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Civil liberties go up in smoke [1]

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A new report by Simon Davies of Privacy International points out that legislation introduced for the protection of public health is being cynically exploited to impose regulations on us that were never intended. The report [3], *Civil Liberties: Up in Smoke,* focuses particularly on tobacco regulations, saying that the official encroachment into the home and family life of smokers is now 'blatant and intrusive'.

It highlights the increasing use of non-statutory fines and controls, increased surveillance, a sharp increase in discrimination against smokers, and a shift from public health consideration to the demonisation of people who don't 'fit in' with prevailing attitudes. Local authorities, health bodies and housing associations are now adopting measures that restrict the right of people to act freely in their own home or vehicle. Tracking and surveillance eqipment is being used to monitor the activities and movements of smokers. And public employers are unfairly discriminating against staff who smoke, and subjecting them to harassment and intimidation. Tolerance and evidence-based policy has been replaced by zealotry. Yet smokers' actions have minimal impact on other people.

I am not a smoker, but I agree that the fanaticism with which smokers are now pursued has gone far beyond any public health considerations, which was the original purpose ? or excuse ? for regulation. In many parts of the US, you cannot even smoke in public parks or on the street anywhere near a building. This is not a public health measure. It is the majority trying to dictate the lifestyle choices of a minority. And one can see the bullies lining up other 'health' targets, like wine and fast food, that they disapprove of.

Frankly, I prefer a world in which people could live in their own way, without others telling them how to behave. That would be a world that is much more diverse, interesting, exciting and innovative. The trouble is that some find it also unsettling. Well, create your own perfect lifestyle world, then, and leave me to mine.

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