

# Now see here McGeer, here's what to do

Attorney-General Garde Gardom, one of the new Social Credit directors of the Insurance Corp. of B.C., has invited the public's views on the long-term future of government auto insurance.

Here, in an open letter to Pat McGeer, the minister responsible for ICBC, are the thoughts of Jes Odam, a Sun reporter who has been writing about ICBC and Autoplan since they began.

Dear Pat,

The first thing you have to do is forget any ideas of throwing out the baby with the dirty bathwater, whatever ideological notions you or your Sacred colleagues in and out of cabinet might have.

The second is to forget this ridiculous nonsense about getting politics out of ICBC once things have been straightened around to your satisfaction.

What you do have to do is start making those political decisions for the benefit of the public, not for the intended benefit of politicians.

Yes, I know the NDP got the thing off on the wrong foot by insisting (for selfish reasons) on premiums which were too low.

Those backbenchers who went



PAT McGEER  
(as if you didn't know)

By  
Jes Odam

to a caucus meeting in 1973 and insisted on cutting the already-low rates put forward by the professionals have had their come-uppance. So has the cabinet that bowed to their pressure and to pressure from other self-interest groups.

But the cabinet of which you are a member has tried to jump premiums too much too soon, again for political reasons. It didn't take very long to prove my point that this type of thinking leads to nothing but trouble.

What you and Garde and Bill and Evan and all the rest have to do is to acknowledge to yourselves, if not to the public, that a well-run government auto insurance plan is both cheaper and better than a privately-owned monopoly, or a competitive situation with either all free-enterprise companies, or a mixture of both private and public.

Once you overcome this hurdle, the rest is relatively easy motoring. The issue of subsidization, for example, becomes one more of mechanics than of principle; the setting of premiums each year becomes a matter of what is most just, not of what is most expedient.

The biggest benefit is that ICBC, through Autoplan, can get down to its real job, which is protection of the public. That protection is not only paying some compensation for the individual's costs of death, injury and dented fenders, but going as far as reasonably possible in preventing those accidents happening in the first place.

This, as well as cheapness and efficiency in operation, is where a government-run,



ICBC STAFF AT WORK . . . does McGeer want the elephant to operate?

universal, province-wide scheme is the only one that can do the job.

So far in its short life, ICBC has made only a couple of token stabs at this part of its work because it has been forced to lurch from crisis to crisis. It has given a financial reward to new drivers who have gone through an approved course, and paid for some anti-drinking advertising at Christmas.

What its management needs to be told — and it does have a management that does its best to follow the orders given by politicians — is that the premium collecting and claim-paying part of its business is a matter of routine.

Once having set up the routine, the emphasis should be on cutting the numbers of accidents and the cost, in both human and monetary aspects, of those which do happen.

ICBC should be at the head of a network of government agencies that is involved with those who drive, what they drive and the streets and highways they travel.

For the purposes of a future accident surcharge plan, which it has announced, ICBC

is already gathering the names of those held to be 50 per cent or more to blame for accidents.

The 50 per cent or more should be stressed; at present drivers will often accept an equal split of blame, thinking that it will cost them only half of any deductible amount involved — usually around \$50 — and save them a lot of time and argument.

In future, being held half or more than half to blame for an accident will mean higher premiums. So it will cost a lot more than \$50 to agree with the adjuster who says "Well, it was half your fault wasn't it." To be fair, ICBC should be pointing this out.

It also should be gathering a lot more information than personal blame, and be doing a lot more with it.

It should be pin-pointing where accidents happen, and then getting together with the highways department and municipalities to see what can be done in the way of eliminating hazards, giving effective warnings, and so on.

The old idea of a graveyard cross at the site of every fatal accident still has merit;

the anti-accident campaign that has been working successfully in Prince George should be extended throughout the province. (In that city there is a great degree of community involvement.)

Police detachments should be given as much information as possible on where enforcement needs to be stepped up and what kind of enforcement needs to be emphasized.

The motor-vehicle branch is already closely linked with ICBC. Those links should be used to get more of those with an irresponsible attitude towards traffic laws off the road for shorter or longer periods of time through withdrawal of their licences. This would be much better than high premium payments.

ICBC should be studying also the modifications which can be made to vehicles to reduce personal injuries when an accident does happen, and to make them cheaper to fix when they are damaged.

Through Consumer Affairs or some other branch, the provincial government should require these modifications on new cars sold in B.C.; through its motor vehicle testing stations it could, in some cases at least, insist on changes to vehicles already on the roads here.

I am not suggesting that B.C. by itself can insist on the perfect vehicle, but there is much that can be done by a government that is determined its citizens receive as many benefits as it can obtain for them.

Once this wide-ranging view is taken, we can all stop talking about automobile insurance and start thinking of protecting people — all people, not just owners and drivers — from the automobile.

