

Government Orders

criminals, those who believe that power and control from the barrel of an illegally obtained handgun is the end all and be all to their existence.

Members opposite will try to convince Canadians that family oriented, loving and caring Canadians who choose target shooting, hunting or competitive shooting as a sport are the same as hardened criminals who place Canadians in grave or mortal danger.

We all know those words are further attempts at giving the elite the means to control our society through the portions of Bill C-68 never mentioned by members of this government

We all know those members opposite are being extorted to hide the true facts about the order in council clauses of this bill. They give absolute authority to the few elite and the few among the Liberals who still believe that total control from the top is the end all and be all of their mandate and that true democracy by way of frank and open debate with those who have opposing views is and must be opposed at all costs. That might convince Canadians they have a choice, intelligence and an opinion.

• (1330)

In conclusion, there has been a wake-up call to politicians from all Canadians indicating to each and every one of us that they will have a voice from this day forward in what comes out of the House, and so they should. I encourage them to continue to be involved in this very contentious issue.

Mr. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons. As is the case in many rural ridings, the legislation has elicited a great deal of interest among my constituents.

Everyone participating in the discussion should do so with the following three points in mind. First, the government promised to toughen firearms legislation during the last election campaign and was elected with a strong mandate. Second, opinion research indicates a very high level of support among Canadians for the legislative initiative. Third, firearms owners have legitimate concerns about the proposed law. If we do not work with these axioms in mind, we will not have the constructive and open debate this important issue merits.

The Minister of Justice introduced a broad set of measures intended to increase public security in Canada. While I have difficulty fully appreciating all the benefits of registering rifles and shotguns, I nonetheless support most of the provisions in the bill.

Most Canadians, even the most sceptical, would admit there is some good in the legislation.

[*Translation*]

However, this debate is about how we can improve this bill even more, to make it acceptable to a larger number of Canadians. As we saw with the GST, for instance, if a new bill is not widely accepted, it will fail to do what it is supposed to do.

During the past few months I have received hundreds of cards and many telephone calls, faxes and letters representing the two poles of this debate. I met a number of constituents personally and also attended regularly the meetings of a special firearms owners advisory committee.

Of the approximately 500 residents of Simcoe North who communicated with me on this bill, about 10 per cent supported the bill and 90 per cent were opposed. The majority of the latter group expressed their views through a mail-in campaign.

[*English*]

Despite the opinion research showing strong support in every region of Canada for the measures contained in Bill C-68, it is clear that large numbers of hunters, target shooters and gun collectors are very dissatisfied. As legislators I feel we should do our utmost to balance these concerns with the will of the majority of Canadians. If we can eliminate the dogmatic rhetoric emanating from those with entrenched positions on either side of the issue and debate the matter with a rational approach and an open mind, we can make important progress toward this balance.

An example of a compromise that would not water down the bill in any way but would certainly render it fair in practice and in perception is the following: Bill C-68 could be significantly improved by removing from the Criminal Code the penalties in section 91 for non-registration in cases where the contravention is not wilful, for example where there has been an oversight. This type of non-registration would be more justly dealt with under the newly created firearms act.

Penalties for wilful non-registration in section 92 could remain in the Criminal Code. This simple amendment would take nothing away from the strength of the bill but would ensure that law-abiding Canadians are not recorded as having criminal records due to an omission, oversight or ignorance of the law. In my opinion the amendment would dispel much of the concern felt by many firearm owners.

• (1335)

I have received a legal opinion that not only would the amendment be constitutional but it would actually improve the constitutionality of the bill. I have requested an opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs to seek its support for the amendment. Barring a chance