

interview:

with Michael Magee

By William Burrill
from the Ontario
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Out of his familiar Fred C. Dobbs makeup, actor Michael Magee eases his formidable bulk into a tiny chair, requesting another to house the cumbersome cast encasing a badly shattered ankle, a victim of an icy Toronto sidewalk. His 'Fred C. Dobbs' character is well known, an elderly horse racing raconteur who doubles as the Liberal Party's self-appointed scourge. Dobbs tempers his harsh political criticism with filthy jokes and long wheezing cackles, pushing the audience to face the sorry state of the nation, easing into a joke when he senses he has pushed too far.

Besides starring in his own TV Ontario television series, 'Magee & Co', 'Fred C. Dobbs' is a regular contributor to CBC's 90 Minutes Live with Peter Gzowski, and CBC Radio's 'Morningside', starring Don Harron. The heavily political humour that is his trademark is also demonstrated on what Magee terms the 'Rubber Chicken Circuit', a series of college and banquet appearances that keep the actor constantly on the crusade.

BURRILL: You stress 'digging for the truth' with your audience, not taking anyone's word at face value.... Why should we take your word as truth then?

MAGEE: You shouldn't ... You shouldn't take what anyone says as truth. What you can do is come close to it by doing your very best to learn what it is that's going on. That's all you can do. You shouldn't take what I say as truth or anybody else. But you should listen to enough people to form a consensus to arrive at your version of the truth. Once, I was in a police office and on the desk there was a sign that read: 'There are your facts and my facts, then there are the facts'. Bacon said 'You start off with a certainty and arrive at a doubt'. It's better to start with a doubt and work towards a certainty... But there are no certainties, especially in horse racing. I don't profess to have the answers. What I want to do is to entertain, and to probe the important things that determine this imperfect place we have.

BURRILL: You see yourself as an entertainer, but much of your show (today) consisted of what was unmistakably a political diatribe... Do you ever feel you're using your captive audience as a subject for a hardsell anti-Trudeau campaign?

MAGEE: I don't use anybody! You can interpret it anyway you want, and they can too.

BURRILL: But those who thought they were coming to see a comedian got a political speech.... And a vicious one at that!

MAGEE: I can't tell what they came to see. Anyone who's read my book or watched me on television knew what to expect.

BURRILL: Do you think the government is concerned about your one man campaign to oust them? Do you think they're really watching you?

MAGEE: No... Why should they?

BURRILL: Then the remarks you've made about the RCMP bugging your phone are strictly designed to get a rise out of the audience.....

MAGEE: I didn't say they bugged my phone. I asked the question 'What if...?' You can sit back and trade security for freedom and say 'I don't care if you open my mail. I don't care if you bug my phone. I haven't done anything wrong.'... I mean, I've heard that argument before. I heard that argument in the States in the fifties. 'Let them bug my phone. I'm not doing anything wrong'. Did you ever see a movie called 'Z'? It's about Greece with the Colonels running it. It's very scary! They would have you in a camp just because of the way you look.

BURRILL: I can believe that....

