

'IMPS' REJECT CURB ON CIGARETTE COUPONS

PUBLIC SMOKING WARNING

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER

THERE was no valid reason to discontinue cigarette coupon schemes, Mr. John Partridge, chairman of the Imperial Tobacco Co., said in London yesterday. To do so would be an unjustifiable interference with marketing freedom and consumers' choice.

Mr. Partridge was commenting on a Commons debate on lung cancer deaths during which Mr. Robinson, Minister of Health, said talks on cigarette advertising and coupon schemes had reached deadlock. Mr. Robinson also said that the Government was considering restrictions on smoking in public places. It is thought cinemas, buses and trains might be in the ban. [Commons debate—P17.]

Two other cigarette manufacturers, Carreras and Gallaher said last night that they accepted in principle the Government's recommendations on both advertising media and on coupons.

Carreras said: "The arbitrary banning of television advertising has obviously upset the balance within the industry and the Government's proposals in all the circumstances are the fairest and would go some way to restoring equality."

Scott Gallaher said it was anxious to avoid the possibility of restrictive legislation and had hoped a voluntary agreement could have been reached.

'Winning brand support'

The Imperial Tobacco Co., with 64 per cent. of the cigarette market, called a Press-conference to justify its position. Mr. Partridge said research showed that coupon schemes neither caused people to smoke more nor encouraged more people to smoke.

Coupons were not designed to circumvent the ending of television advertising; they were a form of deferred price reduction. Their object was to win "brand support."

On the question of smoking and lung cancer, Mr. Partridge said Imperial would spare no effort no matter what it cost, to find the answers. Research was costing about £1 million a year.

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DEATH IN THE SMOKE

SOME of the statistics cited by Dr. DUNWOODY yesterday to convince the House of Commons of the danger of cigarette smoking were merely sensational. "One death from cancer every 20 minutes": yes, but looked at in that crudely numerical way the deaths from old age might also seem shocking. Nor can a useful ratio be calculated between these deaths and the Aberfan disaster, owing to the incommensurable numbers at risk in a village community and a nation of many millions. But other figures were validly and grimly significant. For example, after the danger had become recognised by the medical profession, the habits of 40,000 doctors were studied for 10 years; it was found that among those who gave up cigarettes the death rate from cancer of the lung fell by seven per cent., while that for the whole community rose by 22. The terrible rate of increase of the danger was later acknowledged by the Minister of Health, who said that an annual death rate of 400 in 1900 and 1920 had become 29,377 by 1965.

Nonetheless, an extremely subtle question is raised by Dr. DUNWOODY's argument for a large increase in the taxation of cigarettes, and a simultaneous reduction of that on cigars and pipe tobacco. Has the State a moral right to prevent people from risking their lives by making the process more expensive? Some people will always fall through the ice and be drowned, but we do not therefore tax skates. We deal with the dangers of heroin by letting the doctors prescribe it tax-free for patients who need it and forbidding it to others. Still, if a certain amount of revenue has to be raised by indirect taxation, it is better to levy it on dangerous than on harmless commodities.

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