

# AMERICA'S BIGGEST PUSHERS



Article by Ray Schultz

In response to the news that cigarette smoking had caused cancer in laboratory animals, a tobacco executive remarked, "All this proves is that mice shouldn't smoke." The executive implied that despite these scientific findings, human beings would still continue to enjoy their nicotine, as indeed they have, if cigarette sales are any indication.

As of this writing, much to the glee of the tobacco industry, a full quarter of the American people continue to smoke. They puff on approximately 1½ billion cigarettes a day, or 75 million packs. The average smoker inhaled 214 packs in 1973, which was three packs less than he did in 1963, but 15 more than in 1970.

And unquestionably, the damage to the national health from such inhalation is extreme: Nearly half a million smokers a year die from lung cancer, heart attack, emphysema, cancer of the bladder, pancreas, lip and throat, and countless more suffer from ulcers, chronic bronchitis and assorted mouth diseases. Yet, cigarette use was growing at a steady two or three percent a year between 1970 and 1974, while industry profits, aided by government subsidies and other factors, had risen by a staggering rate of 15 percent.

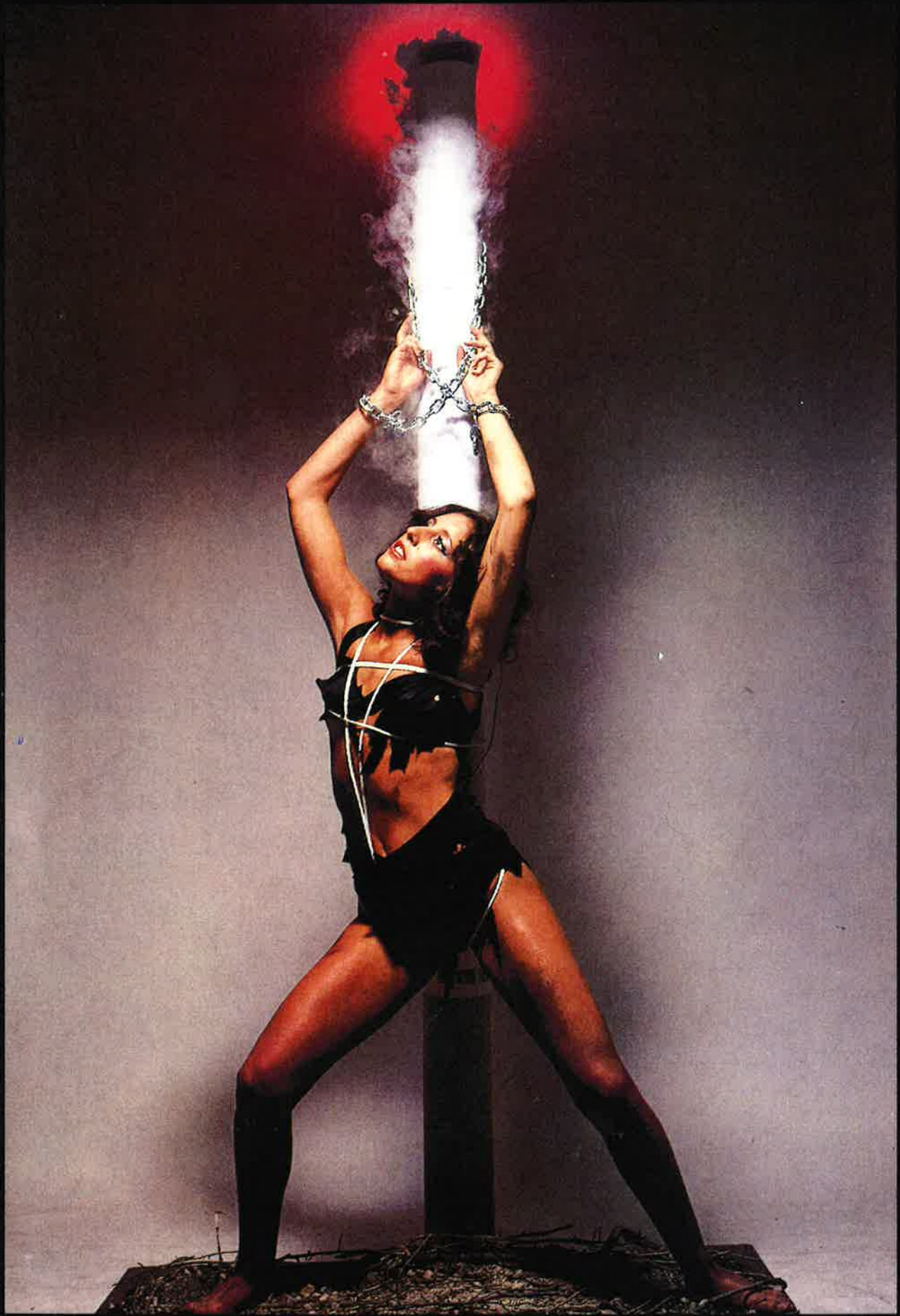
Prior to 1900, most tobacco was either chewed or rolled at home in cigarette papers, much the same as marijuana is today. By and large, it was considered to be a disgusting habit; the rare person who smoked consumed an average of 16 cigarettes per year, and most women did not smoke at all. The situation changed shortly before the turn of the century, when new techniques for mass production were invented, enabling the tobacco companies to produce thousands of cigarettes in the time it previously took a smoker to roll one.

