

'Our Youth Must be Protected From Drug Abuse': Talking Tobacco Control in the New South Wales Parliament from the 1960s to the Twenty-first Century

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Tobacco control histories have tended to concentrate on either the well-documented efforts of the tobacco industry to evade restrictions on the advertising and sale of tobacco products, or the factors influencing the development of regulatory policies. We complement these studies from a cultural history perspective by probing parliamentary debates on tobacco control as they have been conducted in the parliament of New South Wales, Australia. Our main insight is that early on, a new discourse about addiction, corporate wrongdoing and consumer society came to dominate the debates, in which tobacco came to be characterised as a drug. This powerful discourse validated tobacco control as a requirement of good government. Surprisingly, it remained in place through shifts in legislative focus and tended to exclude anticontrol arguments based on concepts of liberty and responsibility.

Tobacco control has been one of the most prominent and important public health initiatives of the past thirty years. In many nations, tobacco control campaigns and their cultural sequelae have become routinised into daily experience in the form of striking mass-media quit campaigns, the disappearance of tobacco advertising, the mass relocation of smoking from the office to the street, and the slowly decreasing social tolerance for what was once totally normal and unremarkable: cigarette smoking. This is not merely an interesting, large scale cultural phenomenon, another episode in the history of manners.¹ The importance of all these changes is also measured in lives. Tobacco smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in many western nations, and causes the deaths of more people in less

developed nations than in wealthier, industrialised countries.²

Now that state-organised tobacco control reaches back into social memory for half a century, it is a subject ripe for historical analysis seeking to understand the conditions that both gave rise to and delayed policies and interventions intended to reduce tobacco use. Such analyses have been produced by tobacco control advocates and students of policy and politics;³ these have identified the importance of a number of factors—from the degree of organisation among advocacy groups to the importance of individual ‘policy entrepreneurs’—in achieving legislative and regulatory control measures in the past (and presumably for the future). Meanwhile a recent edition of *Clio Medica* has heralded the first interest among historians of health and medicine.⁴ This showed that conceptual change was also important for the foundations of tobacco control: Virginia Berridge argued that the rise and diffusion of a new paradigm of epidemiology and statistical inference among medical professionals crucially underpinned policy making on tobacco.⁵ National cultures too have influenced smoking policies, clearly illustrated by the differences in the tobacco control histories of Norway and the United States of America (US). The Norwegians banned all tobacco advertising in 1975, well ahead of the rest of the world, because ‘public health issues appeal to the electorate’ (‘this may be why four out of five parties ... included an advertising ban in their manifestos’⁶). In stark contrast are the Americans, whose intolerance, according to Brandt, of *imposed* risks has mandated smoke-free environments in many states, but whose tolerance of an individual’s choice to *assume* a risk has resulted in legislation protecting smokers from discrimination while severely limiting advertising bans.⁷

Most importantly, of course, we now know a great deal more about how the tobacco industry, often working in global concert, has influenced policy in the past. Indeed, the several books uncovering half a century of ruthless determination to deny and obfuscate emerging evidence on health risks, pharmacological manipulation of nicotine to maximise addiction and aggressive marketing by transnational tobacco companies may fairly claim to have established the paradigm for the history of tobacco.⁸ Most recently, drawing on millions of internal tobacco company documents made available since the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement in the USA, these works examine the relationship between industry,

government, the media and the industry's communications with the public.⁹ This research shows clearly how the tobacco industry has framed tobacco control issues, not in terms of public health, but in ways that appropriate notions of free speech and freedom or forecast economic gloom should tobacco sales be restricted or advertising limited, in order to prevent effective tobacco control legislation.¹⁰ Industry documents show that the tobacco lobby's policy was to 'reassure' smokers as much as possible that the medical evidence was 'inconclusive,' to 'counter tendencies to make smoking socially unacceptable,' and to present the view that any regulation was an infringement of the right of tobacco companies to market a legal product and the right of smokers to enjoy their freedom to choose to smoke where they wished.¹¹

In this paper we complement these studies of how the tobacco industry framed the issues with studies of the cultural history of tobacco control. Here we look at one modest aspect of this by analysing discourses that were discernable in parliamentary discussion of tobacco control and how these represented and sometimes shaped parliamentary action on the issue in the late-twentieth century. In particular this paper situates debates about tobacco within wider debates about 'drugs' in parliament as we trace the beginnings of the modern tobacco control debate as it emerged in the 1960s after global publicity of the 1962 and 1964 reports on the harms caused by smoking of (respectively) the Royal College of Physicians of London and the United States Surgeon General. Debate was then still somewhat shaped by the language and assumptions of the early-twentieth century temperance era. In the second section, we discuss how quickly a new discourse about addiction, corporate wrongdoing and consumer society came to dominate the debate, marginalising the ideas of individual liberty and responsibility that were championed only by an older generation of politicians.¹² Then, we show how, in the 1980s, as politicians steeply increased their attention to 'drugs,' this new discourse coalesced into criticism of a 'drug society,' which included tobacco but differentiated it from illegal drugs. This criticism extended to include advertising, which was sometimes depicted as a kind of 'drug' in consumer society, and culminated in legislation prohibiting tobacco advertising and sponsorship of sport in 1991. In the fourth section we argue that tobacco control debates in the 1990s showed the same features as those of the preceding decade,

