

An Anarchist Case Against Gun Control

BAD Broadside #16

Anarchists envision a society without government, a world where individual people, sometimes on their own and sometimes in cooperation with others, take care of themselves, their needs, their desires. One can expect that in such a libertarian society, with no restrictions on people's freedom to engage in whatever non-coercive productive and commercial activities they choose, and the absence of oppressive political institutions and laws, there will be far fewer incidents of theft and physical attack than there are today. While changing the world to eliminate poverty and institutional violence may be the ultimate solution to the problem of violence and robbery, until that time non-coercive people need a means of defense against those who are not as peaceful as they are.

Most people now look to the armed forces of the government, whether police or military, for such protection. However, not only do police and military personnel do an abysmal job of protecting individuals, they are often themselves the perpetrators of coercive violence. In light of this, people need to look to themselves and their chosen communities for self-defense. Such a strategy of self-defense must include the freedom to own and use handguns without putting oneself at risk of arrest and/or violence by agents of the government.

Many states and cities in the United States have very restrictive laws against handgun ownership and use, under the pretext that such laws keep handguns out of the possession of violent aggressors. In fact, these statutes commonly do nothing of the sort. Their primary effect is to disarm peaceable individuals and leave them at the mercy both of hoods and cops. Aggressors, who are already violating various laws by killing, raping, robbing, etc, will not necessarily be deterred from using guns by criminalizing their use as well. If they were afraid of laws they would not be attacking other people to begin with. Gun control laws make the lives of human predators easier, by depriving their potential victims of an effective means of defense.

The other people who benefit from gun control are the police. Without an armed populace they can freely stop, search, and harass peaceable people, invade their homes, order them from and search their vehicles, and confiscate their property without any fear of reprisal. In order to combat such state-sponsored terrorism, wholesale abolition or evasion of gun control laws and widespread ownership of guns is crucial. While individual possession of firearms may deter "routine" traffic stops and harassment of peaceful people on the street by cops, it is important that any larger-scale attempt at armed self-defense against police or other agents of the state involve more than just a few individuals. If small groups try to defend themselves against police attacks, they can expect military-style assaults on their homes, as was demonstrated in Philadelphia in the MOVE bombing and in Waco in the attack on the Branch Davidians. Only a coordinated neighborhood- or community-wide response has a chance of preventing or resisting such an offensive.

Laws regulating handgun possession and use have helped keep people from fighting against their social and political oppressors. Bans on sales of cheap handguns, so-called "Saturday night specials," were instituted historically to keep weapons out of the hands of peaceable poor people, who often were not able to afford more expensive guns and rifles. This at one time left southern black people at the mercy of the KKK, and workers of all colors no defense against the thugs hired by business owners during strikes and industrial actions. Related militia laws helped destroy the *Lehr-und-Wehr-Verein* armed organization in Chicago in the 1800s, a group organized to defend against police attacks on rebellious workers, which included anarchists among its members. While it is certainly easier for poor people in the United States to afford more expensive handguns than was once the case, modern attempts to outlaw cheaper weapons, despite protestations of concern for the "safety" of the user, will make it harder for those most in need to purchase a gun, rendering them much less safe than they would be if they were free to defend themselves.

While all kinds of peaceable people are put at increased risk by not having the freedom to own and use firearms, some of those most victimized by legal restrictions on handguns have been women who are attacked by lovers or spouses. Such relationships are complicated. The victimized partners do not always want to or are not yet ready to force a change of behavior in, or end their involvement with, the person hurting them. In such situations nothing can be done to protect the person at risk. However, when a physically abused woman decides it is time to fight back, and goes to the police, she is routinely told to get a restraining order, which is not worth the paper it is printed on. The police are unable to protect these women even if they wished to. The only way for them to have a fighting chance is for them or their friends and defenders to have access to firearms and be prepared to use them.

Another group of people at increased risk of violence who would profit from abolition of gun laws are cabbies. While many business owners are able to get handgun permits to protect their businesses and money, cabbies are generally prohibited from carrying weapons, even though they are more isolated and vulnerable than shop owners. In Boston, the local police make the decision about who can and cannot carry a handgun, and require that applicants for permits to carry a gun for self-defense demonstrate that they are "responsible for large sums of money for payrolls, bank deposits...or the transportation of very valuable merchandise in their business." This policy has usually been interpreted as not applying to taxi drivers or virtually anyone else who seeks a gun permit for self-defense, no matter how risky their working or living situation may be. Apparently the Boston police think a store owner's receipts are more valuable and worthy of protection than the life of a cabby (or anyone else who doesn't pass their economic test, for that matter). Boston cabbies are required, by law, to take any potential fare anywhere they ask, and are therefore at least as likely to end up in a dangerous situation as any business owner or banker. They can then be victimized on a deserted street, by an armed thug, and yet the police won't let them have the means to defend themselves.

The police and the laws which support them tell peaceable individuals that they must rely on cops for their protection. Then they either fail to protect, or themselves victimize, those they are mandated to watch over. Even if they did a better job, however, they would still have no right to prevent people from looking out for themselves. No one is asked if they agree to turn their protection over to someone else, and the police presume to "serve and protect" the populace without their consent. Free people must be free to arm and defend themselves with the weapons they choose. While making all of society less violent, by changing the social conditions which breed various sorts of predation and abolishing political coercion, is the best way to stop aggressive acts, until then people should be able to have access to the means to defend themselves, including firearms.

Boston Anarchist Drinking Brigade (BAD Brigade)
PO Box 381323
Cambridge, MA 02238-1323
Internet: bbrigade@world.std.com
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