



AN EX-COP LOOKS AT GUN CONTROL

The analysis of hard evidence reveals that the registration of firearms has no other purpose than to reduce or abolish private ownership of guns.

By Frederick A. Sadowski, Sr.

■ I recently had a visit from a customer living in Chicago. He lamented that due to the severe gun control laws in that city, he must have one of his handguns repaired, almost regardless of cost because the law will not allow a replacement even if the handgun was not repairable.

During our conversation at lunch, I questioned his personal views towards the restrictive gun laws he and his neighbors had to tolerate. One of his comments totally shocked me. In effect, he felt that if local communities wished to establish firearm restrictions, it would be okay as long as they didn't totally ban gun ownership.

It was at this time that I realized his understanding of the reasons for and consequences of gun registration laws was extremely limited.

“Registration is an infringement on the constitutional rights of the law-abiding citizen.”

When I was a police officer in New York City, I had an edge over the average citizen. My experience and training gave me the confidence that I could protect myself and my family. It was too bad about my neighbors, because the law forbade handgun ownership for them, but I had it made—until it was time for me to retire. Even though my service to the public was honorable and unblemished, I was no longer trustworthy and was not permitted to possess a handgun unless I was photographed, fingerprinted, completed the necessary licensing forms and paid the regis-

tration fees. Moving to Colorado was one way to defeat the system, but is it possible licensing and registration will someday creep to bastions of freedom?

There have been many reasons given by “anti-gunners” for the need to license and register firearms, but true analysis shows no other purpose than to reduce or abolish private ownership of guns. For instance, the reason “We want to know where the guns are!” seems to satisfy those who are paranoid and fearful that the “Old West” syndrome will be reestablished with everyone totin’ their irons on their hips ready to shoot anyone who might look cross-eyed at them. It actually is nothing more than a means to intimidate the law-abiding gun-owning citizen. It is the easiest way to force the surrender of privately owned guns. Hitler used registration lists to disarm those against him, but we don’t have to have a Hitler in local government to have registered guns confiscated, legally!

“It’s the best way to reduce gun crimes!” is another reason given to register guns. The anti-gunners want you to believe that without registration, just about anyone might commit a hold-up and there would be no way of telling who did it. But with registration, the gun used in a crime can be traced to the owner and the crime would supposedly be solved. Now why is it so difficult to realize that crooks don’t drop their guns as soon as the robbery is over? If the crook is captured with the gun in his possession, what difference does it make whether the gun is his or was stolen? And, would he really worry about who the gun belongs to if he is not worried about possibly taking a life during the crime?

Those influential anti-gunners often cite

how neat gun control works in other countries, England being the first. Well, what does authoritative research indicate? In 1971, Cambridge University came out with an in-depth study of England’s handgun-permit law. This country’s comparatively low violence was credited wholly to cultural factors and the study indicated that until 1920, England had fewer firearm restrictions than most states in the U.S. Even with fewer gun controls England recorded less violence than those U.S. states with gun controls. So if violence is related to the availability of handguns, why is it that New York City, Washington, D.C. and Chicago have more gun crimes than cities with few or no gun controls at all? Isn’t it better to punish those who have been convicted of gun crimes than punish

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law-abiding citizens who own guns because they “might” commit a crime?

Another pro-registration philosophy has been, “It’s the best way to keep guns out of the hands of children and the irresponsible!” Since under a registration law it is illegal for a child or incompetent to purchase a gun, you’re supposed to think accidents involving these people can’t happen.

As a small arms instructor for the New York City Police Department, part of my job was to instruct police recruits on how to secure their sidearms when dealing with

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their family and friends. We naturally covered unloading and placing the handgun in a lockable drawer or cabinet. However, it was my personal opinion that education was really the answer, and that as soon as a child is old enough to understand, he should be taught the perils of dangerous instruments including scissors, guns, electric tools, etc. Also, he should be able to see and handle the gun anytime, as long as his parent gives permission.

My first experience with youngsters and handguns happened when I visited my brother's house. I had no children as yet but my two nephews were approximately six and eight years old. As soon as I removed my jacket, they were agog that Uncle Fred had a "gun"! My sister-in-law was nervous, but I explained what I was about to do and asked that she be present. The Colt was unloaded and rounds placed in my pocket. Double-checking the revolver, I showed it to the boys, explaining how it worked and letting them hold and dry-fire the gun. They, of course, asked to see the "bullets," so I secured the handgun and brought out two cartridges. I explained how the firing pin set off the round and what happens to the lead bullet. When they asked to see the gun again, I collected the cartridges, put them back in my pocket

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and brought out the gun. A short time later I simply told them that since they had seen the gun, I would be glad to show it again another time, but now it was time for the adults to talk. It was great. The kids took off to play and never did ask to see the gun again. Satisfying curiosity is the first major step. Additional security to protect the incompetent is, of course, essential.

