

Transcript – Deadly Industry: Challenging Big Tobacco – Ep. 3, S.2

00:00:02:23 - 00:00:24:09

Louis

Welcome to season two of Deadly Industry: Challenging Big Tobacco from the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath, hosted by me, Louis Laurence. We are an international research group that investigates the tactics used by Big Tobacco to maximise its profits at the expense of public health. The evidence we produce helps society to hold this deadly industry to account.

00:00:24:11 - 00:00:31:09

Louis

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00:00:31:11 - 00:01:10:04

Louis

Welcome to this special episode of Deadly Industry where we have left the studio and headed into the heart of London to better understand how deeply the roots of the tobacco industry are embedded in the British capital. Today we'll investigate what the tobacco industry actually looks like in the real world. We're going to discover how the industry exerts its power through the corporate boardroom in cities like London, how it spreads its global influence through secret deals, how it lobbies to influence government, and how it deals with the state's attempts to regulate big tobacco's business.

00:01:10:06 - 00:01:30:00

Louis

The global tobacco industry's past, present and future are woven throughout the fabric of the city, found in some of the most surprising places. Think of it like a ghost walk, but much more sinister. My tour guide today will be Phil Chamberlain, project manager at the Tobacco Control Research Group at the University of Bath. And first, we're starting our journey with some history in the East End of London,

00:01:30:01 - 00:01:32:10

Louis

here at the Tobacco Dock in Wapping. Welcome, Phil.

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00:01:32:16 - 00:01:34:00

Phil

Louis, good to see you.

00:01:34:02 - 00:01:50:04

Louis

So we're stood here. I've got a canal on one side. On the other side to me, there's two pretty old looking large boats and beyond those is a massive looking complex of docks which have now turned into swanky bars. Tell me, where are we? Why have we come here?

00:01:50:06 - 00:02:10:01

Phil

So we're in a relatively quiet part of the East End of London, close to the River Thames. And if we'd been here 200 years ago, this same huge building behind us would be here but it'd be teeming with life because it would be holding on to very valuable products and that's tobacco and it would have been shipped over from America.

00:02:10:03 - 00:02:17:19

Phil

Probably not just tobacco here, probably have some alcohol as well. That's why there's such big high walls, because it's so expensive and valuable a product.

00:02:17:21 - 00:02:28:11

Louis

So this is where the tobacco leaf would have, would have come in, imported from various places around the world. How long ago did the tobacco stop arriving here at the docks in London?

00:02:28:13 - 00:02:47:02

Phil

So there's a period of decline in the in the 1960s, and indeed is when regeneration takes place in the 80s, once they realised some about how else they can make use of this area. The production takes place in low and middle income countries more from the 60s onwards. The heyday really is 18th, 19th century.

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00:02:47:02 - 00:02:58:13

Phil

The name, the tobacco quay, I'm looking at it now. Still there will be probably for hundreds of years to come that mark, I think, upon the city of this product and the power that it still holds.

00:02:58:15 - 00:03:15:00

Louis

Anyone who has listened to episode one of this season will have heard from our guests about the exploitative tobacco trade today, and also the links to our imperial past and how intertwined the tobacco trade is in that past. Could you tell us a bit about that film, Phil?

00:03:15:02 - 00:03:43:13

Phil

Yeah, so, very much that the practices that the tobacco companies use to set themselves up, their modes of operation, carry on today in very similar ways. So while Empire notionally sort of has ended actually those imperial links, I think are still there, in the very name of one of the record companies, those connections, global oversees that relationship between these powerful multinational companies and smaller countries elsewhere around the globe.

00:03:43:19 - 00:04:08:04

Phil

I think we've seen that that relationship is still there, that explosive relationship very much is still there. And, you know, listeners to episode one would have discovered those connections particularly between Bristol and Malawi. And actually what we're seeing here in a Wapping is what would have been the heart of a web of connections with many countries and many other goods sort of flowing in as well with the profits reaped for the major companies here.

00:04:08:04 - 00:04:27:03

Louis

So we're going to hear a bit more later in today's episode about how the modern tobacco industry exerts its influence from the corporate boardroom around the city and across the world. But looking back to history for a moment again, these docks here and warehouses would have held the tobacco. Where would the tobacco have gone after it was shipped into these warehouses?

