

*Government Orders*

importation of firearms. Let me relate two of the four principles of the Firearms Act they strongly support.

I will come to splitting the bill in a moment. The splitting of the bill that the Reform Party talks about is nothing but misleading the public on the real intent of their amendment. The leader of the Reform Party stood up a moment ago and talked about moving toward safety measures. He had some good suggestions, I will admit, but the real intent of the amendment put forward by the Reform Party is not to split the bill but to destroy it. The good suggestions that the Reform Party leader talked about will not be put in the bill because the bill would be gone if we went ahead with the amendment.

Let me come back for a moment to the principles that have strong support in this bill. The criminal misuse of firearms will be dealt with through amendments to offence and sentencing provisions of the Criminal Code, including mandatory four-year minimum sentences for 10 specific violent offences committed while in the possession of a firearm. That is a good point.

The 10 offences are attempted murder, manslaughter, criminal negligence causing death, robbery, kidnapping, hostage taking, sexual assault with a weapon, aggravated sexual assault, extortion and the discharging of a firearm with intent to cause harm. Upon conviction, the offender will receive a lifetime prohibition against possession of a restricted or a prohibited firearm.

The second major important principle that there is strong agreement on is smuggling and illegal importation. Smuggling and illegal importations will be dealt with through legislative amendments and the development of programs for controlling the import-export and domestic transit of firearms, including border registration and new Criminal Code offences for illegally importing and trafficking in firearms. Those are good principles and I and many others in the House support them.

I will admit other aspects of the bill are much more controversial. They relate to the impact on legitimate gun owners, hunters, collectors and sports people using firearms. I have previously presented a petition on behalf of my constituents opposing the bill as currently drafted.

Let me go back to the points I raised then. The petition called on Parliament to "desist from passing additional restrictive legislation with respect to firearms or ammunition and to direct its attention to the apprehension and adequate punishment of those who criminally misuse firearms or other deadly weapons".

My constituents feel very strongly that the bill would not accomplish what the minister intended as currently drafted. They are concerned that law-abiding Canadians are already overburdened by unnecessary and ineffective gun legislation. They believe that the new proposals as currently drafted with the

introduction of mandatory gun registration would punish the wrong people. Many of my constituents and other Islanders have concerns with this legislation.

I tabled that position and raised those concerns. Now I want to see that my constituents have the opportunity to go before a committee in the proper forum to express those concerns themselves or through their national organizations. I do not want it to be the same as what we have been seeing in the past where the Reform Party is using misleading amendments and holding meetings across the country for political reasons.

• (1605)

The party talks about crime. Every day its members stand in the House and say they are concerned about crime. The effect of their amendment would, in fact, destroy the opportunity of the bill going to committee and seeing that crime is controlled, including the misuse of firearms.

This is how misunderstood the Reform Party amendment is. Some of my constituents have suggested to me that I should support splitting the bill, believing that the Reform Party amendment will do that. It will not.

I listened closely to the leader of the third party. In his speech he went through a litany of suggestions to improve public safety. The amendment destroys that opportunity. I would suggest that the leader of the Reform Party re-read the amendment. Allow me to take a moment to emphasize to the leader of the third party what the amendment states: "this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-68". That would have the effect of destroying the bill. They know it. They are misleading the Canadian public. For the party that talks about crime control, it would have the opposite effect.

In conclusion, I want to see changes to the bill. Those changes can be made in committee. I suggest that the process is not all that it could have been; however, we have a bill before us that must be improved.

In discussions I have had with fellow MPs and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, I feel I have been given assurance that the bill will be decriminalized with respect to legitimate gun owners, collectors, sports people and hunters, at least on their first offence. With that assurance, I am willing to support the bill going to committee to be improved so that it meets the needs of all Canadians.

I am really disgusted that the Reform Party has tried to turn this, by its amendment, into a political game. However I guess that is life in the world of politics. Reformers are misleading Canadians as to where they really want to go.

By this bill going to committee it will give Canadians the chance to voice their concerns in a public forum, before a legitimate committee, so that the bill can be improved to meet the needs of all Canadians.