ON THE WAY TO 1984

By HENRY STEELE COMMAGER, *professor of history, Amherst College.*

GEORGE ORWELL'S Oceania had a vast and efficient information agency; its name was the Ministry of Truth and its purpose was to make every citizen of Oceania think the right thoughts. "The past is whatever the records agree upon," was its motto and it wrote, or rewrote, the records. Now the information agencies of our own State and Defense Departments, the USIA, and the CIA, seem bent on creating an American Ministry of Truth and imposing upon the American people a record of the past which they themselves write.

It is the CIA whose activities have been most insidious and are most notorious, but the CIA has no monopoly on brainwashing. Consider, for example, the film *Why Vietnam*. It is "one of our most popular films"; it is distributed free to high schools and colleges throughout the country, and to other groups who ask for it—as hundreds doubtless do. Its credentials are beyond reproach; it was produced by the Defense Department and sponsored by the State Department, and President Johnson, Secretary Rusk, and Secretary McNamara all pitch in to give it authenticity.

The USIA is not permitted to carry on propaganda within the United States, and the reason it is not is that the American people do not choose to give government authority to indoctrinate them. Government, they believe, already has

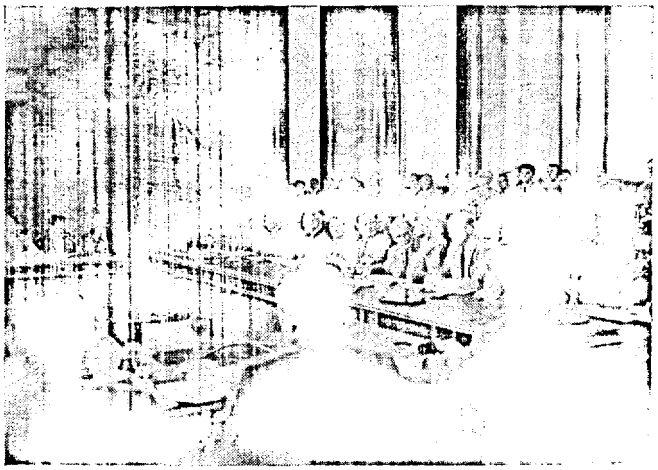
every method of communication with the people that it can properly use. The President, members of the cabinet, the armed services—these can command attention for whatever they have to say, at any time. There is therefore no necessity, and no excuse, for government propaganda, no need for government to resort to subterfuge in its dealings with the people.

What we have always held objectionable is not overt publicity by government, but covert indoctrination. *Why Vietnam* is, in fact, both. It is overt enough, but while it is clear to the sophisticated that it is a government production and therefore an official argument, the film is presented not as an argument, but as history. Needless to say it is not history. It is not even journalism. It is propaganda, naked and unashamed. As the "fact sheet" which accompanies it states, it makes "four basic points," and makes them with the immense authority of the President: that the United States is in Vietnam "to fulfill a solemn pledge," that "appeasement is an invitation to aggression," that "the United States will not surrender or retreat," and that we—but alas not the other side—are always "ready to negotiate a settlement."

Government, which represents all the people and presumably all points of view, should have higher standards than private enterprise in the presentation of news or history. But *Why Vietnam* is well below the standards of objectivity, accuracy, and impartiality which we are accustomed to in newspapers and on television; needless to say, as scholarship it is absurd. In simple, uncritical, and one-dimensional terms it presents the official view of the war in Vietnam with never a suggestion that there is or could be any other view. When Communists sponsor such propaganda, we call it "brainwashing."

Let us look briefly at this film, for it is doubtless a kind of dry run of what we will get increasingly in the future. It begins—we might have anticipated this—with a view of Hitler and Chamberlain at Munich, thus establishing at the very outset that "appeasement" is "a short cut to disaster." Because the free nations of the world failed to stop aggression in the Thirties, they almost lost their freedom and had to fight a gigantic war to survive; if we fail to stop "aggression" now we, too, may lose our freedom. For "we have learned at terrible cost that retreat does not bring safety and that weakness does not bring peace, and it is this lesson that has brought us to Vietnam."

Here, then, is the first distortion of history and it is a preview of what is to come throughout the film. The aggression of the great totalitarian powers in the Thirties in fact bears little analogy to the civil war in Vietnam, nor is the Geneva Agreement of 1954 to be equated with appeasement. The fact is almost precisely the opposite of that implied by *Why Vietnam*. One of President Roosevelt's objectives in the Second World War was to get the French out



—*Photos by Wide World*

Meeting at Munich, 1938, and the Geneva Conference of 1954—"The aggression of the great totalitarian powers in the Thirties bears little analogy to the civil war in Vietnam, nor is the Geneva Agreement of 1954 to be equated."