I happen to think there is justification right now for using money from existing gasoline and motive-fuel taxes for Autoplan.

All the broadening of ICBC responsibilities might enable others who are presently opposed on philosophical or political grounds to accept the use of tax money.

The justification for this goes back to the spring of 1974, when the federal and provincial governments decided between them to raise the well-head price of oil in Canada by \$2.50 a barrel.

The then NDP government promptly increased the royalties paid on oil produced in this province to capture 80 per cent — or \$2 a barrel — of this increase. It estimated it would raise another \$43 million a year for provincial coffers.

The two other oil-producing provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan, announced they would cushion the resulting increases in prices at the pumps.

Here, the NDP decided that instead of giving resident and visitor alike a break when they filled up, the extra money would be channelled back to the residents only, through cheaper insurance premiums.

Territorial and commercial discounts, which cost ICBC \$38 million in 1975, were born. They were designed to give something of a break to those who live in the north — a desirable social goal — and to those who transport goods, with the idea that anything which brings down distribution costs benefits everybody.

This spreading out of benefits, for social and economic reasons, is something else which can be done by a monopoly government-run auto insurance scheme.

For those who make up their minds only when they can be presented with hard figures, here is another reason for keeping Autoplan and only Autoplan: in 1972, the private auto insurance companies operating in B.C. had total expenses amounting to 30 per cent of premiums, even after eliminating premium taxes.

In 1974, ICBC's total expenses for operating Autoplan were about 22.8 per cent of premiums collected, and this percentage would have been even less if adequate premiums had been charged. The figures are those of consulting actuary Byron Straight.

Yours in hope,  
Jes Odam.

## CBC personnel director and Kafka

By Thomas Howe

Mr. Howe describes himself as "a Squamish writer of sorts," and he seems to have had certain difficulties with the CBC. He fantasizes on these here — with apologies to Franz Kafka's 'The Trial.'

Before the CBC stands a personnel director on guard. To this personnel director there comes a man from the country who begs for a job with the CBC. But the personnel director says that she cannot admit the man at the moment.

The man, on reflection, asks if he will be allowed, then, to enter later. "It is possible," answers the personnel director, "but not at this moment." Since the door leading into the CBC stands open to the public as usual and the personnel director steps to one side, the man bends down to peer through the entrance.

When the personnel director sees that, she laughs and says: "If you are so strongly tempted, try to get in without my permission. But note that I am powerful. And I am

not even from Toronto. From hall to hall directors stand at every door, one more powerful than the other. Even the third of these has an importance that even I cannot bear to consider."

These are difficulties which the man from the country, who brought a brand new degree in communications with him, had not expected to meet.

The CBC, he thinks, should be accessible to every man and at all times, but when he looks more closely at the personnel director in her full-length skirt, glinting opal jewelry, and her cruel reassuring smile, he decides that he had better wait until he gets permission to enter.

The personnel director shows him a chair and lets him sit down at the side of the door. There he sits filling out application forms, fingering the edge of his degree.

He waits for days and years.

He makes many attempts to be allowed in and wears the personnel director with his impatience.

The personnel director often engages him in brief conversation, asking him about his home and about other matters, but the questions are put quite impersonally, as great men put questions, and always con-

clude with the statement that the man cannot be allowed to enter yet.

The man, who has equipped himself with many things for his journey, parts with all he has, however valuable, in the hope of bribing the personnel director.

The personnel director accepts it all, saying, however, as she takes each gift: "I take this only to keep you from feeling that you have left something undone."

During all these long years the man watches the personnel director almost incessantly. He forgets about the other personnel directors, and this one seems to him the only barrier between himself and the CBC.

In the first years he curses his evil fate aloud; later, as he grows old, he only mutters to himself. He grows childish, and since in his prolonged watch he has learned to know even the buttons on the personnel director's dress, he begs the very buttons to help him and persuade the personnel director to change her mind.

Finally his eyes grow dim and he does not know whether the world is really darkening around him or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. But in the darkness he can now perceive a radiance that streams immortally from the door of the CBC.

Now his life is drawing to a close. Before he dies, all that he has experienced during the whole time of his sojourn condenses in his mind into one question, which he has never yet put to the personnel director.

He beckons the personnel director, since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The personnel director has to bend far down to hear him, for the difference in size between them has increased very much to the man's disadvantage.

"What do you want to know now?" asks the personnel director. "You are insatiable."

"I have sought to work for the CBC all these years," answers the man, "why is it that you kept telling me to check in every week and to keep my file updated, if you knew I would never get a job?"

The personnel director perceives that the man is at the end of his strength and that his hearing is failing, so she bellows in his ear:

"We couldn't give you the job we had waiting for you behind this door until you had practical experience at it, since the only place you could get this experience was behind the door. The CBC was your only hope. This door was intended only for you, I am now going to shut it."

