

OBSERVATION POINT

Legislature Can Solve Criminal Handgun Abuse

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

Last Wednesday, Charles P. Finlan, a prominent Plymouth businessman, was shot on Main Street. A West Bloomfield resident has been arraigned and charged with the shooting. His alleged weapon was a 9-mm Browning pistol.

Three weeks ago, George Wallace was shot and nearly killed during an afternoon campaign appearance at a shopping center in Maryland. Arthur Bremer, evidently an unstable psychopath, has been accused of the crime.

Homocides involving firearms leaped in Michigan to 671 in 1971, up nearly 130 from 1970 and 50 per cent more than the 443 deaths recorded in 1969. The weapon involved in the majority of these cases was a handgun.

There are presently more than three million firearms in Michigan, nearly one weapon for every three people in the state. Of these, about 1,367,000 are registered handguns; however, estimates are that there are 400,000 stolen or illegally owned revolvers and pistols in the City of Detroit.

EVER SINCE President Kennedy's assassination a lot of attention has been focused on the relationship between the essentially uncontrolled sale and possession of handguns and their use for violent and criminal purposes. Police officials and scholars both agree that the more people have handguns near at hand, the

more they will be used in attempts to kill other people.

This conclusion led the Congress in 1968 to pass a gun control law which, in essence, tightened up on the handgun registration process and set some limits to who could legally buy one.

Clearly, the 1968 law is ineffective. For proof, consider that the man who stalked Gov. Wallace across Michigan to Maryland was arrested last year in Milwaukee for carrying a concealed weapon, he was picked up a month ago in Kalamazoo as a suspicious person, and his room was littered with the foamings of a maniac. Yet he still had access to a .38 caliber revolver.

It seems so clear that much more stringent gun control legislation is needed that there seems little point to urge the obvious.

BUT THIS solution, i.e. ban possession of handguns to all except police officers and other authorized people, has not been put into law. This is so despite the fact that national opinion surveys show a clear majority of the American people agree that gun control laws need tightening up.

The politicians evidently do not agree.

In part, they have been the objects of a fierce, prolonged, and expensive lobbying campaign against any meaningful restrictions on the sale of handguns. Gun manufacturing companies, the National Rifle Association, and

many sportsman's groups have joined in making the argument that "guns don't kill people; people do."

Quite true, and just as irrelevant to the point at issue as the old anti-automobile safety slogan, "it isn't the car that kills people; it's the nut behind the wheel."

THERE IS, however, another part to the argument.

What about those 400,000 illegal handguns in Detroit? Does it make much sense to pass a law rigidly limiting possession of handguns when there are so many already illegally owned?

What about the statement by the head of the Michigan State Police that the 1,367,000 registered handguns in Michigan produce less than one per cent of the problems? Will the interests of the law abiding majority of folks be protected if their guns are taken away from them?

What about the fear of the businessman or homeowner that unless they have a pistol handy they are not safe from a robber or a nut? Even though police officials such as Farmington's Robert Deadman say that having a gun in such a situation only increases the probability of the businessman or homeowner getting hurt, will strong gun control legislation help educate people to that fact?

In my view, these questions do not argue against the clear

necessity of passing tough gun control legislation now. But they do give somewhat more substance to lawmakers' reluctance to pass such laws than the irresponsible lobbyist froth about people and not guns doing the killing.

THERE IS SOMETHING that can be done, right now, to help out the gun situation while state legislature and the Congress work their way clear to passing overall gun control laws.

The state legislature can at the very least wake up to the menace of handguns and pass legislation allowing judges to sock it to people convicted of a crime — any crime — while carrying a handgun.

In England, if a judge finds that a man convicted of a crime had a handgun on him, it means a stiff extra sentence. Period. No plea bargaining. No ifs, ands, or buts.

Result? Although there is still plenty of crime in England, very little of it involves handguns.

If the legislature allowed our judges such freedom, it might become clear to potential criminals that just carrying a gun means more time in jail. That deterrent might start to get rid of some of those 400,000 illegal guns in Detroit, and that in turn might encourage some solid citizens to get rid of the guns now kept out of fear.

Then, perhaps, the legislature could get down to the real business of gun control.

"NORMALLY YOUR SENTENCE WOULD BE ONE YEAR — BUT YOU WERE CARRYING A HAND GUN WEREN'T YOU?"



Betty Mussen writes

Art Center Deserves Consideration

Many projects will doubtless be suggested over the next few years as bicentennial undertakings for 1976.

One that deserves consideration is a community arts center.

A recent article in the Saturday Review of Literature says, "The people themselves are concerned with the arts and humanities as never before."

We have said the same thing on these pages, and we could write at length on the difficulties artists here are facing because of lack of space. One can only admire their ingenuity in coping with them.

Furthermore, with voters turning down millages, budgets are being reduced and the "frills" are being taken out of schools. This means that music, art and drama are among the first to suffer. Many parents are rightly concerned about this.

A community arts center would provide a good, and maybe even a better, alternative. There are indications that the schools are being asked to do too much today.

Michael P. Church, director of the University of Michigan extension service, cultural activities, makes a good case for community arts centers in his spring newsletter.

"This department has assisted many communities in establishing neighborhood art centers and we believe that this trend will continue. A neighborhood art center differs from a large city museum in that it serves and identifies with the neighborhood, it has a sense of community. It differs from the school program because it has an informal atmosphere, it is not encumbered by stop-watch class periods, tests and other traditional academic machinery.

