

this century, and a requirement that they all be registered was instituted in 1934. The first centralized restricted firearms registry system, under the control of the Commissioner of the R.C.M.P., was established in 1951.

Bill C-51, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which resulted in the present gun control regime, was adopted by Parliament in 1977, but it was the result of a process that began the previous year with an earlier bill, Bill C-83. The development that led from this precursor to the bill that was finally accepted by Parliament is a history of controversy and compromise. The problems and diversity of perspectives that were wrestled with then are still being faced today as we meet new challenges and continue the process of developing an effective gun control system.

Prior to 1976, there was no control on the acquisition or possession of ordinary rifles or shotguns. Bill C-83 proposed a strict universal licensing system which would have allowed only those over the age of 18 to be licensed to possess any firearm or ammunition. There was much opposition to the proposed new system, both within Parliament and among members of the public. As a result, the bill died on the Order Paper.

After further consultation with the provinces and interest groups, Bill C-51 was introduced in early 1977. It proposed a system to control the acquisition of any firearm by those over the age of 16. Further controls were added on firearms retailers, and provisions were made for the search and seizure of guns in cases where there was a threat to personal or public safety. Additional provisions expanded the prohibition and restriction of firearms presenting a particular danger. In particular, fully-automatic firearms (previously restricted) were banned, with the possession of such weapons being grandfathered to then current owners. Severe penalties for the criminal use of guns were established, including a minimum sentence of imprisonment for their use in the commission of a crime. The use of prohibition orders was also expanded.

The present regime thus has three general elements. First, the screening of the acquisition of any firearm. Second, controlling specific types of firearms which pose a particularly high risk to public safety. Third, the deterrence of the criminal use of firearms.

This new regime has had some demonstrable success in achieving its aims. Officials from the Department of Justice presented to us data, taken from reports produced by Statistics Canada, that indicate that the criminal use of firearms in Canada has in some cases been significantly reduced (See Issue No. 1, Minutes of Proceedings pp. 1:21-1:22). In addition, statistics also show a decrease in the total proportion of firearms deaths and injuries, including those resulting from homicides, suicides, and accidental misuse.

Nonetheless, over a decade of experience with this system has shown that it has gaps and problems, and efforts have been underway for some time to substantially amend the current law. Shocking incidents in the United States also raised concerns that further controls were needed in Canada. In particular, the use of military and para-military weapons in that country, and their increasing appearance in Canada, led to concerns among police authorities and line officers, and among many members of the public, about the availability of such firearms. A government proposal was made in this regard and consultations begun.

Possible weaknesses in the Firearms Acquisition Certificate ("FAC") screening process have also been the subject of concern for several years among the police, officials of the Federal Department of Justice, and other public officials. The development of a comprehensive set of