

*Government Orders*

For years Canadians from all walks of life have been demanding stiffer mandatory sentencing provisions for the use of a firearm in the commission of violent offences. Bill C-68 addresses this concern. Mandatory sentencing provisions for the use of a firearm while committing one of the 10 key violent offences of attempted murder, manslaughter, negligence causing death, robbery, kidnapping, hostage taking, sexual assault, aggravated sexual assault, extortion and discharging a firearm within intent to cause harm will be increased from one to four years. Offenders convicted of these offences will also be prohibited from possessing a restricted weapon for life.

I am concerned that section 85 charges might continue to be plea bargained away notwithstanding an increase in minimum sentencing provisions. The justice department's own research shows that two-thirds of section 85 charges laid are either dismissed, stayed or withdrawn because of problems of evidence or plea bargaining.

Bill C-68 also creates a new prohibitive category consisting of certain calibre handguns with a barrel length of 105 millimetres or less. In effect this will result in the prohibition of 58 per cent of the handguns currently in existence in Canada. Like all other owners of prohibited firearms, individuals who possessed these handguns on or before February 14, 1995 will be able to buy and sell only among themselves. Owners of these handguns will be able to use the handguns for the purpose for which they were originally obtained, whether target shooting or collecting. They will be required to demonstrate every five years that their handguns continue to be so used.

• (1755)

These measures are a definite improvement over the action plan of November 30, 1994 which had contemplated a complete prohibition against any use or trade in these prohibited firearms. To his credit, the Minister of Justice has announced his willingness to have the justice committee consider whether handguns in the prohibited class that are used in recognized target shooting competitions should be exempted from the ban.

I am also grateful that the minister has asked the committee to examine the whole question of whether there might be a separate exemption provision for firearms that may have special significance to families as relics or heirlooms.

The minister has also suggested that the committee study the issue of whether technical amendments are necessary for historical re-enactments or heritage events using black powder reproduction firearms.

In each of these cases the Minister of Justice is to be commended for his flexibility. I am deeply disappointed, however, that the minister has remained steadfast in his insistence

upon the establishment of a national registration system for all firearms, including non-restricted hunting rifles and shotguns.

Bill C-68 includes provisions for the initiation of universal firearms owner registration where the current FAC will be replaced with a graduated firearms possession certificate, FPC, starting in 1996. Although initially voluntary, by the year 2001 possession of any firearm without an FPC will result in a Criminal Code offence that would carry a sentence of up to five years, one year in excess of the mandatory term proposed for the offence of using a firearm while attempting to murder.

As the second half of the proposed universal registration system, the bill would require every Canadian to register his or her firearm individually. Each firearm is to be identified by make, model, manufacturer's serial number and other identifiers, and a special firearms registration card, FRC, is to be issued for each firearm registered.

We should not be surprised that law-abiding firearms owners are deeply resentful over this registration proposal, which can only be described as intrusive and cumbersome. As more and more makes and models of various types of firearms are either reclassified for regulation or banned outright, we cannot blame some firearms owners for suspecting that the real reason behind registration is a gradual confiscation of most firearms in Canada. Over half of the current legally owned handguns in Canada will be banned as a result of Bill C-68.

It should be obvious by now that criminals do not register their firearms. A universal firearms registry, even if it were fully subscribed to by all legal firearms owners, will not reduce criminal activity involving firearms, nor will it improve public safety. Neither law-abiding firearms owners nor other taxpayers deserve to be burdened with any expense or inconvenience that has no demonstrable effect on reducing crime or improving community safety.

Canadians want tougher measures to be taken to reduce crime. This bill addresses that through mandatory sentencing for the use of firearms in the commission of violent crime.

During the third week of November 1994, when Decima Research asked on behalf of *Maclean's* and CTV what the main reason for the increase in violent crimes is, the greatest number of responses, 40 per cent, said the justice system is too lenient. Only 5 per cent of the over 1,600 respondents said that a lack of tough gun controls was the cause.

Non-firearm owning Canadians are beginning to understand that additional gun controls will only serve to penalize responsible firearms owners unnecessarily and will not reduce crime. The minister insists that a new registration system is the support structure for the government's firearms control package.