

Clobbering hobbies

We all have pastimes. But in Toronto, only the ones the mayor likes are permitted



Pierre LEMIEUX

Toronto is that place in Ontario from where the light of naive statism shines all over the country. David Miller is mayor of that place. Just as law-abiding citizens who have bought legal, thus registered, handguns since 1934 were wondering how they could have been such suckers, the mayor of Toronto penned a remarkable piece in the *National Post* of Dec. 10.

The good mayor's sermon for banning handguns, and probably all guns, reminded me of a former Quebec deputy minister of revenue, Pierre-André Paré, who declared in 1996 that, in this province, owning a house, driving a car or exercising a profession are privileges. "What about the rights of gun owners?" Miller asked rhetorically. They don't have any. It goes without saying that they don't have a right to self-defence. Moreover, Miller explained, "[a] hobby is a privilege."

What about somebody whose hobby is computers? What about somebody whose hobby is religion—be it Islam or any other potentially dangerous religion? What about somebody whose hobby is driving cars, pickups or vans, machines that kill 216 pedestrians per year in Canada, compared to 98 handgun-related homicides (data for 2002)? What about pornography or, for the high classes, eroticism?

What about somebody whose dangerous hobby is going to gay saunas? What about collecting Soviet or Nazi memorabilia—or memorabilia of, say, statocrats who have hanged from lampposts in modern history? What about somebody whose hobby is writing letters to editors? Are all these hobbies privileges?

I assume that David Miller is not yet deep enough into *Nineteen Eighty-four* and the *Brave New World* to answer yes. So, what the Toronto statocrat means, in fact, is that *some* hobbies are privileges, presumably not the ones he likes.

But let's not assume that our apparatchik is so selfish, or so crassly ignorant of subjective preferences different than his. He must then admit that his own hobbies are privileges, and would be willing to sacrifice himself if the

large masses so decided. But who is going to make the decision in practice? Who is going to bark orders through our collective mouth? The majority? An informed majority? The 36.4 per cent of registered voters who elected the Liberal party in the last federal election? The apparatchiks?

"Guns have no place on the streets of Toronto or anywhere else in this country. This is a deeply held Canadian value," Miller says. Now, does anything that counts as a "Canadian value" justify coercive discrimination? Who determines what is a "Canadian value"? Toronto City Hall or the CRTC? Can something be a "Canadian value" if some Canadians—a few millions of gun owners, in this case—don't share it?

Miller blames some of the crimes that his police can't stop on the guns that "are stolen from gun owners in and around the city." "This has to stop," he barks. By which he means that the victims of the thefts must be relieved of their property by the state itself.

Miller says "a hobby is a privilege" not a right. What about if your hobby is computers? Or writing letters to the editor?

Hobbies are a fascinating phenomenon, which says much about the *ludique*, playful aspect of human life. From toy train collectors to oversize pumpkin competitors or model airplane nuts, hobbyists demonstrate the diversity of individual preferences. In the apparatchiks' minds, all these hobbies must be dangerous for they consume scarce resources that could instead cater to the do-gooders' preferences. According to Statistics Canada, \$2.6-billion worth of toys, games and hobby supplies are purchased every year in

Canada. Just one year of Canadian hobbies could purchase 800 PET scanners or provide 650,000 PET scans, or save millions of dying children in poor countries—plus, of course, supply the politicians' bodyguards with brand new, still more powerful handguns.

Although many gun collectors are as eccentric as other hobbyists (from the apparatchiks' and the bland majority's viewpoints), guns are much more than a hobby. They are a powerful symbol of liberty: slaves have always, everywhere, including in 18th- and 19th-century America, been forbidden to own or carry them. Guns are not only a symbol, but an efficient tool of self-defence and individual sovereignty: as a Swiss friend of mine said, talking about his semi-automatic pistol, "My liberty!" **WS**