

## Time to Face the Gun Lobby

by David McReynolds

It is time to take on the gun lobby. Or, to put it another way, how many mass killings does it take for us to finally recognize the NRA as a greater threat to the security and safety of our children than any reasonable law restricting ownership of guns?

One can anticipate a lobbyist from NRA suggesting that if only the children had been armed with hand guns the killing would not have taken place. But in the land of reason, let us look at the issues and a possible solution.

First, those of us who have no problems about gun control should pause and realize that our friends in other states view the matter differently. In New York City what do I need a gun for? But if I live in North Dakota, Nevada, Utah, or any of those states where hunting is an attraction, and where many families have rifles, gun ownership is viewed very differently.

New Yorkers might feel the need for a gun if they have a small shop and fear robbery, but they are not likely to go target shooting, and certainly won't be walking around with the gun on their person.

So let's accept the fact that in a country which reaches from Hawaii to Alaska, from Florida to Seattle, there will be a range of views on guns, and on how frequently one is likely to use them.

Second, the Second Amendment, doesn't this settle the debate? No - this appeal to the constitution is the weakest of all the points used by the NRA. If one reads the second amendment it refers to the possession of guns in the context of an "orderly militia". In short, it was meant to protect the states against too much power and possible military action by the federal government.

Most families in colonial times did not own guns. The guns they had took a long time to load, fire, and reload. Except for the fact the Native Americans were often frightened by the flash and noise of a gun, the man who was trained in firing arrows was about on an equal ground. Arrows had two advantages, they were silent and when discharged they didn't reveal their location by a puff of smoke.

The founding fathers were not even dealing with revolvers – those didn't enter the gun trade until 1814, long after the Constitution had been written. Nor

were the founding fathers dealing with semi-automatic or automatic firearms. They were dealing with a primitive musket, which could fire only one shot, and required some time and skill to reload.

But the Constitution did contain other wordings which were later changed. It allocated the electoral strength of Southern States by giving the slave population a percentage of the vote. An indirect endorsement of slavery. And of course the Constitution did not grant the right of women to vote. The Constitution is a living document, it has changed greatly over the years, sometimes through amendments, but just as often by actions of the courts. Segregation was not struck down by an act of Congress, but by the Supreme Court.

So the Constitution and its Second Amendment is a very weak reed on which to base the entire power of the National Rifle Association. And it grows still weaker when we realize that many other items of daily use, such as automobiles, require both training and a license before we are permitted to use them.

But if we sweep away the Second Amendment - or give it a more reasonable interpretation - where does that leave us? It would mean that anyone who wants a gun could buy one, if they had a license for it, and that such a license would certify they were of sound mind. No one, in short, is going to take away the hunting rifle from the hunter - but he or she will have to register it. And there would be reasonable limits on the kinds of guns that could be had. Hunters do not need automatic rifles and they would not be for sale. Rifles for hunting, and revolvers - with a license - for personal protection, but not to be carried on one's person.

Let's face the reality that this would still leave something like over a hundred million guns in the hands of the population. Trying to seize control of these would mean a modest civil war. So let's assume that in some states lots of people will have guns and in some states very few - but we have another modest means of control. Ammunition. As the great English comedian Eddie Izzard has said, "guns don't kill people, bullets do". The production and sale of bullets can be sharply controlled.

This leaves us with the problem of the mass shootings which have struck such terror (and horror) to our hearts. I'm afraid gun control won't deal with this. Gun control can help, they can sharply limit the number of battered women who are shot dead by their boyfriends. Such controls can help lower the murder rate in urban areas. But the kind of

mass murder we have just seen occurred on an even larger scale in Norway, where 92 people were killed in a mass murder spree last year. (Worth noting that the killer was not a Muslim, but a right winger who targeted left wing youth).

Such mass killings will continue to occur and to cope with them we have to look at our modern society, do some serious examination of the pathology of such killings, and not try to think we can deal with them either by new laws or some new and extended security program.

There is a final comment I would make, with some hesitation, as it might seem I was making light of the suffering in Connecticut following this most recent killing spree. It is to ask us to note that every TV station made this the top news all day today and I assume it will still be the top news tomorrow.

But what attention is paid if a village in Afghanistan is hit "by error" by an American drone? Or, as happened, a wedding party is blown to smithereens? Does that make the evening news? Is it more than a passing item? When Israel jets, purchased with US funds, bomb hell out of a terrified civilian population in Gaza, how much attention is paid to those families? When does FOX News (or, for that matter, CNN or MSNBC) interview the stricken families? To mention one thing is not to minimize the other. But it is to suggest that in a world where the US is complicit in so much massive violence, we should not be too stunned when the pathology of such mass killing surfaces here at home.