but were more ritualistic and predictable. Although one might have expected that a shift in legislative focus to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS, or ‘passive smoking’) would cause a return to the language of liberty and responsibility, in fact the only real change was a tendency to emphasise pragmatic issues of implementation and the need for political compromise. Tobacco control had become accepted as business as usual for government, and, as will be explored throughout the paper, indeed might be said to be almost as much a discourse *about* government as about health.

Our concentration on Australia is appropriate to the history of tobacco control, given that since the 1980s Australia has been a world leader in the tobacco control field.¹³ Known for a protracted period of civil disobedience targeting outdoor tobacco advertising and for its visceral and widely exported quit campaigns,¹⁴ by the end of the 1990s Australia had banned tobacco advertising, including tobacco sponsorship of sport and the arts, had widespread restrictions on smoking in public places and workplaces, a well-established policy of taxation increases and an accumulation of ever stronger warnings on cigarette packets.¹⁵ By comparison, in the USA tobacco advertising is still widespread, and while many local governments, and some States, have passed ordinances restricting where people may smoke, in other ones there is little or no restriction and indeed some States have legislated to override any such ordinances.¹⁶ Multinational tobacco conglomerates with head offices in the USA and the United Kingdom (UK) often regarded Australia as a predictor for what restrictions they might face elsewhere.¹⁷ Although Australian governments have at times looked elsewhere for models of tobacco control legislation, their vanguard role needs to be taken into consideration in the international history of tobacco control.

This study is confined largely to an examination of parliamentary debates (*Hansard*) in the state of New South Wales (NSW), which have been reasonably representative of tobacco control in Australia since tobacco control has been relatively uniform nationwide. Parliamentary debates offer a public record of the avowed motivations of legislators and their ostensible reasons for accepting or rejecting legislative proposals with respect to tobacco. Importantly, they reflect which arguments among those proffered by lobby groups from both pro- and anticontrol positions became part of the public domain and hence had the power to shape

future political discourse and action. They illuminate how debates were framed and constrained, and indicate something of the wider ideological and cultural reference systems of the speakers and of parliament as a body representative of a particular society at a particular time. They do not, of course, explain why tobacco control legislation and policy was or was not accomplished—this depended on a range of other factors, some of which we have explored elsewhere.¹⁸ Although, as it turned out, neither of the major parties can claim to have acted on the issue significantly more strongly than the other, we have nonetheless specified the party affiliation of politicians quoted here. The parties mentioned are: Australian Democrat (a minor, left wing party), Labor (the major centre-left party), Liberal (the major centre-right party), and National (a minor party with a rural conservative constituency, which historically has formed governments in coalition with the Liberal party).

Tobacco as a drug

Ideas about drugs have been an important aspect of tobacco control yet have received surprisingly little historical attention.¹⁹ Health professionals frequently label tobacco a drug and publicly advise that tobacco should be treated ‘as a drug.’ In Australia this position was publicly articulated in Senator Peter Baume’s much publicised 1977 work *Drug problems in Australia: The Intoxicated Society?*, which argued that the abuse of tobacco, alcohol, prescription medicines and pharmaceutical products caused more damage to individual and social health than illegal substances and therefore deserved at least equal political and public attention and concern.²⁰ But what exactly does it mean to treat something ‘as a drug’? While we respect the technical medical definition for ‘drug’ and sympathetically understand the aims of those who, like Baume, were and are concerned with minimising the harms generated by substance use regardless of a substance’s legal status, we recognise that the term ‘drug’ has and continues to have a highly contested history that deserves careful attention here. Just what, and who, defines terms such as ‘drug,’ ‘dependency’ and ‘addiction,’ and what consequences do these definitions have for how smokers, smoking and tobacco companies are imagined and treated?

