

Government Orders

I quote from a February 14 news release from the Department of Justice: "A universal registration system will help combat smuggling by monitoring the types and quantities of firearms coming into Canada". How can that be so when by definition smuggling involves evading the very authorities that would be doing the monitoring at Canadian borders?

If we are prepared to spend more money on gun control, let us spend it wisely. It has been suggested by the solicitor general of Ontario that a national task force on firearms smuggling be set up at key border points. I strongly support this proposal. A well co-ordinated task force involving all levels of police forces, additional customs officers and the support of all three levels of government would yield real results in the reduction of smuggled firearms into this country. That is where the real problem exists. It is not in the continued harassment of law-abiding firearms owners.

• (1800)

I sincerely hope the justice committee will insist upon an objective, dispassionate examination of the utility of a national registration system as set out in the bill. I hope that at the end of its study it would conclude that the current system requiring a firearms acquisition certificate is more than adequate and that if anything has to be done to curb the criminal use of firearms, the work has to be done at Canada's borders and in our court rooms.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to stand in the House to speak on the Reform motion to split Bill C-68. It reads:

That all the words after the word "that" be deleted and the following substituted therefor:

This House decline to give second reading to Bill C-68, an act respecting firearms and other weapons, because the principle of establishing a system for licensing and registration of all firearms and the principle of creating a variety of offences are two unrelated issues that should be addressed separately.

I concur with the motion and I encourage members opposite to support Reform in the motion to split the bill.

I will read an excerpt from a letter from a constituent, Mr. Ole Raasok of Irma, Alberta. He specifically asked me to mention his name and to read his letter if I had the opportunity. He wrote:

I was living in Norway when the Germans invaded our country in April 1940 and took control of government in June 1940 after Norway's capitulation.

In the fall of 1940 all gun owners were ordered to register their shotguns and rifles if they wished to hunt. As law-abiding citizens wanting to hunt, we were dumb enough to register our guns.

I am reading from a letter sent to me by a constituent who was raised in Norway and who experienced registration. I encourage all members opposite to listen carefully to what this gentleman

has to say. I believe we should not make light of individuals who have had similar experiences. He continued:

The following year we received an order to deliver all of our guns to the police. There was no use in trying to hide them because the guns were already registered and the government had the numbers. The guns were never returned and no compensation was made for them. I believe this is the hon. justice minister's plan.

I became a lieutenant in the reserve army before I immigrated to Canada in 1951. In that capacity I had full command over 160 men who all had their own weapons in their homes. There was never any talk of registration or permits to transport or use guns. Statistics show that Norway has one of the lowest criminal use of firearms in the world.

I have read only part of the letter from my constituent. I have heard many members opposite say that any idea or any suggestion by Canadians that registration and tougher gun control would lead to confiscation is ridiculous.

Whether it is the intention of the government to move to confiscation after registration, I have no idea. I would tend to think not. However I believe it is healthy for people in a democracy to have a certain level of distrust for government.

My constituent has seen the effect of not having a healthy level of distrust. I ask hon. members opposite to understand that many Canadians have this concern. Some do not trust this government and others will not trust future governments. It is important to listen to these concerns and it is important in a democracy to have a certain level of distrust.

• (1805)

History has shown that Norway is a prime example that registration leads to confiscation. Is this what the minister has in mind for Canadians? This question is often asked of me in my constituency. It was not just every now and again but every day over the past 10 days. Every single day I had constituents ask me whether the minister had in mind confiscation after registration.

Earlier statements made by the minister suggested that he would prefer to have guns only in the hands of the police and the armed forces. The statement was made shortly after the House started sitting about a year ago.

I fully support the motion put forward by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville because it will separate the so-called crime bill into two different parts. It is logical to split the bill because we are dealing with two different issues. On the one hand is the aspect of targeting crime and on the other hand is the anti-gun sentiment of the legislation which I do not support. The motion is necessary because it focuses on the real problem of crime.

We as members of the Reform Party support a crime bill. We support measures that would get tougher in dealing with the criminal use of firearms, including penalties for smuggling.