

Editorials

Forum: Two Views on Handgun Control

By John Cox

Statistics show that the use of handguns in violent crimes in this country is outrageously extensive. The most direct way to fight such violent crime is to ban handguns—is that not logical enough?

Handguns are not a problem per se; crime is. And crime is not an ill so much as an evil. Hence let us hold no delusions that handguns control is some sort of panacea for the national malaise; fewer guns will not help people "interface" or "self-actualize" (whatever that is). I am for handgun control because I think it might be effective in curbing the violence that is rampant in this country.

Oponents of this new Prohibition raise two arguments against it. They "often" say that it is unconstitutional and also that it is bound to be unsuccessful even if instituted. As for constitutionality anyone who can read can see that the Founding Fathers were trying to ensure the people's right to a militia in the 2nd Amendment, not their right to play Clint Eastwood.

In 1982 the town of Morton Grove, Illinois passed an ordinance prohibiting the sale and possession of handguns. Two federal courts have already upheld the law as constitutional. Judge William Bauer of the US Court of Appeals has written, "According to its plain meaning, it seems clear that the right to bear arms is inextricably connected to the preservation of a militia."

Even if handgun controls were to be enacted, however, would they work? Critics point out that the citizenry in places where such legislation has been effective is in general more deferential to authority than are we Americans. It's the culture, they say, not the laws, that keeps low the number of handgun crimes; and besides, since we cannot win our national battles against drug smugglers and illegal aliens, how can we possibly root out an institution as omnipresent and quintessentially American as the Six-Shooter?

Those are indeed good points. The simple if hard to swallow answer is that we must begin somewhere. The frontier mentality of the 1800's—essential then and important in many respects today—will not by itself pull us through the next century. Certain changes in our mentality must take place.

Short of an absolute ban on handguns, there exist other measures which should be applauded and further studied. Increased waiting periods for buying guns and more detailed background checks on the buyers can help reduce the number of guns bought in anger by ruffians. Florida and Michigan have started a mandatory sentencing policy of more years in the clink for people who use guns in the commission of a felony.

Some law enforcement officers suggest more stringent

regulation of concealed weapons. Some propose the prohibition of "dangerous and useless" guns such as the Saturday Night Special, the hoodlum's dream-tool which is of no value to law-abiding citizens.

It might well be that the promulgation of sticter laws controlling who gets what type of gun and how they use it will be effective in slowing the torrent of violent crime in the US. That would be wonderful; we could then leave sportsmen, collectors, and Mr. Joe Average Citizen alone, as ideally we should. I carry no torch against hunters and historians.

I also have some general problems with federal "prohibitions." You see, I distrust big government. So did the Founding Fathers, and with good reason, I too resent government interference in my private life. If the Feds ever require me to wear a seatbelt, for example, I'll balk heartily. But, as the saying goes, my right to swing my fist ends, where thy nose begins. When we're dealing with the integration of schools, the protection of the consumer from fraud and poison, and the prevention of free shooting anarchy in the streets, the Federal government has a greater range of action. To a certain extent the national good preempts individual rights; such as is the price we all have to pay for leading social lives. Thus, any legislation that lashes at a virulent problem and is well within accepted standards or correct American jurisprudence should be welcomed.

I do not like the idea of buying solutions to problems at a gunshop. I want something better. And I hear of few thieves nailed by indignant gun-toting homeowners, but I hear of plenty of spouses blown away accidentally and children slain by curiosity. Although handguns might make people feel more secure, I am not convinced that they actually make anyone safer. On the contrary they add a higher level or risk and explosiveness to an already frustrated and self-indulgent society.



By Charlie Neill

Recent events in the United States have once again helped to ignite the well-intentioned but misguided faction in our society that foresees a reduction of domestic violence through legislation designed to eliminate the private possession on handguns.

The necessary brevity of an article of this type permits only a brief reference to several key points that, though infinitely

arguable, are simply going to be stated as provable and positive fact: The Constitution of the United States guarantees the right of American citizens to possess handguns (Keep, not Bear, is the key word), the Supreme Court has upheld the existence of this right, and every citizen has both the legal and moral right to defend his or her life from violent attack with equivalent deadly force.

