

OBSERVATION POINT

Auto Industry Woes Could Hurt Suburbs

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

"When the auto industry sneezes, the rest of the Detroit area catches pneumonia." It's an old saw, but it's probably more correct than not.

It affects the suburbs as much as any place else. The auto industry is the single largest direct employer in the area served by this newspaper. If you count in the businesses (machine tool, die casting, sub-assembly, etc.) which indirectly are dependent on the auto industry, you get an even stronger picture of dependence.

That's why comments by various economic experts about the long run economic health of the auto industry are causing such a stir in business circles in these parts.

BASICALLY, THE experts see two sets of problems.

The first is that the auto industry will increasingly come under government regulation.

Anti-pollution devices, especially those required by legislation passed by the last session of Congress, will be installed on each car produced, regardless of what the consumer may want. Safety devices, such as inflatable air bags and shock absorbing bumpers, will probably go the same route.

Both kinds of devices are not cheap: some auto company executives with whom I have talked estimate they may run as high as \$1,000 per car in the next few years.

I don't know many families who can afford an extra grand on top of the price they're currently paying for cars. And this means that, all other things equal, people will postpone buying new cars.

The guy who's accustomed to buying a new car and then trading it in every year or so will be likely to buy his car at the higher price and wait for two or three years before buying another.

If this is so, it means that the total number of cars sold in a given year will go down—just because the price has gone up and cars, unlike food, are a consumer item the purchase of which can be deferred.

Lower auto production, according to the experts, is a good possibility for at least the next 10 years or so. And that's bad news for the suburbs in this area.

THE SECOND big problem is linked to the first, although it's less of an economic analysis than a criticism of the

management policies of the auto industry.

The auto makers are being short-sighted, the argument runs. They will have reduced sales over the short run, but in the long run they may become an obsolete industry. Why? Because the industry is producing mainly private automobiles, when the real growth in transportation in the U.S. is going to be either in mass transportation (busses, trains, etc.) or in an entirely new kind of personal vehicle, much smaller than the auto and probably powered by a different kind of engine.

The critics argue that the industry isn't keeping up with these developments and, by concentrating solely on autos, is sowing the seeds of its own destruction.

THE AUTO industry, of course, says this is just plain incorrect.

In this Sunday's New York

Times, Henry Ford II is quoted saying, "If you think mass transportation is going to replace the automobile, I think you're whistling 'Dixie' or taking pot."

William Spreizer, head of transportation research at General Motors, is also quoted: "The system isn't going to be a hell of a lot different than today," even in a quarter century.

All this may be true. But it doesn't seem to relieve some very prominent bankers in this area. You know, the cold-faced guys who seem accustomed to think most of the time about 30 years from now.

"I just don't see the auto industry thinking very aggressively or concretely about what might happen to it in 10, 20, 30 years' time," said one highly-placed Detroit banker, who preferred not to be named.

ALTHOUGH I'M not among

those who think the automobile as a means of transport is about to disappear, I do agree with the banker.

The railroad industry, once one of the strongest in the country, ruined itself by failing to think aggressively about the future and by failing to keep pace with other developments such as the rise of airplanes and long distance trucking. As a result, it's very, very sick, and probably will be bailed out at taxpayer expense.

Mr. Ford and Mr. Spreizer may be right, but I'd be a lot more comfortable about the economic future of this area if the auto companies would show clear signs they are keeping right up to date with their thinking instead of denying there's going to be any problem.

And I suspect most folks who live here and whose well-being depends on the auto industry in one way or another feel the same way.



R.T. Thompson writes

Private Records Should Remain So

Does a member of the board of education of a school district have a right to check privileged school records for information about students and personnel?

John Stymelski, controversial trustee of the Livonia School Board, says "Yes" and School Supt. R.H. Upton has an emphatic "No."

And where the matter will end no one knows.

Trustee Stymelski has twice asked Supt. Upton for the right to peruse the confidential files and twice has met with a flat refusal.

THE MATTER was brought to the attention of the board recently and dropped for lack of a second motion by Stymelski that existing policies and

procedures be amended to provide that all records and files of the Livonia School District be made available to an elected Livonia School District board member or members for the purpose of evaluating existing policies and establishing new policies beneficial to the school district, students and parents.

The motion went on: "that board members or entrusted personnel uphold the present policies of protecting the rights of individuals and that any information made available for the above stated purposes shall be primarily for obtaining statistical data only."

This means that Stymelski believes he has a right to go into the files and learn, for

instance: how many cases of overdoses of drugs in the school district in the past year; how many girls became pregnant; how many incidents of strongarming with injuries; how many rape cases took place in various cases...etc..

He believes he has a right to look at the personnel records and learn how many members of school administration and faculty have had problems such as mental illness, financial difficulties, personal incidents and the like.

