



National Coalition to Ban Handguns

100 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Washington, DC. 20002

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (partial listing)

American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
Americans for Democratic Action
American Jewish Congress
American Psychiatric Association
American Public Health Association
Black Women's Community
Development Foundation
B'nai B'rith Women
Board of Church and Society,
United Methodist Church
Center for Social Action,
United Church of Christ
Church of the Brethren,
Washington Office
Disarm Education Fund
Frienda Committee on
National Legislation
International Ladies' Garment
Workers' Union
Jesuit Conference, Office
of Social Ministries
National Alliance for Safer Cities
National Association of
Social Workers
National Council of Jewish
Women, Inc.
National Council of Negro Women
National Jewish Welfare Board
Political Action Committee,
Women's National Democratic Club
The Program Agency, United
Presbyterian Church in the USA
Union of American Hebrew
Congregations
Unitarian Universalist Association,
Washington Office for
Social Concern
United States Conference
of Mayors
United States National Student
Association
United Synagogue of America
Women's Division, Board of Global
Ministries, United Methodist
Church
Women's League for Conservative
Judaism
Young Women's Christian
Association of USA, National Board

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Leonard Bernstain
Eugene Carson Blake
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Rep. Michael Harrington
Rabbi Benjamin Z. Kreitman
Norman Lear
Allard K. Lowenstein (deceased)
Bishop James K. Matthews
Otto Preminger
Rabbi Stanley Rabnowitz
Albart Vorspan
Roy Wilkins

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Michael Beard

Dear Friend:

Chances are, you never heard of Henry Dawson, Jr. He hadn't yet made his mark; his passing caused barely a ripple on the sea of human events, in contrast to those of more celebrated recent handgun victims.

But the killing of Henry Dawson, Jr. ought to be burned into the consciousness of anyone who ever believed the witless notion that "guns don't kill people -- people kill people."

Because "people" didn't kill him. He killed himself, with a single shot through his jaw. Was he depressed? Despondent? Desperate? Unable to cope? Suicidal?

Not exactly. Henry Dawson, Jr. was only three years old. He was sleeping with his mother in her bed. At some point during the night, he must have picked up the handgun she kept near the headboard. Henry was pronounced dead at the scene.

What ever he might have become, he is now a statistic. One more case history in the somber annals of the handgun. One more to add to the more than 22,000 Americans who died by the gun this past year.

If the fate of Henry Dawson, Jr. is unacceptable to you as it is to other thinking people, if you're among the 80% of Americans who want handguns either banned or rigorously controlled; if you think it's about time our lawmakers listen to this majority, instead of to the crisp rustle of gun lobby dollars; this letter is for you.

I'm writing to ask for your help -- for your support of a dedicated, determined, increasingly successful campaign to counter the power of the gun lobby and put reasonable gun control laws on the books. We call ourselves the National Coalition to Ban Handguns -- a coalition of more than 30 citizen groups, professional organizations and religious associations.

In our relatively short life, we've become the most

(over, please)

serious threat to the gun lobby's lock on the legislative process, and to its own demented version of the American Dream: a handgun in every home (in every bed, too?).

What is so tragic is that nearly 25,000 of us will die this year, involuntary sacrifices to that vision -- and to the boundless greed of handgun and ammunition manufacturers and the legislators whose coffers they fill. Plus the trigger-happy crazies who mindlessly defend their "right to bear arms," a right the Constitution does not guarantee.

On it goes, year after year. Children find guns and shoot other children accidentally. Fathers shoot "problers" who turn out to be late-returning sons. "Unloaded" guns go off while they're being cleaned. Short-tempered citizens shoot their neighbors over arguments that seem trivial. On it goes in defiance of plain common sense and despite these incontrovertible facts:

If you own a handgun, or if someone in your family owns one, you're twice as likely as the average American to be murdered, accidentally shot or to commit suicide.

The U.S. has the highest handgun death rate of any country in the world. We're also the only major country without effective handgun control laws.

Between 1963 and 1973, 46,121 Americans were killed in the Vietnam War. During the same period, 84,644 of us were killed by firearms here in the U.S.

The murder rate in the U.S. is 100 times greater than in England and Wales, where strict gun control laws are enforced ... and 200 times greater than in Japan, where no private citizen can buy a handgun legally.

Each year, handguns cause more deaths in America than fires, drownings and poison combined.

America's top 10 states and top 10 cities -- in murders per capita -- have the weakest gun control laws.

Notice the apparent correlations between murder rates and handgun availability. There are a couple of ways to explain that. One is that a handgun usually transforms an act of rage or passion into an irreversible tragedy; three of four handgun victims are related to or known by their assailants. Without handguns, such

acts would often result in nothing more enduring than a few lumps and bruises or perhaps superficial cuts.

