

Hollow symbols don't reduce crime

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There is probably nothing more tenacious than a liberal with a bad idea; witness Stephane Dion's reference to the firearms registry in his response to the Throne Speech.

"The work of our police officers and the safety of our citizens would be threatened by the absolute dismantling of the gun registry," Mr. Dion claimed after the Harper government had promised to once again seek the repeal of the national database of firearms.

Too bad for Mr. Dion the national homicide stats came out the same day and once again demonstrated just how useless the Liberals' registry has been at preventing gun murders.

Too bad for taxpayers and gun owners that not even proof of the registry's futility is likely to persuade Mr. Dion to end his support of it.

There were 605 murders in Canada last year, more (210) committed through stabbings than with guns (190).

That in and of itself may have no bearing on the registry's ability to stop crime, although it does beg the question: If supporters of the registry are motivated by a sincere desire to reduce crime -- and are not simply inspired by some irrational hatred of guns -- why are these busybodies not pushing equally hard for a knife/stiletto/ice pick/letter opener registry? Surely what's good for the Glock is equally good for the Henkel. (Of course, it could also be the reverse: what seems instantly preposterous to us for tableware should equally instantly be obviously ineffectual for guns.)

What does bear on the registry's lack of utility, though, are the figures on what guns are used to commit murder in Canada, who owns them and whether or not they are registered.

According to Statistics Canada "handguns accounted for 108, or over half, of the 190 victims killed by a firearm." Twenty-four more were killed with a sawed-off shotgun or rifle. Together, that's 70% of the total.

Why is that important? Because sawed-off guns are illegal and Canadians have been required to register their handguns since 1934. A registry will never prevent crimes committed by illegal guns since, by definition, illegal guns will never be registered. And, if registration were capable of lowering gun crime, the first place we would see the benefits is with handguns.

Yet even though handguns have had to be registered for the past 73 years, handguns have out murdered "long guns" since 1991 and, according to StatsCan, "the gap has continued to grow since."

Registration has done nothing to keep handguns from becoming the murderer's firearm of choice.

It is also important to note that most handguns used in crimes have never been registered because they are owned by criminals who pay smugglers to bring them into the country illegally. So even if some way could be found to help registration reduce crime, our registry would have little impact on the greatest source of gun murders --handguns.

Of the 48 guns recovered by police at murder scenes in 2006, just 18 (38%) were registered.

It is not hard to imagine, either, that most of the 142 murder guns not recovered were also not registered. Handguns are less likely to be left behind at the scene of the crime because they are easy to conceal while getting away, criminals favour handguns and most of criminals' handguns are never registered. So it is entirely likely that of all the firearms used in homicides the total percentage that were registered is far less than 38%.

If that is true, it adds even more credence to the claim that registration is not a crime-reduction tool.

Gun registration is one of those hollow symbols that liberals introduce when they want to claim to be doing something to stop crime but are ideologically opposed to doing what might actually work.

Mr. Dion and his Liberals have blocked Tory attempts to lock up three-time violent offenders longer, impose minimum sentences on criminals who use guns and make bail harder to win for persons accused of gun crimes.

Such real measures make Liberals cringe because they refuse to believe criminals have any responsibility for their actions and, thus, resist attempts to punish the convicted. Instead, to show their commitment to law and order, Liberals prefer to blame inanimate objects and harass those object's legal owners.

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