

## ON GUN CONTROL

In their own ponderous but inimical way, the federal statisticians are moving toward the complete disarming of American citizens through gun controls, and with them the establishment of legal precedents for the final abolition of private property.

The National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence has proposed the most authoritarian and capricious "controls" on private ownership of firearms yet conceived in America.

Apparently attempting to prevent crime by victimizing the innocent, the Commission proposed (1) the restriction of ownership of handguns to those who can prove to the government that they "need" to own handguns, (2) the licensing of all those permitted to own handguns, (3) the confiscation of all handguns not licensed, (4) federal legislation to establish minimum standards for State regulation of long guns, and (5) the requirement that complete records of all changes in the ownership of long guns be kept. The Commission itself estimated that under these laws as many as 90 percent of the 24 million handguns now owned by Americans could be seized.

### Gun Control and Authoritarianism

If the authoritarian and completely immoral nature of these laws is not immediately obvious, consider a few facts.

The first and most important reason why these proposed laws are wrong is that they violate the rights of persons who are not even suspected of being guilty of an aggression by making the mere possession of one type of property a crime. The advocates of this despicable law seem to have forgotten the simple fact that a gun, like any other object, is a tool which may be used properly, as in sport, or improperly, as in robbery; and which can be used to destroy a life, as in a murder, or to save a life, as in self-defense.

Indeed, the advocates of this law seem to have forgotten the only proper and logical purpose of any anti-crime legislation: *the protection of peaceful citizens*. Rather, they have judged 24 million Americans guilty of an unnamed crime, before the fact, and sentenced them to surrender their property without appeal. [For a discussion of the causes of growing crime in America, see the SIL issue paper **Crime In America**.]

Objectively, crime can only exist in *action* initiated against the life or property of another, and such *actions* are the only proper object of legislation. The mere possession (or sale, or purchase) of an

inanimate object, such as a gun, cannot in and of itself be rationally construed to be an immoral or criminal action.

The collectivists who advocate this law cannot even pretend that the men and women whose property they propose to steal have committed an "anti-social" act. It is in fact difficult to see any motivation behind this legislation other than the desire on the part of power-hungry bureaucrats to disarm citizens whom they are beginning to push too far.

### Gun Control is Illegal, Impractical & Unnecessary

Not only is such legislation immoral—it is also illegal, impractical and unnecessary.

The proposed laws are illegal because they violate Article II of the Bill of Rights which clearly states: ". . . the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Thus, even if gun control were moral and practical, which it is not, it would take a Constitutional Amendment to make it legal.

Gun control legislation is impractical because it attempts to prevent crime by outlawing one possible *means* for crime while failing to deal with the *cause* for crime, or deal with the criminal himself.

The cause for crime is not the existence of modern weapons, but the willingness of men to commit aggressive crimes. Only by removing the motives which impel men to violence can violence be prevented.

Almost any object is potentially a weapon. Scissors, kitchen knives, and clenched fists all can be deadly. If one weapon is made more difficult to get, a criminal can always use another. Besides, why would a man willing to commit armed robbery or murder be deterred from buying or stealing a gun simply because they are illegal? A prohibition on the sale of handguns would be about as effective in preventing the illegal acquisition of guns by aggressors as the prohibition on drugs is effective in preventing drug use in America.

Legal prohibition of gun ownership would not deter violent criminals from procuring guns, but it would deter law-abiding citizens. Thus the prohibition of gun ownership would effectively disarm peaceful citizens without disarming violent criminals—making violent crime more likely by making it less risky.

### Effects of Gun Control

Experience shows that stringent gun control laws do nothing to lessen crime. For example, New York State, with its highly restrictive Sullivan Law on firearms, has the same homicide rate as California which has no equivalent strict law.

Just as the mere outlawing of weapons does not cause a decrease in violent crimes, similarly the mere possession of weapons does not lead to a high rate of crime. Indeed, the opposite is often the case.

In Orlando, Florida the city police recently taught some 6,000 women how to use firearms after an alarming series of rapes. This instruction contributed largely to a 9.5% decrease in the city's crime rate even while crime *increased* 20% elsewhere in Florida, and increased nation-wide 16% during the same period.

To cite a second example of how an armed and trained citizenry does not necessarily imply widespread violence, almost all Swiss families have guns in their homes; yet Switzerland has one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

### Gun Control & Crime

Finally, stringent firearms regulations are not necessary because stronger law enforcement and an increase in penalties for using firearms to commit crimes can have the desired result of decreasing the incidence of violent crimes without violating the rights of peaceful citizens.

As many studies have shown, the most important single factor in the effectiveness of laws in preventing crime is the *speed and certainty of punishment*. At the present time, less than 20% of violent crimes that are reported result in an arrest, and less than 25% of arrests result in conviction and imprisonment. Thus the odds of being able to get away with a violent crime are now better than 20 to 1 in favor of the criminal. Streamlining and strengthening the legal process would do more to curb crime than all of the gun control bills that have ever been proposed.

### Ultimate Implications of Gun Control

There is one final aspect of the Commission's recommendations which deserve mention: its long term implications.

To deny men the right to possess one form of property is to set the legal precedent for the *denial* of the right to possess *any* form of property.



Today it is guns. Tomorrow it may be knives, cigarettes or spare gasoline. Once the precedent has been established that the state has the right to punish men for the mere *possession* of property, then no thing and no person is safe.

If enacted, the proposals of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence would be a major step toward the society of the total state and the enslavement of the American people. Ultimately the people must retain the ability to defend their lives and property *by force* against those who would use force against them, or they will lose both their freedom and their property entirely.

The only law and order furthered by gun control legislation is the law of a bureaucratic jungle and the order of a prison cell the size of an entire nation.

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Adopted October 1969

*As Advocates of Individual Liberty We Affirm:*

*That every person has an inalienable right to their own life, liberty and property;*

*That the only proper use of force is in retaliation against those who violate human rights;*

*That the basic violation of human rights consists of the initiation or the threat of the initiation of force against the individual;*

*That all proper social organization can only be a consequence of voluntary association between individuals;*

*That the only economic system consistent with human prosperity and happiness is laissez-faire capitalism;*

*That the ideologies and instrumentalities of coercive collectivism are the basic threat to human rights and the existence of moral human societies;*

*And that both moral individuals and moral societies have the obligation to act in their own rational self-interest to protect themselves from those who seek to coercively control, direct and enslave them.*

*With the apostles of coercion increasingly predominant in the councils of man, it is the duty of all those who value their life, liberty and property to take appropriate action—intellectual and social—to preserve and extend their freedom.*

*We as libertarians resolve to resist all forms of involuntary collectivism and all programs and activities of government which violate our rights and attempt to take from us the ability to set our own goals and to determine our own destiny.*

*We work for the day when all individuals are free, and we look forward to a society of peace, plenty and freedom where the individual's rights are truly politically inalienable. As advocates of reason and liberty we seek and will settle for no less than:*

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# THE QUESTION OF GUN CONTROL

JARRET B. WOLLSTEIN



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