

*Government Orders*

Thirty years ago a domestic dispute in the city of Toronto would rarely if ever involve a handgun. Now police approach every situation as potentially lethal. Thirty years ago police officers did not need SWAT teams, bullet-proof vests or increasingly powerful service revolvers against suspects who are routinely better equipped with the latest weaponry. Just this past week metro Toronto police received permission to carry shotguns inside their cruisers instead of in the trunks of their cars.

There is no doubt whatsoever that our society is becoming more violent than Canadians will tolerate. But how are we different from our friends to the south? What makes us want to take charge of this situation and return order to Canadian streets?

Fortunately, the vast majority of Canadians continue to abhor violence in all its forms. We are still shockable. We can still be touched. We are still willing to fight back. We are not ready to install metal detectors in our schools or huddle behind locked gates and barred windows after dark. From across Canada, this government and every member of this House has heard the message: Get the guns off the streets.

Ninety-six per cent of Canadians support increased penalties for the use of a firearm in the commission of a crime. This bill addresses those Canadians. Ninety per cent favour the registration of all firearms. This bill addresses those Canadians. Fully 70 per cent want tighter gun control laws, restricted access to ammunition and a complete ban on civilian ownership of handguns. This legislation addresses those Canadians.

The issue of violence affects each of us in a profound way. My late father, Ed Janozeski, was a sharpshooter, a gun instructor and a dedicated metro Toronto police officer for 37 years. He watched the use of firearms increase, especially in his last years on the force. He grew increasingly frustrated as legislators seemed unwilling to do anything about it.

Each member of this House knows of an instance where friends, family or acquaintances have been devastated by the misuse of firearms. Every year 1,400 Canadians die as a result of gunshot wounds and another 1,200 are injured. Sadly, the majority are suicides, impulsive acts committed by those who have easy access to guns. Fifty women are killed each year, shot in their own homes by a family member.

Surprisingly, homicide rates from firearms are 50 per cent higher in rural Canada. One hundred persons die accidentally each year while hunting or otherwise handling a firearm. Some of these people are children.

Three million Canadians own seven million firearms, 1.2 million in the restricted category. Vast numbers of illegal, smuggled and unregistered guns add to this arsenal. Between 1974 and 1993, 65,000 firearms were reported missing, lost or stolen and have never been recovered.

Even with all legal weapons registered, criminals will still find handguns. Accidents and suicides will still occur. Are these sensible, rational arguments for doing nothing?

Acceptance of the status quo is acceptance of defeat. The enormity of the task cannot freeze us into inaction. If we start today the net result over time will be significantly fewer handguns in private hands. Those handguns will be in the safer hands of legitimate sport shooters, hunters and collectors.

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A highly efficient computerized system will distinguish legal from illegal firearms and will track them. Police officers when approaching a reported domestic dispute will know if there are weapons in the house. Responsible safe storage by registered gun owners will become a necessity.

Will violent crime cease immediately? No one is foolish enough to believe that. Criminals will not register their firearms or produce a licence to purchase ammunition. But the underground market fed to a great extent by smuggled and stolen firearms will begin to dry up. Registration will permit tracking of imported guns and seizure of unregistered ones. Registration will also encourage safe storage and the availability of fewer stolen firearms.

Through a series of new hard hitting penalties this government is also saying loudly and clearly: Use a weapon and you will face the stiffest penalties in the western world, a minimum of four years in jail for the use of a firearm in any of 10 specific offences.

Police will have a law with teeth enabling them to lock up criminals in possession of stolen firearms before a crime occurs. Those attempting to use replicas to intimidate and terrorize will face a minimum one year sentence.

Our border, the longest unprotected border in the world, will no longer be an easy entry for those trafficking in firearms. Now you will face 10 years in jail and forfeit all vehicles used in the commission of this crime.

The new legislation will outlaw 60 per cent of all handguns currently available for purchase in Canada, all assault-type military and paramilitary weapons, many of which are designed for concealment and terrorist activities. They have absolutely no place in Canadian society.

To acquire and keep handguns, owners will have to provide one of only two valid reasons for doing so: to add to a legitimate collection, or to use in sport or target shooting. This would have to be justified every five years. The single most objectionable requirement in the eyes of the gun lobby is simple: all firearms and all owners of firearms will have to be registered. Contrary to popular myth, the registration of weapons is not new to Canada.