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## Greenwashing an Olympic-Sized Toxic Dump

by Dr. Sharon Beder

When the Olympic Games begin in the year 2000, you can expect to see them hyped as the "greenest" summer Olympics of all time. But a massive toxic waste dump will lie underneath the fine landscaping of the Olympic site. It will be covered by a meter of dirt and a mountain of public relations.

The Olympic Games will be held at Homebush Bay in Sydney, Australia. Homebush Bay is a former industrial site and armaments depot which was previously subjected to years of unregulated waste dumping. In recent years asbestos-contaminated waste and chemicals including dioxins and pesticides have been found there, along with arsenic, cadmium, chromium, copper, lead, mercury and zinc. It is the worst toxic waste dump in Australia, and the bay into which the waste leaches is so contaminated that there is a fishing ban. The sediments in the bay have concentrations of dioxin that make it one of the world's worst dioxin hot spots. The dioxin is largely the result of waste from a Union Carbide factory which manufactured the notorious herbicide Agent Orange there during the Vietnam war.

*continued on next page*

## Flack Attack

During the reign of Catherine the Great in Russia, one of her closest advisors was field marshal Grigori Potemkin, who used numerous wiles to build her image. When she toured the countryside with foreign dignitaries, he arranged to have fake villages built in advance of her visits so as to create an illusion of prosperity. Since that time, the term "Potemkin village" has become a metaphor for things that look elaborate and impressive but in actual fact lack substance.

Today, the public relations industry has become adept at creating its own Potemkin villages, such as the supposed "green showcase" that Olympics promoters in Australia are building atop a toxic waste site.

The effort to create a "green Olympics" arose in response to activist criticisms of environmental damage caused by past Olympics games. "The black list includes vast gashes opened up in forests for various

events, walls erected for bob runs and the imposing stature of ski jumps, to cite just a few examples," admitted a 1993 publication of the International Olympic Committee. The following year, a committee involved with the games in Norway warned that "Confrontations with environmental interest groups and an antagonized local public will increase unless steps are taken to implement a pro-active environmental strategy."

It was activism that prompted Olympics organizers to even *consider* addressing environmental concerns. By contrast, the strategy of collaboration that environmental groups adopted in Australia enabled Olympics organizers to go ahead with their plans while ultimately escaping their environmental obligations.

The lesson we can learn from this sorry fiasco is that activists should not allow themselves to be led into helping society construct more Potemkin villages. The world does not need more facades. We need *real* progress, and real activism in order to attain it.

What is impressive, in PR terms, is the way this massive toxic waste site has been transformed into a “green showcase,” thanks in large part to the endorsement of Greenpeace and other key environmentalists.

## BASHING BEIJING

Part of the story of Sydney’s PR campaign to win the 2000 Olympics has only recently come to light, through investigations into the scandal over Salt Lake City’s bribery of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which is responsible for selecting between competing cities’ bids. In a major report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Gerard Ryle and Gary Hughes revealed a plan by key Australian businessmen and government officials to discredit a bid by Beijing, which was then thought to be the front-runner.

Sydney’s secret public relations strategy was developed by businessmen representing industries which stood to benefit financially if the Olympics bid succeeded. They included the managing director of Lend Lease (one of Australia’s largest construction companies), the managing director of Optus (the country’s second largest telecommunications company), and a corporate lawyer and close adviser to media mogul Kerry Packer. In December 1992, these individuals met with New South Wales Premier John Fahey to discuss how China’s human rights record could be used to damage its bid, and also how to deflect expected criticism of Sydney’s bid from the news media, Aborigines, environmentalists and trade unionists. The group agreed to hire a public relations strategist to help them.

An unofficial committee, named after businessman Ross Turnbull who had organized the meeting, continued working together and steering the bid from behind the scenes. Three international members were added to the committee including James Wolfensohn, the Australian-born president of the World Bank. The “Beijing strategy” was put together by the Turnbull committee with the help of Gabrielle Melville, a former BHP public relations strategist, and Sir Tim Bell, former head of Saatchi and Saatchi advertising company in Australia, and adviser to Margaret Thatcher (which earned him a knighthood).

The Beijing strategy involved covertly funding a human rights group to campaign against China’s human rights abuses in the lead up to the Games decision. The campaign was to be based in Europe or the United States to divert suspicion from Australia. A book was to be published on the same topic, and “an eminent international identity” would be paid to have his name on the book. A story would also be “planted” in the *London Times*



***Construction of a leachate drain for waste at Homebush Bay. (photo by Sharon Beder)***

newspaper. Sydney Games officials claim that this plan was never implemented, but in the months leading up to the bid decision in 1993 there was a US-based human rights campaign that damaged Beijing’s bid.

## SELLING SYDNEY

A veil of secrecy was wrapped around the strategizing for the Sydney bid by establishing a private company, called Sydney Olympics 2000 Bid Limited (SOBL), to oversee the bidding process. As a private company, SOBL was exempt from Freedom of Information requests, thus protecting it from having to disclose its internal reports and documents. SOBL’s articles of association ensured that information was tightly controlled so that very few people had access to documents, and photocopies were prohibited.

Secrecy was further enhanced through various arrangements with the media. A Communications Commission was formed to be in charge of public relations strategies, chaired by the managing director of the Clemengers advertising agency. Other members of the commission included the national director of advertising for Australian Consolidated Press, the media director of the state Premier’s office and the general manager of marketing for the Ampol oil company.

