



## THE GUN CONTROL STORY

The following provides a summary of the chronology of the organization's development and critical events in its evolution.

**December 6, 1989** - A misogynist shoots 28 people at l'Ecole Polytechnique, killing 14 young female engineering students with a Ruger Mini -14 and large capacity magazine.

**December 1989 - January 1990.** Responses varied from focusing generally on violence against women, impediments to women in engineering, and also gun control. The students of l'Ecole Polytechnique begin to circulate a petition calling for a ban on military weapons. At the same time, in Toronto, a small group begins to work on developing a comprehensive approach to gun control, and becomes the nucleus of Canadians for Gun Control. They recommend a position which includes licensing firearms owners, registering guns, banning military assault weapons etc.)

**May 1990** - Justice Minister Kim Campbell introduces Bill C-80, which improves the FAC screening process, defines safe storage, bans some military weapons and large-capacity magazines, but, notably, does not ban semi-automatic military weapons such as the Ruger Mini-14, register firearms, or control the sale of ammunition.

**November 1990** - In an almost unprecedented turn of events, because of opposition in Kim Campbell's own Conservative caucus, Bill C-80 fails second reading and is sent to a "Special Committee."

**November 1990 - February 1991** - The Special Committee on Bill C-80 conducts hearings.

**March 1991** - Parliament prorogues and Bill C-80 dies on the order paper.

**April 1991** - The students of Polytechnique and Canadians for Gun Control formally merge to form the Coalition for Gun Control. The Coalition holds its first national press conference in Ottawa with representatives from the Canadian Police Association, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Victims of Polytechnique, the Canadian Criminal Justice Association, and others calling on the Government to reintroduce gun-control legislation.

**May 1991** - Justice Minister Kim Campbell unveils Bill C-17, a revised version of Bill C-80. The first witness, the Minister of Justice, argues that the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General do not need to conduct extensive hearings but should send the bill back to the House of Commons for third reading. Gun organizations push for hearings in an effort to weaken the bill. Gun-control advocates push for hearings in order to strengthen the bill. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women storms the hearings, arguing that women have the right to be heard, and the bill is subsequently sent to the Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General.

**May - September 1991** - The Legislative Committee hears witnesses on both sides. This time, the Coalition for Gun Control appears with support from health-care, crime-prevention and other experts. Its position is endorsed by over 50 groups and 5000 individuals. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women recommends improvements to the bill to counter problems

with guns in domestic violence. Both the Canadian Police Association and Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police advocate registration of all firearms. In response to an advertising campaign by the gun lobby, the Coalition issues a joint statement in support of Bill C-17, with additional measures such as registration of all firearms. The statement is signed by hundreds of community leaders, chiefs of police, and violence-prevention organizations and issued to all MPs and Senators. A campaign by the Coalition lands over 300,000 postcards on MPs' desks, calling for amendments to strengthen the law. The Liberal and NDP parties support the position of the Coalition for Gun Control advocating licensing of firearm owners and registration of firearms.

**November 7, 1991** - The House of Commons passes Bill C-17. Members of all four political parties acknowledge the efforts of the Coalition for Gun Control.

**November - December 1991** - The Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs reviews the legislation. Priscilla DeVilliers, whose daughter Nina was killed months earlier, and John Bickerstaff, whose son Lee was accidentally killed by a friend playing with his father's service revolver, testify.

**December 5, 1991** - Bill C-17 passes Senate. Legal and Constitutional Affairs Chair, Senator Nathan Nurgitz, writes to Justice Minister Kim Campbell advising her to look carefully at the regulations and to registration of all firearms.

**March 1992** - Regulations are introduced after considerable discussion and lobbying. Major lobbying efforts secure strong screening processes, including the requirement that references sign the FAC application form.

**August 1992** - A professor with legally acquired handguns shoots and kills four colleagues at Concordia University in Montreal. The University launches a petition calling for a ban on all handguns.

**September 1992** - While Bill C-17 banned large-capacity magazines, it allowed provinces to exempt "legitimate competitions a national protest led by Halifax police chief's refusal to issue exemptions results in all provinces refusing.

**January 1993** - After a number of delays, the new screening process associated with Bill C-17 is implemented.

**September 1993** - An Angus Reid poll commissioned by the Coalition for Gun Control shows that the vast majority of Canadians support registration of all firearms (86%), a ban on military weapons (84%), as well as a ban on handguns (70%). There are regional differences: support for gun control is higher in Quebec (90%) and lower in the west (72% in Alberta). There are also gender differences: a higher percentage of women than men support the proposal. But even among gun owners support is high. During the election campaign, the Liberals, Bloc Quebecois, and NDP endorse stricter gun control. The Red Book promises are not specific, despite resolutions passed at the Liberal Convention. The Liberals win a majority government. The Coalition for Gun Control now includes over 100 organizations.

