

Criminal Code

our wildlife when animals become pests in this country.

Again, there are many sportsmen in Canada who have proven that they are experts in the use and control of firearms, for example, in trap and skeet shooting on ranges, and in all forms of hunting, whether it be bird, big game or varmints. I submit that these men are foremost in good citizenship and conservation projects and, when need be, in the defence of their country.

I would hate to see any law passed, Mr. Speaker, which would deprive the farmer or the sportsman of his right to possess and to use legally a legal length rifle or a shotgun. I also think there are others who are entitled to use firearms, such as a banker in a small village who might need a pistol or revolver in his branch for protection. I am sure there are many cases where it would make common sense and would be advisable to issue permits for firearms, both short and long.

The present law relating to offensive weapons can cause serious problems to innocent individuals as the law now stands. I recall a case I handled some years ago where a Hudson Bay factor travelling by train to Toronto happened to open his suitcase in the train to show something inside it to a person with whom he had become acquainted. In doing so a pistol came into the view of some of the passengers on the train. A lady on the train became quite excited and called in the railway police who arrested this factor.

The fact is that this person had been in the north for so long that apparently he could not quite make himself understood in his nervous condition. He was arrested and charges were laid under section 82 of the Code and I believe also another section. He was pretty well hounded by a combination of railway and other police, taken to court and put to a very expensive defence. His only mistake was that he failed to realize when coming from the far north to the south of the country that there would be a different application of the law and probably in a moment of forgetfulness he had put the pistol which he needed for his own protection in the north into his suitcase, though not having a permit to carry it. That is the kind of trouble that he got into. So I would submit there are one or two aspects of the law as it now stands which could be criticized, altered and improved.

I recall that during the last war a problem arose over thefts of firearms from manufacturers such as John Inglis and other small

arms plants. A few of the people who worked in these plants would steal parts of firearms which would be assembled outside the plant. I recall that the police had quite a problem with this sort of thing for some time after the war. I know of one man who was slain by such a weapon.

● (5:50 p.m.)

There is no question in my mind that the indiscriminate distribution of firearms, including defensive weapons, is a bad thing for this country. I recall that after the last war my brother brought back from Germany a Schmeiser, which I believe is sort of a German submachine gun. It is a rapid-fire weapon. Shortly after the government passed a regulation requiring people holding such weapons to divulge that fact. The R.C.M.P. attended, and with considerable regret we saw this war trophy leave our home. But we recognized that that weapon could be stolen and that it was in the best interests that the government's regulation be carried out.

The regulation of firearms in Canada is not in the hands of the federal government. Gun licences and permits are issued by provincial authorities and certain other aspects are controlled by them. In looking into this situation, therefore, it would be necessary to consider the rights and interests of the ten provinces.

Witnesses as to the modern state of affairs in government circles and in police, military and sporting circles, with respect to the question of firearms and defensive weapons, should welcome the call to arms discussion which I hope the hon. member for Laurier has initiated.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few remarks on this motion. A consensus has arisen about this matter to the effect that in essence some consideration should be given to revising the rules concerning firearms but that the hon. member who sponsored the motion has gone much too far.

This question has been discussed on a large scale in the United States because of the unfortunate assassinations there. There has been resistance to changing the rules governing firearms for the very reasons which have been given by hon. members, namely, that the use of firearms in itself is not illegal and that we should not assume that licensing weapons will eliminate their illegal use. Those, I think, are proper assumptions to make. We know very well that anyone bent on assassination, illegal activity or violence