

Criminal Code

Mr. Cullen: Wintario.

Mr. Deans: Thank you, Wintario. At that time I said that it was the thin edge of the wedge. Incidentally, it was to be used for research, for medical care, and for all those marvellous things which the world was being denied.

Mr. Collette: It was a Tory pork barrel.

Mr. Deans: The hon. member opposite says that it was a Tory pork barrel. Perhaps that is an unfair description of it, but it is not that wrong.

This piece of legislation further encourages people to gamble. It does not encourage them to attend horse racing, to enjoy the sport, or to participate in it in any way. It encourages them to gamble, that is all. Within days of the passage of this legislation we will be asked to approve further legislation to encourage people to gamble even more. If that is the level to which the government has sunk, if that is the level of administration which we have in the country, if that is the sense of priority of the government—and given the serious economic problems of the day, I say, as many have said over the last number of months, that the government has been in office too long—then it has lost touch with reality. It is no longer responding to what affects average families in every community across the land.

There are two million people unemployed today, and industry after industry is closing its doors. Industry is operating at 50 per cent of its capacity. People are looking for homes and cannot find them. People are paying mortgages at 19.75 per cent. People owe more on their homes than their homes are worth.

• (1440)

This legislation is before us at a time when the government is unable to find money to sustain medical care at a level that is acceptable across the country. Its priority seems to be to open up gambling a little wider in order that more people can be trapped and pulled into the net. I find it very difficult to see my way clear to support this legislation in the face of those other matters. I do not want to become emotional about the question and if everything else was accomplished which needs to be accomplished in this country I might consider this legislation even worthy of consideration. However, under the current prevailing conditions I simply cannot agree with it.

I cannot help but feel that we are being conned somewhere along the line. I want to join with the hon. member and say with all sincerity that I find no problem in encouraging people to go and watch horse races or to see football, tennis or whatever sporting or artistic event they may find enjoyable. I believe that people do not have enough opportunities to seek release from the pressures which have been brought upon them as a result of the government's economic and social policies. But it remains unclear to me how the passage of this piece of legislation will give people that enjoyment.

It has often been said that lotteries and betting in general are, in fact, a tax on the poor. That statement is as true today as it was when it was first made. It is the dream of sudden

wealth. I found the example given by the hon. member for North Vancouver-Burnaby about the odds of winning lotteries most enlightening. It is quite clear that lotteries are a tax because the chance of winning any of those lotteries is virtually non-existent. It is true that someone wins, but the odds are almost impossible.

It is equally true that if the necessity to go to the event itself is removed, then all that has been accomplished is the creation of another lottery. Instead of horse racing being a sport, it will have been turned into another lottery where a person can run down to an off track betting office or phone in to put his bet on the line for a win, place or show or perhaps a triacta. In effect, it is another attempt to extract additional money from the public. A substantial amount of revenue that comes from betting goes to the government and God only knows for what it will be used. I certainly do not know and I am sure the minister could not explain it. It goes into the general revenue, in any event.

The benefit which flows to individual farmers who sell, grow or provide any of the necessities for the breeding or maintaining of horses is not enhanced one iota by this piece of legislation, even though those supplies are substantial.

I wish I could see the merit of this legislation. I am always reluctant to oppose ideas. I would like to be positive and in favour of the matter but the merit of it escapes me.

I talked to my colleague who will undoubtedly raise these matters. He represents an area in Beaches which has a race track. He will talk about the problems attendant upon that track and its surrounding area.

As I have said, I am trying to understand it but I cannot see how this bill can be supported. Perhaps the minister would care to enter the debate again. I would be happy to give him that opportunity because I would like to hear once more, without going into the details of horse racing or its merit as a sport, why we want to encourage betting or gambling. What is the merit of that? Frankly, it escapes me and I do not understand it. Unless a subsequent speaker is able to convince me, I frankly do not feel that I could inflict the necessity upon my colleagues even to consider voting for this piece of legislation. I believe that we must draw the line somewhere.

If it is true that certain tracks are in financial difficulty, it may be a reflection of the public's sense of value of horse racing more than anything else. It may be the attitude of the Canadian public toward the general sport of horse racing. If that is so, it cannot be claimed that if the public is not supporting it more people are needed to bet in order for tracks to continue operating. I look forward to hearing the answer because I must say to the minister, who is a very sensitive soul at the best of times, that I am sure that deep down below his green hat he has views about the concerns I have raised.

I ask him to show me how the farmer will benefit from this legislation. If the sport is to become more desirable within society and more appealing to people as a sport or form of entertainment—regardless of betting—then show me how this