



Bi-Annual Report 2009-10

Public Interest Investigations

SpinWatch is a project of Public Interest Investigations (PII), a not-for-profit company incorporated in January 2005.

PII's aim is to undertake cutting-edge, public interest investigations into important social, political, environmental and health issues in the UK and Europe.

SpinWatch

PII takes a particular interest in organisations and individuals that seek to shape the public and political agenda. This includes investigating the way that the public relations (PR) industry and corporate and government propaganda, distort public debate and undermine democracy. To this end, a major component of PII to date has been SpinWatch, dedicated to monitoring and reporting on corporate and government spin, as well as the activities of the lobbying industry.

The UK has the second biggest PR industry in the world – it is worth around £7.5 billion. The UK lobbying industry – a sub-sector of PR – is thought to have doubled in size since the early nineties. Until now, lobbying in the UK has been unregulated and hidden from public view.

SpinWatch has continued to lead the campaign for greater transparency in lobbying in the UK. In what was a major campaign victory, in May 2010 the UK coalition government committed itself to introducing transparency regulations for lobbyists (page 2).

We've also retained our close involvement in a similar Brussels-based campaign (page 5), continuing to play a leading role in the ALTER EU campaign for lobbying transparency.

Investigations into individual industry lobbies have continued, including work to expose the hidden influence of the private healthcare industry in the UK, and the finance sector lobby both in the UK and Brussels (page 4).

SpinWatch's profile both in the national press and online has also grown significantly in this period (pages 2,3,6).

We would like to thank all our funders for their support.

What we've been up to

Winning the case for transparency in lobbying

The coalition agreement between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, published on 11 May 2010, included a commitment that “the parties will tackle lobbying through introducing a statutory register of lobbyists.”

This was a major campaign victory for SpinWatch, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency (ALT) coalition led by SpinWatch, as well as the handful of MPs pushing for reform. ALT's key aim is for government to introduce a mandatory public register of lobbyists, with full financial disclosure.

Brief history of ALT campaign

SpinWatch has led the ALT campaign for new rules to open up lobbying in the UK to greater public scrutiny. Our input includes:

- Co-founding the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency (ALT), a coalition of civil society groups and trade unions in 2007;
- Giving evidence to a Parliamentary inquiry into lobbying that called on government to introduce mandatory registrations of lobbyists in January 2009;
- Winning the support of a third of back bench MPs for statutory regulation;
- Building public support through events and joining with the online activist network, 38 Degrees;
- Applying pressure to political parties through investigations into lobbying.



When a Parliamentary Committee published its report into lobbying in January 2009, only the Liberal Democrats then supported its call for a statutory register of lobbyists, with Labour and the Conservative Party both favouring self-regulation.

Sustained campaigning from ALT, as well as a series of lobbying scandals in 2009 and 2010, forced the issue of transparency in lobbying up the political agenda.

Ahead of the general election, for example, SpinWatch, with the activist network 38 Degrees, highlighted the amount of new MPs entering politics from a commercial lobbying background – and the potential for conflicts of interest. The campaign, which called on these prospective MPs to pledge their support for transparency in lobbying, made headlines in the run up to the election.



Pushing for wider political reform

SpinWatch has also been a regular commentator on related political reform issues including party finance, rules governing the so-called revolving door between politics and the commercial world, and politicians outside interests. As such, we have been regularly quoted in the press and contribute to a number of popular political blogs.

theguardian

News | Sport | Comment | Culture | Business | Money | Life & style | Travel

News > Politics > House of Commons

MPs accused of failure to reveal business links

- Three are withholding information, says group
- Tory, Labour and Lib Dem politicians reject claims



Investigations by SpinWatch highlighting the need for political reform include a *Sunday Times* front page story (above) exposing former MPs with privileged access to Parliament who are working as commercial lobbyists.

Another investigation in October 2009 exposed the close links between lobbyists for Donald Trump seeking to win favour for his controversial golf resort in Aberdeenshire, and the council responsible for granting it permission.

We also submitted evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review of MPs' expenses in June 2009.

Where next?

Progress on the drafting of the new rules of lobbyists has been slow and there are indications that the lobbying industry has had undue influence over the process.

However, the legislation is still timetabled for May 2012, with a consultation on the detail of the register ahead of this.

