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*January 2011*

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Dear Ms Lucas

I fully appreciate that, as I am not one of your constituents, you are fully entitled to disregard this note.

My reason for writing is that one of your constituents has sent me a recent letter from you regarding gun control. I paste the relevant part below:

“I strongly oppose the use and private ownership of firearms and lethal weapons, such as air rifles and crossbows, except on registered premises. I think that there should be a complete ban on the private ownership or possession of all automatic and semi-automatic firearms. I also think that all deactivated weapons should be treated in the same way as active weapons in terms of prohibition and licensing, because they are capable of being reactivated and can cause fear. I believe that a single rigorous licensing process should be put in place, based on considerations of public safety rather than the convenience of shooters. I believe that it is important for users of firearms for sporting or agricultural purposes to demonstrate their competence in handling firearms, and satisfy the authorities of their mental and emotional stability. I also think that the cost of medical and psychological tests must be borne by the applicant, together with a new annual fee which is sufficient to repay the economic cost to society of the abuse of guns. I think that the principle for awarding licences should be that the applicant must demonstrate his or her suitability to handle firearms rather than expecting the authorities to prove the applicant's unsuitability. I believe that licence holders should be required to renew their applications on an annual basis and that individuals whose licence application is rejected will be required to wait at least two years before re-applying.”

Caroline Lucas, MP

I have been an enthusiastic target shooter since I was a boy in the 40s. Naturally I became reasonably familiar with the complex procedures involved in becoming a lawful gun-owner. Nevertheless, for several decades I assumed absolutely that strict gun control, as frequently promoted by the British government, media, and police was a good thing.

In 1979, as an academic exercise I decided to try and find out which of the great many different control procedures in UK firearms laws, actually produced the bulk of the social benefits, since it seemed unlikely that all were equally useful.

The UK seemed likely to be a reasonably fertile jurisdiction to study, as there was, effectively no gun control at all prior to 1903, then a major piece of legislation was introduced in 1920, with substantial additional controls added in 1967/8. Since I started my work there have also been major

amendments in 1988 and 1997. Each such change seemed likely to provide an opportunity to examine the costs and effects of the changes, including “before” and “after” crime levels and trends.

After 3 years of research, reading and writing to governments, police forces, insurance companies and other researchers throughout the English-speaking world, in 1982 I was forced, with a considerable sense of surprise and even shock, to have to admit that what I had been looking for so diligently, didn't exist - there were no social benefits from any of the control mechanisms, either individually, or collectively. This total absence of measurable social benefit applied not only to the UK, but every jurisdiction that I looked at. The poor results were so consistent that it is extremely difficult to believe that strict gun control legislation has ever produced any benefits, anywhere.

I have continued to study the subject to the present day.

What has become increasingly clear from this work, is that gun control legislation is by no means without effect. It has substantial effects and, the stricter the regime, the greater the effects:

1. A dangerous person is dangerous with or without a gun; so focussing on the inanimate object is dangerously misleading and creates a wholly false illusion of useful activity. Over 90% of British murders are committed without guns. Anyone intent on mass murder has a host of **legal** mechanisms to hand. The UK's champion mass-murderers are a doctor with a syringe and 2 arsonists. In the Troubles in Northern Ireland, over a thousand people were murdered with bombs made from simple, readily-available ingredients.
2. The controls disarm prospective victims, not criminals.
3. They encourage criminals, who can be confident that their victims are very unlikely to be armed.
4. They consume substantial resources, both public and private, without generating any benefits. As one example, the recording of gun serial numbers is a slow and laborious procedure that has created a huge database of useless information. It does not solve crimes, or catch criminals, in any meaningful way. It's very existence leads to more waste, as well as pointless, crime-less prosecutions for paperwork errors.
5. They damage, or even destroy, sporting activities, as well as the commercial activities that support sport shooting.
6. The authorities frequently issue statements to the effect that *mumbai-style* terrorist attacks are likely, or even highly likely, in the UK. If the authorities are right, the terrorists are extremely unlikely to attack the army or police. They are likely to favour targets where large numbers of ordinary civilians gather. In today's Britain, all those ordinary civilians will be unarmed and will, quite literally, be like sheep to the slaughter.

The policies that you advocate will make a bad situation considerably worse.

Yours sincerely

Derek Bernard