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00:04:27:05 - 00:04:47:09

Phil

So it was originally there were a number of much smaller operations in the UK and elsewhere producing cigarettes in Bristol or in Nottingham, for instance, and some of the brand names that we're aware of from back in the day still exist, although they've been subsumed into much larger corporations. So they would've been shipped out, manufactured locally and distributed.

00:04:47:13 - 00:04:53:18

Phil

Now that process is much more refined and much more concentrated and generally takes place outside of the UK.

00:04:53:19 - 00:05:04:08

Louis

So speaking of these larger corporations developing from kind of small businesses, that brings us on to our next location. So where are we going to be going next, Phil.

00:05:04:10 - 00:05:19:18

Phil

So we're going to go into one of the posher parts of London, and we're going to be seeing where one of the most famous brand names started its business plying luxury goods as seen at the time. And now comes to dominate global trade as well.

00:05:19:20 - 00:05:37:03

Louis

So we've just left the tobacco docks in East London, and we've come into the heart of the city to a much swankier part of town. Walking down New Bond Street, we've walked past Claridge's, Versace and we've stopped just outside the Burberry shop. But what are we doing here, Phil?

00:05:37:05 - 00:05:58:23

Phil

So this was 22 New Bond Street and a chap called Philip Morris who grew up actually where we started in the East End and he ran a tobacconist and he wanted to sell to the right clientele. So he opened up here, on New Bond Street, little tobacconist and Philip Morris, is now probably, the brand name behind the biggest tobacco company in the globe.

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00:05:59:04 - 00:06:19:14

Phil

We think of it as a quintessentially American brand using cowboys to advertise its most popular products. But actually, Philip Morris is a Londoner. But he came here to New Bond Street because this is where he could be surrounded by the brand names we see here today and tobacco's always tried to associate himself with that fashion.

00:06:19:16 - 00:06:39:03

Phil

The picture of the models we've got around us here. The music, sport, it always tries to latch onto that sort of cutting edge of fashion to give yourself some cachet and influence, if you like, and it's no different now as it was then when Philip Morris ran his shop. He didn't stay here, he thought he had something,

00:06:39:03 - 00:07:02:03

Phil

so he actually went to New York to take on the Duke family which is the American Tobacco Company, the big players at the time, there's probably no way back at the time that Philip Morris in his little shop would have thought what he might create. But he certainly saw the opportunity to market a product which still costs relatively small to produce and has enormous, profit potential.

00:07:02:09 - 00:07:17:23

Louis

So tobacco companies obviously always been quite image conscious, had a good marketing awareness setting up in swanky areas like this. But how did that develop from an individual tobacconist that would once have been here to the massive conglomerates we see today?

00:07:18:00 - 00:07:42:14

Phil

So it's been a process of monopolisation where the smaller companies, sometimes they banded together to protect their interests, in other cases simply been taken over, the brand name exists, but the actual original individual company has long been subsumed. And that process of larger companies eating, absorbing the smaller companies has been going on now for well over 100 years

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00:07:42:14 - 00:08:04:07

Phil

and it means we're left with four big beasts globally, if you like that have eaten up all of the opposition. We're going to go to where one of those other big beasts lives in the city and part of the story we're going to tell there is about how it tried to eat some of his opposition, in Africa, where it had its operations.

00:08:04:09 - 00:08:21:04

Louis

So Phil we've left Bond Street and come down to the banks of the Thames. Looking out across the river, Parliament just behind us. We're walking along embankment towards our next location, British American Tobacco's headquarters. Tell me about it.

00:08:21:06 - 00:08:46:05

Phil

So we are approaching a building called Globe House and the clue in the name is in terms of how influential this building is because it has a global reach, more than 100 countries, more than 48,000 employees, been in business for over 100 years. And it's sitting right, squatting right on the banks of the Thames.

00:08:46:07 - 00:08:56:08

Phil

We're going to be walking and describing a little bit more about its operations and what it controls from its empire which we're about to come to the headquarters.

00:08:56:10 - 00:09:06:19

Louis

We're stood right outside the revolving doors of British American Tobacco's headquarters now. I think we've been clocked by security there, shifting around in there, we may get asked to move along soon.