Now that these points have been stated, it seems quite appropriate to examine some of the more prominent myths that the antihandgun establishment presents as "evidence" that supports the necessity of a ban on handguns.

The belief that handguns have no sporting value and are intended primarily for use against humans is basically true. Although there are many handguns designed solely for hunting and/or target shooting, none can equal the performance of a rifle or shotgun. Instead, handguns are primarily designed to protect the life and property of their owner from a violent criminal attack. The fact that they are often used in criminal activities doesn't change their intended purpose any more than a homicide by a drunk driver alters the intended purpose of his automobile. The problem of criminal handgun usage lies not with the inanimate weapon, but the operator's behavior. Those who accept this argument but stress the need for handgun control due to the uncontrollable human element participate in the repressive and dangerous practice of "a priori judgement," the root cause of such atrocities as racial prejudice.

A definite concern that has become twisted into an argument against handgun ownership is the hazard that a handgun presents in a home environment. There is no doubt that handguns are dangerous instruments. So are automobiles, kitchen knives, medicines, electricity, Drano, and Scotch whiskey. Owning and using any of these products in a safe manner requires responsibility and a thorough knowledge of the products and their hazards. This is especially true with a handgun. Many individuals, like myself, were thoroughly instructed in the proficient and safe methods of handling firearms prior to puberty, but many other gun owners are untrained, inexperienced, and irresponsible. These people are the ones that have the vast majority of accidents, and the weapon is rarely to blame.

On the other side of the coin, the possibility of an encounter with an armed victim is a huge deterrent to criminals. Massad Ayoob, the noted New Hampshire police sergeant and criminologist, conducted a 1983 survey of 3,500 New York state inmates who were incarcerated for burglaries and violent crimes. Eighty-eight percent of them stated that their number one fear

when contemplating a crime was the possibility of encountering an armed victim or homeowner. Their reasons were simple: a homeowner has a brief period to prepare for an encounter, he is intimately familiar with the environment, and in all probability is so frightened that he will begin shooting without giving the intruder a chance to surrender. The absence of this threat would undoubtedly result in a sharp increase in these types of crimes. Washington, D.C. is a fine example.

In 1977, the District of Columbia enacted legislation that virtually outlawed the private possession of handguns within its boundaries. Since the enactment of this legislation, D.C.'s homicide rate has increased 30% and its armed robbery rate has increased 62%. Their Assistant Chief of Police recently admitted that "I personally don't think gun control laws work." This legislation has only effectively reduced the number of handguns in the possession of homeowners and other law-abiding citizens, while criminals are having a "field day."

Let me state here that I am not advocating the use of violence or vigilante techniques to curb domestic crime. There are vastly superior methods of crime control that should be employed if at all possible. However, any dried-out junkie or criminal that would crash through one's window at 2:00 a.m. is usually no in the mood for negotiaton. In a situation such as this, a Colt .45 automatic pistol crammed full of fat, nasty hollowpoints is guaranteed to procure his immediate and undivided attention—one way or the other. You don't have to take my word for it. Ask him, he'll tell you.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am aware of the attitude of many individuals who would submit passively to violence without responding in a violent manner. Although I personally could never do this, I cer-

tainly respect their right to live (or die) in any manner that their conscience dictates. I only request the same consideration in return. However, there are others out there who will admit that gun control probably would not work, but are in favor of it anyway. These individuals need to sit down and take a long, hard look at themselves. This is the attitude that frightens me the most.

Stow It

By Tracey Clark

Rumour has it that Guilford may consider selling the Photon. Personally, I feel such a move would be unwise. A great many students have enriched their Guilford College educations by participating in projects undertaken on the Photon, and on trips where students have interacted and learned much from each other in the unique Photon environment.

Prospective students would have to find a boat that was accessible to them sometime during their stay at Guilford and an appealing feature. Appealing features have to please a College which prides itself on its ability to put its signature on each student's education.

If the issue is financial I might be more inclined to be sympathetic; that is, if there were some weird financial reason the College couldn't keep the boat I would accept its sale. If it's a case of losing money, however, I'm afraid the ideals I'm forming while in College in inexorably tell me that the benefits to students (and in the long run to the College and its ideals) have to offset any \$ losses from the Photon's operation.

Do students feel the need for a 'Save the Photon' campaign as a continuation of my very arbitrary hypothesis?

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