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THE FACELESS VIET CONG

By George A. Carver, Jr.

The George A. Carver article on Vietnam in the April 1966 issue of *Foreign Affairs*—"Carver, an employee of the CIA, did not bother to make that connection known to the editors of that journal or the public."

of Indochina; the Eisenhower objective of the Fifties was to keep them there. The French are out now and we are in, playing the role that the French played before Dienbienphu—and still fighting Ho Chi Minh.

But now the scene shifts to Vietnam. In 1954, says our narrator, "the long war is over, and the victorious Communists are moving in." It is a statement which has only the most fortuitous relation to reality. The long war was indeed over—the war between the Vietnamese and the French. But to label the Vietnamese who fought against the French "Communists" and to assume that somehow they "moved in" (they were already there) is a distortion of history. Yet there is worse to come. For next the camera is turned on to the Geneva Conference. It was, so we learn, "a victory for the Communist world," and there is no hint that we ourselves accepted the results of the Conference. Vietnam, we are told, was "divided at the 17th parallel" and there is no suggestion that the division was to be a purely temporary one. Nor is there any reminder that the Geneva Agreement called for an election, that President Eisenhower himself said that in such an election 80 per cent of the vote would have gone to Ho Chi Minh, and that we were chiefly responsible for putting off the election. No, our school children and students are taught that there is a one-dimensional story of Communist conspiracy to destroy the peace of 1954. Worse yet, they are presented with the spectacle of a "reign of terror" in which "children are killed in their sleep." Clearly only Communists kill children; we don't kill children.

Now we are bemused by a scene of peace and plenty, liberty and reform, in South Vietnam. It is Eden before the fall. But staggered by the success of the South, the Communists launch "a furtive and remorseless war against the people," and Secretary Rusk is dragged in to denounce this "cruel and sustained attack." Attack by whom? Presumably by Ho Chi Minh, though this is left, safely enough, to [illegible]

where is there any mention of the Vietcong, nowhere any suggestion of a civil war, and nowhere any hint that until we began a substantial military buildup in Vietnam—in violation of the Geneva Agreement—there was no invasion from the North. And, as part of that corruption of the vocabulary familiar to students of Newspeak, words like North Vietnamese and Vietcong give way to the generic word, "Communist."

But still worse is to come. What is it the "Communists" want? Shadowy hints conjure up terrors that even the narrator is reluctant to name. "The prize the Communists are after . . . South Vietnam . . . standing at the gateway to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, East Pakistan." The imagination reels as it is, of course, meant to. For here, looming up before us, is the menace of China. Says our narrator, "Spurred by Communist China, North Vietnam's goal is to extend the Asiatic dominion of Communists." No wonder that in this phantasmagoric scene American "advisers" somehow become "fighting men," helping the outnumbered South Vietnamese resist Communist aggression. And if there are still any lingering doubts about the justice and the necessity of American participation, here are both President Johnson and Secretary McNamara to set the record straight.

Now we have a new theme: peace. "Fifteen times," no less (it is doubtless thirty by now), we have tried to open negotiations and each time we have been rebuffed. All we want—there is a note of plaintiveness here—is free elections; curiously enough, just what the Geneva Agreements called for back in 1954. All we want is to limit the war. And how do the recalcitrant Communists meet our appeals? They attack us with "high explosives aimed at American air bases." They kill little girls (picture of little girl cruelly destroyed). They even attack the United States Embassy, clearly the crowning infamy. There is a kind of inarticulate assumption that we don't do anything as unsporting as using "high explosives."

Now we are invited to take a more philosophical view of the war. Why are Americans risking life and limb in this distant jungle? That is easy. To keep American promises—indeed, "to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges" in our history, a pledge made by three Presidents, no less. Needless to say, this is