00:09:06:21 - 00:09:27:05

Phil

Yeah. You're right. Yeah. We're just recording some stuff about Sir Globe House. Okay, can I ask well, what's it for. Yeah, we're just doing a podcast about different places in the in the capital. So. Okay. Is

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that alright? Yeah let me just check. Yeah. Sort of. This is public property here, I think. Yeah, it's public property.

00:09:27:05 - 00:09:33:21

Phil

Yeah. No worries mate, thank you. It's okay. Yeah. Okay. That's right.

00:09:33:23 - 00:09:38:17

Louis

Not too keen to see us here, I think.

00:09:38:19 - 00:10:00:08

Phil

So if you were to look up BAT on its website then it says we are a leading consumer goods business thanks to our global portfolio of brands, successful strategy and talented people. Quite deliberately not saying what those brands are. And actually, if few, tend to look through its literature, it shies away as much as possible saying the word cigarettes.

00:10:00:10 - 00:10:23:06

Phil

And if anything about smoking it tends to fall back on its strategy about a smokeless future which is its strategic way of trying to distance itself from the fact that 95% of its profits still come from cigarettes, from the profits are made from old school cigarettes. And as much as it tries not to use that word, that's where the most of its profits come from.

00:10:23:08 - 00:10:47:01

Phil

Although it says about our strategic aim is to migrate smokers and cigarettes to smokeless alternatives, which obviously it's trying to sell as well. There would have been a number of these back in the day. And now we're down to our four main transnational organisations, companies, BAT Japan Tobacco, Imperial and Philip Morris all gobbled up all the opposition, as far as possible.

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00:10:47:03 - 00:11:02:08

Phil

And it's interesting to think how this survived, you know this is now 100 plus years of corporate power that we're looking at here embedded. It's got its claws sunk in deep, and they're still, you know, a very powerful entity.

00:11:02:10 - 00:11:15:06

Louis

So Parliament is just down the road, as we discussed, you know there must be quite strong establishment links, given how close we are to Parliament and how central we are in London, between the corporate boardroom here and the British state.

00:11:15:08 - 00:11:39:09

Phil

Yeah so Ken Clarke who was former chancellor of the Exchequer, a Conservative minister, was on the board of British American Tobacco, was quite gleefully posing with cigars back in the day. Most recently they've recruited Penny Mordaunt another ex-cabinet minister, Conservative cabinet minister, and they've taken her on board as an advisor as well.

00:11:39:11 - 00:12:00:04

Phil

We've have a number of different stories of parliamentarians who have been on the payroll for tobacco companies going back years and that's continuing because they want to make sure they got that influence and it's handy that you're only a very short cab ride from Parliament to be able to make those connections and have those conversations as well.

00:12:00:06 - 00:12:05:21

Phil

Certainly they didn't want to set themselves up back where we started down in the East End, they knew where the decisions were being made.

00:12:05:23 - 00:12:13:09

Louis

Are there instances of the British government intervening on behalf of companies like British American Tobacco abroad?

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00:12:13:11 - 00:12:36:05

Phil

The links between the state and tobacco companies date back decades as they would with all major corporations that operate globally. What's changed is the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, of which Britain is a signatory, prohibits that connection, they shouldn't be acting on behalf, they should be excluding tobacco companies from decision making.

00:12:36:05 - 00:13:00:11

Phil

But there's still an awful lot of connections to go on and that's not actually just with British American Tobacco but Japan Tobacco, Philip Morris, Imperial all make good on their inference as well. And you will find interventions by government for instance Japan Tobacco wanted its help in intervention in Bangladesh to stop taxation policies.

00:13:00:11 - 00:13:41:15

Phil

We've got examples of, in Switzerland, of PMI seeking to influence the government there and for BAT we've got evidence of a British diplomat attending the opening of one of its factories in Yemen. And that's, you know, holy contrary to the FCTC, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. And you have the government officials acting as spokespeople, salespeople, for these corporations unwittingly, perhaps, naively, maybe, but certainly it gives a legitimacy to the corporations and it shows how embedded they are, I think with the state as well, that they've got government

00:13:41:15 - 00:14:01:09

Phil

ministers, or ex-government ministers on the payroll and they're able to exert that influence and know the right numbers to call and the right people to talk to and they've made use of those levers, at a global level to make sure they can sort of bring that pressure to bear, or even simply have people up there at the opening of a factory for the want of a good photo op.