Jordan Goodman has offered one compelling answer around

the notion of ‘dependence,’ seeing the history of tobacco as the outcome of interlocking systems of physiological, cultural, commercial and political dependencies.²¹ While his argument is compelling, it nonetheless remains important to historicise the idea of ‘dependence’ itself and to ask why it has become important at this stage in tobacco’s history. The last time tobacco was treated ‘as a drug’ and controlled, around the turn of the nineteenth century, the central ideas were those of vitiation and degeneracy, concepts that made no distinction—and indeed, would have found distinctions false—between physical and moral decline.²² In the last four decades, by contrast, the notion of dependence has in part been employed by health professionals *in order* to drive a wedge between moral judgement of a person’s character and judgement of their activities: drug dependency was an illness, not a moral failing. Yet we suggest that moral anxieties were not entirely expunged from the medical terminology applied to drugs in the late–twentieth century.

One insight we believe is fruitful for the cultural analysis of the history of tobacco control is the shift described by Desmond Manderson ‘from Mr. Sin to Mr. Big’ in Australia’s drug legislation and policy.²³ Manderson argues that while drugs have been demonised and denigrated as bad throughout the twentieth century, in the latter half there was a change from moral concerns about drug users, which had underpinned increasingly punitive and prohibitionist legislation directed at ‘drugs of addiction’ (chiefly opioids and cannabis) in the 1950s, to drug ‘traffickers’ [*sic*]. From the 1970s onwards it was not the sinful ‘drug fiend’ whom legislators wished to punish, but the moneyed ‘pusher’ whose crime was to profit from the harm their wares inflicted on others.²⁴ Manderson explicitly excludes tobacco as a subject too sizeable to be included in his work, but notes that the drug laws he studied entrenched distinctions between morally abhorrent illegal drugs and a large variety of socially acceptable, even encouraged, drugs, from Bex (headache) powders to cigarettes. This distinction has remained firmly in place for the past thirty years as the ‘war against drugs’ has populated jails with small-time illicit drug dealers, in contrast to those who sit, heavily remunerated, on the boards of tobacco companies. Nonetheless our research suggests that this shift from ‘Mr Sin’ to ‘Mr Big’ is traceable in the early tobacco control debates as well. This may have resulted from health advocates’ criticism

of tobacco companies in the late 1960s. We also suggest that the language of ‘narcotics’ was similarly reshaping conceptions of tobacco at that time.

‘Curing the ills of society’: The tobacco control debate is established, 1962–1973

The earliest Australian parliamentary debates on tobacco, and the enactment of the first legislative control on cigarettes—compulsory warning labels stating ‘smoking is a health hazard’ in 1973²⁵—effectively generated a new, cohesive discourse of tobacco control that would dominate from this period to the present day. This discourse was centred around ideas of addiction and corporate immorality, and replaced notions of liberty and personal responsibility used by older politicians to object to tobacco control. At stake were different visions of and different values for what ‘society’ was and how it should be managed.

Modern political debate about tobacco control began about a decade after Sir Richard Doll’s now-famous paper—which demonstrated a statistical link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer—was published in 1950.²⁶ This debate was not without precedent; before 1950 concerns about the health effects of tobacco had been articulated around the world from time to time by temperance activists and by health reformers who were broadly concerned with ‘degeneration’ and ‘racial fitness.’²⁷ In Australia the only real political manifestation of these concerns were in state laws passed in the 1900s that banned smoking by juveniles—and we note that there is no record of any retailer having been prosecuted for selling to minors until the 1990s.²⁸ The early papers published by Richard Doll and Austin Bradford Hill in the 1950s thus became the ‘starting’ point for a new interest in tobacco control on the basis of firmer scientific evidence.

Shocking though the evidence provided by Doll and Hill was, it was not until the publication of the 1962 (UK) Royal College of Physicians’ Report on Smoking and the 1964 US Surgeon General’s report that sufficient community alarm accumulated and the subject of tobacco was raised in the NSW Parliament.²⁹ During this time many concerned teachers and members of the public, led by activist doctors Nigel Gray in Victoria and Cotter Harvey in Sydney, had begun intensive work to inform the community of the

dangers of smoking and to make public requests for government to intervene and impose restrictions on smoking.³⁰ Dr. Cotter Harvey, a respiratory physician, was a particularly determined and successful lobbyist whose letters to hospitals, health department staff, politicians and the media often substituted the word ‘addicts’ for ‘smokers.’³¹ However neither his concerns nor his language penetrated into Parliament, where the very little attention given tobacco—two questions in 1962 and three in 1964, in response to the two overseas reports—made it clear that smoking was regarded as a normal, legitimate adult activity in which governments ought not to interfere. As an example, Labor Education Minister Ernest Wetherell told Parliament:

It would be necessary to consider carefully the Hon Member’s suggestion that instruction be given to teachers not to smoke in front of students. The proposal seems to be a drastic one, especially as it is considered that about 4/5ths of the population, including teachers, smoke. Nobody would claim that the practice of smoking amounts to a criminal act ... It would be rather severe on teachers to order them to refrain from smoking.³²

The Health Minister was not even questioned and took no part in the debate.

