

As I shall show later, it is exactly the spirit and content of these recommendations which the government seeks to put into law through Bill C-83. It is the same spirit, the same plea for action that underlines the words of Mr. Slinger, father of the 17 year old student who was shot at that school. If I may quote a couple of paragraphs from the letter he sent to the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) after the incident, they are:

Violence is ever present in our society and the contributing factors to its apparent increase may be debated unendingly. Changes in standards and values, pressures of urban living and many other causes are cited, but surely permissive attitudes, which have been so favoured and so common in the last 20 years or so, must be a major contributor to the unacceptable social behaviour of some members of society today. These things cannot be changed quickly by any legislative action, but changes can be made in our laws governing all aspects of the use of firearms and ammunition, the results of which should reduce the use of such weapons in acts of violence, particularly by people who are not generally regarded as criminals.

I would very much like to thank and to congratulate the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) for listening to these ideas and to the many other proposals put forth by myself and, I am sure, by most other members of the House. The result, in my opinion, is an excellent bill, one which deserves the support in principle of all hon. members from all parties in this House.

May I extend a particular and personal note of appreciation to the Solicitor General for the gracious and understanding way in which he discussed the tragedy and the need for remedial action with Mr. and Mrs. Slinger and members of their family. Their trip to Ottawa to discuss their feelings, to relive their experience, to share with officials and with the media the depth of their loss and their hopes for change, was indeed a courageous undertaking. I wish to congratulate them for their reasonable approach to the issue and also for their continuing leadership in this issue.

The need for action is clear. The Brampton incident, while unique in many aspects, is but symptomatic of growing and more general problems. Indeed it will interest the House to know that a teacher at Centennial High School, the same high school, after the tragedy did a survey of surrounding high schools. He found police records of seven other incidents involving guns in those schools.

The need for legislation is vividly demonstrated in the dimensions of the over-all national problem. If we check the period 1965-74 there has been a 115 per cent increase in crimes involving violence. Murder and manslaughter are up 115 per cent, rape 185 per cent, robbery 204 per cent, wounding and attempted murder, 183 per cent, and assaults 113 per cent. The most disturbing factor, however, has been the extent to which firearms have come to be used in crime.

Deaths caused by firearms in murders, suicides, and accidents are up 30 per cent since 1970. Suicide deaths involving guns are up 28 per cent. Guns are now used in over one third of all suicides. Last year 50 per cent of all murders were caused by firearms. Canada now has a gun homicide rate second only to that of the United States. In 1974 firearms were found to be used in two thirds of all armed robberies. The number of robberies involving guns is increasing at almost two times the rate of increase for robberies as a whole.

Measures Against Crime

In fact if you take the first quarter statistics of 1974 versus the first quarter of 1975, armed robberies with firearms increased some 73.5 per cent, armed robberies with other weapons by 44 per cent, and armed robberies with or without weapons 40 per cent. Surely the root cause of these startling trends lies in the increasing number of firearms present in our society and in the proliferation of certain types of firearms which have no legitimate social purpose.

If we look at the inventory of guns we should all be concerned. The number of weapons owned by Canadians is increasing at a rate greater than the rate of growth in population. Over the short period from 1970 to 1974 the average increase has been 3.8 per cent in gun inventory and only 2.2 per cent in terms of population. Canadians are buying guns at the rate of 1,370 a day. In 1960 there was roughly one gun in Canada for every 2.6 Canadians. That is now roughly one for every two Canadians.

We often hear the comment that we hope we will not resemble American society. When you talk about the level of guns, the fact is we are almost a society like that. The United States has about .7 guns per person; Canada has about .5. It is true the United States has about five times more hand-guns per capita, but Canada has proportionately the same number of long guns.

It is an irrefutable conclusion that the rate and number of crimes committed involving firearms are intrinsically related to the availability of guns. When more and more guns are being purchased without stricter controls placed on their use, we can only expect that associated crime rates will continue to escalate. The government, however, can neither condone further increases nor condone the current unacceptable levels of gun related offences.

I am convinced that Bill C-83 will go a long way to reduce the crimes involving guns, to reduce the proliferation of guns where there is no legitimate use for them, and to help ensure that guns are bought only by people who will respect them and use them properly.

The bill sets out provisions that fulfil these three objectives well in terms of reducing crime. There is a proposal for higher maximum sentences for crimes involving offensive weapons, a mandatory one year term and up to 14 years to run consecutively where a person uses an offensive weapon while committing an indictable offence.

There has been a lot of controversy about the seizure of weapons. New authority has been granted to police to seize a weapon, without a warrant, where danger to safety of some person is likely and where obtaining a warrant is impractical. We can all recall reading in the newspapers of situations where this would have been very desirable.

In terms of proliferation of guns the move from a restricted and prohibited firearms class has been expanded to include formerly restricted fully automatic guns, sawed off guns, and "Saturday night specials". I do not happen to be one who believes that people should be collecting operative fully automotive machine-guns.

The tightening of control on restricted firearms is such that applicants would be required to justify the need for such a weapon before being granted a registration certificate. That is one of the key provisions put forward in this bill.