unselling the air war

by Fred Branfman

The Nixon Administration's transformation of a highly visible ground war into an unseen, automated air war has produced a crisis not only for the people of Indochina and the United States, but for humanity itself.

By reducing American casualties, and taking American involvement in the war off the TV screens, the Administration has freed it from former domestic constraints against unlimited war-making. Unless public opinion can be made aware of the fact that the war is not winding down, that Asians are dying as always, but as never before, the war in Indochina will not only continue indefinitely, but this form of automated warfare could spread to billions of people throughout the third world.

Help Unsell the War, a media project that provides TV, radio, and print ads about the war to local groups and media outlets, is determined to pierce through the war to the American people. Since Unsell became a project of Clergy and Laymen Concerned in September 1971, these ads have been produced in every major market area in the country. The spring of 1971. These ads concentrated mainly on growing public pressure that the Unsell material can help local groups make a determined effort to see that people living under the bombs.

We are happy to announce that a new wave of public service announcements for television, radio, and print that dramatically portray the realities of today's air war are now available. We are convinced that these ads, donated at a cost of over $1 million by professional advertising and production firms, can help bring about an end to the war. But they can only be effective if they are distributed, and to do this we need the help of local groups.

We've already gained valuable experience from the first set of Unsell materials, which were produced in the spring of 1971. These ads concentrated mainly on American ground forces and the economic cost of the war to the American people. Since Unsell became a project of Clergy and Laymen Concerned in September, 1971, the campaign has spread to local committees in every major market area in the country. The ads have been placed free of charge as a public service on hundreds of local television and radio stations and in national and local publications.

But now more than ever before there is a need for a renewed commitment by all Americans to the cause of peace. Events in the next few months may well determine whether the United States will remain indefinitely in Indochina or finally leave due to growing public pressure that the Unsell material can help to build.

The War Material

The new Unsell material is designed to bring the reality of the air war home to the American people, who are vaguely aware that the bombing is continuing, but few of whom realize the nature or extent of that bombing.

FACT: The Nixon Administration has already dropped over 3.3 million tons of bombs on Indochina, more than any government has ever dropped in history. (Source: Pentagon Information Office.)

FACT: Over three million civilians have already been killed, wounded, or made homeless since 1969, primarily because of the air war. (Source: U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Refugees.)

FACT: Hundreds of thousands of Indochinese peasants are at this very moment huddling in caves, holes, and tunnels, hiding from the bombs. (Source: Project Air War, Washington, D.C.)

Of the few Americans who have learned of such statistics, even fewer realize what they really mean in terms of human misery. Our country has never been bombed, Americans have rarely been asked to imagine what our bombs do to people.

Our leaders have been carrying out blatant news management about the nature of the air war. The Administration and the Pentagon have kept reporters from going out on the bombing raids, and have classified all sensitive information--such as the extensive use of antipersonnel bombs--out of public reach. They continually drum into the American public the idea that only "military targets" are being bombed, while the reality for the peasants of Indochina is hundreds of bombs falling daily on their homes, villages, and countryside.

Combating News Management

The Help Unsell the War campaign is designed to combat this news management about the air war. Unsell's TV, radio, and print ads go to the heart of the issue. They represent the most ambitious attempt in recent history to bring home the moral issues of the war to millions of Americans. They ask Americans in the safety of their homes to try to imagine the suffering our bombs bring to the people of Southeast Asia.

Unsell cannot combat this news management alone, however. This campaign can only succeed if local groups make a determined effort to see that these ads appear as often as possible in their local media.

Peace-minded community people are asked to request that the broadcasters and publishers in their area run the Unsell material as a public service, to balance the record on the air war issue. (For further information about what local groups can do, see page 58.)

Will it really make any difference? We don't know for sure. We would like to believe that the vast majority of Americans are not so indecent as to be indifferent to the unimaginable suffering of the Indochinese people. We believe that the polls, which indicate that Americans are willing to end the air war by a majority of 57 percent to 29 percent, bear this out.

We believe that, at the very least, our ads will re-energize millions of Americans who are involved in the antiwar movement in previous years, but who have since dropped out. We believe that public indifference to the air war to date is largely due to simple lack of information about it.

