

Freedom to Choose Newsletter 2:2008

This newsletter is brought to you in association with Freedom to Choose (Scotland). Freedom to Choose (Scotland) is constituted separately from Freedom2Choose, because it is fighting the ban under a different administration.

Scotland is entering its third year under the smoking ban. The anniversary week started with the announcement that the UK government plans to ban cigarette displays in shops. Comments appearing in newsletter columns showed frustration with the amount of control ministers are prepared to throw at this issue. Grocers' federations might yet take more action than we have seen from other trade bodies.

In Scotland, the smoking ban is **LABOUR'S BABY, NURTURED BY THE SNP**. In the rest of the UK, Labour is responsible for bringing in the ban, contrary to its election promises, No party seems prepared to challenge it other than UKIP (see below).

Message from Chairman, Freedom2Choose

Hi folks,

The last few months have been pretty intense and the smoker ban has caused a great deal of damage to our hospitality industry, its customers, and our communities. Recently we have learnt some interesting things: pubs are closing at a rate of four per day, the government's top advisors have admitted on Radio Five Live that the argument for second hand smoke is 'not strong', patients have yet again been refused treatment because they smoke, French anti-smokers rushed a study out to a gullible press claiming that their ban had reduced heart attacks by 15% (the 'study' was subsequently trashed by well respected doctors and epidemiologists), and our good friend Tony Blows was fined a total of £12,000 for allowing smoking in his pub. This fine came subsequent to a £2,000 fine for a driver who knocked down and killed a 12-year-old girl. We think that tells you all you need to know about our judicial system.

Thank you for your continued support.

Stay well,

Colin Grainger
Chairman, Freedom2Choose (UK)



The Scottish ban

in the last few weeks the Scottish group, together with the Fife Action Group has been challenging MSPs to defend the progress of our respective petitions through the Scottish Parliament. We have been told that the ban will not be ready for review until the end of this parliamentary session: any attempt to review it sooner would be premature. This in spite of heavy losses demonstrated by pubs and clubs in Fife, The Scottish Health & Sport Committee has missed the point of our petitions since it fails to recognise that we have presented evidence of considerable economic damage that will be much greater after the passage of three more years, and indeed irreversible for many since over 350 recreational venues have closed in two years.

Further, in discussion in the Parliament an MSP claimed that an exposed non-smoker's risk of lung cancer was 20 times that of a non-smoker who was not exposed (Tavish Scott). This was a gross over-statement of the facts, and if any MSPs noticed it they did not challenge him. Even the staunchest advocates of smoking bans claim that the increased risk from secondary smoke is only 25 per cent (or 1.25 times the risk of a non-exposed non-smoker getting ill).

The Health & Sport Committee has pronounced that it is too early for the petitions to be heard. This is no guarantee that they will ever be heard. Although it is not (quite) a rejection, neither is it satisfactory and there is no appeals process: the committee is accountable only to itself. It can ride roughshod over evidence, opposition and people's recreational and working lives just because it feels it has the right to do so.

Following a decision by the convenor of the Health Committee not to correspond further with petitioners on this issue, we wrote to several MSPs to seek advice. Just over half of the MSPs approached (by half a dozen of us) responded, and at least two of those pointed out that we had no absolute right to be heard.

Traffic Light Device

Freedom2Choose believes that choice is missing in the current inflexible policy towards smokers and smoking. Interim results from our survey of licensed businesses show that over 60 per cent of landlords want to choose whether to allow smoking or not. Look out for our new traffic light symbol that can be displayed outside businesses to indicate whether smoking is **forbidden** (red light); **restricted** (amber light) or **permitted** (green light), under the banner 'managed air quality'. Modern air cleaning equipment can make indoor air cleaner than the air outside, regardless of smoking, and the public will have the information to make an informed choice about which premises they enter. Sadly, such signs cannot be used under current legislation, but we will use the 'traffic lights' as a campaigning device.

Club Institute Union

On 15 March we held a public meeting in the Meanwood Working Men's Club, Leeds, attended by Freedom2Choose members (including Scottish members), CIU club members and others, and addressed by several speakers including Godfrey Bloom MEP for UKIP (UK independence Party). UKIP is the only political party to have endorsed our policy of amending the ban and have paid for the production of a beer-mat that includes the Freedom2Choose logo, and explains their endorsement of an amendment to the law that would allow choice in the licensing trade. Freedom2Choose is not politically aligned with any party but seeks support in the political arena and will share information when we gain this support.



