
[Aotearoa/New Zealand: Logging company's dirty tricks revealed](#)

The recent publication in the USA of a book, detailing a conspiracy between government, industry, and various public relations firms to discredit environmentalists in New Zealand, has produced surprise among environmental and official circles in that country.

"Secrets and Lies: The anatomy of an anti-environmental PR campaign" is the result of a research by journalists Nicky Hager and Bob Burton, based on leaked internal documents from the state-owned Timberlands logging company and its consultant in public relations, the New Zealand subsidiary of the giant British-based firm Shandwick. The book reveals that the main priority of the Timberlands public relations campaign was to neutralise the discourse of the environmental groups that threatened its logging plans. Timberlands has been deliberately trying to discredit environmentalist groups involved in the campaign by saying that they were small, extreme and spreading misinformation --even though it knew very well that major environmental groups, including some with a conservationist view, were opposing its activities-- and by making legal threats to discourage people from joining the protests.

Shandwick New Zealand, was paid by Timberlands to monitor all opposing actions and media statements and devise ways to counter them. Contractors were paid as well to remove graffiti and posters from walls and lamp posts in the city of Wellington, which constitutes a violation to freedom of speech. There are also proofs that Timberlands tried to manipulate local communities in the West Coast region, making them promises of improvement in infrastructure and services, to get their support for its native forest logging plans, and at the same time reviling "extremist" environmental groups. For example it aimed to provide assistance to the West Coast Principals Association in return for gaining the opportunity to get the support of local schools for Timberlands and its operations.

Not only civil society was targeted by the manoeuvres of Timberlands. The company has also been trying to reverse the direction of the Labour Party policy, fearing that a change of government in November 1999 would have led to its native forest logging being stopped. In fact the newly elected government --a coalition formed by the Labour Party, the Alliance and the Greens-- forced Timberlands to withdraw its plans to log extensive areas of beech rainforests on the west coast of the country's south island (see WRM Bulletin 30). The strategy of Timberlands to this regard also included providing supply to its allies --among them some academics, the New Zealand Furniture Association and other timber organisations-- for them to write letters to the Labour leaders attacking conservationists and the party's anti-native forest logging policies.