A remarkable admission of the media’s complicity in the bidding process came in February 1999 from Bruce Baird, a former government minister for New South Wales who was responsible for the bidding process. Baird claimed that he had obtained the agreement of three major media executives not to run stories about the

wining, dining and other blandishments offered to IOC officials.

The three executives named by Baird were Kerry Packer (owner of Consolidated Press Holdings), Ken Cowley (chief executive of Murdoch's News Ltd.), and John Alexander (then editor-in-chief of the *Sydney Morning Herald*). All three have vehemently denied Baird's claims, describing them as "absolute bullshit" and "rubbish," and Baird has subsequently recanted.

What is known, however, is that Packer, Cowley and Alexander all accepted invitations to sit on the SOBL committee. All of the Australian commercial television channels, the three main media companies, and a number of radio stations were involved in supporting the bid, either through being on bid committees or through direct sponsorship of the bid. At the time that the bidding was underway, *Herald* journalist Mark Coultan stated that "Journalists who write stories which might be seen as critical are reminded of their bosses' support and told that their stories would be used against Sydney by other cities."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* also editorialized in support of the Sydney bid, and SOBL financed the fare of a *Herald* journalist to Monaco to report on the bid deliberations. Another *Herald* journalist, Sam North, was assigned to report on the Olympics and wrote a succession of favorable stories, several of which appeared in advertising supplements funded by Olympic sponsors. News Ltd's *Telegraph Mirror* also gave unwavering good PR to the bid.

## GREENPEACE BUYS IN

As the bidding and selection process for the 2000 Olympics got underway, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) made it clear that it wanted to have a "green" Olympics. IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch said the IOC's primary concern would be to ensure the environment is respected and that this would be taken into account in the final vote on site selection. For Australia, therefore, it was critical to present itself as "green" despite the toxic waste buried at Homebush Bay.

The co-optation of Greenpeace Australia was a key factor in the success of this campaign. Greenpeace has campaigned against hazardous landfill dumps for many years, so its support for the Homebush Bay Olympic site helped reassure a public that might otherwise be concerned about the site's toxic history.

To win over Greenpeace, SOBL invited them to draw up environmental guidelines for construction and operation of the Olympic facilities. The proposed design of the Olympic Athletes' Village was developed by a consortium of architects including a firm commissioned by Greenpeace Australia. On paper, the design looked impressive. It provided for use of solar technology and solar designs, state-of-the-art energy generation, and waste water recycling systems.

For Greenpeace, participation in developing a showcase Olympic village offered another benefit: the opportunity to transform its own image. Instead of simply sounding the alarm on environmental problems as it had

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done for the previous 20 years, the “new Greenpeace” would be seen as promoting solutions.

Greenpeace involvement in the Sydney bid soon went beyond simply offering ideas, as it became a vocal supporter. Karla Bell, Cities and Coasts Campaigner for Greenpeace Australia, made a statement supporting the environmental merits of the full bid when the IOC visited Sydney early in 1993. Her statement did not mention the problem of land contamination. She made an obvious impression on the IOC, whose report in July of that year “noted with much satisfaction the great emphasis being placed on environmental protection in all aspects of the bidding process and the attention being paid to working closely with environmental protection groups such as Greenpeace.”

Support also came from Paul Gilding, the head at the time of Greenpeace International who previously had headed Greenpeace Australia. “The Olympic village provides a prototype of future environmentally friendly development not only for Australia, but for cities all around the world,” Gilding stated in a March 1993 news release.

SOBL hired Karla Bell and Kate Short (now Kate Hughes) of the Sydney Total Environment Centre (TEC) to draw up environmental guidelines for the Games. Short was a prominent Sydney environmentalist who had a long history of campaigning on toxic issues, particularly pesticides. The guidelines drawn up by Bell and Short advocated the use of recyclable and recycled building materials, the use of plantation timber as opposed to forest timber, and tickets printed on “recycled post consumer waste paper.” Short and other environmentalists and consultants were also appointed to a special environmental task force advising SOBL.

Some environmentalists, however, remained skeptical. The TEC distanced itself from Short’s involvement, and TEC director Jeff Angel argued that the Sydney Olympic bid was ignoring significant environmental problems. “The state of Sydney’s environment has been misrepresented to a serious degree,” he said. “For example, the [New South Wales] Premier in his Introduction to the Bid’s Fact Sheets describes the Games as occurring in a pollution-free environment. The bid document asserts Sydney’s waste system can cope, when in fact we have a waste crisis.” Environmentalists were also concerned about the diversion of revenue into extravagant sports facilities and the loss of valued local ecosystems.

Environmentalists were particularly angry when they discovered that the official Bid Document to the IOC claimed support from various environmental groups

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SYDNEY 2000

## Sydney's Olympic Village plan wins support from Greenpeace



**P**lanning for Sydney's Olympic Village makes the project a world first, according to the environmental group Greenpeace.

The Village, to be built at Sydney Olympic Park, 14 kilometres from the city centre, will house 15,000 athletes and officials in a development comprising townhouses and apartments, shops, entertainment areas, recreation facilities and community services.

Greenpeace Cities and Coasts campaigner Karla Bell gave the Olympic Village a ringing endorsement because it incorporated environmental principles promoted by Greenpeace.

"There has been solar housing before, there has been medium-density housing before, there have been attempts at water conservation before," Ms Bell said.

"The nobody has attempted to pull together all aspects of ecologically sustainable development in a single project before and that makes the Sydney Olympic Village a world first."

