

support the amendment which has been proposed by my colleague. An amazing feature of this legislation is that while the government is generally moving towards a softer attitude with regard to the laws and lesser penalties for illegal activities, we now come face to face with a clause in the bill which, as my colleague, the hon. member for Okanagan Boundary (Mr. Whittaker), has said, makes criminals out of honest citizens and then subjects them to penalties that are in many instances very severe.

So I have a great deal of difficulty in reconciling the various positions taken by this government. I have almost given up trying to reconcile the government's policies because they are so contradictory, so unreasonable, that in many respects one reaches the point of throwing up one's hands and saying, "What is the use? They do not know what they are doing. They do not know how to handle the situation. They let on they have all the answers, and then they turn around and tell us they do not have the answers and ask us for suggestions". Then, when the opposition makes proposals, they reject them out of hand.

The whole thing is a horrible mess so far as this government is concerned. We know that the legislation which was introduced initially stirred up a great deal of resentment across the country, so much so in fact that the government had to bend and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) had to pull in his horns and take another look at the situation. Whoever drafted the legislation did not seem to have any sense or reason. It was so trivial in many respects that it was just a joke. So the government felt it had to remove some of these inconsistencies and absurdities. But we still have this bill before us which will make criminals out of honest, law-abiding citizens who for many years have had certain weapons in their possession and, having found themselves in circumstances where they were out of line a little bit, have been convicted and have had a penalty imposed upon them as a result of these new laws.

It seems to me that the proposition which has been advanced by my colleague is reasonable. He proposes that this matter be dealt with under another section of the act. I think that is perfectly reasonable. Surely, in considering a bill that has stirred up such a great deal of animosity, bitterness and resentment across the country, reason will prevail and the minister will agree to accede to the proposal of my colleague and will accept it.

No matter what amendments we make to the bill, it is a stupid bill—there is no question about that. The problem could be dealt with in other ways. On the basis of reason alone, I believe that an accommodation should be made by the minister and that this amendment should be accepted. Again I say that many aspects of the bill are repugnant because they encroach upon the freedoms and rights which people have enjoyed down through the years. The minister has acknowledged that this will have no effect on the criminal element in the country. I suppose he is looking for more scapegoats and he will turn against the law-abiding citizens of this country. I suggest that he should accept the amendment.

Criminal Code

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words on this amendment to a clause which has been considered very thoroughly and carefully ever since the introduction of Bill C-83, over a year ago. The question is the limiting in the statute of high-powered, rapid-fire weapons with a barrel length of less than 18½ inches. I think that when we are looking at matters of gun control we have to weigh and to balance the public interest against private interests. As I have said, we considered this matter very carefully with firearm experts in the RCMP and others.

Recently, even subsequent to the bill being reported from committee, I met with Colonel Nicholson of the Canadian Wildlife Federation. He came to me on this issue and pressed his case and the case of those who wanted this amendment. As a result of Colonel Nicholson's further visit, I re-examined the whole situation as late as last Thursday and Friday, and in my view the legislation as proposed should stand.

● (1150)

The purpose of this provision is to restrict rapid-fire, concealable weapons. Obviously, a weapon with a short barrel length is easily concealable under a raincoat or a trench coat if the stock has been sawed off. Police records indicate that a large number of short-barrelled guns are being used for criminal purposes. The M1 was developed during the Second World War as a personnel stopper. The AR-15 was designed and produced for use in the Vietnam war and these guns are now being used widely by criminal elements in the United States and in this country. Therefore, as a matter of public policy it seems to me that we should endeavour to restrict their availability and use in Canada as much as possible.

It would be contrary to the rules, but I wish I could bring into the House the kinds of guns we are talking about. I did show those guns to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, and I think the committee was impressed by what we were talking about.

I met very recently with the Kelowna District Fish and Game Club. I showed its members the kinds of guns we are talking about. Once they knew the kinds of guns involved, they supported this bill and this proposal to restrict semi-automatic, centre-fire rifles of barrel lengths of less than 18½ inches. I have examined gun catalogues. I examined the list Colonel Nicholson produced to the committee. The list submitted included short-barrelled .22s which are not restricted under this provision. It included a number of weapons that by no conceivable definition could be considered hunting weapons. The Plainfield Machine Company carbine has a collapsible stock. It was designed as a military weapon and it is ideal for criminal purposes, but quite unsuitable for sporting purposes. If hon. members were able to see pictures of such weapons, let alone the guns themselves, I think they would readily agree that these really have no proper public use in this country.

With regard to the aspect of hunting, I point out to hon. members that last month in Saskatoon there was a meeting of the association of provincial hunter-safety training co-ordinators. This association is composed of provincial officers who