For the first time in history, cigarettes were available by the pack in every city and town in the country. In the meantime, the industry's handpicked emissaries to Congress contrived to exempt tobacco from the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, thus avoiding the regulations that plagued the manufacturers of so many other products. The biggest boost to the prosperity of the tobacco companies came a few years later with the development of mass advertising. By the mid-'20s, ads for brand names like Lucky Strike and Camel were splattered on every billboard and on the pages of every magazine. They depicted smoking as an attractive pastime, linked to sporting activities and romance. In particular, women

were led to believe that smoking was racy and daring. For example, an early Chesterfield ad showed a pretty young girl telling her boyfriend, "Blow some my way." This sort of pitch has continued to this day, with the notorious Virginia Slims ad campaign equating tobacco with women's liberation.

As the tobacco companies were well aware, they were not merely competing with each other to sell cigarettes; they were creating a market for their product that never before existed. In a few years, thanks to subliminal advertising and popularization of smoking by movie and sports idols, millions of men, women and children picked up the habit. Then the companies received an unforeseen advantage: mass addiction. As we know today, nicotine is a habit-forming drug, comparable to heroin and alcohol. In most cases, the physical habit is equaled by a psychological dependence so powerful that people light up cigarettes without even thinking about it.

Maybe the tobacco lords knew that they were addicting an entire population; maybe they didn't. In any case, they wasted no time in exploiting it to the fullest. One obvious ploy was to keep on going as they were, aiming their advertising at the young non-smokers instead of at people who were already hooked. Another ploy was to send



Produced by Steve Sayadian/Photographed by Wayne Phillips

thousands of free cartons to veterans' hospitals and overseas servicemen. Not only did they receive good publicity for this charitable venture, they also gained new lifetime customers among the men who received the handouts. At the same time, their attitude seemed to be symbolized by the copy in one of their ads: "Not a Cough in a Carload."

Even as early as the '20s, there were indications that smoking was harmful, but the tobacco men worked very hard to keep such information from becoming generally known. In 1936, a medical researcher exhibiting a cancerous lung remarked that such a case was so rare it might never be seen again. It wasn't until the early '50s, when the first generation of heavy smokers started dying off en masse, that scientists were able to show a definite relationship between smoking and respiratory disease, especially lung cancer.

The information contained in those reports was grim, to say the least. In lab experiments, it was determined that nicotine was a highly poisonous substance, which, in more concentrated doses, could cause instant death. Less than one gram injected at one time can kill a man of average weight. In cigarettes, it is found in small enough doses so that the body tolerates it, but it is the substance that causes a person to get sick the first time he smokes. Nicotine is normally considered the addictive substance in tobacco. It triggers a discharge from the adrenal glands and this stimulates other endocrine glands, causing the release of sugar (glycogen) from the liver. As one scientist explained, a single cigarette causes an instant high, followed by a sudden down. The obvious solution when you feel yourself coming down is to light up yet another cigarette. In addition, nicotine speeds up the heart rate at least 20 beats a minute and causes blood vessels to constrict, leading to circulation problems.

The "tars" of tobacco are thus far the main substances linked to lung cancer or cancers of other parts of the body, such as the throat, that are exposed to smoke. "Tar" is the sticky brown substance formed from the particles in cigarette smoke after the nicotine and moisture are subtracted. It includes compounds known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). It is the PAH that is generally believed to be the source of the carcinogens in tar because at least 11 chemicals of PAH are known to scientists as tumor initiators.

