

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL LAW AMENDMENT ACT (NO. 1), 1976**MEASURES FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF CANADIAN SOCIETY AGAINST CRIME**

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Basford that Bill C-83, for the better protection of Canadian society against perpetrators of violent and other crime, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, the first point I would like to make in connection with Bill C-83 concerns the way it was presented to the House. The bill covers some six separate areas and I feel that issues as varied as gun control, wire tapping, and parole reform should be presented to the House separately because each of these issues is of great interest to many people. I am sure many of my colleagues will agree with me that parts of the bill are acceptable and that parts of it should be thrown out entirely. However, the government has put us in the position of having to accept all or nothing. But I suppose that is in keeping with its usual methods of consultation, Mr. Speaker.

At this stage of the bill I intend to confine my remarks to the section dealing with gun control. This problem, Mr. Speaker, is a difficult one. The difficulty arises because of the great variety of uses for guns. After all, they are just one of man's many tools. In my own riding, guns are used for legitimate recreational activities such as hunting and target-shooting. Some of my constituents collect guns for their value as antiques, and as personal mementos. And there is no doubt that some guns are used for illegal purposes, just as there is no doubt that a great many people in my constituency use guns to put food on the table.

What I am getting at is that devising a set of controls which will apply equally to people who live in highrise buildings in Toronto and to those who hunt and trap for a living in the High Arctic, is not easy. My main fear is that by attempting this big job the government has placed too much emphasis on conditions in the big cities at the expense of people who use guns as a tool by which to live.

Perhaps I can illustrate my point by the use of a few examples. The bill now contains provision for a police officer to enter a house without a warrant and seize any firearms. I realize that this could happen only under certain conditions, but it could happen. In a lot of cases that is a valuable provision. As several hon. members opposite have said, most violent crimes involving guns occur between people who know each other, often members of the same family. If a police officer feels tempers are running high, and removes the temptation of a gun, many deaths could be prevented.

Measures Against Crime

In a city having your gun removed is not a serious matter. Under the provisions of the legislation before us it could be reclaimed in due time. City people who legitimately own guns rarely use them more than several times a year, and then only for recreational purposes. But this is not the case in other parts of the country. For hunters and trappers there are certain critical times of the year. Ducks and geese fly over only during a short period of time. The same is true of migrating caribou herds. During these critical periods hunters will usually take food to last for several months. What would be the result if their guns were taken away during one of these critical periods? They and their dependants would face hunger, and the government would likely incur increased welfare costs.

Another factor should be taken into consideration. In a city the police are always handy and the courts are in operation all the time. It is fairly easy to fulfil whatever requirements the courts may stipulate to have a gun returned. This is not the case in areas where hunting is the major occupation. There are many villages in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and other places for that matter, where there is no permanent police station. Such places are served by travelling police officers, game officers, and circuit courts. Under these circumstances a hunter may lose the use of his gun for many months unless this bill is amended.

● (2010)

Another problem arises in the provision for a licence to own a shotgun or a rifle. Because of the expense and lack of demand people with the authority to issue licences will not be easily accessible to hunters, trappers, fishermen, prospectors and so on. Hunters live in areas away from large centres of population, and they must travel great distances at great expense into remote territory at certain times of the year. It will be difficult for many hunters to go and get the required licence. As well, hunting communities are small. There may not be a priest, or a lawyer, or other person usually used as a guarantor handy to sign on application, let alone there being two there at the same time.

Many people will also have problems with these provisions in respect of licences because of the cost. This program evidently is supposed to pay for itself. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said in his remarks a few days ago that the estimate of the cost of processing a licence could run as high as \$30. Hunting families, fishermen, and others who use guns to take part of their food do not usually have large cash incomes. If there is a large number of hunters in a family, of course this will be a major obstacle.

Then there is the age restriction. In the city it is a good idea to restrict access to guns to people over the age of 18. I agree with that. In cases where families participate in some recreational aspect of shooting the bill makes adequate provision for allowing licences to people over the age of 14. However, the provision for permits for hunters at age 14 will cause problems. This will cause problems among native families not only in the Northwest Territories and in the Yukon but, I am sure, also in many of the northern parts of the provinces across this country.