For the 1962 NSW Parliament antismoking messages were still discursively located in the temperance movement, whose strongly Christian agenda had been preaching nonsmoking, teetotaling chastity since its heyday in the late–nineteenth century, and which had access to schools for this purpose.³³ ‘Whilst no specific provision is at present made in the curricula for primary and secondary schools for instruction regarding the ill effects suffered from smoking, the department has, for many years, distributed free of charge, on behalf of the Band of Hope Union and the Youth Temperance Educational Council of NSW, copies of the *Health and Temperance Manual*,’ Wetherell explained in response to a question about how children were informed about the dangers of cigarettes.³⁴ In the worldview of the temperance movement physical and social health were conflated³⁵ and the emphasis was more on the social than on the health consequences of indulgence. In the early 1960s, cannabis, depicted as a drug that ravaged bodies and minds simultaneously, creating criminals and lunatics, fitted this discourse perfectly. Tobacco had a low priority in comparison

with alcohol: ‘I ask the Minister whether anybody befogged with cigarette or cigar smoke has ever been guilty of killing himself and others on our roads, or has finished up in a mental hospital? Is it a fact, however, that overindulgence in or misuse of alcohol does bring about these results?’ one Opposition Liberal member of parliament (MP) asked.³⁶

Though these responses seemed to dismiss tobacco control from the political agenda, the issue was slowly gaining attention. The (1941–1965) Labor government introduced an antismoking educational program into schools just before they lost power. From 1965 the subject was raised at the annual State and Federal Health Minister’s conference, and by 1967 the ministers had agreed that all state governments should legislate to place a health warning on cigarette packets. At this point the Australian tobacco industry apparently successfully persuaded the Liberal NSW premier, Robert Askin, to block the legislation in NSW and thus Australia-wide,³⁷ even though Askin’s health minister, A.H. Jago, who claimed the personal friendship of Cotter Harvey, was very much in favour of it. Between 1968 and 1972 the Labor Opposition in NSW made political capital over the government’s refusal to pass the necessary legislation required to implement pack warnings.

The Opposition’s accusations and blistering critique established what remains as the dominant discourse in tobacco control debates today. This was a discourse of intertwined bodily, political and corporate morality, in which perceptions of the evils of smoking extended past its effect on individual human bodies and focused on tobacco company activities and the tobacco lobby’s ability to influence government. Tobacco control was now described as a moral requirement of responsible government, for example when one of Askin’s backbenchers criticised his own party by declaring that

surely we must ask whether in all conscience the Government can refrain any longer from entering this field. It must declare where it really stands in the fight against lung cancer and other diseases that emanate from cigarette smoking ... The intervention of the Government in this field could save a significant number of lives and any further reluctance to take action is morally indefensible.³⁸

This accusation—that political inaction was morally indefensible, and the result of improper industry influence—quickly became and

remained paradigmatic in tobacco control debates.

In 1972, this new discourse on tobacco was still contested by advocates of the older ideas about Christian morality, personal responsibility and liberal government that had been mobilised in the temperance debates. One example of this came from Health Minister Jago, who, despite his general sympathy with tobacco control, defended his government's position thus:

Might I emphasize that while we live in a free society many of these decisions are for people to take of their own volition and on their own responsibility. Must people be tied hand and foot or have a gun held at their heads to prevent their taking excessive alcohol, smoking cigarettes to excess or taking drugs? ... or do we live in a responsible society in which people are responsible for their actions and accordingly pay the price of any lack of responsibility, especially where their own health is concerned?³⁹

A similar echo of early–twentieth century anti-temperance sentiment came from older MPs of rural constituencies. ‘A man is entitled to a few vices. I am a smoker and I drink alcoholic liquor. However, I do not peddle a lot of this nonsense about the demoralizing activity that is going on in the community ... I do not appreciate the honourable member for Campbelltown implying that, because I have a few bad habits, I do not have control of myself,’ said one National MP, protesting the replacement of representations of smoking as pleasurable with those of smoking as addiction in the language of the day.⁴⁰ Said another, contrasting old moral concerns with the new:

The federal colleagues of the members on the opposite side of the House intend to urge the lifting of sales tax on contraceptives. Here is an interesting point: will this lead to increased fornication, which I do not think is good for us? Is it intended to place a warning label on contraceptives? That would indeed be a fascinating exercise. I should like to see the Opposition draw up a bill providing in it for appropriate wording for a warning label.⁴¹

He concluded by saying: ‘Do not single this industry out as one to attack in order to suddenly cure the ills of society.’⁴²

