

• (1530)

QUESTION PASSED AS ORDER FOR RETURN

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 131 could be made an Order for Return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that Question No. 131 be deemed to have been made an Order for Return?

Some hon. members: No.

[English]

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FIREARMS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons, be read the second time and referred to a committee; and of the amendment.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will continue my comments on Bill C-68 concerning the inclusion of replica firearms in this bill and whether it will solve the problem. Unfortunately it does not. It is just a small step in the right direction.

Someone who uses a replica firearm during the commission of an offence will now be subject to the minimum one-year consecutive sentence. In reality, this will generally be the maximum sentence as well. It is a good first move but unfortunately that is as far as this bill goes in addressing the situation.

For serious violent offences where a firearm is likely to be used such as robbery, hostage taking or sexual assault with a

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weapon, to get the new minimum sentence of four years the crown will still have to prove that the object used was a firearm.

In the case of a robbery there will be a witness who saw the criminal waving an object that looked like a firearm. Security cameras will show the criminal waving an object that looks like a firearm. However, unless the firearm is fired or the offender is immediately arrested, there will not be any convictions under this section. In the majority of instances the crown will still be faced with the impossible task of proving that the object met the legal definition of a firearm.

In reality, C-68 will mean that criminals who pull off robberies with real firearms will likely only get an additional one-year sentence for possession of a replica firearm during the commission of an offence as the criminal will claim the object he used was only a replica and the crown will not be able to prove otherwise. This is simply not good enough.

A second aspect of this bill that the Liberals are giving a great deal of acclaim to is the new minimum sentence of four years for any of 10 specific violent offences with a firearm.

My private member's bill called for a minimum sentence for using a firearm during the commission of an offence to be raised to five years. This sentence was to run consecutively to the sentence for the actual crime. Therefore, I suppose those of us calling for a greater minimum sentence should be happy with the minimum of four years.

In all honesty I would be satisfied if the government had introduced a minimum four-year sentence for using a firearm during the commission of an offence if this sentence had been consecutive to any sentence for the actual offence. However, this is not what the government has done. Instead it has created a combined minimum sentence of four years for both the crime and the use of a firearm.

What difference is this going to make? Not much. What about repeat offenders? Unlike section 85 which calls for an increased minimum sentence for repeat offences, there is no such increase for those criminals who repeat their violent crimes with firearms.

The amendments I would suggest are a joke. The minister's press release makes it sound like the government is getting tough on criminals who use firearms but in reality these changes will not result in increased sentences for those who use firearms. At best it will maintain the status quo. In some cases, the length of the sentence will likely decrease.

A four-year minimum sentence for manslaughter with a firearm is a joke, pure and simple. The average sentence for manslaughter is already four years. How is this minimum going to have any deterrent effect? It is not.