Reports like these made *BASP* an effective force, and a target for attack.

with relatively high taxes on manufactured cigarettes, have led to high consumption of high-tar, high-nicotine RYO.

Despite being inconsistent with EU health policy, and despite stating that "health arguments would support increased taxation of hand-rolling tobacco", the Commission is now suggesting that it is "essentially a matter for high taxing Member States to tackle, through reducing their rates and/or improved control measures".

The unconvincing, contradictory discussion of smuggling problems backing up this extraordinary conclusion reeks of tobacco industry influence, and the December issue of *Tobacco International* did nothing to dispel this. Crowing over the defeat of earlier Commission proposals to raise RYO tax levels, a major article proclaimed that "Lobbying by national tobacco industries, muddled thinking by the bureaucrats in Brussels, and a weak college of commissioners have all combined to consign to the dustbin the latest draft proposals by the EU commission to raise minimum excise levels". It went on to explain that "While the commission was in the process of formulating its proposals, the tobacco industry could, and did, intervene – this time successfully."

It is significant that the climb-down followed a conference in Lisbon to discuss the issue, at which 42 tobacco industry representatives took part, but only one health organisation. Despite several requests, health organisations were never informed by the Commission of its initial proposals, whereas the tobacco industry appears to have known them in detail.

The prospects now for effective EU measures against tobacco look poor.

Much depends on the regularly changing presidency, which rotates among member states, but already compromises on the advertising directive are being discussed, so that after years of failing to get agreement, at least some measures can be announced.

This all makes the worldwide picture look much brighter for the tobacco industry. In the United States, the industry may be able to tie up President Clinton's tobacco proposals in the courts until the President is safely tucked up in his retirement home. Together with its victory in the Canadian courts, and the relative lack of threat in Latin America, the Americas are safe enough for the moment. In Australia, recent political changes offer the tobacco industry a glimmer of hope, and it also may be winning back some of its ground in New Zealand, although these are, in any case, comparatively small markets. Asia has pockets of resistance, most notably Singapore, but also opportunities to make the mouth water, the ultimate being China. Africa is mostly an open door, despite some worries in the south; the Middle East can sometimes look worrying, but is still doing well for the industry. That just leaves Europe, effectively much expanded and gasping for cigarettes. If this enormous market were to be blighted by tobacco control legislation that actually worked, the primary effect would be bad enough, but ripple effects in other regions could be even worse. For the moment, though, the worst seems to be over. It is champagne, rather than tears, that is likely to be flowing in the boardrooms of the multinational tobacco companies.

DAVID SIMPSON
News Editor

Euro Quit and Win

Apart from the obvious disparity in resources, one of the starkest contrasts between public health and the tobacco industry is that for the most part, anti-tobacco health campaigns are organised on a national, state, or district scale, whereas the international tobacco industry is, well, just that: international. It is thus a welcome exception to find a small but significant example of international cooperation in the European Region of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Quit and Win '96 smoking cessation campaign.

Quit and Win programmes encourage people to stop smoking with the positive incentive that if they succeed, and provide appropriate verification, their names will be entered in a prize draw. Often the top prizes are of high value – and high publicity potential – such as exotic holidays. In 1994, WHO's Regional Office for Europe co-ordinated such schemes in 13 countries, as part of its Countrywide Integrated Non-communicable Disease Intervention (CINDI) programme. Some 63000 smokers took part, and the organisers claim that an evaluation of a sample of these showed that 15–20% may have stopped smoking for good. This year, it is hoped that well over 100000 smokers will enrol in 20 countries.

Having such a positive image, Quit and Win schemes are difficult for the tobacco industry to sabotage, though with a target population of 52 million smokers overall, the industry is unlikely to be very worried about the 0.03% to 0.04% who may stop smoking this year as a result of the programme. However, any publicity generated in participating countries is likely to be helpful, and the network of cooperation can then be used for further, larger efforts in the future. – DS

Made in Hong Kong, damaged in Britain?

With only a year to go before Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule, the colony's government this year has its last chance to implement its own legislation, including public health legislation on tobacco. It is expected that, after handover in 1997, Hong Kong will be run very much as it is today, so legislation enacted now is unlikely to be repealed by China. Its present colonial power, the United

Health advocates in Hong Kong are struggling to pass legislation banning tobacco advertising and promotion, including four-story-tall advertisements like these covering buildings in the city (as shown on the cover of the Winter 1989 issue of *World Smoking & Health*).

