



B.U.G.A. U.P.

and the image makers

by Louise Williams and Tony Sarne co-editors of NEWSWIT^

B.U.G.A. U.P. and the tobacco and alcohol advertisers are fighting a continuing battle on billboards all over Australia. They finally came face to face in the opulent atmosphere of the Melbourne Art Director's Club in June. One hundred and seventy advertising executives paid \$22 a head to hear Sydney's well known B.U.G.A. U.P. (Billboard Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions) figure head, fred Cole, speak.

While billboard promoters are developing graffiti proof coatings and doing all they can to increase penalties for "vandalism of billboards" it is not surprising that some people were shocked that fred accepted the invitation to visit the "enemy's camp".

The Art Director's provided fred's return air ticket, accommodation and the usual fee paid to guest speakers in return for a lunch time, talk on the workings of B.U.G.A. U.P.

"I wasn't at all scared to confront them, being perfectly grounded philosophically", fred said. He 'suggested that perhaps the information he gave in the talk would be used to limit B.U.G.A. U.P.'s activities.

Jeremy Press, the organiser of the lunch, denied this vehemently and said that he invited fred because he "raised moral issues". The audience

was made up 'largely of art directors, most of whom have been involved in billboard advertising at some time in their careers.

"The advertisers that came probably came out of curiosity. B.U.G.A. U.P. is only about one tenth the size of the Sydney branch here in Melbourne and is a relatively new thing", Rennie Ellis said. Ellis, who runs a photo library, explained that "the Art Director's Club lunches are mainly social occasions but this time people were arguing about fred cole's speech hours later".

"Some people were angry, others sympathetic and nearly everyone stood around trying to justify their own part in the promotion of tobacco and alcohol all over the world," he said. The audience, who earn an estimated \$30,000 to \$100,000 each every year, were presented with fred, an invalid pensioner, dressed in his regular St. Vinny's fashions.

fred's unorthodox image annoyed a few people but most didn't react. As Jeremy Press said, "We try not to stick to conventional speakers at the Art Director's Club".

fred described the lunch as a very intense experience. Apart from some really stupid questions like "You don't smoke, you don't drink, what do you do then?" the audience's reaction was favourable. After talking to the group, fred

showed slides of "buggered up" posters, some of which were originally created by members of the audience.

B.U.G.A. U.P.'s argument was watertight fred told the audience that the number of people dying annually from smoking and associated diseases in Australia (16,500) exceeds the number of people killed per year in both World Wars. And this figure may well increase, not because more Australians are smoking but because scientists are discovering that more and more diseases are related to smoking.

Tobacco manufacturing companies have entered the battle for the Third World market in a big way. fred described this as part of the war which thee multinationals are waging against the rest of the world.

"Promotion of western cigarettes in the third world is comparable to the Nestle's Infant Formula scandal which prompted world-wide boycotts of Nestle's products once *the large numbers of infant deaths (one million a year) became known.

Activities of the multi-nationals are not only encouraging the people of the third world to buy manufactured products such as tailor made cigarettes which they can't afford, but are also causing widespread famine.



Food for local populations is in short supply because big companies are moving to take advantage of the cheap labour and replacing the staple crops of the indigenous people with cash crops, such as tobacco.

While the plight of the populations of countries such as Brazil is recognised in the Western world it is not widely publicised that the United States and others are supplying the third world with tailor made cigarettes as part of their aid programmes. In Brazil, where millions of people are inadequately nourished because of shortages of black beans, tobacco dependency is growing faster than anywhere else in the world.

Cigarette companies market products in the third world with higher nicotine and tar contents than western cigarettes. This is not, as commonly believed, to addict populations more quickly.

"Native tobacco products are so strong that they are not inhaled at all, the nicotine is absorbed through the tongue and the lining of the mouth. So when they switch, as a result of clever advertising, and mimic the west, they have to smoke much more and inhale deeply to get the same hit. So whole populations are suddenly inhaling large amounts of carcinogenic smoke for the first

time", fred explained.