WE ARE NOT saying that Stymelski specifically asked for the files on such cases, but the fact remains that the confidential school records do contain all of that kind of information.

We don't think it is any business of Stymelski or any other board member what student, of students, took overdoses of drugs.

We heard of such an incident at one of the Livonia high schools recently. There isn't any question that almost every student in that school knows the name of the one involved, but that still doesn't make it "public information" from the school files.

It is difficult enough for parents when their daughter suddenly breaks the news that she is pregnant. Again, in most of such cases, the matter becomes more or less common knowledge in the school...but again, this is privileged information in the files only for the

parents, the girl and school counselors who are skilled in handling such affairs.

We have never heard of any rape incidents at any of the area high schools but, if true, this is something to be handled by the parents and the school counselors.

We can't believe any parent would like to have the name of his or her child bandied around as a rape victim. The only reason for bringing it up is that it was mentioned during the discussion of the Stymelski request along with strongarm incidents.

THEN, TOO, THERE is a state law which forbids school teachers and employees from disclosing students' communications.

The act 600.2165 reads:

"Sec. 2165. No teacher, guidance officer, school executive or other professional person engaged in character building in the public schools or in any other educational institution, including any clerical worker or such schools and institutions who maintains records of students' behavior or who has such records in his custody, or who receives confidence communications from students or other juveniles, shall be allowed in any proceedings, civil or criminal, in any court of this state, to disclose any information obtained by him from such records or such communications: nor to produce such records or transcript thereof except that any such testimony may be given, with the consent of the person so confiding or to whom such records relate, if such person is 21 years of age or over, or, if such a person is a minor, with the consent of his or her parent or legal guardian. PA 1961, No. 236-2165, effective Jan. 1, 1963."

Taking this statute as a guideline, we believe Stymelski is entirely wrong in requesting such information and that Supt. Upton acted entirely right in his refusal.

Supt. Upton already has indicated that the administration will provide figures to Stymelski, but a chance to look over privileged information? The answer will always be "No." We agree with Upton.

Tim Richard writes

A Big Step In Right Direction

A great civic improvement was made in the City-County Building last week. They elected Bob FitzPatrick chairman of the Wayne County Board of Commissioners.

It was startling, when you

think about it. Here we have a level of government associated (quite correctly) with the horse-and-buggy days electing a man who is clearly progressive.

Here is a body long known for its devotion to personal politics electing a man whose "style" is to solve problems, not to spend his life rewarding pals and punishing foes.

BOB FITZPATRICK, 36, is a big guy who has played football in college and coached in a high school. He runs the Suburban Industrial Medical Clinic in Livonia.

FitzPatrick is a Democrat from Detroit, but we first heard about him nearly two years ago from then-Commissioner Carl Pursell, a Republican from Plymouth, and Carl thought a lot of Bob.

FitzPatrick was the man who put together a meeting of the commissioners that came up with a compromise in the big salary dispute between the high-pay "Zak Pack" hacks and the board's progressives. He was highly impressive when he appeared before a public meeting sponsored by the Detroit Jaycees to talk about it.

HE SEES county government as something more than a courthouse and welfare center. His first announcement as chairman was to appoint two task forces—one on state legislation affecting counties, the other on methods of working with regional agencies.

Now, it can't be said that his predecessor, Albert Zak, was an enemy of the regional agencies. But this FitzPatrick is more tuned in on what can be done by the Transportation Authority, the Council of Gov-

ernments, the Metropolitan Water Board and the Huron-Clinton parks authority.

He sounds eager to tackle the county government reform problem. This newspaper, having endorsed home rule for Wayne County, finds it wonderful to have FitzPatrick in a leadership position.

If the FitzPatrick board comes up with some ideas that need enabling legislation in Lansing, they will have a champion in Carl Pursell, who is now a state senator.

Sense And Nonsense

Redford Township's Supervisor Bill Robbins recently announced the laudible intention of "making Redford Township operate as much like Dearborn as possible," a campaign which he kicked off by putting "Keep Redford Township Clean" signs on the side of the police cars.

To make Redford Township even more like Dearborn, we might suggest:

Increasing the violent

crime rate, since Redford is a considerably quieter town, according to FBI statistics.

Attracting one of the most noxious industries in the country to make Redford's air unbreathable, just like Dearborn's.

But just possibly, in the back of his mind, Redford's new supervisor might have been referring to the fact that ol' Orvie Hubbard, Michigan's answer to Huey Long, has been reelected for 14 consecutive terms, not a bad aspiration for any young politician.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher
The Livonia Observer • The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer • The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer • The Southfield News & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer



Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.

271 S. Main Street, P.O. Box 200, Plymouth, Mich. 48170

Serving the communities of:

Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Franklin, Bingham Farms,
Village of Beverly Hills