

[English]

• (1610)

Hon. Donald H. Oliver: Honourable senators, I rise today to speak to Bill C-68 and the amendments proposed to this bill by my colleagues. Before I deal with the merits of the legislation before us, I want to make it clear that I support controls on the use of firearms. As with all of us in this chamber, I oppose the use of firearms by criminals, and support measures which effectively keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

As with all law-abiding Canadians, I deplore the acts of violence perpetrated by Valery Fabrikant at Concordia University, and by Marc Lépine at École polytechnique. Those who had contributed so much to society, those who had so much hope for the future, had their lives ended prematurely. I grieve for them and for their survivors.

Honourable senators, I am also acutely aware of the violence perpetrated against both women and children by those who come into possession of deadly weapons. As a former member of the Board of Directors, and indeed as the President of the Halifax Children's Aid Society, I experienced the pain and suffering brought to families through abuse.

I support those parts of this bill which are designed to counteract smuggling of firearms, and perhaps the government could give thought to making them even tougher. As well, I endorse those clauses which increase the punishment for crimes committed with firearms. However, I cannot support the other main thrust of the bill, and that is to impose on Canadians a completely unnecessary gun registration system.

Why is such a system unnecessary? Canada already has firearms laws that are among the toughest in the world. This is what you have to do now in order to own a firearm in Canada: take an optional federal course and a mandatory test to qualify for a firearms acquisition certificate, or FAC; submit to a thorough police examination of your social, employment and psychological history when you apply for the FAC; go through an interview process with police and provide solid references; wait a mandatory 28 days before your FAC is approved and issued with a photograph.

If you want to hunt, you must: take a separate mandatory hunting course, which also covers firearms handling and safety; submit to another provincial written and practical test on firearms handling; abide by strict federal laws that govern dozens of firearms handling and safety situations. They include: storing firearms and ammunition separately under lock and key; rigid transportation standards, and tough guidelines for using firearms.

By adding to these criteria, the bill will not accomplish the goals set for it by the Minister of Justice.

Honourable senators, Minister Rock says:

...such a registration system can contribute to greater public welfare without imposing excessive constraints on hunters, farmers and target shooters.

I say, nonsense! The lowest cost estimate that I have seen anywhere for this registration system is \$100 million. Many people say it is higher. All farmers, hunters and target shooters who own guns must register them under the proposed law. You and I know that these are not guns used by criminals, and we are not likely to run into many criminals in the local gun registration line.

Mr. Rock says:

...registration will encourage compliance with safe storage requirements.

Honourable senators, my further question to that is: how? We are required already by law to safely store them. Minister Rock claims that it will better prepare police who are answering a distress call, since they will know if a gun is in that particular house. Does this mean that police answering these calls will come with their guns drawn? I hope not. This could lead to more violence.

Honourable senators, the minister cites statistics which gun registration in no way will address:

One woman every six days is shot to death...
1,100 Canadians commit suicide with a firearm each year.

• (1620)

As deplorable as these statistics may be, Mr. Rock's registration system will not save any of these people.

I received a fax this morning from the Nova Scotia Wildlife Federation dated November 21 and signed by a Mr. Tony Rodgers, Executive Director. He says, among other things:

Our debate is at an end, the ball is now in your court. After all the personal examination you have given this bill, I'm sure you understand what a poor piece of legislation it is. This bill is riddled with excessive powers for any Minister of Justice, spiked with reverse onus provisions, illegal search and seizure and it will bring negative actions against law abiding citizens in a manner that could be paralleled to the illegal imprisonment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. It will do nothing to reduce crime. This proposed law is nothing more than smoke and mirrors.