



Gun control

There is another way with another focus

by Mark Reesor

A proposal for a cheaper, more effective alternative to the hugely expensive and problem plagued national gun registry comes from perhaps the last group you might expect — the National Firearms Association (NFA).

It's not a new idea either — the NFA says it's promoted its 'Practical Firearms Control

System (PFCS),' a "proven method that will make Canada a safer country (and) attacks the criminal use of weapons," to any government who will listen since 1966.

Firearm owners are militantly resisting the current system. Bill C-68 is seen as "a long-term government policy designed to take lawfully acquired and owned property from its owner without paying compensation and to

criminalize the innocent enjoyment of recreational firearms activities," the national firearms owners group says.

Its suggested firearms act (available at <http://www.nfa.ca/Publications/PFCSEnglish.pdf>) is just 23 pages long.

"The differences between innocent behaviour and criminal behaviour are clear," the group says. "It should, therefore, be possible to define criminal behaviour and innocent behaviour in less than the 137 pages of criminal law plus 142 pages of regulations required by Bill C-68. It should not be necessary to issue a 1370-page 'Firearms Regulations and Associated Criminal Code Desktop Manual' to explain those 279 pages of complex and internally contradictory rules."

The PFCS would classify firearms into four classes:

- Class A - Fully automatic firearms
- Class B - Center fire rifles and shotguns
- Class C - Handguns; everything under 660mm (26") overall
- Class D - Rim fire rifles and shotguns and all muzzle-loading firearms

(There would also be a 'weapons' category for non-firearms items like police batons.) Permits issued would also classify usage:

- Possess: To simply possess the firearm, unused, as a collector, for example
- Basic: To use on a basic shooting range.
- Advanced: To use on an advanced range, where one moves about with a loaded firearm or draws a loaded firearm from a holster
- Field: To use at any place, other than a shooting range, where a firearm may lawfully be fired
- Professional: To carry and use for professional reasons, as a dealer, salesman, expert witness, etc., might require
- Police: To carry and use for protection of human life from criminal violence; requires meeting all relevant standards required of an RCMP constable

A first-time applicant — the system would 'grandfather' firearm owners and users who've already proven they're not a menace to society — would apply to a recognized instructor, certified by an existing firearms body and not paid for by tax money. Instructors, who would not approve people who act unsafely with firearms, would train the applicant and certify that:

- they're trained and competent to use firearms of the class safely;
- know the rules of safety and safe handling, and the laws that apply;
- they're the kind of person who obeys the rules.

The instructor certification is meaningful, the NFA says, because effective screening "can only be done by someone who sees and considers the applicant's behaviour with a firearm over an extended period."

The applicant would then apply to police for a criminal record check, who would then issue (or refuse) a *Police Clearance Certificate*. The applicant takes this to an issuing office, perhaps a motor vehicle licensing office, to get a firearms permit. Using police only for the

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check rather than routine paperwork would free up scarce resources — a sergeant, constable, two clerks and three rooms of a police station in Edmonton alone — for more important work, the group says.

The permit would be in the form of a grid, with firearm classes down the left edge and usage across the top, and each entry would be subject to specific rules. A Class C/Police Endorsement, for example, would license a detective to carry a loaded, concealed handgun to protect human life from criminal violence. Class C/Field endorsement would license a geologist to carry a loaded handgun only in the field to protect human life from animal attack, for survival hunting and for signalling.

The permit would authorize possession, acquisition, carriage, transport and use, with control appropriate to the holder's status, replacing the Firearms Acquisition Certificate, Permit to Carry and Permit to Transport.

Firearm owners would be protected, it says, because they can demonstrate who they are and what they're qualified to have and use. Police would also be protected because absence of a permit is grounds to seize any firearm — the group says no such document exists in the current system — and a permit would provide much meaningful information as to the holder's character and status. There would also be mandatory penalties "that the crown attorney can't plea bargain away" for criminals who use weapons to threaten or harm someone.

Penalties would be more severe for someone who has a firearms license and commits a crime, says NFA President Jim Hinder.

"Jim Hinder has a gun license — I've basically made a pact with society that I can be trusted with this — therefore if Jim Hinder decides to go out and hold up a store, I have to do a tougher sentence... because I've breached that trust. That's the other piece you build into the law."

Registering firearms "gives unrestricted, unsupervised access to someone with a firearms license; you either trust that person or you

don't," says Hinder. "What the government says is 'well, we really don't trust you' — so tonight when I go... shoot my .45 Colt, I need my gun license, registration certificate, authorization to transport, a myriad of paperwork. All of that paper costs money; paper in my hands won't prevent crime."

Hinder says the firearms bill has taken police off the streets and money out of police budgets — "I'm in Edmonton and they're crying for money; we've got our helicopter they're trying to fund, they need a new shooting range and new facilities. This law has taken three million dollars for every federal riding in Canada... and that's dangerous."

After backtracking on its request for another \$72 million, the federal government said it would pull money from other areas of the Justice Department to keep the registry going. "Where's that coming from," wonders Hinder. "The courts? The police? border security? That's where we need to be making the effort — we don't need it on the wrong target."

The government, firearm owners and police all have the same goal, Hinder says — safer communities. "What we need to be doing is putting all of our energy into focusing on who is the problem..."

"Uncle George in Hines Creek, Alberta has never been and never will be a problem. The guy on the street with the gun down his pants selling drugs, breaking into homes or robbing stores — that's the problem. While the police, justice department and bureaucracy are worrying about making sure all my paperwork is up to date, they've missed that target."

When it comes right down to it, "I really don't care what it takes to get a safer Canada," Hinder says. "We want an effective firearm control system that works, that supports community safety, that supports the police... and the current system doesn't. It needs to go."

The National Firearms Association can be reached at NFAinfo@nfa.ca or 780 439-1394. President Jim Hinder can be contacted at jhinder@nfa.ca.



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