

Dog Breeding Bill – 2nd Stage Debate – 26th January 2010

Senator David Norris: I have often heard Senator O'Toole speak in this House. He spoke again with passion today, but I have never heard him speak such absolute, arrant rubbish in my entire life.

Senator Niall Ó Brolcháin: Hear, hear.

Senator David Norris: He talked about the windy uplands and sentimental crap about only the people who live in the countryside, rural people, being able to understand certain issues——

Senator Joe O'Toole: I seek the protection of the Chair.

Senator David Norris: ——and that we in the leafy suburbs cannot understand cruelty. Come off it, O'Toole. We know cruelty when we see it. It is a pity about his pals in the hunts and all the rest of it.

Senator Joe O'Toole: We have seen very few hunts in North Great George's Street recently.

Senator David Norris: If they are so good with their dogs and all the rest of it they should be queuing up to join this initiative.

Acting Chairman (Senator Dan Boyle): Senator Norris should speak through the Chair.

Senator David Norris: What are they afraid of? What is their problem? I do not understand it. I agree with Senator O'Toole that they look after their dogs. They look after their dogs well; therefore, what are they worrying about? They should be subject to every regulation, like everybody else. If the DSPCA is subject to inspection and brought within the terms of this legislation, what is so bloody special about the hunts? The days of the landed aristocracy are gone.

Senator Joe O'Toole: I am glad to hear it.

Senator David Norris: I doubt if Senator O'Toole thought he would ever hear that coming from me and there may be mixed views on whether it is good.

Senator Paudie Coffey: They are not breeding establishments.

Senator David Norris: Since the Senator brought up the issue of hunting and all the rest, I accept that it is a wonderful pageant. My mother adored the hunt. My uncle retired to Rutland, principally because he was surrounded by the Quorn, the Pytchley, the Belvoir and the Cottesmore. I have seen it and listened to talk of the bell-mouthed hounds. I can understand there is an argument in terms of fox hunting, perhaps, that a cull in the natural way is more decent than gassing or shooting them, that it is a tradition and so on and so forth.

Senator Paudie Coffey: That is the point.

Senator David Norris: However, I know of no animal that stands by and takes pleasure in the destruction of another animal. That is a pleasure reserved for human beings. I never understood this. I heard a Member on the Government side attempt to defend the obscenity of coursing, which is indefensible. To see a small, poor frightened animal torn to flitters by the fangs of a dog——

Senator Paudie Coffey: Cats are predators.

Senator David Norris: That is a disgrace. Anybody who can take pleasure in that——

Senator Paudie Coffey: That has nothing to do with the Bill. The dogs are muzzled.

Senator John Paul Phelan: Will the Senator speak to the Bill?

Senator David Norris: I rarely agree with theologians of the Roman Catholic Church. However, I was a great friend of the late Tony Gregory. To his eternal credit, he introduced a Bill on hare coursing which the Government was too gutless to accept. I fed him a quotation from St. Thomas More which read:

Thou shouldst rather be moved with pity to see a silly innocent hare murdered of a dog, the weak of the stronger, the fearful of the fierce, the innocent of the cruel and unmerciful. Therefore, all this exercise of hunting is a thing unworthy to be used of free men.

Senator Paudie Coffey: What has this to do with the Bill?

Acting Chairman: Please allow the speaker to continue.

Senator David Norris: With regard to the Bill, I support the Minister. I can understand there may be some confusion and have asked the Minister to explain why he appeared to give certain undertakings and then changed his mind. It is a prerogative of anybody to change his or her mind. Perhaps it means he or she is acting on superior information.

Senator Paudie Coffey: Perhaps he was influenced.

Senator David Norris: That is a relevant question to be asked. I see no difficulty with the fees for the dog breeding establishments.

This country is known as the puppy farm capital of Europe, of which we should be utterly ashamed. The conditions in which the unfortunate animals are kept are appalling. We also have dog fights taking place all over the country.

I was lobbied hard on the Bill. Given my constituency, I am, as I speak, shedding votes all over the place, but I do not give a damn. I will say what I think and what I believe is the truth. Greyhound establishments claim to be another special interest and are whinging. We all know that greyhounds are badly treated and that very often, when they finish their racing lives, they are disposed of in the most callous and disgusting way. Therefore, I very much welcome the legislation which is reasonable. It does not deal with hunting, another day's work, in which regard we will have something to say.

The Minister stated: "The limit of not fewer than six bitches will exclude the vast majority of cases where people rear dogs as pets." First, what kind of eccentric would want six bitches in a house? Second, when they have more than this, they usually mistreat the dogs and often use them for breeding purposes. I assume the word "dog", rather than "bitch", is being used as a generic term and that it indicates the species, not the particular animal. Some who are unused to the ways of the countryside, as Senator O'Toole claims to be, might find the word "bitch" offensive — I do not know.

I want to ask about one issue. The Bill is vague. The real meat will be in the regulations which is where issues will really be cured. I want to know whether the Minister will implement in the regulations the excellent recommendations of the DSPCA which deal with the provision of accommodation for dogs, the provision of sufficient space for dogs to stand, the location and

construction of kennels and the partition that can be used, the amount of space for dogs to turn around and sleep, the temperature at which they should be kept, noise levels, lighting, ventilation, security, hygiene, bedding, pest control, waste disposal, dog dirt, breeding and so on. An excellent series of recommendations have been made and I strongly hope they will be followed through on by the Minister.

On a final point, a lot of other legislation is needed. For example, we have no legislation dealing with exotic pets. When I raised this matter, I was laughed at. It is very unfair to allow people to keep animals which are completely unsuited to the climate of this country in an unregulated fashion. It is also dangerous, with wild animals such as snakes and spiders escaping. Could we consider legislation in this area also?