

Motor Vehicle Safety Act

Mr. Howe: I thought that was intimidated. If that is not the case, I wish to say a few words. I join all those who have congratulated the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather) for bringing to the attention of this House social measures which have to do with the welfare of so many people whether they be cigarette smokers, drivers or others. His services to the House have been outstanding throughout the years in focusing our attention on areas of concern in connection with the health and welfare of the people of Canada.

• (1750)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Howe: The bill before us directs attention to what is probably the greatest single problem confronting us, the reduction or prevention of death and injury on our highways. Throughout the years efforts have been made to introduce and popularize safety devices—seat belts, improved exhaust systems, more effective bumpers, and so on. All these things are good in themselves but to my mind the most important factor of all is the human element. As the saying goes, it is not the hole in the road that causes the accident, but the nut behind the wheel. We have all driven cars and been subject to little lapses of attention. We have not always paid attention to what was happening on the road. We all know that after a man has been driving for two or three hours on a super highway, he becomes fatigued and there is a danger he will lose track of things and fail to concentrate on situations presented to him.

I was interested to hear the comments of the hon. member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle). I have always thought that driver education ought to be part of the curriculum of every educational system. I believe provincial boards of education should see that driver training courses are made available in our schools. There is a definite place, it seems to me, for training in driver skills because other than food and clothing there is scarcely anything a person uses more than an automobile. So it is just as important to learn the A, B, C of driving at school as it is to learn the A, B, C of finance or politics.

Some years ago the city of Kitchener instituted courses of driver education in its schools. If I remember correctly, statistics thereafter showed a marked reduction in the number of road accidents. This was because young people had been given proper training in handling vehicles. To my mind, no matter what may be done in the way of encouraging the use of seat belts, installing collapsible steering wheels or air cushions which will inflate automatically when an accident occurs, driver training is the most important factor in the prevention of accidents on the road.

I cannot understand why the federal government does not offer assistance to provinces which institute driver training courses as a regular part of their educational systems. It is likely that all of us have played some part in teaching members of our families to drive, but most of us would agree that the job is best done by an independent person who can instruct one on the rules of the highway and the proper way to handle a vehicle. I believe this is just as important as all the safety features which can be built into automobiles by manufacturers. Driver educa-

[Mr. Jerome.]

tion should be encouraged and the federal government should give a lead by assisting provinces which incorporate such programs in their educational systems.

Mr. Hees: A fine speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Does the hon. member for Ottawa East (Mr. Richard) rise on a point of order? The hon. member for Ottawa East.

Mr. J.-T. Richard (Ottawa East): Mr. Speaker, I am a little worried about this kind of proposal, one which will not solve the problem at all. As the hon. member has just stated, what we need is better driving education. Safety belts have proved to be death belts, nothing else. There was a recent case in Montreal where three people died wearing seat belts. It is not a case of providing people with belts; it is a case of educating people to drive properly.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. I gave the floor to the hon. member for Ottawa East because I thought he was raising a point of order. I think, now, I should give the floor to the hon. member for Ottawa East for the purpose of contributing to the debate.

Mr. Richard: I am very happy to take part, Mr. Speaker, having had very little opportunity to speak. Legislation has been introduced by the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather) concerning the use of tobacco and other things—matters which in my view have to do with education and should have nothing to do with the imposing of restrictions. It is in the high schools that it would be most valuable, in my view, for our children to be given an opportunity to learn how to drive. Then, again, there is no doubt that 60 per cent of the accidents on our highways are the result of alcohol.

Mr. Isabelle: Eighty per cent.

Mr. Richard: Perhaps it is 80 per cent. At any rate, it has nothing to do with seat belts. Belts account for a large number of accidents.

An hon. Member: No.

Mr. Richard: The fact that a man is tied down in his seat will not save him from fatal injury. I often wonder whether the hon. member has not sought, by speaking on tobacco, seat belts and so on, to find subjects popular and easy to explain. I am sure the hon. member realizes that the use of seat belts alone will not reduce the death toll on our highways.

• (1800)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): The hour set aside for private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the House took recess.