

Of seatbelts and spotchecks

Law becomes dangerously authoritarian

Government and police officials across Ontario are to be congratulated for the success of their efforts in curbing highway traffic accidents. It's clear that government advertising, widespread publicity about related police operations and a generally tougher attitude toward drunk driving and other forms of carelessness have at least contributed to the steady decline in accidents and fatalities.

Halton police last week reported that 1982 saw fully 1,000 fewer accidents than did 1981. In north Halton alone, traffic fatalities dropped from 21 in 1980 to ten in 1981 to only five last year.

Making the driving public more aware and cautious about known hazards is an idea that cannot be challenged. Unfortunately, though, the means used in producing the above statistics, as admirable as they are, do not have our full support.

In announcing accident figures for the past year, police were quick to cite annual Yuletide spotchecks and a crackdown on drivers who don't wear seatbelts as major factors. Alas, statistics to back up these specific claims are not forthcoming. Who can say if the threat of a severe fine prevented any driver from having a few drinks or ignoring their seatbelts?

It's just a matter of taking the government's and police department's word for it.

Our concern lies with the preservation of an individual's civil rights: the freedom of choice to wear his seatbelt or

leave it off; and the freedom to travel freely without being stopped by police for no apparent reason.

What "happy motoring" end could possibly justify increasingly stronger legislation governing such personal freedoms?

Halton police handed out 400 summonses to drivers not wearing seatbelts during the recent 21-day spotcheck blitz in accordance with provincial legislation approved several years ago. Yet neither the province nor the police can definitely state that "seatbelts save lives"; all kinds of instances can be cited when seatbelts did save lives; instances can also be cited showing how seatbelts may have contributed to traffic fatalities. Officials can only point to a "trend".

Trend or not, what gives any government the right to control one's personal behavior?

And what gives the police the right to conduct ALERT spotchecks at Christmastime or year-round? Stopping cars whose drivers appear to be drunk or at least having trouble driving is about as much as we'd like to see the police doing. Stopping cars for "routine spotchecks" when there is no apparent problem constitutes random harassment.

Such authoritarian moves by a governing body must be guarded against. No matter how sound the reasoning may appear, attempts to curb individual freedoms represent the lower rungs on a fascist ladder.



Is our flamboyant Pierre losing his sportsmanship?



Ottawa Report

By Stewart McLeod

From the Ottawa Bureau of The Herald

Did you see that story from Kuala Lumpur about Prime Minister Trudeau's quest for personal privacy during his Asian tour? Wasn't that something?

What he said was that a picture of him swimming or otherwise enjoying himself would create a mistaken impression. His exact words: "One picture of me swimming in the sea destroys the three weeks of planning by officials and two weeks of travelling by myself."

What gave rise to this, it seems, was the fact that a photographer travelling with the prime minister was told he would be left cooling his heels at some army base unless he promised not to take pictures of Trudeau cavorting in the water.

My, my, how times do change. As they say, no one is more zealous than a convert. And Trudeau, in this

latest public relations thrust, sounds for all the world like a former alcoholic who tries to prevent his old buddies from having a snort. Who among us would have predicted the day would come when our fun-loving prime minister would shy away from a simple snapshot of himself having a little frolic at the beach?

NEW CONVERT

If it were Joe Clark I could easily come to grips with his concern. Clark is not particularly photogenic when he frolics, and a picture of him plunging into the Pacific during a trade mission would do him no good. Come to think of it, such a photograph probably wouldn't do much for Ed Broadbent either.

But what has happened to our prime minister? Where is the Trudeau who thought it was rather spiffy to slide down the bannister at London's Marlborough House during a Commonwealth conference? Where is the sport who thought it was great fun to perform an unsolicited pirouette behind the Queen's back? Good Heavens, he didn't even mind being photographed doing his number in countless discos around the world.

He always seemed to get a great bang out of being photographed playing frisbee on campaign tours - that was no image problem for him - and there was no difficulty taking time away from the affairs of state to swish into the National Arts Centre with Barbra Streisand. Even as recently as

November, he was happily photographed dancing with some pretty young thing at a Liberal convention.