Other than this we discussed strategies for marketing our messages to the wider public, and our political strategies. We have a range of sweatshirts and t-shirts available online from the online shop 'Propergander', which can be accessed from the front page of our website, www.freedom2choose.info. All present pledged to fight the ban, which is damaging the trade of up to 60 per cent of licensed premises.

Membership

Freedom2Choose is delighted to announce the launch of a formal membership scheme. Please help us to help you by showing your commitment to the cause that has brought us all together. The membership fee is £10 per annum, (or 26p a week, or two packets of fags!) or £5 concession. You can download a copy of the membership form here:

<http://www.freedom2choose.info/docs/membership.pdf>. Follow the instructions on the page. If you live in Scotland you can join Freedom to Choose Scotland. Their membership form is here: <http://www.freedom2choose.info/docs/MemberInvite.pdf>

By joining as a member you will be helping to further the aims of Freedom2Choose. To find out more you can download a copy of Freedom2Choose's constitution from here:

http://www.freedom2choose.info/docs/FREEDOM2CHOOSE_Constitution.pdf. And the Scottish constitution from here: http://www.freedom2choose.info/docs/FREEDOM2CHOOSE_Scot_Constitution.pdf.

Membership will also benefit you in a number of ways: 1) The satisfaction of knowing that you are helping the cause. 2) A nice shiny membership card ☺. 3) The right to vote at the AGMs. 4) Greater access to the committee and decision-making. Also, please, please consider a regular donation. This can be any amount you can afford or feel like giving, and can be sent by standing order or cheque, weekly, monthly or even yearly. Please tick the box on the membership form (or leave a note on the Scottish membership form) for more information.

Why should you make the sacrifice of a regular donation?

Unlike ASH or CRUK, FREEDOM2CHOOSE doesn't receive any funding, there's no big industry backing us, no Lottery grants or Government handouts, only what we raise ourselves. So if you want FREEDOM2CHOOSE to act on any of your great ideas then we need cash. **You can make regular donations either to Freedom2Choose or Freedom to Choose Scotland. Please see contact details at the end of this Newsletter.**

Freedom2Choose supporters are generous, having collected over £1,500 for both Hamish Howitt and Nick Hogan. But what about Freedom2Choose itself? A similar commitment here would make so much difference. So please think about a regular donation, keep Freedom2Choose's coffers replenished so we can carry on fighting this war effectively. Please, make the effort to join up and, if you can, make a regular contribution, we need your support ...

Yours

Pete J (Freedom2Choose membership)



Collections for our Defiant Three

Although Tony Blows, Hamish Howitt and Nick Hogan have not asked for financial help, we at Freedom2Choose want to help out. Over the winter, we have had collections for Hamish and Nick, and earlier in March we launched a fund for Tony. These brave men and their families have risked all in the fight to restore choice for their smoking customers and we recognise that brave stance. We hope you do too, and will respond by sending in a donation to help pay ridiculous fines (which for Tony Blows and Nick Hogan amount to around £12,000 each, including costs). All three have kept the issue in the newspapers, both local, and national, and all have spoken out, repeatedly, against the ban. Please, dig deep and show them your support.

The House Magazine

Freedom2Choose ran an 'advertorial' in a recent issue of *The House Magazine* regarding the proposed 'Smoking Permits' plan, introduced by Julian Le Grand. This was a 600-word article and included our logo and URL. This publication is read only by lawmakers in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and the Scottish and Welsh parliaments. This is the first time Freedom2Choose have had the opportunity to speak directly to our lawmakers.

Pub closures

We have been saying for months now that the damage to our hospitality industry has been unacceptably high. We were vindicated when the British Beer and Pub Association issued a press release stating that 27 pubs are closing every week. For comparison, in 2005 the UK lost 102 pubs. In 2006 we lost 204. In 2007, we lost a staggering 1,409. The sad part, of course, is that these venues need not have closed. Their owners/operators need not have lost their jobs, and in most cases, their homes. Their ex-staff also face hard times as they search for work in what *was* a vibrant industry, but now diminishes by *four pubs per day*. Just how long will the industry put up with these incredible losses? We don't know the answer to that, but we hope they wake up soon.

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Write or phone for membership forms and other enquiries for Freedom2Choose. All donations to Freedom2Choose UK and for the Tony Blows fund to this address.

Enquiries, donations and membership forms for Freedom to Choose Scotland to the address above.