

THE INDUSTRY'S COUNTERATTACK

German tobacco manufacturing continued relatively unobstructed throughout the 1930s. Hitler never moved on his early suggestion to transform the trade into a state monopoly—the Reemtsma conglomerate was a de facto monopoly by the 1930s, which may have made nationalization seem unnecessary. Tobacco industry trade journals were allowed to continue publishing, and in fact a new journal, *Der Tabak*, was founded in 1937 to publish articles of interest to growers, rollers, and other tobacco tradesmen. One year later, in Bremen, an International Association for Scientific Tobacco Research was founded, with *Der Tabak* as its official organ.¹⁹⁶ That journal cleaved off another organ, the *Chronica Nicotiana*, in 1940, to review events of significance to the industry—everything from news in the field of nicotine chemistry to updates on tobacco taxes. A book series (*Monographiae Nicotianae*) was also launched, publishing claims by psychobiologists (for example) that total tobacco “abstinence,” like excessive tobacco “abuse,” was to be regarded as a psychopathic “perversion.”¹⁹⁷

Chronica Nicotiana gives us a sense of how the industry fared at the height of the antitobacco fervor. The journal reported on the hygiene of tobacco workers, and whether tobacco dust could adhere to bacteria in the air. A doctoral thesis was cited to show that women working in tobacco factories suffer no ill-effects from contact with nicotine, and a pharmacology text was cited to argue that the nicotine in smoking mothers' milk could not harm the breast-fed infant. The journal conceded that people with ulcers probably should not smoke, but it also cautioned that sex hormones might have something to do with the malady.¹⁹⁸ (A Berlin physician by the name of Margarete Focken had claimed that hormones were more important than smoking in the genesis of ulcers; Focken injected female hormones into at least two dozen men suffering from ulcers, and though it is unclear whether other physicians emulated the practice, the tobacco industry encouraged explorations in this area.)¹⁹⁹ The journal again identified “extreme opponents” of tobacco as “fanatic psychopaths”²⁰⁰ and cautioned against the “sta-

tistical games” played by those who claimed that smoking shortens one's life.

The German tobacco industry's response to criticism will sound familiar to anyone who has followed the past fifty years or so of American tobacco politics; the basic strategy is to claim the “high ground” of sober science for pro-tobacco forces.²⁰¹ What is interesting about the German debate, however, is the strength of the response from German health authorities—who were not exactly pleased with the industry's foray into medical research—as the following episode will demonstrate.

Helmuth Aschenbrenner, head of the International Association for Scientific Tobacco Research, in the summer of 1941 announced the formation of a health research commission—the *Tabacologia medicinalis*, based in Budapest—to explore the health effects of tobacco.²⁰² German health authorities were told that the association had planned to explore health issues from its founding, but it is hard to imagine that the recent spate of antitobacco propaganda was not weighing on the minds of the founders. The widely publicized March 1939 antitobacco congress in Frankfurt had been followed by new rounds of rhetoric from *Reine Luft*, and Müller's epidemiology had turned out pretty solid proof of a lung cancer hazard.²⁰³ Tobacco sales were doing fine, but the industry seemed to be losing the PR battle with antitobacco forces—especially after the founding of Astel's institute. In September of 1941, Goebbels's ministry added insult to injury when it barred the association from creating a “Lavoisier Foundation” (to award prizes for tobacco research) on the grounds that this would pander to French propaganda interests.²⁰⁴ (Best known for discovering that breathing is a form of combustion, Antoine Lavoisier also headed France's tobacco monopoly prior to losing his head in the French Revolution.)

Aschenbrenner claimed that the *Tabacologia medicinalis* was established in the normal course of an industry's legitimate concerns for industrial hygiene, but Nazi health authorities were not impressed. Reich Health Führer Leonardo Conti read about the formation of the commission in the *Tabakzeitung* and immediately launched an investigation, demanding that Aschenbrenner give him the names of all participating German physicians. He