00:14:01:11 - 00:14:23:19

Louis

I think it's also telling that the Tobacco Control Research Group research found that these diplomats lobby on behalf of companies like British American Tobacco, were almost all from high income countries and the vast majority of their lobbying actions were in low and middle income countries, which certainly does, you know, feel a bit imperial.

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00:14:23:21 - 00:14:51:07

Phil

By its very nature, I think, and that imbalance of power, I think, you know, where some of these most egregious efforts are taking place are where the countries are perhaps most vulnerable, where that the dollar power buys you that most clout. And I think that power imbalance between north and south, between these large corporations, is seen really kind of clearly there in that influence they try to build.

00:14:51:09 - 00:15:03:22

Phil

If you want to think about some specific, an example of just how that power is deployed on the ground in some of these countries then follow me and I'll I'll show you where it gets decided.

00:15:03:24 - 00:15:09:05

Louis

So we've walked back through the back streets, back towards Parliament from Globe House.

00:15:09:07 - 00:15:27:05

Phil

Well it's a quintessential little London street, isn't it? Got the red of the two pubs here, the old lamp posts going down the arches underneath Charing Cross Station. You have got the Ship and Shovell, the pub here one little Craven Passage, has a tobacco connection. 20 years ago you could have smoked inside, not anymore, we've seen some change there down to

00:15:27:05 - 00:15:36:19

Phil

tobacco control but there's been some plotting going on behind these walls, and we'll have a little look inside.

00:15:36:21 - 00:15:47:12

Louis

Pub on both sides of the street, how exciting. Well, which side did the plotting happen on?

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00:15:47:14 - 00:15:48:19

Phil

Hey, how are you doing?

00:15:48:21 - 00:15:51:24

Louis

Are you doing food at the moment?

00:15:57:12 - 00:16:10:19

Louis

So we're sat in a pub, which is always nice. It's a beautiful old, cozy, wood panelled London pub just sat in a little booth here. Tell me Phil, why have you brought me to this pub?

00:16:10:21 - 00:16:39:13

Phil

Well I like the fact that the booth we have chosen to sit in has got this quote on the side of it saying, "Beware of little expenses, a small leak will sink a great ship." and we're going to be talking about leaks and great ships. We've come from that headquarters of British American Tobacco a short walk away. We know from the evidence given in leaked documents and whistleblowers about its operations in Africa and how it looked to preserve its position there and some of the plotting for that took place very much in this pub here.

00:16:39:15 - 00:16:40:14

Louis

What exact were they plotting?

00:16:40:14 - 00:16:51:00

Phil

They are plotting to make sure, fundamentally that BATs position, its economic position, was maintained. They wanted to make sure that its rivals are neutralised and the state stayed out of its affairs.

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Louis

So this is, I guess, a classic example of we looked at that, the kind of corporate boardroom power, this is secret power in action. In what countries were they operating in?

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Phil

So BAT has been strong in the whole of Africa for a number of years, probably its most primary place of operation is going to be in South Africa. That's where it has a really large manufacturing base as well, really influential for that part of Africa. And what the whistleblower and the document showed was it had essentially taken over parts of the state in South Africa, and its agents were able to make sure they could use parts of the state, parts of the police force, to keep an eye and frustrate the activities of rival tobacco companies.

00:17:29:23 - 00:17:42:06

Phil

The corporate decision was about making sure that it could protect its profits and stay strong in its marketplace. That has real world implications. Those implications are felt on the ground in a number of countries in Africa.

00:17:42:08 - 00:17:57:15

Louis

I mean, that's quite a huge amount of covert power required to take over parts of the state. Presumably that carries of it some danger for researchers. How did you guys come by the documents, and was there much risk attached to this kind of investigation?

00:17:57:17 - 00:18:17:01

Phil

There is certainly risk, but I would say that the risk to the whistleblowers are always much stronger. There's a certain predisposition for researchers in many places in terms of what they're able to look at, shouldn't discount the fact of the intimidation that might take place, but whistleblowers generally find themselves bearing the brunt of any reprisal retribution that takes place.

