

Introductory Note by FB

The article below is a further addition to my writings on assisted suicide. Others are included within the Topic 'Assisted suicide'. The Topic can be found on this website at www.francisbennion.com/topic/huntingact2004.htm.

Red Ken and hunting pink

That noted Cockney MFH Mr Jorrocks had a high opinion of his vocation in the field. "Of all situations under the sun, none is more enviable or more 'onorable than that of a master of fox'ounds" he said in Surtees' *Handley Cross*. Mr Jorrocks did not think much of Members of Parliament. "Talk of a MP! vot's an MP compared to an MFH?" To which one can only add vot indeed!

Mr Jorrocks would have used fruity language about the Bill currently being promoted by the MP for Brent East and candidate for London mayor Mr Ken Livingstone. Called the Wild Mammals (Hunting With Dogs) Bill, it had a second reading as a private Member's Bill on 7 April. Suitably enough, there were high jinks in the Commons. This began with a procedural trick played by Mr Andrew Dismore (Labour) to get the Bill on ahead of one higher in the order. When Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative) complained to the Speaker that this was a massive abuse of the process of the House she told him the trick was not new and the supporters of his Bill should have made sure sufficient of them were present at the crucial time. Hansard then recorded-

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.
May I make it clear that I had no idea . . . [*Laughter*]

Mr Livingstone denied that his motive in putting forward this anti-hunting Bill was to gain publicity and win favour for his mayoral bid. I will, he said, always put animal welfare ahead of human pleasure. He went on-

"I believe that animals have the right not to be torn apart on a grand scale . . . 100,000 foxes, deer and hares are torn apart by dogs every year. That is totally unnecessary cruelty and suffering on a scale that is rejected by the vast majority of the British people . . . I am proud today to be able to build on the work of colleagues who introduced earlier Bills on the subject, and once again to give the vast majority of hon. Members the right to ban the unacceptable face of cruelty and to end the appalling abuse of our responsibility to protect the life that shares these islands with us. I have foxes in my garden, and it has been a source of amusement to the media that one of them bit off the head of one of my tortoises. I have no illusions about foxes: they are wild animals and they themselves hunt, but we are not wild animals and we can make a conscious choice about the degree of cruelty and pain that we impose on other human beings and on the wildlife in these islands . . . We have a duty to protect wild animals in exactly the same way that we protect our domestic pets."

The Conservatives might have pointed out that it is the hounds, acting according to their natures, who actually tear foxes apart. Instead they continued to complain about the procedural trick that had been played on them. Then they grouched that Mr Livingstone kept leaving the chamber and coming back like a fox going in and out of cover. The Deputy Speaker upheld this complaint: "It is the convention of the House that when one has made a speech to the House, one should stay and hear at least the response from the other side". Where is he? demanded Mr Douglas Hogg, then answered his own question: "Talking to the press no doubt". Then a mobile phone went off.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Madam Speaker takes an extremely strong line on electronic devices that are not under hon. Members' control in the Chamber.

The Conservatives started to filibuster. Mr Hogg, objecting that angling was also cruel, told a long story about how his wife's inefficiency with the rod added to the sufferings of the fish. For the Liberal Democrats Mr Lembit Opik told an incredulous House that, after listening to the arguments favouring hunting, he had actually changed his mind on the issue. The Minister, Mr Mike O'Brien, said the Government thought the Bill should wait until the inquiry under Lord Burns had established the underlying facts. Glenda Jackson asked why, if hunting was so effective, were numerous foxes living and breeding in her Hampstead garden?

Finally the Bill was talked out when only 74 of its supporters (instead of the necessary 100) turned up to vote for the closure. Mr James Gray (Conservative) said that Labour MPs should remember that small number next time they tried to argue that their party is overwhelmingly opposed to fox hunting.

Mr Jorrocks would have rubbed his hands at that last crack.

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