

Measures Against Crime

Possession of guns used in the commission of an indictable crime will constitute an offence, carrying a penalty of from one to 14 years. This could have a significant deterrent effect on the hardened criminal. The argument is often made that a professional criminal can always steal a gun so what is the value of the licence? That may be true, but at present a person who is released from prison can go to a store and purchase a gun without any inhibitions whatsoever, and then go out and commit a crime. It seems to me that this provision would have a deterrent effect.

When we look at the number of murders committed in the United States as compared to Canada we see that in the United States some 75 per cent of murders committed with a gun are committed with a handgun, whereas in Canada, where possession of handguns has been restricted for many years, only 25 per cent are committed with handguns. So it seems to me that this is some indication that this provision would have some deterrent effect even on the professional criminal.

Likewise it seems to me that in the impulse crime where a person has a fight with his next door neighbour, flies into a rage and rushes down to a store to buy a gun and then commit a crime, such a licensing provision would require time, provide a cooling off period, and would have a deterrent effect.

Likewise a person who has a problem with alcohol or drugs or who is mentally unstable, or a person who has suicidal tendencies, could be screened out by a licensing procedure and be deterred from an incident involving a gun.

Similarly it seems to me that the provisions in this bill would be quite beneficial in the case of careless handling and storage of guns and other weapons. We often hear of children having guns and either hurting themselves or injuring others. This legislation draws attention to the careless storage and handling of guns and not taking proper precautions to preserve the safety of others. The present Criminal Code provides for the use of guns, but this bill adds the provision with regard to storage and with regard to taking proper precautions against injury to others.

There are a number of areas which members of the committee, when they start the study of this legislation, should look at in detail. Perhaps they can strengthen the legislation and make it more practical. One of these areas is the careless storage and handling of guns. A great deal of concern has been expressed about this. I should like to see the committee do a detailed study on this. Certainly proper and reasonable care of guns and storage of guns in a bush camp in northern Ontario will be different from proper storage and handling of guns in downtown Toronto. I hope that the committee will review that provision to make sure that it is practical and workable.

It seems to me that proposed section 106.8(1)(g)(ii) relating to agreements with the provinces could be studied in detail in the committee. This provides for agreements with the provinces under the regulations for the licensing, and implementation of this act. It seems to me that there should be maximum co-ordination with the provinces in that regard.

● (2150)

Many provinces already have hunting licences which require a competency test. Although I am not aware of the details in every province, some provinces may have a fitness test as well, so it seems to me that this provision is very important because in many northern areas where a great deal of hunting is done practically all the gun owners are either hunters or sportsmen. By co-ordinating with the provinces we would be cutting down on bureaucracy, red tape, and duplication of efforts, and likely reducing the cost of the administration of this proposed legislation.

Likewise it seems to me that the committee will want to consider the possibility when phasing in this kind of legislation how it could be co-ordinated with the present hunting licence provisions, especially in northern and remote areas of our country where nearly all guns are used for hunting purposes and where the number of crimes related to gun incidents is minimal.

The third matter at which I should like to see the committee take a close look is the purchase of ammunition in northern and remote areas. We should think of the situation which would occur in northern Ontario and in many areas of the west where the housewife would have to drive 40 or 50 miles to town to buy provisions for her family, and she would not be able to pick up a box of .22 shells which her husband would need to kill vermin or groundhogs. It seems to me that we must look closer at that provision to make sure it is practical and workable, and that we are not just writing a bill which is suitable for downtown Montréal, Toronto or Vancouver.

Those are some of the main matters on which I should like to see the committee go into more detail as it studies this legislation. When this legislation is before the committee, the committee will want to have representatives of fish and game groups and of hunting clubs come before it to outline the practical difficulties in implementing a program like this. We are all aware that difficulties will occur and that no draftsman can ever prepare a bill which is completely perfect, and surely we want to have the deliberations and suggestions which have been made in this House reflected in the work of the standing committee.

Having said all that, I believe we should move on to see this legislation dealt with by the committee. I hope the committee can review it and make improvements, where it is possible, so that we can have a workable and practical piece of legislation which at the same time will improve public safety in Canada.

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): Mr. Speaker, when the debate resumes tomorrow I should like to share some of my philosophical thoughts on this subject with hon. members. In the few moments remaining tonight I should like to start—and it will be finished tomorrow—an adventurous phantasy into what would happen if this bill becomes law. I set it in the Halifax area, the front line trench in two world wars, and I think about an occasion—after Royal Assent might be given to the bill in its present form—in which a task force from the enemy lands in Halifax. These people are armed with one of the deadliest weapons which can be used by one part of mankind against another. What is that deadly weapon? It is the Criminal Code of Canada as revised by Bill C-83.