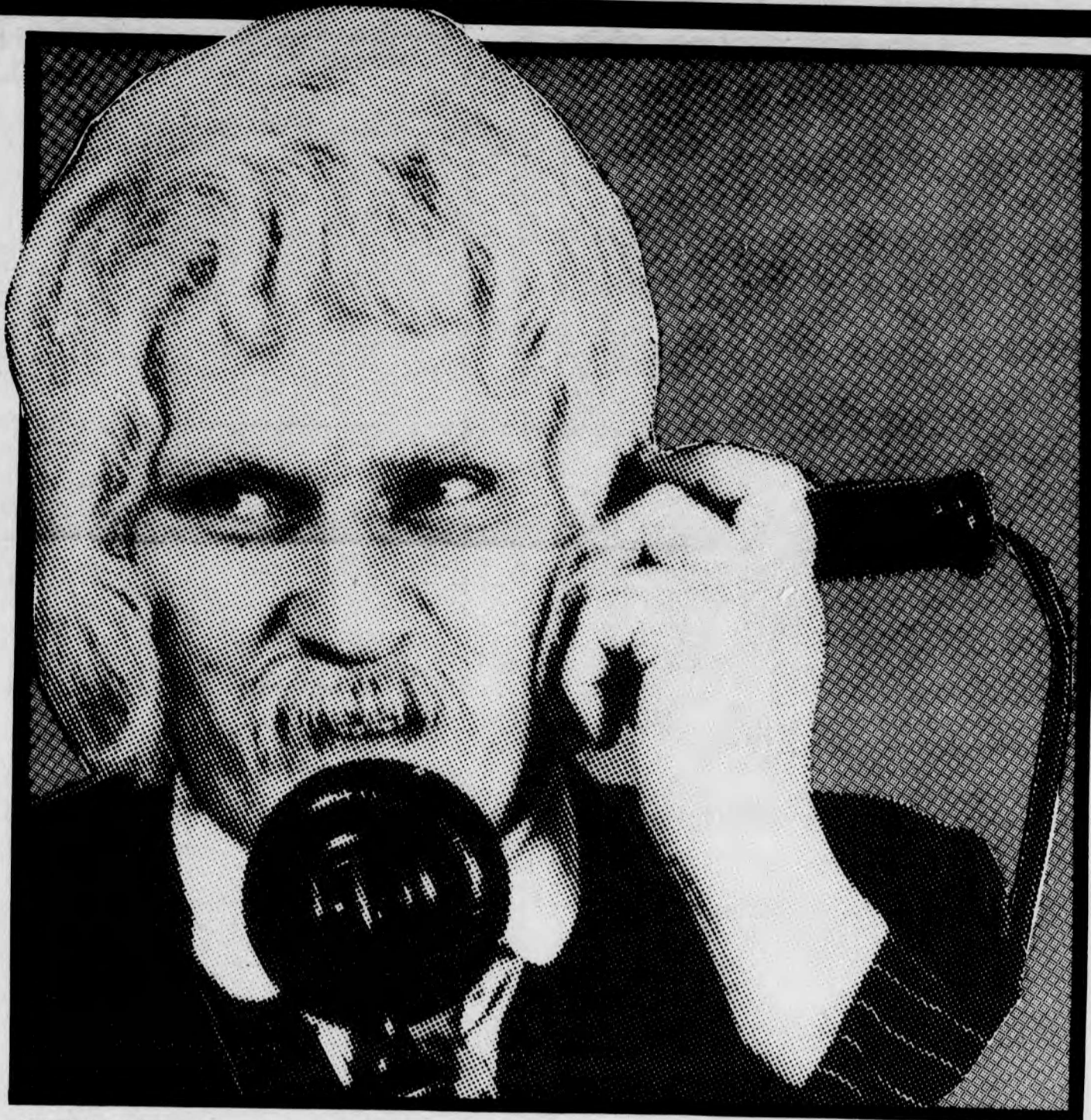
MAGEE: Just because you wanted to think for yourself, that would be a second reason you'd be in a camp, and then someone might say 'Let's get rid of people with blue eyes'... That'd be three.

BURRILL: If you were to have your way politically, in Canada anyway, what would you like to see happen?

MAGEE: I'd like to see much more of the Prime Minister being the Prime Minister. I'd like to see much more of elected representatives who really care about the people they represent. I don't blame the young people for feeling the way that they do. There hasn't been very much good news about politics in the last decade, especially in America. So I'd like to see better dedication, and better application... and I think it's imperative that it happen!

BURRILL: This is obviously Election Year. If Trudeau was to be defeated, would you carry on the same campaign against say, Joe Clark?

MAGEE: If he behaved the same way, absolutely! I think I said enough in my show today for example to indicate the concept of liberal Continentalism at the turn of the century, and the Conservatives hiding behind the Mother Country and the crown was really just a ruse. There are people who are 'agin the government', and I guess they're called anarchists... against any government. But I'm not Diogenes. He walked around with a lantern looking for an honest man.



BURRILL: Yes, and someone stole the lantern.... Do you think Trudeau is an honest man?

MAGEE: He's careful... The press tries to make him out as dishonest.

The press very often gets things wrong about Trudeau and he has to combat that when they try to push him and crowd him. He is very, very good at picking out imperfections and untruths. For example, Gillespie at the Minister's Conference presented that enormous board and easel thing to create jobs. Now to me, it was flim flam, but their wording if you listened correctly couldn't be faulted. He didn't say a million jobs, the Press said that he said a million jobs. Trudeau, on the floor of the House, had to say "We never did say a million". They've now got it all organized some other way, in so many Man Hours. What was it... 100 Million man hours in a 190 Billion dollar project?... The Pipe Line was only ten billion, and they're talking about 190 billion with a chart and an easel. That's what I don't like, and if the Tories were doing it, I'd shit on them.