Why was there this perception that proponents of tobacco control had ‘the ills of society,’ and not just a reduction in outcomes like lung cancer incidence, in their sights? We would

argue that in fact, at least symbolically, it was because tobacco control was presented as a larger moral project. The new moral discourse surrounding tobacco control conflated it with the values of honesty and altruism in political and social life instead of with former religiously-based ideas of personal and sexual morality. Cotter Harvey was the personification of these values: a former inmate of the iconic and infamously brutal Japanese prisoner of war camp, Changi, in Singapore, he was depicted as the archetype of unselfish civic responsibility. As Liberal MP Doyle, a member of Askin's government, put it:

It is no wonder that men such as Dr. Cotter Harvey have taken up the cause against cancer, despite the fact that such action could not be in the best financial interests of their own practices, which are based on trying to maintain the lives of persons ridden with cancer caused by smoking. Notwithstanding that fact, they have come out to fight the smoking habit, and they are the ones to whom we should listen rather than the cigarette companies.⁴³

It was these values that ordered the moral universe in which the activities of governments and industry would be judged in the ensuing years, as tobacco control became an important vehicle for critiquing the profiteering, alienating and manipulative nature of contemporary consumer society—ideas that were bound together in growing concerns about drugs.

A drugged society: Debates in the 1980s

Following the eventual successful passage of the *Cigarettes (Labelling) Bill* in 1973, tobacco went unmentioned in the NSW parliament until 1979. Neither federal legislation banning tobacco advertising on radio and television in 1975, nor the change in the NSW government in 1976 and consequent appointment of one of the most vocal among the earlier antitobacco speakers, Labor's Kevin Stewart, as the new minister for health, aroused any comment on the subject in parliament at all. Instead, the tobacco debate restarted in the context of a wider debate on drugs. Antitobacco advocates and politicians felt that a small group of illegal ('class A') drugs were garnering a disproportionate degree of media and political attention when deaths from tobacco smoking were ten times greater. They and those concerned about alcohol made a strong

attempt to draw both legal substances firmly onto the discursive ground occupied by illegal drugs, stating for example that nicotine was ‘more addictive than heroin’⁴⁴ and that tobacco caused ‘81% of all drug-related deaths.’⁴⁵ Treating tobacco as a ‘drug’ and users as ‘addicts’ recognised the very real medico-social difficulties of quitting and had important implications for the implementation of government controls over smoking. If tobacco smoking was a behaviour produced by physiological dependence, then the argument that governments had no right to interfere in someone’s free choice to smoke was invalid as the choice was, after the first smoke or two, not so free after all. Though they felt the practice of tobacco smoking was too widespread for prohibition to be possible or desirable, MPs lamented that had we known ‘then’ (some distant point in the past before tobacco was widely used) what we know now, tobacco would most certainly have been sitting right beside opium poppies on the shelf of banned substances.

The success of this strategy was only partial: illegal drugs continued to garner greater moral panic and social condemnation than did cigarettes, nor were the CEOs of tobacco companies ever as reviled as those who managed the supply of class A drugs. Nonetheless the debate around tobacco in the 1980s was deeply shaped by discourse on the place of ‘drugs’ in modern society. The dominant themes in the tobacco debate were those of manipulation, illusion, enslavement and addiction—themes that belonged primarily to the drugs debate.

The NSW parliament became suddenly preoccupied with ‘drugs’ in the early 1980s. (The subject had attracted little parliamentary attention in the 1960s and 70s, despite widespread public concerns about increased recreational drug use by the ‘permissive society’ and about heroin use in the wake of the Vietnam war. While there was clearly a wider discourse about drugs in the media and society that provided a context for parliamentary interest in the issue, we could find no particular explanation, such as an event or advocate, for why there was this sudden escalation in indexed entries under the term in *Hansard* from 1980 onwards but not before.) In many respects, the term had recently assumed new cultural valencies. In government, the use of ‘drugs’ to refer to illegal substances, above all heroin, cannabis, LSD, and cocaine, was replacing that of the word prevalent in the 1950s and 60s, ‘narcotic,’ which had been associated with intoxication, mental instability and criminality

in the user.⁴⁶ The emerging discourse about ‘drugs,’ by contrast (though of course there was considerable overlap), as Manderson demonstrates, was more strongly associated with users described as dependent, powerless and deceived. Moral culpability was shifted to a significant degree from user to seller.