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00:18:17:03 - 00:18:55:18

Phil

There were some people that took risks to give us information, and it took a long time, many years to be able to ascertain, to check and be sure about what those allegations were and what we could prove. And what they were able to show was that BAT had engaged in bribery across a number of different countries and to ensure that its market position was protected, that tobacco control laws were as weak as possible, and that its rivals were the ones suffering the most attention from law enforcement.

00:18:55:20 - 00:19:00:19

Louis

Did BAT see any consequences from the investigation you guys conducted?

00:19:00:21 - 00:19:20:05

Phil

So there have been two major investigation over the last few years into that, and they've raised a number of questions about its operations. The Serious Fraud Office started but has stopped an investigation, we think that should carry on. We know there have been questions raised by public health groups across the across the continent about its operations.

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Phil

We know there have been questions raised in Parliament about it. There needs to be more scrutiny because, as you said, a lot of this is about covert power and the company thrives by being able to do that where there isn't transparency or oversight, where they can plot in the corners of pubs rather than be made to be transparent and accountable.

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Louis

I mean, this sounds like the stuff of sort of spy novels from the 1950s. When was this? Was it as long ago as that?

00:19:50:19 - 00:20:15:24

Phil

This is 21st century practices for 21st century business. You know, it needs to make sure that it's operating with as little oversight as possible. And perhaps the old school would have been about

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respecting international boundaries, respecting sovereignty. These transnational companies operate across borders. They manipulate at a global level.

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Phil

And so, you know, this is very much a 21st century problem of multinationals with, you know, more than enough money and not enough oversight.

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Louis

So for those listeners who want the full story of the BAT files, you can look back to season one, episode three, our episode all about fighting regulation, where we spoke to Andy Rowell about his investigation into British American Tobacco and this pub comes up in that conversation.

00:20:46:14 - 00:20:51:15

Louis

So we're on our way out of the pub now and on to Craven Passage.

00:20:51:17 - 00:21:12:08

Phil

There's actually a tobacco link there, not just the agents that met for a pint and a plot in the Ship and Shovell, but also Craven Passage, named after first Earl Craven. Not a name that trips off the tongue, but people might remember a cigarette brand called Craven A. Well the Early gave his name to a particular mix of tobacco that was made in his name, bit like Earl Grey tea,

00:21:12:08 - 00:21:35:11

Phil

bit of old celebrity endorsement, if you like, so it's perhaps a sign of that intertwined the way that power, celebrity, culture all rub shoulders in this little, almost Dickensian, street we've got here in the in the centre of London. All coming together, those different parts of tobacco and the thread that runs through history, not just through London, but actually runs around the globe.

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00:21:35:13 - 00:21:41:02

Louis

So we've heard about this kind of secret power. What's the next aspect of industry power we're going to go look at?

00:21:41:04 - 00:22:05:22

Phil

So we're going to take you just a short trip, further along the Thames. It's another place which likes to be discreet. Small name plates on the side of doors, behind that an awful lot of power wielded. We'll have another peek into how that power was exercised by tobacco companies to influence legislation in this country.

00:22:05:24 - 00:22:25:21

Louis

So we've come to some quiet streets just around the corner from Parliament. This is Tufton Street, and we're looking for a specific address that houses a historical lobby group for the tobacco industry.

00:22:25:23 - 00:22:28:00

Phil

Here we go, number 55.

00:22:28:02 - 00:22:40:03

Louis

So we're stood outside, a fairly unassuming red brick building with white columns and a big 55 painted on it. Quite a lot of CCTV. Why are we here, Phil?

00:22:40:05 - 00:23:01:10

Phil

So we're only less than ten minutes walk from Parliament, a little bit further down the river from BAT's headquarters, as you're saying, quiet set of streets. Probably the biggest concentration of lobbying power outside of Washington within these few city blocks here. And like all good lobbying, it's quite quiet, discreet because that's exactly how they like it.

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00:23:01:12 - 00:23:10:09

Louis

So these are the well paid go-betweens from BAT headquarters to Parliament, just around the corner, as you say, you've got these organisations in the middle.

00:23:10:11 - 00:23:25:15

Phil

Tobacco executives frequently don't want to appear in public to talk about it, because they'll be asked very robust questions about their products, and rightly so. So it's much better for them to have other people talking for them and these people do the talking for them.

