

The wrong response to Rochfort

Giving cops more power in the wake of the RCMP slayings only makes life more dangerous for everyone



Pierre LEMIEUX

If it saves only one life," they say. The freedom of grown-ups to smoke what they want and of grow-ops to supply it could have saved five lives in Rochfort Bridge, Alta., on March 3. The U.S. Prohibition of the 1920s had already demonstrated that prohibiting sins is a good way to waste lives. If, on the other hand, the four slain RCMP cops were also investigating some real crime, like theft, the tragedy

illustrates the vacuity of the simplistic "one life" principle: everything depends upon whether a life is saved or lost as a consequence of protecting liberty or of imposing coercion.

As we are going to press, just days after the killings, our information on the Rochfort Bridge tragedy is still limited, but many lessons can already be drawn.

That the presumed killer was not a nice specimen of humanity does not change the fact that the whole prohibition thing is a terrible mess, of which Rochfort Bridge is only the latest illustration. Victimless crimes (drug consumption and production by adults) have been created that lead to illegal activities and to new crimes, more repression, and the takeover of the business by real criminals.

Now, aren't guns tightly controlled in Canada? How did the killer get one? Had he dutifully, every five years, answered the obscene questions about his love affairs and existential anguish on the gun licence forms? Didn't the cops check the gun registry before going on his farm? In fact, gun controls are most efficient at controlling guns in the hands of peaceful citizens.

Consider how our liberties are lost. A madman (who, in this case, however, was on his own property) kills four cops who perhaps had no morally legitimate business there. What will be the consequences for you and me, even if you don't have guns and I don't like pot? Tougher enforcement of gun and drug prohibitions, more militarized police forces (even the army is now called upon in the drug war), more authoritarian and still more powerfully armed cops?

Indeed, the blood had barely dried at Rochfort Bridge when the statocratic and praetorian establishments began calling for tougher repression. An RCMP spokesman apparently complained that the officers' weapons were no match for the killer's "rapid-fire high-powered rifle," while, for a few years, they have themselves been carrying rapid-fire semi-automatic pistols with high-capacity magazines that are forbidden to ordinary citizens. And please note that losing a loved one is not a sufficient reason for promoting tyranny. Each time somebody blows a fuse, the state jumps on the opportunity to increase its power and crush everybody's liberties.

More generally, the more choices are collectivized—that is, the less individuals are free to make their own choices regarding what they do with their own lives—the more you will see oppressed, angry and police-hating minorities. The only alternative is real political tolerance: if I want to be free to, say, practise the religion of my choice, I have to defend the right of others to smoke what they want.

In the *Sunday Telegraph* of Jan. 23, Richard Munday recalled the "Tottenham Outrage." On the same day in 1909, two Latvian "anarchists" conducted an armed robbery in Tottenham, a London neighbourhood, and tried to literally shoot their way out. A posse of policemen and local people gave chase. In the epic pursuit, a police constable and a child died under the

thugs' bullets and two-dozen persons were injured. Until they retrieved their guns in a locked cabinet of which they had lost the key, the policemen were unarmed. At that time, it was perfectly legal and not uncommon for peaceful citizens to carry concealed guns on the street: not only were many of the pursuing civilians armed, but passersby lent at least four pistols to the cops.

If you witnessed a shootout where cops were involved, would you still, like in Tottenham a century ago, just assume that they are the ones in the right and side with them? Perhaps still, but times are changing dangerously. **WS**

Pierre Lemieux is a professor and writer based in Montreal.

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