

Measures Against Crime

for the compulsory registration of all firearms. The association also proposes that the purchaser of a firearm would have to have a government certificate to purchase a gun and this permit would have to be carried whenever the gun was in use. Failure to do so would mean a mandatory sentence of one year.

A former Ontario attorney general also studied a series of measures to tighten the offensive weapons section of the Criminal Code. He says that Ontario is considering the licensing of outlets or salesmen of guns, the introduction of a "cooling-off" period of 48 hours or more from the time of application of purchase of a weapon, the banning of the sale or possession of semi-automatic weapons, and an increase from the minimum age of 16 years for the purchase of a rifle or a shotgun.

The Canadian Wildlife Federation is opposed to the compulsory registration of rifles and shotguns because it does not believe this would reduce the number of murders with guns. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police notes that before any legislation of gun control is introduced the administration of that legislation must be given first priority. If any new system could not be operated feasibly, it should be scrapped and we should remain with the legislation that currently exists. The Canadian Wildlife Federation's paper outlines very well the administrative costs of registration of all firearms.

Last summer The Canadian Institute of Public Opinion conducted a national poll, questioning whether the Canadian public favoured or opposed the registration of all firearms. Nationally, 83 per cent favoured the registration of all firearms, while only 13 per cent opposed such registration. It is interesting to note that there was widespread agreement respecting compulsory registration among all socioeconomic and language groups. In the United States, where the crime rate is increasing at a far greater rate than in Canada, only 67 per cent supported registration of all firearms.

Although in the U.S. the House judicial subcommittee hearings on crime are still taking place, President Ford has proposed some specific gun control legislation. President Ford's main proposal would set mandatory prison sentences for armed criminals who commit violent crimes under federal jurisdiction and would compensate victims of such crimes for losses as high as \$50,000. But under U.S. law, mandatory sentences would not affect such persons as murderers and rapists unless the crime was committed on federal property. Such crimes can seldom be attacked by the federal government because most are violations of state or local laws. Consequently, Ford has asked state and local governments to follow suit in respect of jail terms. Other options submitted by the Ford administration would tighten the restrictions concerning the licensing of gun dealers and would ban the manufacture and sale of cheap handguns known as Saturday night specials.

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The issue of firearms' ownership is an emotional and ambiguous one. Research into the problem is limited, and when available it is prejudicial and interpreted to advance the cause either for or against stricter gun control. There is little doubt that some form of stricter gun control will provide the means for an effective attack on crime. But

[Mr. McKenzie.]

there is more to the issue than just the registration or non-registration of all firearms. Mass ownership may aid in the commission of violent crimes, but it is seriously questionable whether it actually causes them. Since most murders involving firearms take place in a domestic environment, it is doubtful whether compulsory registration would reduce crimes or violence by way of this medium. The fundamental causes of increasing violence go much deeper than simply the ownership of firearms. The increase in violent crimes in Canada has caused many people to drastically rearrange their lives.

The Conservative party does not want a grab-bag of gun control proposals that will not lend themselves to a sharply focused campaign for public support. Efforts to regulate the criminal use of firearms must be carried out with justice and fairness in order not to infringe upon the rights of law-abiding citizens. Any legislation respecting gun control must primarily concern itself with the rights of the people it exists to protect. The Conservative party supports the concept of mandatory sentences for crimes involving the use of firearms. At present, sentencing is erratic and inconsistent and therefore provides little deterrence to offenders. More financial and technical assistance should be provided to all levels of police forces, thereby enhancing their ability to enforce the law.

I should also like to point out that nearly every country with high homicide rates has gun laws which, for the average citizen, can be considered confiscatory or prohibitive, particularly with regard to the handling of guns. The availability of firearms has no bearing on the murder rate. Murder will be committed by whatever means are available. Just this week I received a letter from a prison guard in a Canadian federal penitentiary in which he stated:

I wish to point out that being associated with the criminal element for 40 hours a week, I have been able to get their reaction to the gun law as it is being presented for a vote.

Frankly, they think of it as more of a joke than gun owners do. They have told me that there is no legislation that can prevent them from acquiring weapons. One in particular volunteered to get me a 38 revolver for the mere sum of \$46, much less than I would pay through legal channels.

The answer to all of this is that there must be heavy penalties for anyone selling or buying small handguns illegally. Harassment, or making things difficult for gun collectors and legitimate hunters or sportsmen, is not the answer to Canada's crime problems. Earlier in my remarks I pointed out that the government must take the responsibility for the present criminal attitudes and, indeed, share the blame for the rise in crime. I should like to stress that I do not feel comfortable about the fact that this government has tried to make political hay with Bill C-83. I am relieved that the government realizes that the public is fed up with criminals and wants action; but I am saddened that, instead of action and leadership, all we get is a piecemeal effort. Crime should not be a political issue. Far too many law-abiding and innocent citizens have suffered. We can only hope that in the weeks ahead a more positive bill will emerge from this parliament.

[Translation]

Mr. Armand Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, it is not with pleasure that I take part in this debate on Bill C-83. I would like it a lot more if the government had not introduced this useless legislation and instead put before