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After a man's heart...

*...when smokers find out the good things
Chesterfields give them
Nothing else
will do*

THE WORLD CIGARETTE PANDEMIC

BUGA-UP (Billboard Utilizing Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions)

An Australian movement to end cigarette advertising

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On national, state, and local levels, Australian health professionals are making a determined bid to eliminate all forms of cigarette advertising.¹⁻⁴

During the past decade public awareness of cigarette smoking as a major health problem has increased, in large part due to efforts of such groups as the Victorian Anti-Cancer Council, the Australian Council on Smoking and Health, and the National Heart Foundation.

However, as in the United States, certain early successes such as the ban on televised cigarette advertising in 1975 have been undermined by stepped-up cigarette advertising in other media, combined with tobacco company promotions designed to keep a favorable image of brands of cigarettes in the public eye. A survey of Sydney teenagers showed that they smoke the most advertised brands out of proportion to the rest of the smoking population.⁵

In 1979 when even recommendations by a Senate committee for a complete ban on cigarette advertising⁶ had gone unheeded, a group was formed in Sydney to mobilize greater public attention to the pervasiveness of advertising for cigarettes and other harmful products.

The group, BUGA-UP (Billboard Utilizing Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions), has relied on satire rather than health messages as a way of making omnipresent cigarette company trademarks such as the Marlboro man an object of ridicule. BUGA-UP's main weapon is not buttons or brochures but the spray can with which to "re-face" billboard advertising and thus call attention to the original advertisement. As a BUGA-UP member explained in 1980 in its annual report,

What we are trying to do with our graffiti is to expose the devices the advertisers are using to exploit us—demystifying their process. The advertisements use two main ways to promote their products, sexuality (both male and female) and insecurity. They do that by setting up a situation visually and verbally where the viewer is made to feel somehow insecure or inadequate, and then imply that by consuming the product they can be saved from the terrible situation in which they find themselves. The billboards say 'all you've got to do is buy this product and you'll enter this terrific fantasy.' The product can no longer exist without the fantasy.

The group has attracted hundreds of people of all ages, including physicians, journalists, teachers, and clergymen. It has also attracted the attention of the police: 38 arrests

were recorded to members of BUGA-UP between 1980 and 1983, including five physicians. But in general both the police and the courts have not been unkind to BUGA-UP. Imposing a fine of \$35, one magistrate said to two defendants, "I have the utmost sympathy for you, or any person doing what he thinks can be done to remedy the situation" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, February 25, 1982). BUGA-UP's legal defense to the charge of "malicious damage" (the definition of which involves "indifference to human life and suffering") has been turned around to suggest that the billboards aren't damaged but improved. The defense of necessity has been used, whereby if one bursts into a burning house to save a child from fire but is then charged with trespassing one can be acquitted on the grounds that the crime was committed to prevent a greater evil. This defense has stimulated discussion in the legal community. One lawyer for BUGA-UP has suggested serving a Writ of Mandamus against Ministers (an action to compel persons in office to discharge a public duty) for having failed to ban cigarette advertising. Another legal authority suggests it could be an offense to conspire to encourage people to smoke: "People are allowed to kill and injure themselves, but they are not allowed to encourage others to through the use of insidiously subtle psychology."⁷

As advertisers' activities diversified into more subtle sponsorship, BUGA-UP stepped up its counterattack. In September 1981 a nationwide advertising campaign was launched by Philip Morris to find the "Marlboro man of Australia," someone, according to the entry form, with a "strong and distinctly individual masculinity." A group of Sydney health workers entered a patient who had for years smoked through a tracheostomy tube, and BUGA-UP funded the distribution of the entrant's campaign poster showing him in his wheelchair holding up a pack of Marlboro cigarettes.⁸ Thousands of these posters were posted over cigarette advertisements on shops, and when BUGA-UP announced that its entrant would attend the major public presentation Philip Morris retreated and released the name of the "winner" at a private party.

In August 1982 a racing car plastered with Marlboro decals were displayed in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, as an example of technology as an art form. (A concurrent exhibition at the Gallery, "The World of Edward Hopper," originated from the Whitney Museum in New York under the sponsorship of Philip Morris.) The chaining by an artist-sympathizer of BUGA-UP to the car in the course of a public demonstration against this form of cigarette promotion resulted in the car's permanent withdrawal from the Gallery. More importantly, the action raised questions about the propriety of such sponsorship at

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public-supported institutions.

Other widely reported activities have included an exposé of the increasing involvement of Amatil (British American Tobacco's Australian company) in the Australian Ballet and other cultural bodies, and opposition to the proliferation of cigarette advertising at the Royal Easter Show, (akin to an American State Fair), the premier children's event of the year. Along with a Melbourne-based kindred group MOP UP (Movement Opposed to the Promotion of Unhealthy Products), BUGA-UP has protested attempts to circumvent the law prohibiting cigarette advertising and sponsorship on television such as Philip Morris' Marlboro Australian Open Tennis Championships.

Far from incurring public disdain for "vandalism," as the tobacco industry and billboard companies would claim, there is no doubting that the real vandals are cigarette companies and those who defend their activities. BUGA-UP can be credited with having brought the issue of cigarette company business practices before the public eye. Physician-members of BUGA-UP, who have been hailed by the media as "The Doctors Who Fight Cancer with Spray Cans" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, February 19, 1983), have been much sought-after speakers at medical meetings and at primary and secondary schools and universities.

Even if a total ban on cigarette advertising comes about in the next couple of years, as now seems likely, BUGA-UP will not become complacent about other ways in which cigarette manufacturers may aim at children. The individuals in BUGA-UP are committed to counteracting the pervasive pushing of unhealthy products in Australia, especially the loathsome activities of the tobacco industry.

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