**April 1994** - A series of shootings in rapid succession heighten concern about gun control. The Minister of Justice, Allan Rock, signals that he intends to strengthen gun-control legislation and is considering a range of proposals.

**April - September 1994** - Pro-gun groups across the country begin to organize rallies and protests. New "Responsible Firearms Owners" groups appear in most provinces. The Coalition for Gun Control launches a gun-control-now postcard campaign, calling on the government to introduce stricter laws. A large number of policing and community organizations participate, including the Metro Toronto, Peel, and Montreal Police Departments, Cities of Toronto and Montreal and Ontario Federation of Women Teachers Associations.

**September 1994** - The gun lobby organizes a rally on Parliament Hill of 10,000 gun owners. "Crime control not gun control" and "Don't blame us" were the rallying cries. A press conference by the families of victims of gun violence put the rally into perspective:

**November 1994 - January 1995** - The Minister of Justice, Allan Rock unveils a comprehensive package of gun-control proposals which include licensing and registration of all firearms, a ban on semi-automatic military weapons, a ban on some handguns, and stiffer penalties for firearms offenses. The proposals are quickly denounced by gun groups and endorsed by over 300 police, injury-prevention, crime-prevention, and other organizations. The proposals address the key demands of the Coalition for Gun Control and, in some respects, go further. The Coalition organizes press conferences across the country of groups in support of the law, including Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, Montreal, Quebec City, and Toronto.

**February 1995** - Bill C-68 is tabled and is faithful to the proposals announced earlier.

**March - June 1995** - The Standing Committee on Justice and the Solicitor General hears over 75 witnesses. Pro-gun witnesses outnumber gun-control supporters 2 to 1.

**June 1995** - The House of Commons passes Bill C-68.

**June - November 1995** - The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Chaired by Senator Gerald Beaudoin, begins its review of the legislation. Letter-writing and telephoning campaigns on both sides escalate. In last-minute appeals, both the families of the victims of Polytechnique and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police call on the Senate to pass the law without amendment.

**September 26, 1995** - The Province of Alberta supported by Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories, and Yukon announce they will challenge the constitutionality of the law in Court.

**November 22, 1995** - Senators on both sides of the issue make impassioned speeches. Notably, Senator Lynch Staunton, leader of the Conservatives, focuses entirely on the concerns of "law-abiding gun owners" and quotes gun-lobby-funded experts to support his case: "Criminals won't register their guns." Amendments which would have gutted the bill and sent it back to the House of Commons are narrowly defeated 53 to 46. The amendments are defeated because four Conservative women, Senators Mira Spivak, Ermine Cohen, Janis Johnson, and Therese Lavoie Roux were joined by three Conservative men from Quebec, Senators Gerald Beaudoin, Senator Rivest, and Senator Bolduc, in breaking party ranks. Most telling was the decision of Gerald Beaudoin, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Chair and noted constitutional expert, who said his decision was merely a matter of conscience. Once the amendments were defeated, the intact legislation passed by a comfortable margin of 64 to 28, with 7 abstentions.

**December 5, 1995** - Bill C-68 is proclaimed as law.

**March 13, 1996** - In Dunblane, Scotland 16 primary-school children and their teacher are murdered by a member of a local gun club who then killed himself. A petition is launched calling for a complete ban on handguns.

**April 5, 1996** - In Vernon, BC Rajwar Gakhel and 8 members of her family are murdered by her estranged husband, a gun-club member, who then commits suicide. The Coalition raises a number of questions about the way in which the RCMP processed the murderer's gun application. An inquest and inquiry are called which makes wide ranging recommendations relevant to the implementation of the firearms legislation

**May 1996** - First regulations are tabled, and then withdrawn, after opposition from the rural caucus over the provision to "double lock" long guns with a trigger lock and safe storage compartment.

**May 10, 1996** - 35 people are killed and 18 injured in Port Arthur, Tasmania, Australia by a gun collector with military style semi-automatic rifles. Within months the Australian government announces a series of improvements to gun-control legislation, including a buy-back of semi-automatic weapons and a national licensing and registration scheme. Previously, 5 of 8 states had registered guns. Tasmania was not one of them.

**Fall, 1996** – Provinces led by Alberta announce their intention to challenge the constitutionality of the law.

**December 2, 1996** - Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and others, file documents to obtain intervener status in the constitutional challenge to oppose the law. The Coalition for Gun Control, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Cities of Montreal and Toronto, and Alberta Council of Women's Shelters obtain intervenor status in support of the law and the Federal Government.

**February 1997** - Britain's bill banning 90% of handguns is passed. Victims press for a ban on all handguns and are supported by the opposition Labour Party.

**April 1997** - United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice releases its multi-nation study. A resolution sponsored by 33 countries calls on all countries which have not already done so to introduce regulations concerning safe storage of firearms, licensing firearms owners, and registering firearms. The NRA, which has allocated substantial funds to fighting the United Nation's efforts, denounces the move as driven by Japanese interests. Consultations are scheduled around the world in Slovenia, Tanzania, India, and Brazil.

