

PRINTERS' INK

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Buboes in the FCC

The advertising business can live with the Federal Communications Commission ruling that, in "fairness" to the viewer, broadcasters must present anti-tobacco arguments countering the appeals of cigarette advertising. (See page 20.) The immediate effect of this single ruling won't eliminate cigarette advertising nor profoundly affect broadcasting.

But an extremely serious issue is involved in this unilateral action. Congress has spent a lot of time examining the whole matter of cigarette advertising, and has decided to take no action so far. The majority apparently believe that if a product is legal, its maker should be able to advertise it.

If Congress chose not to restrict cigarette advertising, where does a mere regulatory agency get the authority to do so on its own? And by what stretch of the imagination should the "fairness doctrine" be applied to the advertising of a product? It was developed specifically to give differing social viewpoints equitable, non-commercial exposure on the airwaves. Never has a broadcaster been required to give anyone free time to offset viewpoints expressed in paid commercials. But now broadcasters are required to do so to the opponents of a product, although they are not contradicting any idea expressed in the commercials.

Such instances of doublethink in a regulatory agency should be treated like a case of buboes. They must be isolated and stamped out before they become a plague. Congress should call the FCC on the carpet and ask it where it got the right to tell broadcasters what they must say against a legal, honestly advertised product.

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