



Are Montrealers at risk because of loose by-laws?

For several months now citizens have been plagued periodically by problems arising from faulty or absent legislation. We present three situations which could have been solved or prevented with proper regulations in place. But laws must not only be made; they have to be enforced. A tall order for the present administration...

1. Barring Controversy on Saint Lawrence Boulevard

By ALAIN LABELLE

The problem of bars in this district is really one of legislation. Whether it be from a lack of will or just laxity of enforcement, municipal administrations since the end of the '80s have been unable to control the number of bars (now almost 60) springing up on Saint Lawrence and surrounding streets. Worse still, for any group of citizens roused to complain about an establishment, the process is long enough to discourage even the most dedicated.

The Tantra controversy is a good example. Following the closure of the Pool Pub (which more or less respected the tranquility of the neighbourhood), the discotheque Tantra opened its doors—or more properly, its door. The owners decided, in the course of remodelling, to move the main entrance to the rear of the bar, thus using the old fire exit on Guilbault for the bulk of their traffic. This decision was made without taking into account the fact that Guilbault Street is a residential block. After several days of operation, events began to move quickly: outraged citizens unable to sleep wrote to the Mayor (to no avail, even to this day); Councillor Michel Prescott attempted to intervene without result; a petition calling for a community boycott of the bar was circulated; and a furious, fed-up resident was arrested after an outburst at the weeks of waiting for a solution.

How does one handle a situation which demands immediate action, when the proper channels respond slowly and with little comprehension of the seriousness of the case? From the beginning it was obvious that the promises and good intentions of the bar owners were never real. Pressure mounted on different branches of city services produced no results. Basically everything that could be done legally was done without solving the problem. Why?

First, because various municipal authorities had different versions of the story. Some, like those working in the Mayor's office, felt

that the owners had acted illegally; others supported what they had done. Still others urged compromises that would have pleased no one...in fact, every possible scenario.

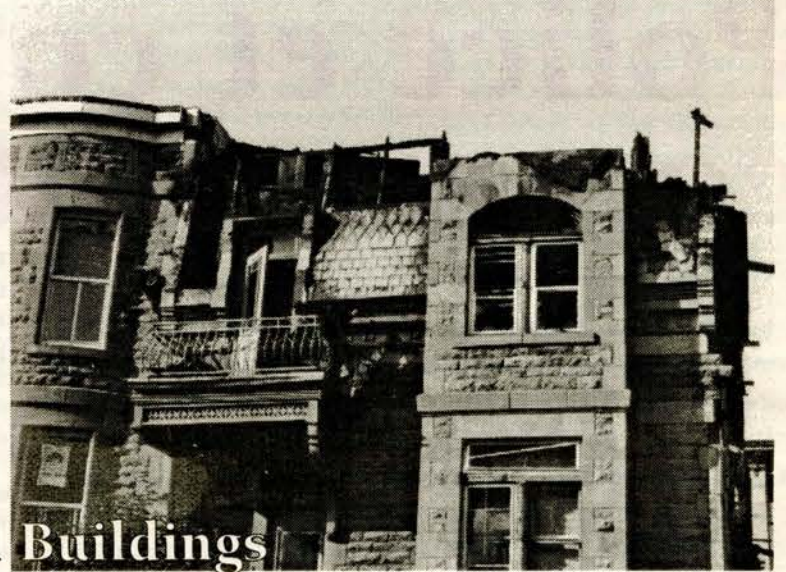
The truth is, they're all technically right. Guilbault IS a residential street; but it is also zoned for commercial use. Legally the Tantra's owners are both within their rights and yet contravening city ordinances by leaving the main entrance on Guilbault. So what can be done? The rules are inexcusably vague. The Tantra, even while closing its ears to the community, has certainly the right to open its door at the rear. The citizens are certainly right to complain about the noise and the inconvenience it causes. It is the contradictory nature of city by-laws which have created this mess: if they were better thought-out and more precise, none of this would have happened. The current administration could and should use this situation to demonstrate its ability to deal rapidly and effectively with a crisis. But will a crisis for 250 people appear urgent to the Executive Committee? If the Director of Services or another member of the Executive Committee lived on Guilbault Street, would things have happened differently—more rapidly, perhaps?

