

The Chickens Come Home to Roost
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“Why are there gangland style slayings here in Toronto when Canada has such strict gun control laws?” The young voice asked me over the phone.

The young woman was calling from a news organization in Ontario to ask me to help her understand why drug dealers in Toronto were killing each other this summer in greater numbers than ever before. She was honestly perplexed because she thought Canadian firearm laws would have somehow stopped criminals from misusing guns. She was shocked that there had been 16 gangland-style killings in Toronto alone this year. And the year was only half over. “How could this happen in Canada? I thought this kind of gun violence only happened in the US,” she said.

Unfortunately, she could have been calling me from Montreal or from Vancouver. News reports from each of these cities this summer told of an outbreak of “gun violence.” A crime wave was feared. Despite our tough gun laws (on hunters and target shooters anyway), homicides involving handguns have increased over the past twenty-five years. While the overall homicide rate has declined, the share involving handguns has doubled. Handgun homicides have gone from 25% to over 50% of gun homicides. Of course, very few of these handguns have ever been registered. These guns haven’t been stolen from law-abiding citizens. They were smuggled into Canada by criminals for criminals.

The police speculate that this summer’s killings are due to disputes over drug territories or simply vengeance. The police report that 60% of all homicides in Toronto so far this year have involved unregistered handguns. Virtually all homicides involving guns. Staff Sergeant Harvey Williams of the OPP says the underground market for guns is driven by relentless criminal demand.

The increase in violence is not limited to Toronto. Delta, BC, which used to be a sleepy rural hamlet, has seen a big increase in violent crime. This July there were three drive-by shootings in as many days; plus there have been two murders in the past two years. None of the guns recovered from the suspects were of course registered. The media report that the violence is due to local gangs and battles over drug territories. In Montreal there are similar drive-by shootings, with one man being killed on a busy highway.

The crime wave is reflected in recent crime statistics. According to Statistics Canada, most categories of youth violence rose in 2000, including assault (up 7%). Assaults also increased for adults as well (up 5%). Although one should be cautious in interpreting crime statistics, because they are so dependent upon the willingness to report crimes as well as police priorities. The driving force behind the increase in violent crime appears to be the sizeable increase (9%) in drug crimes. Particularly alarming are the increases in cocaine and marijuana trafficking.

So, why haven't Canada's strict gun laws stopped all of this criminal violence?

In response to the young woman's question, I told her that Canada has a crime problem, not a gun problem. Our strict gun control laws are a cause of the crime wave, not a solution for it. Studies of the guns used by street thugs find that their guns are almost all smuggled into Canada and have never been registered as required by Canadian law. Handguns have been registered since the 1930s, but that can't keep them from criminals. Street criminals don't register their firearms; only law abiding hunters and target shooters do.

How could anyone be surprised that gun control has not stopped violent crime? The Canadian government has wasted almost a billion dollars so far on attempting to licence deer hunters and target shooters. These are not the people who sell drugs, or shoot at each other in turf wars. At the same time, the federal government has slashed RCMP budgets, disbanded the Vancouver Port Police, and cut back the Coast Guard. With nearly unguarded borders, smugglers have less trouble bringing in guns and narcotics than they do illegal immigrants.

Shrinking police budgets mean fewer cops on the beat, and less money to mount expensive crack downs on organized crime. Now you know why you haven't heard about many big-time drug dealers being arrested.

As if this wasn't bad enough, when criminals are caught they aren't punished. A study for the Justice Department found that career criminals get away virtually scott free for having or using illegal guns. Gun charges are rarely brought by the Crown, and when they are, they are plea bargained away. Even when convicted, criminals are back on the streets almost immediately. Judges do not want to give them long jail sentences. Why should criminals worry? If they ever happen to be arrested, their brief visit in jail is akin to a restful holiday away from the busy office.

Canada isn't the only country where this tragedy is being played out. Violent crime has increased in both England and Australia since strict gun control has been imposed. England has seen handgun crime increase since the Labour government banned handguns in the wake of the Dunblane massacre. The Centre for Defence Studies at Kings College in London reported that the number of crimes in which a handgun was reported increased from 2,600 in 1997/98 to 3,600 in 1999/00. Unsurprisingly, only one firearm in 10 used in homicide was legally held.

In contrast, violent crime rates, particularly murder, have decreased in the United States. According to a recent US Department of Justice study, violent crime rates are now higher in England than in the United States. A similar sad story may be seen in statistics published by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

It seems so obvious to anyone who is a gunowner that firearm licencing and registration would do little or nothing to bring violent crime to heel. Thus, it may be natural to assume that the government will soon recognize it's mistake, and abandon such an obviously failed policy. Surely, it's clear by now that firearm registration won't stop criminal violence.

Unfortunately, this is naive. The government has not yet seen that its firearm policy has failed. The nearly a billion dollars spent on registration may be seen by the public as a waste of tax money, but to the Ottawa mandarins, that's money they can spend hiring their friends and furnishing their offices. Where's the failure?

Not only does firearm registration waste money creating a federal bureaucracy to monitor duck hunters, more importantly, it starves the police of the money needed to fight real criminals. This just leaves the rest of us to become victims.

The Canadian press aren't watchdogs; they're lapdogs. The media are afraid to talk about criminals causing violent crime. They still talk about how evil guns are!

Justice Minister Anne Mclellan still believes that she has fooled the Canadian public and can continue to still fool them. Her department is claiming firearm registration is a success! Jean Chretien is laughing because his opposition is still bitterly divided. The Alliance is falling apart; the Tories are weak. Who is there to challenge the federal Liberals? Who will tell them that gun registration is a failure?

Ottawa still doesn't see the crime wave of 2001 as the result of their own failed policies. They haven't yet come to the point where they realize that C-68 is worse than barking up the wrong tree. C-68 is actually causing violent crime.

The only way for the politicians to learn that, "the chickens have come home to roost," is if you tell them. Have you called your MP lately? This is your opportunity. If you don't, they'll never learn.

Remember: The only time you lose the battle is if you give up.

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