News analysis

Austria: small but deadly

If Germany is the bad boy of western Europe, in tobacco control terms, it is high time to meet its little brother. Austria, with just a 10th of Germany's population, possibly has an even worse record for lack of action to protect its citizens from tobacco. In the past, some of this may have been due to the malign though seemingly cosy participation in government policy of Austria Tabak, the state monopoly that dominated the Austrian tobacco industry until European Union (EU) requirements saw it part privatised in 1997, then sold off to UK-based Gallaher in 2001. Austrian citizens must be among Europe's worst educated about tobacco, with tobacco related morbidity and mortality rates to prove it. Leaders of its medical profession seem to have been suffering from some form of collective denial or disbelief, and all those delegates from Austrian medical charities who have faithfully attended international meetings seem to have managed to sit through the tobacco control sessions in some sort of delusion that such matters just did not apply back in their comfortable, tolerant home country.

And tolerance is part of the excuse: it is a word often used by health ministry and other officials, and by the mass media, in defending the country's hopeless position, and when responding to those who over the years had called for some real progress. We Austrians are tolerant people and don't like to exclude anyone, they would say. Some suggest this line is hypocritical, as it seems to crop up more in discussions about the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and unhealthy foods, mostly the products of big industries, than in connection with immigration, minorities, and other difficult issues faced by any prosperous, land locked, multi-bordered country. Nevertheless, it has often been seen as an acceptable excuse for not taking effective action.

There have been exceptions, though. In 1980, a burst of enthusiasm by a health minister who was in power for little more than a year saw the first attempt at a national anti-tobacco campaign, but cries of horror at his plans, even though they were relatively tame and included the creative use of athletes and other opinion leaders, were followed by another decade of near inaction and official complacency. Then, in 1992, Michael Ausserwinkler, a physician, became minister of health, sport and consumer protection. The following year, he presented a draft tobacco bill that included a total ban on tobacco advertising. Its potential effectiveness can be gauged by the strength of adverse reaction it generated, particularly in the form of political repercussions.

Most alarmingly, he was forced to accept that to prove the effectiveness of cigarette advertising on consumption, an advertising psychologist should be consulted—without knowing that the same expert had designed the advertising strategy of Austria Tabak. There was even a reaction from Germany, where tobacco interests were appalled at the prospect of progressive tobacco control policies being implemented so close to home. A senior figure in the German newspaper industry, was despatched to a personal meeting with Dr Ausserwinkler, warning him that if he proceeded, he would have to face "strong adverse winds" from the international press—an unpleasant threat, given that Austria imports a mass of print and other media from its much larger, German speaking neighbour.

The minister was still not deterred, but a public education campaign he initiated to prepare the ground for his bill drew even more opposition, including threats that football clubs would lose the tobacco sponsorship on which they depended—he was, after all, minister for sport, as well as health. Finally, he paid the classic price of a good health minister with tobacco in his sights, being removed from his post and sent back to serve in his home region, Carinthia.

Last year, another health minister had a go. Maria Rauch-Kallat, a teacher by profession, announced a package of measures on smoking in public places. Compared to other EU countries, not only is it modest, but it is questionable whether it is even up to minimum EU requirements. Worst of all, implementation relies in the early years on that long discredited, tobacco friendly mechanism, "voluntary agreement", though with the option for the minister to step in with legislation later. But judging by the uproar that ensued, she might as

Austrian health minister, Maria Rauch-Kallat, appears in a leaflet distributed by the country's tobacconists proclaiming "This woman will take away your rights".

Israel: the owner of the advertising agency that produced this provocative ad for Dutch manufactured Max cigarettes said there were "almost no holy cows" when using controversial images. The ad, which appeared last November, was designed to capture market share from US made L&M brand. The caption translates as, "The Dutch one that shocked the Americans and took them out of L&M"; a slang pronunciation of the Hebrew word for shock sounds like L&M.

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well have proposed restrictions on skiing, or eating apple strudel.

The country's 8000 tobacconists led the revolt, distributing leaflets bearing a far from flattering picture of the minister, and proclaiming, ''This woman will take away your rights. Today she will forbid where (or what) you can smoke,'' followed by similar, absurd claims that tomorrow she would introduce equally outrageous restrictions on what people drink, and the day after, on what they eat.

It is unclear what will happen, in the absence of any other leadership or encouragement for the lone minister. Will she be moved on, as Dr Ausserwinkler was? If so, it is hard to see what different line her successor could take, given that doing nothing will no longer be an option as EU and other international requirements begin to bite. It is not as if there is no base at all to build on: a recent Gallup poll showed that despite years of neglect, Austrians are not so very different to other Europeans: seven out of 10 smokers want to quit, a majority of all citizens would like to see smoking banned in all restaurants, and more than two thirds feel ''harassed'' by other people's smoke. Perhaps most remarkably, in this tolerant land of unrestricted smoking, more than a quarter of smokers themselves said they found the smoke of their fellow smokers unbearable.

