

Big brains bought by big tobacco

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IT IS well known that when the dangers of smoking became increasingly obvious in the 1950s, tobacco companies funded scientific research aimed at downplaying the risks. Now, a little-known strand of that campaign, aimed at giving an intellectual gloss to pro-smoking arguments, has been detailed for the first time.

In an attempt to win hearts and minds, the tobacco companies bankrolled a network of economists, philosophers and sociologists. Documents newly scrutinised by academics reveal that members of the network generated extensive media coverage and numerous academic articles – with almost no mention that the work had been paid for by cigarette manufacturers.

“The industry realised it had to affect public opinion,” says Anne Landman, an independent tobacco policy

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expert based in Colorado, who carried out the research with colleagues at the University of California at San Francisco.

Landman and her colleagues found details of the scheme in the Legacy Tobacco Documents Library, a collection of 8 million industry documents made public and assembled during court cases against tobacco companies. Although some individuals in the network have already been linked to the tobacco industry, including the psychologist Hans Eysenck and the philosopher Roger Scruton,

the UCSF study is the first to catalogue the full scale of the effort (*Social Science & Medicine*, DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.11.007).

The network originated in the 1970s, when the social impacts of smoking, such as fire risks and medical costs, were increasingly being discussed. The documents show that seven international cigarette firms, including industry giants Philip Morris, British American Tobacco and Rothmans, met in 1977 to formulate a “united approach” to this threat. All seven declined opportunities to respond to the allegations.

The companies started by bankrolling academics opposed to smoking restrictions, including economists who questioned the financial benefits of the restrictions and anthropologists who argued that smoking brings people together and so has social benefits. Eysenck contributed a paper blaming genetic factors for tobacco-related diseases.

The link with industry was seldom mentioned. For example, a 1985 book entitled *Smoking and Society: Towards a more balanced perspective* comprising articles from network members contained only one line citing the “assistance and support of representatives” from cigarette firms. A few years later, in a 1998 piece for *The Times* newspaper in London, Scruton attacked arguments over smoking and health costs by noting, for example, that smokers impose less of a health burden than others because they die early. It was revealed in 2002 that he had been paid annually by Japan Tobacco International.

Tobacco firms also pumped half a million dollars a year during the 1990s into Associates for Research into the Science of Enjoyment, a group attacking health “puritanism”. ●



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