

Government Orders

criminal use of firearms, the Liberals invariably say: "Do both, even if doing one hurts the other". They are following the advice of that great American philosopher Yogi Berra, who said: "If you come to a fork in the road, take it".

So the justice minister has brought forward this Bill C-68—C stands for compromise—20 per cent of it, under pressure from Reformers, contains partial measures for tightening up the criminal use of firearms, but 80 per cent of it focuses on increased regulation of the non-criminal use of firearms for hunting, recreational and collection purposes, including the establishment of a universal, national firearms registry reputed to cost anywhere from \$85 million to \$500 million. One reason for this wild variance in the cost estimates is because the Liberal government underestimates the number of firearms in Canada.

• (1555)

In 1976 a Department of Justice document estimated the number of firearms in Canada at 10 million, with about a quarter of a million guns being added to the stock each year. Using this estimate there should now be over 15 million firearms in Canada, but the justice minister says there are now only 6 million or 7 million guns in Canada.

Bill C-68 cannot be effectively evaluated or costed out unless and until the justice minister can explain where the other 8 million or 9 million guns went.

Reformers oppose the major portion of this bill for three reasons. First, the registry will not be universal. The criminals in whose hands firearms are a huge threat to public safety will unfortunately decline to register. The minister cannot understand why not. He will send polite letters to the Mafia and ads will be placed in the smuggler and gun runners digests, saying "Please, fill out these forms in triplicate in either official language and take them to the police". In the end the registry will omit the one group in whose hands firearms are most dangerous.

Second, the cost of implementing this bill will be far greater than what the minister says. Liberal cabinet ministers are notoriously inept at estimating cost. That is why the federal debt is almost \$550 billion and the government will spend \$35 billion more this year than it takes in.

The Reform caucus has developed a table of multipliers to help determine the real cost of any new proposal put forward by a Liberal cabinet minister. The more soft-headed the minister, the higher the multiplier.

The Minister of Human Resources Development, for example, is a 10. If he says something might cost \$100 million, we multiply it by 10 because the real cost will be closer to \$1 billion. The justice minister is not far behind. He is a 7. When he says his registry will cost \$85 million, we multiply it by 7 and the true cost will be over \$500 million, which is \$500 million that we do not have.

The third and most important reason for opposing Bill C-68 as it is now is that the proposed national registry of firearms for hunting, recreational and collection purposes will not improve public safety. The present handgun registry, which has been in place for 60 years, has not improved public safety. The Washington, D.C. handgun ban and registry has not prevented murder and rape in that city from going out of sight. The police in both New Zealand and Australia have recommended abandoning their costly and ineffective gun registries for precisely this reason.

Despite repeated invitations to do so, the minister has put forward no evidence that his proposed registry will improve public safety, nor has he even proposed public safety measuring sticks against which the performance of the registry can be measured.

In conclusion, if what Canadians want are safer streets, safer homes and safer communities, if public safety is really our aim, then Bill C-68 should be split, as the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville has proposed. The ineffective national registration part should be defeated. The sections tightening up the criminal use of firearms should be strengthened and passed forthwith. This is the course of action that will truly make Canada a safer place to live.

Mr. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on second reading of Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons. In particular, I welcome the opportunity to speak to some of the points raised a moment ago by the leader of the third party. I will come to that in a moment.

This is an extremely important discussion, and strong feelings are being expressed by all sides in the House and by many Canadians.

Approval of second reading will in fact send this bill to committee for discussion and amendment, and then the bill will come back to the House for a final decision and we will all know what the facts are surrounding the bill.

What happens at committee will be extremely important in relation to concerns that Canadians are raising and the concerns that I have expressed with regard to this bill.

• (1600)

Constituents have raised their concerns with me with respect to their views on Bill C-68 and I have expressed them to members of my party. They also point out that they support certain measures in the bill to control crime, promote public health and safety and to impose stiff mandatory minimum jail sentences for a range of gun offences. There is strong support for that among my constituents.

My constituents also agree that the government should enact measures to strengthen border controls and amend the Criminal Code to address the problems of smuggling and the illegal