However, as we now know, nicotine and these particles of tar are not the only dangerous substances found in cigarettes. Altogether, the tobacco of the common butt contains some 100 chemical compounds,

**Cigarette smoke contains over 270 gaseous compounds, including DDT, hydrogen cyanide and carbon monoxide.**

and the smoke itself contains over 270 gaseous compounds, many of which are dangerous. DDT, the pesticide that is sprayed on tobacco crops, is a compound that accelerates PAH tumor-forming activity. Among the gases in cigarette smoke are hydrogen cyanide, chemically related to the deadly potassium cyanide, and to carbon monoxide, an odorless substance emitted in the exhaust fumes of automobiles. Carbon monoxide is one of the noxious vapors now believed to be the most dangerous of the gases. It is present in cigarette smoke to something like 400 times the level considered safe in industry and reduces the capacity of blood cells to carry oxygen. Also, in 1975, scientists found evidence of radioactive particles in cigarette smoke, and studies suggest that these, rather than tar or nicotine, might be the main cause of lung cancer.

For more than 50 years, the tobacco industry sold this composite of poisons with only the slightest bit of interference from the authorities, but eventually, as 77 million workdays were lost and 360,000 deaths were reported due to smoking-related illnesses each year, the problem became too big for any responsible government to ignore. Finally, in 1964, after painstaking research on the subject, the U. S. Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health released a historic report linking

smoking with the spiraling death rate from cancer and heart disease. Unlike previous reports, this one spelled it all out, for anybody who wanted to see it—it was also excerpted in almost every newspaper and magazine in the country. Needless to say, the tobacco industry tried hard to kill the report or soften its findings, but for once their manipulative efforts failed.

The effect on the nation's smokers was severe. Some people managed to ignore it entirely, but thousands of others were shocked enough to stop smoking. Art Buchwald remarked that, after years of ostracism by cigarette smokers, he was finally glad to admit that he smoked cigars.

For the next few years, cigarette sales slumped badly. Some people suggested that tobacco should be outlawed, but nobody with any brains took the idea seriously—they remembered how impossible it had been to enforce prohibition of alcohol during the '20s and early '30s (and how equally hard it was to prevent marijuana smuggling in their own time). Anyway, with the tobacco lobby working overtime, such a bill wouldn't have a chance. Finally, a tepid bill was passed by Congress in 1965, forcing the companies to print the following warning on each pack of cigarettes: "Caution: Cigarette smoking may be hazardous to your health." (It was changed in 1970 to: "Warning: The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is hazardous to your health.")

Of course, the cigarette companies did not sit back and calmly accept all this. Almost out of nowhere, two scientific articles appeared, one in *True* magazine (January 1968) and another in the *National Enquirer* (March 1968), purporting to show that cigarette smoking wasn't bad for you at all—in fact, that it was much safer over the long run than walking across the street, or trying to fix a faulty electrical appliance. The articles were reprinted in several other magazines, and Xerox copies, under *True* magazine letterhead, were mailed to 500,000 private citizens.

An F.T.C. investigation revealed that the *True* letterhead was mailed out by the Tobacco Institute. The author of the article, Stanley Frank, was no scientist. He had previously done some articles on sports and other topics for *True*. The editor of *True* got together with a public relations executive hired by a tobacco company to think about doing an article from the industry's point of view. Frank got the assignment and was paid a retainer. The Tobacco Institute, which hires lobbyists and does public relations work for the tobacco industry, bought ads that promoted the articles and had sent out the reprints.

(continued on page 94)

# CIGARETTES

(continued from page 42)

The hoax was condemned by the Federal Trade Commission, but by that time the damage was already done; cigarette sales had jumped slightly.

Another move was a sleazy campaign to prevent the F.C.C. from banning cigarette advertising on television. This went back and forth for a few years, until 1967 when a young New York attorney named John F. Banzhaf III petitioned the F.C.C. on behalf of the antismoking forces, claiming that if the cigarette companies were going to be allowed to advertise on the air then his people should be given equal time to refute them, under the F.C.C.'s Fairness Doctrine. Both the industry and the TV networks brought in all their heavy legal guns to fight the challenge, but, amazingly, they lost out. Within a few months, the airwaves were deluged with antismoking commercials. Cigarette manufacturers and broadcasters continued fighting it, but in 1969 the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the ruling.

At this point, the tobacco companies suffered a second and more serious slump in sales, and finally they decided that it would probably be better for them if they *did* take their advertising off the air, because then the prime time antismoking commercials would also cease. So throughout 1969 and 1970, in contrast to their previous position, they lobbied assiduously behind the scenes to bring such a ban about. During one Congressional hearing, industry spokesman Joseph F. Cullman vowed that if they were allowed to withdraw from the air slowly in a phase-out process, the companies would also stop all other advertising aimed at young people.

The ban went into effect on January 2, 1971, in accord with the Public Health Smoking Act of 1970. Some antismoking people saw it as a great victory, but others knew that the gains were illusory. Soon after, the networks stopped showing the antismoking commercials in prime time, and cigarette sales shot up almost as quickly as they had gone down.

