

Government Orders

to working with the aboriginal communities across Canada to ensure that happens.

From time to time issues and questions arise which permit the legislature of a country to define what kind of future it wants for the country. It seems to me that on the subject of the regulation of firearms we have just such an issue. We have an opportunity for Parliament to make a statement about the kind of Canada that we want for ourselves and for our children, about the efforts we are prepared to make to ensure the peaceful and civilized nation that we have and enjoy and to demonstrate just who is in control of firearms in Canada. Is it the gun lobby or is it the people of this country?

Much reference is made in the House on the subject of polls. It was not polls that inspired this legislation. This legislation is based on the principles and objectives that I described at the outset. However, polls are useful from time to time to remind us just where the people stand on these issues. There is no doubt that these proposals enjoy the support of the vast majority of Canadians, rural and urban, in every region of the country. They see this legislation as an opportunity for us to make exactly the kind of statement I referred to about the kind of country we want, the kind of future we want and just how firearms should be acquired and used in Canada.

I commend this legislation to the House. I invite its attention to the principles of which we speak and I ask for the support of the House for those principles.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, at last we have a bill on gun control, and we are very pleased. It was high time the Minister of Justice tabled his plan of action in the form of a bill. We are delighted to proceed with the real debate. No more delays, no more conferences and consultations. Now the debate can start on Bill C-68, which is supposed to be an innovative piece of legislation.

We in the official opposition are aware of the concerns of a public that is disturbed, and rightly so, about the proliferation of firearms and the shocking number of deaths caused by these weapons.

• (1245)

We do not criticize just for the sake of criticizing, although the Minister of Justice does not seem to agree. Our criticism is constructive. Basically, we support legislation that will tighten gun control.

Right from the start, I would like to stress the attitude of the Minister of Justice during the debate on gun control. It is always a pleasure to watch a politician who sticks to his guns.

That being said, although the Minister of Justice is to be commended, Bill C-68 is not a panacea. It will not deal with all the problems out there. In fact, I am not so much worried about

what the bill contains as about what it does not contain. I will expand on this in a few minutes.

I can hardly ignore the behaviour of the minority pro-gun lobby, a minority that managed to give the impression that its extreme position is widely shared. The pro-gun lobby and their Reform Party friends have been piling on the speeches. They would have us believe that more is better. The warm welcome they gave the Minister of Justice when he visited Calgary says a lot about their allegiance and their cynical attitudes. Threats of civil disobedience, the sacrosanct right to own firearms and individual and collective rights are all part of their rallying cry.

They want the public to believe that a bill on gun control is worthy of a dictator like Stalin, Hitler or Pol Pot. I even received a communication in my office in Ottawa, with a list attached of countries where genocide had been practised and the dates on which gun control legislation had come into effect in those countries.

These fervent supporters of the right to bear arms were trying to establish a link between gun control and the genocides that have tarnished the history of mankind. This is pretty sad. I never saw such a total lack of intellectual honesty. These people should be ashamed of spreading such monstrous lies. To claim that the Armenian genocide was a direct consequence of gun control legislation that came into effect 40 years earlier is not only absurd but insane.

I agree that these individuals are not representative of the majority of those who object to all forms of gun control. Reform Party members should check their ranks and flush out the extremists. Some spring cleaning would be in order.

I come back to the bill before us today. In the fall we criticized it and, again today, we decry the minister's hesitation. Since the minister has been promising us legislation on arms control for such a long time, we were expecting something more complete, I can assure you.

The Minister of Justice wanted to win everyone over by giving something to each of them. Reformers, the gun lobby, and a number of colleagues of the Minister of Justice are delighted with the increase in the minimum sentences for crimes committed with guns and the fact that current firearms owners have almost eight years' grace to comply with the requirements of the national registration system the government is proposing today.

Let us have a closer look at who should be celebrating: the gun lobby or those in favour of stricter arms.

First, the bill proposes major changes to the Criminal Code. In terms of sentences, the bill increases from one year to four years the minimum sentence an individual must serve for committing a crime with a firearm. The present section 85 of the Criminal Code provides for a minimum sentence of one year for anyone using a firearm to commit a criminal act.