***This brochure, published by the Australian Olympic bidders, highlighted the bid's endorsement from Greenpeace.***

including the Australian Conservation Foundation, the New South Wales Nature Conservation Council and the TEC. Although individuals affiliated with those organizations had joined the bid committee’s environmental task force, the groups themselves emphatically denied their support and the statement had to be retracted.

Notwithstanding these misgivings, the issue of toxic contamination of the site was not openly discussed prior to the Olympic decision. This was clearly because of the inaccessibility of relevant information and the successful co-optation of key environmentalists who reassured others that the site was being cleaned up properly.

In private communications at the time of the bidding process, Greenpeace Australia toxics campaigner Robert Cartmel told me that “there is every likelihood that the remediation measures being undertaken at Homebush Bay won’t measure up.” He said that this was “an area that would be considered to be a Superfund site in the US.” He warned that “when it comes to leakage of toxic materials, it is not a question of *if*, it is a question of *when*. There is no such thing as a safe landfill.” Yet Cartmel was unwilling to publicly criticize Greenpeace’s involvement in the Olympics bidding process.

## FROM RHETORIC TO REALITY

The promised measures, particularly the village design and the environmental guidelines, were heralded as a major environmental breakthrough in urban design. "No other event at the beginning of the 21st Century will have a greater impact on protecting the environment than the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney," stated a SOBL news release. New South Wales minister Bruce Baird said that Sydney's Olympics would be an environmental showpiece to the rest of the world and a model for other cities to follow in future games. Ros Kelly, the Federal Minister for Environment, Sport and Territories, also put out a news release arguing that "a vote by the international community for Sydney will be a vote for the environment."

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***"The Olympic village provides a prototype of future environmentally friendly development not only for Australia, but for cities all around the world."***  
—Greenpeace leader Paul Gilding, March 1993

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Once the bid was won, however, the government's lack of genuine commitment to a green Olympics became apparent. It discarded the winning village design, the one that was supposed to be a showcase of green technology. The consortium of architects that had designed the village, including the Greenpeace-commissioned architects, complained of being "absolutely shafted." Within a year, Greenpeace was forced to denounce the government's failure to keep to the environmental guidelines written by Short and Bell.

Cost considerations also led the planners to quietly shelve another environmental showcase, the Olympic Pavilion and Visitors Center. The original design had envisioned a center made of recycled materials with natural ventilation.

## PLASTIC RULES

In 1994, Paul Gilding resigned as head of Greenpeace International and went into business for himself as an environmental consultant. One of his clients was Lend Lease/Mirvac, the same company that had participated in behind-the-scenes strategizing to win the Sydney bid. Lend Lease was hired to draw up a new plan for the Athletes' Village.

The new village design, unveiled in 1995, was touted as environmental because it used solar technology, even



***"Remediation" of toxic wastes underway prior to construction of the Olympic grounds. (photo by Sharon Beder)***

though more than half the houses were temporary structures, designed to be taken down later. Worse yet, from the perspective of Greenpeace, the plans called for the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) as a building material.

Greenpeace has campaigned internationally against the use of PVCs, and the environmental guidelines which it helped draft for the Sydney Olympic games had called for "minimizing and ideally avoiding the use of chlorine-based products (organochlorines) such as PCB, PVC and chlorinated bleached paper." The Olympic Coordination Authority's decision to abandon this commitment came in the wake of a deliberate public relations campaign by the plastics and chemical industry.

In 1995, Andrew Byrne of the *Sydney Morning Herald* revealed how Australia's Plastics and Chemical Industries Association (PACIA) was financing a campaign to undermine commitments to a PVC-free Games. PACIA was concerned that making the Village a PVC-free showpiece would add momentum to the Greenpeace campaign against organochlorines—a reasonable fear, since that was precisely the point behind the original environmental recommendations.

Using contributions from member companies, the PACIA launched a PVC Defense Action Fund for the purpose of bringing pro-PVC experts from Europe to brief key government officials. Other tactics detailed in a document obtained by Byrne included enlarging its Olympic lobbying program, developing a "credibility file" on Greenpeace and promoting the benefits of

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PVC on the internet. PVC manufacturer James Hardie even became a member of the Olympic Village planning consortium.

### TOXIC LEAKS

The government continued with its own PR activities, offering guided tours of the Olympic site to the public and announcing a major tree planting effort coordinated by “Greener Sydney 2000” committee which would provide “a unique opportunity to involve the whole community in the 2000 Olympics.” A landscaping project for the site was heralded as greening the site, even though the toxic waste remained untreated beneath (see accompanying story).

As evidence of toxic contamination of the site filtered out, environmentalists involved in the Olympics bidding began to change their stories. In 1995, a major television current affairs program featured Greenpeace and Kate Short criticizing the cover-up of the site’s toxic contamination (which they had known about all along but had previously refrained from mentioning).

In subsequent years Greenpeace staged two actions to highlight dioxin contamination in the vicinity of the Olympic site. “Our investigations show that not only is the ‘Green Games’ concept rapidly becoming a cynical farce, but that the presence of high levels of dioxin at Homebush Bay presents a real environmental and health threat,” stated one Greenpeace news release. David Richmond, the head of the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA), responded by accusing green groups who highlighted toxic contamination of the Games site as doing “damage to Australia.”