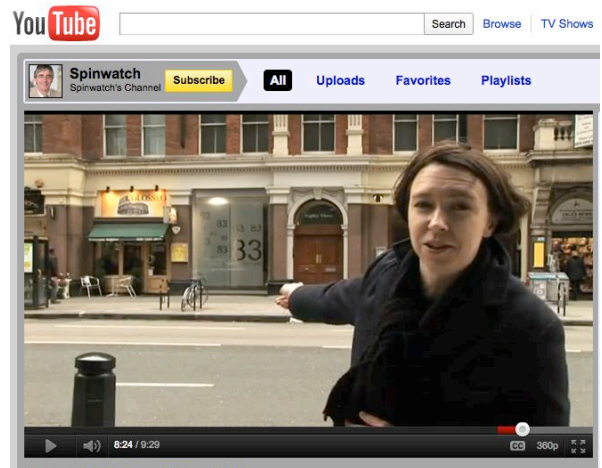
SpinWatch and ALT will continue to push the government to introduce a robust statutory register of lobbyists, through direct lobbying, as well as investigations into undue influence and privileged access in UK politics.

Industry investigations

SpinWatch continues to investigate lobbying by specific industries. Previous work has looked at the nuclear industry, alcohol and food sector lobbying.

Finance lobby: In February 2010 SpinWatch began to look at lobbying by the UK financial services sector, which is without parallel in both in terms of resources and its extensive and close links with politicians.

In February 2010 we published an initial report into our findings: *An Inside Job: A snapshot of political schmoozing by the City*. It revealed a well oiled revolving door between the finance industry, the government and its regulators, and opened a door onto the cosy social world they inhabit together. It provided a snapshot of the connections enjoyed by the banks, their trade associations and their lobbyists-for-hire, as well as insight into the role of the City of London Corporation and the capital's Mayor, Boris Johnson. It concluded by making the case for compulsory transparency rules for lobbyists.



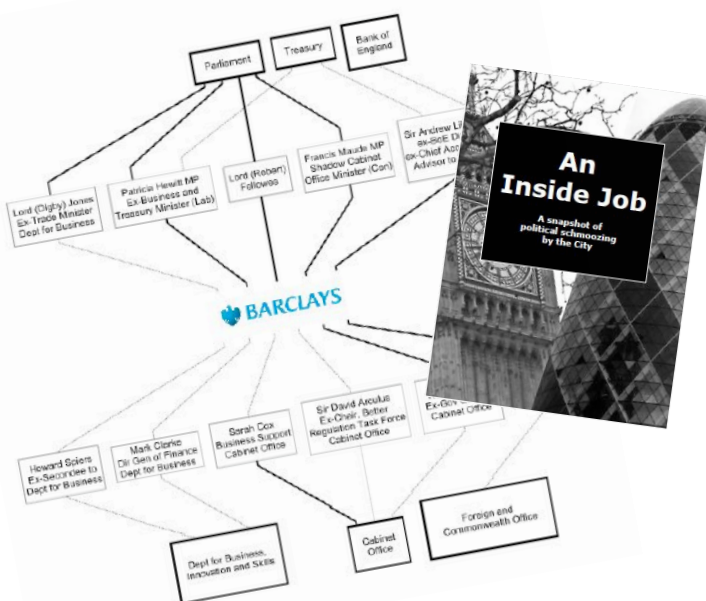
Private healthcare lobby: The coalition government has embarked on the most radical reform programme the NHS has ever seen, opening it up to the private sector, to great opposition from medical professionals and the public.

In this context, SpinWatch has sought to expose the well resourced and organised lobbying by the private healthcare industry for these reforms.

In late 2010, we created a short online film touring some of the Westminster offices of the companies, lobbying agencies and think tanks pushing for the changes. It has since been viewed by over 12,000 people and widely re-posted.

In 2010 the *British Medical Journal* also published a regular 'Lobby Watch' column by SpinWatch, which exposed health industry front groups and corporate funded think tanks.

Work on the private health industry lobby has continued into 2011 with SpinWatch investigations featuring on the front pages of the *Observer* and the *Guardian*, Radio4's Today programme, and quoted in a speech by the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg.



