

“The Royal College of Physicians of London selected Ash Wednesday of this year to make an ominous public pronouncement on the dangers of tobacco smoking. During the past decade the British public had repeatedly been informed of medicoscientific studies relating lung cancer to smoking and to general pollution of the atmosphere. None of them, however, had been thought sufficiently conclusive to move the government to initiate measures seriously calculated to discourage smoking. Any such movement would, of course, jeopardize the £850 million (\$2.4 billion) which comes into the national exchequer from tobacco taxation each year.

“Five years ago the state-sponsored Medical Research Council advised the government that the relationship between smoking and lung cancer was one of direct cause and effect. Even then the Minister of Health evaded responsibility by delegating to his local health authorities the task of publicizing the risk. As a result of the official policy of laissez-faire, local authorities spent only £3624 (\$10,147) on educational material relating to smoking in the years 1956 to 1960. Over the same period the tobacco industry spent £38 million (\$106.4 million) in advertising tobacco...

“There are no zealots among the nine specialists under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Platt, professor of medicine at Manchester University, who interpreted the evidence on smoking. (Atmospheric pollution will be examined in a later survey.) Their verdict is presented unemotionally and in language comprehensible to any smoker. From their scrutiny of the scientific literature, the physicians conclude that cigarette smoking is a cause of both lung cancer and bronchitis. It delays healing of gastric and duodenal ulcers and probably contributes to the development of coronary heart disease, cancer of the male bladder, and the arterial disorder, found mainly in the legs, known as thromboangiitis obliterans; it may also play a part in causing cancer of the mouth, pharynx, and gullet. Smoking during pregnancy, it is stated, may result in smaller babies than those born to nonsmoking mothers.

“With these conclusions in mind, the British doctors urge their government to take seven decisive steps to curb the rising consumption of tobacco, especially cigarettes. Their most striking proposal is that a law should be passed to prevent, or at least restrict, the advertisement of smoking, described as ‘a habit which causes such widespread injury to health.’ Such action, say the doctors, would prove that the reality of the risk had been officially accepted.

“The writers suggest that much more imagination, effort, and money should be devoted to drawing the attention of the public to the dangers of smoking...

“Several authoritative independent agencies had already scrutinized the evidence before the publication of the recent report. That the relationship between lung cancer and smoking is established was agreed by the British Ministry of Health, the Medical Research Council of Great Britain, the U.S. Public Health Service, the U.S. Study Group of Smoking and Health, 1957, the National Cancer Institute of Canada, World Health Organization, and the Netherlands Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Health...”

“With the government rested the power to show the most decisive reaction of all. ‘Why not in the coming Budget?’ asked *The Lancet*, referring to the idea of making a relative increase in the tax on cigarettes. It was a thought that must have cost the Chancellor of the Exchequer many a troubled night, for the tobacco levy is about one third of the total revenue from taxation -- just enough to run the entire National Health Service.

“Mr. Selwyn Lloyd's hour came on April 9, when he explained carefully the administrative difficulties there would be in putting a discriminatory tax on cigarettes. He was not prepared to make a further, penal increase in the general rate of duty that would put smoking, even in moderation, out of the reach of many people of limited means. Sadly, it seemed that the resolutions of the Chancellor's fellow ministers to do battle with lung cancer were destined to failure. But the anxiety regarding the effects of cigarette smoking remains.”