Kingdom, has relentlessly killed or ignored every opportunity to implement significant tobacco control legislation in the UK during the past 15 years. Surprisingly, in view of this and Hong Kong's pivotal importance in free trade in the region, the same period has seen the colony make extraordinary progress, from an adventure playground for young tobacco advertisers, with virtually no health programme on tobacco, to an aspiring model on course to challenge that overall regional and global leader in tobacco control, Singapore.

True to its recent form, the government did not lose its final opportunity to make more progress, and in January, despite massive and crude industry lobbying, it announced sketchy details of a new Smoking (Public Health) Bill, apparently to ban tobacco advertising.

Not surprisingly, the tobacco industry tried to make much of the Canadian court decision overturning that country's tobacco control legislation, on grounds of inconsistency with the bill of rights, but Hong Kong government officials were already in touch with advisors, including counterparts in Canada, Australia, and elsewhere, to ensure they did not encounter the same problem. The official announcement of the Bill stressed that it had been specially drafted to avoid breaching Hong Kong's own Bill of Rights, a spectre with which the industry had tried to frighten off the lawmakers.

But it is thought that the Bill had already been weakened since its first draft; in particular, that draft was said to cover sponsorship, which is rife in

the region, and is the main way the tobacco companies are getting round China's supposed ban on advertising. A stronger law in Hong Kong might have been a significant bonus for Chinese health organisations trying to get their government to tighten up its law, but the present Bill, although welcome, provides no such incentive.

The key question is: If the Bill was announced despite the industry onslaught, how did sponsorship get dropped from its remit? In the period in which it was weakened, it had to be passed by the governor, Mr Chris Patten, a former British minister appointed from London. Despite an earlier incarnation as health minister in Northern Ireland, where he seemed to support anti-tobacco work, his time in Hong Kong has not reinforced this reputation, with a number of embarrassing and sometimes downright culpable personal associations with the cigarette industry. Could he have demanded that the Bill be made less harsh on the tobacco industry friends of his political colleagues back home?

In previous generations, Hong Kong's role in the opium trade, strongly supported by London, inflicted untold suffering on China. It would be ironic if the UK's last Hong Kong-made health gesture to China was to hand over a specially blunted weapon in the fight against the biggest addiction of them all. – DS

Gains in Ghana

When an industry has to compare its product with the most unpleasant, annoying things its PR people can imagine, it must be fairly desperate about declining social acceptability. Towards the end of last year, BAT Industries spent about US\$150 000 on a 10-country survey, purportedly to find out what annoyed people most and how people perceived changing levels of tolerance. In the light of the tobacco industry's usual public attitude surveys, we can guess at the standard of the questionnaire, but the important question is whether it achieved its obvious aim of getting people to think that the key issues about tobacco are not addiction and disease, but tolerance and individual rights.

The fact that such worthless research was published anywhere is probably evidence of success. The fact that in Ghana, for example, a journalist on a national daily carefully wrote over 100 column centimetres based on BAT's press release, timed specially for the United Nations Day for Tolerance (16 November), illustrates how pernicious this sort of

subtle disinformation can be. However, in this particular example, that was not the end of the story. The Ghana Committee on Tobacco Control not only replied, but did so with a full length, double column advertisement. "We... feel obliged to write this rejoinder", their advertisement stated, "since we deem it our civic responsibility to set the record straight and to remove the smoke screen which the results of the... survey seek to provide." In the depressing story of exploitation of developing countries by the tobacco industry, we can at least take heart that it can no longer rely on getting away with such nonsense unchallenged, as it could just a decade ago. – DS

Through the Net

The Internet is being used increasingly as a tool for tobacco control internationally (such as the International Union Against Cancer's GLOBALink service – <http://www.uicc.who.ch/> – and the Brown and Williamson documents available from the University of California/ San Francisco Library, Tobacco Control Archives – <http://www.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/bw.html>), but what is concerning tobacco control advocates is the apparent increase in the use of the Internet by those interested in selling tobacco (such as Smokin' Joe's Cigar retailer – <http://www.charm.net/~ibc/smokin/>).

A growing development in the United States is for cigarettes, mainly imported and other non-mainstream brands, to be marketed via the Internet, and sent by mail to customers who pay by credit card. Although the big tobacco manufacturers are keeping aloof from the practice – Philip Morris is even on record opposing it – the Tobacco Institute merely says that the industry as a whole has no policy on the issue. A major concern is minors' access, because even if a supplier asks for a customer's age (and not all do), there is no way of checking it. But that sort of nicety never seems to have bothered the manufacturers, apart from the usual token denial of their real intent. So what today may be merely another unregulated Internet marketing ploy, if it looks profitable enough, could become another major channel of promotion and sales in the future. – DS

Lithuania

After three years of debate, the new law on tobacco control has at last been