

Government Orders

Let us take the example of an 18-year old committing his first offence. We do not know what incites an 18-year old to hold up a corner store—we are not justifying it, it is completely unacceptable, serious things happen in those situations—but we do know that often these young people are grappling with drug problems, are in withdrawal, are in fact very well brought up—it happens everywhere—; for the first time in his life he goes and uses a firearm to hold up a corner store, and automatically gets four years in prison.

There is no possibility of the judge looking into the case, making distinctions, taking circumstances into account, or trying to give that young man a chance. When you are 18, you can be rehabilitated after a first offence and become a very good citizen. But with this bill, I tell you, I hesitated before taking a position. I deeply regret that the minister, who appears to be progressive in all respects, has made this abusive lapse, which will mean automatic prison sentences.

• (1100)

Incarceration becomes the only means of rehabilitating young offenders, of reintegrating them in society. That is serious. That smacks of a philosophical conception which worries me a lot. I am surprised that the gun control lobby would have steered the minister in that direction. I am truly astonished because I believe that the forces which impel us to adopt this bill are progressive forces, but not in this case. In this case, there is something absolutely deplorable and senseless, there are things that defy comprehension.

For example, if a sharp 12-inch dagger is held to the throat of a convenience store clerk to commit the same crime, the offender will get the minimum, not four years. I do not see the difference between a dagger and a gun—the clerk might not have his throat cut. It is the same thing with rape. These are dreadful acts. What is the difference between using a dagger or a gun to commit rape on a young woman? The two acts are absolutely abominable. And yet, in one case, it will be four years, automatically, and in the other not.

It seems to me that the minister in charge of developing the Criminal Code could have had a common sense reflex. It is not too late, by the way. I sincerely believe that this is something that should be fixed.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Bouchard: I know that opponents have their arguments, I have heard them many a time. All members of this House have been submitted to intense discussions with the lobbyists, but I do not think a bill has ever been better scrutinized, analyzed in such depth.

I know the arguments, for example those of the lobbyists. The arguments of those who oppose this bill are not all ridiculous, but I believe they can be refuted. For example, there are those who say that it makes no difference whether firearms are

registered or not because criminals are not forced to use a registered gun to commit their crime. But there are criminals who can use registered guns too. A sawed off twelve-gauge shotgun becomes an extraordinary assault weapon. If the weapon is registered, it is that much easier for the police to conduct their investigation.

Do not tell me that police will not be helped by the fact that weapons are registered, that the owner can be identified, that his name can be instantly retrieved in the central registry, in the computer. This will obviously be a powerful tool in the hands of the police when investigating crimes committed with registered weapons.

Unregistered weapons are already banned. It is just a matter of putting in place the means of stopping the illegal importation and sale of prohibited weapons in Canada. To the extent that there are millions of legal firearms, let them be registered. And if, as happens so often, they are used to commit crimes, their registration will greatly increase the effectiveness of police investigations. That argument does not hold water.

All the more so since habitual criminals are not the only ones who commit violent crimes with firearms. We all know that in the case of family violence, acts of desperation, etc., legal weapons are used most often, weapons that are found in the house. Some will say that it makes no difference whether they are registered or not.

I believe that registration will have an extremely important educational value. If, after this great public debate, the bill is passed, there will be an immediate result in that people will no longer be able to take firearms for granted, to treat them as if they were commonplace objects like a slingshot. The attitudes toward weapons will not be the same, the perceptions will be quite different. People will know that the State treats weapons as dangerous instruments.

Indeed, contrary to cars and bicycles, for example, weapons are made to kill. Except for the few of us who practise shooting as a sport, a firearm, if we keep one at home, is used essentially to go hunting, to kill and it is very efficient at that. It is practically the most efficient way to kill.

• (1105)

One must realize that a firearm—and people will become more conscious of this fact, especially if they have to register it—is not an ordinary household object but a dangerous weapon which can easily be used to commit a crime or a violent act.

It is therefore false to say that registration will accomplish nothing. Indeed, if such was the case, then why did the powerful lobbies make so much noise? We also heard about costs which would be too high. We have here estimates provided by the minister. There is no reason to question them or to doubt that the minister and his department did their job carefully. The numbers