It was at this point that Rennie Ellis stood up and announced that he would withdraw his photographs from a cigarette advertising campaign to be launched in Papua New Guinea. The audience applauded.

"I did it in anger really. That morning a guy from a Sydney Ad agency had flown down to see me and I'd agreed to supply him with a series of photos of VFL footballers at \$500 a shot."

"I insisted that they check with the players involved because I thought they might object to being linked with something as obviously unsporting as smoking."

"So I wrote to the agency outlining the reason for my decision and haven't heard from them since," Ellis said.

Rennie Ellis is self employed, so a decision like this won't cost him any more than the money lost for the particular photographs.

"The people working for the big companies and taking home really big money are hardly likely to take a stand and jeopardise their jobs, even if they were impressed with fred's talk - that'd be like biting off the hand that feed them," Ellis said.

"I support B.U.G.A. U.P. emotionally. We live in a democracy so what they're doing is merely exercising their right to freedom of speech. The only difference is that advertising is seen as legitimate in the eyes of the law and B.U.G.A. U.P. members risk imprisonment every time they throw paint at a bill board they find offensive," he said.

fred described advertising as false communication. "What B.U.G.A.. U.P. is doing is turning the false messages back onto themselves and converting the one way dictatorship of the billboards into two way communication."

Billboards are designed to work almost subconsciously. By altering the message B.U.G.A. U.P. draws attention to the false logic of the original message, for example "Smoking makes you attractive' to the opposite sex, smoking makes you fit and healthy."

'B.U.G.A. U.P. is forcing a dialogue, regrettably at the expense of going to gaol," fred said.

And fred was recently back at the Newtown Court again on another "refacement charge".

His trial prompted other professionals to come out in support

of B.U.G.A. U.P. His lawyer, Bruce Miles, donated his services free, and Dr Alan Blum, editor of the Australian Medical journal, gave testimony on Fred's behalf at the trial.

The cover of the Medical journal's August issue featured a poster of a man in a wheelchair who smoked through a tube in his throat after undergoing an operation to treat cancer of the larynx.

Entitled "Marble Row", the poster was originally entered as a photograph in the Phillip Morris nationwide competition to find the "Marlboro man of Australia", last year. Blum chose it on the front cover of the journal to highlight an article inside about B.U.G.A. U.P.'s success in mobilising public ridicule for that competition.

The article, written by Renee Bitoun, from the Thoracic unit of St Vincent's hospital, described how B.U.G.A. U.P. enlarged the photograph into a poster, and by drawing public attention to it, defused the Marlboro competition to the point where the organisers had to award the prizes in secrecy.

It also said that if the scientific community took a more active role in ridiculing cigarette advertising, efforts to reduce cigarette sales would meet with more success than "finger, wagging campaigns of the past."

News of the article and poster somehow reached Phillip Morris before the journal's publication, and resulted in a letter from the company's Sydney solicitors asking the Australasian Medical Publishing Company to delete any references to the Marlboro trade mark. It was a request that the Medical Publishing Company duly ignored after consulting with its own solicitors.

This was despite successful legal manoeuvring by Phillip Morris in 1976 to prevent an anti-smoking documentary from being shown outside the UK.

That year, Britain's independent television network, Thames

Television screened on its "This Week" programme, a half-hour documentary called "Death in the West". An audience of some 12 million viewers saw footage of Phillip Morris executives claiming cigarettes were not harmful intercut with interviews of real life American cowboys suffering from lung cancers and emphysemas. After each cowboy, the film showed the victim's doctor testifying that his patient's condition was caused by cigarette smoking.

Phillip Morris immediately sued Thames Television for deception and breach of copyright, claiming it was double-crossed into allowing Marlboro cigarette commercials to be used in a film that depicted cigarette smoking as harmful. It obtained a court order prohibiting the film from being shown or discussed publicly until its suit could be heard. Phillip Morris obviously did not want the showing of "Death in the West" in the US - its most profitable market. The widespread showing of the Thames documentary could damage the he-man image promoted by the most successful advertising campaign of all time. In 1977, the company spent \$27.2 million to help sell two trillion Marlboro cigarettes to Americans.

