

carried out in passionate circumstances by a person without heed for consequences with an all-too-available firearm.

Mr. Dick: That is manslaughter.

Mr. Allmand: It is murder. Two-thirds of our murders are committed in that way.

We must also keep very much in mind the fact that firearms were the instruments in around one-third of our more than 3,000 suicides in 1974, and caused death in more than 100 accidents in that year. The same circumstances apply all too often in cases of firearms robbery. In many cases, if a gun was not easily available, the act of robbery would not have occurred. The stolen, or borrowed, or easily purchased gun supplies the false courage and the clouding of reason that leads to a senseless act.

Some have suggested that we prohibit all firearms. We reject such a suggestion. Such a suggestion denies the legitimacy of firearms ownership and use for target shooting, hunting for sport or for food, or antique collecting, and these are uses which the government recognizes as perfectly legitimate. Furthermore, it is the government's belief that these uses of firearms need not be prohibited in order to reduce firearms incidents and public concern. Most current users should accept the appropriateness of the measures proposed, since by curbing firearms misuse they enhance legitimate use. It is difficult to understand why a current, responsible firearms owner would object to demonstrating his fitness for ownership or to ensuring that his guns and ammunition were securely stored and responsibly used. By this process he can also feel more secure that fewer guns are in hands of the irresponsible or criminally careless. Many sportsmen have indicated that they can live with, and benefit from, measures designed to screen out possession and use of firearms by those not fit to use them.

No one would be so naive as to suggest, Mr. Speaker, that any package of gun control measures will completely eliminate gun misuse. The roots of violent behaviour go deep and the gun as a tool of criminal activity will not disappear—not with ten million guns in Canada, or one for every two Canadians. In such cases, society's denunciation of such an act will be expressed in mandatory and stiffer sentences, if the proposed amendments in this bill are approved. Yet this is certainly not the whole solution. Where we must concentrate our attention is on the prevention of tragic incidents. Firearms ownership and use represents a collection of circumstances, and we must use a package of measures to have an impact at every stage. For each step, we must ask: "What are the possible benefits of measures here, and what are the offsetting costs?" When the benefits exceed the costs, a proposed option should be adopted.

● (1620)

I referred earlier to the many circumstances surrounding firearms possession and I am anxious that the measures we have proposed be seen as, and be considered as, a package designed to have an impact on all of those circumstances. We are trying, first and foremost, to reduce availability through tough import controls, new prohibitions, a voluntary recall program, and a needs test for the possession of

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restricted weapons, second, for those who continue to possess firearms, we wish to ensure they have nothing in their backgrounds that might render them unfit to do so. Further, we intend to offer an education program in responsible and secure gun storage and use, and we propose to augment that by applying criminal sanctions against careless misuse. Third, in dangerous situations that might still arise, we have proposed broader powers to the police and finally we suggest making greater powers available to the courts to deal with offenders. Each of these items in isolation can reduce the problem of firearms violence in Canada, but their real strength lies in their interlocking nature.

With respect to the most complex part of the package—the licensing system—let me try to differentiate it from a registration system and say why we rejected extending registration to long guns. Registration pertains to things—guns in this case—not people. It records the description, serial number and ownership of each item or weapon. For extremely lethal and easily hidden weapons such as handguns—which in Canada are restricted and of which there are relatively few—it is a workable and relatively effective system that screens owners and weapons alike and inhibits casual purchase. However, for the ten million long guns in Canada I believe that a registration scheme would be unworkable and impractical in comparison with its potential benefits. Instead, I believe that we can accomplish most of the same ends by a different means—licensing users. With licensing we focus on the person rather than the object, and we endeavor to ensure that he is not unfit to possess a lethal instrument such as a gun.

The government is pleased to see that some provinces wish to go even further in using the provisions of section 106(8) of the act, which encourage provinces to ensure that the licensed possessor is "safety trained" by means of programs they are now operating or could establish. Once licensed, a person could possess as many guns as he needed or wanted to have. Thus, with this bill's approach we are faced with the task of screening some two million to three million owners rather than having to register some ten million weapons.

Obviously, a licensing system as proposed here is a complex undertaking. Yet it has been designed so as to provide maximum flexibility in introduction and administration at the lowest possible cost. Aside from record-keeping, the system will be highly decentralized, with a number of licensing officers throughout Canada. These officers would process applications and approve licence issuance if justified. They would be supported and aided by local registrars, and each province would have a chief local registrar at the provincial level. Local registrars would normally be police officers as well, but licensing officers who will perform most of the administrative tasks would not necessarily be. Retired police officers or armed forces personnel may be excellent for this function.

Thus, individuals applying for a licence would deal with someone from their district or region of the province who may well know the applicant and be able to easily confirm his fitness to hold a gun licence. The police would carry out necessary record checks, while officials would handle administration. The requirement on the applicant to obtain a declaration signed by two guarantors who must affirm