

The Hobby Privilege

BY MARNI SOUPCOFF

I'VE RECENTLY RETURNED FROM A VISIT TO Florida, which—friends and family will know—means that I've also recently returned from a visit to a gun range. It's not that I'm a gun nut. Far from it. After my one previous gun adventure, my thumbs were so sore from loading the Glock 9mm I'd rented that I thought I'd need physiotherapy for years, never mind the fact that I'd jumped a foot in the air every time I pulled the trigger. But my husband likes to shoot things (strictly inanimate things, mind you), and me, I happen to like anything I'm told I can't have.

So, lately, I've been really starting to like handguns. It began when, after a spate of gang-related shootings in my Canadian hometown of Toronto, politicians reached two conclusions so simplistic that only an elected official could have come up with them.

The first was that the solution to the violence in Toronto would be to ban all handguns. If we did that, the politicians seemed to think, all those criminal types would drop their guns immediately. Sure, the gang-members in question don't seem to pay the criminal code much mind when it comes to, say, *the already-existing ban on committing homicide*. But for some reason politicians were certain that these same gangstas would be frantically disarming themselves the moment handguns were declared verboten.

The politicians' second less-than-persuasive conclusion was that the party to blame for the recent violence in Toronto was not the shooters (God forbid), or the gun manufacturers, or even "society," but rather—wait for it—the United States! "The U.S. is exporting its problem of violence to the streets of Toronto," the city's mayor, David Miller, complained late last year. His theory was that America's own lax gun laws were "allowing guns to flood across the border" into Canada and, therefore, causing all those nasty gun crimes.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Blaming the United States for the shootings in Toronto is a little like getting run over by a Toyota and then blaming Japan. True, the country in question played a role in the injury, but it seems far fairer to nail the idiot driving the Camry on the sidewalk at 60 mph than to shut down the entire assembly line in Hokkaido, even

if the latter act would reduce the number of Japanese car accidents on North American streets.

Part of the problem is that the folks pushing handgun bans tend to be of the yoga-loving and wine-tasting sort, as opposed to the target-shooting or gun-collecting sort. So it's very easy for them to forget that there are innocent people who will bear the cost of a ban.

"A hobby is a privilege," Toronto mayor Miller explained last December in a subtle and nuanced newspaper article on the subject, entitled "We Must Ban Handguns." "And gun collection has become a very dangerous [hobby]."

Now, he's right to a degree. Some gun collectors and target shooters *do* get burgled and their weapons used in crimes, so a handgun ban would probably prevent at least some acts of violence.

But what price are we willing to pay to reduce the danger? Would we stand for having to get the mayor's permission before starting a bottle cap collection or a bridge club? If a hobby is a privilege, should we require kids to get permits before reading *Harry Potter* books (just in case wizard literature proves to be a dangerous avenue to the Occult)? Should birdwatchers be made to register their binoculars to cut down on peeping Toms?

Besides, even if all the gun collectors in North America dutifully complied, a handgun ban would be as successful at causing handguns to completely disappear from the continent (or even at greatly reducing gun

deaths) as... well, as the ban on cocaine has been at causing crack to vanish from street corners. And the results would be just as destructive: a higher-stakes and bloodier handgun trade—hardly a recipe for making a city safer.

That's why I was glad to stop by the Florida gun range. I didn't want to shoot. I've got lousy aim and an overdeveloped startle reflex, neither of which makes for a very good marksman. But I liked being in a spot where people respect the power of a gun and respond by acting responsibly, rather than sweeping in with calls for guns to be taken away from everyone—everyone except the government, that is.

Because the funny thing about politicians is that no matter how down on handguns they may be, somehow they're always OK with keeping a few around for those in power. Which is, when all's said and done, the strongest argument of them all against a handgun ban.



Marni Soupcoff is a member of the *National Post* editorial board and a Toronto-based journalist. She is a former Institute for Justice staff attorney.

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KEVIN TUMA