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The anti-smoking boondoggle [1]

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A new report [3] released today by FOREST (Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco), the smokers? lobby, shows the extent to which the government has been funding groups like ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) and No Smoking Day and continues to do so.

In 2009 the government gave ASH £142,000. ASH Scotland received a whopping £921,837 from the Scottish government in 2009 and another £500,000 from the BIG lottery. ASH and No Smoking Day have both received up to a quarter of a million pounds annually over the last decade, and the ?UK Centre for Tobacco Control Studies? was given over £3.5 million in 2008. Several other lobby groups have received grants of millions of pounds from the NHS to pressurize adults out of smoking.

Apart from the obvious waste of money involved here ? does anybody know what ?tobacco control studies? actually is? ? today?s report shows the alarming habit the government has of pushing people around to fit its own vision of what ?good? habits are. Every act has an element of danger and requires the actor to make a judgment about whether the potential payoff is worth the danger. Taking a tube to work is only different to having a cigarette in the judgment made by the actor. Everybody enjoys things differently and puts a different premium on long life ? it is silly to suppose that there is a ?correct? option.

Furthermore, since we know cuts have to be made to government spending, is it too much to ask that the low-hanging fruit be cut first? I?m not crazy about many government projects, but I recognise that the cuts will hurt. As FOREST?s report shows, small but real savings could be made by abolishing the anti-smoking quangos to no loss to anybody. It's small change in the grand scheme of things, perhaps, but it all adds up and would end the practicd of forcing us to pay for ourselves to be 'educated' in how to be well-behaved.

Some people like oranges, some like apples, and some like cigarettes ? everybody's tastes are different. This is obvious to most children but, unfortunately, not to the government. If the government is serious about restoring some of the freedoms lost during the Labour years and scaling back the state's presence in our lives, the anti-smoking quangos would be a nice place to start.

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