

Measures Against Crime

I turn now to gun control. Despite what the hon. member for Calgary North said this afternoon, I fail to see language in this bill which says that rifles or weapons must be registered. Such provisions in this bill are licensing provisions and ownership provisions. All hon. members have received much mail from those interested in gun sports. It is important to consider the objects of worth-while organizations; incidentally many of their worth-while recommendations are contained in the bill.

I have before me a brief from the B.C. Wildlife Federation. It is on gun control. In bold type we are told, in the brief, that all firearms owners should be licensed. This bill does what the B.C. Wildlife Federation asks, and what many gun clubs in Canada ask. I was urged personally not to touch on the question of gun registration. I say that the government is to be congratulated for a reasoned approach to firearms control.

I have read the bill through. Largely, it is sensible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: Did I go too far?

Mr. Epp: You had better modify that.

Mr. Leggatt: Although I have some reservations about parts of the bill, I say that the principle of this gun legislation is sound. At a time like this some credit should be given to members of the public who had considerable influence and worked very hard to see some change made in gun laws. Mr. and Mrs. Slinger had a tragedy in their family as a result of firearms killing. Their member, the hon. member for Peel-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Milne), has been active in this matter. It is to his credit that we now see brought to fruition a significant change in the law.

● (2010)

We can also congratulate a lady from British Columbia, Mrs. Maggie Burtinshaw, whose son met with a tragedy. These people, Mr. and Mrs. Slinger and Mr. and Mrs. Burtinshaw, did not hide or go away to suffer their tragedies. They had a feeling for the Canadian community. They wanted to do something so that other tragedies would not occur.

We in this House very often argue statistics on the question of gun control. What percentage was shot by rifle, what percentage was shot by handguns? The real question is the human tragedy. It is not statistics. It is the personal story of people like Mrs. Burtinshaw and Mr. and Mrs. Slinger who had the courage, out of their tragedies, to come to parliament to make sure that similar tragedies are not repeated. This House should congratulate those individuals in particular for their efforts in terms of trying to provide some safety in the area of gun control for Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: I also wish to congratulate the coroner from the city of New Westminster, Mr. Doug Jack, who a long time ago started to be concerned about this. He investigated 26 homicides in the New Westminster coroners' district. He found that 24 were as a result of firearms.

An hon. Member: Is he a doctor?

Mr. Leggatt: He is an ex-police officer. He was concerned that the recommendations of coroner's juries which have been made over and over for the past ten, 15 or 20 years were never reflected in legislation. He could not understand why. I can understand why. When I came to parliament in 1972 I just had to read my mail coming from various gun clubs, continually arguing there should be no change made under any circumstances.

That position has been modified over the years. We can congratulate most of the people in the shooting sports for a rational approach to the question of gun control. In fact their positions have become modified. Some of us who came to this House with a firm position with regard to the registration of weapons have modified that position. There has been a meeting of minds to a very large extent on the question of gun control.

You cannot avoid looking at some statistics on the effectiveness of the question of gun control. In Canada the handgun is the agent for about 10.4 per cent of our homicides. That is not a high percentage, but you must consider that the handgun is a restricted weapon in Canada. In the United States, where it is largely unrestricted, 54 per cent of homicides occur as a result of the handgun. When you refer those figures to Canada, we are doing the same with long rifles that they are doing in the United States. There is no more cogent argument that controls work when you compare the two cultures which have some similarity. Where we control the weapon, we reduce the extent of homicide.

It is important to remember that in Canada the firearm of one kind or another is the agent used in about 44 per cent of the homicides. Something like 50 per cent of those homicides are domestic. When you sift through these domestics you reach the conclusion that there are preventable homicides as a result of the negligent distribution of firearms in Canada among people who should not have access to them. That is what this legislation is designed to do. For enshrining that principle, our party will support it.

We have some reservations, however, in terms of what the legislation does not do. There are some very special problems with rural and native people in Canada. Native people, particularly in the north, have a severe problem in terms of their survival in that climate without the use of the rifle.

If the issuing officers in the north have a standard that is the same as that in the south, there could be a very severe prejudice to native people. Our party will suggest there should be guidelines drawn for the use of the rifle by that special group of people who need the rifle to survive. For example, we may have a case of an indictable offence in the north where a native person, or someone working in the north, is convicted. Without the use of his weapon his livelihood is finished. Therefore there has to be some flexibility and exception under the terms of the legislation in that area.

I see the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) in the Chamber. I am hoping that the government will give consideration, if not to amending the legislation, to setting forth some very careful guidelines for the licensing officials in the north and in rural areas so that people who require a weapon for survival are not deprived of it frivolously or through the prejudice of a licensing officer. It may be we