

George Jonas

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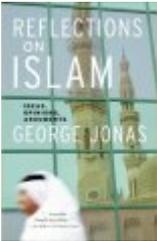
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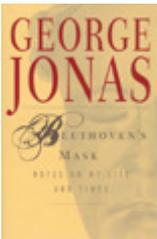
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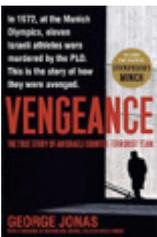
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The protection racket we call government

by George Jonas

National Post

October 6, 2007

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One of the constitutional guarantees Canadians enjoy is security of the person. It sounds too good to be true, and it is. A constitution obviously can't guarantee that no harm will come to us -- that would be impossible. All it can guarantee is our right to protect ourselves.

And so Canada's constitution does -- on paper. In reality, the state limits our right to security by putting restrictions and conditions on self-defence. When it bans the use or concealment of weapons, along with such things as body armour, or certain breeds of guard-or attack-dogs, the state breaches a guarantee it is constitutionally obliged to make.

It also assumes an obligation it cannot fulfill. A state that limits people's ability to protect themselves becomes responsible for their protection. Every victim of a mugging, robbery or rape that might not have occurred if the perpetrator had reason to think the victim might carry a concealed weapon has -- or ought to have -- a lawsuit against the government.

This isn't just a Canadian thing. Our governments follow the historic lead of all authorities that equate state monopoly on force with civilization. Show me a person who finds self-defence uncivilized, and I'll show you a friend of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Also a friend of Robin Hood, ironically. Outlaws like Robin and his merry men approve of the defenceless being "civilized" -- that is, the civilized being defenceless -- as much as the sheriff and his merry deputies do. Monopoly on force is the name of the game, and both cops and robbers want it.

In 18th-century France, revolutionary authorities would have kissed any abjurer of self-defence on both cheeks. "You're so civilized, madam," Dr. Guillotine would have said to the Canadian Coalition for Gun Control's Wendy Cukier. "Welcome to the Reign of Terror. Why should you bother getting up every time you hear a noise in the night? The state will deter all your assailants with my marvellous machine. Have you seen it? No miss, no mess. Humane.

The blade runs on tracks."

"Yeah, real civilized, buddy," Al Capone would have added from across the pond 150 years later. "Why pack a gun? My boys will protect you."

Protection rackets still flourish, whether organized by Chicago gangsters, the agents of Canada's gun registry, or the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The deal is always the same:

1. Citizen promises to pay protection money ("tax") promptly.
2. Citizen undertakes not to violate racketeer's monopoly by protecting himself (well, he may lock his doors and windows, but keep no vicious dogs and certainly no firearms).
3. Racketeer agrees not to rob, rape, mug and massacre citizen himself, at least not without a good reason -- such as, say, former U.S. attorney general Janet Reno's troops had at Waco. In addition, racketeer may provide citizen with a phone number to call if anybody else is trying to mug, rob, rape or massacre him.

What, as a matter of interest, happens if citizen reaches Protection Central on the phone? Well, they'll send the closest available unit of protection racketeers -- sorry, peace officers -- to his rescue. Great, and what does citizen do with robber-mugger-rapist in the meantime? Why, he asks him to please wait.

Will he wait? Well, if he's half as civilized as other Canadians, yes.

But for Pete's sake, if he were civilized, would he be a robber-mugger-rapist in the first place? Chances are the creature loading your stereo and silver on the pickup in the driveway is a ferocious sociopath, a moral derelict, who understands nothing but the growl of a Rottweiler

Cut to our less civilized neighbour south of the border. Between 1988 and 1996, the number of U.S. states where ordinary citizens could legally carry concealed handguns rose from nine to 31. In 1996, the University of Chicago released a nationwide survey seeking to determine what impact, if any, the new state laws have had on major crimes.

The study found that in states where carrying concealed weapons became legal for people with no criminal record or mental illness, homicide had been reduced by 8.5%. Rape was down by 5%, and aggravated assault by 7%.

It wasn't the use, or even show of force -- victims pulling

guns on assailants -- that brought down the numbers. The reduction was due to general deterrence: the awareness of would-be predators that their potential prey may be armed.

Based on the Chicago figures, if we had passed a law in this country letting citizens carry concealed weapons when the Americans did, it might have saved 48 lives in that year alone. In 1988, there were 565 reported homicides in Canada.

But Canada isn't the United States. We wait for the government's cops -- or the government's doctors. If they come in time, we live; if not, heigh-ho. We're civilized.

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