

Gun Control

all, have to get a temporary possession form and later a permanent possession form. That will mean they will have to go through the bureaucracy twice in order to keep a weapon that could have been in the family for 40 or 50 or even 60 years. This creates a problem for people who want to live within the law.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, this Party opposes the Bill. If the Hon. Member had offered reasonable gun control legislation we might support it, but certainly the Bill before us would hurt a lot of ordinary Canadians. It is completely unacceptable to this Party for the reasons I have stated.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Tardif (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to be taking part in this debate and to have this opportunity to respond to Bill C-451. I was not sitting in the House at the time Bill C-51 was passed, but I am sure Hon. Members will recall that the passage of this bill was accompanied by some controversy. The implementation of the legislation has been smooth, however. Since 1977, new penalties for misuse of firearms were introduced and changes were made in the restricted weapons system on January 1, 1978. A successful Amnesty/Recall program took place in November 1978, and the introduction of the Firearms Acquisition Certificate and Business Permit systems took effect on January 1, 1979.

• (1650)

[English]

As significant as these changes were, I think they should be viewed in the context of the history of firearms control in Canada. It is not widely appreciated that Canadian law has controlled firearms in one manner or another for more than 100 years. The first permit system for the carrying of a small arm outside one's residence or place of business was introduced in 1892. By 1934, the law required the registration of all hand guns. Changes to the law in 1968, created three classes of weapons in Canada: prohibited, restricted, and unrestricted.

I bring this brief history to the attention of the House because I believe it sheds some light on why, although a frontier society that depended to a large extent on firearms, Canada has generally enjoyed a history of responsible use of firearms.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, the changes enacted by Parliament in 1977 continued in the same Canadian tradition, the most important change being the Firearms Acquisition Certificate system. As I mentioned, the 1968 law created three classes of weapons: prohibited, restricted and unrestricted, while conditions were attached to the acquisition and use of handguns, shotguns and hunting rifles—all restricted weapons. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1977, introduced controls of long arms to the extent of requiring that individuals wishing to acquire them in any manner after January 1, 1979 must be screened by police

to ensure that they do not have a criminal record or history of mental illness associated with violence.

Mr. Speaker, it has now been three full years since all the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, and in particular the Firearms Acquisition Certificate system have been in force. Although there are some encouraging indications that the misuse of firearms is declining, it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions about the success of the firearms control program. The most recent report by Statistics Canada shows that homicides and the use of firearms in homicides has continued to decline. I would submit, however, Mr. Speaker, that it would be wrong to amend the legislation in the manner suggested by the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East (Mr. Allmand), or in any other way, until we have fully assessed the impact of the existing legislation. It may well be that no further changes are justified, or indeed that some of the present law is unnecessary from the point of view of public safety.

Because of the extent of public interest in the firearms control laws and because of the sensitive and complex nature of the legislation, the Government decided, when Bill C-51 was tabled in Parliament in 1977, that a thorough evaluation of the program would be carried out. The purpose of the study, which is now underway, is to ensure that legislators as well as interested members of the public will have full and objective information with which to assess the effectiveness of the firearms control program.

Now, as the Hon. Members are, I am sure, aware, the Ministry of the Solicitor General has engaged an outside objective consulting firm to carry out a three-year evaluation study to gather information which will allow us to gauge the impact of the legislation on the frequency and nature of firearms incidents, both criminal and accidental. In addition, the study is collecting data on the implementation of the legislation and the Firearms Acquisition Certificate system so that we will have a much clearer idea of which aspects of the legislation are most effective and which might require amendment. The consulting firm has established co-operative arrangements with provincial and municipal agencies to enable the efficient collection of information relating to the legislation.

The reports from this study will be available to all interested parties in order to ensure that all the facts are available when forming conclusions about the effectiveness of these legislative and administrative measures. The final report will be available in April 1983 for public distribution. I am sure all Hon. Members will appreciate that the accurate measurement of the effect of a complex legislative program such as this must be carefully conducted over a reasonable period of time before reaching definitive conclusions. The final report will permit us, as legislators, to have outside objective material to provide a basis on which we may draw some sound conclusions and make decisions as to whether the program is meeting the objectives set out in 1977 or whether it is in need of revision. In response to thousands of letters received concerning Bill C-451, the