And we surely know this: Before we wake tomorrow, dozens more Indochinese people will have been burned alive by our napalm, cut to pieces by our fragmentation bombs, riddled by our antipersonnel weapons, or buried alive by our high explosives. If we cannot awaken the American conscience in this crucial election year, then not only will the war in Indochina go on indefinitely, but American aircraft carriers could soon be carrying out such automated slaughter off the coasts of Africa, Asia, or Latin America throughout the decade to come without a bit of public protest.

For these reasons, we know that we have no choice but to try to get the truth to the American people.

Fred Branfman is director of Project Air War, Washington, D.C., and editor of the recently published book Voices from the Plain of Jars (Harper & Row).
the media movement

by Roger Hickey

From its very beginnings at the Yale conference in 1971, Help Unsell the War has caught the imaginations and involved the energies of people who work in the media industries. We have built and expanded a functional relationship with highly talented and influential people in the advertising world.

More than 400 individuals and agencies have worked on or facilitated the production of Unsell ads, and the whole industry has come to view its own social usefulness and influence in the advertising world.

The Unsell campaign has caught people's imagination on many levels of this new movement. Its emphasis on professional creation and production talent has led to an ongoing and fruitful exchange of ideas and resources from the many creative and resourceful people in the advertising industry.

The real people who make Unsell work are the tireless committee members from the very real development of a broadcasting industry to which they feel strongly. Having come to the area of broadcasting from many levels of this new movement, they have incurred an imbalance on several legal fronts. And the whole question of broadcaster liability for controversial material is open to question and challenge.

Unsell is now a focus for activism on many levels. Eventually, the war must end, and we hope that the resources and energy that Unsell has mobilized will continue to grow and develop.

There are many aspects of corporate and political life in America that need to be "unsold." Issues such as consumer ethics, the environment, public interest advocacy, and minority and workers' struggles could use the kinds of media campaigns that we have developed around the war in Indochina.

We would like to see Unsell develop into a real media resource agency, bringing the talent of the rapidly changing media industries to the service of the progressive work for social justice.

All of our work is seen in the context of the tremendous changes that are occurring in the media systems and "consciousness industries" of our advanced industrial society. New technology, if applied correctly, will tend to decentralize media inputs and empower the reader and consumer for socially progressive, strengthening groups.

Unsell material is produced in the mold and form of mass advertising, but it is nothing wrong with that format or with the ideas of mass media itself, but we would hope that perhaps the results of our Unsell work will be a growth of diversity and humanity in media.

Roger Hickey works for the West Coast office of the Help Unsell the War Campaign.

If questions of "equal time" or the "fairness doctrine" come up in connection with the Unsell ads, it is a situation that should help eliminate most concerns a radio or television station might have. This information was prepared by a veteran broadcaster and a noted media lawyer.

Is there any legal impediment to a broadcaster carrying the Unsell ads?

No. Nothing in the Communications Act or any other law prevents a broadcaster from carrying the ads, either free or paid.

What is the "fairness doctrine"?

Simply stated, the "fairness doctrine" obliges broadcasters to achieve a reasonable balance in the presentation of controversial issues of public importance. Thus, each station must permit the airing of contrasting viewpoints on such issues. It is clear that the question of U.S. involvement in Vietnam is a controversial issue of public importance.

Does the "fairness doctrine" apply to the Unsell ads?

Yes. Unsell is a broadcaster, and the FCC's decision in 1969 to force the Pentagon to release and report the statement on the war by Administration leaders forced the Pentagon to present opposing views. They may have inadvertently incurred an imbalance on the side of the Administration's position on the war. Unsell material can redress such an imbalance where it exists.

This situation is very likely in the case of the "right-wing" broadcasters who carry programs such as Hunter's "Hunt's Line." In dealing with these stations, Unsell proponents should insist that stations agree on the "fairness doctrine" as a requirement that the ads be aired.

Can the "fairness doctrine" be raised as a reason why a broadcaster would not carry the ads?

Yes. It may very well be raised by a station that fears the presentation of the Unsell advertisements will create an imbalance and oblige them to present "pro-Indochina war" advertisements.

Don't accept this argument unless the broadcasters haven't been covering the war issue at all, or they are already so heavily balanced toward presenting anti-war points of view that the presentation of one more will create the imbalance. In the latter instance—the only one in which a broadcaster could rightfully refuse to carry the ads—the community could use the Unsell ads to create him fair-ness doctrine problems—he has already created a situation existing entitlement program or other "equal time" ads. This would avoid an imbalance.

