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Tobacco Politics: The "Safer" Cigarette Flap

Gio Gori, the National Cancer Institute official who correctly, but imprudently, suggested that some cigarettes — though not safe — are safer than others, has taken temporary shelter at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, where he will spend the next nine months in a master of public health program.

Gori's move to academe will not wholly separate him from NCI affairs, since he will retain directorship of the Institute's program on smoking and health. But since he and the program are in disfavor with the NCI leadership, it is doubtful that he will figure significantly in the federal government's schizophrenic relationship with tobacco.

The transition to the student life for this senior research administrator was in the works long before last month's eruption over his forthcoming article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, wherein he reported that some current brands have been denatured to the point where their nastiness is now a

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mere fraction of those that were on the market in 1960. But, given the flap produced by the article, Gori deemed it wise to make a go decision on returning to school, and off he's gone, to add a master's degree to the Ph.D. in microbiology that he received 20 years ago.

What's left behind, however, is a nice lesson in tobacco politics, a governmental area that is dominated by vast hypocrisy, big money, and, in the present period, the faltering fortunes of Jimmy Carter.

Gori, it should be noted, spent the past five years as director of a program, which was begun in 1968, to develop safer cigarettes. Under his supervision, the US government expended some \$18 million toward this goal, while in various subtle ways it prodded the tobacco industry toward the same objective. While opponents of the weed may gag on the proposition that there can be anything such as a "safe" cigarette, there is no doubt that NCI has been working on its development, with Gio Gori in administrative command of the operation.

Furthermore, just prior to the disclosure of Gori's JAMA paper, none other than Jimmy Carter traveled to North Carolina, heart of tobacco land, to assure the financial beneficiaries of that crop that the government

wasn't going to hurt their interests. In fact, Mr. Carter, in the course of a tour that took him through a tobacco warehouse, told his appreciative, but apprehensive, listeners that the federal government aimed "to make the smoking of tobacco even more safe than it is today." Though it is doubtful that Mr. Carter knew that back there in Bethesda, Md., one Gio Gori had been laboring for five years to fulfill this objective, and that he had collected reliable evidence to demonstrate that partial success had been achieved, there was no reason for Gori's superiors to be astonished by these facts.

Gori's JAMA paper is essentially an extension of a paper he published in *Science* in 1976, the main difference being that in the forthcoming article, he lists the contents of various brands, whereas in the earlier

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In Brief

The Office of Management and Budget has directed federal agencies to adopt a use-it-or-lose-it policy for grantees whose awards are supposed to be expended in a given period. A memo from OMB Director James T. McIntyre states that "There is no reason why federal funds should be held outside the Treasury awaiting the closeout of a grant."

OMB tells SGR that this means that if money remains after the work is completed, it's got to be returned to the government, or, if a continuing grant is involved, "new" money will be withheld and replaced by the carryover.

The Administration's drive to slash the number of government advisory committees is proving burdensome for NIH's study section system. In 1969, NIH used 48 study sections to review 8227 grant applications; last year, 50 study sections handled 17,741 applications. Meanwhile, staff support in the Division of Research grants dropped from 425 to 392 during that period.

The Committee on Human Rights of the National Academy of Sciences has taken a stand against any communitywide policy on dealings with the Soviets, whose rough treatment of dissident Soviet scientists it has regularly deplored. "...each American scientist, contemplating a visit to the USSR (or asked to host a Soviet scientist in the US) must determine his or her own course of action," the committee states.

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. . . Califano's \$6 Million "War" on Smoking

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publication he dealt generally with the subject of so-called safer cigarettes.

Nevertheless, the high command of the government health establishment chose on this occasion to roll out its heavy artillery. Surgeon General Julius B. Richmond proclaimed that "There is no known safe level of smoking of any cigarette of any type. No one should be misled by Dr. Gori's study into the belief that there is some way that one can adjust one's smoking habits and the cigarette one smokes and thus avoid all health risks. Stopping smoking completely, on the other hand, has a dramatic beneficial effect."

At the same time, Gori's boss, NCI Director Arthur Upton, and Robert Levy, director of the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, issued a joint statement which said, "While some research has tended to show that reduced tar and nicotine reduces the risks of cancer, we do not know with any certainty how much risk is reduced." To which they added, "We fear that Dr. Gori's paper may mislead the public. We are even more concerned about his assertion that the risk involved with low-tar-and-nicotine cigarettes is 'tolerable.'"

(This last point was an unfair jab, since Gori had not said that the risk is "tolerable," but rather had merely speculated that if death rates from cigarette-induced illness fell sharply, they might be regarded as "socially tolerable," in the sense they wouldn't be glaringly evident, as they now are, in mortality statistics.)

Whatever the case, a search for the origins of this irritable reaction to a reasonable thesis leads to the peculiarities of the federal government's so-called war against smoking. The basic fact is that it is a very small, carefully regulated war, never so large as to offend the tobacco industry, but large enough to salve the consciences of officials who feel that the cigarette menace requires some government action.

Thus, Joe Califano, the Napoleonic commandant of HEW, thunders about the evils and costs of smoking, but when it comes to spending government money on the problem, Califano comes up with \$6 million for

education programs and \$20 million to investigate the psychology of smoking. It must be conceded that there's growth in those figures, though how much is difficult to say, given the numerological hanky-panky that accompanies government activities in this area. But when these sums are compared with the \$300 million a year that the cigarette industry spends to promote the top 20 brands, it is difficult to conclude that the federal government is seriously working against the habit.

