



# F.A.C.S. REPORT

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## The Gun Debate Revisited II

by Murray-McLeod-Boyle

**I**n the first Article, "The Gun Debate Revisited", a number of issues with regards to, law, rights, and self-protection were raised.

In this article, I would like to take a different direction. Here, I intend to outline some of the more disturbing aspects of this debate.

Some may dispute what is presented here. All I ask is that, whatever your position may be, carefully weigh what is said. I am not seeking to influence people to become "pro-guns". I am simply endeavouring to alert people, so that they do not have their attention distracted by the current hype.

### 1. History

**F**or people in many States of Australia, the present attempt at gun control is the first. Many are no doubt left wondering why the gun owners are so 'anti' any reform, especially when Port Arthur is such recent history.

The short answer to this is, Victoria. Those who take the time to remember history will be familiar with the Queen St and Hoddle St shootings. In the wake of these, the Cain Government pushed for reform. The various shooting organisations came to the party. Whilst most shooters did not like the moves, they agreed with them. In good faith they surrendered part of their armoury, in order to show that they too were concerned

citizens. As honest citizens, they nothing to hide.

One of the moves to which they agreed was the registration of firearms. This meant that you had to get a permit to buy a gun, and that the gun had to have its serial number recorded.

Everyone at that time was cautious. Why? Because they knew that such a registry, in the wrong hands, could see them stripped of their weapons.

It is now 1996. On a quiet Sunday afternoon, a cold blooded murderer kills 35 people at Port Arthur. Another State; a different set of gun laws.

What is the Federal Government's reaction? They propose to use that central registry (where it exists) to disarm or confiscate the weapons of the innocent. (Shooters gave an inch, now the Government wants to take a mile.)

On Wednesday, May 29, a group of about 70 people gathered in Bendigo for a forum on gun control. At that little meeting, one of the constantly asked questions was, 'what about the bad guys'? Snr. Sgt. Nilon, representing the Police, answered this quite plainly — *the police can only recover those weapons that are registered or known about*. For this answer, the Sergeant was clapped and cheered. He thought that it was because he had supported the gun lobby. He had misread the audience. The real reason we cheered was because he had articulated what everybody already knew — *that only law abiding citizens, who had*

*registered their weapons, will have them confiscated*. This is the reality.

Allow me to illustrate. Mr Bloggs is a keen shooter. He has his SLSG registered and kept under lock and key. If this legislation goes through, he will receive a knock on the door and a polite, 'please hand it over'. This will happen because his gun is registered.

On the other hand, you have Mr Crook. He has got lots and lots of nasty little goodies lying around the place. If this legislation goes through, will anyone knock on his door? No! Why? Because he does not have his weapons registered.<sup>1</sup>

Now, let's face the truth head on. Who is most likely to use a gun to commit murder? The average Joe Bloggs who enjoys shooting, or the criminal, who will commit his crime, gun or no gun.

### 2. Speed of Legislation

**C**oncern must also be expressed at the speed at which the politicians are trying to *force* this legislation through.

For politicians who are normally so cautious that they look both ways before they cross their legs, the recent grit and determination is astounding. Likewise, it must be said that the current metamorphosis is also uncharacteristic. We are used to observing a bureaucratic machine that resembles an ice glacier - it moves about 1 metre per year.<sup>2</sup> Yet, what

1. It is worth noting that very few States actually have gun registers. This means that the buy-back scheme is grounded before it makes its maiden flight. Further, now that people living in States where registration does not exist have experienced the corrupt use of a central register, they are unlikely to queue up to register their weapons.

2. Actually, a slug is probably a better picture. Firstly, the ice glacier moves faster than bureaucracy. Secondly, the slug is slimy and hard to handle — just like

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we are seeing at the moment is something akin to a sleek, well oiled, locomotive, with a full head of steam.

Why the rush? Well, it's all about implementing a plan while the opportunity is ripe.<sup>3</sup>

As we all know, our parliamentarians, past and present, have taken great liberties in signing UN. treaties that are supposedly binding upon each one of us. We have seen it with the 'rights of the child', 'religious liberty' and with 'world heritage' listings on our forests. Well, now they're at it again. This time with gun control.

Some years ago the UN. commissioned a report on gun use by private citizens. This report was drawn up by the Colombian delegation. You know Colombia! That great paragon of moral excellence, where the greatest national export is drugs and all presidential candidates have to wear 'flack' jackets.

A second report was drawn up by the Japanese. During this procedure an Australian proposal was submitted and, if I understand correctly, adopted.

So it would seem that the ideas now articulated in the proposed changes to gun legislation were already present; all the government needed was a catalyst. Enter, Port Arthur.

