

TOBACCO INDUSTRY DOCUMENTS FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON INDUSTRY STRATEGIES ON LOCAL LEVELS

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SUMMARY

The internal tobacco industry documents have also been used to study tobacco industry operations outside the United States. The scope of the documents on a country outside the US is decided mainly by the extent to which documents and reports were transmitted from the abroad offices of the US tobacco companies to headquarters. We explored whether the material from a private archive of a Finnish public relation consultant to Philip Morris will augment or revise the earlier reports on tobacco industry manipulation in Finland. The private records add more details to previously published reports. The new information mainly concerned implementation of the tobacco industry strategies. A general conclusion is that tobacco industry documents may not give a detailed picture of tobacco industry activities in distant markets, which would be of interest locally, even if they provide sufficient information to convey a general view of tobacco industry strategies.

Key words: tobacco industry document research, tobacco industry strategies, tobacco lobbying in Finland

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INTRODUCTION

After a more than a decade of tobacco industry document research (TIDR) it is clear that the activities of tobacco companies are becoming better known than any other globally operating industry (1). The document have also been used to study tobacco industry operations outside the United States (US), even in small countries such as Singapore (2), Uzbekistan (3), Hungary (4-6) and Finland (7-8). The reports raise questions concerning the limitations of the document source. Tobacco industry documents originate from tobacco litigation in the US. No industry keeps every document it produces, especially if they are produced in a distant country. (9) The scope of the documents on a country outside the US is decided mainly by the extent to which documents and reports were transmitted from the abroad offices of the US tobacco companies to headquarters. While operating on distant markets the international tobacco companies may, for instance, have used subcontractors who might have not reported about their operations. Consequently, activities of the US tobacco companies in distant markets might be under-represented.

The information on the comprehensiveness of the tobacco industry documents is particularly relevant to Central and East European area with a number of countries where international tobacco companies not only invaded the markets by making their product widely available, but also introduced sophisticated lobbying and marketing tactics (4). Central and Eastern Europe has witnessed a dramatic rise in premature mortality in middle-aged men (35–64 years) that has not been recorded in any other parts of the world. (10) It is estimated that there are more than

700,000 deaths per year related to tobacco in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis of the industry behaviour in Central and East European region provides lessons for tobacco control advocates from developing countries, which are expecting transnational tobacco companies entering their markets (4).

So far it has been almost impossible to assess the number of documents that never entered the records. A case in Finland could provide some leads to the dilemma. In 2003 the Cancer Society in Finland received a private archive of a person, Matti Otva, who worked as a public relation consultant to Philip Morris (PM), the most influential international tobacco company in Finland, and its licensee Amer-Tupakka. The files indicate in greater detail what was going on in tobacco lobbying at the local level. Similar caches of documents could also be available in other countries (11). In the following report we explore whether the material from the private archive will augment or revise the earlier reports on tobacco industry manipulation in Finland. The study will also provide general information on the limitations of the tobacco documents.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material possessed by the Cancer Society consists of some 1,000 pages of correspondence and memoranda. Otva's records deal mainly with public relations matters. In the following we will compare the information on tobacco lobbying contained in Mr. Otva's documents with earlier reports on tobacco industry manipulation in Finland (7-8, 12). The analysis is supplemented with

systematic search of tobacco industry documents published online. The aim is to evaluate whether TIDR establishes a comprehensive picture of tobacco lobbying in a distant market. Information conveyed by the documents has not been validated with the people mentioned in them (1) *.

RESULTS

What is known from earlier TIDR on Finland is that the tobacco industry began to take a special interest in the Nordic countries since Iceland proposed harmonizing tobacco legislation in those nations in 1987 (13). To counter the adverse proposal PM started to work with local manufacturers against the Nordic Council (14). Philip Morris employees identified Sweden and Finland in particular, as priority areas for action because the dangers of secondhand smoke had received extensive media coverage there and because both SAS and Finnair, the national airlines of Sweden and Finland, had contemplated or were preparing to implement smoking restrictions.

