

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Caron: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. With respect to the matter of imprisonment, I, of course, am not advocating that prisons be abolished or shut down. I do think, however, that the bill puts a little too much emphasis on imprisonment as a solution.

We may, for example, wonder why there are 49 inmates per 100,000 people in the Netherlands, compared to 116 in Canada and 519 in the U.S. I do not think that violence is commonplace in the Netherlands. I think that some societies do not see jail terms as a deterrent in the same way as we do in Canada and the U.S.

The question I ask myself about this bill is whether the proposed solution of systematically increasing jail terms for crimes committed with firearms is effective.

● (1225)

My colleague's second question deals with Reform's amendment to split the bill in two and make a distinction between hunting rifles owned by ordinary, law-abiding citizens, as my colleague would say, and handguns more often used in committing crimes.

I think there is no reason to make such a distinction because, in my opinion, a firearm is a firearm. A misused firearm can cause definite, serious harm to people. It does not matter whether one gets shot with a 12 gauge shotgun, a hunting rifle or a pistol. I think that, in our society, it is important that all those who have the power to harm others with their firearms be aware of this responsibility and let society know that they have this potential power.

Although these people will not, of course, misuse their firearms, that is still a possibility. There is no reason to make a distinction between presumably law-abiding citizens—and I agree that they are—and less respectable people who own handguns or other types of firearms. I do not think that a distinction should be made.

In my opinion, some handguns should be completely banned or recalled, even if they are collector's items, because they are potentially dangerous.

I do not see how it would be prejudicial to a citizen to register his hunting rifles. Many things are registered. Many of our possessions are registered and I do not think this violates anyone's rights.

I will not vote for the amendment put forward by my Reform colleague because I do not think it should be adopted. In my opinion, all weapons are potentially dangerous and their owners should be aware of this. One way to make them aware of this is to require them to let society know that they own firearms and will live up to their responsibility to use them properly.

[English]

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Madam Speaker, there are laws that presently exist for people who are negligent in the use of firearms. There are laws on the books that should be enforced and in some cases are.

After 61 years of registration of handguns, today one can get a handgun in the right bars across the whole country; there are even rent-a-guns. It is running rampant and the registration has failed to do anything.

Can the member please explain to me how spending another million or billion dollars, whatever it takes to register shotguns and rifles, is going to make one iota of difference when it has not made any difference in the past.

[Translation]

Mr. Caron: Let there be no misunderstanding, Madam Speaker. I believe that this bill is a message that society is sending to itself. It is citizens saying to each other that they want to live in a non-violent environment, in a less violent environment. They are saying that it is not good, that it is not acceptable in our society to possess firearms, to be able, as my colleague pointed out, to go to a bar and buy a handgun, something that I personally have never done, but that it seems is possible.

In addition to its practical effectiveness in controlling firearms, the bill that we are examining is symbolic, it is a message that society is sending to itself. It is not insignificant that hundreds of thousands of people have signed petitions calling for better control of firearms in Canada. There is a problem, contrary to what my colleague is implying in his question.

● (1230)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): We will resume debate. We are now at 10-minute speeches only, no questions and comments.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak at second reading of Bill C-68, the Firearms Act.

My preparations for this began earlier last year but most seriously last fall with the tabling of the initial proposals in late November. Quite frankly I was really surprised at the degree and depth of response from my constituency. I represent the riding of Algoma in northern Ontario where we have a long tradition of hunting, target shooting, recreational uses of firearms and other reasons for having firearms.

I was surprised at how deep and emotional the response was to the issue. I have had a chance to meet with over 1,000 legitimate gun owners over the last few months and have received letters and phone calls from over 1,000 gun owners and have met many