

*Government Orders*

• (1320)

Canadians have repeatedly urged the government to do something about crime, to strengthen the Young Offenders Act, to reform sentencing procedures and the parole system that continues the early release of violent offenders into society. These people have witnessed innocent victims being murdered, raped and viciously assaulted by offenders released into society by a system of justice that is preoccupied with the rights of the criminal, not the protection of the law-abiding citizen.

I might add that the registration of rifles and shotguns is aimed at the law-abiding citizen. I will touch upon this point later in my speech. If they should deliberately neglect to register their shotgun or firearm they are subject to 10 years in jail, which is draconian, absolutely absurd.

The sentencing provisions of the bill suggest the justice minister and the Liberal government are getting tough on crime. This is nothing more than a pretence. The bill contains provisions for a minimum of four years imprisonment for the criminal use of a firearm. However section 85 of the Criminal Code already allows for an additional sentence from one to fourteen years for the use of a firearm in the commission of a crime. This law has not been enforced rigorously at all in some areas of the country.

Crown prosecutors have used their discretion either to ignore this law or to plea bargain it away. The justice minister admitted shortly after he submitted the proposals in the legislation that his new bill would not eliminate the discretion of the prosecutors to continue to ignore or plea bargain away the new four-year minimum sentence. There is no assurance of that.

We look upon this portion of the bill as a step in the right direction. However it would not be needed if section 85 were enforced and it will be useless if the crown continues to plea bargain away the new four-year minimum sentence.

In addition to the lack of enforcement of section 85, lenient sentences and early parole are contributing to a violent society. Who is responsible for this? I ask this question of the House: Are the parliamentarians who created the laws that now spew violent offenders on to the street before they have served their full sentences not responsible for the death of the Melanie Carpenters of the country? Are those same parliamentarians not responsible for creating a situation where the rights of the criminal supersede the rights of the victim and the victim's family? Are they not responsible for the growing fear of violence experienced throughout the country?

I want the people of Canada to know that when the justice minister had the opportunity to vote for a safer society or the early release of murderers into society, he voted for the violent criminal instead of a safer society. The Minister of Justice voted against eliminating section 745 from the Criminal Code which

grants first degree murderers the right to apply for early parole. The justice minister in effect voted for the criminal and against eliminating violence and against the Melanie Carpenters of the country. So did the entire caucus, except for the Minister of Transport.

The Minister of Transport stood with 24 of his Liberal colleagues and voted with the Reform Party to eliminate section 745 which allows for the early release of convicted murderers into society. I might add that during that vote when I looked over at Bloc members I did not see one of them standing against the early release of violent criminals back into society.

If the minister is sincere about fighting crime we recommend that he do the following: increase the maximum jail terms for all violent crimes including firearms crimes, implement a zero tolerance policy for criminal offences involving firearms, ensure that charges are laid in all firearm crimes and that plea bargains are not permitted, provide judges with sentencing options including no parole for all violent crime and provide for progressively more severe penalties for repeat violent offenders and firearms offenders.

• (1325)

Until the Minister of Justice implements these get tough measures he is only pretending to get tough on crime. Until the minister can demonstrate to us that the sentencing provisions of the bill will deter criminals from using a firearm during the commission of a crime we cannot support the bill because that we understand is what the bill ought to be doing. It is not going to do that.

Until the minister can assure Canadians unequivocally that the registration of rifles and shotguns and the banning of 58 per cent of the handguns currently sold in Canada will reduce the criminal use of firearms we will work to defeat this convoluted and expensive piece of legislation.

Reform members, like many Canadians, support gun control legislation based upon common sense. We fully support any and all gun regulations that will enhance public safety by reducing the criminal use of firearms. We say that present firearms legislation is adequate.

What the government ought to be doing is focusing its attention on the criminal use of firearms, giving Bill C-17 an honest chance and evaluating the impact it has upon these problems. It was recommended by the Auditor General in his 1993 report that before the government moves forward with any further gun control legislation a careful and thorough analysis of Bill C-17 and its impact upon the whole issue should be made. This we submit has not been done and it should be done.

The expensive and ineffective system of licensing and registration rifles and shotguns described within Bill C-68 simply does not make sense. It will not reduce the criminal use of these