

From *Slings And Arrows*, Toward The Stars

Inhospitable Hospitals

While most US hospitals have had strong restrictions on smoking for the last twenty years, hospitals in the UK were far more relaxed about puffing patients, visitors, and staff, until the turn of the twenty-first century. The incoming bans have not been greeted with enthusiasm. When hospitals institute such bans, they not only ignore the discomfort they will be causing some of their patients, staff, and visitors, but they also ignore the problems that such policies create.

These artificially created problems could be easily solved by the provision of clean, comfortable, separately ventilated smoking lounges within the hospitals. Would such lounges cause some expense? Certainly... but very little when one thinks of the problems solved and the goodwill created. It could even be argued that patients' health would benefit as they no longer have to sneak outdoors in the cold and rain to grab a smoke or freeze to death when a door snaps shut behind them during such a break. (And no, that is not a fantasy; it has already happened more than once.)

Three particular problems resulting from the UK hospital bans – harassment, bugs, and litter – inspired letters from me. The first dealt with Antismokers' liking for preaching their gospel whether the listener wants to hear it or not. The second dealt with a staff problem where hospital workers were leaving a back door propped open so they could pop out for a smoke while little visitors quietly popped in for some fun. And the third was a response to one of those annoyingly shrill news stories that want to gripe about a problem by putting all the blame on smokers while ignoring the fact that at least part of the problem exists because of Antismokers.

The first two never made it to print, but the third surprised me and did.

For Your Own Good...

Dear Editor,

Cherry Thomas' March 6th article, "Stop Smoking Advisers on Hospital Duty" notes that "Stop smoking advisers will be in the main hospital corridor all morning on No Smoking Day ... talking to patients, visitors and staff..."

There is a fine line between "talking to" and "harassing," and I'll bet these "advisers" will be stepping quite a bit over it. Hospital staff, unless they are deaf, dumb, and blind, have certainly heard all there is to hear about smoking so many times that they'll need to sign up for a stomach pumping after being so "advised." Patients in the hospital for virtually anything more than an inflamed bunion have probably also heard the stop-smoking lecture more often than they've had their bedpans changed. And visitors who are worried and frantic about sick loved ones could almost be excused if they put insistent advisers into hospital beds for a slightly longer stint than a "No Smoking Day."

There is no good reason for banning outdoor smoking on the hospital grounds and the hospital administration knows that. So to pump up support for the move, they have activities like this to quiet dissent and instill the "proper" attitude amongst all concerned. I can almost hear the intercom buzzing now: "Calling Dr. Orwell! Dr. Orwell! Visitor needs a dose of NewThink in Ward # 9!"

It's bad enough we've let the crazy folks take over half the hospitals in the United States. There's no reason why the UK should follow suit.

A Buggy Headline...

Dear Editor,

Helen Branswell's Feb 4th article, "Another Reason Not to Smoke in Hospitals: Cockroaches," had a very misleading headline. It should actually have been, "Another Reason to Provide Smoking Lounges in Hospitals: Cockroaches."

The bugs did not come from smoking in a hospital, they came because of the hospital's unreasonably strict smoking ban. Smoking bans always have "unintended consequences" such as lost income, smokers gathering on nearby properties or outside doorways, fires from hidden smoking, and now, cockroaches sneaking into hospitals. Those consequences may not be "intended" but they are real, and the solution is simple: provide comfortable, separately ventilated, friendly indoor spaces where smoking patients, staff, and their friends can gather together and relax. The provision of even a few such spaces would put a simple halt to back doors being propped open while people smoke and provide an unintended open highway for invading insects.

Of course, those pushing for bans will never accept such a solution. It doesn't fit in with their real fundamental goal of "denormalizing" smokers. Fires and cockroaches are seen by such extremists as simply being regrettable, but fully acceptable, costs of smoking bans.

Litter Legacy of What?

Dear Editor,

The headline of your Feb. 12th story, “Litter Legacy of Smokers at the Royal Bolton Hospital,” was misleading. The proper headline would have been, “Litter Legacy of the Smoking Ban at Royal Bolton Hospital.”

As part of the story, your reporter interviewed a groundskeeper who had been working at the hospital for sixteen years. It would have been very easy, and a very obvious reportorial responsibility, to ask him the simple question, “Did the litter problem change once the hospital banned all indoor smoking?”

The answer would most definitely have been a very resounding “Yes!” ... but I guess it wouldn't have been very politically correct to point out that the hospital had created its own problem by refusing to provide even a few decent and separately ventilated smoking lounges for its patients, staff, and visitors.

