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Fresh-air fascists trample the lives of smokers The Vancouver Sun - 6.4.2005

It's apparent that the sanctimonious nanny-staters who have been leading the crusade against smoking in Canada and the United States have become drunk with success and now believe they can get away with almost anything in their quest for a smoke-free world.

What started as a well-intentioned campaign has become a holy war in which the heathen smoker is dehumanized and persecuted in the name of public health. Down south, smokers are now being fired from their jobs, not for smoking at work but for smoking in their own homes. In Michigan and Indiana companies have started breath-testing their employees and those who either fail or refuse to take the test are fired. The American Civil Liberties Union estimates there are at least 6,000 companies who have similar, but, so far, less draconian, policies.

If that's not horrifying enough, think about the logical extension of such policies. If what anti-smoking crusaders have been claiming to justify smoking bans is true—namely that secondhand smoke is so hazardous that there is no safe level of exposure to it—non-smokers who hang out with friends, spouses and/or family members who smoke will fail breath tests and be fired.

The message is clear: Don't even associate with smokers or you'll be fired.

There is no doubt that the social ostracization of smokers is a deliberate tactic of the crusaders. Health Canada refers to the tactic as denormalization and its website states that efforts to denormalize smokers "can help ensure that people behave in appropriate ways—including making efforts to quit—without the need for a lot of policing or enforcement."

So, smokers who are not trying to quit are not behaving in an appropriate way?

Health Canada further states, "Denormalization activities are important because they may help develop a set of values and behaviours that bring the whole community together to reinforce desirable behaviour and attitudes."

Obviously smokers who do not agree that smoking is an undesirable behaviour cannot be a part of the community.

Health Canada concludes its defence of socially ostracizing smokers by stating that the tactic, "can help generate support for government and broader defence of public health policy in the face of industry challenges."

Obviously, denormalization will make it easier for governments to pass smoking bans, increase tobacco taxes and further attack smokers by any legislative means they can think of, including allowing employers to fire smokers on this side of the border.

The legal justification for firing smokers in the U.S. is that they drive up the health care costs of their employers. How long will it be before Canadian employers who provide extended health care coverage for their employees start to contemplate similar policies? Some Canadian doctors have already publicly stated that smokers should be denied state-subsidized health care coverage.

The attack on smokers is not confined to the workplace. Smokers have lost or been denied custody of their children in divorce disputes.

If this judicial trend continues, will we one day see the state seizing children who have two smoking parents? Anti-smoking groups have already gone so far as to say that smoking parents should even be denied visiting rights.

In Ontario, professional anti-smoking activists are lobbying for legislation to criminalize smoking in all hotel and motel rooms, personal vehicles, outdoor locations such as patios and even in people's own homes.

The professional activists behind what can and should now be referred to as anti-smoker campaigns appear to believe that all smokers are self-loathing victims of the wily barons of big tobacco.

These proponents of nanny-state paternalism and behaviour modification refuse to recognize that some people actually like smoking. If crusading anti-smokers were to accept that some people like to smoke, they would have to seriously question their right to further persecute smokers.

Of course, it's so much easier to pretend that they are perfectly right to protect smokers from ourselves because we are all stupid, hopeless slaves to an addiction that we cannot kick. And so much for free will.

What we have here is a cabal of fresh-air fascists orchestrating campaigns that trample the rights, freedoms and lives of smokers. The generalissimos of this crusade are being aided and abetted by a band of hopelessly naive non-smokers who are being taught to fear and loathe the selfish and dangerous tribe of smoking barbarians.

Not satisfied with their holy war against smokers, social engineers are now beginning to target obese and overweight people. As that insidious campaign cranks up we will be offered more proof of the assertion that one of the greatest threats to personal civil liberties today is public health. Indeed, many civil libertarians are now referring to it as the tyranny of public health.

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