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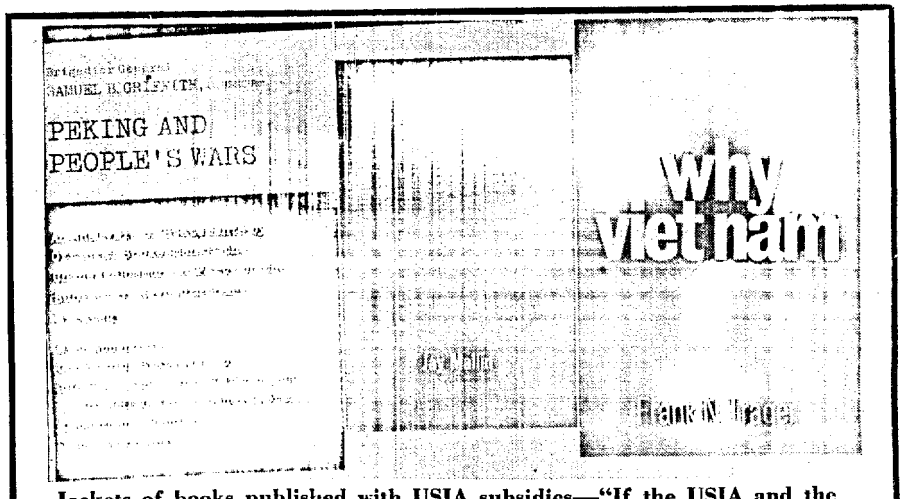

Jackets of books published with USIA subsidies—"If the USIA and the CIA can sponsor books to fight Communism, they may, with equal justification, sponsor books to fight 'socialism' or the 'welfare state.'"

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nonsense. President Eisenhower refused to make such a pledge; President Kennedy insisted that the Vietnamese should fight their own war. It is President Johnson who made the pledge (though not, it might be remembered, in the campaign of 1964), and who is now busy conferring retroactive solemnity upon it.

But there is still another reason why we are in Vietnam—self-defense. For if freedom is to endure in Chicago, Birmingham, and Dallas it must be vindicated in South Vietnam. What is more it must be vindicated by us, for the non-Communist countries of Asia cannot, by themselves, resist the grasping ambitions of the Communists. What we have here is pretty clearly a rationalization of intervention against Communism everywhere, for Communism is, by definition, "grasping and ambitious." And the reason we must take on this heavy responsibility is because "there is no one else." How does it happen that there is no one else? How does it happen that except for Thailand the other members of SEATO are not taking on any responsibilities? Deponent saith not.

THERE is one final reason for fighting in Vietnam and it is given us, again, by President Johnson. "We intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated." This has, at least, the merit of frankness: we are fighting a war to prove that we can't be defeated. It is all a bit like William James's Italian woman who stood on a street corner passing out cards saying that she had come over to America to raise money to pay her passage back to Italy, but not nearly so amusing.

We are almost through with *Why Vietnam*. Once again the audience is assured that we long for peace; once again that "as long as there are men who hate and destroy" we must keep on

—*U.S. Information Agency.*

Reed Harris of the USIA—"We control the things from the very idea down to the final edited manuscript."

fighting. Perhaps even high school children are mature enough to wonder who it is who is doing the destroying. But are they mature enough to resist hate?

The dissemination of *Why Vietnam* in high schools and colleges is no isolated episode in the manipulation of public opinion by government, but part of a larger pattern. We must view it in connection with the publication program of the USIA, the clandestine activities of the CIA, and the vendetta of the Passport Office against travel to unpopular countries, or by unpopular people, as part of an almost instinctive attempt (we cannot call it anything so formal as a program) to control American thinking about foreign relations. We had supposed, in our innocence, that this sort of thing was the special prerogative of totalitarian governments, but it is clear that we were mistaken.

Forbidden by law from carrying on propaganda in the United States, the USIA has managed to circumvent this prohibition. Not only does it sponsor books that give a benign view of American policies, it cooks up the books, finds the authors, provides the materials, and subsidizes the publication. "We control the things from the very idea down to the final edited manuscript," said Reed Harris of the USIA, his contempt showing through by the use of the term "things." The CIA—it, too, is forbidden by law from operating as an intelligence agency at home—engages in much the same kind of hanky-panky; thus the article in the distinguished journal *Foreign Affairs* defending the American role in Vietnam, by George Carver—an employee of the CIA who did not bother to make that connection known to the editors of the journal or to the public. How many other articles of this nature have been planted or insinuated in American magazines we do not know. One of the worst features of this clandestine activity is that it exposes the entire publishing and scholarly enterprise to suspicion.

IT is, needless to say, not the sponsorship but the secrecy that is the pervasive and irremediable vice. If books and articles sponsored by government agencies were openly acknowledged for what they are, they could be judged on their merits, which are often substantial. In the absence of such acknowledgement they are a fraud upon the public. What is needed is a Truth in Packaging Act for the United States Government.

What is perhaps most surprising is that many of those involved in these subterranean activities seem unable to understand what is wrong about them. They defend them on the ground that, after all, the Communists use deception, too, and we must fight fire with fire.

able to grasp the essential point: the corruption of the democratic process. All of these attempts to control the minds of the American people in order to win the cold war violate the two great Kantian moral imperatives: to conduct yourself so that your every act can be generalized into a universal principle, and to regard every human being as an end in himself, never as merely a means to an end.