Before the mid 1980s, PM argued that the Nordic market was characterized by a lack of coordinated lobbying activity. Motivated by the ETS threat PM was reviewing plans and hiring corporate affairs staff specialists to strengthen the National Manufacturers Associations (NMA) in each market. In October 1987 Matti Otva was addressed as an NMA's "PR-man" (15).

Otva was also mentioned in December 1987 as a person to be contacted in order to market the In-Air-Quality study. Sponsoring that type of studies was one of several tactics the tobacco industry employed in attempts to reverse or delay implementation of in-flight smoking restrictions (13). Otva had been working as a journalist for many years, also as an editor-in-chief for Finnair in-flight magazine (16).

In April 1988, EEMA Corporate Affairs meeting discussed about recruiting Matti Otva as a person who could undertake the work "to get industry's viewpoints printed" and possibly act as a "spokesperson" for the industry (17). At first Otva worked for the public relations agency Sek & Greys. In that capacity Otva visited Neuchatel in late 1989 (18). Later on Otva established an agency of his own.

Tobacco Lobbying

The TIDR on lobbying in Finland has established that the international tobacco companies utilized similar strategies in Finland as in other industrial markets to fight tobacco control. The description of strategies is detailed but most of the target names are missing. The PM documents discuss government relations programs, for instance (19), but no single cabinet minister in Finland is mentioned in the documents as a recipient of PM's hospitality.

Otva's papers, however, give more details. In 1989 Otva proposed inviting a certain cabinet minister to Switzerland: "As an eager skier the minister might be interested in visiting Lausanne and one of the Swiss ski resorts as guest of PM. The matter should be handled without any publicity. The most natural way to arrange the skiing trip sponsored by PM would be to connect it with one of his other trips" (20). It seems that hospitality was well received. In

1990 he gave a statement criticizing advertising ban (21). In 1992 the minister invited Amer Tobacco's managing director to a golf evening and to the government's manor K  nigst  dt (22).

In 1990, the tobacco companies found that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health had drafted a proposal for a new tobacco act in autumn 1990 (7). As a result of tobacco industry lobbying efforts the proposal did not come before parliament (7); but in 1992, Amer-Tupakka discovered that the bill had been revived. TIDR describe a major lobbying effort to counter the proposal. It is obvious that lobbying was facilitated with trips and lunches for key persons (23). However, that is not made explicit in the documents. To slow down the development and implementation of the Tobacco Act in Finland PM established, among other things, direct contact with the Minister of Social Affairs and Health and his chief advisor as well as arranging briefings for MP's and labor union representatives.

While proposal for a new tobacco act was processed in the parliament, Otva was reporting on weekly basis. Otva's reports included very detailed descriptions of the internal issues of the ministry of health and social affairs which prepared the proposal for Tobacco Act amendment. The main issue was that the Head of Office of the ministry was suffering from a drinking problem and had lost power. The reports indicate who were the most influential person at each particular moment (24).

Otva gave very detailed recommendations for lobbying. Otva proposed exact phrases of wording for the amendments to the act. For example, in 1994 Otva recommended that PM should lobby for introduction of an additional resolution to the act. The resolution would oblige the government to synchronize Finnish tobacco legislation with the corresponding legislation in the European Union (25). He also provided names of the contact persons and persons who could act as tobacco industry "spokesmen". Otva proposed e.g. that Managing Director of the Central Chamber of Commerce could influence MPs on the tobacco law. "In his statement he would use the tobacco law as an example in reminding the Parliament of the promise to diminish guardianship and bureaucracy in the society. The managing director can also quite naturally be worried about the working conditions of Finnish business and industry" (26). The role of the "spokesmen" is illustrated as Otva, after discussing various methods to influence the parliament, states: "Some of the eventual information measures should be performed in the name of the industry itself, and some of the by the help of credible third parties" (26).