Transparency in Brussels

In Europe, SpinWatch continues to play a leading role in the ALTER EU campaign for lobbying transparency in Brussels.

For example, SpinWatch was involved in the campaign to get European Parliamentary candidates to sign up to transparency pledges during the 2009 European elections (details can be seen on SpinWatch's MEPedia portal).

In October 2009, SpinWatch was one of the authors of a report published by ALTER EU entitled *A Captive Commission*, which examined the role of the Commission's financial 'Expert Groups'. The report found that the vast majority of the financial 'experts' advising the Commission represented the very same companies that had been responsible for the global economic crisis. Such is the corporate takeover of the Commission, the report revealed that there

were more corporate employees helping draft Europe's financial policies than Commission civil servants.



SpinWatch also contributed to an ALTER EU book on lobbying in Brussels called "*Bursting the Bubble*", published in 2010, with chapters by Will Dinan and Andy Rowell. SpinWatch has also contributed to research and monitoring of the European Commission Transparency Register.

In December 2010, SpinWatch and Corporate Europe Observatory published a report that exposed how lobbyists for BP and other energy firms had drafted climate change legislation that secured a nine billion euro subsidy from taxpayers.

Lobby awards

In 2009, in the run up to the United Nations meeting on Climate Change, SpinWatch worked with NGOs from Europe and America to highlight adverse lobbying on climate related issues, in what was called the Angry Mermaid Awards.



At a press conference at the UN climate talks, the award-winning writer and journalist Naomi Klein announced that the controversial biotech company, Monsanto had won the award. The agriculture giant had been nominated for promoting its genetically modified (GM) crops as a solution to climate change and pushing for its crops to be used as biofuels.

A year later, in December SpinWatch was a member of the coalition that organised the Worst EU lobby Awards, which were awarded in two different categories for the first time; one on climate and another on finance. The awards were won by the German energy giant RWE (npower), and bank Goldman Sachs (coupled with the derivatives lobby group ISDA).

In all around 10,000 citizens from across Europe participated in an online public vote.

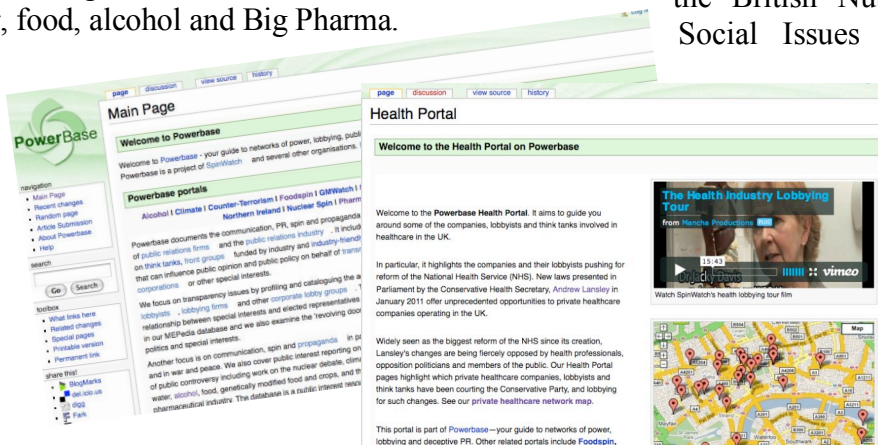


Powerbase.info

Our ground-breaking wiki, which was launched in May 2009, was renamed Powerbase in 2010 to reflect its widening focus on the networks of powerful individuals and institutions shaping the public agenda.

This free online encyclopaedia seeks to highlight conflicts of interest, hidden agendas and promote transparency in public life.

Made up of 20 separate portals containing over 11,900 articles, Powerbase reveals how power networks are organised and examines associated issues such as spin and propaganda in politics, the corporate world and by government agencies. It covers wide-ranging subjects such as health, climate change, neoconservative networks, policing and intelligence agencies, and industries such as nuclear, food, alcohol and Big Pharma.



special advisers, numerous free-market think tanks, and Islamophobia-related groups such as the English and Scottish Defence Leagues.

Investigations by SpinWatch and Powerbase editors and contributors have been covered in media outlets such as the *Guardian*, the *Times*, *Private Eye*, the *Ecologist*, *Radical Statistics* journal and numerous websites.

