

amendments for the entire gun control system was thus already well along when this development was given an urgent impetus by the tragic events of December 6, 1989. On that date, 14 young women were massacred at the École Polytechnique in Montreal by a disturbed young man on a rampage. In the aftermath of this horrible event, public calls for a vastly improved gun control system led to the expansion of the legislative proposals then under development. On June 26, 1990, Bill C-80 was tabled in Parliament by the Minister of Justice, along with an announcement of several accompanying regulatory proposals. Concerns with the makeup of this package of proposed measures then led to the creation of this Special Committee.

3. OVERVIEW OF WITNESSES' VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been said that the polarity of views on gun control ranges from those who advocate their total abolition to those who want their availability to be completely unrestricted. Such extreme perspectives do exist, but they do not dominate the debate. Many of the witnesses who appeared before the Special Committee displayed both a significant degree of understanding of the concerns of those with different interests and a willingness to compromise. Although the witnesses often differed radically in their views as to how the present system could be improved, all of them, along with members of the Special Committee, shared the same goal — protecting the safety of the Canadian public through the development of a more effective system for regulating firearms.

The Special Committee held 17 public hearings, occupying over 35 hours, and heard from over 60 individual witnesses. In addition, we received over 387 written submissions. We heard from individuals and citizens groups, including womens' groups, police associations, and legal and public health experts and associations, that concentrated on the danger posed by firearms to public safety. We had the advice and the views of the Minister of Justice and officials from her Department, firearms experts, hunter safety coordinators, customs officials, and some of the Chief Provincial Firearms Officers who actually administer the system. Representatives of the students and employees of the École Polytechnique, and the families of the victims of that tragedy, eloquently presented their perspective. The Special Committee also heard from wildlife and shooting federations, gun clubs, competitive shooting organizations, and other individuals and groups representing those Canadians, numbering perhaps in the millions, who use firearms legitimately and responsibly for their livelihood and for recreational hunting, target shooting, and collecting.

Some witnesses were concerned primarily with the danger to the public arising from the misuse of firearms by their owners and the possibility of theft and resultant criminal use of those firearms. They cited deaths and injuries resulting from domestic and social violence, suicides and accidents. Such violence involving guns is seen as a particularly urgent problem in our cities, where the majority of our people live, but it was asserted as well that the problem was not one confined strictly to urban areas.

These same witnesses also advocated the complete prohibition of all military-design firearms, with no grandfathering of those currently owned. Some urged that all semi-automatics, whether of military design or not, be banned or at least restricted. The restrictions would be tied to narrowly defined permitted uses, and there would be no use of semi-automatic firearms for hunting. They also urged that strict limits be put on ammunition magazine capacity and that the sale of ammunition be controlled as well. In some cases, settling for these prohibitions, limits, and restrictions was seen as a significant compromise, with the complete abolition of all private ownership and use of firearms being the preferred option.