

My personal opinion is that this bill does not deal severely enough with the criminals who carry or use guns. Bill C-68 does not contain harsh enough penalties for those who misuse weapons. We must send the strongest possible message to those who use firearms in the commission of crimes, those who smuggle firearms into Canada, and those who possess illegal weapons. We must let them know that law-abiding Canadians will not tolerate their actions, and that they will pay a heavy price. Those who believe that "packing a piece" is a status symbol must be taught a lesson they will not easily forget.

Honourable senators, Bill C-68 does not do this. This bill will do nothing to stop illegally owned weapons from getting on to our streets. If this legislation is passed, I am afraid that the streets will not be safer and neither will our schools.

It seems to me that Mr. Rock is playing political games with window-dressing and is not addressing the real problem of the criminals who threaten and shoot people. Bill C-68 may very well help criminals by expanding the illegal underground market for restricted and banned weapons.

For the past several months, Canadians have engaged in this passionate debate and, as anticipated, the debate has flushed out weaknesses in this bill. Some of the weaknesses are reflected in the proposed amendments.

What the amendments do not truly reflect is the frustration and anger felt by so many Canadians whose voices are being ignored. These men and women are not hoodlums or criminals, although Bill C-68 may criminalize some of them. They care as passionately as all of us about the painful and atrocious tragedies which result from criminal acts involving guns. They are farmers and professionals, small and large business owners, housewives and factory workers, grandparents and sales clerks. They are all citizens like you and me, and they come from every corner of our country. They have been understanding and patient. However, I fear they are reaching the limits of their tolerance. Yes, these are real Canadians, and there are millions of them.

• (1750)

Honourable senators, I may not totally agree with them, but I will not ignore them. Because of all the eloquent voices raised in protest to this bill by so many Canadians, I believe that the best way to deal with this issue is for the Parliament of Canada to delay the passage of this bill for a couple of years.

I ask the Minister of Justice to allow time for calm reflection, a period of thoughtful contemplation and dialogue among interested Canadians. What is the hurry, Mr. Rock? Why are we creating another divisive issue which pits Canadian against Canadian, especially at this time in our history?

With the thoughtful input of all the stakeholders during the next couple of years, we can craft a bill which will really get tough on criminals and be fair to law-abiding Canadians.

If this bill is passed now, then Karen Selick's prediction may come to pass:

But the debate that raged throughout Canada in 1994 and 1995 will ultimately prove to be just one of many battles in a long, long war.

Honourable senators, others in this chamber have spoken much more eloquently than I ever could on the pros and cons of this bill. What I have done is to listen to Canadians who are being ignored and, with my vote tomorrow, I will speak on their behalf.

Senator Graham: Honourable senators, I see the clock and I will try to speak within the time. I know that honourable senators opposite have regional caucuses scheduled for six o'clock. I assure honourable senators that I will not go beyond two or three minutes past six.

I want to address just one aspect of the current debate. I think it is best illustrated in a little story that I read about a few weeks ago. At a recent National Rifle Association convention in Phoenix, Arizona, all the delegates were observed to be walking the halls with empty holsters. The question which immediately crossed my mind was: Why would such ardent gun owners be caught without their shooting irons handy? The answer is a simple one: The NRA demands that their members deposit their guns at the door as a pre-condition to admission. In other words, the common good of the membership is served by a rigorous control of the individuals who make up the association.

Although NRA officials openly state that people, not guns, kill people, I believe the actions taken in organizing their conventions speak louder than their words.

Clearly, the organizers worry about the exceptions, and I emphasize the exceptions. The greatest threat to any free association is the fear of the unexpected; and the greatest threat to freedom is fear.

Robert Frost had the gift of saying important things with the beauty of simplicity. "There's nothing I am afraid of like scared people," he once observed. I would like to reflect briefly on this thought in stressing the great significance of the legislation before us today.

None of us can be unaffected by the waves of crime and violence so endemic in our country today. I do not think any supporters of this legislation believe that this will be the final chapter in the government's fight against the tragedy incurred by far too many of our citizens as a result of the actions of some gunmen. This, of course, can be of the random variety, but it can be of the far more dangerous, premeditated kind of violence as well. Frost was right in his observation — fear generates fear. It destroys confidence. It destroys optimism. It generates paralysis.