

*Private Members' Business*

I hope it will go to committee because it is clear from debate in the House today that many questions were unanswered as a result of Bill C-17, that there is a need for debate, and that there is a need for further education on the part of members of Parliament and the public at large.

The purpose of the bill would be to establish a reporting system for unrestricted firearms which are acquired after the coming into force of the act. Restricted weapons, typically hand-guns, are registered but unrestricted weapons, typically rifles and shotguns, are not. There is no record of how many unrestricted firearms are in circulation. Persons who are issued firearms acquisition certificates may buy as many unrestricted weapons as they want. The purpose of the bill would be to get a handle on unregistered firearms, to require that unrestricted firearms, typically shotguns and rifles, be registered.

We are talking about after the coming into force of this act. It would be an incremental step. It would be a beginning. It would enable us to determine whether the technology available today would allow the implementation of such a system in an efficient manner and a manner that would not impose undue cost or hardship on owners of these weapons.

I support the bill. I hope it goes into committee. I hope we have an opportunity to debate the matter further and to hear from witnesses. I note that many respected organizations support the bill including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, the Canadian Police Association, my city of Montreal, and a number of organizations in the city of Montreal including the Montreal General Hospital Surgical Intensive Care Trauma Unit which has had to deal with the victims of the tragedies at Ecole Polytechnique and Concordia University.

The bill is also supported by Concordia University and by Ecole Polytechnique, the staff, teachers and students of those schools. I support this measure and indeed hope to participate in the committee meetings on this bill.

**Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a couple of comments on Bill C-348, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to gun control.

I have been looking at the bill. I understand its purpose is to establish a system that would essentially form a system of registration of unrestricted firearms, for example long-guns, hunting rifles and shotguns which people including myself use for recreational purposes. I have some real difficulties with the bill. I guess it is one of those times when I have to disagree with my New Democratic colleague who said the New Democratic Party is supporting this bill. I do not think that is unanimous.

• (1800)

I know that I also speak on behalf of my colleague, the hon. member for Kootenay West—Revelstoke, who feels very much the same as I do.

We of course understand and sympathize with the intent of the legislation which is to reduce the amount of criminal misuse of firearms. Certainly any specific initiatives that can impact on the misuse and the deadly use of firearms in acts of criminal violence should be implemented, but this is going about it in the wrong sense and that is why we have difficulties with the bill.

The bill attempts to restrict ownership of firearms and to layer on more bureaucratic red tape in terms of the purchase, the ownership, the sale and lending of these firearms.

What it is essentially doing is confounding the legitimate and recreational use of firearms that people have throughout Canada. It is essentially attacking the problem from the wrong side. Where we should be attacking the problem is in terms of increased criminal sanctions when firearms are used in criminal acts or in acts of violence. I think that is a more appropriate mechanism in which to impose penalties.

This particular bill, for example, forces the further reporting and filling out of forms for the trading and lending of firearms. Really as was pointed out earlier people that are purchasing firearms or trading firearms now essentially have to register through the firearms acquisition certificate. I think that is an appropriate mechanism in which really anyone that is applying for an FAC is essentially registering that they are going to become a new owner of a firearm.