In order to have an effective registration law, it must be enforceable. Therefore, local governments assign this task to their police departments. But what do advocates of such a registration law demand as restrictions? Here is what registration means as well as some of these consequences:

1. Before a citizen can be permitted possession of a gun, the police want background information.

Consequence: The applicant, rather than being considered innocent of any law violations, must prove he is of good character. Therefore, he is fingerprinted, photographed, and must provide character references and endure an investigation into his personal and business life.

2. The citizen must provide an adequate reason for possession of a firearm.

Consequence: This requirement appears innocuous, but is absolutely devastating. It provides total arbitrary enforcement. A request may be denied simply because the approving officer may "feel" the need is not satisfactory. What does the applicant do next? Intervention by the courts is expensive and certainly not a guarantee. After all, you're bucking the system, and once a law is established "for the public good," the individual's chances are small or even nonexistent.

3. The applicant is required to pay a registration fee.

Consequence: Although the fee usually begins low, it will increase over the years. New York City's Sullivan Law started out at 50 cents, just to let them know you had a handgun, that's all. But now the application fee is \$50, along with a one-time \$26 fingerprint fee. Once approved, you're good for two years. After that, it's \$40 every two years. If you're a long gun shooter, don't snicker at the handgunners. Application fees for rifles and shotguns are \$25 and a \$14 fingerprint fee (do they print fewer fingers?) for three years, with an additional \$25 every three years thereafter. A recent survey indicates registration advocates are suggesting \$50 per year as a minimum.

4. Failure to register all guns is a crime.

Consequence: Since each firearm is registered, all new laws and/or changes must be obeyed whether it be an increase in fees or even a total ban. This requirement provides a method for legal confiscation and separates ownership and possession. For instance, it is perfectly legal for an unlicensed driver to drive an unregistered vehicle as long as the vehicle is not driven on public streets! What does that mean? Well, a rancher or farmer can have a pick-up which has never been registered (or he may decide not to obtain plates for a particular vehicle that year) driven all over the ranch by an unlicensed 12-year-old without violating the law as long as the kid does not drive onto the highway.

Now, how does this relate to the gun owner? Many fail to appreciate how devious this particular consequence is. Failure to register that gun each year violates the law and you may not maintain possession of that gun. You are actually accused of being a potential criminal. Therefore, although you may be the owner of that piece of property, you may not possess it. It must be confiscated!

An elderly man in New York City had a legally licensed handgun collection which his wife tolerated. Although the guns were not true antiques, the collector value grew year after year. After his death, a police sergeant visited the widow, asking if she

were going to apply for a permit to possess the firearms. She said no as she had no interest nor knowledge regarding the guns. The guns were immediately collected and placed in the police property clerk's vault. Technically, she owned the collection, but could not possess it. Relatives suggested the guns be sold and when a potential buyer showed interest, he found he was unable to inspect the guns as the property clerk's office was not a showroom. He either had to have the transfer papers or forget it. Consequently, the widow had to sell the collection for less than half its value. Was gun registration of public benefit?

5. Citizens may not obtain nor dispose of any firearm without prior police approval.

Consequence: Perhaps this is the most insidious of all the regulations. Failure to anticipate the potential consequences can result in legal and/or economic confiscation, yes, even total confiscation! How? Well, suppose the registration fee is what some may consider "reasonable," perhaps a dollar a year. After all, most anyone can afford that. However, suppose the local government finds itself in a financial bind and one of the politicians suggests raising the gun registration fee. How much is the question—\$5, \$50 or \$500 per year? Certainly the public uproar would be great, but once the fee increase is enforced, it must be paid or the firearm is confiscated.

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Fee increases aren't the only means of disarming the law-abiding. Cleveland, Ohio instituted registration and later decided handguns with barrel lengths of 2½ inches or less were considered "Saturday Night Specials" and banned ownership.

An outright ban! Either sell the gun to a licensed dealer (guess how much he offered) or have it confiscated. What happens if the city decides all handguns are bad? You know what happens!

At present, if such a scenario were to take place, the gun owner would probably be able to sell his firearm (with police approval) to a dealer in another city or state. But what happens if the anti-gunners get their way and the entire country is forced to have such registration laws? There would be no way to economically dispose of personal property.