In 2010 we also worked with the *British Medical Journal* to produce a series of articles and research on the lack of transparency and lobbying in the health sector.

This exposed corporate links and funding behind various front groups for the food, pharmaceutical and alcohol industries, such as the Portman Group, the Stockholm Network, the British Nutrition Foundation, the Social Issues Research Centre and Nurses for Reform.

All evidence collected for such research, for example Freedom of Information requests and company accounts, was made publicly available on Powerbase.

Powerbase's popularity has seen it rapidly rise up Google's rankings, with its profiles often appearing in the top three items or first page of searches.

**3.5million page views
from over 450,000
visits in 2010**

We have also increased our use of social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

In 2010 it received over 3.5 million page views from over 450,000 separate visits worldwide – this was triple the average number of visits in 2009.

Traffic to SpinWatch.org remains steady with over 1.5 million pages viewed in over 360,000 visits in 2010.

Popular portals and pages include those on NuclearSpin, counter-terrorism, MEPs, the Living Marxism Network, GM foods and alcohol, plus profiles on the UK government's

We regularly give presentations of our work to our target audiences of activists, journalists and academics at national conferences and events, including The Centre for Investigative Journalism's Summer School.

Other projects

The Shell Files

Another SpinWatch project has been examining confidential court documents concerning the legal case by the family of murdered Ogoni activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and others against oil giant Shell.

After the legal case was settled in May 2010 for \$15.5 million, SpinWatch's Andy Rowell and Eveline Lubbers read thousands of pages of undisclosed legal testimony and documents.

The result was articles published by the *Guardian* about Shell's secret PR tactics in the wake of Saro-Wiwa's murder and in the *Independent on Sunday* about how Saro-Wiwa was framed by the Nigeria military who at the time were being paid by Shell. The documents were also the subject of two radio programmes in Holland.

theguardian

News | Sport | Comment | Culture | Business | Money | Life & style | Travel | Environment | TV

Business | Royal Dutch Shell

NGOs and BBC targeted by Shell PR machine in wake of Saro-Wiwa death

Secret documents reveal the oil giant's crisis management strategy following the execution of the Nigerian activist

Eveline Lubbers and Andy Rowell
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 9 November 2010 17.33 GMT
[Article history](#)



NuclearSpin

In January 2009 SpinWatch's project, NuclearSpin, revealed that a British local council had solicited hundreds of thousands of pounds from two companies that want to build a new nuclear power station - Hinkley C – in its region. This was in spite of the fact that the local council will play a major role in granting planning approval for the project. The story received significant coverage in the local media and by the BBC nationally.

Art collaboration

In October 2009 SpinWatch teamed up with two artists, Hollington & Kyprianou, for an exhibition at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol as part of its 'C Words' show on climate change.



The collaboration saw the creation of 'Adams & Smith – Auctioneers of Late Capitalist Period Artifacts'. Set 25 years from now, the exhibition featured thirteen everyday objects that have ceased to exist in this imagined future. They were accompanied tales of their demise and a 'selected provenance' supplied by SpinWatch, detailing the role PR and lobbying played in sustaining their existence: from greenwashing by the cement industry, negative campaigning by bottled water manufacturers, to the 'revolving door' between the banking sector and its regulators.

Funding and Accounts

Grant giving bodies in 2009-2010

We would like to thank all our funders

Date	Funder	Amount
2008-2009	Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	£30,000
2009	Isvara Foundation	£21,000
2009	FOE Europe	£1,762
2009	Scurrah Wainwright Charity	£2,000
2009	Roddick Foundation	£7,328
2010	Cordoba Foundation	£5,000
2010	Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust	£21,000
2010	Scurrah Wainwright	£3,200
2010-2011	Isvara Foundation	£24,200

Trading, profit and loss account 2009-2010

	2010**	2009*
	£	£
TURNOVER	69,417	43,904
Cost of sales	-	-
GROSS PROFIT	69,419	43,904
Administrative expenses	(57,707)	(40,621)
	11,712	3,283
Other operating income	0	0
Interest receivable and similar income	27	17
PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	11,739	3,300
RETAINED PROFIT CARRIED FORWARD	11,739	3,300

* 2009 accounts are until 31 January 2010

** 2010 accounts are until 31 January 2011