A number of revelations about dioxin on the Homebush site posed another public relations crisis for the OCA in 1997. Colin Grant, OCA’s executive director of planning, environment and policy, publicly stated that the site did not contain any 2,3,7,8 TCDD (the most toxic form of dioxin). After this statement was proven false, the OCA was forced to “unreservedly” apologize for the “mistake.”

### DAMAGE CONTROL

Hired by OCA as an “environmental special advisor,” Kate Short organized a series of forums in 1998 on “Dioxin and Beyond: Enhancing Remediation Strategies at Homebush.” In reality, the forums were carefully-staged public relations events aimed at creating the appearance of public consultation without the openness that true public involvement would require. Attendance was by invitation only, and the forums primarily showcased speakers dwelling on good news about the remediation.

Following the forum series, in what seemed like an attempt to give the forums a veneer of having been a real consultation, the Australian government announced that a further \$11.6 million would be spent for an “Enhanced Remediation Program” which would consist of validation, monitoring and “education and community development” involving school children, but no further treatment of the wastes.

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***“The ‘Green Games’ concept is rapidly becoming a cynical farce.”***

**—Greenpeace Australia, 1995**

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As the pressure has mounted for public disclosure of documents relevant to the Sydney bid, the Games promoters have turned again to using the cover of a private company in order to maintain secrecy, claiming that its financial documents belong to internal auditors who are a private firm and therefore exempt from Freedom of Information rules.

Although involvement in the Olympic Games has been an environmental embarrassment, it has also been a gold mine of opportunities for the individuals who supported the Sydney bid. The *Sydney Morning Herald* is now a “Team Millennium Partner” for the Games and has established a unit to “maximize the associated commercial opportunities.”

Karla Bell and Paul Gilding have both left Greenpeace to become consultants to companies seeking contracts to construct Olympic facilities. Both have also participated as paid consultants in preparing Stockholm’s bid for the 2004 Olympics.

By contrast, Robert Cartmel, the Greenpeace campaigner whose misgivings kept him from joining in the campaign to greenwash Homebush Bay, has since been squeezed out of his job. n

Dr. Sharon Beder is a professional civil engineer and associate professor in Science and Technology Studies at the University of Wollongong, Australia. She is the author of several books, including *The Nature of Sustainable Development*, *The New Engineer*, *Toxic Fish and Sewer Surfing*, and *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism*, as well as numerous articles on environmental and other issues, many of which are available on her website at <<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/sbeder/>>.

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# Media Self-Censorship in Australia's Olympics Bid

by Dr. Sharon Beder

Perhaps the rarest and most perverse form of flattery that a writer can receive is to have the government seek to suppress his or her work. I had the opportunity to experience one of these institutional efforts at censorship in 1993, when two senior government officials—the general manager and the information manager of the Homebush Bay Development Corporation—visited me and the head of my university department, demanding to see a copy of an article I had written for *New Scientist*, the international science magazine. My article dealt with pollution remediation methods for the Homebush Bay toxic waste site in Sydney, Australia where authorities were hoping to locate the year 2000 Olympic Games.

The timing of my article, and of the visit by these government officials, was critical. The article had already been accepted for publication and was scheduled to appear in the weeks leading up to the International Olympic Committee's final decision about which city would host the year 2000 games. The front-runners at the time were Sydney, Beijing and Manchester.

My article detailed the contaminants buried at the site, government efforts to bypass public consultation on site remediation, and inadequacies of the government's preferred remediation process which would leave contaminants untreated on site. Some of the information for the article had been obtained from unpublished reports commissioned by a state government authority. I had gained access to these reports as an academic researcher, but after finding out that I was writing an article, the person who had given me access demanded the right to review the article prior to publication. And then came the visit from the senior officials.

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## ***Journalists who wrote critical stories were attacked as "unpatriotic, eccentric, inaccurate and negative."***

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My visitors told me that some of the reports that I obtained were not even available to the public under Freedom of Information legislation (implying that they therefore had some sort of right to control information obtained from them). I told them that they should approach the magazine itself for a copy of the article. Within three days of this visit I received a phone call from the magazine's deputy editor informing me that they had held an editorial meeting and decided not to run the article. He said the article was well written and balanced but that they had decided to "kill" it for political reasons.

He gave me three reasons. First, it would be unfair to run such a story on the environmental credentials of

the Sydney bid if they did not run stories on the environmental credentials of the Manchester and Beijing bids, and there was not time to do that before the winner was announced. Second, he said that the Chinese were playing dirty and would use such an article to campaign against Sydney winning the Olympics and that at all costs they didn't want China to win the Games. Third, he feared that the magazine would bear the brunt of blame if it published my article and Sydney lost the bid.

The Australian media were effectively closed to criticism of the Sydney bid at this time. The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism published a special Olympic Edition of its newsletter *Reportage* which covered a number of stories that were not being covered in the general media. The Centre's director, Wendy Bacon, noted that the few journalists who wrote critical stories had been "attacked as unpatriotic, eccentric, inaccurate and negative." Meanwhile, public support for the bid had been mobilized using a "pervasive media and marketing exercise" which included putting the bid logo on milk cartons, car registration stickers, buses, and all sorts of other places.

## **AFTER THE VICTORY**

The state government began releasing information about the contamination of the site to the media shortly after the bid had been won, carefully framing the information in terms of the clean-up. "Restoring Homebush Bay for the 2000 Olympics, billed as the biggest environmental repair job undertaken in Australia, is reversing decades of environmental abuse at a cost of \$83 million," reported an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which went on to reassure the public that the clean-up would make the site perfectly safe.

