

First, honourable senators, I want to state to all honourable senators that I am a strong supporter of gun control. Bill C-68, in my view, though, is not gun control — it is gun registration. A bureaucracy will be imposed on law-abiding citizens.

Honourable senators, I also support the safety and storage aspects of this bill. I think this is what distinguishes us from other societies in that we exercise a high degree of safety and control within our society. If I believed for one second that Bill C-68, as drafted, would improve the control of guns, I would be the first one to vote for it. If I believed that the registration portion of the legislation would do anything, I would be front and centre in supporting Bill C-68. However, I do support the criminal enforcement aspects of Bill C-68 because I think it is most important that we tighten our laws to impede those who would defy our laws.

• (2150)

I also respect the elected place in our bicameral system of Parliament. It is in that spirit that I support amendments to the legislation. I was shocked by the attitude of the minister who felt his bill was perfect. I have been around this place long enough, honourable senators, to know that nothing here is perfect. In spite of how great or how eloquent or how well-educated or how experienced one is, there is always room for improvement. I believe a minister who would not entertain, or even consider, any amendments is remiss in his or her duties.

To a degree, there is some intellectual dishonesty regarding gun registration when people say it will reduce crime and control criminals. I do not believe that it will.

If the minister and those who support him were to be really honest, do you know what they would be asking for? They would be asking that we ban all firearms other than for the police and the military. I do not know what the result of that would be in our society, but I do think that would have more credence than asserting that the registration of the firearms of law-abiding citizens will make a difference, because if all the guns we have in this country were to be registered, they would all still exist in their present form. As Senator Sparrow and others have said here today and on other occasions, it would make no difference because criminals would not register their guns anyway.

What difference would it make with respect to suicides? I have heard so many times that suicide would be reduced if all guns were registered. What difference would it make if every gun were registered in the Northwest Territories? Theoretically, this bill will cause everyone to send in a little slip to register their guns. When a registered gun owner reaches such a low point that he or she wants to end his or her life, registration will do nothing to stop them.

The Marc Lépins of our world will not go away because of registration. They will still be there, front and centre, because no government can legislate against insanity. We will always have those in our society who will be dangerous. I do not believe that

gun registration, in any way, shape or form, will eliminate those people who become violent.

I do wish the minister had been honest and stuck to his guns when he said he believed that only the police and the military should have guns. Then he would have had some credibility with me. Then I could possibly believe that he was really committed to reducing violence in our society.

I would hope that the families of victims of violent crimes in this country are not used in the political agenda to pursue any kind of legislation. It is not fair to misrepresent the facts in that manner.

As most honourable senators know, I travelled with several senators across this country to hear what Canadians had to say about this bill. I apologize to Senator Prud'homme for not making him aware of the travels that we undertook; he would have accompanied us. However, we did hear, in the western provinces and in the north, what Canadians had to say on this issue. It is regrettable that the meetings were boycotted by those who support Bill C-68 because, as I said earlier, if someone could point out to me how gun registration would reduce crime, I would change my position and my views on this matter.

We did hear from school teachers, farmers, trappers, outfitters, that what we need in our society more than anything is education. We need the removal of violence from our media. We need to work with and build on the family unit. These are the issues which were brought forward to Senators Tkachuk, Stratton, Carney, Lucier, Lawson and others who were with us. These are the concerns that will make a significant change in our society.

We heard from our aboriginal community. We have, as a society, done things to these people for which we should all be very ashamed. I went and lived with the Inuit on the Beaufort Sea. I slept in a sleeping bag on the floor of one of their hunting cabins, which I shared with a family of seven. I spent the day with them. I saw how they lived. I did not want to come back here and just say that I believe I know how they live. I spent time with them.

I spent time with the Dene Nation, with Chief Bill Erasmus. I spent time with the Minister of Justice, Steven Kakfwi, in the Northwest Territories and with his people. I spoke to no native people, men or women, who were in favour of this legislation with the sole exception of Senator Marchand. He is the only native person with whom I have been in contact who supports this bill.

As I have pointed out before in this place, we have forced these people off their traditional lands. We placed them on reserves. We virtually persecuted them. One native at the Dene Nation meeting said to me: "Your white community should have practised gun control 150 to 200 years ago when they were killing all of us." When Senator Spivak talks about the need for gun control, I would point out to her that that is when it was needed.