

Topic of cancer: Tisch & CBS

THERE WAS a day in the past when an old friend, Jim Shanahan, who worked as a press agent for the Loews theater chain, owned by the Tisch brothers, dug into his pocket at the bar and came up with a piece of paper.

"You're from Queens," he said. "You deserve this."

He handed me a pass for two to the Loews Valencia movie house, which sat under the el on Jamaica Ave. I once worked at a newspaper around the corner from the Valencia, and on those nights when I failed to get home, I used to go into the Valencia for the first daytime show and sleep. Now at the bar, the pass and the memories it



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his fingers out of his mouth.

"You have to do that every day to remind yourself," he said.

"Of what?"

"Of what the Tisch boys will do to you if they catch you taking their money."

Inside, here was the night manager, Leo, standing alongside a goldfish pool; the Valencia was out of the old days, of Esther Williams movies. Leo looked terrified.

"Somebody said Tisch was coming," he explained.

"Which one? There are two of them."

"I don't know which one," Leo said. "I hear one of them carries a flashlight and he shines it on you. If you're not doing your job, they say somebody runs in after him and takes you downstairs and sets your clothes on fire."

After the movie, Bob Allen, Leo and I went to the old Jim's Steak House on Hillside Ave. and we had a few drinks and that was the end of that. Or so we all thought.

And then last year, the CBS television network had a thorough fright. A man named Turner in Atlanta, whose business was putting news on television all day, tried to take over CBS in a stock maneuver. Immediately, CBS threw up breastworks. Why something in the public interest such as television news can be fought over,

was so great that the head of CBS even stopped bothering secretaries. The defense consisted of expensive stupidity. At the end, here came a man to save everybody, Larry Tisch. He owned 24% of CBS and he took over.

I know Larry Tisch and his brother Bob from around town for a long time. A smile, a drink. Send somebody over to them for a job. They always tried to help. Fine. And it was great sport to tell stories about the guy biting his fingers at the Valencia movie house. But now Larry Tisch is involved in the news that the public gets and you take another look. Larry Tisch owns the Loews Corporation, and something like 50 percent of Loews' profits comes from a company called Lorillard, which makes cancer. One of the Lorillard brands is True Blue. The last time I went to Memorial Sloan-Kettering in Manhattan was to visit a person who smoked True Blue. The funeral was held at Schwartz Brothers on Queens Blvd.

CBS is not allowed to take commercials from Lorillard because the product gives people cancer.

But the man who owns the company that sells cancer is allowed to own CBS. Larry Tisch ought to know enough about cigarets. If he has any questions, let him pick up the

him a number: Call Sam Hellman or Tom Fahey up at Memorial, 794-7722, and ask them about cigarets.

When Larry Tisch arrived at CBS, these most brilliant newsmen were all wildly excited. They were safe.

"I sure could have told them," Leo, the old manager from the Valencia movie house, said yesterday. But he can understand simple things. Like what happens when Larry Tisch runs a place. Yesterday, while reading that Tisch had fired 215 news workers at CBS, closing a couple of their bureaus around the world, Leo said, "Wait'll they find out that when they get sick they have to bring in a note from the doctor. That's coming for sure."

I then told Leo a show business rumor, that Dan Rather, the CBS announcer, had a fight with Tisch during the week and Tisch said, "Look, leave. I can replace you in a day."

"Why do you call that a story?" Leo said. "That is old news. Tisch will replace Rather with a laundry man."

So the news people at CBS appear foolish, which they are. Probably, CBS News is oversized and spoiled, and something should be done about it.

But there is something dramatically wrong when a man with mere money, Larry Tisch, can walk in and, like a baron shrinking the payroll at an insurance office, start tearing away at the news that people see. The only reason this country is different from any place else is that once in a great while, this huge, snobbish, generally untalented

stops covering stories of interest only to itself, and actually serves the public. It is because of these moments when news reporting actually works, and because of the threat that it might work at any time, that we have a country that can be absolutely thrilling.

In 1974, this nation changed governments at night, Nixon resigning, and outside the White House there was no mob of people. There was not one soldier, not one tank. Traffic was only a little heavier than usual and one motorcycle cop pulled up, dismounted and began waving the traffic along. That was it. That was how we change governments. Now we suddenly have another administration reeling and stammering and you'll notice that the only military presence consists of these Norths and Poindexters running to defense lawyers. Best not soften anything that helps such a system.

THEREFORE, IF a man, for private profit, tears at the public news, does so with the impatience of one who thinks he actually owns the news you get, it is against the national interest. When Larry Tisch closes CBS news bureaus, then it follows that NBC and ABC will do the same. Prudent business. Which happens to harm the country. Tisch's only credential is that he has money. And a lot of the money, I am sorry to say, and he should be ashamed to admit, comes from selling a product that gives cancer.

I liked him better when he had the Valencia, which was right under the el on Jamaica

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LAYOFF NETWORK

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drew kept us going all night. It was terrific.

Sometime after that, I was walking out of the cleaners after throwing some clothes on the counter and the guy called me back. "I found this." He handed me a crumpled piece of paper. Two seats to the Valencia. Of course now I had to go. And so one night, along with a guy from Jamaica, Bob Allen, I went to the Valencia.

As I remember, I got there just as shifts were changing. Somebody left the ticket booth and now a guy came in, sat down on his stool, opened his mouth and stuck his fingers inside. Suddenly, he bit down on his fingers as hard