

*Government Orders*

the application. This is followed by a 28-day mandatory waiting period during which a firearms officer can conduct an investigation on applicants. Upon completion the applicants must then pass a course or test on the safe handling and use of firearms and the laws relating to them. The applicant is then photographed and his or her certificate is processed centrally by the chief provincial or territorial firearms officer. What more can you do?

In the time it takes one legal gun owner to go through this process, thousands of stolen or smuggled guns will change hands in the streets. That is the problem. If this government would take more time to identify the right problem, it would find 60 per cent of the solution.

The national debt is the problem. The deficit is a contributing factor. That is why we have to get to a zero deficit, not just 3 per cent of GDP. The lack of deterrence for the criminal misuse of firearms is the problem. Registration is not even a contributing factor.

The Liberals are identifying the wrong problem. The Minister of Justice stated in the House that last year an estimated 375,000 weapons were smuggled into Canada. In the same breath he went on to say last year approximately 3,800 firearms were lost or stolen by those who lawfully own them in Canada. In the years since 1974 a cumulative total of 65,000 firearms have been stolen or lost, not recovered.

There were 3,800 stolen or lost weapons as opposed to 375,000 smuggled guns, yet the main emphasis of our new gun control laws will be registration for legal gun owners. I believe that instead of throwing millions of dollars toward registration we should look at all possible ways to beef up our security at borders.

Let us do everything in our power to stop the 375,000 guns from finding their way into hands of criminals. Let us send a clear message to the people who bring them across the border that if they get caught, they will not just get a slap on the wrist or a fine, but a guarantee of time behind bars.

Currently we have mandatory sentences for firearms offences that are not enforced because they are plea bargained away. Therefore a mandatory sentence is utterly meaningless and useless. I can see the need for a crown prosecutor to have some latitude in handling a case. The flexibility that plea bargaining offers is intended to lead to a conviction. I realize it is necessary, but not the outright elimination of a mandatory sentence. It should be a reduced sentence.

• (1650)

A national firearms registry flies directly in the face of today's reality which is that the vast majority of people want less government regulation and intrusion in their lives, not more. A 10-year jail term for failure to register and the right to register a

firearm and the right to search and seizure without a warrant are incomprehensible.

Are we headed for a police state if this bill passes in its present form? Is the minister not willing to separate the bill and debate the two separate issues? He knows full well that they are two separate issues. He knows that this party would support the amendments to the Criminal Code to make it tougher on crime. He knows he would get our support.

Why bother with this national registration issue with the same bill? Separate the two. Have the courage and conviction to have a true and honest debate. People are sick and tired of hearing about the rights of criminals. They want them caught. They want them off the streets. They want them punished and, above all, they want laws that will make people think twice about becoming criminals in the first place.

**Mr. Sarkis Assadourian (Don Valley North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 128 years ago our founding fathers came together, gave this House power to enact laws, to ensure peace, order and good government in Canada.

Even President Clinton on his visit to this country on February 23 said Canada has shown to the world how to balance freedom with compassion and tradition with innovation. Canada set the example for the rest of the world on many occasions. This certainly is one of those occasions when we can say to the world that we set the standards and we make the examples for the rest to follow.

On October 25, 1993 the people of Canada voted for the Liberal Party. In the red book we made a promise to make our streets safe and offload the guns. Bill C-68 goes in that direction.

Public support for this bill has been enormous, 80 per cent to 85 per cent. Even in Alberta we are told 62 per cent of the population supports the bill. In my riding of Don Valley North, which I am proud to represent, 90 per cent of the population supports this bill.

In my riding I received only seven or eight representations opposing the bill. Out of those, one of them was a U.S. citizen complaining about the bill. When I asked him why he does not complain to U.S. senators, he said he lives here and has to complain to me.

Many of us receive many letters from various organizations and individuals regarding Bill C-68. I received maybe 200 letters from various parts of the country. One said in part: "It has come to my attention that someone has sent a number of misleading letters to various members of Parliament and some Reformers, including yourself".

These letters are on the subject of government policy proposals and gun controls. One says in part: "Many of these letters bear my name and address and are signed but were not written, signed or sent by me. My signature is false. I believe you have