My article, the one that had been "killed," was published a month later in the Australian *Current Affairs Bulletin*. I was subsequently interviewed about it on Australian public television. The Homebush Bay Development Corporation responded by issuing a news release headlined "Attack on Remediation Program Scientifically Flawed."

It claimed that "all the allegations contained in the article were bereft of fact. What we are doing at Homebush Bay is the greatest urban environmental reformation seen in Australia's history. . . . The remediation strategies adopted for Homebush Bay are the best international practice for the type of contamination at the site. . . . Scientists with proven track records in this field endorse this approach." (The release neglected, however, to identify by name any of these "proven scientists" or their evidence.)

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on the Corporation's response even though it had not deemed my article important enough to mention previously. Its Olympics reporter, Sam North, wrote an article based on the press release criticizing my article without contacting me for comment. When I contacted the *Herald* to complain about inaccuracies in North's article, the paper refused to report on my response and suggested I write a letter to the editor, which they published.

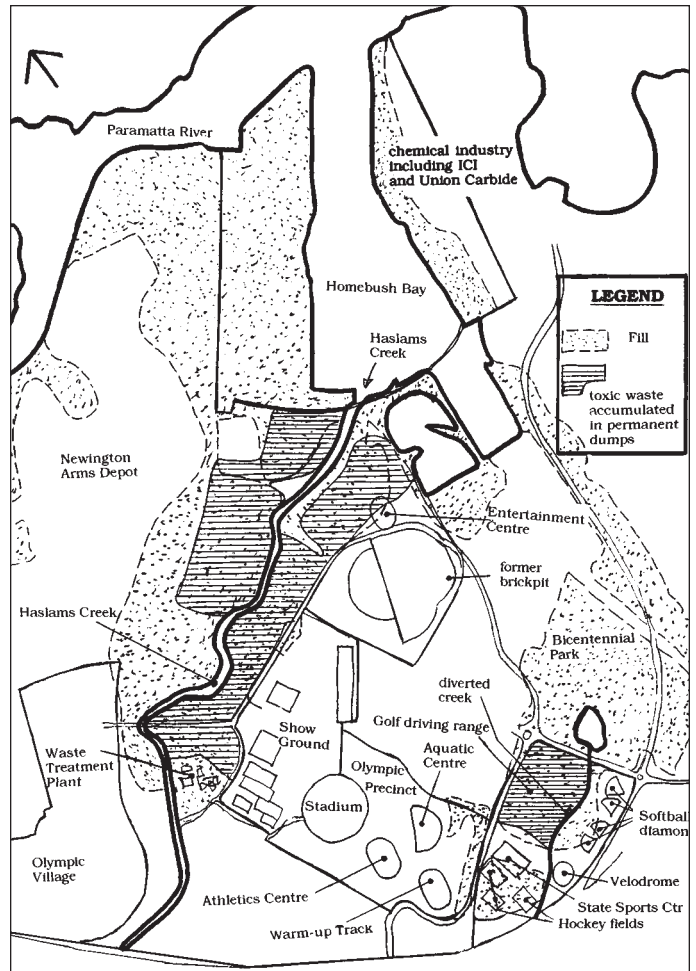
After it was announced that Sydney would host the 2000 Games, the Freedom of Information Act for New South Wales was amended to ensure that Sydney Olympic committee documents could not be accessed. This decision was criticized by the NSW Ombudsman, who pointed out that the exemptions to the Act had been added without public consultation.

The amendment specifically denied the public access to contracts, proposals for the various Olympic facilities including the athletes' village, the criteria for selecting contractors, progress reports, committee meetings, and public opinion surveys. Contractors who work on the facilities must sign a confidentiality agreement. Even the contract between the NSW government and the International Olympic Committee is a state secret.

In 1996, *Herald* environment writer Murray Hogarth reported on the continuing secrecy surrounding the Games: "Though we are less than four years out and closing fast, there are five rings of secrecy enveloping key aspects of Sydney's Olympics. They are the often-impenetrable International Olympic Committee (IOC), the State Government with its spin doctors, the 30-year Cabinet secrecy rules and the ban on Freedom of Information requests, SOCOG and its media Games-keepers, OCA's ICAC-inspired probity requirements, and finally big business, with a tangled web of confidentiality agreements."

In 1997 Nathan Vass of the *Herald* reported that the state government was considering setting up a multi-million dollar strategy to deal with an expected 5,000 or so international non-accredited journalists who would be hanging around Sydney before and during the 2000 Games looking for stories. Such journalists, unlike the 15,000 or so officially accredited journalists there to report on the sporting events, were likely to be the source of critical stories.

In preparation for this feared onslaught of scrutiny, the Olympics manager of the Australian Tourist Commission has recommended a "crisis media management program" to deal with negative stories about the environment, the ozone layer and Aboriginal issues. The plan called for seeking money from Olympic sponsors to



**A diagram of the Olympic Games site, showing the location of toxic waste dumps.**

establish a center to house and respond to such journalists, thereby ensuring that "the non-accredited media present Sydney in a very positive fashion."

In the years following the winning of the bid, the story of the toxic waste contamination of Homebush Bay has been well covered by the Australian media and has also received some international coverage, especially in Germany. But when journalists from throughout the world begin arriving in Sydney to cover the Olympics, will they be able to see through the "media management" that is being geared up to greet them? n

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# Selling a Leaky Landfill as the “World’s Best Practice”

by Dr. Sharon Beder

In 1989, Australian government authorities decided to use Homebush Bay as the site for a future Olympic Games. Even the chance of winning an Olympic bid, however, could not justify spending the \$190 million that experts estimated it would cost to contain and treat the toxic wastes buried there. The government therefore sought a cheaper, more modest remediation strategy that could be carried out in time for the 1993 Olympic bid.

