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"Compulsary breath tests would be an intolerable instrusion on liberty" 19/6/1965

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Driver's blood test on way?

New legislation to deal with drunken driving may be brought in this year, the Minister of Transport, Mr Tom Fraser, told the Commons yesterday. It will be based on blood alcohol concentration, and he is busy working out the level to be allowed and the most desirable testing method.

Giving the House far more details about the Government's thinking than he has felt able to do before, the Minister accepted that the present law was ineffective but said the new one would take some time to work out because it would have to be seen to be practicable and fair.

In his quiet way, Mr Fraser gave some pretty startling glimpses of just how inadequate the law now is. Apparently it is possible for a driver to drink as many as 25 whiskies and still feel it worth his while to plead not guilty—presumably because he managed to walk along a white line without actually falling over.

Need for change

"This," said Mr Fraser moderately, "doesn't seem to be good enough." He was accepting the fact that the degree of intoxication, far less dramatic than is needed to convince some courts, can be lethal on the roads. He was not lending his support to the fashionable belief that people are safer drivers after a few drinks. He also showed himself urgently aware of the need for a change in national habits and attitudes. Again revealing his powers of dramatic understatement, Mr Fraser looked forward to the day when it will be no longer "quite the done thing" to be found slumped in a stupor over the wheel of a car.

Having said all this, Mr Fraser felt justified in rejecting Mr Graham Page's "do-it-yourself" Road Safety Bill when its second reading was discussed. The debate produced a horrified protest that any compulsory breath-testing would be an intolerable intrusion on the liberty of the subject.

AA opposed to amending the law

Mr Cecil Orr, secretary of the Automobile Association, commenting on the statement of the Minister of Transport during the second reading of the Road Safety Bill, said the association was opposed to legislation based on conviction for content as the difficulties were almost insuperable.

The association believed that the 1962 Act, which made it an offence for a person to drive when his ability was impaired by drinks or drugs, was adequate to deal with the problem, given proper enforcement.

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