

Gun Control

firearms, Bill C-207 would be superfluous. The purpose of this Bill is not to deal with criminals and irresponsible individuals. It would only impose an unfair and unnecessary burden on legitimate firearm users.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that we would better achieve the true objectives of firearm control by strictly imposing heavy penalties on all those convicted of an offence involving the improper, criminal or reckless use of firearms. In other words, I think that it would be better to punish severely all criminals and irresponsible individuals, and not create new obstacles for law-abiding citizens wishing to possess firearms for legitimate sporting or leisure activities, as would be the case with Bill C-207.

The current legislation includes, in the area of sentencing, a whole series of provisions to dissuade criminals from using firearms. The Criminal Code, as amended in 1977, has reinforced the penalties which the courts may impose. The most significant of these new means provides, under Section 83 of the Criminal Code, in the case of a first offence, for a penalty of not less than one year and not more than 14 years, to every one who, and I quote: "uses a firearm while committing or attempting to commit an indictable offence". This new section, which came into force on January 1, 1978, provides that a sentence so imposed on a person would be served consecutively to any other punishment imposed on him or her.

In the case of subsequent offences, the minimum penalty is increased to three years and should also be served consecutively to any other punishment.

Also, the legislation provides for the following offences and penalties: a fine or imprisonment of not more than two years for permit related offences; a fine or imprisonment of no more than five years for the possession of a firearm by a person who is prohibited from owning one; the possession of a prohibited weapon, pointing a gun at another person, carrying a concealed weapon without a permit; and also an imprisonment of no more than ten years for carrying a weapon or an imitation thereof for a purpose dangerous to the public peace or for the purpose of committing an offence.

In addition to the penalties I have just mentioned, there are safety related offences dealing with the handling, storage and sale of firearms.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the whole series of offences and penalties which I have just described may effectively achieve the essential goals of firearm control, which are to dissuade their criminal and ill-advised use and discourage their irresponsible and inconsiderate use.

According to an independent evaluation carried out every three years of the current legislative measures, these provisions have had positive results.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the provisions of Bill C-207 are not aimed at facing the true problem which is the criminal and irresponsible use of firearms. It would introduce bureaucratic complications which would prove expensive by absorbing the

modest resources of the criminal justice system and represent an unfair burden for millions of honest and law-abiding users. Under the circumstances, Mr. Speaker, I will vote against Bill C-207.

• (1730)

[English]

Mr. William G. Lesick (Edmonton East): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-207, a proposal to amend the gun-control provisions of the Criminal Code.

When I was born in a teacherage in a remote spot in Alberta, we had a gun in the house. We have always had guns and have handled them safely and well. They have given us a great deal of pleasure and have provided a great deal of food.

Guns have not proven to be any problem to us. The only person ever killed violently in our family was my grandfather who died in a car accident in 1929. No one has ever been killed due to the use of a gun in our family.

I have always believed that guns are an essential part of our lives in western Canada, and Alberta in particular.

In essence, the proposed amendments to the legislation would extend the current law in three ways. First, individuals who owned a firearm prior to 1979 and who have not subsequently obtained a firearms acquisition certificate would be required, if they wished to retain possession of the firearm, to submit themselves to screening by police. The purpose of this screening would be to determine if their possession of a firearm constitutes a hazard to their safety or to the safety of others. Second, it would mean that the mere possession of ammunition by anyone who has not passed this screening will be an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada. Finally, the amendment would require anyone who has a firearm or ammunition in a motor vehicle to have a firearms possession certificate. I would like to use the time available to outline some very serious reservations I have regarding these proposed changes.

• (1740)

The current legislation provides the legal basis to deny individuals who wish to acquire a firearm the right to do so if there is reasonable cause to believe, for the safety of the public, that they should not have one. It is intended to prevent convicted criminals who have used violence against another person, or who have used firearms in the commission of their crimes, and individuals who have been treated for mental disorders associated with violent behaviour, or who have attempted or threatened violence against others, all within a previous five-year period, from legally acquiring firearms.

At the time the current legislation was being drafted, a choice had to be made as to whether or not this screening should apply to everyone who possessed a firearm or only to those who would acquire one after the legislation came into