

Guest Editorial

A time for action

By Constance Irving

Enough has already been said about the slayings of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy, and John Lennon. No doubt by the time this article reaches print, enough will have been said about the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan. We have heard all the arguments already. When will Congress do something about gun control?

The most recent Gallup poll says that 62% of Americans are in favor of stricter handgun control legislation, but still nothing has been done to regulate the ownership of handguns. The National Rifle Association, an organization that opposes all handgun control, is one of the most powerful lobbies in Washington. Politicians are often afraid to stand up to the NRA. Perhaps the American people ought to fear the NRA as well, though perhaps not for the same reasons. How long will we allow the NRA to pressure Congress into allowing any madman the right to obtain handguns?

And it isn't only the madmen who kill people with handguns. Anyone, however untrained, can own a gun; Nancy Reagan does. One wonders how she must feel about what she called "just a tiny little gun" now that someone has grazed her husband with a tiny little .22. One is probably in as much danger from the weapons one keeps in one's home as from those wielded by unknown attackers. One is very likely to shoot a friend or relative by mistake or during an argument. Chances are the handgun owner will not have the opportunity or presence of mind to fire at an unknown intruder; he will probably shoot someone he knows.

Anyone can buy a handgun and shoot it. Why can't there be more selectivity in ownership; some slight assurance that the person using the weapon is both sane and adequately skilled with guns?

Handguns are not used for hunting animals; they are designed to shoot human beings. Some people might conceivably need to use handguns for protection, but if they really need the handgun and know how to use it, surely any legislation passed would take note of their need and their skill. Handgun registration should hold no threat for them.

Many opponents of handgun control argue that the possession of the gun is not the problem, that criminals will get guns anyway. They claim that the solution to the use of guns by criminals is to provide stiffer and surer penalties for crimes committed with guns. Perhaps harsher penalties would be in order, but perhaps it would also be in order to make handguns a little less accessible. It seems reasonable that the harder it is to find a gun, the less likely that the handgun will be used in a crime. Besides, "better deterrence" has very little to do with crime committed by the mentally imbalanced; it is doubtful they really take such consequences into consideration. "Deterrence" has even less to do, of course, with accidental handgun murders.

It is a favorite tag line of the NRA that "guns don't kill people, people kill people." This is true, but it is also true that people usually kill people with guns, and that the gun is the simplest way to kill someone.

If you think your own concerns about handguns are more than empty words and mental exercises designed to soothe your conscience, why not do something to get Congress to act in favor of handgun control legislation? You can write your congressman, write a letter to our hometown newspaper, or send money to a handgun control lobby. Do it now, this week, or whenever you possibly can, because there has been more than enough talk about handgun control. It is time to take action.

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Basking in the spotlight

A Column By
O.L. Backer

When will I stop trusting people? Last week a friend and professional troublemaker from N.C. Public Interest Research Group invited several of us on a trip to Raleigh to watch the trained legislature perform. "Washington has nothing on this crowd," he said. "Raleigh during the session is a combination Elephant's Graveyard, Chamber of Commerce Feasting Club, and Stumbling Brothers' Thirty-ring Circus."

"The good ole boys creep down to Raleigh to drink themselves to death at the expense of the business lobbies. Meanwhile, anyone with a good cause, or at least a decent excuse, is basking in the fickle spotlight of state press attention."

I took this malcontent at his word and joined his excursion to the North Carolina General Assembly. Visions of Tidal Basin Bombshells filled my head. I had fantasies of undercover agents offering me \$50,000 to smuggle in their cousin from Armenia. Naturally I would do no such thing. I would merely take the money and run.

The N.C. Legislature Building is a beautiful piece of architecture, complete with rooftop gardens and multiple fountains. But to a true child of our paranoid times such as myself, the first thing that struck me was the remarkable lack of security. I had a thick briefcase with me as usual, with my papers and a spare pair of socks -- but for all anybody checked, it could have been filled with plastic explosive.

"After listening to an hour of the Senate babbling below. . . I started shaking the case and muttering, 'Let's rain death on those fascists below.'"

