

*Government Orders*

After the bill was sent to the committee on April 24, we held 52 meetings lasting until June 5. In that time we heard 70 witness groups.

While I am and always have been a strong supporter of gun control and a supporter of Bill C-68, I took the position as chair of the committee that I would bend over backward to accommodate those groups which opposed the bill, to accommodate those members of Parliament and parties who had concerns about or opposition to the bill. I did this because I think the credibility and integrity of the parliamentary system take precedence over partisan views and behaviour. As a result, approximately two-thirds of the witnesses who appeared before the committee were in opposition to the bill and 61 amendments were made.

Further amendments were made last night at report stage. Of course not all amendments were accepted, which is normal in a democratic society where there are opposing views. Some of the amendments would have cut out the essential elements of the bill, and therefore they were opposed. Other amendments which were directed to major and minor improvements in the bill were not convincing to the majority on the committee.

Now I should like to take off my committee chairman's hat and put on my House of Commons hat and show my support for the bill. Ever since I was elected in 1965 I have been a strong supporter of gun control. Nearly all the elements in this bill and in Bill C-17 from 1992 were contained in one or other of my private member's bills from the late 1960s and early 1970s. With this bill nearly all the proposals I made 30 years ago will have been legislated.

Over and over again, before the committee, witnesses opposing the bill said there was no evidence that the licensing of gun owners and the registration of guns would reduce crime. That is not correct. There is overwhelming evidence that where guns and gun owners are more strictly controlled there is less crime with guns.

If we examine the situation in western Europe where in nearly all countries guns are registered, they have a much lower rate of crime with guns. In Canada, where we have had the registration of handguns for many years, we have had a lower rate of crime with handguns than in the United States where handguns or no guns are registered at all.

Some people might refer to some of the states of the United States that have very strict gun laws, but we cannot really consider them because in the United States there is no border control between the states. For example, if one is in New York State one can very easily travel to a neighbouring state where guns are easily available. Therefore the strict gun laws in one American state do not have very much impact on the control of crime with guns.

However, in Canada, as I say, we have had very strict control on handguns which have been restricted weapons since 1934. In Canada 53 per cent of our crimes with guns are with long guns, whereas only 17 per cent of crimes with guns are with handguns. It is interesting to note that in the United States the statistics are exactly the opposite where two-thirds of its crimes with guns are with handguns. This demonstrates that where we control handguns we have a much lower rate of crime with handguns. Because we have no control on long guns most of our crimes with guns are with long guns.

• (1615)

The purpose of licensing is to screen out irresponsible, imbalanced reckless persons who might acquire guns, to screen out people who have problems with alcohol or narcotics. The licensing system in the bill is merely an extension of what we have already had for several years with firearms acquisition certificates.

The registration system will require more responsibility from gun owners and provide police with more tools for crime prevention and crime detection. The purpose of both of these measures is public safety. The bill requires no more of gun owners than we already have in varying degrees for automobiles, boats, aircraft, ski-doos, dogs and bicycles. In other words, the measures in the bill with respect to licensing and registration are for preventive policing, the approach of the police these days, to prevent crimes than after the crime applying a harsh penalty. It is much better to prevent the crime by keeping guns out of the hands of dangerous, irresponsible people than to punish them after they have committed the crime.

Furthermore, I want to make absolutely clear there is no intention at all by me or anybody else in government to ban all guns or ban hunting or competitive shooting.

This is my fourth gun bill debate since I came here in 1965. On those four occasions this fear was raised by opponents of those bills. It never happened. We have as many or more hunters today than we had in 1965 when we first started introducing bills to control guns.

On the other hand, while there has been no real reduction in the number of hunters or competitive shooters there has been a gradual reduction of crime with guns. In 1974, 47.2 per cent of homicides were with a firearm. In 1976, we passed a law that brought in a certain restriction on firearms. That was the year we brought in the firearms acquisition certificate. By 1980 only 32.9 per cent of homicides were committed with a firearm. In 1992 we had Bill C-17 with further restrictions and further controls on firearms. In 1993, the last year for which we have statistics, only 30.6 per cent of homicides were with firearms.

In that period homicides have declined as well. The highest rate for homicides in recent years was in 1975 when we had 3.02 homicides per 100,000 population. In 1993 there were 2.19 per