Government compensation? It didn't happen in Bermuda. Why should it happen anywhere else? The 55,000 good people of Bermuda obeyed the gun registration law and were rewarded with a 1973 Firearms Act requiring surrender of all firearms. Why? Well, between September of 1972

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and April of 1973, the island was alarmed because some armed robbers and terrorists were responsible for five murders. Two men were killed during a robbery at a shopping center, but more importantly, terrorists murdered the police commissioner, George Duckett, the island's governor Sir Richard Sharples and his bodyguard, Capt. E.H.L. Sayers. This being the "most serious crime wave in Bermuda's history" was cause enough for the government to take retaliatory steps to stop this crime wave. They disarmed the law-abiding citizens. They even required that police officers turn in their sporting arms as well as guns used for personal protection. No one, it seemed, was immune. Yes, they passed a "temporary" Firearms Act and made the private possession of firearms illegal. But, how temporary was this law?

Now here's the most important point—all firearms had been previously registered. There was no way to refuse the surrender of one's gun. If there had not been a registration law, the gun owner had the option of violating the confiscation law and claiming he did not possess a firearm. It's not that they would search every house, but at least the gun owner can be given that

"Isn't it better to punish those who have been convicted of gun crimes than punish law-abiding citizens who own guns?"

choice. Should he surrender his gun and surrender his right to self-protection or become a law breaker? It's not much of a choice, but a choice the citizens of Bermuda were never given.

And how did this crackdown affect the criminal element? Why, they shot up the police headquarters with machine gun fire. The police probably wondered why the criminals didn't turn in their guns. After all, it was the law!

The next year, 1974, the public was rewarded with only 31 rifle and shotgun permits (political pull couldn't get you a handgun permit), but the government wasn't through by any means. They forced the registration of industrial stud guns, flare guns and air pistols and rifles.

None of the handguns surrendered were returned, even though their owners prayed that once things had settled down, a more rational government would return these firearms. Ten years have gone by and as of 1983 no one got his handgun. Does the government have the right to confiscate property without compensation? Maybe not, but Bermuda never shelled out a cent to these handgun owners. No proof is

available, but word has it that officials dumped all the handguns into the sea. How does the public defend itself against an unjust government? Certainly not by allowing its firearms to be registered.

But, were the law-abiding protected by the 1973 Firearms Act? Bermuda police produced their 1974 crime report and were chagrined to state, "Indictable crime increased drastically (by 46 percent) over the previous year in most categories. This was disappointing in view of the slight decrease recorded during the previous year."

It was obvious that when the populace is unable to defend itself, criminals have less fear of the law and become more bold. Bermuda shares the same fate as do New York City, Washington, D.C. and Chicago as well as many other cities with strict gun control laws; a frightening increase in crime! In ten years the crime rate almost doubled.

Yes, this is a dramatic example of the dangers of gun registration and gun control in general. Should owners of rifles and shotguns also be concerned? You bet!

But are these the only consequences gun owners might look forward to? Hardly. Many cities have experienced civil disorder. If the mayor or governor decided to establish a "state of emergency" and confiscated privately owned guns "to prevent further bloodshed," how do you protect your house and family?

Not only would the private citizen be under scrutiny, but gun dealers would be limited and prices would rise. Gunsmithing charges would rise to compensate for fewer guns being worked on. Ammunition availability would suffer and military surplus would be nonexistent. A vision of doom? Not really, when one understands the purpose for registration—limited personal firearms possession.

Although some of the basic rules of registration have been listed, the potential consequences may be considered just that, potential, by some. But there have been too many examples to believe that the gun owner has nothing to worry about. Many believe "it can't happen here" and others believe registration only deals with handguns and that their rifles and shotguns are invulnerable. Don't relax too much. Once the law is enacted, it may never be repealed. Although the Second Amendment forbids infringement, we still haven't convinced all governmental agencies.

Is firearms registration acceptable? Never, not under any circumstances! Registration is an infringement on the constitutional rights of the law-abiding citizen.

What can you do about it? Become educated regarding proposed laws. Be critical and suspicious. Support the various organizations fighting for your rights. Write to your legislators and to the media. Yes, it will cost you time and money.

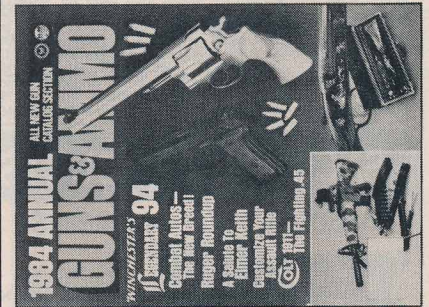
But then again, you can always hope someone else will do that work for you. And when registration is already in your town, is that when you will take this article seriously?

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