In the NSW parliament, MPs never contested what the term ‘drugs’ meant—even those who argued for the legalisation of marijuana did not question what ‘drugs’ were or that they were bad, arguing only that the negative consequences of marijuana’s legal status outweighed the positives. But in their speeches the term ‘drugs’ also became shorthand for concerns about superficiality and alienation in modern society, and in particular about how citizens may be manipulated by or disengaged within it. ‘Drugs’ in MPs speeches were associated with a dangerously impressionable, malleable society that too easily sought illusory short-term solutions to deeper problems. Labor Health Minister Stewart put it:

There is no doubt that our modern society is a drug and pill oriented society in which many people seek comfort with chemicals to dispel or erase tension and worries; to get rid of headaches and to alleviate cold symptoms; to alter our mood or perceptions; to overcome tiredness; to make us slim; to put us to sleep or to wake us up. Every day the average citizen is assailed by convincing slogans and commercials that relief from every problem is just a couple of pills away, and the exhortation is that life—or the ideal situation in which to love—is one that is without pain, discomfort or worry.⁴⁷

Such a society was vulnerable to the mendacious tendencies of drug lords and worse, to the potential for greed and corruption in government. As one National party MP put it, ‘Mind you, Bruce Jeffrey is no wowser’ [a colloquialism for the puritan eschewing of pleasure] ‘but our youth must be protected from drug abuse. ... Unfortunately, we must face the fact that governments, big business and organized crime benefit when more and more drugs of all kinds are consumed.’ The juxtaposition in this quote of government, big business and organised crime is most striking. Jeffrey’s thought was that prevention of ‘drug abuse,’ including the accepted, normal behaviours of smoking and drinking, was itself the best prevention against abuses from governing and business powers.⁴⁸ The discourse on drugs therefore also became a discourse on good government.

The concerns about good government and good citizenship decisively shaped the debates about tobacco. Most obviously, the language of ‘drug lords,’ dope-pushers and traffickers was applied to tobacco companies, with the emphasis not on murder but on their deception of the public. MPs regularly devoted part of their speeches on tobacco (which were now coming to occupy adjournment debates, grievance motions and public interest debates as well as question time) to criticising and refuting the tobacco industry’s campaign of misinformation that persisted through this period. The industry’s ability to derail good government through either improper influence or threat was also made much of. The Tobacco Institute of Australia (TIA)’s legal action against the first Quit campaign, run in northern NSW in 1979 with the memorable ‘lungs-as-sponge’ advertisement, was savagely attacked by a Labor backbencher.⁴⁹ When another backbencher, Ernie Page, who regarded the industry as ‘corporate thugs,’ wished to show the film ‘Death in the West’ in Parliament (it critiqued ‘Marlborough Man’ tobacco advertising) and received a letter threatening legal action from the TIA, he was unanimously granted parliamentary privilege to go ahead. There were also many references to the major parties being ‘in the pockets of the tobacco companies’ in every debate, and a narrative of ‘good politicians’—those that behaved altruistically, like Cotter Harvey—and ‘bad politicians,’ those who allowed economic considerations to influence their actions, became pervasive. Although in practice the implementation of regulations (for example those that banned smoking in public transport and government buildings), let alone the development of new legislation, was very slow, and the tobacco lobby may be judged relatively successful in its effort to delay legislation and evade the moral outrage applied to traffickers of illegal drugs, tobacco control had been constructed as a symbol of good government.

But the ‘drugs’ debate was not merely about good government, it was also about good *self*-government. Smokers were not stigmatised by MPs in the same ways as heroin addicts.⁵⁰ Nonetheless they, and smoking, were often portrayed through subtle pejoratives. The most common description of smokers was constructed within the wider discourse on drugs: smokers were largely ‘victims’ or ‘addicts.’ Both terms deliberately represented smokers as pawns of the tobacco industry; both emphasised smokers’ powerlessness and dependency on a controlling drug. MPs particularly contrasted the pure innocence of children (particularly girls) with the predations

of the tobacco industry. 'In particular he has cited advertisements aimed at the young, particularly at teenage girls. Regrettably, these days teenage girls appear to be the most popular target for drug pushers,' Democrat MP Elizabeth Kirkby commented.⁵¹ Yet 'Mr Sin' seemed not to have entirely vanished from the debate. Smokers came to be defined by their lack of self-government—by their 'addiction,' a term carrying pejorative connotations. Smokers were seen as dirty and weak and nonsmokers, especially passive smokers, became the innocent: 'the sorts of things inhaled by the innocent from other people's habit in side-stream smoke.'⁵² Smoking mothers were also represented as a particular cause for concern, since, while no moral condemnation was explicitly attached to them as it was to heroin-addicted mothers, they were believed to inflict drastic harms on their babies.