SHOULD REBEL

And who among us can ever forget that jolly little portrait of the prime minister being photographed giving the finger-up sign - not to be confused with a thumbs-up sign - to the good folk at Salmon Arm, B.C.?

It strikes me as incredulous that this same person now is worried about the possible damaging effects of being pictured having a dip. And it does nothing to dissipate this incredulity to learn that the worry comes from officials accompanying the prime minister. "The people who handle me are very concerned," he said.

Trudeau, so far as I knew, had never allowed himself to be handled this way in the past. In fact, one of the refreshing things about the prime minister on these trips was his unpredictability and the fact that he told his so-called handlers to go to blazes when it came to image-making.

I would hate to think that he has finally fallen under the spell of some of these ninnyes who foolishly think that the public's perception can be altered favorably by photo restrictions. And before it's too late, I would hope that Trudeau would find himself a suitable bannister, an enticing disco, or an irresistible pirouetting point behind some emperor so he can revert to his old self.

Worst thing about bishops is taking them seriously



Queen's Park

By Derek Nelson

From the Queen's Park Bureau of The Herald

Perhaps the most depressing aspect connected with the Ethical Reflections (or Marxist musings) of eight Roman Catholic Bishops who protested the "moral disorder" of our economic system is that they are being taken seriously.

It just goes to show to what level the English language has sunk in its corruption by political mindlessness.

Leaving aside New Democrats, who love the rhetoric of the Ethical Reflections, most politicians have taken the cautious middle road of praising the Bishops' moral concerns while having doubts their eminenences understand how the economy actually works.

That was the route of provincial Treasurer Frank Miller, for example, who thought they over-simplified and missed the connection between inflation and unemployment. It isn't an either-or thing.

But that is being far too kind to the Bishops, who should be raked over the coals not for their specific economic criticisms (such as choosing to ignore inflation), but for what they did and are doing to political dialogue in this country.

ONE EXAMPLE

Lacking the space to go over their Manifesto point-by-point, I thought it representative to take the first "fundamental Gospel principle" they list and see what they are trying to say by it.

I failed. And here's why. The Bishops wrote that "as Christians, we are called to follow Jesus by identifying with the victims of injustice, by analyzing the dominant attitudes and structures that cause human suffering, and by actively supporting the poor and oppressed in their

struggles to transform society."

That paragraph reads like the product of laziness, of authors who, lacking clear thoughts, decided instead to gum together long strips of words without precise meanings but which do leave a reader with a vague feeling of sentimentality.

SILLY PHRASES

"Victims of injustice" and "dominant attitudes and structures that cause human suffering" and "actively supporting the poor and oppressed" and "struggles to transform society" are all meaningless jargon.

There is nothing humane in such phraseology, no connection with individual people and their lives, nothing concrete upon which a reader can hang an argument and say in response yes, no, or maybe.

If, as the Bishops' Manifesto hints elsewhere, the "transformed society" they seek is one without private capital, why don't they say so? If not, why don't they say what they do mean?

What are these "structures that cause human suffering"? Investor-owned corporations? Government-

owned business? Our freely-elected governments?

And who are the "poor and oppressed" and "victims of injustice"? Are we using the silly Statistics Canada definition of "poverty line," or historical comparisons, or what? Oppressed by what? And by whom?

REAL POINT

When people use such abstractions they are projecting an emotion - who, after all, doesn't feel for someone truly "poor and oppressed?" - but are being careful to avoid a specific that would allow a reader to call up a mental image of what they are actually talking about.

Now that could be for one of two reasons. Either they don't know what they are really saying and are simply giving an appearance of solidity to pure wind - or else they are trying to hide their real meaning.

In either case they do political dialogue a massive disservice.

Attacking or defending what the Bishops say misses the point. First we have to know what it is they are really advocating.