A main lobbying strategy against the new tobacco law was to contact the representatives of the Finnish labor unions, which are key players in formulating and winning support for social legislation in Finland. Somewhat earlier, the leaders of these organizations were sent on a PM VIP trip to Switzerland (27).

A letter from PM manger in Finland in March 1992 stated that the blue collar workers Union, SAK, which had initially taken a positive view of listing tobacco smoke as a carcinogen, was after briefings with a tobacco industry lobbyist willing to change its position (28). However, in November 1992 Otva reported that an official in the ministry of health and social affairs had informed his colleagues that blue collars unions officials were supporting the proposed amendments (29). That gave the ministry new energy to push through the proposal. The notion is particularly interesting.

* We have decided to omit proper names mentioned in the documents as they are no longer relevant for tobacco control in Finland today.

The time when the union officials changed their opinion could be the decisive movement when the outcome of the tobacco act amendment was actually decided.

Tobacco companies created International Tobacco Information Incorporated (INFOTAB) to establish an "early warning" system for anti-smoking initiatives worldwide, to "track activities of pressure groups and international consumer unions" and "to take industry programs to the grass roots and municipal levels" to help the industry to prevail over public health efforts to control tobacco (30). To gain more information and supplement services offered by INFOTAB, tobacco companies hired communications agencies to gather information in Finland. Subcontractors assisted the industry in translating clippings and other published material and in identifying relevant research and decision makers. Otva's PR company made an offer to monitor news media in Finland (31). Apparently the offer was declined.

One of Otva's most interesting papers is a memorandum of PM's Nordic bimonthly corporate affairs meeting in November 1990 (32). Publicly available tobacco documents include similar memoranda describing PM strategies and their implementation but this particular document is missing. The meeting evaluated, among other things, the International Smokers' Rights Conference which was held in Helsinki in October. Similar examples of internal memoranda not entered in the publicly available tobacco documents are lists of corporate affairs accountabilities for Nordic area in April-May 1990, in February – March 1991 and September – October 1991 (33-35). The documents are rich in details on how PM strategies were implemented on local level.

The published tobacco documents contain information on several PR-trips. However, the information on participants is scarce. While the new tobacco act was processed in the parliament Otva wrote weekly reports for PM. In 1992 Otva reported to PM employee Johan Puotila that a secretary of the center party's parliamentary group, had just returned from "B-trip" to Tokyo and requested that departure from Monaco would not be very early in the morning (36). In 1993 Otva reported about a "hungry secretary". According to Otva the secretary had let it be known that he would gladly accept an invitation to lunch to discuss about tobacco act (37).

Later on Otva reported that Johan Puotila had met with the secretary: "The secretary is satisfied – he was and will be provided with tangible written material about the tobacco law bill. After going into the material he will be able to present well-founded views and opinions about the bill" (38).

Otva mentions also two party officials for the conservative party: "One official is as greatly interested in hospitality as the other official. I've answered to the official that everything will be arranged at its time but those who I represent tend to be friendly to those who are friendly to them" (39).

PM invited both officials to a "fact-finding tour to Harare, Zimbabwe" to give "firsthand experience of tobacco farming and industry" (40-41). However, the officials canceled the trip (42).

In week 19 of 1994 Otva reported about a trip which the Amer-Group had paid to some decision-makers to the Ice Hockey World Championship Games in Milan (43). The information about the trip had leaked outside the travel group. A year before the corresponding trip caused negative publicity to tobacco industry as the chairman of the parliamentary group for the conservative party leaked the information to the press.

Friendly Journalists

Journalists sympathetic to the tobacco industry provided fertile ground for the arguments of the tobacco companies, which claimed that the health effects of smoking were not proven and thus no regulation was warranted. PR Otva devised a list of potentially "friendly journalist" with detailed background information e.g. on their tobacco status and attitudes

Otva also tried to arrange PM support to Ski Club International des Journalists (SCIJ). "The members of the SCIJ are probably the most influential group of journalists in the world today. PM now has the opportunity to obtain the good-will of this elite group for a comparatively small contribution" (44). PM/New York was not keen on the club as it believed that the members consisted of second rank journalist only. Otva tried to prove that this was not the case e.g. by mentioning that one of the members had interviewed Saddam Hussein in 1984 (45).

