

# Australia may soon outlaw cigarette advertising

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ALMOST EVERYWHERE you go in this large country, people will tell you how passive Australians are when it comes to citizen action. Part of this supposed passivity may be due to a broad consensus about what government's role is in their society.

Ralph  
Nader

Voting, in national elections, for example, is an accepted, mandatory civic duty based in the Australian constitution. Virtually everyone buckles up when they enter their cars — in part because that's the law.

But there is much civic apathy here and it can be explained by the absence of the deep internal divisions which rock other societies. In one area, however, Australians are leading most of the world. They are pressing their state governments to ban all tobacco advertising.

In the conservative state of Western Australia, the government believes that it has the votes in the Parliament to secure the ban. The tobacco companies are unleashing a massive counter-campaign

whose argument is that no more tobacco money will go to support sports teams. A similar banning effort is underway in South Australia and soon in the largest state of New South Wales.

What is remarkable about the drive against the \$60 million the tobacco companies spend each year on advertising is that the vast majority of the people favor such a prohibition. The polls are coming in between 85 percent and 90 percent.

Taking off from the industry's own admission that advertising is only for the purpose of getting customers to switch brands, the ban-the-ads advocates are focusing on who the real audience is for these slick promotions. Says one brochure:

"The advertising is aimed at people between the ages of 11 and 15, and it works. Psychologists know that early adolescence is usually a period of deep anxiety. Children in search of a clear self-image find that cigarette ads promise them the world — vigorous, handsome youthhood linked with courage, daring, athletic prowess; beautiful, alluring young womanhood linked with wealth, the outdoor life and happiness. That is

also why the tobacco companies are so 'generous' in promoting sporting events."

Other brochures list numerous additional reasons against tobacco promotion — cigarette-caused fires, sexism in the ads, the rights of non-smokers and of course the damage to health of smokers — who die from cancer, heart disease and other ailments.

But it is in New South Wales — in this city of Sydney — where the most dramatic counter-advertising effort is underway. The organization is called B.U.G.A.U.P. which stands for "billboard-utilizing graffitists against unhealthy promotions."

Fred Cole, a 57-year old activist, started B.U.G.A.U.P. and is now a Sydney celebrity.

He sends his days and nights putting large messages on billboards which advertise cigarettes. I asked; "Fred, why are you defacing private property?" He replied: "You mean refacing . . . laws which permit advertising products that kill 40 Australians a day bring disrespect for the law generally. I am trying to change these laws."

But Fred Cole does not work alone. He works with one hundred volunteers who

also "reface" billboards, including half a dozen doctors who put in about five hours a week in the effort.

This open civil disobedience by people, willing to take the penalties in order to change what they believe to be a law that permits companies to hook teenagers into a shortened lifetime of smoking, would not be necessary if there were an open media. Australia has probably the most concentrated media in the western world. Every major newspaper is owned by one of two media chains. There are private and government-owned television stations but dissenting citizens often only get on the news when they make themselves a nuisance.

In our country's history, many a law — from anti-labor, to censorship to anti-civil rights — had to be openly and peacefully violated in order to give the courts an opportunity to declare them unconstitutional. There are signs, judging by a recent issue of Co-Evolution Quarterly, that the "refacing" movement against intrinsically harmful products is starting in the U.S. Let us hope that the media will be more open to diverse views than is presently the case in Australia.

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