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Off Target

Gun control aimed in the wrong direction, argue advocates of responsible ownership

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Prince George Free Press

Federal Justice Minister Alan Rock is expected to unveil his gun control legislation any day now and local Prince George gun advocates are banding together to fend off what they foresee as a major assault on their freedoms. Mr. Rock is expected to mandate some kind of gun registration, and because the Liberals have a majority of the seats in the House of Commons, the legislation should then pass into law.

That scares people like Sheldon Clare, field officer for Canada's National Firearms Association and one of Prince George's foremost gun advocates. He says the anti-gun control advocates all across Canada have just begun. "We're in an organizational phase. Wildlife federations, firearms associations, shooting clubs, firearms alliances, different associations like that are organizing to communicate more effectively. Everything that's happened in reaction to Mr. Chrétien's gun control stuff, so far, has been grassroots. It hasn't been any...planning and directing; it's just been people who are concerned about this, rising up and trying to do something about it."

Mr. Clare says he was at an anti-gun control meeting in Langley recently and he says it could be the start of something big. "There were a lot of organizations across the country that hadn't talked to each other, that have competing interests, and they were sitting at the same table. For example, the First Nations, we had a representative from treaty six in northern Alberta who was at this table. The government position or opinion has been that Native groups are divided...away from the firearms owners already so we don't have to worry about them getting together."

Mr. Clare says he and his fellow gun owners are waiting to see what the details of Mr. Rock's legislation are. Mr. Clare figures Mr. Rock will announce the gun control legislation in the House close to December 6, the anniversary of the day Marc Lepine killed several female engineering students at the University of Montreal. He also figures he knows what the legislation will say. "I

expect he'll require registration, to give people five years to do it. It will probably be free for five years, and then after that there'll be a fee, so they'll be some sort of incentive for people to register while it's free. I think that will be political suicide for the Liberal Party in the next federal election."

Mr. Clare says the gun registration will just make gun prohibition much easier, making the weapons easier to find when the time comes to confiscate them. Furthermore, he says the government already set a precedent for it two years ago. "In 1992, they took away several types of firearms after having them registered in the 1979 legislation. They said that this is no longer an acceptable type of firearm and it's now prohibited, thank you very much." The weapons banned include about 30 varieties of shotguns, pistols and rifles.

Mr. Clare says anybody who owns property should have a problem with gun control legislation. "I mean if someone came up to you and said well, cars that go faster than 90 kilometres an hour are no longer legitimate property in Canada because you're not allowed to go faster than 90 kilometres an hour on the road...It sounds trite to say that but that's exactly what happened."



Safety first: Sheldon Clare, wearing ear protection, shows Paul LeFavre, Kurtis LePoe, John Dupras and Theo Mushumanski the proper way to handle a Ruger .22. ROB BIRON/FREE PRESS

Furthermore, Mr. Clare says there's enough restrictions on gun ownership already. "I've found that when I encounter a person who feels that there should be more restrictions, with more gun control...I say 'do you know what the particular regulations that are in effect right now, what laws are in effect right now?' and I have found that they don't. They aren't aware that the clearing time, the process and financial obstacles that are in place to buy a firearm are rather stringent. And I think people need to be aware that gun control only does one thing - it denies legal access to people who shouldn't have guns. That's the only thing any gun control system can do. Ours already does that."

Mr. Clare says gun crime is not a big problem in Canada. "We're at a situation in Canada where we don't really have a lot of gun crime. There really isn't a lot of crime involving firearms. That type of crime is

extremely rare."

A few weeks ago, 16-year-old Derek McLelland was shot dead in a Prince George home. Police have laid a charge of second degree murder against a 15-year-old girl, but so

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far have had difficulty in identifying the owner of the gun. Registration of the gun would likely lead to the owner. However, Mr. Clare says the same thing could happen again with or without Mr. Rock's gun control. "(It was) very unfortunate but a very rare type of happening, fortunately. Could that have been prevented with more gun control? I don't think so. As near as I can tell, everything that happened there was illegal. It was illegal for a 15-year-old to be in possession of a rifle, bring it to a house. It was illegal for her to pass it around, it was illegal for the other people to pass it around amongst themselves. It was illegal for that firearm to be left unsecured...Everything about it was against the law."

The gun control legislation will probably pass, but Mr. Clare is hoping it will be so controversial that the Liberals will be turfed out in the next election. "I do have some optimism that it will be repealed because I think they drastically underestimated the resistance to this in the Canadian community."

Mr. Clare also fears much more serious consequences for Canada in the short term. He thinks the people may rise up violently against the government if the bill passes into law, though he refuses to be specific. "It's very scary. I'm not really sure that I can articulate what I'm afraid of...What is the reasoning behind this? Because the government's own statistics show that the gun control stuff that they want does not work in the way they claim it will. Firearms owners have traditionally been your most law-abiding citizens. When this kind of thing happens, there are going to be many firearms owners who will be less-inclined to go along with these rules. There will be a lot more non-compliance, a lot more distrust of police, distrust of authority, distrust of government. I don't think that's a healthy situation."

So, you want to get a gun?

Here are the restrictions on acquiring a gun in Canada.

Getting an FAC: You need to take either a 12-hour training course, or you need to take two exams for which the passing marks are 80 per cent. One of the exams requires you to show how to handle a firearm safely. If you pass the course or the exams, the RCMP will run a criminal record check on you. If you have a record that the RCMP think makes you a risk to own a firearm, you'll be denied. If you are denied, you can appeal your case to a provincial court judge. However, if everything checks out, it'll take a minimum of 28 days before you get your FAC. It costs \$50 for a new one, or \$25 for a renewal, which is necessary every five years.

Hunting: If you want to go hunting, you need to take an eight to 12 hour course, or get a minimum of 70 per cent on an exam given by the Ministry of Environment.

Firearms permit: If you don't want to go hunting but you do want to shoot a gun at a range, or you need one for safety out in the bush, you need to go to the

RCMP and get a firearms permit. There's a minimal fee and you can get it over the counter.

Getting a restricted weapon: Restricted weapons are things like handguns and gas-operated semi-automatic rifles. To get a restricted weapon you first need to be a member of a gun club. You then have to go to the RCMP and ask for the permit while bringing with you the necessary paperwork. The RCMP will then run a criminal record check on you and if you have any history of social irresponsibility, you will be denied (that includes two impaired driving convictions).

If you pass all the requirements up to this point, you still have to get a conveyance permit. The conveyance permit allows you to transport your weapon from your home to your range, and from your range to your home. You can't take it anywhere else and you can't use it for hunting.

Furthermore, the range you take the weapon to must be approved by the authorities. The conveyance permit will take between four to six weeks to arrive and in that time the gun you bought must remain at the store where you bought it.