I carried it right up to the gallery unmolested, and after listening to an hour of the Senate babbling below I began to lose control. I started shaking the case and muttering, "Let's rain death on those fascists below." My PIRG friend was not amused. He led me swiftly downstairs.

It was time for the first main feature of the day. We filed into the Utilities Committee meeting room on the main floor to hear debate on a bill that would change the method of utility financing. Representatives from half a dozen consumer groups were there to urge the passage of the bill, calling it a long-overdue reform.

Unfortunately, meaningful reform from the smiley-face mentalities on the committee seemed to have about as much chance as prime cut sirloin in a pool of starving piranha. A power company representative also spoke, and the legislators -- obviously prepped by utility lobbyists -- directed all their questions at him. Most of the questions would have insulted a well-informed two year old: "Isn't it true that nuclear power is the cheapest and safest energy source?" "Right. It's too cheap to meter, and if we don't have it we'll all freeze in the dark, unemployed."

After repeated slow-pitch questions, I was about ready to jump up and start batting at them myself. My friend sensed this, and realized also that it would be bad for his group's image. "Enough of this," he said. "Let's head downstairs for some hardball."

Indeed, in a basement meeting room we listened while a handful of legislators prepared to play political hardball to try and get an environmental bill out of committee for a vote by the full House. They were studying a list of undecided committee members, and discussing what kind of pressure or compromises could persuade each individual.

I spoke with one of the legislators afterwards: "I thought only the bad guys plotted in basements."

"No," she smiled. "They can afford to do their plotting in the penthouse suites."

When we were finished downstairs, my friend from PIRG suggested that we wander the halls to get a feel for the ambience. "Like over there," he pointed. "See that pack of silver-haired men in three-piece suits? That's the bankers' lobby, pushing for higher loan interest rates. This year the Senate's giving them everything they ask for."

We passed by an office which exuded an air of cigar smoke and corruption. "Who works there?" I asked.

"That's Senator Hardhead from down East. He chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee and is a real wheeler-dealer. Every year, for example, he gets a porkbarrel appropriation marked 'mosquito control' that really goes to drain cropland for wealthy landowners in his district. Everybody knows it, but he's so powerful that nobody can stop it."

"That's atrocious!" I fumed. "Surely somebody can do something about this mess."

"Only the voters," he answered. "And most of them are more interested in why Dean Smith can't win the Big One against that turkey Bobby Knight."



Letters to the Editor

All Letters must be submitted to the Guilfordian at Box 17717 by Friday night, and should be no longer than 200 words. Names may be withheld if requested by the author in person or in writing.

A nuclear promise

Dear Editor,

I would like to respond to Scott Gassler's letter in the March 26th issue. Although Mr. Gassler's argument is a very good one, I believe that his fundamental assumption is incomplete. He states that there are "only two things a country can do with nuclear weapons: use them or threaten to use them." I think that he has overlooked a very crucial "use" of nuclear weapons - that of a defense mechanism. This can be viewed as a threat to use them, but it is a passive threat rather than an active one. Basically it says "If you use your nuclear weapons, then we will use ours." This, for the honor and protection of our

country, should not be a threat, but rather a promise. That way any other nuclear power will have to think long and hard before they exercise their power. They will know that there will be a price to pay for exercising their capabilities. I do not advocate the use of nuclear weapons, by any means. I merely think that we cannot afford to be naive in our dealings with other countries. If they have nuclear capabilities, we must be able to keep the use of those capabilities in check. Having a bomb and using it before the other guy uses his are two entirely different matters. I pray that the military leaders of our nation will not initiate the use of nuclear weapons.

Sincerely,
Karen Lewis

Library planning

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your provocative editorial on "Costs of Quakerism." It marks the first time this year that the Friends Historical Collection has been discussed somewhere other than the back page of the paper, and we are grateful.

The Friends Historical Collection is a unique resource, the only one of its kind in the Southeast. We have original minutes of Friends meetings in North Carolina dating back to 1680. We have a very large collection of Quaker books and periodicals that are also a part of the general Library collection. We have personal papers of important Quakers from the last two centuries. We also