This is the only way that the Howard Government was able to act so quickly.<sup>4</sup> Instead of having to go and research the topic of gun control, Mr Howard, as it were, was able to simply reach for a set

of pre-existing guidelines and proposals. To be sure, Mr Howard has thrown in a few extra proposals for good measure, but the fact remains that the similarity between the two documents is more than coincidence.

### 3. Lies

**A**dded to these already unjust proposals are the lies that accompany them. The outcry over these proposed changes to the law has brought such a backlash, that various Governments are scrambling to push this legislation through before their opponents can mount any serious challenge.

This was evident in Victoria by the fact that the Government said that it was unlikely that this legislation would be presented to this sitting of parliament because of its complex nature. As of the 30th of May, the second draft bill had already been tabled in Parliament.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is government by deceit.

### 4. What About A Referendum?

**M**embers of both State and Federal Governments are throwing around some good, yet unproved, quotes. They are continually saying that 'the people want this'. From a statistical point of view, I have heard the outrageous claim that 90% of Australians are in favour of these changes.

All I can suggest is the quote is vague, and the statistic, dubious. If the Government is so sure that the people want this, then why not give them the opportunity to vote on it? Why not have a referendum? After all, if a referendum were held, you would know exactly what the people thought. Moreover, if a referendum was won by a substantial majority, then I believe it would take all the sting out of the gun lobby's tail, causing many to comply with the request to surrender guns, much more willingly.

The reality is, however, that there is nowhere near the support for these proposed changes, as that which the Government purport. How do they come up with these figures? Simple. In the wake of a tragic event like Port Arthur, while

emotions are running high, a Government 'pencil pusher' — read 'employee' — rings you up and asks, 'given the tragic events of Sunday last, would you support a move to reform gun laws'? The answer to which would undoubtedly be, 'Yes'!

Now let me ask you, what would you mean by answering 'yes' to that question?

At this point I walk out on a limb, but if I were to hazard a guess, I believe something along the following lines would be running through your mind. 'The Port Arthur tragedy was committed by someone with a high powered rifle capable of holding between 30 to 60 rounds of ammunition. We really do not need these type of weapons for everyday use. Yes, I will support a move to ban or restrict *these types* of weapons'. What then happens, is that the statistics that were canvassed, as to support for the vague concept of 'gun reform', are applied to the Government's concrete proposals.

There is a quantum leap between asking people about the vague concept of supporting 'gun reform' and, the specific case of 'banning all SLR's, SLSC's, Pump Action SG's and Military style rifles (a very vague term used to conjure pictures of horror).

### 5. Media

**T**he media have been major players in this debate. (I tend to think that society would be better off if we kept our guns and banned the media.) The media have been deliberately biased in all their reporting of incidents regarding firearms, and the current debate is no exception.

Allow me to illustrate. As I mentioned above, I recently attended a forum on gun debate. About 70 people attended, and we had a panel of six people, representing different interest groups - Greens, Police, 'Citizens against Violence', FGA, AMA, and 'a concerned' citizen. Each of the panel was given five minutes to speak, then the floor was opened to the public for questions and comment.

a bureaucracy.

3. What comes next is going to sound a bit like the old "conspiracy" theory. However, this is not my intention. I am simply seeking to highlight the relevant points to this debate.

4. On page 4 of the *Bendigo Advertiser*, June 3, 1996, Mr Howard is reported as saying that "it was only with reluctance that the government imposed the new controls". If this is a reluctant move, I would not like to see Mr Howard when he was determined to do something.

This meeting went for two hours. The last person to speak was an unnamed individual who claimed:

- that he was an ex-Tasmanian,
- that he *had* owned a 7.62mm weapon,
- that he *had* contemplated a mass shooting, and
- that he *had* gone to the local mall and picked out targets.

I have emphasised the past tense here, as it was obvious that the person was talking about something that *had* happened some time ago in Tasmania. As you can well guess, the media portrayed this inaccurately and out of context. The *Bendigo Advertiser* placed an article dealing with this forum on the front page. What was its title? 'Community chats for two hours over guns'. 'Community agrees that we have a moral problem'. No. Emblazoned, three quarters of the way down the front page, was — "I considered murder" — gun owner".

Moreover, the report carried the following: "a Tasmanian who owned . . . had considered similar actions . . . I've sat in the mall picking out my targets and thinking to myself how easy it would be".<sup>5</sup>

The disturbing thing about this is that Bendigo has a mall, and the report made it sound as though this man was going to duplicate the actions of the Port Arthur gunman, right here in town.

Am I over-reacting? Not a bit. The very next day a further article — under the equally sensational title, "Reformed 'dangerous' gun owner hands in his weapons" — on this same man appeared. He had gone to the trouble of contacting the paper because "he was worried that Bendigo citizens might be frightened by his comments".<sup>6</sup>

Question. Whose comments were likely to scare the "Bendigo citizens"? Answer: the misrepresented statements put forward by the *Bendigo Advertiser*. Sure, the man who made these comments was agitated, but I do not believe anyone at that meeting — including the Senior Sergeant of Police — considered him as a present threat.

