

*Government Orders*

This is because the provisions that deal with the status of specific firearms must do so in a very detailed and specific manner. Such language is not well suited to statutory provisions.

I must emphasize that there is no hidden agenda. It is not our intention to enact overly restrictive measures, either by Order in Council or by amending the statute itself. Nor is it our intention to bring in the various supplementary measures without giving Canada's firearms owners a fair and reasonable opportunity to review them and make their views known. I would point out that it has been very much the policy of this government to make our regulatory process as fair as possible to give ample prior warning to members of the Canadian public to allow their input. In this way we have in many ways revolutionized that process since 1984.

It is also important that there not be a blithe assumption on the part of Parliament of the wisdom of always giving the Governor in Council a blank cheque. The concerns raised by firearms owners about the use of regulatory power are interesting ones and force us to reconsider some of our what I call legislative reflexes. It is always the instinct of legislative drafters to attempt to give to the executive the broadest possible discretion. But where there are issues and subjects of legislation that are contentious, it may in fact be more appropriate for Parliament to be as explicit as possible in legislation in order that those who are affected by these regulations are confident and feel comfortable with them.

That is one of the issues that I would like the committee to look at: the extent to which perhaps some of the things that I am proposing to do by regulation could perhaps be incorporated in legislation. What we must do is not be arrogant about the use of the regulatory power of Orders in Council and listen genuinely to people who are of the concern that perhaps orders will be made without taking into account their views.

There is a perception in part of the country, for example, that gun control is an issue that is an urban-rural split and the fear that regulations will be made by urban people. I am not sure that is true. In fact it is my observation that there is an enormous effort made to be sensitive.

If further review by Parliament would give some sense of security and confidence to people who are affected by these regulations, then I would not want to make a strenuous argument on behalf of the right of the Governor in Council to make these regulations if it was not necessary. I would like to have a system in place that people are confident of and feel comfortable about.

That is a very appropriate subject for the special committee that we seek to have created by this motion to deal with, to look at the balance of how we use the very extraordinary powers that we have as government. I really hope to get some sensitive and well thought out advice from the committee on that subject.

• (1210)

For example, one of the most contentious proposals, the size limits for cartridge magazines, is not contained in the bill. It depends on the expansion of one of the existing Order in Council provisions made by the amendments. Once the necessary power is placed in the statute, Orders in Council must still be developed and evaluated before they are enacted.

The provision in Bill C-80 is the provision which would allow the Governor in Council to designate certain devices as prohibited weapons. The power already exists to designate weapons, in other words those that are self-contained. Devices would be those which are accessories or parts of a weapon, and high powered cartridge magazines are what we are looking at.

The proposal to prohibit or restrict specific types of military or paramilitary guns by Order in Council does not depend on the amendments at all. That statutory power is there now in the Criminal Code. The Governor in Council already has the power to enact such orders under existing legislation, provided that the firearms involved are not commonly used for hunting or sporting purposes in Canada.

I would like to reassure the legitimate gun owners of Canada that it is not our intention to use any of these powers to prohibit or confiscate large numbers of commonly used firearms. Every attempt will be made to keep the firearms community informed about proposed changes to the law and to obtain their views before changes take effect.