



Thursday » April
19 » 2007

Virginia: gun-worshippers' paradise

Randy Burton

The StarPhoenix

Thursday, April 19, 2007

One of the biggest questions raised by the tragic deaths at Virginia Tech this week is this: How many senseless massacres does it take before the United States finally takes gun control seriously?

While questions are raised about campus security and Cho Seung-Hui's status as a resident alien, few in America seem to be questioning his right to own a handgun. U.S. President George W. Bush even showed up on campus to promise support and counselling for anyone who needs it, but he had nothing to offer on what the government might be able to do to prevent such calamities.

Following Tuesday's carnage, information soon emerged that showed Cho was able to buy the pistols he used to gun down 32 people simply by showing nothing more than personal identification and a demonstration that he had no criminal record.

This was in spite of the fact he was well-known to his English teachers as a disturbed individual fixated on the violent fantasies that dominated the one-act plays he wrote as class assignments.

One professor was so disturbed by his writings that she threatened to resign unless Cho was removed from her class. The university complied, and from then on Cho was taught in a special workshop, which only heightened the fears that he could be dangerous.

Police also confirmed Wednesday that Cho had been subject to a temporary detention order in a mental-health facility back in 2005 after making vague threats toward two female students.

Obviously, anyone considering selling Cho a gun should have been made aware of this. With a slightly more rigorous background check, the worst mass-shooting in U.S. history might have been avoided.

A Washington-based think-tank called the Violence Policy Center has observed that it's no coincidence that most violent acts of this kind are committed by men carrying guns.

Every study of murder-suicides reaches the same conclusion: 90 per cent of the perpetrators are males using firearms.

It follows, then, that making it tougher for such people to buy pistols might have some deterring effect.

Not that the state of Virginia has ever shown any interest in finding out. According to a survey conducted by CNN, a gun buyer in Virginia requires no permit to purchase a firearm, including handguns. Nor is there any mandatory firearm registration, no licensing of gun owners and no permit required to carry a gun.

In fact, it's perfectly legal to carry a pistol in Virginia, so long as it's kept in plain view. A concealed weapon requires a permit.

In spite of the lax regulatory regime, there is no serious sign that this will spur the Americans to action. The all-powerful U.S. gun lobby still believes that the problem is not enough guns. Larry Pratt of the Gunowners of America noted Wednesday that to date there have been no massacres in either Utah or Oregon, where faculty members are allowed to carry weapons.

If you take this philosophy to its logical conclusion, only those with the fastest draw have a chance for survival.

Few in Canada would argue that this kind of regime makes any sense at all. Registration of handguns has been required since 1934 and anyone who wants to buy a gun of any kind in Canada must first qualify for possession and acquisition licences. Registration of long guns became the law with the Firearms Act of 1995, although the federal government has offered owners an amnesty period.

While it has been sitting on the back burner for a time, the horrific events in Virginia this week will no doubt raise the profile of gun control in Canada once again.

This can only make it harder for the federal government to act on its promise to scrap the long gun registry in Canada.

Expect Prime Minister Stephen Harper to keep his head down on this issue until he secures a majority government.

DO LIKE I SAY

One thing about the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union -- it has a sense of humour.

Just months after negotiating a wage increase of 12 per cent over three years, it is offering its own workers something around two per cent over three years.

The apparent double standard is explained by the fact that this is a retroactive agreement covering the period between 2004 and 2007, a period when SGEU also saw some restraint imposed by the provincial government.

Imagine the outcry if the SGEU had gone without a contract for three years. Such a thing would be denounced as an "attack on working people" or worse. Yet when its own employees are involved, it's merely business as usual for the union.

No doubt this irony is not lost on the SGEU employees seeking a new contract.

THE POT AND THE KETTLE

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe says Queen Elizabeth should not visit Quebec City on its 400th anniversary because she represents an "archaic"

institution.

One might make the same observation about the ethnic nationalism upon which the Bloc bases its appeal.

Just lately, the whole idea of separation has begun to look increasingly archaic, given that even Parti Quebecois Leader Andre Boisclair suggests it should be put on the shelf for a good long while.

As for the Bloc, its raison d'etre wanes with the decline in separatist sentiment.

Old fashioned though it might be, I'm guessing the British monarchy will outlast the Bloc Quebecois.

Phone: 657-6212

E-mail: rburton@sp.canwest.com

© The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon) 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.