**News analysis**

**NEW ZEALAND: INDUSTRY FACES GRILLING OVER MAORIS**

In which country might one hear the most refreshingly straight talk about the tobacco industry in the national legislature? There may be no easy, single answer, but recent experience suggests that New Zealand must be a contender.

While the majority of New Zealanders have been reducing their tobacco consumption for several decades, the indigenous Maori people still have alarmingly high smoking rates. New data announced by the health ministry in September showed that 49.3 per cent of Maori women and 41.5 per cent of Maori men still smoke, compared to just over a fifth of the adult population as a whole. Like many countries with a relatively long history of public education about tobacco, it is among the lower income, more vulnerable minority population where tobacco companies see their greatest hopes of sustaining sales.

Not surprisingly, then, Mr Hone Harawira, a member of parliament for the Maori Party, wants tobacco company executives to be summoned personally to face questions at an inquiry by the Maori Affairs parliamentary select committee into the impact of tobacco use on Maori people. The committee would talk to everybody concerned, he said, before it got to the tobacco companies, implying that he was determined that the fullest powers available to the parliament’s Speaker be used to force the New Zealand-based chairpersons and chief executives, not just the public relations “spin doctors”, to be involved.

Mr Harawira made it plain that he expected this to be an uncomfortable experience for those involved. Just in case anyone missed any slight nuance of meaning in his announcement, he added: “to be brutally frank I’d like to lynch these bastards... This is a war against people who kill New Zealanders ... I don’t particularly give a shit about what they say [in their defence].”

**URUGUAY: NEW HEALTH WARNINGS**

Uruguay is set to have the largest health warnings in the world. A new set of six graphic pack warnings, each covering 80 per cent of the front and back of the pack, was finalised in September. They will have to be in place by 1 March 2010, though the warnings they replace, which covered 50 per cent of the pack, were ordered to be expanded to 80 per cent by December. The two large sides of the pack are not the only place where Uruguayan smokers will see health warning information: a statement will also be required on the side of tobacco packages, in black on white, to the effect that the product inside contains nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide.

The bold assurance with which a relatively small country in Latin America has ordered yet another set of warnings— the fourth since 2006—is a mark of just how far this aspect of tobacco control has come in a relatively short time, as well as of the Uruguayan government’s admirable determination to place appropriate labels on a uniquely dangerous product. The bloody fights waged in countries such as Canada, a pioneer of modern graphic warnings, seem a very long time ago. Absurd arguments and desperate threats may still be used by the tobacco industry—in Canada, for example, they gave straight-faced assurances that more than a few colours were technically impossible, while threatening to take their package printing work to the USA—but now that the great graphic warnings race is well and truly off the starting blocks, we should see progressively less of such nonsense, and progressively more creative and effective ways of showing just what is contained in those once alluring packs.

**KAZAKHSTAN: PUBLIC SMOKING BAN**

Like Bulgaria (see page 429), just a few years ago Kazakhstan would not have been expected to turn up on a list of countries likely to ban smoking in all public places. But as the health ministry said when announcing such a move in September, the central Asian country is now following the recommendations of the World Health Organization, according to whose data more than 50,000 people die every year in Kazakhstan from smoking. Sports stadiums and public transport facilities were already smoke-free, but Kazakh bars and nightclubs, and all other remaining public areas not previously covered by the ban, have now been forced to go smoke-free. At the same time, the age at which people may be sold alcoholic drinks has been raised from eighteen to 21, in view of the country’s significant problem of alcoholism.

**RUSSIA: WHAT IS JTI PLAYING AT?**

The acting profession and the tobacco industry have shared a long and infamous history, promoting the fiction that smoking is glamorous. While campaigns, including Smoke Free Movies, have exposed the industry’s extensive use of tactics such as paid endorsement and product placement, the linking of smoking with aspirational lifestyles remains a key strategy.

This is evident in a casting call this autumn for jobbing British actors by Eyecandy Model and Promotions Agency for a job to help launch a new brand of cigarette in Russia. But the call is not for an acting part in a commercial film. Regulation of tobacco advertising has progressively tightened in Russia since 2002, with restrictions on television and radio, and a ban on outdoor tobacco advertising since 2007. New legislation is currently making its way through the Russian parliament which would make the country compliant with FCTC stipulations for a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. According to Euromonitor, these restrictions have made it extremely difficult to launch new brands in Russia, currently the third largest cigarette market in the world by volume.

Tobacco companies in Russia have therefore shifted increasingly to indirect marketing methods. The casting call for a “good looking” British actor aged 25-48, with “well groomed hands”, is a good example. The 8-week job takes the now familiar distribution of free samples in bars even further by requiring the actor to

---

All articles written by David Simpson unless otherwise attributed. Ideas and items for News Analysis should be sent to: d.simpson@iath.org
play the part of a “vitolier”, a seemingly made up word meaning “tobacco expert”, which is likened to the respected position of sommelier, a master of all aspects of fine wines. For £125 ($204) per day plus £15 ($24) expenses, the actor will visit restaurants, with an interpreter, to play out the following scenario on unsuspecting members of the public.

