

Government Orders

Canada, while firearm ownership has increased, the accidental death rate has reduced by 80 per cent between 1986 and 1991.

In conclusion, people are demanding that we take action to further protect them from violent crime and other illegal activities present in certain areas of our society. The problem that the minister and indeed the entire government faces is the question of what response is most appropriate.

In his recent report, the Auditor General expressed concerns over the lack of evidence to justify the fact that the Canadian government passed more gun control legislation between 1977 and 1995 than in the entire preceding 50 years. The Auditor General also questioned the enforceability of the laws contained in Bill C-17. He also expressed anxiety over the lack of uniformity across the country regarding the FAC screening system.

These concerns are only a few expressed by the Auditor General and others concerned with this issue. I call upon the minister to consider the Auditor General's comments and the comments of all Canadians. Hunters and collectors compose a large part of our population and generate revenue for our economy each year through licensing fees, conservation efforts and the recreational hunting industry.

Canada's first explorers were from Europe, *coureurs des bois* who served the vital function of opening the new world to settlers. Hunting and responsible gun ownership is an intricate part of our rich heritage.

I suggest to the minister and to the House that firearms can co-exist with all Canadians in an allegorical guns and roses relationship respecting individual rights and privileges without further imposing unnecessary, cumbersome and expensive regulations on legitimate firearms owners and our nation's finances. The process must begin here with us.

• (1820)

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, of course I would like to see support for the amendment to split this bill. That is the way we should proceed.

I received some information with regard to the registration system recommended by the minister. The minister has said both inside and outside this House that it is going to be a simplified system, that it is going to place a tool in the hands of the law enforcement agencies to help them do their job and maintain a safer society. All the law-abiding gun owner will have to do is pick up a card at the post office or one of the stores in his or her community, fill in the make, model and serial number of their firearm and mail the card in.

Last week I visited three of the RCMP forensic laboratories and spoke with their technical experts on this matter. Either the information they have is not getting through to the minister or he

is ignoring it. When I asked them about this concept of having the gun owner fill in a card and send it in, they laughed.

I also found out that these labs have what they call a standard collection of firearms, meaning they are one of a kind. No two firearms are the same in the collection. These standard collections are in every one of their labs across the country.

In this one lab the technicians had examined the long guns of which there were just under a thousand. They found that 20 per cent of those firearms did not have serial numbers and 1.7 per cent could not be identified.

I do not know how the justice minister is going to create a registration system when 20 per cent of a standard collection that is fairly representative of the firearms in this country do not have serial numbers. How are we going to register a firearm that does not have a serial number?

When I asked these questions the technicians' response was that they would have to be brought in. Brought in where? To the labs that do not as yet have but would have the technology to handle the thousands of firearms that would have to be brought in.

Already they are examining the feasibility of what form and what type of system ought to be used to place a serial number on a firearm. Certainly it is going to cost more than \$10 a firearm. Certainly it is not going to impose a simple constraint on a gun owner to fill out a form. I ask the minister, how in the world can a serial number be written on a card if there is no serial number on the gun?

I was also told that many firearms in this country are over 100 years old. A firearm does not wear out. A firearm is usually maintained fairly well by the owner. Many of those firearms do not have the manufacturer's name, the calibre, or any identifying marks other than perhaps a model number or a serial number.

I was shown a firearm that had been imported from Russia. There are thousands of them in Canada, according to the information given to me. All it has on it is a serial number consisting of two Russian letters and three numbers. There is not the calibre, the make or any other identifying features on that firearm.

• (1825)

If we are going to develop a registration system which is truly going to be a workable and a valuable tool in the hands of our law enforcement agencies, we had better take a careful look at what we are going to do.

It is important, proper and wise that we consider the amendment before the House now. If the minister will consider splitting this bill, let us put our efforts together to devise a bill directed at the criminal use of firearms. If there are people who honestly and sincerely believe that universal registration will help, let us examine it before we go forward. Let us not hurry