Authorities considered various options for dealing with the wastes. One possibility would be to segregate and treat the wastes, but this option would have been difficult and expensive.

Another possibility would have been to take a “bank vault” approach—sealing up and walling in the wastes. This approach would have entailed tightly containing the contaminated soil with double liners beneath, soil capping over the top, leachate drains and gas collection and treatment systems. This approach was tried for a badly-contaminated embankment where the Olympic swimming facility was to be built, but the planners decided that it was too expensive to be used elsewhere.

A third, cheaper option was chosen for the rest of the site. It eliminated the gas collection and treatment systems and the double liners. This option meant that the wastes would continue to leak into underlying groundwater. A consultant to the government explained the reasoning behind this approach:

The liability associated with deterioration and or failure of a “bank vault” secure landfill remained constant with time, but its probability of occurrence increased with time as the facility aged. By contrast the leaky landfill would over time carry less liability as the quality of leachate eventually improved. Therefore it is an intrinsically more robust or resilient way of limiting risks.

In other words, the waste would be disposed of by letting it slowly leak into the surrounding environment, rather than risk the financial liability of a possible sudden and more traceable major failure in the future.

In public discussions, however, these cost and liability issues were not raised. Instead, the public was told that the leaky landfill was the only feasible option, given the difficulty of treating the diverse range of chemicals that were present on the site. The option of a more secure “bank vault” landfill was not discussed outside of consultants’ reports.

By choosing the leaky landfill option, the planners were able to reduce the cost of remediation of the Olympic site from \$190 million to \$69 million, including landscaping and road base preparations. This

enabled most of the remediation to be completed by 1993, in time for Sydney to win the bid for the 2000 Olympic Games.

## EXCLUDING THE PUBLIC

Australian guidelines are quite explicit about the public’s right to know and participate in decision-making about the clean-up of contaminated sites. The remediation work at Homebush Bay, however, was carried out without proper public consultation. The government’s reports on contamination at the site and the risks associated with it have not been published. In their place are newsletters and brochures produced for public relations purposes.

In 1992, when the remediation was already underway, a local environmental group conducted a survey which found that 71 percent of the respondents felt they were not getting enough information to form an opinion about what was being done in the Homebush Bay area. Roughly the same number—75 percent—said they had not received enough information to satisfy them that the area would be safe for people to live and work.

The usual process in New South Wales for involving the public in such decisions is to issue and seek public comments on an environmental impact statement (EIS). For the Olympic site, however, the NSW Minister of Planning was given full authority to make decisions without the normal consultation process. The reaction of Greenpeace Australia’s Lynette Thorstensen is a telling indication of how deeply the venerable environmental crusader had allowed itself to be co-opted. “At this stage we are much more interested in seeing the green development up and running than having ourselves locked up in disputes about process,” Thorstensen stated.

The urgency to get the Games ready without bothering about due process is something that the Olympic authorities undoubtedly appreciated. Public relations is a much simpler and more controllable process than genuine public consultation.

In the absence of true public participation, PR around the Homebush Bay site has focused on vacuous media stunts and photo opportunities. A brochure by the Olympic Coordination Authority falsely describes the remediation of the site as the “world’s best practice.”

On October 31, 1998, the OCA also organized an “Olympic Neighbors Day.” Titled “the Big Clean-up,” the event took area residents on a tour of the nicely-landscaped Olympic site, while avoiding mention of the toxic wastes buried underneath the new lawns and shrubbery that will be slowly contaminating these neighbors’ groundwater for years to come. <sup>n</sup>

## ACSH Defended

As a career professional scientist with more than 30 years of tenured service at two Big Ten universities plus a decade as a researcher at the National Institutes of Health, I feel qualified to challenge your criticism of the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) as expressed in your Fourth Quarter 1998 issue.

First of all, I have been a member of the ACSH Board of Directors for a number of years and a Scientific Advisor virtually since its inception. Your selective description of the ACSH Board of Directors carefully omitted Nobel Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug (originator of the "Green Revolution"), the eminent Dr. Robert White of Case Western Reserve University and other eminent scientists. The policies of the ACSH are not determined solely by the Board members you actively criticized.

Secondly, the ACSH is completely "up front" about its sources of funding. In contrast, I would suggest that you attempt to obtain a complete list of the individuals and/or organizations who fund the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI).

Thirdly, I would suggest that you should actually count the number of ACSH Scientific Advisors who are in academic departments of "food science and technology." They are a very small minority. Indeed, the breadth of sciences covered by this group is literally astounding—literally an alphabet of biological and medical sciences, medicine, nursing, engineering, etc. We all contribute to the peer-review process for ACSH publications, just as we do to numerous professional journals.

A major portion of the ACSH overall effort is devoted to presenting materials that enhance the public understanding of science from a perspective of unbiased evaluation of the complete scientific literature, not from a selective, pre-biased viewpoint.

*Roger P. Maickel, Ph.D., FRSC  
Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology*

**PR Watch responds:** Drs. Borlaug and White are indeed eminent in their fields, a fact which in no way contradicts ACSH's documented pro-industry bias. Indeed, our Fourth Quarter 1998 issue detailed the ways that ACSH has been able to advance its right-wing agenda through its associations with the distinguished former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop. Space did not permit us to analyze the role of every individual who is affiliated with ACSH.

