

*Private Members' Business*

The regulations that came in today in the House of Commons really basically deal with the non-criminal use of guns which we have to deal with and I will come back to that in a moment.

I think someone said 1,400 people a year die through accidents and suicides and so on. These are not criminals, so we cannot use it as a trade off. We cannot say, as many people said in the gun control debate: "Don't have strong gun control. Just focus on criminals who use guns". I say we have to do both. I want to make that very clear.

The bill that the hon. member for Kitchener introduces does four things as I understand it.

The first one is that it would toughen up section 85 of the Criminal Code so a minimum mandatory sentence would be increased from one year to three years for a first offence.

Second, there would be no eligibility for parole.

Let me just backtrack on the first one because I want to say I am prepared to see this bill go to committee. We could seriously consider it as a piece of legislation. The increase from one year to five, I think the committee has to look perhaps at three. The hon. member from Cape Breton—The Sydneys said that. That is a matter we can debate in committee.

I accept the principle in the bill that it should be increased from the one year. As the hon. member knows, I have changed my mind. I have been listening, as I should and of course as I do all the time, to my constituents from Port Moody—Coquitlam and I am very disturbed that the ordinary person is getting disturbed, upset and scared about the increase in violent crime in Canada. To me, that is not good.

It is not good that we have the increase in violent crime. It is important that people are concerned. I say this to my constituents who may be reading this or who may be watching this that I am listening to what they are saying. That is why I am supporting the hon. member today.

Second, he says that there should be no eligibility for parole. Well, I wonder about that. I have a question mark there. We do that; it is not a precedent. We do it on

murder, do we not? No eligibility for a certain number of years.

I would not want to hurt the parole system. I would want to hear more about that from the hon. member in committee. I know he said he has offered some amendments to his bill. I want to see those amendments and look at it closely and I flag that as a concern I do have.

Third, he says the bill also specifically prevents the mandatory sentence from having an impact on the sentence imposed for another offence. I think that is a good idea and I support that.

Fourth, he says the bill also requires the consent of the provincial attorney general before any section 85 charge, that is a charge of having a weapon while committing an offence, before that could be withdrawn or plea-bargained away. I want to tell the hon. member that in my court when I was Crown attorney, no one plea-bargained away a case of having a gun. I used to say to my clients when I was defence counsel: "You are charged with a gun offence. You are looking at a jail term".

• (1840)

The hon. member has told me that things have changed in the courts. I am surprised. It was always my experience that if you had a gun in an offence situation you got mandatory time for that. You were convicted.

I can accept that. It leaves a situation where there might be an extraordinary circumstance. I have given an example of an aboriginal person in a northern settlement. It is easy to be charged with robbery when someone with a gun has been drinking. With hunters or trappers the gun is there all the time and it would be easy to get into a situation where there would be some unique case that would be out of line. I think the hon. member captures that in his bill. I am glad he put that in.

Let me summarize by saying that I believe there should be zero tolerance. I believe that we should have tough laws with respect to the commission of an offence. I also believe that we should have good and effective gun control on other issues and that is the non-criminal element of the crime.

I do not believe that semi-automatic assault weapons, converted weapons, should be flowing into this country as they are now. This government is not acting fast enough to bring in effective regulations to stop that.