

Cruelty to Animals

Mr. Gilbert: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Robinson: I would not mind being asked a question but there are many others who wish to speak on this measure. Perhaps it could be reserved until later.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Robinson) on introducing the bill before us. We have been somewhat negligent with respect to animal cruelty in Canada and it is not until the present parliament that we seem to be making any headway. In the last parliament a special committee was established to deal with animal welfare, but we could not get it off the ground because no Liberals would attend meetings.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. McKenzie: I am certainly pleased that the hon. member should have taken such an interest in animal welfare. He made a good point when he touched upon the importation of exotic species. I have had a considerable interest in the importation of exotic species, as was evident especially in the last parliament. Many problems were raised at that time and I still do not know whether they have been dealt with. As an example I should like to mention what has been happening to air shipments arriving in Canada.

One man is encountering difficulty when making insurance claims for the dead fish he has been receiving. He thinks the fault lies with the Toronto air express base. The situation is disheartening to my constituent since he has to pay freight charges 50 per cent higher than the regular shipping charges. He is experiencing great difficulty settling claims with respect to his fish with Air Canada. He was experiencing heavy losses because fish were arriving dead.

In correspondence with me, officials of the Department of Transport pointed out recently they were setting up a special committee dealing with animal welfare in the course of air transit and that the committee had been established, among other things, to develop more sophisticated facilities on the ground for use by live animals. A move was under way to educate all the personnel involved in the better handling and care of animals. Aircraft environment was to be reviewed and training material was to be produced useful to everyone concerned. Whether these proposals were carried out, I do not know.

● (1750)

Recently the Ontario Humane Society, in co-operation with the Animal Welfare Foundation of Canada, did a survey of the retail trade in exotic animals in Ontario, and the following were the problems encountered in the area of transportation:

Since most pet store owners buy from Canadian wholesalers the transportation part of the survey is inconclusive as far as the questionnaire goes.

They sent out a questionnaire to a number of pet stores.

Method of transportation and transportation time were interprovincial estimates and consequently very few problems were encountered. The most common complaints which arose dealt with the airlines and

[Mr. Robinson.]

express handlers and to lesser degrees the veterinary services at the port of entry. Eleven stores complained of the airlines because:

1. Handlers (airline personnel) did not know how to handle the animals.
2. Animals were not crated properly.
3. Animals did not have proper food or water.
4. In winter animals are left on the runway or in drafts.
5. Airlines are too slow in notifying animal owners that their animals have arrived.
6. Airlines lose animals much like they lose luggage.

We all know how Air Canada loses luggage.

A few shops complained that government veterinarians were not on duty 24 hours a day and if their animals came in late in the day they had to rouse a veterinarian and pay him to inspect the animals. Some charges were laid that the government veterinarians did not know enough about the animals concerned to pronounce them healthy or not and that inspections were carried out in a somewhat cursory manner.

Complaints were also received concerning inadequate housing while in transit. This complaint was somewhat substantiated by an article in the "Pet Dealer".

In a number of American and European cities there are special terminals for properly handling imported animals and pets. This is something that we in Canada must examine. I hope that the bill will be sent to committee where we can question Air Canada officials, and other airline officials, as well as officials of the Department of Transport as to whether animals are properly handled at our terminals across Canada.

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the hon. member for bringing forward this private member's bill and for his continuing sensitivity in terms of the mistreatment of animals in Canada. I also appreciate the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie) who said we should reconstitute the animal welfare committee. Perhaps all members of the House, owing to the pressure of time, have not devoted the kind of attention to this subject that it merits, and I welcome the invitation of the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre to deal with this question on a regular basis in a committee of the House.

The intention of the bill is good, but the hon. member should keep in mind that Bill C-71, which we passed on January 27, provided for a two-year prohibition period. The hon. member's bill appears to depart somewhat from that in that, where there is an order for prohibition after an offence relating to the keeping of an animal, his bill would provide for a period not exceeding two months upon first conviction.

I would take issue with this legislation inasmuch as I prefer the bill that we have passed, which gives a judge discretion to impose more than a two months' denial of possession of any animal. The penalty is greater under the provisions of Bill C-71. I realize the intention behind the hon. member's bill is to provide flexibility in the area of treating animals. I have long believed that the degree of civilization or culture in any country has a lot to do with the way we treat our animals. Canada is not at the top of the list in terms of treating animals humanely. We have a considerable distance to travel in this area, and in those terms the hon. member's bill does seek to continue to move this country forward in a civilized way.