

Criminal Code

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, just a further point of order. This Bill would normally go to a legislative committee but the offer was made by the Hon. Member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) that it go to the Agriculture Committee. If it is the intention of the Opposition to have the Bill dealt with in committee, I would certainly support the suggestion of sending it to the Standing Committee on Agriculture. If there is agreement from the New Democratic Party and the Liberals, perhaps we could make that agreement right here.

Mr. Althouse: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order, our Party would be quite willing to send the matter to the Standing Committee on Agriculture rather than to the legislative committee.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) because of the concern we in the Sudbury Basin had about the closing of Sudbury Downs. The owners of that track have long requested and supported teletheatre betting. In fact, horsemen who operate at the track and the owners of the track negotiated the collective agreement which provided for 50 per cent of the revenues from teletheatre betting to go to them in increased purses. I want to let the Deputy Prime Minister know that if we on this side had received the support of the Liberal Party, we would have liked to see the Bill go through all stages. It is long overdue and it will really help northern Ontario which has the one standard bred track, a B track, in Sudbury which has a very small population. This Bill would put racing entertainment into all corners of northern Ontario.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, in light of that very convincing support, maybe the Hon. Member from Algoma and his Party may want to reconsider. I always find the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) very persuasive, very articulate and very emotional when he has to be. Today he made his point in a very clear and coherent fashion without any emotion. I appreciate his support. I think he has hit the nail right on the head. It is important that this matter be moved very quickly.

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I have been following this conversation with interest.

I take it the Government is now proposing that the order on second reading be changed and that the Bill be referred to the Agriculture Committee. With that I agree. I have no difficulties that debate continue and when debate on second reading is terminated the Bill can go to that committee.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, I rise on second reading debate on Bill C-7, to amend the Criminal Code with regard to parimutuel betting at race tracks. This is one of the items that reinforces the variety of the agriculture critic. This Bill comes under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture because of its role in monitoring race tracks, the way animals are treated, testing for doping and so on. RCMP officers are used at the tracks to provide the legal overview. I understand those members of the RCMP are temporarily paid by the Department of Agriculture so they too become members of the vast Department of Agriculture for the period of time they are thus engaged.

Horse racing in Canada, as we all know, has been a longstanding form of entertainment for people. It is something that we brought from our European and Asian roots as well as from our North American roots. Regardless of our ethnic background, horse racing has been very much a part of our culture. It has continued to be the case in Canada from the days when furlong races occurred between the cross-roads of Ontario and Quebec farms because the survey system was measured in furlongs. Many races are still held on a furlong and a fraction basis. That tradition remains with us.

• (1600)

The racing industry has been used as a means of developing competition, both as to who can develop the best training techniques, who can produce the fastest horses and who can provide that last little technical advice at the jockey level to produce a winner by a nose instead of a loser by half a length.

So it is something that we have grown up with, that we are interested in maintaining. It still attracts the attention of a great many Canadians. It is still one of the largest spectator sports in this country because of its entertainment value. But because it has developed as an industry, as often happens when you are attempting to develop something that is faster and better than somebody else, there is the element of competition that makes it a business. Part of the financing of that business has always been the sale of breeding stock, with the owners and producers of the very fastest horses getting a premium price for the seed stock that they have raised and produced.