And the reason for this is apparent in the economics of tobacco. In an era of big agriculture, tobacco remains a small-scale product, thanks to the government's price-support system, which limits guarantees to holdings of only a few acres. Thus, government figures show that last year, 370,000 farms produced 1.9 billion pounds of tobacco, for a cash return of \$2.3 billion. Some 600,000 families shared in this take — which is not unrelated to the President's recent pilgrimage to tobacco country.

Tobacco's strong political base thus assures that no President — not even one who is piously dedicated to holding down health-care costs — will dare initiate an all-out war against the product. Which means, in turn, that his appointed health officials, all of whom would like to see greater resources directed against smoking, fear the tactical danger in anything suggesting a federal endorsement of the concept of "safer" cigarettes. Messrs. Califano, Richmond, Upton and Levy have no difficulty in recognizing the validity of Gori's concept — that "safer" does not mean "safe," but that given the fact that 50 million Americans continue to smoke, it would be prudent for them to smoke less harmful cigarettes; further, that cessation programs should continue and that reduced-tar-and-nicotine cigarettes are probably easier to kick than higher-octane ones.

Quite sensible, but for the problem that the Gori thesis invites the argument that if safer cigarettes are here, there is no need for the government to sermonize on the dangers of smoking. Industry, with its formidable resources for manipulating public under-

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Vanguard of Chinese Students Due Next Year

China's expressed desire to send a stream of students to American universities has so far encountered no hitches, and it is now expected that a handful will arrive this winter, and that perhaps as many as 500 will be enrolled for the 1979-80 academic year.

American officials are still a bit bedazzled by the suddenness of the Chinese request for access to American universities, and a sense of uncertainty still surrounds the questions of how many, where, when, and how these young people will adapt to American campus life. And still to be resolved is the matter of reciprocal access for Americans who want to spend time in China.

Progress toward clarifying these and related matters is expected to come from a visit to Washington early next month by a delegation headed by Chou Pei-Yuan, who is president of Peking University as well as a top official of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

By all accounts, the representatives of the People's Republic of China have been highly accommodating in the few negotiations that have so far taken place. The view from the American side is that the Chinese are extremely eager to place their students here, and that they are willing to go to considerable lengths to overcome any problems that might get in the way of that goal.

Within academe, the sudden prospect of a booming China connection is being happily received. Officials of some 25 representative universities and five national educational associations met August 24 in Washington to discuss China's request with officials of the National Science Foundation, the White House science office, and the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the PRC. The consensus of that meeting was that American institutions can absorb fairly large numbers of Chinese students; how many the Chinese want to have here at any one time is not known, but their plans for worldwide placements may run as high as 10,000, if some reports are to be credited.

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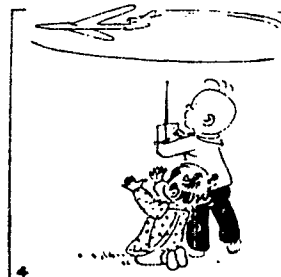
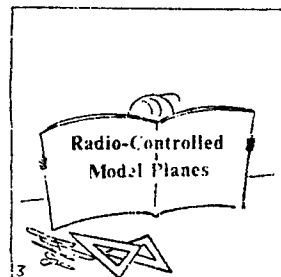
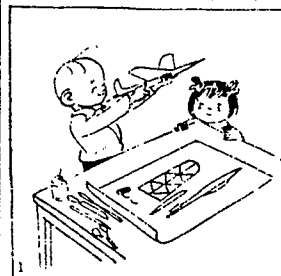
standing, can be expected to pick up on that one.

What it all comes down to is that it's okay for the President to tout safer smoking. But in the beleaguered camp of the government's anti-smoking forces, that's a dangerous message.

While Gori is back in academe, he will remain a government employee and can later return to NCI. But the clear lesson of this episode is that the politics and science of tobacco are very different entities, and a politically naive researcher has to be careful of what he says on this subject — even when he's on sound scientific grounds. —DSG

San Mao After the Downfall of the 'Gang of Four'

We Love Science



The "Peanuts" of China, "San Mao" ("Three Hairs"), has adopted the theme of scientific modernization, as can be seen in the August issue of *China Reconstructs*, a monthly magazine that the PRC publishes for foreign audiences.

The Chinese have indicated that they are interested in all fields of study, but they are mainly interested in disciplines that tie in with their longterm plans to achieve world standards in science and engineering (SGR Vol. VIII, No. 8).

What's intriguing from the American perspective is that, in contrast to other Communist nations, the Chinese are not confining themselves to sending a few handpicked advanced students or senior researchers to look in on the American scene. Rather, they're aiming at sending thousands — starting with teen-age undergraduates and on upwards to senior professionals. From the outset, they have made it clear that they will pay all costs for their students. This financial element is, of course, not decisive in the receptivity that American universities are showing toward this pending influx of students; on the other hand, given the shaky finances of most academic institutions, cash customers, at the very least, are less troublesome.

In any case, a fairly optimistic spirit surrounds the cumbersome administrative task of actually getting the students over here and into suitable universities and

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