

Fur and the Mayor

How long will it be before a Government Bill is introduced to ban the rearing of animals for food? The sequence might go like this. We start with the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill, which was introduced into the House of Commons on November 22. The only type of activity currently within its range is mink farming. A person will be guilty of an offence if in England or Wales he keeps animals solely or primarily for slaughter for the value of their fur, or for breeding progeny for such slaughter. The maximum penalty will be a fine of £20,000. The Countryside Minister Mr Elliott Morley MP said in the Commons on November 23 that the Bill is justified on public morality grounds. This overlooks Genesis iii 21: 'Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them'.

Next we will get a Bill banning the keeping of animals solely or primarily for slaughter for the value of their skin. If it offends public morality to keep animals for their fur it must be equally wrong to keep them for their hide. For both the object is that people shall wear the product, whether as fur coats or hats or as leather footwear (I make no mention of ladies' handbags or the carpenter's apron).

A supporter of Mr Morley might say people do not need to wear fur in England or Wales because the climate is not cold enough. That is absurd. It can get very cold in north Wales, and on parts of the east coast. A government would not try this nonsense in any really cold country such as Finland or Russia because the people would not stand for it. There they know that animal fur is and has always been essential outdoor wear. Can morality really vary with temperature?

If it is immoral to rear animals for clothing it is equally immoral to rear them to eat. There are alternatives to roast meat, such as titivated soya beans. I give it ten years before a Government anti-livestock rearing Bill comes along proclaimed as the vegetarians' charter. Meanwhile back to fur. What will the new London Mayor do about the fur Bill when it is law? Presumably he and his entourage will feel inhibited from dressing in sable like their antique opposite numbers in the City of London, though there is no express prohibition of that in the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

I have been glancing through this Act, which received royal assent on November 11. Readers may be surprised to learn that it runs to 425 sections and 34 Schedules, so there will not be space to say much about it here. After the recent fun and games with Livingstone and Archer one's first thought is to look at the functions of the person the Act calls the Mayor of London. As you would expect, it is not easy to decipher these.

The story starts with the Greater London Authority, which will consist of the Mayor and the Assembly of 25 members. Elections are to be held on the first Thursday in May every four years, beginning in 2000. The functions of the Mayor and the Assembly are more or less interchangeable, though some are only exercisable by the two acting jointly. There are three principal purposes, to promote (1) economic development and wealth creation, (2) "social development" (whatever that may be), and (3) the improvement of the environment. Simple administration is not mentioned. The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has power to issue guidelines, so Government control will be maintained. If, as may well happen sometimes, the Mayor and Assembly are of one political persuasion and the Secretary of State is of another, sparks will fly.

The Mayor is required to develop and implement policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport facilities and services. To further this he must prepare and publish a document to be known as his transport strategy. He must also pursue various other strategies, such as a spatial development strategy, a biodiversity action plan, an ambient noise strategy and (of course) a culture strategy. In relation to the last, the Mayor will be assisted by a Culture Strategy Group. Here “culture” includes the arts, tourism, sport, ancient monuments, and treasure and antiquities of a movable nature. It also includes broadcasting, film production and the media generally. Clearly Londoners are in for an interesting time culturally. I could find no provision disturbing the alternative Lord Mayor in his ancient Mansion House.

Mention of that august building reminds me that a leader of our own profession, Lord Bingham of Cornhill C.J., recently told a Mansion House audience that most people find repellent the habits of thought, speech and bearing which characterise professional lawyers.¹ Evidently his Lordship has forgotten a hoary proverb: it’s an ill bird that fouls its own nest.

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¹ *Proceedings of the 37th Annual General Meeting of the Magistrates’ Association, Guildhall, 30 October 1999*, p. 8 (address by Chairman of Council, Mrs Anne Fuller JP).