## Outgunned CRTC held U.S. gov't at bay

OTTAWA — IF THE MEMBERS of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission are sounding a bit smug these days, it is for good cause. Though badly outnumbered and outgunned, the CRTC held the mighty U.S. government at bay. These brave Canadians did the unthinkable: They publicly humiliated the Yankee traders and sent them packing back to Washington, D.C.

That, at least, is one interpretation of what happened on Tuesday during day-long meetings in Ottawa between the CRTC and middle-ranking Canadian officials and a high-powered U.S. delegation of lawyers, lobbyists, state department officials and representatives of the federal communications commission.

The other view is that the CRTC, with the blessing of its political superiors, indulged in foolhardy insult that could provoke further and unnecessary deterioration in relations between the two countries. No matter which interpretation is subscribed to, it must be conceded that the issue is larger than the specific stakes.

The specific stakes in this case involve television. To be precise, the future of U.S. border television stations, whose revenue-making capacity is threatened by two Canadian initiatives. The first is the CRTC's policy of commercial deletion on U.S. chan-



Marjorie NICHOLS

nels beamed into Canada via cablevision. The second is the bill now before the Commons which would deny Canadian advertisers the right to deduct the cost of advertisements carried on U.S. border stations.

It is not news that the U.S. stations, in particular, and the U.S. government, in general, are displeased at the Canadian initiatives. Stations at Buffalo, N.Y., whose commercials may be deleted, have threatened to jam their signals. The other stations, like KVOS Bellingham whose entire existence is threatened by the legislation to render Canadian ads non-deductible, have launched vigorous lobbies in Ottawa and Washington. Then, last November, the U.S. state department delivered a note to the Canadian embassy in Washington asking for bilateral discussion of the whole contentious issue.

OTTAWA AGREED TO THE REQUEST. Thus the Tuesday meeting between the two delegations in a board room of the Canadian external affairs building. On paper, it was a routine meeting. The two delegations

presented their positions and then initiated preliminary discussions. There were no agreements reached, but the two sides agreed to meet again.

The truth is, however, that it was not a routine meeting. First there was the matter of protocol. The two delegations were outrageously mismatched. The U.S. delegation numbered a deputy assistant secretary of state, the chairman of the FCC, Richard Wiley, a former U.S. senator, a former FCC chairman and several high-powered Washington lawyers. The Canadian delegation numbered civil servants a rung or more below the U.S. delegation in official pecking order. The CRTC was represented, not by its chairman, Harry Boyle, but by Michael Schoemaker, the commission's director of policy planning and analysis.

It is only slight exaggeration to say that this would be the equivalent of sending a backbench Liberal MP to meet with Gerald Ford. It was a snub, all right, on the part of the Canadians, but Canada has the letter of protocol on its side. Several weeks ago the Canadians informed Washington of the composition of its official delegation. Then, only four days before the meeting, Washington informed Ottawa that it was upgrading its own delegation to include, among others, the chairman of the FCC.

IT WAS OBVIOUSLY, A PRESSURE tactic, a not-so-subtle indication of Wash-

ington's view that the television issue is an issue of consequence, not one to be dealt with by middling civil servants. But Ottawa refused to budge.

One of the U.S. lawyers blurted out his displeasure at this high-handed treatment within earshot of reporters. But, for the record, the Americans made no accusations. As for the meeting itself, it was not the most amicable.

Schoemaker, for the Canadians, made emphatically clear that Ottawa was not looking for a compromise. Rather, he suggested that the Americans figure out an alternative, designed to incorporate a guarantee that the \$20 million in advertising revenue now being "lost" to U.S. stations would be returned to Canada. Translation: Ottawa refuses to negotiate.

The troubling thing is not the tough stand taken by the CRTC. It is the suspicion that this is all part of the little vendetta launched by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau in response to retiring U.S. ambassador William Porter's out-loud musings about a deterioration in the state of Canada-U.S. relations.

Trudeau says relations are just grand. Well, they are not, as the television meeting demonstrated. The sure sign of big trouble is not the size of the issue, but the dimensions of the pettiness. The pettiness here is huge.

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Mr. & Mrs. John Lindsay of Francis Road, Richmond, are seen here receiving tickets to Hawaii, from Doug Salter, General Manager of The Independent Retail Lumber Yards (IRLY Birds), the grand prize at the free Irlly Bird Do-It-Yourself Fair '75, held October 23rd to 26th at the Showmart Building on the PNE Grounds. The prize was the choice of a New Horizon holiday for two from Hagen's Travel Services, to Hawaii or Mexico. The Lindsays went to Fair '75 to attend the free do-it-yourself classes. The Fair is Irlly Bird's way of saying, "Thank you," to the general public for its patronage.

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