**May 1997** - New Zealand's review of firearms regulations is released. Retired Judge, Sir Thomas Thorp, announces that the reasons which led New Zealand to discontinue registration of rifles and shotguns no longer apply and recommends, among other things, a return to registering all firearms.

**May 1997** - Britain's Labour party sweeps the country and moves to ban all handguns.

**May - June 1997** - During the Canadian election campaign, Reform and Conservative parties pledge to repeal the law. The NDP sits on the fence despite Alexa McDonough's commitment during the leadership campaign. Liberals and Bloc Quebecois stand firm.

**September 12 - 16 1997** - Constitutional Challenge is heard in the Alberta Court of Appeal. During the court case, the Province of Alberta argued that while handguns and other restricted weapons were dangerous and, therefore, could be controlled by the Federal Government, rifles and shotguns were "ordinary firearms" and therefore just private property which was properly provincial jurisdiction.

**October 1997** - The final set of regulations is tabled.

**March 1998** - Regulations are finalized.

**April - May 1998** - The United National Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice passes a resolution calling for the development of an internationally binding instrument to control the import, export and in transit movement of firearms.

**September 1998** - The gun lobby hosts a rally on Parliament Hill which includes many Americans. In particular, John Lott, author of "More Guns, Less Crime." This was the same "expert" who argued that gun control caused an 11 year old and 13 year old to steal some guns and shoot their classmates and a teacher in Arkansas. He argued that if only one of the teachers had been armed, the tragedy would not have happened.

**October 1998** In the majority judgment of the Alberta Court of Appeal in the Firearms Reference, federal jurisdiction was upheld. The Alberta Court of Appeal releases its 3 to 2 decision upholding the constitutionality of the law. Chief Justice Catherine Fraser reaffirmed the importance of licensing and registration to any effective gun control system because these are: "... about the protection of public safety from the misuse of ordinary firearms. This is to be accomplished through a simple but compelling concept - individual responsibility and accountability for ones ordinary firearms. This is a small price to pay for the privilege of being allowed to possess and use a dangerous weapon." She also wrote "...increased firearms controls are also consistent with the philosophy underlying the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, ..I am well aware that the Declaration has not been expressly incorporated into domestic law. However, where legislation is open to two interpretations, one of which is more consistent with international human rights norms, then that interpretation is to be preferred....Parliament's efforts with Bill C-68 were motivated, in part, by the desire to reduce the incidence of firearms-related domestic violence. This being so, one should not ignore the international human rights context."

**October 1998** - Alberta announces its intention to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court of Canada.

**December 1, 1998** - Coming into force of most elements including individual licensing and firearm registration. First license issued. First long gun registered.

**April 1999** - The Coalition for Gun Control along with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, CAVEAT, the Canadian Paediatric Society, Canadian Association for Adolescent Health, Quebec Public Health Association, the December 6th Foundation, the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the Cities of Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg are granted intervener status at the Supreme Court.

**February 21-22, 2000** - The Supreme Court of Canada hears Alberta's constitutional challenge and the testimony of intervenors.

**June 15, 2000** – Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, announced that the law is fully constitutional.

**December 31, 2000** – Deadline for individual licensing

**March 2001** – Bill C-15 introduced (eventually becomes Bill C-10A) which relaxed screening processes and extended grand fathering for prohibited handguns.

**December 3, 2002** – Auditor General's Report on the Firearms Program criticizing cost overruns and lack of transparency. "We did not audit program efficiency or whether it is meeting its objective" and stated in a news conference that: "The issue here is not gun control. And its not even astronomical cost overruns, although these are serious. What's really inexcusable is that Parliament was in the dark."

**December 31, 2002** - Deadline for firearm registration

**February 2003** – Gun Control Program Action Plan announced to streamline costs and make it easier for firearms owners to comply

**May 2003** – Royal Assent to Bill C-10A

**June 2003** – Proposed changes to Firearms Act regulations tabled in the House of Commons and the Senate

**Fall 2003** – CAFC Stakeholder consultations and Parliamentary Committee reviews of proposed regulatory changes

**Early 2004** – Ministerial review of the Firearms Program – pressure to relax the legislation in order to appease critics

**March 2004** – Effort to cut funding for the firearms program is defeated

**May 2004** – Government announcement of Firearms Program cost caps and other measures to help combat firearms crime

**June 2004** – Federal election. Conservatives pledge to repeal the law. Liberals win a minority government.

**December 2005** – effort to cut funding to Firearms Program is defeated despite the minority government. Most NDP and Bloc Quebecois vote with the Liberals in support of the programme.

**December 2005** – Requirements for renewing firearms licenses are relaxed.