Thames television will probably never take the suit to trial because it would cost an estimated quarter of a million dollars to mount a full-scale self-defence, which is reportedly more than it could earn through further sales of the film.*

Dr Blum said that although the Medical Journal and the Australian Medical Association had a long history of opposition to the cigarette industry, now was the time to look specifically at who was aiming the positive imagery of cigarette smoking at children.

He explained, "We're taking it to a brand name identity. This is what consumers identify with. Not with smoking - they don't smoke, but they become cowboys and he-men and sophisticated ladies."

According to Dr Blum consumers

do not realize who these companies are, and the "evil" they are doing. "Basically these people can most charitably be described as drug pushers," he said, and added "it's about time we stopped looking at the profits being made by individual, doctors, and looked at the absurd profits from death these people make."

Following publication of the article in the Medical journal, a spokesperson from Phillip Morris criticised the AMA, saying it was trying to divert attention from recent allegations of in-house problems, Dr Blum argued that vested interests were present more in such an accusation than publication of the article in the journal. "I don't know anyone who would believe a drug pusher over a medical practitioner who is trying to, serve the interests of the community, and was trained for that purpose. I don't know what vested interest it is for the doctors to talk about smoking - they'll lose a lot of customers if they get people off cigarettes."

Reaction from the medical profession to the Medical journal's B.U.G.A. U.P. feature has been mostly favourable, according to the editor, although he admitted support was hard to gauge on the strength of a few congratulatory phone calls. "A couple of surgeons called to say it was the greatest thing they've ever seen," he said.

"At last doctors are seeing that we are taking a generic health issue that everyone and his grandmother has preached about, and looking at who specifically is promoting this epidemic."

Hopefully this could signal the beginning of a determined offensive by doctors and health professionals against those who, in Dr Blum's own words, make the Marlboro man "unfit for human intercourse." Refacing of billboards by groups such as B.U.G.A. U.P. alone is not enough. It is merely the start of a wider campaign which will require members of the scientific and business communities to alert the public not only to the physical

dangers of smoking, but also too its economic cost to society. The 16,500 deaths in Australia each year attributable to the isolated effects of smoking according to the Victorian Cancer, Council cost the Australian economy more than \$1,000 million each year.

In fact, Blum said that "the real thrust to get rid of these drug pushers will come not from doctors, or universities, but from the other corporations who will see the harm they are causing the economic well being of society."

He explained that cigarette companies are the black sheep of the corporate world, totally lacking in credibility, "so what they're doing is buying off goodwill by the sponsorship of sport, of art museums . . . they're trying very hard to buy off the complacency of

those of us who could stop them pushing their epidemic."

The real significance of the publication of the poster and article in the Medical journal, according to Dr Blum is that the journal is distributed internationally, including to those third world nations where cigarette companies are luring thousands of consumers by promoting cigarettes as a sign of wealth and sophistication.

"The journal will be in every medical library in the world. In Lesotho, or Botswana, where they would devour a journal such as ours, this is one of the main sources of communication, because as impoverished countries, they do not get many books or medical publications!

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He explained that multi-national tobacco corporations are now beginning to gain a stronghold in those countries. That is where such information can still have very telling effects. If the recent issue of the Medical journal had come out 30 years ago in Australia, then perhaps it might have had a profound effect on the smoking habits of many people, Dr Blum argued.

fred cole , B.U.G.A. U.P. figure-head said of Dr Blum and Bruce Miles, his solicitor: "These are the people I admire most, for they have to put a lot more at stake than some others when speaking out for something they believe in."

And fred also had a word of warning for the tobacco companies: "They've got to realize that we will simply not stop!"

^ NEWSWIT published by the New South Wales Institute of Technology Student Association c1983.

* "Death in the West" is available in Australia on video cassette for \$25 from C.A.C.A .PO Box 473 N. Fitzroy VIC, or PO Box K 1380 Haymarket NSW 2000