With an aspiring multi-national company in charge of the old state monopoly, and the other big players free to exploit the market, it is unlikely that any effective, comprehensive tobacco control legislation can be achieved without a long, hard, and somewhat un-Austrian fight, even if it is several decades overdue.

Kenya: beach party ''helps'' tobacco bill

As we know, one of the most serious dangers of the implementation process of the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is that tobacco companies will make cash strapped developing country governments offers they cannot refuse, to ''help'' draft the necessary laws. With this in mind, it is easy to imagine the bitter disappointment of Kenyan health advocates last November. In the same week that their country had proudly announced it was ratifying the FCTC, they learned of a junket thrown in connection with the country's tobacco bill for more than 40 members of parliament (MPs), at an exclusive resort on the coast. Some of the MPs were of ministerial rank, and one was a doctor in whose constituency tobacco is the main crop, an area where health experts say there are significant, related health problems.

The seaside jaunt was hardly a secret: the country's leading newspaper, *The Daily Nation*, carried the story as its front page lead under the provocative and revealing headline, ''MPs have fun at Tobacco Bill talks'', complete with a photograph—of questionable aesthetic appeal—of some of the MPs entering the water at the luxurious hotel where the ''workshop'' took place. Overleaf, readers were treated to another paddling picture and some suggestions from an MP about essential amendments that would need to be made to the bill, predictably the industry friendly sort that we all know so well. There was also a defensive statement from the public relations firm reported to have organised the event, denying that tobacco manufacturers were behind it, though failing to confirm who was.

The despondent health workers can take comfort, however, that they clearly have friends in the right places. The newspaper did no favours to the MPs, reporting that they had received handsome cash allowances on top of their travel and subsistence costs; and its reporter elicited the important information that the health ministry, commendably, had boycotted the event. But if this is how it is to be in poor countries that try to do the right thing by the FCTC, we may see sinister events like this repeated all over the world, as the industry tries to ensure that life under the treaty can mean business as usual.

China: tobacco museum's ''smoky'' health information

The very fact that there is a prestigious new China Tobacco Museum shows how tobacco's status in China is still far from compatible with the country's urgent need for serious, effective tobacco control. It was inaugurated in Shanghai City last July, to subdued local excitement. Funded entirely by the Chinese tobacco industry, under the leadership of the State Tobacco Monopoly Bureau, to the tune of 180 million Renminbi (US$21.7 million), this is the world's largest tobacco museum. The museum spans over 3000 square metres and houses over 150 000

USA: Philip Morris (PM) has quietly phased out the ''LOWERED TAR & NICOTINE'' on packs of Marlboro Lights, apparently starting in 2003. Over several decades, tobacco manufacturers have been strident in their defence of being allowed to print whatever they want on cigarette advertisements and packs, citing the vital necessity of informing customers of important consumer information. Strangely, PM does not appear to have informed its customers about why it dropped the claim from its packs—perhaps one factor was the guilty verdict in a consumer fraud case where a judge concluded in 2003 that PM misled smokers by suggesting light cigarettes were safer than regular varieties. At the appeal hearing last November, PM's lawyer, former Illinois Governor James Thompson, was asked to comment on why the label was removed—after all, if there was no fraud, why remove the statement? He was unable to provide an answer. Although PM has removed the words, the cigarettes still seem to contain filter vents—which were central to the charge of deception.

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artefacts, depicting the 400 year history of tobacco in China. Its aim is to promote a ''positive'' image of the tobacco industry and to expand its influence in society. It also aims to celebrate Chinese culture and civilisation.

Representations of a historical ocean going ship and a Mayan temple are on the museum's beautifully finished exterior. Inside, the exhibits further emphasise that tobacco culture ''came from abroad''. In addition to information on tobacco history, the museum states that one of its main purposes is health protection. An exhibit on smoking and tobacco control measures informs the visitor that smoking is harmful, while a nearby placard claims that due to findings from the 1940s that smoking decreases mental tension, ''there is no need to object to cigarette smoking''. The exhibit does not mention the addictive nature of cigarettes. Furthermore, most of the ''more recent'' medical information presented was published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and thus excludes any substantive coverage of passive smoking.

The exhibits range from the agricultural production of tobacco to its importance in the national economy. Elsewhere in the museum, the ''gorgeous and colourful tobacco culture'' of China is displayed: elaborate water pipes from the 1800s, ornate snuff containers more than 300 years old, cigarette advertisements from the 1930s, and historical figures depicting people involved in the tobacco industry.

The museum is smoke-free except the final ''exhibit'', which houses a smoking bar. Visitors must pass through this area, inhaling second hand smoke, in order to reach the gift shop where they can purchase their favourite brand of cigarettes. The website of the China Tobacco Museum (in Chinese) hosted within that of the State Tobacco Monopoly Bureau, is at http://www.tobacco.gov.cn/bowuguan/index.htm.