As if this were not enough, we also had the television media attend our little gathering. Toward the end of our meet-

ing the reporter, Matt Carden, took over the microphone and asked some questions. In response to his questions, the local representative of the FGA, asked Mr Carden what he thought of the media's involvement in crimes like Port Arthur. Mr Carden responded by saying that they had a big role to play. He agreed that violence on television was a problem. He agreed with Snr. Sgt. Nilon, who had earlier stated that the media was having a "feeding frenzy".

Naively buoyed by this, I sat down the following evening to watch the local news. First, the presenter launched the report with some emotive language. Next, the report itself, with pictures of our meeting. This report focused primarily upon the 'citizens against violence', whom I suspect invited the media in the first place, giving their speaker the only interview.

That was not all, however. Out of all that the panel contributed the only snippet given air time, was of a local farmer claiming, 'that we will be left defenceless and shot by an aggressor with our hands tied behind our back'. This farmer was correct in most of what he said. Unfortunately, he was not a public speaker, and was given over to the odd emotional and, sometimes incoherent, statement. Again, what did the media grab? Certainly not a balanced view. It was concerned only for the sensational headline.

Some people in the media have a 'barrow to push' in this campaign and we must be aware of it. Recently, there was a rally organised here in Bendigo, for those who did not support the proposed changes to gun law. Approximately 2000 people turned out for this meeting. Moreover, it was the most peaceful and well behaved of all the recent rallies. Was our beloved *Bendigo Advertiser* kind or sympathetic? No. The headline the next morning read — "Gun owners revolt".<sup>7</sup>

The interesting thing about this is that the gun-lobby's protest was not the only one to be held in Bendigo on that day. University staff and students also protested by walking through the streets of Bendigo — the gun owners gathered peacefully at the town hall. Yet do we read, 'University revolt'? No! We have, "La Trobe unites to fight cutbacks".<sup>7</sup>

So, why can we not have, "Gun owners unite against cutbacks"?

I do not wish to go on *ad nauseum*, but this point must be made.

On Saturday, June 1, there was a rally in Melbourne organised for those who opposed the proposed changes. In Monday's *Bendigo Advertiser*, there is a small report on page 3, which says "various media estimates put the rally at between 70,000 and 150,000 strong". Math is not my best subject, but, when I went to school, there was a huge difference between 70 and 150; in fact, if my memory serves me correctly, 70 will go into 150, twice. "But wait, there's more". On the very next page, there was an article under the title, "Howard affirms firearm action". In this article it is claimed that there were only 60,000 at the rally. As if this were not enough, part of this article dealt with the situation in Queensland, where pro- and anti- gun people held a rally simultaneously. The amazing thing about this was not the rally itself. Rather, it has to do with the fact that this report could distinguish that there were "around 400 people in favour of the new gun laws", but only "350" who were opposed.

Could someone please explain to me, how the media cannot tell the difference between 60,000 and 150,000, yet, they can spot a difference of 50 in an instant. (Note that the figures are given to support gun reform.) Lastly, what was the photo that accompanied this report? You would naturally think it would be of the rally covered by the story. However, it is actually a photo of the pro-reform rally that took place on Sunday.<sup>8</sup>

(Just before finishing with this rally, it is worth noting that the SSAA, who organised the rally, officially estimated that there were 140,000 people present — in Melbourne alone. As to Sunday's pro-reform meeting, there were 30,000 — Australia wide.)

Nor is this misrepresentation limited to the country. In Melbourne, the SSAA tried to place paid advertisements on several radio stations. Some of these stations refused to put the ads. to air. One station said that a management decision had been taken, not to have anything to do with the pro-gun lobby.

5. *Bendigo Advertiser*, Thursday, May 30, 1996; No 41,396.

6. *Bendigo Advertiser*, Friday, May 31, 1996; No 41, 397. p.2.

7. *Bendigo Advertiser* Friday, May 31, 1996; No 41, 397. p.3.

8. More tricks - one of the banners in the photograph says 'ban duck shooting'. Those opposed to duck shooting have not had much success with their campaign, so now they are throwing their weight behind the pro-reform lobby. I suppose their logic is, 'it is hard to shoot a duck with a broom handle'.

I am not saying that these stations are compelled to run these ads. It is their business, and if they do not want somebody's ad on their station that is their prerogative.

What I am saying, though, is that it is a pretty poor time to develop a conscience or to exercise the right of refusal.

