

should just about eliminate the need for private ownership of handguns for protection.

That just about says it all, and the *Globe and Mail* to its credit leaves no doubt where it stands, just about where most of us Canadians stand, for increased public safety from firearms.

In February, 1976, the National Firearms Safety Association came out publicly, urging Canadians to support what it calls the government's positive and responsible actions in moves toward gun control. It said that it was pleased with the firearms provisions of the federal peace and security bill, that Canadians would have to buy licences after proving they were fit to have guns and ammunition, that anyone owning or selling rifles and shotguns could be held responsible if carelessness led to their use in crime. It and the Canadian Wildlife Federation have taken a firm stand in favour of a competency test to ensure a person knows how to use a firearm.

The Ontario Attorney General said in an interview that the federal legislation follows in principle what the province was prepared to introduce in the coming session. He added that gun control would upset groups such as hunters, but that we cannot let any special group dictate against the wishes of the public in general.

Mr. Jack Pickett, past-president of the Liberal party in Alberta, recently wrote to assure his support for the peace and security package including the gun control, bail, and abolition of capital punishment provisions, in spite of the fact that he had previously and publicly supported capital punishment. He had in fact presented a motion to that effect at the 1975 Liberal convention. I believe that the government is coming to grips with crime in our society, he stated in a wire to the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), and is tightening up the bail laws. As for gun controls, he continued, surely the ownership of firearms must carry certain responsibilities. He further noted that a federal Conservative MP recently found an 81.5 per cent response in favour of tighter gun controls, and only 16.4 per cent against, in a poll he had taken.

Yet a *Globe and Mail* reporter, Jonathan Manthorpe, in late March, 1976, was able to report gun controls a hotter issue than hanging, with about 360 letters per week arriving, most of them against the legislation, compared to only 200 a week on capital punishment, and few on other aspects of the bill such as parole and sentencing.

Paradoxically, he said, organizations characterized as the gun lobby and against all controls have said the bill is not tough enough in many areas, that it will do nothing to stop the negligent or criminal use of firearms. They are apparently perturbed that many of the gun control provisions are ill-defined, that the bill will give too much arbitrary power to local firearm registrars, and that there will not be a standard system across the country. Special concern has been expressed over the provision that makes a gun owner liable to criminal negligence if his firearm is left in an insecure place and taken and misused by someone else. They complain that the bill does not define what is meant by secure, that different judges might hand down different decisions.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, that is why it is so urgent for parliament to approve this bill in principle by putting an end to second reading and sending it to committee where it

### *Measures Against Crime*

can receive a full public hearing and debate. Surely in its present size it presents enough detail, and further amendments and improvements will be made at the next stage of its passage through parliament.

Also there are a number of misconceptions about the bill. The first is that it requires registration of all firearms—but not so, only the person will require to be licensed by the local firearms registrar. The second is that the decision of the registrar will be final—not so, there will be an appeal system in the courts.

The government has clearly opted, says Orland French of the *Ottawa Citizen*, for controls on people, not guns, to stop the spread of firearms. It has frankly rejected gun registration in favour of stronger controls on licensing of gun users, owners, dealers, and manufacturers, to screen out potential misusers of guns, and restrict the general availability of firearms. At the same time the government is sincerely trying to avoid harrasing sportsmen, and to meet with the approval of hunting groups and rifle clubs. Is that not fair?

Applicants for restricted weapons such as handguns will be required to justify the need for such a weapon before a certificate is granted. However, the bill's provisions place the emphasis squarely on the criminal element where it belongs—higher maximum sentences from a mandatory minimum sentence of one year up to 14 years for the use of a gun while committing an indictable offence, running consecutively to any other sentence.

Every possessor of firearms will need a licence, good for five years, issued only if the licensing officer is satisfied there is nothing in the applicant's background to make him unfit to possess a weapon. Is that too much to ask?

Local registrars and licensing officers will be located in convenient places throughout the country, and their decisions will be subject to appeal in the courts. Is that not democratic? In general I think that the provisions of this bill are fairly reasonable and deserve to go to committee.

It seems there are still some people in this country who complain. Mr. William Jones, president of Firearms and Responsible Ownership, stated that the new gun control legislation is a Madison Avenue con job. It is perhaps appropriate that he chose a cynical American term, considering the prevalent situation in the U.S.A. regarding guns and crime. Such name-calling has been used before by critics toward responsible government programs—our anti-inflation program for example—and we all know how successful that plan is already, even at this early stage.

To his credit Mr. Jones has tried to take the middle ground with our government, has tried to keep the extremists of both types out. Together we have done that, but there is a place for flexibility in a program, for avoiding fixed details that can be better developed as we gain experience with a new program.

In many instances the critics have not bothered to make themselves familiar with the bill and are complaining of some problems which do not exist, suggesting things which are already included. On the other hand our serious problems are not just those which have happened but also those which could happen, for example with regard to fully automatic weapons.