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The Decline of an Institution [1]

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It's sad to see a once proud institution enter a death spiral but we do have to consider quite seriously that the LSE might be doing so. The former home of luminaries such as Karl Popper and Freddie Hayek (and educator of some lesser talents [3]) now has as one of its adornments a certain Professor Julian Le Grand who has come up with this idea [4]:

> *A ban on the sale of cigarettes to anyone who does not pay for a government smoking permit has been proposed by Health England, a ministerial advisory board.*

It is of course grossly illiberal: we do not need permission to do things. Whether to smoke or not is our right, not an allowance from the State. But rather worse the Professor seems to be incapable of actual thought. The licence might only be £10, but could be made complex to obtain:

> *"Breaking the new year's resolution not to smoke would be costly in terms of both money and time ... [This] would probably have a greater impact on poor smokers than on rich ones, hence contributing to a reduction in health inequalities."*

Sigh. Time is more valuable to you the richer you are, for you have more opportunities. Thus the opportunity cost to the wealthy of queuing to get the permit is greater, meaning such bureaucratic obstacle making will reduce the smoking rate amongst the wealthy more than amongst the poor, leading to an increase, not a decrease, in the beloved "health inequalities".

> *The money raised would go to the NHS.*

Eh? What money raised? Does anyone at all think that a licence, especially one that is deliberately bureaucratically complex, can be issued for £10?

But the ultimate fatuity is that of course such a scheme will only cover the UK. We will still all be free to purchase anywhere else in the EU without such a licence. And still free, as at present, to bring such back into the UK, for the free movement of legally purchased goods is a cornerstone of the entire enterprise.

Meaning, of course, that the numbers who do this will rise, leading to less revenue from the taxation of tobacco sales to pay for the NHS.

None of these effects are, from either my or the Professor's point of view, desirable. Something seems to have changed at the LSE: back in my day we were urged to think before making proposals.

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