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Freedom2Choose.info

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SMOKING BAN: LABOUR'S BABY, NURTURED BY THE SNP

Freedom2Choose cheque to Hamish 'Guy Fawkes' Howitt

As we reported last month, Hamish Howitt, the Scottish landlord in Blackpool has been prosecuted for allowing smoking in his pub. His trial date has been set for 26 March (second anniversary of the Scottish ban), and at his recent hearing he was presented with a cheque for £1,540.29 towards his costs by Freedom2Choose; money raised from members of the organisation and generous supporters. Tony Blows goes to trial on 21 January and Nick Hogan on 28 January.

Pub Closures South of the Border

Peterborough, Gloucester, Oxford, Littlehampton, Huddersfield, Calderdale, Preston, Sheffield, Dudley and more report closures and enormous drops in business volume, threatening licensed establishments. Pub closures have never made the news on this scale before ... although smoking ban supporters suggest that the phenomenon has other causes, they can't explain the media interest in these stories or the plummeting share values of many of the pub companies. The Scottish picture is less widely reported ... is it any different?

National Smoking Day

And so, here we are in 2008. Hogmanay marked a landmark in the fight against the smoking ban with the first 'National Smoking Day'. Publicans throughout the UK were encouraged to flout the ban by allowing their customers to light up inside their premises. This event was organized by a group called 'Sleep Walk Prison', who also include 'No2id' in their campaign and are protesting against the erosion of civil liberties.

We have had several reports of pubs either closing early and having 'a smoke in' or simply putting out the ashtrays and allowing customers who do so to smoke in civilized surroundings.

But, the most astonishing part of the story is the absence of trouble. There were no reports of masses of people suddenly dropping dead on exposure to tobacco smoke indoors! Also quite remarkable was the non-appearance of the smoke police. A cynic might say that the authorities were trying to avoid giving any publicity to the event, since it showed a level of dissatisfaction with the ban. As, it may be said, does the alarming proliferation of 'To Let' signs on pubs since the inception of the ban.

These are signs, we would suggest, that the deluge of previously disenfranchised non-smokers predicted to flood our pubs in the wake of the ban has failed to materialize. Looks like that was just wishful thinking.

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‘... AND STATISTICS’

On the subject of wishful thinking, we'd like to take you back to 11 September last year when Professor Jill Pell of Glasgow University announced the results of a study she had led which found a drop in cardiac admissions to Scottish hospitals of 17% in one year. While the beaming face of Professor Pell was seen on every TV news broadcast, politicians of every hue were queuing up to express their joy at this triumph of the smoking ban, for, obviously, there could be no other possible explanation for such a dramatic improvement in the nation's health.

Prize for 'quote of the day' however goes to Maureen Moore, now-retired CEO of ASH Scotland, who said. 'This is fantastic news'. Give that lady a cigar! (Or, on second thoughts, ...)

It was indeed fantastic: in the true sense of the word. When the official figures were released, they showed a drop of 8%. Now, this is an improvement on the average of 5% shown in the previous 3 years ... but slightly disappointing when compared with the 1999/2000 figure of 11% when people were happily puffing away in pubs throughout Scotland.

We at Freedom To Choose Scotland are as happy anybody to see an improvement in the nation's health. However, we can't help but wonder; is forcing elderly and other vulnerable people out in severe winter weather a sensible way to go about achieving it?

VENTILATION AND THE ELEMENT OF CHOICE

Second-hand smoke is harmless, although some people find it unpleasant or irritating. Ventilation and air cleaning systems are used successfully in industrial systems where danger of contamination from toxic airborne material is a real threat. A chemical worker told us this: **During my employment with a large chemical manufacturer, it was part of my duties to carry out explosiveness tests on new products. This meant exposing them to flame, among other tests. Many of the chemicals had known cancer-causing ingredients and were also harmful to the nervous system. The only way to eliminate possible harm to the operator was to ventilate the area. My question is this: if ventilation was the answer in industry, then why can't the same be done in any social environment?** (Morgan Slavin)

Freedom2choose advocates a 'traffic light system' of signage outside pubs: Red: no smoking; amber: separate areas (with air-cleaning systems); green: smoking throughout (with air cleaning systems). Cleaner air and choice: what could be fairer than that?

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