A script outline dictates the essential shape of each visit, starting with the “vitolier” and interpreter entering a restaurant and taking a seat at the bar, looking for a table with smokers, sending over a waiter with a note in which “a British tobacco expert from London” asks to talk to them. After introducing himself, the actor says he has been invited by Japan Tobacco International (JTI) to visit their country and that he is “really interested in the tastes of Russian smokers.” He is then to converse with them about their tastes and preferences regarding premium cigarettes, also telling them about “the English tobacco traditions”, mentioning Sobranie cigarettes and recommending the new Sobranie product. Finally, “He tells them about the tones of premium tastes... the latest trends in contemporary art, and recommends the current art-project of Sobranie in Moscow.”

Sobranie of London, established in 1879, is one of the oldest tobacco brands in the world. Originally handmade and supplied to royal courts across Europe, today Sobranie brands (including Black Russian) are produced by JTI and are among the most expensive in Russia. The company’s aim is to encourage smokers to “trade up”, from lower priced cigarettes to higher priced brands. To promote its high-end image, Sobranie also sponsors the Millionaire Fair Moscow, “a leading exhibition of luxury, despite and contrary to the world financial crisis”. The casting of a British actor to play the part of a “vitolier”, dressed in a suit and armed with a “frank, straightforward, honest, and pleasant smile”, is part of that strategy.

What is perhaps most remarkable is how out of touch the whole campaign is with the economic and social realities of life for most Russians today. Amid global recession, the Russian economy has been hard hit by the decline in world commodity prices. Unemployment reached 8.5 per cent in October and the official inflation rate for 2009 is running at 15 per cent. These recent problems have worsened longer term declines in living standards since the mid 1990s. Male life expectancy has plummeted to less than 59 years in 2008 (compared to 72 years for females), well below the 74 years of men in western European countries such as France and Germany. While staggering levels of alcohol consumption have a lot to answer for, smoking is also taking a major toll. With male smoking rates at 61 per cent, the number of reported cases of lung cancer has increased by 63 per cent over the last ten years. Smoking is cited as the main cause for 52 per cent of all cancer cases, the biggest cause of premature deaths alongside heart disease.

With most Russians struggling to earn a decent living, JTI’s attempt to launch a new luxury brand of cigarette really does belong in the realm of fantasy. The whole campaign has an air of fiddling while Rome burns. One must also ask whether tobacco advertising executives really are that out of touch with reality. Or is this just another example of the creativity of the industry in seeking to circumvent stronger regulation? JTI claims that it “believes that appropriate regulation of tobacco is both necessary and right, in the interest of public health. We believe that the WHO, sovereign governments, non-government organizations and the tobacco industry should all work together to resolve these issues.” If the company really believes this, perhaps it should thus stop play-acting and tell the truth.

KELLEY LEE
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK
kelley.lee@lshtm.ac.uk

UK: SMOKER’S LUNGS KILL TRANSPLANT MAN
A coroner’s court examining a British soldier’s death from lung cancer in 2008 heard recently that the 31-year-old man had received a bilateral lung transplant the previous year after being diagnosed with an incurable lung condition. Immunosuppressive drugs prescribed to help his body accept the new lungs, which had an undetected tumour, simply increased the speed of its growth. On investigation, it was revealed that he had received the lungs of a smoker of 30 to 50 hand-rolled cigarettes per day.

While most people know that on average, smokers die younger, often from serious diseases caused by their smoking, it came as a shock to realise how many of their bodies were being recycled for transplantation. In 2007, 22 per cent of British adults aged 16 and over smoked and a further 27 per cent were ex-smokers; so it is not surprising that 51 per cent of all organs for transplants originate from smokers. The transplanting hospital said that the soldier’s case was extremely rare, in an area of great need, with half as many patients as receive a lung transplant dying while still on the waiting list for one; and if the hospital did not use the lungs of smokers, the number of lung transplants would be significantly lower.

CHINA: EXPO REJECTS TOBACCO FUNDS
Organisers of the 2010 Shanghai World Expo recently responded to concern and rejected a 200 million yuan (US$29 million) donation from the Shanghai tobacco company in order to observe the promise of a “healthy and smoke-free Expo”.

The announcement came in response to several weeks of heated debate around China in July on the legitimacy of allowing tobacco promotion and sponsorship in a public event like the World Expo. The debate was partly triggered by an earlier suggestion from a group of Chinese health experts that Expo organisers should reject the donation, which would have been a “public showcase of tobacco advertising” and a “violation of international treaties”. They cited Article 13 of the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), under which parties are obliged to undertake a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, at both domestic and international levels. China, the world’s largest tobacco producer and consumer, signed the FCTC in 2003 and committed to ending all types of tobacco advertising and promotion by 2011, and to making workplaces totally smoke-free.

Shanghai Tobacco, which produces China’s major cigarette brands including Fanda and Chung Hua, donated 200 million yuan in May to help build the China Pavilion, which is expected to cost 1.5 billion yuan.

The decision by the World Expo authorities to refuse tobacco funding was praised by the World Health Organization. However, health experts say that an even

China: Shanghai Expo organisers initially accepted a 200 million yuan (US$29m) cheque from Shanghai Tobacco, which they later rejected.