Consider the first imperative. We can generalize the particular policies which the CIA, USIA, and Defense Department have adopted into three principles.

FIRST, and most elementary, if government can indoctrinate schoolchildren, and their parents, about foreign policy it may, with equal logic, indoctrinate them about domestic policy. If the USIA and the CIA can sponsor books and finance organizations to fight Communism they may, with equal justification, sponsor books and finance organizations to fight "socialism" or the "welfare state" or anything else that they think odious. Congress has quite deliberately withheld such powers from these and other organizations; if they circumvent these prohibitions will we not have an end to genuine freedom of choice in American politics?

Second, if government can carry war propaganda into the classroom—even without a formal war—may it not with equal logic carry any other propaganda into the classroom? And if it has this power, what will happen to the American principle that the national government has no control over the substance of what is taught in the schools? If the principle of indoctrination of schoolchildren is once firmly established, may we not end up with the Napoleonic philosophy of public education—that the overarching purpose of schools is to produce loyal patriots?

Third, if government can control the thinking of its citizens it can control everything else. Americans pride themselves on their tradition of "free enterprise," and some of them go so far as to equate free enterprise with "the American system." But the only free enterprise that counts, in the long run, is intellectual enterprise, for if that dries up all individual enterprise dries up. A government that can control the thinking of its citizens can silence criticism and destroy initiative, and a government that is exempt from the pressures of criticism and of political initiative is one that is in training for tyranny.

Governmental malpractices of thought control violate, just as clearly, the second categorical imperative: to treat all men as ends, never as means. For to exploit the integrity of school and university, science and scholarship, to the dubious ends of ideological conflict, is to subvert the very foundations of our civilization and our moral order.

THE reason we are trying to win the contest with Communism, and indeed with all forms of injustice and oppression, is because we believe in the virtue of freedom, of the open mind, of the unimpeded search for truth. These are not only our ultimate ends; they are, equally, the indispensable means whereby we hope to achieve these ends. If we corrupt all of this at the very source we may indeed win the immediate contest with "Communism" and lose the cause for which we are fighting. If we triumph over the enemy with the weapons of deceit and subversion we employ his weapons, embrace his standards, and absorb his principles.

Without intellectual freedom—uncontaminated, unimpeachable, and categorical—we cannot achieve the ends to which our society is dedicated. This is ultimately why we cannot tolerate activities of governmental agencies which, whatever their alleged justification, repudiate and paralyze the principles of freedom.

Games

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ual" whose life they are managing, wins the game. This game proved particularly successful recently when used by some Baltimore high schools to motivate slow-learning students.

Slow-learners, in fact, are among the chief beneficiaries of games, say researchers. One game specifically aimed at students considered to be potential dropouts is BMG, developed two years ago by the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute for use in four San Diego schools. Noting that such students are often fond of cars, a WBSI spokesman explains that the young people, for the purpose of the game, play auto manufacturers required both to increase profits and carve out a larger share of the market for their respective "companies."

LIKE some Baltimore and San Diego schools, Nova High School in Ft. Lauderdale also uses games "to meet the educational needs of the student classified as nonmotivated, under-achiever, or less capable," says Robert Allen. At the same time, he notes that Nova's games are aimed at "the gifted or advanced student; or the student who has formed negative attitudes about a given subject."

Perhaps more deeply involved in gaming than any other school, Nova now uses about fifteen games in its science, mathematics, and social studies classes. Among them are a smattering of games developed at Johns Hopkins, such as Life Career and the Game of Democracy, and two logic games—Wff'n Proof and Equations—developed by Layman Allen, associate professor of law at Yale University and brother of Nova's Robert Allen.

Such games are by no means used simply as teacher aids, however. During 1965, the first year games were used at Nova, the school divided its mathematics classes into two five-week phases of intramural competition using Wff'n Proof and Equations. Now in its second year, Nova's intramural competition consists of ten leagues, each with anywhere from six to twelve teams. Student gamers push the parallel with athletics about as far as it will go. Each week complete statistics are compiled giving individual and team won-lost records, total points scored, and league standings. Further, teams carry names like The Mods, Rat Finks, Brain Kids, and Clear Thinkers; each week Nova names "a player of the week." Winning teams of the intramural leagues eventually compete in a playoff to determine Nova's representative in the emotion-laden Academic Olympics.

Not surprisingly, some Nova educators worry that such competition may