

by the NATION Multimedia Group which owns several print and electronic (TV) media, including the second most popular English language daily newspaper and *Bangkok Business*, the most popular Thai language business daily. The project was publicised in these newspapers over four weeks last autumn, with half page advertisements showing the logos of its three sponsors. The principal sponsor was British American Tobacco (BAT). An ad in early October publicised Canal Lovers Day festival, when the Bangkok governor received the funds donated by sponsors, including BAT's local manager. Publicity of the event included television coverage and billboards along the sides of the canal. The organisers said the publicity would run right through until the end of March 2002.

Dr Hatai Chitanondh, president of the Thailand Health Promotion Institute, was appalled by what he described as “this blood-stained donation to charity”, and set about compiling a dossier of all the worst aspects of BAT's operations. The result, a 12 page document, *Facts about BAT*, aimed to inform ordinary people, in clear and simple language, about the real nature of tobacco companies—how they know that cigarettes are addictive, manipulating nicotine to hook consumers, sabotaging tobacco control in developing countries, their contempt of the World Health Organization, their targeting of youth and women, price collusion, smuggling, and image laundering—with all the key points illustrated from internal industry documents, many of them from BAT. Dr Chitanondh sent the dossier to the chairman of the NATION Multimedia Group asking him to reconsider BAT's sponsorship. The result? The NATION Multimedia Group promptly discontinued the publicity and handed over the funds to the districts along the Saen Saeb canal, to continue the good work without any more fanfare.

Germany: bogus polls and the Euro-pain syndrome

More news from Germany, tobacco rent-a-nation of the European Union (EU), where the fight by industry interests against relatively small health forces continues to produce some extraordinary anomalies in a country so long at the forefront of technological progress. In December,



Billboard alongside the Saen Saeb canal in Bangkok, featuring the British American Tobacco logo. Although BAT were the main sponsors of the Keep Saen Saeb Canal Clean Project, the company's funding was described by one Thai health official as “this blood-stained donation to charity”, and the publicity was promptly stopped.

the German tobacco trade journal *Tabakzeitung* gleefully announced the results of a poll carried out last year, apparently showing that only 6% of adult Germans backed a tobacco advertising ban, whereas three times that number had backed one just a year earlier. It said almost half of Germans did not want to see any changes to advertising regulations, a dramatic increase in acceptance since 1999, when only 30% shared this opinion.

German health advocates tried to obtain the questionnaire used in the poll, but the reputable research company declined on the grounds of client confidentiality, confirming that it had been privately commissioned, presumably by the tobacco industry.

The tobacco industry may have hoped that the new poll findings would help its case at an important World Health Organization inter-ministerial conference on tobacco held in Warsaw in February. Perhaps it did indeed provide further justification for the German government's already well established hostility to an ad ban, though the reason cited by the German delegation in Warsaw, which kept pulling furiously on the handbrake as other, exasperated nations pressed for a strong ‘Warsaw Declaration for a Tobacco-Free Europe’, was that it would violate Germany's constitution.

Health advocates say several large Mercedes trucks could be driven side by side through the gaps in this argument. More to the point, they note that

as long ago as 1997 the German health ministry included questions on attitudes to a tobacco advertising ban in a regular health ministry survey of a representative sample of some 8000 German residents aged 18–59 years. Compared to the new poll in the industry journal, the results told a very different story. The majority in the health ministry survey, around 6 out of 10, favoured an ad ban. Furthermore, a survey commissioned by a television station five years ago, and conducted by the same researchers used by *Tabakzeitung*, found that even then, two thirds of adults favoured an ad ban.

Since 1997, there has been a significant increase in publicity about the disastrous toll of smoking on German people's health, and about outrageous tobacco industry activities to maintain business as usual; so, if anything, it might be expected that approval for anti-tobacco measures would have increased. Unfortunately, and perhaps not accidentally, when the health ministry repeated its survey recently, tobacco advertising was not among the topics addressed in the attitudinal questions. How much longer the government favours tobacco advertising over the interests of public health remains to be seen; but those returning to Bonn surely cannot have failed to report the desperate sense of frustration generated in Warsaw by their government's stubborn and unwavering loyalty to the tobacco industry.