Japan: health advocates are still finding ample evidence of the concerted efforts of cigarette companies to recruit young women to smoking (see Japan: smoke clouds over the land of the rising sun. *Tobacco Control* 2003;**12**:8–10). This picture shows another recent example of an unmistakeably female ''starter pack'', complete with cigarette lighter. The brand is a version of Virginia Slims, made by RJ Reynolds (RJR), whose non-US operations are now owned by Japan Tobacco. Ironically, internal tobacco industry documents show that in September 1998, Adam Bryon Brown, responsible for RJR International's markets outside the USA, wrote, ''We don't target female smokers. We don't encourage anyone, male or female, to smoke. We do recognize that female smoking is increasing in some countries. No one knows for sure why this is the case but it appears to be linked to female emancipation and higher disposable incomes. It is certainly nothing to do with promotional activities by tobacco companies.''

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Entrance to the China Tobacco Museum, recently inaugurated in Shanghai City.

New Zealand: alcohol makes fun of tobacco

There is a history of alliance between alcohol and tobacco companies in many countries, based on their shared interests in maintaining ''rights'' to promote products, and in the battlefield of smoke-free bars. Recently, a small crack appeared in this alliance in New Zealand.

The Dutch and Singapore owned New Zealand brewing company DB Breweries runs a series of advertisements for its beer brand Tui. The advertisements have a standard format consisting of a short statement alluding to a topical issue, with the reply ''Yeah right'', indicating scepticism about that statement. For instance, ''I saw a great reality TV show last night. Yeah right.'' The series aims to tap into popular New Zealand culture.

Towards the end of last year, the company conducted a competition for ideas for the advertisements. Keeping up with public opinion seems to have won the day over defending the old alliance: one winner was, ''Those poor tobacco companies. Yeah right''.

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USA: the smokin' Marlboro man of Fallujah

In a November 2004 photo essay for the *Los Angeles Times*, photographer Luis Sinco documented the battle of Fallujah. His images of broken Iraqi bodies and buildings were, like so many others, simply recording the banality of death and destruction, but one picture of the new ''Marlboro Man'' resonated with news editors across the USA. Suddenly, Marine Lance Cpl James Blake Miller, 20, a ''country boy'' from tobacco growing Kentucky, was everywhere. His bloodied nose, smudged camouflage, and dangling cigarette portrait was splashed across the pages of hundreds of newspapers. On evening newscasts and in pro-war opinion pieces he was praised as the embodiment of the noble American fighting spirit.

Miller admitted not understanding ''what all the fuss is about'', but his portrait was iconic, evoking images of past wars, connecting modern day observers to the GIs currently serving in Iraq and to past generations of soldiers fondly remembered in fading photographs. Today's soldiers and marines might be fighting a war deplored by

Marine Lance Cpl James Blake Miller, a ''country boy'' from tobacco growing Kentucky.

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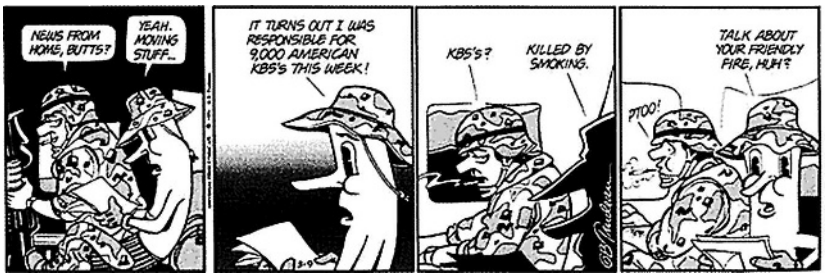

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much of the world, and Miller himself may be, as the *LA Times* described him, ''unassuming: of medium height, his face slightly pimpled, his teeth a little crooked'', but this man in uniform, smoking a cigarette, was somehow reassuring.

The New York Post, published by war supporter Rupert Murdoch, who has sat on the board of directors of Philip Morris, went further than any other paper, putting Blake's picture on the front page, and offering that tabloid special, a zinging headline: ''Marlboro men kick butt in Fallujah.''

The image certainly reinforced efforts to glamourise smoking and provided the industry a bonanza of free publicity—although one might argue Philip Morris pre-paid this picture with decades' worth of Marlboro Man imagery. After the photo appeared, newspapers were filled with letters about Miller, some praising editors for celebrating this modern day ''hero'', others chastising the papers for glorifying smoking. His mother went on record asking him to stop smoking, but Miller seemed to be using his new fame to get extra cartons delivered to his military unit.

During the first Gulf War, in 1991, Doonesbury cartoon strip creator Garry Trudeau had a much more telling and accurate take on the costs of smoking, in peacetime or during war. The panel reproduced here will not pack the iconic punch delivered by Luis Sinco's photo of Corporal Miller, but it speaks a truth that still needs telling.

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The Lighter Side

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