BURRILL: You said you thought the CBC's interview with Trudeau was a farce. Would you like to interview him yourself?

MAGEE: I know as an interviewer, I'd be able to ask question he'd respect more than the Goddamn silly questions he gets asked... I think you would as well. I'm sure you would!... There's no reason for him to demonstrate the arrogance he has on occasion. I mean, politically, it's no good, and he always allows it to show with journalists...

BURRILL: But the old line about Trudeau is that he acts smarter than the journalists because he is...

MAGEE: Yeah, well I believe there's enormous truth in that. What I mentioned earlier today, and what I think is important, is that so many bright or potentially bright journalists are picked off by these people, bought! You check out who is working for who as who's special assistant. You check through all the Ministries and Departments of the Government. There are a hell of a lot of guys who've come from newspapers. That's what I meant when I said the government doesn't buy your loyalty, they buy your silence!

BURRILL: How do you know so much about newspapermen?

MAGEE: The only newspaper subject I really know a lot about is horse racing. I know where a horse racing reporter is really coming from... But what I'm suggesting is that we struggle a little more to cut through the baloney. Look at all the coverage the government's been getting the last few weeks. Do you think that's an accident?... It's a spring election!

BURRILL: You seem very pessimistic about everything but horse racing. Do you think sports is fixed? Do you think the fix was on in the recent All-Spinks fight?

MAGEE: Well, it could have been fixed or it could have been a bad fight that looked like it was fixed.

BURRILL: You said earlier that you idolized Scotland Yard as a child, and you never would have believed they'd be crooked.

Magee: No, I wouldn't have.

BURRILL: Well, I'm sure a lot of Canadians felt the same way about the mounties.

MAGEE: Yes, and I think a lot of Canadians still think the Mounties are right, that they haven't done wrong because they after 'bad people'. But the Police Force's job is to uphold the law, not to be above it. They should be working for us, not isolating themselves. And I think a lot of funny things have been going on. Remember Jean Marchand's claim of persecution when the CBC and the Mounties were at his front door a couple of years ago?... Or during the time of the FLQ Crisis, one person who must have raised absolute shit was Pelletier, when they came after his daughter. He must have rung up Trudeau and gave him shit! I was talking to a Québec Liberal MP and he told me that there is enormous paranoia concerning the Mounties. Are they up to a coup d'etat? The question was asked on the floor of the House of Commons.

BURRILL: I guess the obvious political counter ploy was the sudden expulsion of the Soviet spies that the Mounties had known about for a year. It's pretty obvious they did that to regain public support.

MAGEE: Of course it was why they did that! There was an article in the November 27 *Sunday Sun* stating that there were five hundred spies operating in Canada. Not one newspaper picked it up that I know of! Note the date... November 27th. I don't know of a paper that carried the story, and certainly none of the television stations picked it up. We did at TV Ontario, but nobody else did. Then, all of a sudden they send those bums home, and the *Star* has it all over the front page. They interviewed Kosenko for Christ's sake. So my suggestion to you is that the *Sunday Sun* is going against the tide. And it's Peter Worthington and Lubor Zink and a bunch of people who see the 'Red Peril' in a different way than the rest of us did, so nobody pays attention to it. But Kosenko did say in the article, 'When I blew the whistle on the Soviet spy ring in '45, I blew the whistle on a military spy ring that was just one of the eight or nine operating. The others are still operating...' So what do you do about that? It's in the *Sun*, but no one cares about it? How is it so? They see it in the *Sunday Sun* and make an editorial decision that it's just shit, but then the *Star* carries the same story four months later!

I think the story said 500 spies in Canada, and not just from Russia. So by expelling 13 Russians, it swings the ethnic vote to the Liberals because it looks like a hard line on communism.

BURRILL: You really don't like the Liberal party, then?

MAGEE: Hey, I'm not an anti-Liberal. I'm an anti-Trudeau Liberal. There's a very big difference. I don't like these manipulators. I don't like political people who sit back working things, using things, timing things. There are a lot of Liberals who don't like Trudeau's actions. I've spoken to many. A lot of them wish Turner was in there. Christ, a lot of Conservatives wish Turner would bolt and become a Tory!

BURRILL: Yeah, but if Turner was in they'd shit on him.

MAGEE: You can't second guess. It's like saying, 'Would Seattle Slew have beaten Secretariat?' (Laughs)... Seattle Slew was the only thing I saw in the year 1977 and was close to perfection.... and he had to go and blow it.