"The community art center operates on the hypothesis that most people have creative abilities that can be developed — that there are unexplored dimensions to the human potential."

IN A COMMUNITY arts

center, adults could pursue interests in painting and music during the day and in the evening.

Children could come in after school and on Saturdays. An arts center could and should provide facilities for our theater groups.

It is very possible that funds would be available at the federal and state level, if we get busy now.

It's a sobering fact, and perhaps a tribute to American ingenuity, that the federal government right now spends less per capita on the arts than any other major nation in the Western world.

Last year, the House voted nearly \$30 million for the National Endowment for the Arts. At the same time, Canada with nearly 22 million people, spent \$26.5 million.

Per capita expenditure in the U.S. is exactly 15 cents. In Canada, it's \$2. In West Germany, it's \$2.42. In Great Britain, it's \$1.23.

In spite of this lack of support, the arts in America command respect throughout the world.

With support, our base of appreciation and activity could be widened immeasurably.

SUPPORTERS ARE URGING congress to raise its allocations to \$200 million — still not quite a dollar a head — by 1976. We could do a lot to help these efforts, and see the effects right in our own communities.

It's taken a lot of time and a lot of effort, but most of our communities now have hockey rinks. We welcome this, but the happiest person is the one who has the opportunity to develop all his talents.

Church points out in his letter, "A lot of people who are about to retire seek my advice and when I suggest that they might want to learn to play a musical instrument, they ask, 'Why should I take up a musical instrument when transistor radios, records and tapes do it all for me?'"

"Then why write or read?", I ask them. "Why not let Walter Cronkite do it for you?"

Sense And Nonsense

At a time when it's hard enough to get people to say the pledge to the United States flag, the State Legislature is cooking up another pledge — to the state flag.

The State Senate has already given its approval to the pledge of allegiance to Michigan which goes like this:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of Michigan, and to the state for which it stands, two beautiful peninsulas united by a bridge of steel, where equal opportunity and justice to all is ideal."

Significantly, of the six opposition votes to the pledge, three were from Overland Senators.

But what happened to Sen. William Faust (D-Westland) who voted for the pledge that isn't even grammatically correct? It should read: "...opportunity and justice to all ARE ideal."

R. T. Thompson writes

Drivers Warned To Beware; Kids Will Be On Loose Soon

There isn't any better time than right now to issue the annual summer warning to drivers ... take care, drive slower with more caution, on narrow streets be alert at all times for youngsters racing into traffic between cars.

What does it all mean? It means that area schools are rapidly drawing to a close for the summer vacation and there'll be thousands of young ones suddenly thrown loose on the sidewalks and streets.

It's the one time of the year when police departments dread the thought of what traditionally takes place. With all of the kids loose and racing

here and there without thought of traffic or anything else ... only to get to a certain spot for more fun ... it behooves all drivers to be more cautious than usual.

In some areas, pupils in the first through third grades have taken home with them a safety reminder designed to help them cross streets safely during the summer.

IT'S TOO BAD that information of this type isn't sent home with all youngsters in public and parochial schools. It might curb to some extent the many accidents that occur during the summer.

More than 100,000 copies of a sticker to be placed on the screen door the youngster uses most, have been distributed. The sticker carries the message "Stop at the curb, Look both ways, Wait until it is safe, Then walk across the street."

The stickers are being distributed by the Traffic Safety Association with the hope that it will reduce accidents.

Figures show that June, July and August are all high accident months for children as pedestrians and bicyclists. Children five through eight suffer the most injuries.

The statistics over the years show that youngsters of this age range seem to forget all of the safety lessons taught in the schools and from their parents ... they are so engrossed in play and freedom for the summer that they do run out into the

traffic without looking in either direction.

Most of the kiddies are injured when struck as they run into the streets in midblock. The majority of accidents occur on residential streets, not main thoroughfares and figures show that two of three of those struck are boys.

A DISTURBING trend during recent years has been the sharp increase in the number of children injured while passengers in cars.

For instance, during 1971 in the City of Detroit, 71 per cent of child traffic victims, nearly 2,900, were passengers in vehicles. Because of this record, parents are urged to make sure their children buckle their seat belts before starting on a trip.

Why Shut Out Public At Hearing?

By W. EDWARD WENDOVER

The purpose of a "public hearing" is to hear the public. Right?

"Wrong," says the Redford Township Planning Commission.

At its June 1 meeting the planning commission scheduled a public hearing on a proposed master plan for future land use in Redford Township.

The plan was the culmination of two years of study and while a master plan has no effect on current zoning of any property,

it does reflect the official township feelings about future goals.

THUS THE PLAN was of interest to the several persons who attended the hearing to express their feelings.

But the commission opened the discussion, called for the question and then voted without letting the members of the audience have their say.

They voted to kill the master plan — which is what the audience wanted. But it is dangerous that the commission

usurp the right of the people to be heard.

Of course it has been said that: boards, commissions and other public bodies vote the way they want with little or no regard to what the people want. So, maybe this move by the planning commission was simply to expedite matters by eliminating the step where the people get their say.

The people should stand up and demand their right to be heard and they shouldn't have to demand it — particularly at a "public hearing."

Editorial & Opinion

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Philip H. Power, Publisher

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