

Measures Against Crime

ought to be ordered under Standing Order 26, is simply this: the matter has been before the House, having first been raised, if my recollection is correct, before Christmas. It has been before the House for several weeks. It has perhaps acquired more urgency as it has gone along. Is it possible, on the eve of an important development in respect of that matter, to bring in a motion and say that that important development which takes place tomorrow now gives it an urgency it did not have two or three weeks ago and, therefore, the House ought to set aside this evening to discuss it? Again I say it is a concern that I express but not one upon which I base the decision. The one upon which I base the decision is the fact that the matter may be decided by cabinet tomorrow.

I think hon. members realize that if the Chair once accepts that as a definition of the urgency it would qualify as a subject for acceptance pursuant to Standing Order 26, this could cause a problem since, presumably, every matter which is on the regular cabinet a problem agenda for Thursday morning ought to be, and I am sure all members agree, of serious concern—otherwise it would not be there in the first place. Since it is fairly well known that cabinet meets every Thursday morning, if the Chair once accepts an imminent decision by cabinet on Thursday morning as being proper grounds for coming within the rules, then every Wednesday the Chair will have the decision of selecting which items in the forthcoming cabinet agenda ought to qualify for a Wednesday evening discussion.

Certainly, that may be a very desirable practice in the House in terms of relevant debate, but it does not seem to me that was the intention of Standing Order 26 in those matters. Therefore, for that consideration I decline at this moment, in the circumstances, to grant the debate under Standing Order 26.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL LAW AMENDMENT ACT (NO. 1), 1976

MEASURES FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF CANADIAN SOCIETY AGAINST CRIME

The House resumed, from Tuesday, March 30, consideration of the motion of Mr. Basford that Bill C-83, for the better protection of Canadian society against perpetrators of violent and other crime, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, last night when we adjourned to the other place for royal assent in order to get moneys to pay our civil servants I was speaking about the matter of gun control. I think it can be said that few issues have raised more interest throughout the country, including capital punishment. I have received a much greater number of letters on this issue than on capital punishment. For example, I have here a petition

[Mr. Speaker.]

from the village of Gilbert Plains, in my constituency. It reads:

We, the undersigned, strongly protest the legislation presently before the House imposing undue restrictions upon responsible firearm owners.

When one considers it is signed by 500 people out of a population of 1,000 it shows how important it is. Therefore, I hope there will not be any curtailment of debate on this issue. It is of great importance, particularly to those who live in rural areas. When you examine the legislation you find it will do little, if anything, to reduce the use of guns in crime. However, it will seriously inconvenience sportsmen, legitimate gun owners. In fact, it may make them more susceptible to disturbances in our society.

I mentioned previously that the taking away of guns from the general population could result in loss of the militia effect that has been a time-honoured vehicle for the presentation of liberties in western countries in times past. I have read that in Switzerland there is no restrictive legislation whatever to curb the general use of firearms of any kind, but in no country of Europe is the use of firearm more general. Every able-bodied male is required by law to possess and know how to use military rifles. In addition, he can own all the pistols he likes, contrary to our law at present, and rifle and pistol shooting is universally indulged in by all classes of people. Yet it is conceded that in Switzerland crimes of violence are extremely rare, which obviously indicates that the use of firearms does not promote crimes of violence unless the conditions are conducive to violence.

Regarding crimes of murder, the statistics are most interesting. Based on the Canadian experience, it seems fair to conclude that most murders involving firearms take place in a domestic environment. Most murders are not ingeniously planned, but occur on the spur of the moment. The people involved are not chronic criminals, but husbands, wives, neighbours and friends. I understand that of the 272 shootings in Canada in 1974, 97 took place in a domestic environment—husband and wife—111 took place in a quasi-domestic involvement, and of the balance, 19 were committed during the commission of a crime and 45 remained unresolved.

● (1520)

Because the majority of murders in Canada and the United States have occurred among families, an attempt has been made to classify these so-called intimate murders. It is interesting to note the results of one study by L. A. Rotenberg and R. L. Sodeff which appeared in two journals, "Corrective Psychiatry" and "The Journal of Social Therapy (1970)." The two authors and scientists isolated two distinct groups, an anti-social group and a schizoid group. The anti-social group was the most stable, and while those belonging to it kept guns readily at hand, whenever they committed a crime the weapons were not used unless that crime was contested.

Study of the schizoid group showed that a gun formed an integral part of unpredictable action. It might be possible to weed out the use of guns by those in the schizoid group by a requirement for registration backed by psychiatric investigation. The legislation before us is, I suggest, based on the presumption that somehow the person who issued