

*Gun Control*

Moreover, I have another problem resulting from the fact that it would include in the Criminal Code divisions which are federal constituencies. I am a little concerned about this, because riding boundaries are changed every ten years on the basis of census results. Some of these ridings should not appear in that group. But I am mostly concerned about the fact that, following the next electoral boundaries readjustment, other regions could be added to the list which are not really remote and where this legislation could be used differently from what our hon. friend expects. I urge him, therefore, to suggest a more equitable formula—I am not saying that our party would necessarily support it entirely—to define these so-called remote regions, in order to convince Hon. Members that they do need and want these exemptions.

Mr. Speaker, we know that many Canadians, but certainly not most of them, would like to have an unrestricted right to carry fire arms. But I know that there are a great many more who insist on restrictions and controls. This does not mean that we want to prevent reasonable people who have full use of their faculties and who do not represent any risk to society from owning firearms. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, both as Members of Parliament and as Canadians, we want to avoid a proliferation of firearms and especially their falling into the hands of people who should not have them, as is often the case especially in the United States.

I therefore urge the Hon. Member to prepare another Bill which would be more acceptable to the House, because, in spite of his good intentions, I do not feel I could support Bill C-213 as debated in the House this afternoon.

**Mrs. Anne Blouin (Montmorency—Orléans):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to take part in the debate on Bill C-213, whose purpose is to amend the provisions of the Criminal Code relating to firearms.

The explanatory notes accompanying this Private Member's Bill are very revealing. They start with the words:

The purpose of this Bill is to relax certain features of the gun control legislation in effect since 1979.

Mr. Speaker, the very purpose of this Bill raises some very serious questions. In fact, the question of relaxing some very important features of Canada's gun control legislation deserves to be looked at very carefully.

Canada has a long tradition of responsible use of firearms and a long history of controlling ownership and use. Although it is not generally known, Canada has exercised control over this area for over 100 years. As early as 1877 there were restrictions on the carrying of firearms. After Confederation, the federal Government adopted a Criminal Code that was administered by the provinces, and in 1892, the first national gun controls were introduced.

With the support of successive Governments, Canada's gun control system has evolved over the years and been reinforced to take into consideration the situation existing at the time. I am sure that most Hon. Members will remember some very

interesting debates that took place when the last amendments to the provisions on gun control were passed in 1977.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be a mistake to depart from a national control system which has been in place for such a long time and which provides for uniform controls across this vast country of ours. Exempting the twenty-five ridings listed in Schedule 3 of the Canada Elections Act from the obligation to obtain a firearms acquisition certificate might do tremendous harm to an important part of this program and would be a direct contradiction of its fundamental principles.

Mr. Speaker, I said that Canada's reasonable approach to firearms control has been endorsed by successive governments. I should also point out that firearms control has had considerable public support. The provisions concerning firearms acquisition certificates came into force in 1979. Three years later, the following question was asked in a Gallup poll:

“Under current legislation, a person must be at least 16 years of age, have completed an acquisition form and obtained police permission before buying a firearm. In your opinion, should this law be maintained as is, should it be more restrictive, or should it be less restrictive?”

According to the results tabulated throughout Canada, 28 per cent of respondents felt it should remain unchanged, 66 per cent were in favour of more restrictive control, and only 4 per cent thought the law should be less restrictive. In addition, even in communities of fewer than 10,000 residents, only 7 per cent favoured less restrictive legislation.

More recently, in 1985, another survey on this issue produced similar results. To sum up, the response in the country as a whole indicates that 90 per cent of Canadians want existing controls to be maintained or tightened.

Mr. Speaker, such findings deserve serious thought. I do not advocate government by polls, but it seems obvious that the legislative provisions concerning firearms in general and the firearms acquisition certificate system in particular have gained widespread acceptance. In fact, I saw nothing to indicate this system is an excessive hurdle for *bona fide* firearm users. Nothing has been adduced to show the usefulness of dismantling it by eliminating the firearms acquisition certificate in major areas of Canada. As far as firearms control is concerned, the Government insisted on the need to strike a balance between the genuine interests of users and public security.

It should be recalled, Mr. Speaker, that the goal of the firearms acquisition certificate is to provide better public protection. By making firearm buyers subject to a review process, the system is aimed at preventing as far as possible that access to firearms be opened to potentially dangerous people. Each year, the firearms acquisition certificate is denied for cause to some 1,000 individuals. In my view, those rejections are a very significant contribution to solving what otherwise could be serious problems. Why should we abolish such a system in a large part of the country?