In addition, the cigarette companies were now able to save millions of dollars in TV advertising money (estimated annual expenditure: \$200 million). They wasted no time in diverting some of it to other media, where, contrary to their vows before the Congress, they started a spectacular ad campaign aimed at the nation's youth. In 1972, after increasing pressure from the Federal Trade Commission, they agreed to print the cigarette warning on billboard and magazine advertising. But they initiated

such tricks as printing the warning in English on Spanish-language ads. As usual, though, they were soon able to see some benefits in the supposed setback. For one thing, they found that the warning had little effect on sales. Also, it enabled them to avoid possible damage suits from the families of lung cancer victims. After all, they could say, the smokers *had* been warned.

Next, they started coming up with new and better promotional gimmicks, such as the Virginia Slims Tennis Tournament, which won the endorsement of some of the biggest names in the world of sports, while also gaining prime-time TV coverage (with the name Virginia Slims prominently displayed in color around the court). They also started mailing out free samples, just as they had done years before, but the F.T.C. put a quick stop to it.

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## The federal government subsidizes the tobacco industry to the tune of millions a year.

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At this time, the domestic cigarette market is controlled by six major companies. Even if cigarette smoking is some day outlawed in the United States, these companies will never go broke. Of late, they have been diversifying into other fields, to such an extent that cigarette sales now account for only 56 percent of their profits. For example, according to an article in *New Yorker* magazine on November 18, 1974, Liggett & Myers now owns Alpo dog food, Brite watch bands, and J&B Scotch; American Tobacco Company operates Swingline Staples and Jergens Lotion; and Philip Morris has assumed the control of Personna Blades, Burma Shave and Miller Beer. More recent information shows that R. J. Reynolds has 29 divisions and subsidiaries that include Sea-Land Containership, Mail Express, American Independent Oil Company, Aminoil divisions in London and Kuwait and a tobacco company in Turkey. Also, the companies are supposedly ready to market legal marijuana, should that ever become a reality.

Needless to say, the American government has also been doing its bit to insure that the Big Six remain prosperous. In contrast to a measly \$900,000 appropriation to HEW to educate the public about the dangers of smoking, the federal government now subsidizes the tobacco industry to a tune of millions of dollars per year.

In 1975, these appropriations included \$3.1 million in support payments for the

exporting of tobacco, \$1.9 million in subsidies for tobacco farmers, \$5.3 million for inspection and grading of the crop, and \$100,000 to advertise the product overseas. Most amazing is a \$17.7 million grant to ship tobacco to poor countries. How tobacco ever got included in the list of desperately needed foodstuffs is anybody's guess because tobacco has no nutritional value. When he was president, Ford refused to have anything to do with such questions; in fact, he had been seen playing golf with a Tobacco Institute lobbyist who is a personal friend of his. And Ford was cool to proposals to ban high-tar cigarettes from sale and to further restrict cigarette advertising.

Scientists now report that it is possible to produce a nonnicotine "safe" cigarette, but the tobacco industry has spent only a few hundred thousand dollars to study it. Obviously, they are aware that if nicotine were removed from cigarettes for good, millions of persons would not become addicted every year. "The industry is as likely to produce a nonnicotine cigarette as the nylon stocking industry is to produce a run-free stocking," pointed out one consumer advocate.

Nevertheless, as we all should know, the tobacco industry has been producing cigarettes with *less* nicotine for years. These cigarettes, such as Vantage and True, contain enough nicotine to keep the smoker addicted; but they are still low enough in tars to convince people that they are smoking a safer cigarette. As a result of this, the industry is able to save money on tobacco. Over the last few years, because of spiraling costs, they have actually preferred to use less tobacco, even on nonfilter cigarettes. They replace it with potentially dangerous filler material that is much cheaper to produce.

In recent years, the only hopeful sign is that hundreds of small smoking clinics have opened, offering a complete program of rehabilitation for anywhere from \$5 to \$450, depending on where they are located. These clinics report a fair rate of success, and they now advertise in many magazines, directly opposite the cigarette ads. At one clinic, directors report that it takes about two weeks to kick the habit temporarily and two more weeks to lick it for good. The lungs start repairing themselves almost as soon as they stop receiving smoke.

It would be nice to report that cigarette sales have slumped because of all this, but unfortunately it is not the case. In fact, it is now estimated that 5000 adolescents per day are picking up the smoking habit, thus refuting the notion that they are brighter and more well informed than their parents. In fact, they are just as dumb—and the cigarette companies know it. 