The language of 'pushing,' deception, 'hooks' and dope was easily transferred from tobacco sales to advertising itself. Advertising was constructed as a kind of mental 'dope,' a way of clouding the perceptions and judgement of the viewer, and thus encouraging an already too gullible society to seek the short-term alleviations offered by consumption to larger, harder questions about identity, desire or social status.⁵³ Tobacco advertising exemplified this kind of deception, conflating pharmacological manipulation (by nicotine) with psychological manipulation (by absent information and deceptive imagery). Indeed in the history of advertising, the cigarette remains the stand-out example of how one object can evoke, at least momentarily, the possibility that the consumer might possess beauty, prestige, comradeship, luxury, escape, mystery, domesticity, women's liberation, sexuality, courage ... virtually the whole range of dreams commonly used to sell products. The cigarette's cultural power and hence capacity for deception in tobacco advertisements alarmed many politicians. 'Cigarette manufacturers are the slickest and shrewdest of advertisers, for they are selling drugs to the public,' one argued even back in 1973.⁵⁴ Expressing a common opinion (in defiance of his party's anticontrol position) more than a decade later, the Liberal Opposition spokesman for Health, Peter Collins said:

One of the things that most offends me is the use of advertisements ... that give the impression that smoking is a clean and healthy habit. One of the most personally offensive advertisements shows crystal-clear waters on some idyllic tropical lagoon ... nothing

is less consistent with the healthy environment portrayed in that advertisement than cigarette smoking.⁵⁵

In the 1980s tobacco control thus was framed as a critique of consumer society through the leitmotif of ‘drugs’: the greed of ‘pusher’ corporations, their ‘doping’ of people’s minds through advertising, and the act of consumption itself were all dangerous to the individual and the social body. It was also an important means of articulating ideas about what constituted ‘good’ government. Perhaps surprisingly, it was this latter function that was to assume increasing importance in tobacco control debates in the 1990.

Conventional and pragmatic: Tobacco control debates in the 1990s

The parliamentary tobacco control debates of the 1980s culminated in the *1991 Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Bill*, which was introduced by a minority Christian party, Call To Australia, but passed (albeit much amended) with the support of all parties. Following this milestone, tobacco control became a thoroughly regular part of the government agenda: online searches in *Hansard* between 1991 and 2001 under ‘tobacco,’ ‘cigarettes,’ and ‘smoking’ or ‘smoke’ locate well over the limit of 100 entries the search engine will provide for each searchable period (2–3 years), a frequency much greater than at any time during the 1980s. While these debates covered a range of topics, from placing new warning labels on cigarette packets to ways of preventing the sale and supply of tobacco to juveniles, the strongest focus of legislative intervention in this period was environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). From 1986 the NSW Government had slowly required that workplaces under its control become smoke-free, along with public transport and public buildings. In the 1990s, legislation followed: in 1993 Parliament decided its own workplace would become smoke-free; in 1997 it legislated for smoke-free workplaces five years after establishing air quality standards; and in 2000, it passed the *Smoke-Free Environment Bill* which made all workplaces smoke-free but granted exemptions to pubs and clubs, which are only now being slowly removed.

ETS could be similarly said to be the primary focus for tobacco control advocacy in the 1990s. In arguing that legislation was needed, advocates emphasised that the current situation was unjust

for two reasons: imposing ETS on nonsmokers, whether patrons or coworkers, is unfair, and the failure to protect workers from ETS unfairly violated the spirit, if not the letter, of occupational health and safety laws. That workers were most at risk from ETS in the one industry—the hospitality industry—that most strongly resisted the introduction of smoke-free environments heightened the sense of injustice. Their central themes were about *rights* and *freedoms*—the right to a smoke-free workplace for workers, the freedom to attend venues or enjoy a meal without the dangerous and unpleasant intrusion of cigarette smoke. Advocates' arguments were strategic and carefully tailored in order to encourage political action about ETS.

We therefore expected to see a return to debate centrally structured around ideas of rights, freedoms and personal responsibility. After all, there was some precedent in the 1980s, when the importance of recognising the rights of nonsmokers had been raised at least in passing by various speakers.⁵⁶ But somewhat to our surprise, we found that although ETS dominated the political agenda on tobacco control, parliamentary debate did not in fact vastly restructure. Instead, tobacco control debates saw the reiteration of familiar arguments and themes. Perhaps this was partly because it was more or less the same small number of MPs, most of them procontrol advocates of many years standing, who spoke on each occasion.

We found that the central discourse of tobacco control as a moral requirement of government simply continued, and speculate that this effectively excluded other opposing frames for tobacco control in the debates. Certainly there was no mention in parliament of the prevaricating language of hypocrisy and uncertainty that was promoted by tobacco companies at the time—for example, the scientific validity of the claims for the risk posed by ETS was not questioned. The categories of information regularly mentioned were the same in each debate as they had been for close to a decade, each designed to show the magnitude of the problem and imply that inaction was unacceptable: lists of the horrific diseases caused or statistically associated with tobacco; mortality statistics, given by total numbers per year, percentage of total deaths of lung cancer and heart disease, and in comparison with prohibited drug and road death; smoking statistics, including percentage of teenagers and especially teenage girls who smoke; and the costs associated with smoking. The same basic principles and criticisms were offered:

that the government had a moral responsibility to intervene; that tobacco companies were corrupt and deceptive.

