

*Government Orders*

stated: "It is a superb and courageous proposal for gun control. It is almost everything that anti-crime advocates could ask for".

The legislation is also a reflection of the wishes and even the demands of the Canadian people, that we toughen our laws and our positions, that we make things tougher for criminals and that we improve the level of safety in the streets and homes of our nation.

The government was given a mandate in the last election to strengthen gun control laws. The Liberal program made that promise. It is most appropriate that the Minister of Justice, with the support of Parliament, move to fulfil it.

• (1350)

Debate on this legislation will provide opponents with the opportunity to seek changes in the areas to which they object. However at the end of the day the will of the majority must prevail. It is most distressing to have Reform Party members indicate that they are not content to seek change but that they will flaunt the will of the majority and put themselves above the law.

It is distressing to hear statements that reflect a kind of wild frontier mentality. "I do not like the law, therefore I will break it". At this point, it is not simply a question of guns or gun control but rather a question of democracy.

The legislative proposals have been dealt with in detail by members who have spoken previously but I feel I should mention some of them again in brief. On the get tough on criminals side of the ledger, there will be a mandatory minimum sentence of four years in prison for the use of a firearm in the commission of any of 10 specific violent offences. This is not only a suitable penalty for such crimes but should also serve as a deterrent to the use of a firearm in the commission of crime.

There will be increased penalties for illegal importing and trafficking of firearms. These will be accomplished by increased border controls and surveillance measures.

On the other side of the ledger—the enhancement of public safety—there are two main items: a law applying to certain types of handguns, the restricted buying and selling of others and a national registration system for all firearms.

This registration will be administered by the RCMP in co-operation with the provinces and territories. Virtually no one has a problem with the get tough on criminals part of the legislation. If there is a criticism, it is that the mandatory sentences are not severe enough.

However when we get to the area of handguns, opposition grows. I believe that the treatment of handguns is eminently defensible. Target shooting and collecting are both legitimate

exercises and adequate provisions are made for both of them in the bill. These handguns and certain other prohibited firearms are also able to be bought and sold among existing owners. On the issue of handguns, I want to include a quote from Ontario Judge Hugh Locke.

When delivering a decision involving possession of a restricted weapon, Justice Locke said: "Handguns are the scourge of the human race and their unlawful possession must be totally discouraged. Such weapons are useful for one purpose and one purpose only. They are employed to kill and maim human beings. Our society is plagued with those who feel handguns are a normal part of one's equipment. They are not".

On the subject of registration, nowhere in the legislation does it say that Canadians have to give up their guns. However it does say that Canadians must register all of their guns. Granted, registration is an inconvenience and will have a cost attached but the whole registration process allows for seven years before it is fully mandatory and the cost is minimal.

The minister recognized that the proposed legislation may not yet be in its best or final form. There are concerns about cost, about the treatment of relics and heirlooms and the legitimacy of certain types of guns. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs will hold hearings so that concerns such as these may be addressed.

Opposition on the basis of slogans such as "registration today, confiscation tomorrow", promoting the idea that a tyrannical government is disarming its citizens to make it easier to suppress and oppose them is nonsense. It is fanatical nonsense and seriously diminishes the credibility of those who espouse such beliefs. When we discuss legislation of this nature, I believe it is important that we talk to the people on the front lines, the ones who live it on a daily basis.

P.E.I. is considered to be quite a peaceful society even by Canadian standards. I would like to put the following letter on the record. This letter is from Transition House and was written by Joanne Ings, executive director:

As you are aware, the P.E.I. Transition House Association operates Anderson House, the Island's only emergency shelter for women and children seeking refuge from family violence. Since Anderson House opened in 1981, we have sheltered 1,800 women and over 2,000 children.

The impetus for gun control legislation came from the shocking murders of women engineering students in Montreal in 1989. The P.E.I. Transition House Association has been a strong supporter of the legislation since its inception. We believe that stricter controls will save lives, particularly lives of women and children who live in violent family situations where unregistered firearms are present.

Many of the women and children who stay at Anderson House are from rural P.E.I. and we have learned from these families that the threat of the use of firearms is a real fear. We understand that the registration of shotguns and other firearms will not stop family violence but statistics prove that registration is a deterrent and does result in fewer deaths by firearms.