



By Pat Nurse

THE FIRST international anti-prohibition conference was held in Brussels last week where people from around the world came to register opposition to smoking bans and other moves to control our lifestyles.

Smokers are leading the fightback against the puritans they believe have made them social outcasts. They feel they must raise the issue before the overweight and those who like a tippie find themselves subject to the same social exclusion.

This conference was concerned with choice, the right to control your own body and why it is dangerous to give that essential freedom to the State.

I expected tobacco executives and coughing and spluttering delegates but I found a healthy group of British working-class people in despair. They believe Big Government, aided by Big Business and Big Charity, is taking control of their lives and making them miserable.

They intended to meet in the European Parliament building in Brussels but because of an objection from a smoke-free organisation the event was banned, leaving organisers the International Coalition Against Prohibition having to find an alternative venue just days before delegates were due to arrive.

Furious host Godfrey Bloom, the UK Independence Party MEP, told delegates it was disgraceful that freedom of speech could be infringed by an unelected organisation with no interest in debate.

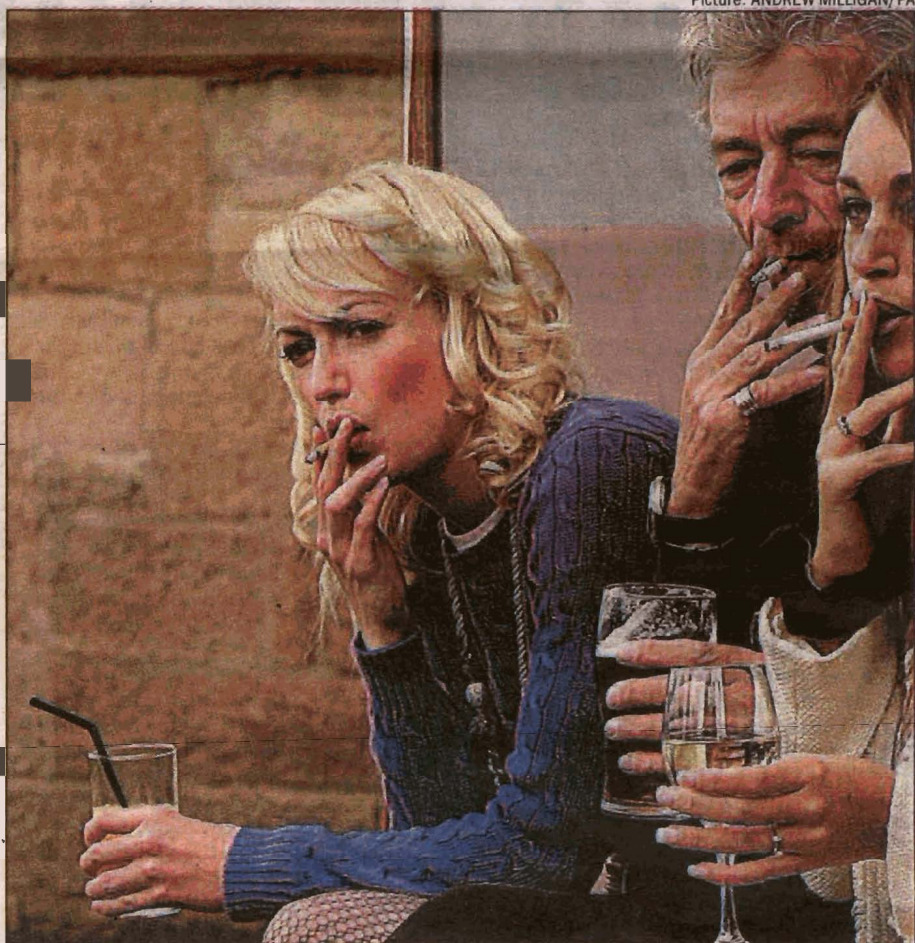
Ironically a later tour of the EU building ended with smokers gathering in his office. MEPs can smoke at work and there are places for smokers in the building. Bizarrely, it would seem that smoking is permitted in the centre of European democracy but talking about it is not.

"That is because there is one rule for me and other MEPs and another for the rest of you," said Bloom. "The EU is democracy by à la carte menu but you simply cannot pick and choose which parts you support and which you don't."

There were scurrilous allegations that delegates were somehow funded or supported by the tobacco industry, a claim that didn't go down well with the pensioners, shop assistants, bar staff, plumbers and factory workers who paid for the trip out of their own pockets because they are seriously disturbed at the danger of the march of prohibition.

Just as Twenties' prohibition in the US led to an increase in alcohol intake, it would seem the puritanical stance on smoking in public that led to the smoking ban has led to a rise in the number of people taking up the habit. Big Tobacco has no interest in the plight of consumers. Smoking bans are very good for business.

During the conference I didn't hear one



DEFIANT: Smokers are persecuted but drinkers and the obese may be next

word about promoting smoking. Indeed there was a discussion about what could be done to turn young people away from it. Dr John Luik, joint author of *Diet Nation: Exposing The Obesity Crusade*, said perhaps a more persuasive message to reduce youth smoking would be: "Warning: your parents think smoking is cool."

The alleged scientific evidence used to justify smoking bans was put into context and author Christopher Snowden discussed the funding of charities such as ASH, the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK and the WHO. Serious questions must be asked about the impartiality of any organisations that receive funds from pharmaceutical companies.

British pensioner Barry Connaughton told of his efforts to turn the tide of hatred away from smokers. From his limited funds he has printed leaflets and walked the streets of his home town day after day in a bid to spread the message that smoking bans are killing pubs and working men's clubs and isolating people who don't deserve to be excluded in this way.

University of Amsterdam Psychophysiological Dr Jan Snel explained how smoking bans can damage mental health, cause depression and lead to suicide.

Economist Barrie Craven told of the

devastation in the hospitality industry. He said smoking bans discriminated against the working class because traditional meeting places such as bingo halls and working men's clubs faced huge culls.

Prohibitionists are now moving on to attack those who drink alcohol and those called clinically obese. It was the passive smoking argument that led to the smoking ban. We now hear of passive drinking and lately, from America, passive obesity.

MARYETTA ABLES from the US said this latest concept was quickly gaining credence. "They say people who have an obese friend are more likely to become obese themselves as a result."

I am a smoker, I have smoked for years and acknowledge that it can damage health but like millions of others I resent the growing power of the prohibitionists.

I have no problem with prohibiting smoking in public spaces but it is the way the ban is enforced that worries me.

This conference was the first sign that ordinary people are demanding an end to state bullying. British delegates were mostly former Labour supporters who feel abandoned by the party. They and 12 million British smokers are looking at who deserves their votes at the next election.

Meanwhile, they were delighted to find smoking allowed in most places in Brussels, which treated them warmly, welcomed them inside and gave them an opportunity to have a great time socially for the first time since July 1, 2007.

'It is dangerous to give so much control to governments'