

The Firearms Debate in Canada

The average Canadian neither understands the intricacies of the Canadian Firearms Act, nor do they care. As long as they are "protected" by tough laws, they feel that the government has done its job. It turns out that the Government of Canada have badly botched the Firearms Act, and Canadians are at greater risk than ever before from illegal firearms in the hands of criminals.

While the argument over the efficacy and efficiency of the Firearms Registry in Canada rages on, that is only one aspect of the Firearms Act, and is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Perhaps a red herring as well. While the government cling to the registry concept, in truth it serves no purpose for the public safety, the prevention of crime, nor its resolution.

The fundamental problem with the firearms law in Canada is that while Canadians should expect laws to be designed to identify and deter criminals, the Canadian Firearms Act actually applies only to the scrupulously law abiding, and has instead created myriad ways to actually criminalize that segment of the population.

Flawed in scope, target and design, the principle architect of the flawed Act, former politician Alan Rock who claimed at the height of his less than illustrious career "*I came ... with the firm belief that the only people in this country who should have guns are police officers and soldiers*". Hardly the view of one who believes in the hard won rights and freedoms of a democratic society.

By treating as criminals the most regulated, and by definition a peaceful segment of the population, the ones who might submit to licensing and regulation, the government have undermined a trust which is deeply offensive to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the fundamental principles of democracy and the rights of the citizen to due process.

While insurance companies do not even recognize firearms ownership as a recognizable risk factor, a failure to renew a firearms license can and will result in felony prosecution for a paper

offense. When was the last time you renewed your driver's license late? How would you like to face five years in a federal penitentiary for that simple omission?

Perhaps worse than the arbitrary oppression of a peaceful segment of the population is the fact that in spite of the government's patting their own backs on the efficacy of the program, there is not one aspect of the law and the slew of inane regulations which has any impact on the criminal use of firearms. The importation of illegal firearms in Canada has increased, simply because there is a growing market for them, and no deterrent in our criminal justice system to change that reality.

By convincing Canadians that wasteful and expensive regulation is equivalent to the public safety, and at the same time providing "no irritants for criminals", we have been fed a placebo which will, in the long run cause more harm than good. The only solution appears to be a complete revision of the Firearms Act to distinguish between responsible owners and those who are not responsible — the criminal. The current system not only fails to distinguish between law abiding and responsible owners and criminals, but worse, has completely reversed the identities of the two.

Canada needs firearms legislation, and criminal laws and penalties for their misuse. The Canadian Firearms Act (1995) has been rejected by law abiding Canadians who most cherish the rule of law and good order. These same Canadians will stand up and support fair and effective legislation, but the current Act is neither fair nor effective.