

Giugno '87

RIGHTS OF ANIMALS
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Mr BANKS (*United Kingdom*).- ~~Yes, I am here sir~~

I congratulate Mr Michels ~~both~~ on his excellent speech and on the report. Indeed, the speeches that I have heard in the debate have greatly encouraged me. There are some, both individuals and organisations, who do not believe that animals have any rights whatever. I do not agree. I believe that animals do have rights, not least the right not to be tortured and abused by human beings.

To me it seems wholly appropriate that the Council of Europe, which acts as the guardian of human rights, should perform a similar role in respect of animal rights. People who are oblivious to animal suffering, or who even take pleasure in killing animals as part of a so-called sport - such as foxhunting in my country and bullfighting in Spain - are usually the same sort of people who are careless about human rights. For me, human rights and animal rights are on the same political continuum, even if they are separated by some distance.

The report rightly points out the need for the Committee of Ministers to put pressure on the parties to the various European conventions to enforce their provisions properly. Much cynicism is bred by governments who willingly sign agreements, but then do little or nothing to enforce them.

There has been far too much tinkering around with the rules on animal transportation by various European bodies, as a way of trying to head off the enormous public outrage that is felt, especially in countries such as mine, and increasingly in other European countries. There is a public demand for real action, and playing around with the rules in an attempt to quieten public concern is not good enough.

The EU transport directive agreed last June is a good example of how such rules can be too little, too late. I welcome paragraph 6 ~~of~~ of the draft recommendation, which calls for animals to be slaughtered as near as possible to where they are bred. In England we say that it is better to be exported "on the hook" than "on the hoof".

Unlike my good colleague, Sir Andrew Bowden, I am a vegetarian - although it is difficult to be a vegetarian in a place such as Strasbourg, where there is so much emphasis on meat. As a vegetarian in this city, I find that I am still treated as if I had a disability - as if I had only one leg, for example. Vegetarianism is not a disability, it is a matter of personal choice, and I should like to have far more chance to exercise that choice.

If the parliamentarians here had actually visited an abattoir, as many meat-consumers should, perhaps they would not sit down with such relish to enjoy their excellent meat dinners in this city. People see raw meat neatly packaged in the supermarket or on the butcher's slab. What they do not see, when the meat comes so nicely well prepared on the plate, is the stress and suffering that the animal has endured so that people can eat.

In his report Mr Michels says that the directive of June 1995 represented a positive step in terms of the transportation of animals. I do not agree. Frankly, the new rules will make little difference to the transportation problem. The directive's new journey limits are not really limits, but mere requirements for a break for food, water and rest. The transportation can continue 24 hours later. Mr Seiler rightly drew attention to the fact that we need an eight-hour journey limit rather than just a break before the animals are transported on.

In his report, Mr Michels highlights examples of cruelty to animals in the live trade. He talks about horses being transported over thousands of kilometres from the United States, from South America and from Poland. He could have given many other examples, such as the export of fattened calves from Holland to Turkey. The calves go by road to Italy and then by boat to Turkey. That is an enormous journey, which imposes great stress and suffering on the animals. Many live cattle are exported from Germany and the Republic of Ireland to the Middle East and to north Africa where they often undergo ritual slaughter. I do not support that in my own country and I do not support it anywhere else. We have many videos showing the sufferings that animals experience in transportation. If any members are interested, I shall willingly provide them.

My very good friend and colleague, Sir Andrew Bowden, who comes from a party different from my own, mentioned the veal calf trade. There have been many legitimate protests in my country. The animals are taken from their mothers when they are a few weeks old and are then transported to France and Holland. They are put in crates in which they cannot move, they are kept in the dark and they are fed a diet that has no roughage or iron in it to keep the veal white. The next time anyone eats white veal, he should remember that he is eating the product of animal torture.