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Louis

Presumably it's more comfortable for politicians to meet with someone from a third party from Tufton Street rather than go down the road to BAT headquarters where they're not really supposed to go.

00:23:37:00 - 00:23:58:00

Phil

Gives a sense of independence, a sense of legitimacy. It's an outside organisation. It has, might be presenting with a pretence to evidence with a potential objectivity, playing on all of these aspects, which they want to exploit to make sure the industry has a seat at the table, has an influence on the table.

00:23:58:02 - 00:24:17:09

Phil

The UK signed up to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control which seeks to exclude industry from public health policy making. It needs other ways to get access. This is one way that you can get a foot in the door. I'm actually just looking at number 55, I've got number 55 of one, two, three, four, five places I've got,

00:24:17:09 - 00:24:35:06

Phil

number 55. Just to be absolutely clear what the address is, but no actual brass plaque, as far as I can see. So if you need to know who's inside, you'll be able to find out if you don't know, you'll just walk straight on by and then not have an idea. And that's probably exactly how they like it.

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00:24:35:07 - 00:24:39:11

Louis

If there was a brass plaque, what would it say? Who's been here and who's here now?

00:24:39:13 - 00:25:00:07

Phil

Well, actually, this would be a blue plaque, because it used to be the Tobacco Advisory Council, which was set up by the industry to act as a sort of official spokesperson organisation, if you like. They've actually changed their name, they're now Tobacco Manufacturers Association, they're based a couple of blocks away in Caxton Street. 55 now has got Taxpayers Alliance based there,

00:25:00:09 - 00:25:09:04

Phil

they back a lot of industry talking points. And 55 Tufton Street as I said has become a sort of shorthand for that lobbying HQ as it is here.

00:25:09:06 - 00:25:22:15

Louis

So we've come just around the corner from Tufton Street to Lord North Street. We're outside the address of another influential lobby group, often associated with the tobacco industry. Tell me about them, Phil.

00:25:22:17 - 00:25:45:15

Phil

So this is the Institute of Economic Affairs, and they describe themselves as an educational charity and the UK's original free market think tank, founded in 1955. So think tank being those organisations which come up with ideas, adding to the great policy dialogue that takes place in society, and all part of that rich narrative we have about how do we decide what we want to do so

00:25:45:15 - 00:26:12:20

Phil

think tanks come up with these ideas, and the IEA says it's their mission to improve the understanding of the fundamental institutions of free society by analysing and expounding the role of markets in solving economic and social problems. And what they have certainly been useful is

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useful for the tobacco industry because they've repeated and amplified an awful lot of industry talking points, and arguments, and they've amplified those to policy makers and regulators.

00:26:12:22 - 00:26:38:20

Phil

They have been really helpful to the industry in repeating that information and giving it a sense of objectivity and independence. And as you're saying, I think the key issues about that is transparency so the regulators know who is they're talking to and who's providing that information, where its originated from. And, you know, we want to make sure that information given to regulators is clear and transparent and credible.

00:26:38:22 - 00:26:53:07

Phil

And, you know, it's really important that these think tanks and other lobby groups are held to account for what they're doing because they're really keen to make sure that they have a power just down the road at the House of Commons.

00:26:53:09 - 00:27:10:09

Louis

And if you want to know any more about organisations like the Institute of Economic Affairs I would definitely direct listeners to tobaccotactics.org where if you put in some of the names of these lobby groups you'll find a lot of the evidence about exactly how they're associated with tobacco companies. Oh Phil, look at this one, here's another.

00:27:10:11 - 00:27:22:18

Phil

Oh yeah. Adam Smith Institute. So number 23, another one of the free market think tanks which has been regularly repeating industry arguments and talking points for a number of years.

00:27:22:20 - 00:27:25:07

Louis

This one's right opposite the Department for education.

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00:27:25:09 - 00:27:27:17

Phil

Yes, indeed.

00:27:27:19 - 00:27:33:04

Louis

So from these quiet streets where the power is hidden in plain sight, where are we heading to next?

