

Government Orders

• (1215)

There is also the time frame. This is important in connection with the requirement to register a weapon and license it. If we add up all the possible time periods, and take into account the number of people currently owning firearms, we are talking about a period of almost seven years.

Obviously, enough time must be allowed for the appropriate administrative measures to be taken to ensure an effective registration and licensing system is in place. However, I think seven years is a lot. This is a very long time, in view of the urgency of the situation and the value of the firearms control measure of registration. It would be preferable to shorten the time period so that people with firearms could take note of their responsibilities and register their weapons as quickly as possible.

There is also the whole matter of costs. There are fairly low fees for registration and there are fees for licensing, which is renewable every five years. I think many people who opposed mandatory registration of firearms mentioned that significant amounts would be involved. Of course, if we add everything up, we arrive at a figure of perhaps several tens of millions of dollars. Not a mind boggling figure, but a reasonable amount, to some extent.

Clearly, if we could lower the administrative costs of licensing and registration, it would be easier on people who have to keep an eye on their spending. But I do not think that the \$50 or \$60 fee currently provided for under the proposed regulation is high enough to prevent people who would like to own guns from assuming their responsibilities and from registering them, a measure designed to let society know who is armed.

There is another aspect. Some categories of guns—for example the infamous AK-47—will remain in the hands of their present owners. In my opinion, these kinds of weapons have no place in a democratic and free country. They have a history in several countries. They have served all sorts of purposes, not always noble. I think it would have been appropriate for the minister to immediately recall these weapons.

Those are the main points I wanted to make about this bill, which is legitimate in a free and democratic society. In a society favouring non-violent values, it is important to know who owns firearms, because they increase carnage when violence breaks out. As well they are a symbol of violence.

These days, no one can walk the streets with a gun without alarming citizens. This was not the case 30 years ago. In my own town, which was closer to a medium size town than a small town, I recall that, at 17 or 18 years of age, we went through town carrying our .22 calibre rifles to go target shooting in the fields. People did not make a fuss because most of them knew

each other and knew who was who. They did not think we were violent. Nobody worried about it. But now, no one can walk the streets of my town, Jonquière, with a .22 rifle without the police hearing about it.

• (1220)

In my opinion, this indicates a shift in society's values and I believe that the time has come for us in Quebec and in Canada to know who is armed, who owns guns, and why, so that people become fully aware of their responsibilities as gun owners.

[English]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech on Bill C-68 with great interest, recognizing that the great thing about this Chamber is that we hold a wide divergence of opinion on controversial subjects such as gun control. I do respect his opinions.

However, I want to raise a couple of issues brought out in his presentation. He said we will not solve the problems of crime through imprisonment and that he is therefore opposed or has some difficulty with the more stringent and tougher measures in Bill C-68 on the criminal misuse and abuse of firearms.

He is opposed to deterrence through longer prison sentences. He mentioned there are better ways to deal with this than prison sentences. As is so typical when we debate bills, the Bloc fails to mention better ways. It consistently criticizes but does not bring forward any constructive criticism in the form of viable options.

For years we have tried to rehabilitate some of these violent offenders but basically there are those in society for which rehabilitation simply does not work. That is proven time and time again by the high incidence of repeat offenders. Some of our most violent and horrendous crimes are committed by people who have already served prison sentences and have been let out on early parole only to recommit.

Since the member raised the issue that there are better ways than longer prison sentences to combat crime and the criminal misuse of firearms, what are those better ways?

We are now debating the motion put forward by my hon. colleague from the Reform Party to split the bill in two. It was unclear from the member's presentation whether he is in favour of splitting the bill in two.

Reform feels there are two separate issues in the bill. One is more restrictions on law-abiding gun owners with the minister's firearms act and the second is more amendments to section 3 of the Criminal Code which deals with the criminal misuse of firearms which we feel are two separate issues.

I wonder if the member could enlighten the Chamber as to what his feelings are on splitting the bill.