

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Honourable senators, looking at the clock, I see that it is 4:45. It was agreed earlier this afternoon that at this time we would hear from the Honourable Senator Lynch-Staunton for 15 minutes, followed by the Honourable Senator Fairbairn.

**Hon. John Lynch-Staunton (Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, I am sure that nothing I will say on the bill itself will change any minds, as all minds are obviously pretty well made up by now. The debate has been eloquent, convincing and, certainly for the most part, extraordinarily well thought out.

However, I want to clarify the position of this caucus on its approach to the bill. First, I want to say that the Progressive Conservative Party, as represented by this caucus, unanimously has never opposed gun control. As a matter of fact, it was the Mulroney government, with Kim Campbell as Minister of Justice which, in 1991, introduced and legislated, if not the toughest gun control law in the world, certainly one of the toughest gun control laws in the world. Yet Canadians are unaware of that. Only this morning Senator Meighen was telling us about a highly educated, well-informed friend of his who asked him last night while talking about Bill C-68, "Why are you delaying it? Anyone can walk into a shop and buy a gun, legally." That is the sort of ignorance about gun control that there is in this country, which, unfortunately, is leading people to wrong conclusions about the laws that we have, and how strict they are.

Let me tell honourable senators about how they can acquire a gun in Quebec today under the law which we passed in 1991. If you want to buy any kind of a gun, for whatever legal purpose — target shooting, let us say — did you know that you have to take two safety courses, be investigated by the police on three separate occasions and produce 12 letters of reference? That is just part of the process which can take up to one year. There is no other country in the world which imposes such conditions on those who want to legally acquire firearms. This is our doing, but it has had a negative effect. It has led to a drop in the issuance of firearms acquisition certificates and, as a result, an increase in the smuggling of illegal guns and the trade in them.

One must be careful in designing legislation that becomes so strict and so onerous that some people just cannot cope with it, and will use other means to attain the same ends.

It is this party that allows us to look at Bill C-68 today. Had there been no Bill C-17, there would be no Bill C-68 today. It is because of the pioneering work of Brian Mulroney, Kim Campbell and the Conservative caucus that we can at least discuss Bill C-68 today.

What disturbs many of us is that the principles on which Bill C-17 is based have not been honoured. When Ms Campbell introduced Bill C-17, she said that the legislation "was to provide better protection for all Canadians against firearms violence, while avoiding undue or unnecessary interference in the

activities of Canadians who use guns legally, responsibly and safely." Russell MacLellan, who was then the Liberal critic, said:

The objective of the legislation is to control access to firearms and ammunition in Canada and not to place excessive or undue restrictions on responsible gun owners. I think that has been achieved.

Those were the comments in 1991 of the two main parties in the House of Commons on our legislation.

Those principles and those objectives have been abandoned with Bill C-68. What the government should have done is introduce two bills, one on gun control exclusively, increasing the penalties and the sanctions for those who trade and bring in arms which are illegal or not acceptable. There would have been hardly any debate on it, except some of us may have thought that the sanctions were not severe enough, as such a bill would have gone after the criminal element.

Another bill on registration should have been introduced, a law which affects law-abiding citizens. Criminals do not register their firearms, nor do they ask for firearms acquisition certificates. They thumb their noses at Bill C-17, just as they will thumb their noses at Bill C-68. If Bill C-68 is passed, all Canadians will be deemed as suspect because they will be mixed with the criminal element. This is why so many law-abiding citizens are concerned and upset, because they are being treated as suspects right off the bat; being targeted by a law which aims at both the criminal element and themselves.

• (1650)

Look at the amendments. I will not discuss the details because they have been extremely well analyzed by those who are supporting them. These amendments in no way affect the gun control feature of the bill. They do not affect in any way the registration feature of the bill. They are but a modest response to complaints heard, not just in one part of the country but across the country. These complaints and concerns were expressed not from a well-financed gun lobby about which I have heard so much — I can tell you honestly I have never met nor spoken with such a group — but rather from concerned, law-abiding citizens, including their elected representatives, in four provinces and two territories.

I am sure that these amendments are a great disappointment to those citizens. These amendments represent a minimum response but, to many of them, they are below the minimum. They expected more from us, particularly after so many of our colleagues went out across the country and listened to responsible, law-abiding citizens who, as one example, did not want their gun collections confiscated, which Bill C-68 allows.

As another example, the Canadian Olympic shooting team has told us that, had this bill been in effect at the time of the Commonwealth Games, there would have been no shooting competition.