As for the claim that ACSH is "completely 'up front' about its sources of funding," that is not what we were told when we contacted the ACSH office on

December 23, 1998, to ask for a list of its institutional funders. ACSH Associate Director Jeff Stier refused to provide a list, stating that to do so would have a "prejudicial effect" on our readers. ACSH once *did* have a policy of publicly disclosing its funders, but that policy was abandoned years ago. As a member of the ACSH Board of Directors, Dr. Maickel ought to know this.

Dr. Maickel's dig at CSPI notwithstanding, the fact remains that CSPI offers better funding disclosure than ACSH, because CSPI discloses its institutional funders. If Dr. Maickel believes that nonprofit organizations should also disclose all of their *individual* donors (a highly unusual practice, since most groups allow individuals to give anonymously), he should at least have the integrity to do the same on behalf of his own organization.

## Sandman's Cagey Tactics

Prior to reading your First Quarter 1999 issue, we had never heard of Peter Sandman by name. His tactics, however, bore a familiar ring.

The State of Nevada has long opposed efforts by the U.S. Department of Energy and the commercial nuclear industry to turn our state into a national dump site for high-level nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain. Sandman's advice to the DOE sounds exactly like the strategy taken a few years ago when the Secretary of Energy announced that there would be a "citizen advisory panel" to discuss the Yucca Mountain project. The real purpose of the panel was to invite opponents of the site such as ourselves to draft standards that would make the Yucca Mountain program acceptable.

We were also invited to workshops in which government, industry and public representatives were supposed to "prioritize your values." Then we were supposed to "trade off" our values in order to reach an acceptable compromise. Our response was to "just say no." We were then told that we were being "unreasonable." In our opinion, however, dumping nuclear waste on an unwilling community is itself an unreasonable action.

DOE also appears to have taken Sandman's advice on how to play the role of what he calls the "caged beast." We decided to control the beast on our own terms and not play with a Cheshire cat.

We urge all public advocates and public interest groups to carefully read and understand how Sandman and his "outrage" neutralization schemes work. Don't be fooled. Outrage can be good. Keep it and use it.

*Judy Treichel and Steve Frishman  
Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force*

# The Father of Spin: Edward L. Bernays & The Birth of PR

book review

Today, few people outside the public relations profession recognize the name of Edward L. Bernays. As the year 2000 approaches, however, his name deserves to figure on historians' lists of the most influential figures of the 20th century.

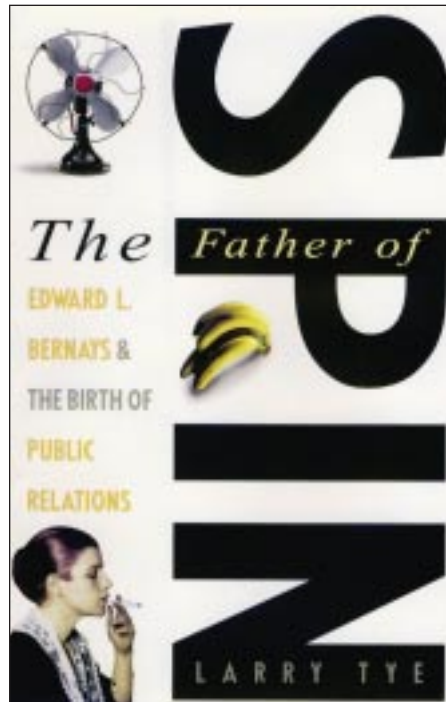
It is impossible to fundamentally grasp the social, political, economic and cultural developments of the past 100 years without some understanding of Bernays and his professional heirs in the public relations industry. PR is a 20th century phenomenon, and Bernays—widely eulogized as the “father of public relations” at the time of his death in 1995—played a major role in defining the industry’s philosophy and methods.

Eddie Bernays himself desperately craved fame and a place in history. During his lifetime he worked and schemed to be remembered as the founder of his profession and sometimes drew ridicule from his industry colleagues for his incessant self-promotions. These schemes notwithstanding, Bernays richly deserves the title that Boston Globe reporter Larry Tye has given him in his engagingly written new book, *The Father of Spin*.

In keeping with his obsessive desire for recognition, Bernays was the author of a massive memoir, titled *Biography of an Idea*, and he fretted about who would author his biography. He would probably be happy with Tye’s book, the first written since his passing.

*The Father of Spin* is a bit too fawning and uncritical of Bernays and his profession. We recommend it, however, for its new insights into Bernays, many of which are based on a first-time-ever examination of the 80 boxes of papers and documents that Bernays left to the Library of Congress. The portrait that emerges is of a brilliant, contradictory man.

Tye writes that “Bernays’ papers . . . provide illuminating and sometimes disturbing background on some of the most interesting episodes of twentieth-century history, from the way American tobacco tycoons made it socially acceptable for women to smoke to the way other titans of industry persuaded us to pave over our landscape and switch to beer as the ‘beverage of moderation.’ The companies involved aren’t likely to release their records of those campaigns, assuming they still exist. But Bernays saved every scrap of paper he sent out or took



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in. . . . In so doing, he let us see just how policies were made and how, in many cases, they were founded on deception.”

