

Cigarette ad was sexual, court told

A Rothmans cigarette advertisement was "explicitly sexual" in its design, and was aimed specifically at inducing young women to smoke, a member of an organisation known as BUGA-UP told Melbourne Magistrates Court yesterday.

Frederick James Cole, of Harris Street, Ultimo, NSW, was placed on a good-behavior bond after he pleaded not guilty to theft and unlawful possession of a cigarette advertising sign from a North Fitzroy milk bar last Friday.

Mr Cole, a prominent member of the Sydney branch of BUGA-UP (billboard utilising graffitists against unhealthy promotions), told the court he had removed the sign with the intention of "refacing" it, when "an angry Greek man" (Mr Bill Lagogannis, the owner of the milk bar) had intercepted him.

Mr Cole said that after seeing a 13-year-old girl buying cigarettes at the Victoria Market the same afternoon, he decided to remove some cigarette promotions and did so from the milk bar in Scotchmer Street, North Fitzroy. He said he intended to change the words "Move up" on the sign to "Cough up", and to remove the letter T from the word "true".

Mr Cole, 56, who has a long grey beard and shoulder-length grey hair, arrived in court with bare feet and wearing a caftan. He described the advertising industry as "a one way dictatorship which instructs us how to act, what to think, and even what to dream".

He said the Rothmans cigarette advertisement was a particularly insidious form of advertising and was aimed specifically at young women. The advertisement was so "explicitly sexual" that it would not be allowed if it was used to advertise a brothel, Mr Cole said.

Holding the sign, which was produced in court as evidence, Mr Cole pointed to a diagram at the base of the sign and told the magistrate, Mr Graeme Wheelhouse, SM, that the drawing represented a woman's urethra and a man's testicles.

He said that the advertisement, which showed an attractive young couple with cigarettes in their hands and bore the words "Move Up — New Rothmans King Size" would be construed by most people as relating to social mobility. But by placing the woman higher than the man, and in brighter colors, the advertisement was using the women's movement in order to persuade women to smoke.

"The advertisement is sending young women the message, 'Smoke Rothmans, and you too can move up to a higher status than men,'" Mr Cole said.

Mr Cole was represented by his nephew, Mr Neil Cole, who told the court that his client had served three years with the British Army in the war zone during World War II, and was now fighting another war against multinational companies promoting unhealthy products to Third World countries.

He said Mr Cole was due to give the keynote address at the fifth world conference on smoking and health, to be held in Canada in July.

Mr Cole admitted earlier conviction for defacing advertising signs. Mr Wheelhouse said he was not satisfied as to the ownership of the sign, which the Rothmans company paid the proprietor of the milk bar \$100 a year to display. He dismissed the charge of theft. On the charge of unlawful possession, he put Mr Cole on a \$50, 12-month good-behavior bond.