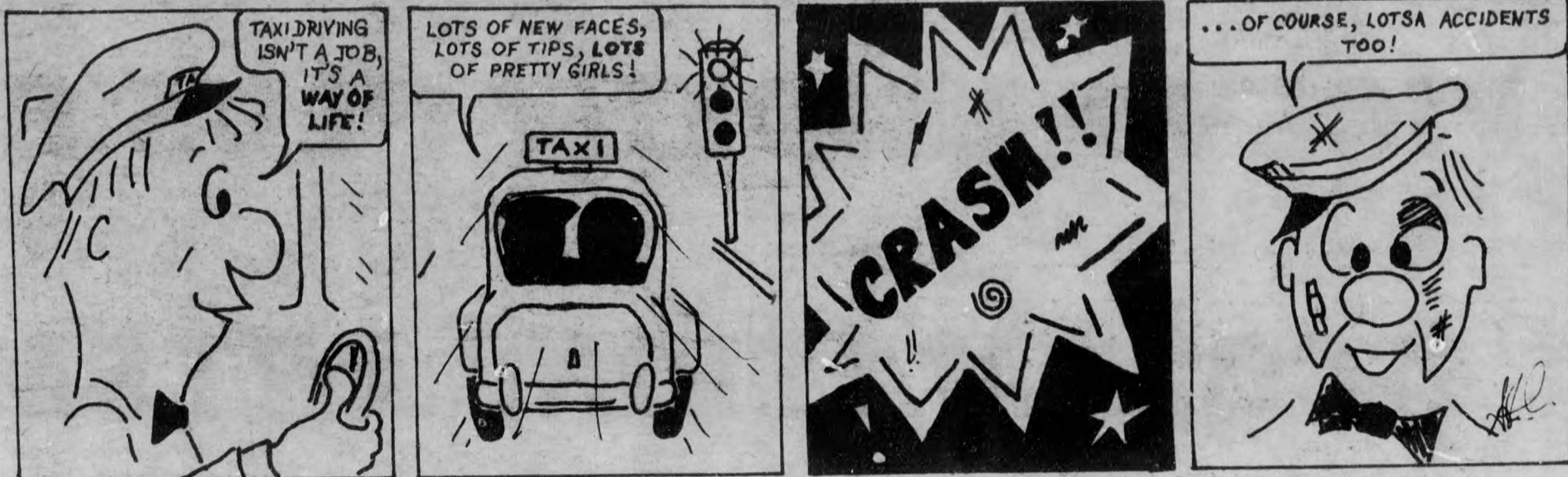


POTPOURRI ... ON A RECENT INTERVIEW BY OUR DIANNE ...



# THE F' TON CAB BUSINESS

could you work 75 hours a week?

Is the taxi business in Fredericton a racket where the owner cleans up at the expense of his drivers and both at the expense of the public?

A few hundred stops later, still hadn't given a definite answer but an insight into the mysterious world of the cab driver was gained.

Pushing a hack isn't one of the world's simplest jobs, nor is it the highest paying. Daily dealing with the public makes neatness, cleanliness, efficiency and politeness mandatory. Much skill and awareness is required, when every driver on the road instinctively hates the

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taxi driver on sight. The public leans on him for top service and the boss leans on him for profit. The life of the boss isn't easier, but he gets most of the cream. He has usually started in a cab and has pushed to the top. He knows the ropes.

Both drivers and owners find that taxi driving is a way of life and not just a job. In general, the cab driver works eleven hours daily, six days a week. Some men, however, work 15-16 hours one day and only six hours the next. These long hours, the worst aspect of the job, do not allow the married man to spend much time or to eat regularly with his family.

The men are not attracted to the job for the money. One driver summarized - "It takes every cent you earn to make a living - every cent and more." Paid \$1.00 per hour, which at present the N.B. Minimum Wage Law, the average driver grosses \$75 weekly. Therefore, for working approximately 3400 hours, the driver's annual income amounts to \$4,000.

One Fredericton taxi company owner said that considering the average wages in the Maritimes the driver's wages are "Okay" for a single man, but extremely difficult for the family man.

The very poor tipping in Fredericton is one of the taxi drivers' major beefs - a good tipping day might produce \$1. When asked if the men from the legislature were the best tippers replied - "Hell no. You are lucky to get fifty cents from Robichaud. Charlie, what's his name ... Van Horne. There, is a big tipper."

A few drivers believe that because of their low wages chiseling is part of the business. There is always an attractive opportunity to be dishonest. The driver can beat the company with street pick-ups or he can bootleg booze, in the big cities some "cabbies" push dope, but not here. Most company owners who have driven taxis and existed on the drivers' wages for years do not mind a little chiseling, but agree that it should be weeded out. Excessive drinking by drivers is not tolerated mainly because of the possibility of suit by customers.

Some taxi company owners believe that it will take them a long time to get rich but the figures indicate that the owners (according to the repeated quote from drivers) "are clearing a hell of a profit". The driver takes in approximately \$6.00 in fares every hour and adds 200-250 miles to the cab's mileage each day. Annual repair services and insurance each amount to \$1100. N.B. Tel is paid approximately \$375.00 monthly for the dispatcher's equipment and each taxi's light radio unit.

One co-owner of a taxi

company in its first year of operation (reported to be the toughest year) cleared about \$18,000. In contrast his drivers, whose quality of service creates or repels business, each averaged \$4000.

An attempt to narrow this gap has been made by individual taxi drivers who have endeavoured in the past to unionize all of Fredericton's cab drivers but were unsuccessful. The reason for the failure is that "most drivers are terrified of losing their jobs if owners found out that they were involved in unionizing and some others aren't interested because they have other jobs and incomes".

Those men favouring union said that the organization of a union, that is, mainly obtaining signatures of 50% of all Fredericton's licensed taxi drivers, must be done by someone outside the taxi driving business because the ordinary driver lacks the free time. The benefits of a union are said to be shorter hours, higher wages, better service of the cars and more efficient service for the passengers. It is probable that fares which at present are considerably lower than most cities would increase if the drivers unionized. However, one company owner's reaction to the possibility of a union was, "I have been in the taxi business for over twenty years and all those guys do is talk".

It seems strange, then, that there are so many men who continue to drive taxis despite the long hours and low wages. Part of the explanation for this is that the drivers enjoy "meeting" and being around all types of people. The drivers under the age of forty seem to

prefer hauling college kids and aren't bothered by the city's hippies. All drivers agree that they get the hardest time from drunks.

When asked if he tries to make dates with his female passengers, one driver answered, "There is no harm in trying. But I can't stand those bitchy types."

One taxi company owner said that he could sell his business and still survive on his secondary business interests but neither he nor his wife would be happy.

"Driving taxis is just like drugs. You can get hooked on it. You will always come back to it. It is a job that gets into your system."



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