00:27:33:06 - 00:27:57:01

Phil

Well the last stop on the tour, so it's only a few minutes back along the embankment to the House of Commons. The efforts here are directed at influencing citizens to some extent, media certainly, but probably primarily the regulators and legislators. We know where they sit in the House of Commons. They're only a few hundred meters away so we're going to pop over there.

00:27:57:03 - 00:28:20:24

Louis

So Phil we've left the quiet streets and quiet words of the lobbyists behind us. We've come just ten minutes down the road to somewhere very recognisable. We're here outside Parliament, it's quite a frenetic energy here compared to where we were before. There is tourists all around, busses, police and this is where those levers of power are held, of course, that the lobbyists are trying to target.

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Phil

Yes, it's handy to be this close, I think and we all want to influence those in power to look after our interests, you know we write to MPs, we have some ability to do that at perhaps elections every few years, things like that. But money talks with quite a loud voice and you'll find that the corporate money, the corporate influence is still really strong here.

00:28:44:20 - 00:29:04:01

Phil

Even after all these years, even after all the efforts to regulate the industry, they will do their very best to make sure to delay and deny and derail legislation which might fundamentally affect tobacco control or tobacco company profits. Of course, just on the other side of Parliament, on the other side of the river is St Thomas's Hospital

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00:29:04:01 - 00:29:06:24

Phil

and that's where Richard Dole was based.

00:29:07:02 - 00:29:19:09

Louis

Yeah. Of course, my granddad worked with him actually. He was one of the pioneers who discovered the casual link between cancer and tobacco smoking, a huge moment of progress in challenging the power of big tobacco.

00:29:19:11 - 00:29:38:16

Phil

Yeah and important about having evidence based policymaking. The work done to show that link and prove that link and then base public policy upon that is incredibly important. And something where you find the industry continually then trying to undermine that with its own manipulation of science, which I know has been covered in other podcasts in the series.

00:29:38:18 - 00:29:47:00

Louis

What's some regulation that's going through Parliament now that these lobbyists and their, you know, people in the boardroom at British American Tobacco are concerned about?

00:29:47:02 - 00:30:05:22

Phil

So it's really key piece of legislation. It's what they call endgame policy, thinks about how we might be able to end the tobacco epidemic and it's something called Tobacco and Vapes Bill, has a number of different parts to it but one of it is about regulating tobacco so that those born on a certain date won't be able to legally be able to buy tobacco.

00:30:05:22 - 00:30:25:14

Phil

It envisages a state where we may have, getting to a place where we have, a very low smoking take up rate. We'd be able to taper out the number of people taking up smoking and be able to, you

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know, end this addiction, which, you know, is going to be a problem for the companies because they need to maintain their profits.

00:30:25:18 - 00:30:37:04

Phil

So that Tobacco and Vapes Bill is going through Parliament at the moment and we know the industry's wanting to make sure that, you know, it is doing its damndest to make sure that thing's not going to go through.

00:30:37:06 - 00:30:43:09

Louis

As we speak today. It's a day in in June. And where is that Bill at as we speak?

00:30:43:11 - 00:31:04:04

Phil

So it's been through a number of hearings in Parliament. It currently will be with the House of Lords. So that's a checking chamber on the legislation. And we know, for instance, that Philip Morris have certainly paid for at least one lord to attend their research facilities and listen to its messages and get them to repeat those messages in the House of Lords.

00:31:04:06 - 00:31:09:11

Phil

The Bill will go back to the House of Commons and there's a hope that will be ratified by the end of the year.

00:31:09:13 - 00:31:24:24

Louis

So this will be out in Autumn. We're not sure where the Bill will have reached by then. It may well have passed through Parliament and come into law. You mentioned there so that Philip Morris amongst other tobacco companies have been, it sounds like, opposing this bill despite what they say about being in support of good public health.

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00:31:25:01 - 00:31:28:18

Louis

What are some of the specific examples of that opposition?

00:31:28:20 - 00:31:47:00

Phil

Well this is actually the second time the Bill has been introduced because it was introduced under the last government. And then fell when that government fell, and that first time that it was entered, the tobacco companies threatened to go to the courts, a classic tactic. Tobacco companies, you know, reach for the reach for the lawyers if they can.

