

Government Orders

Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, who just made a good speech, should use his persuasiveness to convince his colleagues to support this legislation.

• (1530)

Bill C-68 proposes several measures, including: the establishment of a national firearms registration system; a minimum jail sentence of four years for violent crimes committed with a firearm, as well as a prohibition to ever own a restricted or prohibited weapon; the inclusion of new Criminal Code offences with harsh penalties for the illegal importation and traffic of firearms; measures to tighten controls at the Canadian border—this morning, the minister mentioned that a very large number of firearms are imported into Canada each year—, and a prohibition to import and sell .25 and .32 calibre handguns, as well as handguns equipped with a barrel of 105mm or less.

Individuals who do not acquire a licence or a certificate within the time prescribed could be sentenced, under the Criminal Code, to a maximum of six months in jail, or to a fine of up to \$2,000. The weapons license is renewable every five years at a cost of \$60. The registration certificate will be valid for life, unless the weapon is sold or transferred. Once the system is in place, the license will be mandatory for the purchase of ammunition.

Control of firearms has caused and continues to cause heated debate. Those in favour of control are demanding, among other things, more stringent regulation, that all weapons be registered, and that certain types of firearms be prohibited.

On the other hand, the weapons industry is angry at having to submit to new restrictions. It will therefore intensify its pressure in strongly opposing this bill. We of the Bloc Québécois have always held that there must be legislation in this area in order to better control firearms.

In my opinion, it will also help resolve the crime problem. I also realize that more restrictive gun control alone cannot resolve the crime problem. We must reconcile the right of individuals to protect themselves against violence with the legitimate interests of weapons' owners, including hunters.

It must be pointed out that the minister resisted the pressure of the powerful gun lobby. Universal registration of firearms is a positive measure. It will encourage owners to find ways to store them safely.

Reactions to the bill in Canada and in Quebec are divided. However, I think most of the country, including the people in my riding of Bourassa, in Montreal North, support the broad lines of the bill. Therefore, I believe this bill, despite many gaps and shortcomings, is a step in the right direction.

• (1535)

Among the measures contained in this bill, the registration of all firearms is the most seriously disputed. Under the administrative control of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, this measure should be implemented in conjunction with the provinces and territories. We will keep an eye on co-operation between the RCMP and the Government of Quebec. In Quebec, where at least one firearm offence is committed daily, the police must use stronger measures to effectively counter the criminal use of firearms.

In my province, 400 to 450 deaths are caused by firearms every year, about 300 of which are suicides. This is why the health care community, in particular, has been calling for registration of all firearms for a long time. We must remember that in Quebec firearms have been registered since 1972, but the registration system must be improved.

I have serious reservations about several measures in the bill, especially in regard to registration procedures and costs. The national registration system is not self-financed, something which the Bloc Québécois has been demanding for a long time. The justice minister has merely mentioned that implementing this system will cost \$85 million over seven years. But he has not said where he got these figures, how he arrived at this amount. In addition, I believe the cost will be much higher than what the minister has calculated.

Moreover, we believe the minister and his government have given in to the powerful progun lobby by allowing a period of eight years for the registration of gun owners and their weapons.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am Chilean by birth. I came here following the military coup in 1973. Chile was a peaceful country; Pinochet's dictatorship brought total insecurity. When my wife, my children and I came to Montreal in 1974, we most cherished the safety of this country's cities and streets.

However, I was shaken by the tragedy of December 6, 1989, when 14 young women lost their lives at l'École polytechnique de Montréal, at the hand of a misogynist murderer. Marc Lépine used a Luger rifle. The incident spurred a major movement in Quebec and Canada in favour of increasing firearm controls and it heightened awareness of the daily violence that women are subjected to in our society.

I was personally affected by the tragic incident five years ago because one of my goddaughters was studying at l'École polytechnique during the incident but, fortunately, did not get shot.

The bill outlaws the sale of all weapons like the one used by Marc Lépine. At the time, close to three out of four Canadians felt that the massacre of the 14 students at l'École polytechnique demonstrated the need for tighter gun controls.