Can Unsell demand "equal time"?

No. "Equal time" has crept into the layman's vocabulary through frequent misuse of the phrase by controversial issues in broadcasting. As a legal term, "equal time" is a very narrow statutory provision that deals only with the use of broadcasting stations' facilities by a candidate for political office, and that use must be by the candidate himself, i.e., in the candidate's own voice. As you can see, "equal time"—or the more precise, "equal opportunity," which is what the phrase means—is not applicable to the Unsell campaign, but the "fairness doctrine" does.

Can individuals or groups buy air time for the broadcasting of the Unsell ads?

There is no law that prevents a broadcaster from selling time for the presentation of opposing viewpoints on controversial issues, and in fact, the courts have indicated that they should. However, the question of whether stations can be legally forced to sell time is pending before the Supreme Court. The decision of the United States Court of Appeals in Columbia in Business Executives Move for Viet Nam Peace v. FCC (67-1071) established the precedents of Columbia in Business Executives Move for Viet Nam Peace v. FCC, which established the right of broadcast stations to refuse to carry spot announcements dealing with controversial issues, has been appealed.

If a broadcaster refuses to give time for the ads, then it also refuses to sell time to candidates, and therefore may be threatened with legal action. If a broadcaster refuses to give time for the ads, then it also refuses to sell time to candidates, and therefore may be threatened with legal action.

Yes. It is legal to run the ads, but it might be wise to include a statement to the effect that the ads will continue to run as long as possible.

Inquiries to Tom Asher, Media Director, Room 213, New York Times Building, New York, New York, 10020; or your local media lawyer.
As the bombing and mining in Southeast Asia build, the Unsell the War campaign has begun an escalation of its own.

A new crop of radio and television ads, posters, and print ads for magazines and newspapers, and even billboard advertisements is being turned out by top-flight West Coast talent, making it clear that "winding down a war," like winding a clock, is the best way to keep it going.

The Unsell campaign really began with the horridly C.B. Starr documentary, Uncle Sam 'I Want Out' Poster (February, 1971) that pinpointed the gigantic advertising and public relations campaign conducted by the Pentagon to sell the American people on its Southeast Asia war.

Yale student Iris Nerenk, along with fellow students and faculty members, decided that the Madison Avenue approach could be used to sell the war, it could be used just as successfully "to unsell" by informing, educating, and persuading the American public.

Nerenk enlisted the support of David McCull, president of the McCaffrey, McCull advertising agency in New York. Old friends who had worked together on the Yale campus more than 300 persons from 50 different advertising agencies were directed by distinguished experts on Indochina, the defense establishment, and economics.

The "Unsell" Army

The briefing unleashed a "new army" of its own. Students went to work doing research and advertising which has volunteered their time and talent; production people gave the project a great deal of their time and facilities.

The result was an advertising campaign that represented over a million dollars in defense resources—the largest contribution ever made to a single peace effort.

In September, 1971 the Unsell campaign became a project of Clergy and Laymen Concerned (CALC). Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), and the Roosevelt Institute, organized the campaign as Iris Nerenk returned to his studies at Yale.

CALC involvement carried the Unsell effort to the grass roots. Local community groups and individuals are now at work in nearly every state and major market area in the country. Public service Unsell ads have been placed free of charge in hundreds of local radio and television outlets, as well as national and local publications.

One result is that the usual talk-show fare has been spiced with more weighty information. For example, in Sacramento and Minneapolis Unsell spots have run during the "Dick Cavett Show"; in Los Vegas, during the "Tonight Show," and in Louisville and Pittsburgh, during "The Today Show.""}

New Emphasis for '72

At the turn of the year, CALC staffer Green Greek took over responsibility in San Francisco to manage the West Coast Two of the Unsell effort.

It was clear that a new political situation required a new kind of Unsell materials. Nixon truce talk still had the Far East campaign as its backbone.

An American public that saw the war primarily in terms of loss of American lives had become bored with the issue. Troop withdrawal did not seem "winding down the war," but rather a hollowing out in war activity. Nor did it bring about a sense of restoration in cul tural aims, but only "changing the color of the canvas."

