

Measures Against Crime

cannot live with capital punishment. What happens if the capital punishment legislation does not turn out the way the Solicitor General wants it? Will he resign? If that is the case, the Minister of Justice will have to break in a new sidekick. He should seriously suggest to the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues that he draw back into his portfolio the Solicitor General's duties. If there is an extra cabinet slot around, probably the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) could use it to create a ministry of air. He needs more help in transport than the Minister of Justice, capable as he is, needs in administering justice, as difficult a job as that may be.

I urge the minister to consider changing in committee, along the lines suggested so ably by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams), some of the unnecessary and counter-productive things presently contained in his rather cumbersome legislation. I urge him to give a lot of thought to the very fine speech made by the hon. member for New Westminster. He pointed out very dramatically some of the deficiencies in this legislation in the sense that it overlooks completely some of the relevant things that should logically be a much higher priority than interfering with the rights of people, particularly those in rural areas who want to continue having rifles and shotguns which, for the most part, they use very sensibly. In many cases they are essential tools to shoot vermin. They use these guns for purposes which no one, by the remotest stretch of the imagination, could say was a menace to law-abiding citizens.

If a person wishes to commit an act of violence, he does not need a gun. Also, there is no guarantee that if a commissioner of official feels that a person is entitled to have a gun by reason of his present sanity that he may not within a couple of weeks turn into a depraved maniac.

A couple of amendments to the Criminal Code with very minor penalties, at least initially, would have the desired effect of encouraging law-abiding people to register their guns, in a more conscientious way than at present. That is all that is needed.

An hon. Member: It is not in the bill.

Mr. MacKay: No, but it certainly could be in the bill. The authorities would then know where any guns happen to be at any given moment and who had them. It is ridiculous to try to equate a trade-off in two separate philosophical areas and set this off to the Canadian people as some kind of tit for tat arrangement, gun control for abolition of the death penalty.

If we should abolish capital punishment, fine, but let us debate it. If we should do certain things to rehabilitate prisoners, let us consider that. If we should regulate guns, let us consider that. However, let us not have a dishonest and semantic practice where something is done in order to compensate for doing something else. That is absolutely dishonest.

Mr. Woolliams: Deliberately.

Mr. MacKay: Yes, probably deliberately as a calculated measure. If the minister will let the committee have a long time to study this legislation and permit people from a broad spectrum of society to present their views and opin-

[Mr. MacKay.]

ions, he will eventually become convinced that he is, as I said, hunting squirrels with an elephant gun. He does not need this regressive and restrictive legislation to accomplish that which should be a very laudable objective. Instead, what he has done is arouse a lot of needless alarm, cause a lot of hard feelings and worry among decent law-abiding citizens who have never broken the law in their lives and never will, unless they get caught as a result of some stupid legislative procedure.

Mr. Hugh A. Anderson (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in the debate on the peace and security legislation brought in by the hon. Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford), as it is an honour to be a sitting member of the Thirtieth Parliament, a parliament that has been highlighted by controversial but progressive legislation.

All members of this House know that there is a growing public concern about the rising number of firearms incidents in Canada. Statistics show that from one year to the next there are more murders, armed robberies, suicides and accidents than the previous year. In 1974 almost 1,500 Canadians were killed from the use of firearms, an increase of over 30 per cent since 1970. Statistics also show that our population has not increased by 30 per cent. Therefore there has been an actual growth of death from gunshot wounds outside of our normal population increase.

During the same time period, 1974, firearms were used in half of Canada's 543 murders and in 30 per cent of Canada's 15,000 robberies. This, Mr. Speaker, is unacceptable, not only to this House but also to the majority of Canadians who are appalled at the indiscriminate use of firearms. Canadian people have asked the government for remedial legislation and I congratulate the Minister of Justice for providing that leadership to bring in tough, but rational legislation to make this country of ours a better place for all of us. As all hon. members know, Canada has had strict controls for many years regarding handguns. In this class of weapons, Canada's record is excellent.

I would like to curtail my remarks regarding the peace and security measures to gun control since my constituency is primarily a rural constituency and the proposed legislation will have a very direct impact on the riding of Comox-Alberni. I might say that the Minister of Justice is aware of this and has hunted in this area.

First, let me state that we in the government realize that long rifles or shotguns are not lethal themselves; it is the person pulling the trigger who may be dangerous, and the proposed legislation deals with the user of the firearm rather than with the firearm itself. This is a correct assessment, in my opinion, and therefore I support the licensing of the individual and not the registration of firearms as the most rational way of dealing with the prevention of abuse of rifles and shotguns.

U.S. studies suggest death is at least five times as likely in an incident involving a gun as opposed to some other weapon. If the government seeks a reduction in the level of firearm violence, it cannot simply be obtained by punishing severely those who are responsible for firearm incidents but a program must be initiated, preventive in nature, to screen out those people who are potentially