

Private Members' Business

sorts of exotic types of livestock—but in this case it just refers to an animal and thievery.

If found guilty of cattle thievery the imprisonment term would be extended up to 15 years. That would send a clear signal. However I would like to suggest that when the matter is referred to the standing committee on agriculture for consideration we actually give thought to a minimum fine as well. A person charged with cattle rustling and found guilty would receive a minimum sentence. It would send out a clear signal to all folks participating in these kinds of activities that we will not tolerate it.

• (1420)

We cannot have an RCMP agent on every square hectare of range land in the country. We cannot have a neighbourhood watch very easily out on the range. We are simply not going to tolerate people who go out of their way to steal other people's property such as livestock or shoot other people's livestock. I think this would send that kind of signal.

I know there are many other points to make, but we will now have an opportunity to pursue the matter in the standing committee on agriculture. Once again I thank my colleagues for their support. I look forward to hearing the comments of my hon. friend in the Reform Party who will speak next.

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today in support of Bill C-211. I thank my hon. friend and colleague from Kamloops. When I was young I had the good fortune of growing up in the member's constituency. We ranched a fair ways in, in country called the Dead Man. We used to like to think it got its name from what happened to rustlers in those days. Unfortunately that is not how it got its name or maybe it is fortunate, but that is another story.

I can speak on the subject from experience. We ranched between 50 and 60 miles in from the Kamloops highway on a back road and we lost cattle through rustling and butchering. There is nothing worse than coming in from a long trip to Kamloops, which in those days was about a three and a half or four hour trip one way, pulling into the yard, coming through the gate and seeing half a carcass lying there. We knew we had been hit.

As the hon. member said in his speech we did not report it because we would have left ourselves wide open for other people to go in there. They would know when we were in and when we were out. We kept it as quiet as possible and tried to find out through our own means who had been in there. We asked neighbours if they happened to be around. Unfortunately our closest neighbour was five or six miles away as the crow flies. We did not get to see our neighbours that much. It was not only on our range; it was happening everywhere.

When we talk about cattle, people have a tendency to think about hamburgers and McDonald's. It is a livelihood. It has been a livelihood in the country for years. It helped make the country. The act of rustling has also cost many ranchers their livelihood. Ranching is not big business like some people tend to think. Sometimes it is make it or break it on 10, 15 or 20 steers, depending on whether or not we have a good winter or we have to work elsewhere to support the ranch the next year to help get us through.

Today it is not uncommon to lose 10, 20 or 25 head at one time. They move in today with cattle trucks; they are in and they are out; they are quick. They are on government range. The ranchers pay for a lease on the range. It is up to ranchers to patrol it as much as possible. In most cases they do have range patrols.

I come back to the problem of when rustlers are caught. In most cases the sentence is a joke. It is a slap on the wrist; maybe a \$300 fine after they have already ripped us off for \$15,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000. What does this tell us? As the hon. member said, if they are not going to be charged for it they will just keep coming back.

At one time we painted the word cow on one of our cows. We went to town and when we came back the cow had been shot. The worst of it was it was not a Hereford, it was not a black Angus, it was our milk cow, a Jersey. Half of it was still lying there. They just took what they thought were the best chunks of meat and left.

It does not seem to matter what a rancher does to try to protect his herd. The laws are not on the books to help him protect it. This bill introduced by the hon. member for Kamloops goes a long way. I have one regret about this. I wish he had been around when we were ranching and could have introduced this. It makes a lot of sense.

We cannot afford to keep on going this way. The cost is phenomenal to ranchers and has to be built into the cost of selling the herds. Today we seem to have more laws on the books for the ranchers when they want to trail the herd out to market than there are for the rustler who comes in to steal the herd. Our priorities have gone backward.

Maybe the oldtimers had it right. At one time it was almost a capital offence to steal cattle or horses. It was people's livelihood and the way we survived.

This bill goes a long way toward toughening up something that has been let slide for many years. I hope every member in the House supports this bill and I cannot wait to see it get into the agriculture committee because that is the fastest way to move it through. Again I thank the hon. member for Kamloops.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly under the special order made earlier today Bill C-211 is withdrawn from the Order Paper and the subject matter of the bill is referred to the standing committee on agriculture.

It being 2.30 p.m. the House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m.

(The House adjourned at 2.26 p.m.)