

*Measures Against Crime*

the fitness of the applicant as a responsible person is an important part of this system. The idea is analogous to that of the passport system, but the list of potential guarantors could be widened to take account of the special needs and concerns involved; that is, it could include wildlife officers, officials from shooting or hunting clubs, Indian band organizations, and so on. The government wishes to involve sportsmen and take account of localized needs as much as possible in the administration of this program.

In the event of a licence refusal or revocation or for refusal or revocation of a restricted weapon, an appeal would be available in a court of law, and reasons for the refusal or revocation would be provided in writing to the appellant. Such appeals currently exist for firearms' registration certificates, but are rarely used, suggesting that original decisions are seen to be fair and appropriate. We would expect this pattern to continue here.

The exact costs of licensing and dealer regulation are still being worked out in conjunction with the provinces. The point I wish to emphasize here is that the cost to society of firearms possession and its attendant control will be borne principally by the gun owner. We think nothing of paying a fee for the privilege of driving a car—or owning it for that matter—or for numerous other privileges that may impose a cost on society. We aim at ensuring that drivers are fit to handle such potentially dangerous machines as autos by prohibiting driving without a license, which a potential driver must pay to obtain. So it should be with an instrument of potential danger such as a gun. Screening potential misusers is not without cost, but we believe that serious and responsible gun owners should be willing to pay for such a process.

Hon. members surely cannot support the current system, under which a person who has just been released from a prison or a mental hospital can walk into a sporting goods store, or a hardware or department store, and buy a high-powered rifle or shotgun, with no questions asked. Nor do I think hon. members believe it is reasonable that the same system—or lack of it—applies to young persons buying their first gun or individuals who, in the emotional wake of a personal crisis, rush to a store to purchase a firearm with which they believe they can resolve their problems.

One subsidiary, but not inconsequential, benefit of a licensing system is that it, hopefully, will cause many people to rethink the entire subject of firearms possession. Many guns are kept today because they were acquired some time ago, used briefly for shooting or hunting and then simply put away in a closet, such as occurred in the recent Dresden incident. As such, they represent danger through theft or use in a violent incident. This casual owner may decide he would rather turn in such a weapon rather than go through the process of obtaining a licence and the necessary devices to keep his gun secure in his home. The active gun user will not be inhibited, since the process is straightforward, and security may well already be a fait accompli.

I feel I should remind the House that the total firearms package is not represented by the bill before it alone. Let me stress again the importance to the package of such measures as the voluntary recall of weapons, the education program, tighter import checks, and an on-going consultation with the provinces. Many of them have already prom-

[Mr. Allmand.]

ised additional measures that will augment and strengthen the controls proposed here. In fact, many have such measures in place already. I was recently reminded that Newfoundland has some of the strictest firearms controls in Canada and one of the lowest incidences of firearms violence as well.

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on criticisms made against these proposals by former RCMP commissioner L. H. Nicholson, now with the Canadian Wildlife Federation, as reported in the press. On the subject of the alleged ignoring of the views of the Canadian Wildlife Federation, I can say that the government gave careful consideration to the brief and, in fact, adopted many of its recommendations. The rejection of a registration system, provision of an amnesty program, prohibition of sawed-off rifles and shotguns, and improvement of seizure provisions under sections 103 and 105 of the Criminal Code were all recommended by the Federation. The suggestion to strengthen provincial safety training standards was also accepted and, in fact, formed the basis for the proposed licensing system.

● (1630)

It was felt, however, that it was not enough to require only competency in gun handling or storage. The government concluded, after considering the views of the Canadian Wildlife Federation, FARO the Shooting Federation of Canada, the Canadian Sporting Arms and Administration Association, and other groups, that before a person should be able to possess a firearm he should be able to show that he is not unfit to do so.

On the complaint that the bill was kept secret before tabling, I can only reply that of course it was. If it had been released to outside interest groups before presentation in this House, the government would justifiably be subject to severe criticism. This is not to say that there was no prior consultation of the general subject matter. However, as I mentioned just now, in fact Mr. Nicholson himself was invited to address, and did address, the first national conference of local firearms registrars held in Ottawa last June. He attended the conference for two days. I listened to many of the remarks that he made and they did have some impact on the legislation.

In addressing the House, the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) drew attention to the definition of "ammunition". He suggested a person finding a spent shell might be guilty of an offense for possessing unlicensed ammunition. I am sure the hon. member recognized that the concept of *mens rea*, along with discretion on the part of the police, Crown attorneys and the judiciary, must be taken into account in any discussion of this point. In fact, the government intends to amend this section in order to make the requirement of *mens rea* very clear, so that no one can be found guilty of an offence merely by finding a spent shell. Also, the definition in the bill is purposely complete because it is intended to require those people who possess the means for making ammunition and guns to be screened for fitness as much and as thoroughly as are the possessors of the completed item.

The hon. member for Calgary North also said that the gun control measures introduced by the government are, in effect, an ill-prepared and hurriedly worked out effort to