## 6. Guns, Suicide & Statistics

One of the panelists at our little forum, was Dr. Bernie Street, a local representative from the AMA. He stated that in 1994, 522 people were killed with firearms. Quite a staggering figure, is it not? No! Not when you learn that 80% of these were suicides. Which means that if we subtract the number of suicides from this total, we are left with a figure that is pretty lame. Out of 522 deaths only, 105 can be classified as homicides.<sup>9</sup>

Remember, this is a national figure. Now, compare this with the thousand or so that we kill in motor vehicle accidents each year;<sup>10</sup> compare it with the 280(?) drug related deaths in Victoria in 1995,<sup>11</sup> and the focus is quickly adjusted. 280 drug related deaths, and the Victorian Government wants to consider legalising marijuana for personal use! 105 gun deaths — Australia wide — and people are screaming to ban guns. *Can you make sense of it?*

It is also worth noting that all the mass shootings of the last decade or so, only account for about 69 deaths. Let me reiterate: I am not unmoved by these deaths. The point I am simply trying to make is that statistically, we have a greater number and more urgent problems to face than gun control.

As to suicide and guns, there is no proven link. If a person is going to commit suicide, then they will use whatever is at hand. If it is a gun, then a gun; if it is a box of pills, then it is a box of pills — you get the picture.<sup>12</sup>

Last year, SBS screened a program on suicide. The reporter on this program could not help but ask about the use of guns in suicide. As to the question, 'How

tougher gun laws had impacted upon the number of suicides committed with guns?', the answer is that in NSW the suicide rate fell 12%. However, ask the question, 'did the overall suicide rate fall?' and the answer is, no. The truth of the matter is, that all other modes of suicide increased to compensate for the 12% drop in the use of guns.

Once again it is clear — guns are not the problem.

While on the topic of statistics, it is worth noting that the statistics show that more people are killed by knives, than with a gun. Snr. Sgt. Nilon informed us, that there has been one homicide in Bendigo in 3 years — a *stabbing* (This is wrong. There were actually two — both stabbings). He also told us that there had been eighteen suicides in that same period. Four of which involved firearms — none of which will fall into the 'prohibited' category under the proposed law. These suicides were committed with single shot SGs and .22s.<sup>13</sup>

## 7. Morals

In the first article I mentioned that we had a moral problem. The surprising thing is that most individuals agree. At the above mentioned forum, even the representative from the Green party agreed that we had a moral problem. In fact, it would be fair to say that everyone on the panel, and most of the audience agreed that the problems we face are moral ones.

Hence, the question still remains, *what are the politicians going to do to address the real problems?*

## 8. Conclusion

I would like to draw a parallel if I may. Several years ago, a young lad, by the name of Daniel Valerio, was murdered by his mother's defacto (or whatever he was).

As a result of that incident, there were numerous calls to ban corporal punishment — i.e., no smacking your children. Others called for a forum to be set up so

'would be' child abusers could be "dobbled" in. One person went so far as to advocate that we introduce legislation to ban spanking — physical abuse. Now, we would not act on this legislation — who was he trying to fool? — it would simply be there to let everyone know that this type of violence to children would not be tolerated.

He claimed we had a violence problem which, according to him, stemmed from smacking children in the home. The ridiculous thing about his comments was that in the very week that he made this statement, two new movies were released. Both were violent, and, the one I remember, was called, 'Demolition Man'. No need to guess what its content was.

The community was side-tracked from the real issues by people like this. Why do I say this? Because, in the case of young Daniel Valerio, the unknown reality is, that everybody, who was anybody, new of the problems in that situation.

Social workers knew; Community services knew; Even the Police doctor knew.

*They did nothing.*

Who knew about the perpetrator of the Port Arthur massacre?

What (or who) failed Daniel Valerio? What failed the 35 victims of Port Arthur? What is failing gun owners now? What is failing every Australian now?

Answer — *Bureaucracy.*

A bureaucracy that cannot, or will not, deal with the real issues. A bureaucracy that, in refusing to address the real issues, puts all law abiding people at risk.

The present focus on guns has been deliberately put there by a Government that is both unwilling and unable to address the moral degradation within society. The spotlight has been placed on gun owners in order to deflect the heat away from a Government that will not protect its citizens. More importantly, it is about to deny its citizens the right to protect themselves.

9. Please, do not consider this a callous statement. All deaths are tragic events. However, we must show that these figures do not support what the establishment wants them to support.
10. *Federal Office of Road Safety, Road Toll Statistics Jan-April 1996: Total 641; By States: Vic. 155; SA. 64; NT. 17; QLD. 94; NSW. 188; WA. 86. Tas. 34. ACT. 3; (June 3, 1996, Victorian road toll: 188; SA: 77).*
11. Drugs and our Community; Report of the Premier's Drug Advisory Council; 25.
12. It has even been established of late, that some single vehicle accidents were suicides.
13. In this regard, one elderly gentleman was correct when he asked, 'what military style rifles had to do with suicide'? His point was simple. You only need one bullet to commit suicide. Having a magazine of fifteen or thirty is absolutely pointless. The link between suicides and military style weapons is another media driven lie.