

*Government Orders*

Concurrently with Bill C-68, the justice minister has banned several types of military and paramilitary weapons by an order in council taking effect on January 1st, 1995. A total of 21 types of military and paramilitary firearms will now be prohibited, and they include more than 200 models. However, as the Minister of Justice said, the cornerstone of his bill is the registration system, a computerized record of names and particulars of all gun owners, along with a description of all the firearms they own.

On the eve of the new budget of the Liberal government, the proposals of the Minister of Justice raise a number of questions on the cost of implementing such a system at the national level. The minister was saying, on December 6, in Alberta, that it would cost at least \$85 million to implement. He said that the cost would be spread over five years and that, afterwards, the system would generate revenues. The day before yesterday, during a press conference, he went back on his word and said that the cost would actually be spread over seven years. He demonstrated to the people that he has no idea of the possible cost of such a system and who should bear it.

Unfortunately, we can no longer rely on the minister's estimates since, in two months, he added two years to the amortization period. In a few months, will come before the Standing Committee on Justice to tell us that the costs will never be recovered?

We always asked for a self-financing system. How is the Minister of Justice going to finance his system? He said that gun owners would not have to pay a cent to get their new registration certificates. Current owners will simply have to pay renewal fees of \$60 in five years.

He also states that new certificate holders will only have to pay a small fee of around \$10. How can the minister claim that system costs will be paid off over five or seven years? Why not 10 years?

• (1300)

In the meantime, he is asking the provinces to loosen their purse strings to help him pay the bill. He is asking the provinces to help him administer a system whose costs are unknown. This means that not only gun buyers and owners but all taxpayers will pay.

As I said earlier, to the costs associated with the system we must add those associated with a possible increase in prison population. The Minister of Justice can manipulate numbers as much as he likes, but the fact remains that the costs of his bill will be supported by the entire population.

Another flagrant example of the lack of rigour in calculating costs is a January 19 memorandum from the office of the justice minister stating that the government hopes but cannot confirm that current gun owners will not have to pay fees to obtain certificates of ownership.

The memorandum goes on to explain that fees will go up over time to encourage early registration and that the government is hoping that fees will not be charged during the first year.

Terms like "hoping" and "cannot confirm" suggest that the minister does not know the first thing about arithmetic. He has no idea of how much ordinary taxpayers will have to pay. He does not have any idea of the costs associated with Bill C-68 and how much gun owners will have to pay. We are basically demanding that the Minister of Justice's mathematics be clarified.

Finally, can we really talk about a victory, as suggested by the minister, when we know that all this great system will not become operational until the next century? I doubt it.

On the subject of regulations, the justice minister has missed a golden opportunity to practice what he preaches. Regulations respecting the storage, display, handling and transportation of certain firearms is a legal jumble that his department would have trouble sorting out. These regulations have been in force since January 1, 1993, but a great many people are still not aware of their existence, let alone their requirements. Even the police, who are responsible for enforcing them, says they are unfamiliar with these regulations.

When I questioned him in the House on November 15, the Minister of Justice answered, and I quote: "I well understand that the challenge we face is to make Canadians understand and comply with safe storage requirements."

I reviewed his action plan and his bill inside out, but nowhere is any revision of these regulations to be found. Yet, the Minister of Justice claims universal registration of firearms is necessary to make owners more responsible vis-à-vis storage and transportation. How can gun owners be asked to be more responsible and comply with regulations that they do not know about or do not understand?

The danger with inadequate regulations is that improperly stored firearms and ammunition are readily available to an individual who yields to a suicidal or violent impulsion. On the other hand, if firearms and ammunition are not readily available, chances are the person will calm down. Statistics on deaths caused by firearms are alarming. In 1991, suicides accounted for 77 per cent of the 1,445 deaths caused by firearms. In 1992, out of 732 registered homicides in Canada, 246, or 34 per cent, were committed with a firearm.

In the last ten years, most homicides were committed with shotguns or hunting rifles. Three times out of four, a spouse is killed by a rifle or a shotgun.

• (1305)

In Quebec, from 1990 to 1992, there were 1,293 deaths caused by firearms, which represents an annual average of 425. In that same province, suicides account for three out of four deaths