Letter to the editor

Seatbelt laws hurt freedom of choice

To the editor:

Yesterday, my freedom of choice was invaded by local Halton police charging me and my passenger for failing to wear seatbelts.

I fail to see how my failing to wear seatbelts has anything to do with

anyone but myself and my personal choice. I am not endangering anyone's life or property.

What I have done is blatantly refused our dictator's (government's) direct orders. We have the choice to drive - let us have the choice to wear or not to wear

seatbelts. I feel that I am a safer driver without the restriction of a seatbelt.

Obviously local administration has ordered police to crack down on this criminal element - what's next? Belts to keep our pants up!

Mario Shadbolt, Acton

YOUR LETTERS ARE WELCOME



THIRTY YEARS AGO—Because of a delay in meter reading at the end of the year, town council will send the minimum bill to all water users in January. A man will be hired in June to read meters and in future all meters will be read by Dec. 1 and June 1 and bills sent a month later. Town council granted substantial pay raises to town employees effective Feb. 1. The raises will increase the municipal payroll by \$4,000 yearly. New pay for salaried employees is: town clerk \$3,300 (\$2,800); assessor \$3,000 (\$2,470); foreman \$3,800 (\$3,030); assistant to clerk \$1,800 (\$1,500); caretaker \$284 (\$720).

TWENTY YEARS AGO—Herald staffer Dave Hastings, of 24 John St. E. is the new president of the Georgetown Brass and Reed Band. He was elected to the office Jan. 7 when the band held its annual business meeting at the home of bandsman Tom Eason. He succeeds Bruce McKerr of Milton as president. Tuesday remains as practice night at the Chapel Street School and efforts are being made by members to encourage local former bandmen to rejoin the organization.

TEN YEARS AGO—It will cost Georgetown close to \$50,000 this year to establish a new landfill site for municipal waste. The present site, in use for some years, is almost full, and the town has a lease agreement with the owner of industrial land nearby. The site, according to Reeve Ric Morrow, will serve the town for at least 15 years. The land will need the drainage, a seepage pump and other improvements for its use. Estimated cost of preparing the site is \$45 to \$50,000.

ONE YEAR AGO—Lingering concerns about possible traffic accidents involving snowplows prompted town council Monday night not to reverse recent controversial changes in its snow clearing policies. The policies were changed last week to save the town's public works department money in the face of declining subsidies from the provincial ministry of transportation and communications. Under the new policies which remain intact, cul de sacs and dead-end streets may not receive the snow clearance service to which residents living on them have become accustomed in previous years.

POET'S CORNER

Empty Shell

Only the empty shell of what I was or might have been I need your quiet fountain of youth.

I hesitate to pollute your space with experiences of unfortunate circumstances but I love you.

Selfishness is not a credit in our ledger of experience but it's got me this far now I need your thoughtful reply.

—By MARLOWE C. DICKSON RR2 Beeton

On the Bridge

In stillness, On the bridge, I watched the snow swirl carelessly in the wind.

I noticed Chocolate water, Turned brown by the storm. I remembered, too Like a photograph, The childhood days Of tadpoles and alleys.

Abruptly - "Sur Le Pont" A juvenile jangle, Entered my mind.

Just then, The dancing river Collected her swirling skirts, As my frivolous memories Cascaded from recollection, To clamour distastefully Around the bend.

Forgotten again. —By SHARON McBRIDE AHS Student

The Day You Left

These feelings deep within myself, I try to hide from you. Forsaking all this love I have, and living with it too. I wish you'd reach within your heart, and see how much I care, and realize what you did wasn't really all that fair. The day you left, I sat and cried, and wondered what to do, But all I saw were empty visions of living without you.

—By DIANE CREWE-READ, AHS student

DREAM FOR A DAY APPLICATION FORM

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Address _____
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Special need _____

Applications can be dropped off at The Herald, IGA, Miracle Mart or A and P, or mailed to Mrs. B. Iddi, RR1 Terra Colla, Ont., L0P 1N0.