

Government Orders

We will see whether or not this goal is achieved in concrete terms. I will remind you that success will have to be determined by taking into account all the actions taken. Last week, I learned that additional resources will be allocated to the RCMP to fight smuggling. Will these resources be enough? I do not know. This measure must be part of an action plan and I think this is an interesting idea.

On the other hand, as you solve one problem, you want to make sure you are not creating new problems in the process; in the case in point, this means not making life impossible for honest citizens who use firearms correctly. In that sense, it is a shame that the government did not see fit to incorporate some of the amendments proposed by the Bloc Québécois, particularly with regard to having the legislation apply equally to everyone.

It says that the First Nations, aboriginal peoples can be exempted by cabinet decision from the application of any or all provisions of the act. It seems to me that creating two classes of citizens like that is unfair.

• (1550)

With respect to cost control, we were assured that it would not cost more than \$10 to register up to 10 weapons per owner and that this registration would be good for life.

We, however, put forward a proposal to ensure that, for example, the next government would not suddenly be tempted to do what was done in many other registration systems like those in the auto industry and other sectors, to turn this into a cash cow for the government through very substantial cost increases. I think that this would be inappropriate and that the government would have to be accountable for its actions should it do so in the future. We would have liked this to be included in the bill, but it was not.

Another amendment called for a minimum four year sentence, provided for in the bill, for crimes committed with weapons. We think that this will create a double standard and that judges will have a hard time implementing this provision because crimes committed with firearms will have to be treated differently from those committed with other tools or instruments. I think that the government should have spent more time considering this.

In the debate on the firearms bill, the Bloc Québécois's policy has always been to ensure that we have a balanced bill at the end of the day. Will it be sufficiently balanced for us to vote in favour? In this regard, the amendments deliver a number of gains.

For example, with regard to decriminalization, converting a Criminal Code offence to a statutory offence, which does not involve fingerprinting, mug shots, and entry into the police electronic network for first time offenders, is an interesting gain, because those who forget to register during the five year

period would not be considered to be criminals but simply citizens who forgot to do something and who must rectify the situation.

Another element on which gains were made is the decision to issue licences. We do not rely only on reports from other people, we take into account the place of residence of the person. A person will not be kept from owning a firearm on the ground that he or she is in contact with a specific individual. Rather, the decision will be related to that person's place of residence, and whether interdictions apply to other individuals in that residence. That is, in our opinion, a valuable gain.

Another important issue raised by several hunters is the fact that the firearm handling courses which they took under the Quebec legislation were not recognized. Again, an important gain was made regarding this issue and the situation will now be more acceptable to Quebec hunters. That change is a good one. It does not go against the principle which underlies gun control, but it eliminates the frustrations experienced by hunters who use firearms for an honest purpose, their hobby.

I also want to point out that, after a few years, only those who have a valid license will be allowed to buy non-prohibited ammunition. This will surely help avoid accidents which occur, for example, when young people go out and buy ammunition. Indeed, this type of situation often results in accidents, and that is unacceptable.

We are dealing with a bill which, in my opinion, is not perfect, a bill which has been the object of numerous debates. This legislation led us to examine the pros and the cons of an interesting principle, a principle which is aimed at reducing violence as well as the number of accidents and tragedies which we hear about on the news, including violence against one's spouse. This is not to say that all accidents and tragedies will be eliminated. People will still be able to use other means of violence.

• (1555)

We have witnessed this recently, but the use of a firearm has such a devastating and often definitive effect that we hope that implementing this bill will have positive effects.

I would like to conclude by saying that I drew my reflections on this bill today from personal experience, and I tried to see the bill's everyday implications. I still remember a story I was told, like the one about one of my uncles who died in a hunting accident years ago. At the time, no training courses were given to hunters to inform them regarding the proper use of firearms. Courses were introduced to try to remedy this situation. I could also talk to you about one of my friends who was in a corner store when suddenly, in came a gang of robbers. I hope that this law will correct situations of this kind.