The "Unsell" Army

The Unsell the War: A Project of Clergy and Laymen Concerned

HELP UNSELL THE WAR: A Project of Clergy and Laymen Concerned

HELP UNSELL THE WAR ORDER FORM/PRICE LIST

Please use this form to order materials and literature from Help Unsell The War

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[Table with columns for ITEM, PRICE, QUANTITY, and TOTAL]

Bud Arnold, with offices in one of the few pre-1960 earth quake buildings left standing in San Francisco, formed his agen­ cy a couple of years ago with the announcement: "We pledge a full 20 percent of our time and talent to fight war, racism, waste, and poverty. One day out of every five from everybody in the business." Since that time, along with ads for such clients as Panzer Co., the Unsell Agency has produced materials for Business Executives for Human rights, for the Americanpeace movement, for Viet Nam Veterans Against the War, and for McCleary, Mexican American Coalition against Disenfranchisement, and other social causes.

Bill Honig, whose company ads have appeared in the East Coast and a large number would be excited by the prospect of helping the Unsell effort.

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Tying the package together

Unsell the War for as many years as we can. That may be tired, but the gut reaction is that some people won't give up and others insisted, "Give us a break now. We've got a great peg for the future." Carson enthuses. "The American people have to make aware those who think it's all over. It's still a very great faith in the American people's response to the message of humanity."

Read the Average American

An initial meeting in San Francisco in July 1969 did not produce a consensus that determined the content of the current new crop of Unsell materials. The new materials were to be geared toward reaching the average American.

Three issues would be given primary consideration: (1) the need for new, unfettered criticism of the war, (2) the need for new, unfettered criticism of the war and the havoc it causes to war domestic priorities, and (3) the need to let the American people understand the big lie with which the war is an American lie.

American involvement in the Viet Nam war back in 1963, says Honig, "I read everything I could and I said, 'we are doing.' But in advertising, we said 'no.'" With his background in long-term Viet Nam analysis, Honig is now considered one of the most knowledgeable on the latest developments.

"Says Honig: 'What Nixon calls peace war.' He's very excited in making people believe that black is white. Not only does the Government lie, but the President lies. People see Nixon as a man of peace from his Administration, which is continuing the war.

Ralph Carson describes him­ self as a prophet. "It's my feeling, insists Carson, "that some people have been against this war for as many years as we have. They are as vitally involved as they were in 1966. They may be tired, but the out reaction is the same."

Thus Carson sees the Unsell effort as a real opportunity, es­ pecially in view of Government efforts to camouflage the true nature of the war.

"We've got a great peg for creative material," Carson enthuses. "The American people have to be made aware those who think it's all over. It's still a very great faith in the American people's response to the message of humanity."

Landmark Campaign Ever

Green Greek's head is still reeling, it appears, from both overwork and excitement. He enthusiastically tells of ad ex­ perts insisting that they "never seen so much production power in one room in Los Angeles. The only problem was there were not enough scripts."

Greek further enthuses that "the'3 battle of the advertising campaign ever on the West Coast, in terms of films and production of major advertising. Unsell is the largest volunteer campaign ever.

Not only are we the writing, ar­ tistic, and production of the highest quality, but such noted ad professionals as James Whitmore and Henry Fonda are providing the talent and services.

That's quite a package! Most of the results from this new wave of advertising, hard work, and commitment are now available for further local grass­ roots excitement and competition (and are listed in one of the supplem ents).

James R. McGraw is a fre­ e lance writer living in New York City.

photo: P. Robilotta

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That's quite a package! Most of the results from this new wave of advertising, hard work, and commitment are now available for further local grass-roots excitement and competition (and are listed in one of the supplements).
What can you do about it? Well, this is still a democracy, isn't it?

American pilots and electronic technicians are killing thousands of Asians, without even seeing who they kill... when I see each week stepping up the tonnage of bombs dropped on Indochina... then I don't feel so proud any more. Because I thought that was what the bad countries did... not my country.

What can he do about it? Well, this is still a democracy, isn't it?

The American Government has brought 450,000 of our men back from Viet Nam.

Thank God for that.

The American casualties have fallen from 1,400 a month to less than 100.

Thank God for that.

But the American Government is still dropping 1,500 tons of bombs every day on the men, women, and children of Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia.

God help us.

What can he do about it? Well, this is still a democracy, isn't it?