In fact, most speeches still had the ‘ills of society’ and not just the topic at hand in their sights. For example, many speeches still focused on children, even when the topic was smoking in bars, where children were not permitted; here legislators still wished to speak of damage to the innocent and intertwined the need to protect them from ETS, from taking up smoking and from tobacco industry manipulation. The moral condemnation of tobacco smoking was even extended by speakers who associated smoking (or an absence of tobacco control) with many of the premier social concerns of the decade: breast cancer, child abuse, antiracism and green policies, for instance. One typical speech ran:

Smoking in the home could be considered to be child abuse. In the United States children involved in custody struggles are given to a parent who does not smoke. In that country smoking in the home is regarded as child abuse. I have given notice of a private member’s bill that will prohibit smoking in cars when children are present. That is a worse form of child abuse. Finally the community is beginning to realise that smoking in front of teenagers or young children is a form of child abuse.⁵⁷

A long time antismoking advocate turned senator told his colleagues:

All round cigarette smoke has a negative impact on our community. It also has a significant environmental impact, because tobacco production has been blamed for the destruction of approximately one-third of the world’s forests. In many areas, particularly third world countries, tobacco production takes over forest land and other types of arable land that is normally used for subsistence agriculture. Rather than using the land to survive, people in third world countries are introduced to a cash crop of tobacco.⁵⁸

The only feature of tobacco control debates in the 1990s that allowed for any opposition to procontrol arguments was a subtle but increasing emphasis on being ‘practical.’ Notions of pragmatism and compromise have always been stock in trade for MPs and were therefore part of tobacco control debates from the beginning. However in the 1990s this language become more prominent, suiting the ‘postideological’ political philosophy of the day.⁵⁹ Acting

‘pragmatically’ became a subject for discussion in tobacco control debates as the volume of legislative proposals for tobacco control rose but their rate of passage declined. Legislation that was passed mostly fine-tuned existing legislation or dealt with changes in taxation structure. Those bills that were rejected by parliament were mostly thrown out on the grounds of being ‘unworkable’ (one such was the proposal to make smoking in vehicles illegal, mentioned above, debated in 1997 and 1999). In the view of parliamentarians, some particular cases justified the substitution of pragmatism for morality as the central requirement of good government, such as in 1997, when the (Liberal-National) Opposition took advantage of Labor’s health minister’s failure to act on the recommendations of a task force on passive smoking that he had created and added a raft of amendments to a private member’s bill that proposed across the board workplace bans on smoking. Advocates were quite clear that this made the bill a mere political play for advantage, ineffectual, and unenforceable. Yet a surprising number of MPs, including those with strong antismoking views among the Opposition, found the amended Bill acceptable because it was ‘commonsense.’ For example, one Opposition backbencher, a longtime vocal supporter of tobacco control policies, said:

I have always found smoking to be offensive and have been concerned about the health of those addicted to this habit. In some ways I agree with the honourable member for Manly that there should be an immediate and total ban on smoking in enclosed public places. But, being practical, I realise that would cost an enormous amount of money for many organisations such as restaurants and clubs.⁶⁰

Another Democrat antismoking advocate even added:

I was concerned about the effects on the hotel industry of a ban on the smoking of tobacco. It is my view that people who visit hotels should be able to smoke tobacco—it is just another drug—as well as consume alcohol. Hotels are essentially places where people go to consume drugs such as alcohol and tobacco, and I do not propose to try to prevent people going to hotels. I believe some public places should be available where people can smoke tobacco. If hotels are the only such places, so be it.⁶¹

Conclusion

Given the power and ability of the tobacco lobby to delay or prevent legislative controls over the forty year period discussed in this paper, and the resources it devoted to reframing tobacco issues in ways favourable for its cause, it is remarkable that so few of the arguments so assiduously cultivated by the industry were articulated by MPs in parliament. Our study indicates that the gradual passage of increasing levels of tobacco control regulation and legislation was validated by a powerful discourse in which tobacco control was constructed as a moral requirement of good government—and not as overly intrusive government nor as pragmatic economic/health policy, frames we had expected to find. We identified this construction as associated with parliamentary discussions that called for tobacco to be treated ‘as a drug,’ in which moral culpability for its harms was attached not to users, who were represented as victims of manipulation and addiction, but to the ‘traffickers,’ the tobacco industry. This representation of tobacco ‘as a drug’ in turn became a trope for concerns about a manipulated, escapist public, and corrupted government, in consumer society generally. In this fashion, we argue, debate about tobacco control expressed the particular morals and values speakers in parliament wished to promote in general, and looked, in the long run, beyond promoting physical health to the shaping of society itself.

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