive voter apathy in the US and Britain, where voting is voluntary.

At a time of rising citizen participation in environmental and public interest groups, less than half US citizens even bother to vote. At the regional and local level a candidate usually only needs twenty to thirty per cent of the votes of the eligible electorate to get elected. At the 1994 Congressional elections when the Republicans gained a majority, only a third of those eligible to vote did so. Even amongst those who vote, apathy is high. One survey found that only ten per cent of those who voted thought their vote made a difference and only seventeen per cent thought the election was important.⁵²

In the UK, participation in general elections tends to be higher, generally between seventy and eighty per cent. However *Freedom's Children*, a 1995 study by Helen Wilkison and Geoff Mulgan of UK voters between eighteen and thirty-five years old, found that young people are increasingly alienated from party politics. They are less likely to register to vote than older people, "less likely to vote for or join a political party, and less likely to be politically active."

The overwhelming story emerging from our research, both quantitative and qualitative, is of an historic political disconnection. In effect, an entire generation has opted out of party politics.⁵³

Whilst they are concerned about particular issues, including the environment, they do not see that voting for a particular party will do much to address them.

The Media and Democracy

The media's bland diet of superficial material does not encourage participation in the political process, but rather depoliticizes the audience. Political Scientist Lance Bennett argues that the "parade of disjointed spectacles" that fill news programmes "relegate citizens to spectator roles, leaving a residue of powerlessness after the drama and entertainment of the moment have faded."⁵¹ This is done by avoiding larger questions of power and institutional reform, by focusing on individual actors, appealing to the "concerns of individual viewers" and severing the connection between political information (as received from the media) and political organization and participation.⁵⁵ The media present politics "as a depressing spectacle rather than as a vital activity in which citizens can and should be engaged."⁵⁶

Television, in particular, tends to depoliticize its viewers by filling their time with mindless passive entertainment which portrays the existing system of free enterprise and consumption as generally beneficial, and gives only limited air play to protest groups, usually the more moderate of these. The TV entertainment format tends to shorten viewers' attention spans, so that they have less patience for listening to ideas that take a while to explain.⁵⁷

Joe Saltzman, an editor of *USA Today*, argues that the media practice of replacing complex information with symbols, images and catchwords, has trained the audience to want nothing else, and that this threatens democracy:

Citizens become conditioned to respond to the facile stereotype, to the symbols they trust or fear, and they become incapable of understanding and acting on real debate and questioning. They even grow to resent such discussion, wanting instead a quick fix, a fast image, an easy-to-grasp phrase.⁵⁸

"The overwhelming conclusion is that the media generally operate in ways that promote apathy, cynicism, and quiescence, rather than active citizenship and participation."⁵⁹ Writing about the British media in his book *Packaging Politics*, Bob Franklin notes that most citizens glean their political knowledge from the media, but at the same time the media packaging of politics has emphasized "image and appearance" and the reduction of political discourse to sound bites. Audiences have therefore grown "increasingly sceptical, uninterested and cynical about media presentations of politics". This has resulted in "an increasingly widespread lack of interest in politics".⁶⁰

In media democracy, politics (like football) has become an armchair activity. Watching the match from a ringside seat at home has replaced the need to play the game. Participation in a media democracy is essentially ersatz and vicarious.⁶¹

Similarly Jacobson and Mazur, from the Centre for the Study of Commercialism, argue that television undermines democracy:

Democracy demands an informed citizenry; TV reduces information to oversimplified factoids. Democracy demands involvement; television keeps us glued to the couch. Democracy depends on the freedom of the press; television is controlled by a handful of private interests. Democracy thrives in strong communities; television keeps us isolated in our separate living rooms.⁶²

At the same time that the media are turning the public away from politics, politicians are increasingly using the media, rather than the public, "as a source of issues and as a source of support". The media have become the most significant audience for politicians.⁶³ Noam Chomsky divides the media into 'mass popular' and 'elite'. The latter, for example the *New York*

Times and the *Washington Post*, are aimed at decision-makers—the "more educated, wealthy, articulate part of the population".⁶⁴ Of the mass popular media, Chomsky says:

For the large mass of the population, I suspect that the main impact of television comes not through the news but through mechanisms to divert their attention. That means network programming—everything from sports to sitcoms to fanciful pictures of the way life is 'supposed' to be. Anything that has the effect of isolating people— keeping them separated from one another and focused on the tube—will make people passive observers. . . The role of the public, then, is to be spectators, not participants; their role is just to watch and occasionally to ratify.⁶⁵

Implications for Environmentalism

Nevertheless, the media plays a part in creating mass movements through its ability to present images of protest and alternative lifestyles to masses of people. No matter how negatively it portrays such groups and their leaders, it cannot prevent people from being attracted to the values and lifestyles of those being portrayed. In the 1960s, television "might have inadvertently advanced counter-cultural and radical values."⁶⁶

The periodic emergence of counter-cultural movements and strong public activism is a sign that even the underlying realm of cultural understandings and meanings is fluid and changeable. This fluidity and changeability means that the opportunity to break free from corporate definitions of what is possible and feasible is always there. John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton, in their book *Toxic Sludge is Good For You!: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry*, put their faith for the future in the emergence of a new genuine democratic movement. They say that the existence of such a vast public relations industry "proves it *is* possible. The fact that corporations and governments feel compelled to spend billions of dollars every year manipulating the public is a perverse tribute to human nature and our own moral values."⁶⁷

But to influence the covert realm of cultural constructions and ideology requires going beyond the superficial jockeying for influence that occurs in the realm of policy debate. Environmentalists, particularly those in the major environmental groups, tend to concentrate their efforts in the public realm of pressure group politics and ignore the ideological sphere where corporations set the agenda. It is in this ideological sphere that environmentalists need to devote their energies if they want to win.

Jim Hightower argues in *Earth Island Journal* that environmentalists are not doing much good as lobbyists in Washington, where the boundaries of the debate and its rules of etiquette are already clearly drawn:

We've simply got to get the hogs out of the creek. As Aunt Eula knew, this is not a chore to undertake in your best trousers, politely pleading: 'Here hog, here hog. . . pretty please.' To get hogs out of the creek, you have to put your shoulders to them—and shove. . . Yet most national environmental organisations today are indeed dressed in their Sunday trousers, engaged in the soft-hands work of lawyers and lobbyists in Washington, sincerely but futilely attempting to negotiate the relative positions of hogs. . .⁶⁸

A new wave of environmentalism is now called for: one that will engage in the task of exposing corporate myths and methods of manipulation. One that opens up new areas and ideas to public debate rather than following an old agenda set by corporations.

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