

I personally do not object to the registration of firearms, any more than I object to the registration of my car or my dog. I would reject the claim which has been made by some, that registration is a Trojan horse for government expropriation, that once the government knows where these firearms are, it will swoop down and take them away. Quite frankly, with all due respect, I find this argument silly, although I admit that, in a public relations sense, it has been effective. It is based on a view of the world and a relationship between government and governed which is more reflective of the American right-wing militia than mainstream Canadian society.

Honourable senators, I have concluded that this bill, taken as a whole, meets my three tests. It is not a perfect bill, but I think we all agree that few bills that pass this place are without some flaws. My biggest concern is that, by supporting certain amendments, I may help put the entire bill at risk. I do not wish to be a party to killing this bill.

If we are committed to voting for or against the amendments as a slate, I will have to consider very carefully and weigh the risks inherent in supporting a set of amendments that may imperil the bill against my personal desire to support certain important amendments that I think would improve the bill.

Honourable senators, it is not an easy decision. I shall weigh the alternatives very carefully between now and 5:30 tomorrow evening.

Hon. Herbert O. Sparrow: Honourable senators, first of all, I would like to thank the Speaker for attending my office earlier today.

Next, I want to speak on the committee report and on the amendments which are before us. At the end of my short address, I want to make a further amendment.

The members of the Senate who have spoken have all indicated that they are not opposed to greater efforts to control crime in this country, nor to additional penalties for criminals who commit crimes with firearms. I think we are all of one mind there.

• (2020)

My greatest objection to the bill, and I will speak in opposition to some of its provisions, is primarily the registration of the long barrelled guns. These are the so-called shotguns and rifles used extensively by the native community as a tool for livelihood and also by the agricultural and ranching communities who consider those firearms a tool. We fail to consider those of our citizens who may be from the larger, urban communities and who may have never owned a gun or used a gun. Perhaps they have never known anyone who owns a gun. They may have never been outside city limits where guns might very well be used.

I have some sympathy for those people who say, "As far as I am concerned, there should be no guns." There is a school of thought that exists out there because of that very issue.

Where I come from — and we can call it distinct society or whatever we want — there is a distinct difference in the way we think. That is true for various parts of this country. There is definitely a distinct way of thinking in Northern Canada, there is definitely a distinct way of thinking in Western Canada, in the agricultural community. It is unfair for us to say that those people are bigots, or whatever, because they are opposed to some provisions of this bill and, more particularly, the registration of those firearms.

Let me just talk to you for a minute about that aspect of the bill, namely the registration of guns. People who have never committed a crime, and who have no intention of committing a crime, wonder why it is necessary for them to register the tools of their trade. Let me talk to you about a farmer, or a rancher, and the use of guns.

Many of such people do not hunt for a living, but they use the tool of a rifle or a shotgun on the farm. They would use it, not necessarily daily but certainly at least once a week. When they have predators on their farms, be they porcupines, rabbits, skunks, rats, gophers, coyotes — any of those predators — the gun is a necessary tool. When people head for their pastures and ranches, they must take a gun with them in the event that a calf or a cow has broken a leg, and must be put down. Some animals, such as bears, may be predators on the calves, and the gun is a necessary tool.

Let me make this personal: I do not hunt, but I have two guns on the farm. They are tools. I must use those guns to give to the men who work on that farm, or to the members of my family who go from point to point. If I am required to register that gun, I must register it in my name only. I must register at the address where I live. I cannot take that gun to the four different areas in which I ranch or farm.

I have what we call bunkhouses on each of those places. They have only one room. When you stay overnight in that bunkhouse with a gun, you will be breaking that law. I cannot have my men go out with those guns because the gun is not registered to them. It is easy to say, "Well, get them to apply for a licence to own a gun." This involves all of my family members, and all of the people who may work on my farm. It may be a person who is working there for just one day, going out to the ranch or the farm for that use. It is unreasonable that they should be expected to conform to the desires of the problem areas in the city of Toronto. It is not fair. Why would we make criminals out of those farmers or those farm workers because they did not have a gun to register?

If a farmer attends to a farm 50 miles from his residence and he takes a shotgun and a rifle with him — which is the normal process — in his truck or car, because he will need it there, and he decides to stop on the way back, 25 miles out, to attend a Liberal meeting, he breaks the law. Maybe he should not attend