Only two publicly available tobacco industry documents mention in passing the Nordic Film Festival, a PR event sponsored by PM (46-47). Otva's documents include a memo by PM's Nordic spokeswoman Ingemo Bonnier which gives detailed account of PM's objectives and strategies with regard to Nordic Film Festival (48). First of all PM aimed to increase social acceptability of the company "through positive association with an event which is seen and reported as beneficial to the Nordic markets" (48). The event also allowed PM to foster contacts with "leading Nordic journalists" and with an "exceptionally important Nordic journalist residing in the US".

Otva was also in correspondence with an PM official to arrange tolerance conference in Finland with the aim to introduce Libertad, a third party mouthpiece for PM to support freedom of commercial speech (49), in Finland (50). The fact that PM had representatives among the visitors was not allowed to be mentioned (51). The meeting was to take place in Helsinki June 1990 with Lord Henry Plumb, former president of the European Parliament, and with some prominent speakers from Finland (52). While with the European Parliament Plumb was a very important contact person for the tobacco industry (53-54).

Otva's papers show that Amer was trying to persuade PM to sponsor the Mannerheimexhibition in Switzerland in 1991 (34, 55). Carl Mannerheim is a national hero in Finland, the war time commander-in-chief and former president who died in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1951.

Otva also arranged connection with influential persons abroad. In 1991 Otva wrote to Stig Carlson PM's corporate affairs director in Europe, about Carlson's request to meet with Turkey's prime minister Mesut Yilmaz (56). The letter included list of contact persons in Turkey. In 1992 Otva wrote to Stig Carlson that the foreign affairs committee of the Finnish parliament is about to embark on a trip to Iran, Pakistan and Nepal. "I could try to get a member of the committee as your 'camouflaged representative' to promote your interest", Otva wrote (57). A day earlier Otva had provided Carlson with contact persons to Iran on Carlson's request (58).

Smokers' Rights Groups

The published tobacco documents describe how tobacco industry used the Smokepeace movement in promoting the "accommodation message" also in Finland. It is clear from the documents that the association presented as a spontaneous NGO was actually controlled by the tobacco industry. More detailed

information is included in Otva's papers. As a paid PR-specialist Otva was a member of the board in the Finnish association. Otva e.g. took responsibility of digitalizing the membership records and devised a statement on tobacco taxation. Otva was also involved in recruiting new members for the association (35, 59). According to a board meeting minute a BAT employee and a Amer-Tobacco employee took part in the meeting of the information group of the association in August 1991 (60).

PM devised strategies for Smokepeace associations in all Nordic countries at the same meetings (61). At the time the criminal proceeding against tobacco company directors in Finland became public Otva proposed writing letters-to-the-editor where the law suit would be ridiculed and the ongoing product liability litigation portrayed as contempt of the court.

DISCUSSION

The private records add more details to previously published reports. The new information mainly concerned implementation of the tobacco industry strategies. The records include not only private documents but also some produced by PM which have not been made available on the PM document web site. This suggests the limitations of the published tobacco industry documents.

The private records illustrated, for example, how connections with influential persons in Finland were used for lobbying in Turkey and Iran. The records also included lobbying plans that were not implemented. Nonetheless, Otva's records do not contain material of PM's strategies in Finland that would lead to a sharp reconsideration of the earlier reports on tobacco industry manipulation in Finland.

Otva's material is by no means exhaustive, and it may only give clues on the limitations of the tobacco documents generally. The same problems of reliability apply to Otva's material. Otva may have cleaned his own archive of the most disturbing documents and/or exaggerated tobacco industry's lobbying efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

A general conclusion is that tobacco industry documents may not give a detailed picture of tobacco industry activities in distant markets, which would be of interest locally, even if they provide sufficient information to convey a general view of tobacco industry strategies.

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