Easier to just blame the smokers who've been thrown out into the cold, right? And certainly more in tune with the nasty little mechanics of social engineering.

Figures Lie And Liars Figure...

Lies with numbers mingle with lies with words, and New York's Mayor Bloomberg has a special talent for saying the most outrageously untrue things about his smoking ban right in the face of TV cameras and microphones and getting away with it because he's "The Mayor" and it's not polite to point out that he's either a liar or just simply nuts. One particular *Toledo Blade* article caught my eye in 2004 because in a single interview, he managed to come out with not just one or two humdingers, but with *four* of them!

That article, along with one by Chris Stirewalt of the *Washington Examiner*, created the incentive for the first two letters in this selection, while the sheer Orwellian redefinition of legal language around the terms "Employer" and "Employee" brought about the third. While the issue was a bit too complex to examine in the context of a Letter to the Editor, one thing I found when checking up on the legal terminology in that third letter was particularly unsettling. As noted earlier in the section on outdoor tobacco smoke, a Googling of terms defining "Employee" as one who "performs services for an Employer with or without compensation" turns up about 8,000 with about 7,999 referring only to smoking ban laws. Evidently we here have a case where the fundamental meaning of words has not only been consciously changed for the benefit of the Antismokers, but it has been fully accepted and enshrined within our laws, all without anyone even noticing such a fundamental alteration!

The Blade, The Bloom, And The Truth...

Dear Editor,

In the *Blade*'s Sept. 2nd "Reporters' Notebook," four statements are made by Mayor Bloomberg. All four should be seen for what they are: little more than lies.

Bloomberg says bar owners enjoy not having to have "separate smoking and nonsmoking sections." The truth, however, is that most bars never HAD nonsmoking sections and very few of their customers or workers cared.

Bloomberg says bar owners are worried about being sued by nonsmokers. The truth, however, is that the only ones proclaiming such worries are the Antismoking groups trying to convince bar owners to ban smoking. No bar owner I have *ever* spoken to was worried about such suits.

Bloomberg says Big Tobacco supports the bans "because they realize their future is in other products." The truth, however, is that Big Tobacco is now simply supporting anything and everything that might help it squeeze out of lawsuits by playing the "good corporate citizen."

Bloomberg says that as he drives by, smokers outside bars extend their arms and hands to wave their cigarettes at him "with a smile." No human being in their right mind could possibly believe that smokers ENJOY being exiled to the streets. The truth, however, is that the "extensions" he's seeing from the smokers' raised hands are most certainly something other than cigarettes.

The Antismoking Crusaders lie. They do it consistently, they do it with intent, they do it "for your own good," but they lie and the *Blade* should see to it that anyone reading about the issue of smoking bans should be fully and completely aware of that. If you do not, you are doing your readers and your community a grave disservice.

Deep And Serious Trouble

Dear Editor,

Chris Stirewalt's "Free Markets Go Up in Smoke" does a good job pointing out West Virginia's hypocrisy when it refuses to ban smoking in the gambling meccas where such bans would hurt its own pocketbook. At the same time that government preaches to businesses that smoking bans will actually be good for them, that same government knows full well that it's a lie and exempts itself from coverage.

That sort of doublethink is not unique to West Virginia. Rhode Island gave its video gaming parlors a complete exemption (the state gets 250 million dollars a year from gaming taxes), and New York exempted a good number of its off-track betting parlors. Most other "smoke-free" states practice variations of the same double standard.

But I would disagree with Stirewalt's statement that the real problem is constitutional. I think the real problem lies with simple honesty. Ban supporters know perfectly well that thousands of small business owners will suffer because of the bans, but they'll stand up in the media spotlight and blatantly deny it. The Emperor has no clothes, but almost no one in a position of power is willing to admit it.

New York's Mayor Bloomberg himself has been publicly challenged to prove his honesty in proclaiming that his ban is a roaring success and that businesses are thriving. All he has to do to prove he's telling the truth is to lift the ban. If he's lying, then we'll see lots of places going back to allowing smoking. If he's truthful, then we won't.

Has he accepted the challenge? Of course not. Will he ever? Of course not. He knows he's lying, everyone knows he's lying, and he'll continue to lie, and people will simply accept it as par for the course.

A democratic republic that allows its policies to be built on the basis of lies, and a citizenry that accepts those lies as being the norm, is a republic and a citizenry in very deep and serious trouble.