

Issue Recalls Carrie Nation

By FRED HAMILTON
Press Staff Writer

There's a hidden streak of Puritan in most everyone, but is usually takes a subject like drinking, smoking — or in this case, legalized gaming — to flush it out in the open.

While most people in doubt about the subject have refrained commenting until more information is made available, a few — as expected — have delivered to The Press their letters of condemnation.

And they've come out in the usual vehement manner, basing their statements on hunches or intuition, and leaving themselves no room to maneuver.

Their letters read as if the subject is entirely black or white, good or bad, and that they are irreversibly right.

One of the most dogmatic of these letters was signed by "An Ex-Gambler" who tried to show that the idea being forwarded by the ACTION Committee for Legalized Gaming is very, very bad, because once-upon-a-time there was dog racing in Convention Hall and it was gambling and it was bad, and casino-type gaming is also gambling, so it too must therefore be bad.



HAMILTON

ANGUISHED CRIES

Another part of the ex-gambler's letter read as if he may have drawn from personal experience in saying:

"... the same anguished cries are heard after every racing season from the working people here who have lost their savings and are faced with a bleak winter."

This is the kind of reasoning Carrie Nation used in smashing up bars during pre-Prohibition Days. What's good for Carrie is good for the nation, or so she thought.

Said another way, the vast majority of people in the Atlantic City area pass by the race track and never spend a dime. Some visit occasionally and lose a few dollars, or perhaps even win some.

But because one or two people completely addicted to gambling lose their shirts every year is no reason to outlaw it for the thousands who might enjoy visiting the track several times a season.

The same is true of liquor. Most people can handle their drinks. But a reformed alcoholic is the first to tell you that a drink, no matter how small, is wicked, sinful, and will inevitably lead to alcoholism.

SMOKING, TOO

As for smoking, I will be the first to tell you what a lousy habit it is, and before crushing out my last king-sized cigarette, I was puffing to the tune of two to three packs a day.

This kind of reaction is expected. And it is usually the reactionary who will by innuendo cast guilt through statements like this one from the "ex-gambler":

"The State of New Jersey is presently in the midst of a federal probe investigating crime and gambling throughout the state, while certain people here are trying to promote gambling with all the side effects for Atlantic City."

What side effects? Is the "ex-gambler" trying to hint that a side effect of gambling is crime? Well, if he is, that would certainly be the case throughout the state right now. Illegal gambling is a major source of revenue for organized crime. Every crime study has clearly shown that.

But it is hard to conceive that men like Meyer I. (Mike) Segal, former president of the Ventnor City Council, and hotel owners Gary Malamut and Maxwell (Sonny) Goldberg want to bring crime to Atlantic City.

Nothing could be farther from the truth, but the "ex-gambler" apparently wasn't much interested in that, anyway. Segal, Malamut and Goldberg have said publicly that one of their goals is to take gambling money out of the hands of organized crime and put it in the coffers of the state of New Jersey, and ultimately the City of Atlantic City.

MINISTER SPEAKS OUT

Even more distressing was a letter in Tuesday's Press from the Rev. Tom Horbelt, pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church, Ventnor.

Rev. Horbelt, quoting the "Methodist Discipline," said "... organized and commercial gambling is a menace to business, breeds crime and poverty, and is destructive of the interests of good government."

Then in his own words, Rev. Horbelt added:

"The same can be said of legalized gambling. Gambling is gambling, whether it is legal or illegal . . . and no matter who runs it or participates in it."

The danger of dealing in absolutes such as this is that the relativity of a matter is never considered. For example, smoking is smoking. But marijuana smoking happens to be something quite apart from cigarette smoking, according to the laws and mores of our society.

HOW ABOUT BINGO?

Gambling is indeed gambling. But bingo is certainly far removed from a poker game in the back room. Yet both are forms of gambling.

It is evident, then that absolute value judgments such as the one forwarded by the Rev. Mr. Horbelt have to be defined and made relative in order to be meaningful.

The subject of legalized gaming for Atlantic City will be hotly debated and discussed in the coming months. It will benefit the entire community to listen closely to the debate and attempt to weigh the arguments carefully.

It is hoped, however that arguments like those mentioned above will be withheld for the sake of all concerned.

Sunday Press