



contributing to health worldwide

Source: **Observer**
Date: Sunday 31. October 2004
Page: 3
Circulation: ABC 451350 Weekly
Ad Rates: page rate £22,000.00
scc rate £58.00
Tel: 020 7278 2332



Durrants

London School Of Hygiene And Tropical Med(D9817-1)

Page 1 of 1

Tobacco lobby targeted Blair as 'smoker friendly'

by **Jamie Doward**
Social Affairs Editor

TONY BLAIR was identified by the tobacco lobby as a potential ally more than a decade ago, according to confidential documents that will reignite the debate about Number 10's links with cigarette manufacturers.

It emerged last week that the Prime Minister and a number of his key allies, including former Trade Secretary Stephen Byers, had met executives and lobbyists from British American Tobacco (BAT) in 2000, at a time when the company was being investigated over claims that it was colluding with smugglers.

The revelations raised questions about the power and influence of the tobacco lobby, which is currently looking to steer the government away from making a manifesto commitment to banning smoking in pubs.

Now, previously unpublished documents show that Blair, a former smoker, had been targeted by the tobacco industry for almost 15 years. The industry conducted a series of meetings while Blair was a shadow minister and these continued when he entered Number 10.

In 1991 the Prime Minister, then an MP, was included on a list of politicians, journalists and other key opinion formers who were viewed as 'friendly' towards the Tobacco Advisory Council (TAC), the pan-industry group that represents the interests of the cigarette firms and set up the pressure group Forest (Freedom of the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco).

The list, headlined with the words 'Subject: target list advertising campaign newsletter', was drawn up on 23 August, 1991, by the lobbying and public relations firm, Edelman, on behalf of the TAC. It was sent to executives working for four cigarette companies, Gallaher, Rothmans, Imperial and British American Tobacco and identified people who might support its campaign to derail the European Commission's plans to outlaw tobacco advertising.

Blair, and the current Speaker of the House of Commons, Michael Martin, were included under the headline 'TAC friendly MPs', along with scores of other, chiefly Conservative politicians, journalists such as Auberon Waugh of the *Telegraph* and Richard Littlejohn of the *Sun*,

and members of the Commons Pipe Smokers Club. One person who helped draw up the list said Blair may have been included because he had been tacitly supportive of the tobacco lobby's 'freedom to choose' campaign.

However, a Downing Street spokeswoman said: 'This list was put together by a lobbying firm to impress its clients. We know of no evidence that the Prime Minister has ever taken an interest in this issue.'

A spokeswoman for the Tobacco Manufacturers' Association, which replaced the TAC, said it was impossible to say why its predecessor had viewed Blair as 'friendly'. But she suggested that the TAC might have taken the view because Blair's constituency contained a cigarette factory and would have been worried about potential job losses once the Brussels directive came into force.

The document of 'friendly MPs' was buried in the archives of BAT's library in Guildford, Surrey. The company was forced to open up the archives as part of a series of lawsuits, but it had failed to implement any index or classification system. The list emerged only last week after researchers at the London

School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine finished a three-year project to systematise the archive's 6.5 million pages and put it online.

By 1995, six months after he was elected leader of the Labour Party, documents show Blair's name had been dropped from the list of MPs viewed as 'friendly' by the tobacco lobby.

But Ash, the anti-smoking group, said the Prime Minister's inclusion on the 1991 list was worrying. 'There are some deeply disturbing names on this list. These lobbyists know their business. They don't put contacts on without some reason. It would be interesting to find out what the reason was for Mr Blair,' said Ian Wilmore, a spokesman for Ash.

The pressure group said it was not surprised Martin was considered 'friendly' by the tobacco lobby. Interviewed in a book, *Smoke Ring: Tobacco, Money and Multinational Politics*, first published in 1984, Martin talked about his relationship with Imperial Tobacco, then a big employer in his constituency. 'The wealth of the Imperial group was created by tobacco workers. We help them when they need us,' he said.

