

*Gun Control*

Hon. Member said, Bill C-213 was debated during Private Members' hour. That Bill, sponsored by the Hon. Member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton), proposed to relax gun control in certain parts of the country. It is interesting to note that members of the same Party, the NDP, can have such divergent views. That is typical of their inconsistent and scrambled egg approach to most things of importance. It also illustrates, in all fairness, that this is a controversial subject.

In this country it is difficult to propose measures relating to firearms control. Canada is diverse, and the interests of those major urban centres such as Montreal and Vancouver are not the same as those of more remote communities. The trapper in northern Alberta and the Inuit of Baffin Island have far different interests in gun control than do people in Montreal or Vancouver. For that matter, the people in my constituency have a far different interest in gun control than do people in major urban centres.

● (1720)

One should also not forget the millions of Canadians who safely and responsibly enjoy firearms in sport and recreation. Let us not forget that target shooting is a very important part of the Olympic Games. I think all Canadians were justifiably proud when Linda Thom won the gold medal in pistol shooting for Canada in the 1984 Olympics. When we consider gun control let us also not forget that the use of firearms in sport, recreation, and as a means of livelihood has been part of Canada's heritage for over 400 years. Hunting and target shooting remain legitimate pastimes today enjoyed by millions of Canadians from coast to coast.

It should be emphasized that it is not the concept of gun control which is at issue here. The principles and objectives of gun control designed to prevent criminal and irresponsible use are supported by the vast majority of Canadians and deserve our full support. Any change to the legislation must recognize the legitimate interests of millions of Canadians who own and use firearms responsibly. I believe a careful balance must be struck. It is important that all those affected are carefully considered before the House brings any change in gun-control legislation.

It is as a result of my concern for the millions of honest, law-abiding Canadians who enjoy the use of firearms that I must speak out strongly against the main thrust of this Bill. I am informed that over 6,000 letters were received by the Government when a Private Member's Bill identical to this one was before this House. My own office was flooded with letters on the subject. Typically, they expressed concern about what most people perceived as proposals to place further restrictions on the use and ownership of guns in Canada. The majority of those letters indicated that we already have sufficient gun-control laws and strongly opposed greater restrictions on the use of guns.

People living in rural areas of Canada are dependent on their guns, some for their living and others simply as a means

of protection of property and a form of recreation. It is worth remembering that firearms are very important to a large number of Canadians. It is an unusual farm truck in my constituency which does not have a gun rack and guns in the cab which are used daily for the legitimate purposes of sport, recreation, hunting or protection of farms from animals. The people in my constituency of Okanagan North have a strong interest in legislation which proposes to restrict their activities in this area.

Let us consider for a moment the many Canadians who would be affected by Bill C-207. In the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec alone there are over one million hunting licences issued each year. Hunting is a very popular sport and, in many cases, a means of livelihood from coast to coast in Canada. Indeed, hunting is truly a unique part of Canada's heritage. It is a pastime enjoyed by fathers and sons and, I am pleased to note, an increasing number of women are also participating in this sport.

I am talking about law-abiding citizens. Many hunters have had their firearms in their families for many years. All of these people would be required to get firearm possession certificates under this proposal. These many people have presented no problem in the way in which they use guns, and this Bill does not attack the problem areas. This Bill would only unnecessarily inconvenience millions of responsible gun owners.

Experience before 1979 and since then with the firearms acquisition certificate system does not indicate that any problem exists for which more stringent controls would be justified. This system has been in force for just over eight years, and it is still too early to determine how effective the system has been. It is certainly premature to consider introducing even more restrictive legislation.

The objectives of the gun-control legislation seem to have been forgotten when Bill C-207 was drafted. The Bill does not deal at all with the criminal element. It deals with millions of Canadians who use their firearms responsibly.

There are many implications of this Bill which concern me. I would like to make it clear that bureaucratic red tape would ensnarl the many citizens who would be affected under this Bill. First, they would have to get an application form and then present themselves to a firearms officer to make application. This can cause considerable hardship for many people in outlying areas where the nearest police station may be many miles away. They must make application during normal working hours, which would mean that many people would lose wages. This procedure would have to be carried out by millions of people.

My investigations indicate that one million man-hours would be required for the issuance of the certificate to all those who do not now hold one. That represents the equivalent of 645 police officers working full-time for one year. I think the House will agree that the time of our police can be put to better use.