

Gun Control

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has said that Parliament should recognize that it is too easy to buy a gun in Canada and that that results in unnecessary death, suffering, additional crime and suicide. As well, there are more accidents involving children coming across loaded weapons, accidentally discharging them and being critically injured or in some cases killed.

Chief Bob Stewart, the Chief of the Vancouver Police Department and the former head of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, has himself spoken out very strongly on this question. He said, as quoted in a newspaper article:

"The proliferation of handguns is reason for concern," said Vancouver police chief Bob Stewart—

"If we don't try to control this at this stage, it will get to the point of being like the U.S. problem and there will be no way to turn it around," Stewart said.

There are today at least 850,000 firearms registered in Canada and it is unclear just how many rifles and shotguns are in circulation because, unlike handguns, they do not require any form of registration with local police departments or the RCMP. My Private Members' Bill would recognize that problem and tighten the law in that particular area.

There are other areas of concern as well. A coroner's jury in Toronto was recently very critical of Canada's gun legislation. It pointed out that even after a person has been convicted of an offence involving firearms, as long as he has a firearms acquisition certificate, he can go right back out and buy another gun. That does not make any sense whatsoever. The coroner's inquest into the death of Scarborough musician Alan Boyarski who was shot dead by police on August 11, 1985, made it very clear that there is a serious loophole in the law in this respect.

In fact, the law should require that a person's right to own a firearm following such a conviction would be limited. Surely we should take away the firearms acquisition certificate of a person convicted of such a crime for an extended period of time to prevent similar incidents from taking place in the future.

There are other areas as well that should be looked at in our examination of Canadian gun control legislation, and I would like to touch on two or three of them. There is the question of combat schools in Canada, an alarming recent development. In a number of areas, schools have sprung up to train people in combat techniques. In some cases, this involves the use of guns.

As well, there are concerns about suicide. The Centre for Suicide Prevention in the Province of Quebec has called upon federal and provincial Governments to impose stricter regulations on who can obtain firearms. The centre points out that firearms were used in one-third of all suicides in Quebec between 1975 and 1979.

Another concern is the rapidity with which individuals may obtain a firearm. A person may acquire a firearms certificate, and a matter of a few hours later go into a store and buy a

gun. That person may be in a state of extreme anger or in an unbalanced state and may go right out and shoot someone or in some cases commit suicide. Surely there should be a minimum period of time between the acquisition of the certificate and the actual purchase of the weapon in order to ensure that the possibility of death is not as great.

As well, we must look at tighter controls on the use of guns by police involved, for example, in chases. The former Chief of Staff of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Bill Neville, lost his 20-year-old son Lindsay on an isolated stretch of Highway 38 near Parham, Ontario. He pleaded with the coroner's jury to recommend to the Government tighter controls on the inappropriate use of firearms by the police in certain situations.

Another problem that has been highlighted by a number of police authorities is the problem of the illegal acquisition of firearms. It has been pointed out that in a number of cases, people have obtained very seriously lethal weapons without even going through the procedure of obtaining a firearms acquisition certificate.

Our judiciary may not be applying as rigorously as one would have hoped the provisions of the Criminal Code requiring prohibition orders and mandatory minimum sentences for convictions involving the use of firearms. As well, there is a provision in the existing gun control law requiring that a course in firearms safety be taken before a certificate can be issued.

This particular provision was referred to in a recent evaluation. Decision Dynamics Corporation conducted a very comprehensive review of gun control provisions in Canada and pointed out that the 1977 legislation includes a provision which has still not been proclaimed 10 years later. That is the provision that requires the completion of a safety course or a test in the safe use and handling of firearms as approved by the provincial Attorney General as prerequisite to obtaining a firearms acquisition certificate. Ten years later, that provision has not yet been proclaimed. I would have hoped that the Government would have moved forward quickly on that.

It is important to note that my proposed tougher gun control legislation would in no way impair the rights of those who enjoy hunting in a safe manner. This legislation would in no way diminish their rights. Indeed, many hunting clubs in Canada have been at the forefront of the call for safety courses, and indeed many have educated their members themselves in the safe use of firearms. Those are not the people targeted, if I may use that word in the context of this debate, by this legislation. Rather, the purpose of the legislation is to recognize that far too many people in Canada are dying as a result of the widespread abuse of firearms.

Statistics speak loudly and clearly on this question. Let us compare the situation in Britain with that in the United States. In the U.S. of course it is wide open. We all know about the incredibly high level of crime there involving the use of handguns. Thousands of people are murdered every year as a result