

*Highway Traffic Accidents*

a much better position now than we were a few years ago to study this factor of highway design.

The problem of the vehicle I think is the one that was attacked most seriously by the United States committee and the dreadful thing that came out of their last hearing in 1959—and I use the word “dreadful” advisedly—was that it could be proven that certain safety devices would cut down serious accidents but neither the car manufacturers—or at least the biggest car manufacturer, namely General Motors—nor the people who were buying cars seemed to be particularly interested in those features. The paramount case is the question of the safety belt. I have a few remarks from an excellent article in *The Reporter* called “Epidemic on the Highways” by Daniel P. Moynihan which makes this point quite well.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the automobile industry's attitude is the problem of seat belts. General Motors has opposed them from the very beginning. When the American Standards Association, an organization of unimpeachable integrity and conservatism, proposed a project to establish national specifications for seat belts as it has for so many other products, a spokesman for the society of automotive engineers informed it that “if the ASA went ahead with its project, the industry might make one of three moves: first, it might resign as a member of the ASA; second, instead of resigning it might reduce its financial support to ASA to cover only its share of the costs of technical standardization work in which it as an industry was really interested; or third, it might refuse to participate in standardization of projects in its area which might be undertaken over its objection.” It is, to say the least, very unusual for an engineering society to object to the establishment of performance standards for equipment, but the G.M.-dominated society of automotive engineers did so publicly.

Since then seat belts have been available as optional equipment on most automobiles, but they can be expensive and difficult to instal. Dealers don't like them and discourage customers from getting them. Garages can instal them, but with considerable expense and trouble, since it is necessary to drill holes in the floor pan and weld special fittings to the frame for each pair of belts. The result is that seat belts are used by fewer than 1 per cent of American drivers: apparently you have to be hipped on the subject before you go to the trouble and expense of having them installed.

That is an example of the inertia of the public that we face in this question of safety. It also pinpoints to me a place where our government has some real control, or some possibilities of real control, in guaranteeing safety features. I do not know the mechanics of it, but I feel the federal government could make some provision so far as automobile imports are concerned which would guarantee that all automobiles coming in would have such safety features as safety belts.

The question, of course, is whether this would be worth while if the resistance or inertia of the people today is as high as some

[Mr. Fisher.]

of us think. This is one of the reasons why I think a committee, or even a royal commission as the hon. member suggests might be useful in publicizing the matter.

In the province of Ontario, since Attorney General Kelso Roberts took over the post there has been co-operation with the provincial minister of transport, Hon. Mr. Yaremko. A great deal of publicity has been given to the driver factor, and there have been promises and exhortations on all sides for police vigilance, tougher penalties in the courts and much stricter licensing in an effort to go to work on this driver factor. Actually, we have not the statistics very clearly as to how these campaigns are going, but there was the example of the United States and the failure of this kind of campaign.

In this connection, the best known effort was tried by Governor Ribicoff of Connecticut. Late in 1955, the year he took office, he announced a crackdown on speeders, including suspension of speeders' licences for thirty days on their first conviction. Speeding suspensions went from 372 in his first year in office to 10,055 in his second year in office. The people of Connecticut backed up their governor's campaign.

But what were the results? After a bad year in 1955 before the program got under way, the number of deaths went down slightly, as it did in the rest of the United States, but it never got down to the level of the year before Governor Ribicoff took office. The death rate declined slightly, but less than in the nation as a whole. Yet the number of accidents and the number of injuries went up despite the crackdown. Most significant of all, the injury rate went up sharply. During Governor Ribicoff's very intensive campaign, the chance of getting seriously injured increased 8 per cent for every mile travelled. This points up much of the futility of these police crackdowns and these attempts to constrict the speed factor.

If you are looking for an explanation as to why the Ribicoff campaign fell down, it just happened to coincide with the years when the horsepower of cars was increasing so much and, of course, more cars were going on the roads. I think the hon. member made the point very well that we have a superb mechanical adventure which gives everyone, I think, who drives a car a sense of power and a feeling of mastery. But I think every one of us is aware that this mastery is a very temporal and temperamental thing.

This question is such a serious one overall that I think the federal government should consider it. But as the Speaker indicated in his interjection, it lies largely