

Criminal Code

operate within the ministries of natural resources and tourism or their counterparts in each of the provinces, and those officers are responsible for the development of gun safety programs and their operations in the provinces.

It was the unanimous view of the provincial administrators of gun safety programs that this type of provision should be in the law and that it should be supported. I refer to the restriction of less than 18½-inch, rapid-fire or semi-automatic centre-fire weapons. I suggest that there is no proper hunting use for these guns. That was the view of the provincial administrators. Many of these guns are of low calibre and would wound more deer than they would ever kill. Some of them are quite inaccurate in terms of target. They are not good shooting weapons. I could bring before the House a stack of textbooks on rifles and guns indicating that these particular weapons serve no useful hunting purpose.

I want to make it clear that for sporting purposes the present owners of these guns will be able to register them and use them for sporting purposes, that is, for target purposes as part of the regular activities of game clubs. However, when we consider the fact that these weapons are not suitable hunting weapons, and when we consider that they are widely used for criminal purposes and are ideal for criminal purposes, I think we should resist this amendment and implement this provision in the bill.

Hon. members have suggested that we should do this by regulation, but I resist that. Some have criticized this bill by saying it has too many regulations, but in the committee I think we were able to show that the regulatory power under this bill is much more restricted than it was in Bill C-83. The problem with accepting the suggestion of the hon. member from the Okanagan would be that the governor in council would be restricting specific types and names of rifles, and in a very short time neither gun dealers, gun owners, nor the police would know which guns are restricted and which are not.

The demand over the last year has been that there be as great a degree of certainty as possible so that gun owners, gun dealers and the police will know what is legal and what is not, what is restricted and what is not, and what is prohibited and what is not. If we were to accept the suggestions of the hon. member and deal with short-barrelled guns by way of regulation, I submit that in a very short time there would be very great confusion as to which guns were restricted and which guns were not. I do not think gun owners or the police want that result, and I submit that on reflection hon. members would not want it either.

Mr. Neil: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would accept a question.

Mr. Basford: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Neil: The minister is probably aware that the Canadian Wildlife Federation and the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation are opposed to this amendment because it would result in many thousands of people having in their possession restricted weapons after this bill is passed. Does the minister have any

[Mr. Basford.]

statistics to indicate how many of these weapons have been used in the commission of crimes? I am not talking about professional criminals.

Mr. Basford: Mr. Speaker, I do not have that statistic here in the House. I am advised that they are widely used by criminals in this country and in the United States, but I do not have the statistics to cover that point. One need only recall the picture which appeared in the international press of Patty Hearst robbing the bank—it was probably the most photographed robbery in the world—and she was using a weapon of this type.

● (1200)

Mr. Neil: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would admit that regardless of any regulation or prohibition, the professional criminal will always be able to get handguns, rifles and weapons of any kind?

Mr. Basford: Mr. Speaker, to a certain extent I have always conceded that, but I have also said that the more a law is certain, and the more the police can be certain what is restricted and what is not, then if they come across a criminal who is not committing a crime but is in possession of a weapon, they are better able to deal with the situation on the spot. It is also easier for customs officials to deal with shipments, and it is easier for gun dealers to know what they can import and sell than when there is a lack of certainty. If this amendment were accepted and the weapons were restricted by powers of regulation, there would be uncertainty for customs officers, dealers and gun owners.

Mr. Brisco: Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the minister. In his response to the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil), the minister referred to semi-automatic weapons. When he referred to the statistics available regarding the number of sawed-off weapons, I wonder if he was talking about such weapons as the AR-15, a type of semi-automatic weapon, or whether he was putting the emphasis on sawed-off hunting rifles and sawed-off shotguns of the Lupara variety. Is he putting emphasis on the sawed-off shotgun, rifle or semi-automatic weapon?

Mr. Basford: Mr. Speaker, the amendment is clear: it is aimed at short-barrelled, semi-automatic, centre-fire rifles.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): The question is on motion No. 1 in the name of the hon. member for Moose Jaw (Mr. Neil). All those in favour of the said motion will please say yea.

Some hon. Members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): All those opposed please say nay.