

As was mentioned in the debate by way of background, it is easier to maintain control than regain it. This bill is designed to amend the criminal law, improve this country's administration of criminal justice, come to grips with the increasing incidence of crime in Canadian society, and provide the public with the greater measure of protection which it wants.

● (1750)

Mr. Speaker, I would first like to discuss the aspects of gun control. This was the first matter that was brought to my attention by a constituent after my arrival in Ottawa as a new member of parliament in the summer of 1974. The first item brought to my attention was, indeed, from a constituent who was most concerned about the freedom with which guns could be acquired in this country. I was asked to inform him what was happening in connection with a bill which was referred to as Senator Cameron's bill.

One of my first priorities on arriving here was not to try and find out specific information on a specific bill: however, on doing some research on it, it became evident that this particular senator had put forward, in two or three parliaments, a bill dealing with the subject of gun control. It had gone into committee at least twice and had died because of sessions ending or parliament being prorogued. My understanding is that this particular bill was a sequel to a bill presented to parliament by the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) as a private member's bill when he was a backbench member. There has, indeed, been considerable attention paid to gun control in this country. In fact, I further understand that the omnibus amendments to the Criminal Code in 1969 contained elements relating to gun control.

Correspondence is still coming forward to myself, and I am sure to other members of parliament, asking "What are you doing, as a government? What do you intend to do in relation to gun control? Can you not see the problem that is before the public? When are you going to give us some leadership?" I suggest that this is not new. It is by no means something that is arriving for the first time. It is an area in which the Canadian public is demanding, not requesting, some action by the federal government.

In my own brief reviews of this matter before the legislation came forward I had the opportunity to spend a whole evening with a concerned citizen in the Toronto area who is chairman of the Toronto chapter of the National Firearms Association. This citizen and several others got together some time ago because of their concern over the matter of inadequate gun controls and their inability to work through the bureaucracy to try to get something on their own. They put together a group of recommendations which they were able finally to discuss with the Solicitor General and his officials. I was very impressed with this concerted citizen act. It is my hope, and indeed it is the case, that this bill now incorporates many of the aspects these people brought to light.

In reviewing the many cases involved in gun control we must bear in mind that unnecessary fears have been put into the minds of the Canadian public. This has been done to some extent by the media and to some extent by members of this House, indicating that suddenly weapons are

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going to be seized and that people will not be able to continue holding on to their collections of guns. We must understand this is not the intention. Rather, the intention of the gun control legislation is to license people just as today we license a person who drives an automobile.

The automobile is presumably considered some sort of lethal weapon, otherwise why did we go to the great trouble many years ago to bring out such things as drivers' licences and automobile licences? Surely, it was felt at that time by governments in all provinces, states and governmental jurisdictions, that this was something new, had certain dangers attached to it and that it was necessary not only to keep control of where the vehicles were and what was happening to them, but to ensure that those who got behind the wheel of those vehicles had some basic qualifications to qualify them to take a vehicle on the road without becoming an undue menace to the rest of the public. Surely, there is an analogy here. It has been suggested across the way that we do not need this kind of licensing, that we have too many licences today. I am sure these people would not want to suggest the elimination of drivers' licences or automobile licences. They are accepted in society today.

I believe that society is now ready to accept some kind of licensing, some kind of assurance that the person who is going to operate a gun of some form of other is going to be qualified to do so. After all, he does possess a lethal weapon, a weapon that can do harm to others. It is the same as when he gets behind the wheel of an automobile. I think it makes eminent sense to look at that analogy in the light of what governments have done in the area of control over automobiles and their drivers.

We are not asking that all guns be licensed; we are suggesting that dealers be licensed. When speaking last spring to an eminent member of parliament in Sweden who was here with his finance committee, I posed the question of gun control. He said that for years it has been accepted that guns can only be sold in Sweden at licensed outlets. He took it as such a norm that he could not understand the point of my question. It is accepted in Sweden that you do not sell guns you know something about the gun business and are a qualified person. This kind of licensing is acceptable.

It is clear in Sweden that a person who has a gun in his home is licensed. This indicates that he is qualified to handle the weapon. I might go a step further and indicate that they are not permitted to leave a weapon in a state where it can immediately be used. In other words, the bolt must be removed. This is the attitude adopted by the military. It is done for one clear purpose, to prevent theft and misuse. That is not recommended in this legislation but it is something that could be considered in the future. It is important to consider how weapons are maintained in the home. There should be an insistence that weapons are maintained carefully and in a manner in which there is a psychological response to a person dashing over, picking up a weapon and running down the street in a moment when he may feel somewhat berserk.

Much more could be said about gun control. It is important that we are imposing a higher maximum sentence in the case of crime involving an offensive weapon. It is important that the police have some power of seizure. It is