

Adjournment Debate

FITNESS AND AMATEUR SPORT—OTTAWA "CITIZEN" INDOOR GAMES—ALLEGED PAYMENTS TO PARTICIPATING ATHLETES

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Mr. Speaker, I am very interested in the fact that the hon. member for Parkdale-High Park (Mr. Flis) raised his question. All of us in this House know the reason for our having the late night show is dissatisfaction on the part of hon. members with the responses they receive from the government or with the actions of the government respecting the issues in question.

● (2210)

I fully understand why the hon. member for Parkdale-High Park would be irate at the fact that the government is not taking any action on this issue. It is on the same basis that I am now raising my question because I was very dissatisfied with the response I received from the Minister of Labour (Mr. Regan), who is responsible for amateur sport in this country.

The background is simply this: there have been reports in the press with respect to payments by the Ottawa *Citizen*, the one newspaper remaining in Ottawa, our national capital, to amateur athletes participating in the Ottawa *Citizen* Indoor Games.

There are two aspects which have caused me some serious concern. One is the whole question of where we are going in terms of amateur sport, and the other is the reports which have been forthcoming, and not denied by the newspaper, about an attempt to suppress the reporting of this particular story by a reporter employed by *The Citizen*. This is a matter of great concern in Canada today. The Kent commission is investigating the monopolistic tendencies of the newspapers in our country. The one-newspaper town is becoming a reality in more and more cities across Canada, and this is a very delicate issue to which we must address ourselves.

We should discuss in Parliament whether there is going to be a proper balance in terms of reporting and whether one-newspaper towns will have that balance where there will be freedom of reporting and disclosure of information, regardless of whether the newspaper involved is what I consider to be a commercial enterprise.

I know the management of the Ottawa *Citizen* has indicated that this event is not a commercial endeavour. There have been reactions to the fact that I raised this matter in the House of Commons and suggested that the Ottawa *Citizen*, according to the editor, lost something like \$80,000. But let us face it, this particular indoor track meet, which is very popular and successful—and I hope it will continue—is a promotion by the Ottawa *Citizen* the same as the promotions one finds in the brewery business or the cigarette business, and the fact that the *Citizen* does not break even and loses money is a price the newspaper pays for this promotion. To suggest that it is not a commercial endeavour is, I think, not as close to the actual facts as one would hope, in view of the response from the editor of the Ottawa *Citizen*.

The Minister of Labour, who is responsible for fitness and amateur sport in Canada, said he will not investigate this matter. I find this to be a curious business. I do not wish him

to be the policeman of amateur sport. That was not my purpose in asking him to look into this matter. But the minister responsible for amateur sport is the person in cabinet designated to disburse a substantial amount of money to amateur athletics across Canada. It seems preposterous for the minister to say he is not going to look into the matter at all, that he is not responsible for this and has no interest in it, when I am sure the taxpayers of Canada would be very interested to know who is in receipt of these funds.

● (2215)

In terms of the minister's properly administering his department, it would seem to me that he would want to know exactly the nature of guidelines set by the organizations which are funded by the department. I suppose that was the point I was making to the Minister of Labour. It is his responsibility as a custodian of taxpayers' money to find out exactly what is happening in terms of the organizations and associations to which he is disbursing funds. That question remains unanswered by the minister.

I was more satisfied with the response of the Minister of State for Multiculturalism (Mr. Fleming), to whom the Kent commission is reporting. He responded in the House that the matter would be brought to the attention of the Kent commission. Subsequently I received a telephone call from his office assuring me that this matter was brought to the attention of the Kent commission, that is, the whole concern of suppressing news stories by the Ottawa *Citizen* or newspapers involved in commercial enterprises. The Minister of State for Multiculturalism has assumed his responsibility to have this matter looked into and to ensure that this aspect is investigated so that there will be a balance in Canada and we will not have a one-newspaper town subjected to coercion, or whatever one wants to call it, by the publisher or the editorial staff, as apparently took place, on the face of it, in this particular instance.

I should like to refer to an article by Julia Turner which appeared in last Saturday's edition of *The Globe and Mail*, in which she pointed out that Tim Harper, a reporter for the Ottawa *Citizen*, made a telephone call to follow up on a tip he received about these payments and was told by the senior editor that the matter was to be dropped. In a meeting on Thursday to explain why the story was dropped the sources said that the newspaper admitted to the payments.

I should like to conclude on this note: the Minister of Labour has a responsibility to find out whether this is an isolated incident or whether it is widespread in terms of the disbursement of funds. I simply ask the parliamentary secretary if he will respond by indicating why the minister is refusing to take any action in this regard.

Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Ottawa *Citizen* Indoor Games are organized and sponsored solely by the Ottawa *Citizen*. They have been held annually for the past four years at the Civic Centre, which is located in my riding of Ottawa Centre. Quite frankly, the games have been a great success. Whether or not they have been a profit-making ven-