00:31:47:02 - 00:32:07:20

Phil

They were arguing about consultation and what they perceive as a lack of consultation. Here, we know there's been lobbying using allies and groups trying to get consumers as they call them, to speak out for it, for trying to get shopkeepers to speak up against it as well, they are getting those to act as their proxies, we're going to set these regulations,

00:32:08:01 - 00:32:29:16

Phil

people need to know what the influence is taking place and be able to see it clearly and transparently. We're looking up the House of Commons here. It's lots and lots of, lots and lots of little windows in a really big building. A chance to sort peer inside if you like, to trust what's going on there, we have got to have those windows open to clearly be able to see in on what those processes are taking place on our behalf.

00:32:29:18 - 00:32:36:18

Phil

The industry would like to shut that window and have those conversations privately and we think that makes a poor decision making and poor for public health policy.

00:32:36:20 - 00:32:48:08

Louis

So we hear a lot about, you know, in the series about the industry and the power it wields, the kind of negative influence it has. Is there hope to kind of manage the harm by big tobacco?

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00:32:48:10 - 00:33:07:02

Phil

So when, the journey today, we came up by train, we were there in the east End with the old Tobacco Dock was and now that's repurposed for another building. So when tobacco wasn't stored there anymore, the building isn't demolished, it gets reused, there are purposes, other businesses gets take place. Replacing tobacco isn't a loss of revenue in

00:33:07:02 - 00:33:24:05

Phil

one area, it's an opportunity in others. And then we walked and we took the tube and we were in a pub and you know, 20 years ago there would have been people smoking in the pub, there would have been people smoking in tube, there would have been people smoking on the trains as we came up. None of that is there and that's called denormalisation.

00:33:24:05 - 00:33:44:05

Phil

It's about making it normal to be able to breathe clean air, if you like, and that's a huge step forward, not just that it's taken place, but that it's natural. The idea of now being, you know, in a tube carriage under London with it full of smoking is beggars belief if you like and so it's possible to see a different place.

00:33:44:05 - 00:34:07:03

Phil

It's possible to envisage a healthier future. And we've got that in many places but I think you're absolutely right, it is really, it is possible and it is optimistic. The fact that the UK, there are couple of places around the world that are looking to or haven't invented the similar sort of policies, the fact that the UK is really likely to have this come into place is a huge step forward, not just for the UK, but globally.

00:34:07:05 - 00:34:28:11

Phil

It's possible to do this as well. So we've looked at how they look to leverage their power and have their influence and do so in a way which is unaccountable. But the march in many places has been hugely positive within the UK and I think it's good to hold on to that good example about what is possible.

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00:34:28:13 - 00:34:46:24

Louis

Yeah and I think London is a great example of that kind of progress and public health. We've been walking along the River Thames today. It no longer stinks like it once did, we have been walking around the roads which are quieter, less polluted, there's more electric vehicles, that's been noticeable that change and of course walking around and I don't think I've smelt a single cigarette all day

00:34:46:24 - 00:34:56:08

Louis

so I think public health progress can be made and today's tour has been a great example of that. So thank you very much for leading me around London and it's tobacco history.

00:34:56:10 - 00:35:11:24

Phil

No problem and I think if whoever you are listening to this podcast, if you want to do your own tobacco tour in your locale, what can you see, where that influences might be, where those changes have taken place, it's good to sort of keep your eyes open and think also about where the sort of public health gains and also where we've still got to make,

00:35:12:01 - 00:35:27:24

Phil

still got to make progress because the companies we've spoken about have a global reach. And while there are good steps here in other places, there are still some leaps to make and we need to be able to support those places to make better health policy for their citizens.

00:35:28:01 - 00:35:46:18

Louis

So thanks so much, Phil for being my tour guide today and any sources referenced or that are relevant to the discussion today can be found in the show notes. We'll be back in the studio next episode, where I'll be joined by Amber van den Akker and Nason Maani to discuss multi-stakeholderism and ask the big question of whether Big Tobacco should have a seat at the table.

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00:35:46:20 - 00:35:50:06

Louis

See you next time. From the Tobacco Control Research Group, you've been listening to season two of Deadly Industry: Challenging Big Tobacco, hosted by Louis Laurence, produced by Kate White and edited by Sacha Goodwin.

00:36:10:08 - 00:36:22:02

Louis

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