

Criminal Code

authorities feel that 300 jobs will be saved, this bill adds up to several thousand jobs across Canada.

That is why it is a real pleasure for me to support this bill and I hope it will be passed by the House with the requisite speed, as agreed, so that money spent by Canadians on this type of recreation will be channelled to an industry that creates jobs, that will make it possible for farmers to make a decent living—an industry that formerly saw mostly American horses racing on Canadian tracks—and for Canadians to raise good quality horses and racing fans to see a good race.

Mr. Speaker, every year the summer Grand Prix is held at Blue Bonnet race track. Last week we celebrated the track's 75th anniversary. The statistics for the last few years show that a track like Blue Bonnet has been losing from 500 to 1,000 spectators each year, and I think that by allowing parimutuel betting and helping the industry, it will be possible to save several hundred jobs in the Montreal area alone. Some day, I hope it will be possible to open the Richelieu race track, which is in my riding, because it would provide a magnificent showplace for off-track betting. I can imagine the giant screens and people going to the wickets in the back placing their bets on the tracks in Toronto, Quebec City or Trois-Rivières. The whole point of the exercise, which will be strictly controlled by government authorities, is to generate income for the industry and the Canadian public in general through the taxes paid by people working in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a correction, because earlier it was said that the federal government was getting a very generous slice of the tax levied at the track. Perhaps I should make it clear that out of every dollar generated at the racetrack, 81 cents goes back to the bettors, 7.5 cents goes to the provincial government, the owner of the horse receives 5.7 cents if he wins the purse, the track gets 4.4 cents and the federal government .06 cent. The bill makes it quite clear that the purpose is not to get rid of the federal government's budget deficit but to encourage this part of the private sector, and I feel that this type of privately-owned industry which is very well regulated and is able to operate very smoothly with private funds and government assistance, will benefit from a bill like the one before the House today. It will no longer be necessary to make telephone calls to bookies, since now calls will be made directly to the track. Perhaps I should explain. Telephone calls will be made, but the money will have to be deposited beforehand. People who enjoy betting on races will have to have the money. They cannot get credit to bet on a race. The money will have to be deposited in advance, and the bettor will use a code number to indicate the track and express his preferences.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any reason to worry about people running up debts. At every corner store, bettors can buy tickets for all kinds of lotteries, which, as my colleague so aptly said, offer the worst odds imaginable, namely, one to two or three million, and the proceeds do not go to any of our industries and are really indirect taxes in disguise. In this particular case, I feel that we are supporting a viable

industry that will give thousands of Canadians—here again, I think this has been abundantly demonstrated by my colleague from North Vancouver-Burnaby (Mr. Cook)—an industry that will open new horizons for Canadians and give people who want to have fun their money's worth. I feel, Mr. Speaker, that we must not forget the recreational side of our lives here in Canada. Of course, we can be serious. From my vantage point on this side of the House, I see that since the beginning of this session, we have passed quite a lot of very serious bills, which were still being debated yesterday evening. The energy bill was passed. I feel that if this bill is used to give thousands of racing enthusiasts a chance to get actively involved in this sport, we shall have opened new horizons for these people, and the industry in general will benefit.

• (1500)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Before I recognize the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre (Mr. Wilson), the Chair has been advised that there may be a disposition to complete all stages of this bill before four o'clock this afternoon, at which time we would ordinarily go to the private members' hour. I wanted to indicate to the House what I have indicated privately, that in the event that the debate were to be completed prior to four o'clock, then, upon the understanding of hon. members, regardless of the time, the Chair would call it four o'clock and proceed with private members' hour. That is, as I understand, the wish of hon. members.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I had hoped to have an opportunity for a more lengthy speech on this very important piece of legislation but because of the pressures on the time of the House I shall try to keep my remarks short. I am sure the minister will appreciate my forbearance in that regard.

I am not an expert on the subject of this legislation but I find the pastime of horse racing a most enjoyable entertainment and a good way to meet friends for an afternoon.

I am very conscious of what the economic impact on the industry could be if we do not pass the legislation. As the minister has pointed out, the industry employs in excess of 40,000 people. I believe the proposal to increase the commission rates as well as to broaden the economic base of race tracks, particularly the small ones, will have a favourable effect upon all concerned—the tracks, the horsemen and the breeders. We should consider the legislation as a package, and I propose to examine it in that light.

Many small tracks are losing money today, and for some there is the threat that they may have to go out of business. That would have an important impact upon a number of communities. There are upwards of 100 tracks in Canada, so 100 communities would be affected if they went out of existence. That is what could happen if this legislation did not go through.