In an industry that is notable for its mastery of evasions and euphemisms, Bernays stood out for his remarkable frankness. He was a propagandist and proud of it. (In an interview with Bill Moyers, Bernays said that what he did was propaganda, and that he just “hoped it was ‘proper-ganda’ and not ‘improper-ganda.’”)

Bernays’ life was amazing in many ways. He had a role in many of the seminal intellectual and commercial events of this century. “The techniques he developed fast became staples of political campaigns and of image-making in general,” Tye notes. “That is why it is essential to understand Edward L. Bernays if we are to understand what Hill and Knowlton did in Iraq—not to mention how

Richard Nixon was able to dig his way out of his post-Watergate depths and remake himself into an elder statesman worthy of a lavish state funeral, how Richard Morris repositioned President Bill Clinton as an ideological centrist in order to get him reelected, and how most other modern-day miracles of public relations are conceived and carried out.”

Many of the new insights that Tye offers have to do with Bernays’s relationship with his family and his uncle Sigmund Freud, whose reputation as “the father of psychoanalysis” owes something to Bernays’ publicity efforts. Bernays regarded Uncle Sigmund as a mentor, and used Freud’s insights into the human psyche and motivation to design his PR campaigns, while also trading on his famous uncle’s name to inflate his own stature.

There is, however, a striking paradox in the relationship between the two. Uncle Sigmund’s “talking cure” was designed to unearth his patients’ unconscious drives and hidden motives, in the belief that bringing them into conscious discourse would help people lead healthier lives. Bernays, by contrast, used psychological techniques to *mask* the motives of his clients, as part of a deliberate strategy aimed at keeping the public unconscious of the forces that were working to mold their minds.

Characteristically (and again paradoxically), Bernays was remarkably candid about his manipulative intent. “If we understand the mechanisms and motives of the group

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mind, it is now possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it," he argued in *Propaganda*, one of his first books. In a later book, he coined the term "engineering of consent" to describe his technique for controlling the masses.

"The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society," Bernays argued. "Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. . . . In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons . . . who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind."

This definition of "democratic society" is itself a contradiction in terms—a theoretical attempt to reconcile rule by the few with the democratic system which threatened (and still threatens) the privileges and powers of the governing elite. On occasion, Bernays himself recoiled from the anti-democratic implications of his theory.

During Bernays' lifetime and since, propaganda has usually had dirty connotations, loaded and identified with the evils of Nazi PR genius Joseph Goebbels, or the oafish efforts of the Soviet Communists. In his memoirs, Bernays wrote that he was "shocked" to discover that Goebbels kept copies of Bernays' writings in his own personal library, and that his theories were therefore helping to "engineer" the rise of the Third Reich.

Bernays liked to cultivate an image as a supporter of feminism and other liberating ideas, but his work on behalf of the United Fruit Company had consequences just as evil and terrifying as if he'd worked directly for the Nazis. *The Father of Spin* sheds new and important light on the extent to which the Bernays' propaganda campaign for the United Fruit Company (today's United Brands) led directly to the CIA's overthrow of the elected government of Guatemala.

The term "banana republic" actually originated in reference to United Fruit's domination of corrupt governments in Guatemala and other Central American countries. The company brutally exploited virtual slave labor in order to produce cheap bananas for the lucrative U.S. market. When a mildly reformist Guatemala government attempted to reign in the company's power, Bernays whipped up media and political sentiment against it in the commie-crazed 1950s.

"Articles began appearing in the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Time*,

*Newsweek*, the *New Leader*, and other publications all discussing the growing influence of Guatemala's Communists," Tye writes. "The fact that liberal journals like the *Nation* were also coming around was especially satisfying to Bernays, who believed that winning the liberals over was essential. . . . At the same time, plans were under way to mail to American Legion posts and auxiliaries 300,000 copies of a brochure entitled 'Communism in Guatemala—22 Facts.'"

His efforts led directly to a brutal military coup. Tye writes that Bernays "remained a key source of information for the press, especially the liberal press, right through the takeover. In fact, as the invasion was commencing on June 18, his personal papers indicate he was giving the 'first news anyone received on the situation' to the Associate Press, United Press, the International News Service, and the *New York Times*, with contacts intensifying over the next several days."

The result, tragically, has meant decades of tyranny under a Guatemalan government whose brutality rivaled the Nazis as it condemned hundreds of thousands of people (mostly members of the country's impoverished Maya Indian majority) to dislocation, torture and death.

Bernays relished and apparently never regretted his work for United Fruit, for which he was reportedly paid \$100,000 a year, a huge fee in the early 1950s. Tye writes that Bernays' papers "make clear how the United States viewed its Latin neighbors as ripe for economic exploitation and political manipulation—and how the propaganda war Bernays waged in Guatemala set the pattern for future U.S.-led campaigns in Cuba and, much later, Vietnam."

As these examples show, Tye's biography of Bernays is important. It casts a spotlight on the anti-democratic and dangerous corporate worldview of the public relations industry. The significance of these dangers is often overlooked, in large part because of the PR industry's deliberate efforts to operate behind the scenes as it manages and manipulates opinions and public policies. This strategy of invisibility is the reason that PR academic Scott Cutlip refers to public relations as "the unseen power."

Bernays pioneered many of the industry's techniques for achieving invisibility, yet his self-aggrandizing personality drove him to leave behind a record of how and for whom he worked. By compiling this information and presenting it to the public in a readable form, Tye has accomplished something similar to the therapeutic mission that Freud attempted with his patients—a recovery of historical memories that a psychoanalyst might term a "return of the repressed." <sup>n</sup>