

Canadian Professional Football

This is not a positive bill, a bill which does something for Canadian football. It does nothing for Canadian football at all. This is a piece of legislation which says: If you play in a foreign league, you go to jail for two years. Football is an important national sport, but we must remember that it is only played actively as a professional sport west of the island of Montreal. As I say, it is a unifying sport, but is it so important that the government of Canada should be making rules to control it and not rules with respect to every other professional sport?

Is this a subject which should be looked at now, a time when economic exigencies are threatening the country, or should such consideration be deferred to a more apt occasion? Is it really necessary to make sure that the Northmen are thrown out of Canada on the grounds that if they were not, poor old Canada, and national sport in Canada, would disintegrate? I suggest the *raison d'être* of this bill will not stand up to serious examination.

● (2130)

The Toronto market is more than capable of supporting two professional football teams. After all, we have an affluent market of at least four million people and there are already many competing athletic events as well as other cultural activities taking place simultaneously in Toronto. The entry of the Toronto Northmen playing in a foreign league will not mean a thing to the market, any more than if we organized a new soccer team, a new lacrosse team, another hockey team, a professional basketball team, or even more professional tennis stars. This really would not matter because the market is far larger than any which could be satisfied by the Canadian Football League at the present time or in the foreseeable future.

This bill is not really going to do a thing for Canadian unity, but it will deprive the people of the greater Toronto and Ontario area of the right to look at what they want to see when they want to see it, or if they are prepared to pay for the ticket to see it.

When the minister introduced this bill he waxed long about the CPR as the national dream, about the CBC and how the Conservative party was responsible in the original instance for forming that corporation, and he talked about national unity and national identity. He did not mention the penalty of two years in jail when he talked about national unity in relation to these other national things.

What are we talking about here? We are talking about a football team. We are talking about one football team in one city competing in an international league. Perhaps this is just a continental league, but it is a league about which we are talking. What audacity to compare that with activities in Canada such as building a pipeline, a seaway, a railway, a radio network or the unity of this country! As I suggested earlier, that borders on the ridiculous.

This arrangement Mr. Bassett has with the WFL is an arrangement whereby he has the right to operate one team in the World Football League in Canada. He has given the minister the assurance that there will be only one WFL team in Canada. What the minister is suggesting is that the city of Toronto cannot support one football team playing in international competition, and that if that one

[Mr. Blenkarn.]

football team plays in Toronto the gate receipts of the CFL will be so tremendously damaged that the whole CFL will fall apart and the Grey Cup will be used as an ash can. That is what he is saying. Does that not sound ridiculous when compared with the CBC, the CPR, the trans-Canada pipeline, the Seaway and all those things Canadians have accomplished through good times, bad times, depression and war? He says the CFL will fall apart if we have one team located in Toronto competing in an international league. He says the whole country will fall apart and national unity will be destroyed forever.

What about this international league? When people talk about professional baseball in this country they cheer the Montreal Expos because they play big league baseball in the big leagues. Canadians who are interested in big league baseball like to see the Montreal Expos play in other cities throughout the United States. We have a team playing baseball in international competition, so what would be wrong with our having a team playing football in international competition—and I emphasize, only one team in Canada? The minister says this is going to destroy the country; it will destroy Regina, wipe out Winnipeg and visit disaster upon Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver. Such nonsense! Can Canadians not go beyond their borders and win games in New York, Atlanta and other cities in the United States, and perhaps even lose some as well? What is wrong with Canadians going into international competition? The hon. member for High Park-Humber Valley (Mr. Jelinek) spoke earlier about this.

This is the first time the government has said: Thou shalt not enter a league in Canada, competing internationally in any league in another country. That is what this bill is; it is a "Thou shalt not" bill.

Hon. members opposite suggest that we should keep quiet, not speak too often, let this bill come to a vote and pass quickly. They do not want to talk about it because they know in their very heart of hearts that this bill is not right and should not pass.

Mr. Alexander: Show me a Liberal with a heart. I don't know any of them.

Mr. Blenkarn: The part of this bill that bothers me most is Clause 6. If this was a bill designed to encourage Canadians by providing that any professional football team in Canada must have so many Canadians on its roster and no more than so many foreigners on its coaching or playing staff, I would not be quite so upset. This bill provides that any Canadian who plays for a team playing football in any foreign league in Canada as defined—and it refers to Canadian or American football—will be subject to two years in jail. That is the iniquitous part of this bill. If this bill, following its marvellous preamble, went on to show some method by which growing young Canadians would be encouraged to play football and be given more opportunity, that would be pretty good.

If this bill provided that the CFL must have teams in London, Halifax, Quebec City and Charlottetown, that might be a good thing too. But this bill provides nothing of the kind. This bill confirms the fact that the Canadian Football League is entitled to continue to have at least 15 American players on its roster, providing that is not more than 40 per cent of the authorized playing group. It does