Two different schools

There are two schools of thought on this issue. First, there are those who see Saint Lawrence and its surrounding streets as a commercial sector. For them, the number of bars is a sign of economic vitality in the area; and they maintain that residents knew what they were getting into by moving to such a lively neighbourhood. But there are others, residents and owners of quieter establishments who pre-date the arrival of the bars. They mourn what once-tranquil Saint Lawrence Boulevard has become: a street of bars and discos, subject to marketplace moods and fads. And when will the municipal machine remember its primary responsibility—serving its citizens?♦

2. Abandoned Buildings Grace Period Fire Hazard

The length of time allotted to landlords and property owners, before the City requires them to board up abandoned buildings, can be anywhere between three months and four years. According to Fire Department spokesman Jean Doré (not THAT Jean Doré), the



duration of this grace period depends on the condition of the building itself. "We can't force a landlord to barricade a building in good condition simply because it is empty" Doré said. He admitted, however, that vacant buildings invite itinerants and curious chil-

dren, not to mention arsonists. Any of these could start an accidental fire. Tougher regulations might prevent, or at least reduce in number, fires such as the blaze that destroyed ten apartments at Duluth and Saint Urban.♦ A. H.

3. Of Pesticides, Politics and Perfidy

By ARIEL HARPER

On June 19th, 1995, in City Council, Mayor Bourque told Jean-Dominic Lévesque-René that the City of Montreal uses only organic pesticides. Jean-Dominic is an eleven-year-old boy with Non-Hodgkins' lymphoma, a form of cancer linked to pesticide poisoning, who has won a YTV Youth Achievement Award for his crusade against cosmetic pesticide use. A week later, Councillor Michael Applebaum videotaped a City worker spraying Round-Up in MacDonald Park hours before children would be playing in it. Round-Up's active ingredient, glyphosate, causes urinary tract problems, nausea and vomiting and has been linked to testicular cancer. This information is readily available through Citizens for Alternatives to Pesticides (CAP), the Pesticide Action Group (PAG), the New York Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NYCAP), etc. And Pierre Bourque is a botanist, a landscape architect, a professional. It is inconceivable that he could be unaware of the toxic effects of the chemicals he uses: Round-Up, Killex, Ambush, 2-4-D (a pesticide Bourque has denied publicly to be in municipal use, still, however, listed in the Parks Services' inventory). Why lie to a child?

And why lie to the rest of us? On July 17th, 1995, also in City Council, Mayor Bourque insisted the City "almost never uses pesticides any more." He was answering a question put forth by Beatrice Malmström of Rosemont,

a former public health nurse who worked in epidemiology at McGill. She wanted to know when Montreal will have pesticide by-laws as strong as those of Hudson, which has banned cosmetic pesticide use altogether. (Under Quebec's present Pesticide Code regulations concerning pesticide use are decided by individual municipalities.) Currently in Montreal no formal by-law exists; but the MacDonald Park incident raises questions concerning the need for clear regulations. ⇨

⇨ Malmström's question was not the only one on pesticides: Sam Teitelbaum of Hampstead asked whether Bourque had a list of the inert ingredients in Round-Up. "Inert" ingredients are enhancers for the active ingredients in pesticides. Active ingredients are known and must be labeled, under Canadian law; inerts are trade secrets protected by patents. These have been found to be considerably more toxic than the active ingredients, but their composition and their effects are a mystery. They help kill. Mayor Bourque then suggested that legislation regarding inerts should be a provincial matter and that concerned citizens should work towards that end.

They do. Dr. Jonathan Singerman recently presented the Town Council of Hampstead with an open letter expressing his concerns regarding pesticide spraying: "These agents are absorbed through the skin, lungs, and gastrointestinal tract. Once sprayed [they] persist for over eight weeks. One third of the quantities sprayed

is...spread in the air. Thus if one's neighbour sprays, one does not have a choice to be exposed or not. It is insufficient to post warnings, or limit the time of spraying...The harmful product persists in the environment and is spread in the air for weeks."

What can we do? Work for change. Ask questions. Question answers. Lobby. Dr. Merryl Hammond, a member of CAP, has published a book on *Pesticide Bylaws: why we need them; how to get them* (Consultancy for Alternative Education, Montreal, 1995). Dr. Hammond notes that pesticide regulations in Canada are under the jurisdiction of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency of Health Canada. Dr. Sol Gunner, who heads it, has a doctorate in chemistry. He is not a medical professional, nor (as of last spring) are any of his staff. They are chemists and toxicologists. Despite substantial research findings which link pesticide use to cancer, Dr. Elizabeth Kægi, Director of the Canadian Cancer Society, has refused consistently to champion any proposed moratorium on pesticide use. She advised Hammond to "...talk to people in the industry. They're really very nice: when I worked at Imperial Chemical Industries they were always very helpful." According to Hammond, pharmaceutical industries, of which pesticides are merely a division, are one of the most powerful lobby groups in the world. How then to persuade professionals to risk precious funding by speaking out?

There are those who do. Dr. June Irwin has been doing it for years. She is a Montreal dermatologist who specialises in treating pesticide poisoning, and she has

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