

Measures Against Crime

effective safety program, the development of high standards of proficiency among sportsmen and hunters. In these respects, legitimate sportsmen organizations throughout the country have never been recognized; their recommendations have never been acknowledged; they have not been consulted or requested to provide input into the legislation we are considering. Surely an effective safety program could be worked out jointly between the federal government and the provinces in consultation with gun clubs, hunters' groups and fish and game associations. If this legislation is to command the co-operation and support it will need in order to make work, the minister and the government will have to go to these people and work with them.

For years, fish and game associations across Canada have been asking for some of compulsory, hunter training program or for some form of selective screening process. This limited objective was rejected by provincial government on the basis that it was overly cumbersome and costly. The federal government now comes along and unilaterally imposes a universal licensing and/or registration program that will be cumbersome, costly and complicated.

● (1650)

As far as the use of an offensive weapon while committing an indictable offense is concerned, penalties should be severe and they should be enforced. There can be no doubt, so far as I am concerned, that the courts and enforcement agencies have been overly lenient in this particular area. A general tightening up with respect to the issuance of permits for restricted weapons and the broadening of the prohibited class is a step in the right direction, providing the laws are enforced. However, here again we see the powers that are granted to the governor in council as being overly excessive and broad.

So while we have some very serious misgivings about this piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, we recognize that there are areas where the government could act, and act in a co-operative fashion, with the hunters, gun owners and sportsmen, and indeed with the provinces. However, to impose the universal licensing and/or registration program that is advanced in this bill is, to me, nothing more than overkill.

We have to ask ourselves this question, Mr. Speaker: Will this law be effective in reducing deaths caused by guns through accident, murder or suicide? I say the answer is "No". As a matter of fact, I think a fair case could be made for saying that if the Criminal Code as it now stands were properly enforced, it would perhaps do more to minimize death and injury caused by firearms than the draconian measures advanced in this legislation.

For example, we have in this country a registration and licensing program for the owners of hand guns. The statistics that have been provided by the minister relating to gun control indicate that as of February, 1976, some 644,481 hand guns were registered and that some 50,000 hand guns were probably in circulation which were not registered. It is interesting to note that in spite of this provision—something that this bill sets out to do for all guns—the incidence of murder involving the use of hand guns has increased by 115 per cent over the past five years. That is a record which is clearly indicated on page 14 of the report.

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

Further, Mr. Speaker, one notes that armed robbery involving the use of hand guns has increased by 65 per cent over the last five years in Canada—two robberies out of three involve the use of hand guns—while armed robbery involving the use of long-guns has increased by only 17 per cent. What this means is that in spite of the registration and licensing provisions, the incidence of murder is increasing dramatically and the incidence of armed robbery has increased dramatically over the past five years.

So we have to ask ourselves: Why, then, are we imposing a licensing and/or registration system on the owners of long-guns in Canada? Why are they made the scapegoats? Where are the statistics to prove that the licensing and/or registration of shotguns and rifles will reduce murders and robberies in this country?

Mr. Basford: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether I might ask the hon. member a question. He asked how registration of long guns would have some effect. I would be delighted if he could point out to me any provision in the bill that proposes the registration of long guns and rifles.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister asked that question. Section 106(1) is very broad in nature. By government order in council, the powers can be extended to require registration of all guns. I appreciate the fact that the minister is listening to me, but I did expressly say in my comments the licensing and/or registration provisions, and I used that option.

Let me move on to suicides, where the same thing applies. These figures are bandied around in the packaging and merchandising of this gun control legislation, but is the minister really saying that by imposing a licensing and/or registration system for all firearms we are going to reduce the suicide rate in this country? He cannot seriously defend this legislation on that ground. If so, let him bring forth the statistics. If it can be proven to me that by imposing a licensing and/or registration system for all guns he could have saved one or more of the 1,021 lives lost through suicide committed by using a gun, we might be sympathetic and go along with his argument. I believe that by using the suicide statistics in trying to sell this package, the whole question of gun control becomes distorted, cloudy and confused. I submit that suicide has very little relevance to gun control as it applies to the licensing provisions.

Before this debate is concluded, Mr. Speaker, I should like the minister to prove unequivocally that licensing as proposed in this bill will either prevent or impede crimes of murder, robbery or any other form of violent crime involving the use of a firearm. I challenge him to prove to the Canadian people that guns will be kept out of the hands of criminals under the provisions of this legislation. I have yet to see any statistical proof, any projection at all, that does in fact lend some credence to this proposition.

Many members have cited statistics relating to other states and countries. The city of New York, for example, possesses some of the most restrictive firearms legislation on the North American continent, yet has one of the highest crime rates. It has been proven conclusively that registration is an expensive government exercise in futility. In Massachusetts, harsh gun law have been adopted which have proven useless in reducing crime. The Washington