But there's another factor, too, as psychologist Leonard Berkowitz found in a study at the University of Wisconsin a few years ago. Even so trivial a thing as the casual sight of a gun can stimulate aggressive behavior. Dr. Berkowitz concluded, "Guns not only permit violence, they can stimulate it as well. The finger pulls the trigger, but the trigger may be pulling the finger."

Handgun enthusiasts are fond of saying that it's too late anyway, because there are already some 100 million handguns stashed away in the nation's drawers, closets, handbags and glove compartments. Gun control laws, they say, would thus be ineffectual.

If you're tempted to believe this, consider:

The National Coalition to Ban Handguns helped to pass a tough gun control law in Washington, D.C. three years ago; handgun crimes dropped 26%.

A similar law in Massachusetts is credited with saving 50 to 75 lives each year.

Last year we helped New York State pass a strong law and defeated National Rifle Association-backed attempts to wipe out the few protective provisions in the better-than-nothing federal gun control act of 1968.

We're helping Connecticut, Missouri, California and Illinois draft strong gun control laws. And things are changing. State legislators know we defeated the NRA in Congress and New York last year, so they are listening a little more carefully. Doors once closed are now opening.

The campaign against handguns is gaining momentum. NCBH's educational and lobbying efforts are beginning to pay off.

But ominous clouds are gathering in the national horizon. President Reagan, a lifetime NRA member, promised to veto any gun control. Congress is still dominated by pro-gunners; there will be attempts, supported by the White House, to repeal or emasculate the already-weak 1968 law.

Among other horrors, the bill to revoke sections of the 1968 law -- McClure/Volkner Bill -- would permit convicted felons to

possess and deal in firearms, and prohibit the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms from conducting inspections to determine whether licensed firearms dealers are complying with the law.

Can you believe it? Can you believe these pistol-packing champions of your neighbor's right to blow your head off? Can you believe this is happening despite all the statistics and evidence -- and despite the will of a comfortable majority of the American people? The greed and arrogance of the NRA and its fellow crazies knows no limits.

For a while, they were shooting public servants. Now they're shooting the poets. John Lennon. Doctor-writer Michael Halberstam. Sarai Ribicoff. Henry Dawson, Jr., who didn't have time to become poet, politician or anything else. Edna St. Vincent Millay put it well in her "Dirge Without Music":

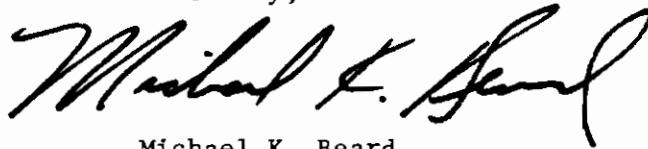
"Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave,
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned."

Well, maybe not too quietly and gently in this case. But we do not approve either, and we're not resigned. I hope you feel the same way, and that you'll support this all-out effort to civilize America. Your life, quite literally, may depend on it.

Let me suggest a contribution of \$25, but please don't feel restricted to that. Give as much as you can. I've enclosed a postage-paid reply envelope for your convenience.

I hope we can count on you.

Sincerely,



Michael K. Beard
Director

MKB:jm

P.S. Throughout the country this year, NCBH will air a most compelling program, "The National Handgun Test." This is an important step toward greater national media coverage of your side of the handgun issue, try to watch it.



DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

1325 Jefferson Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38104
(901) 725-6761

May 19, 1981

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Friend:

As I reflected last week on the senseless shooting of our Holy Father, I received word of an event that compounded the anguish for me.

Following the shooting of Pope John Paul II, one of our priests, The Rev. John J. Jackson, spoke in a radio interview of love and peace: "We thank God that maybe through the outrage that many people feel and are expressing, we will come again to see how important it is to live in peace, to put down our guns, to put away our hatred and to really try and do what the Gospel asks us to do -- to love one another."

Sadly, he was not at all prophetic. One day later, this good and gentle man of God was found shot to death by a handgun in the rectory of St. Mary's Church in Jackson, Tennessee, evidently the victim of a robbery.

The deranged, demented and disturbed are everywhere among us, apparently eager to add their names to the infamous, eons-old history of human aggression. None of us is safe. Not me, not you, not the gentlest, most peaceable human on Earth. Because there is nothing rational about this.

For that matter, there is nothing rational about the underlying premise that violence is an acceptable method for resolving conflicts and handguns an acceptable tool -- a premise that society condones and even encourages.

And yet we see people of good will, people in positions of responsibility and trust, not only endorse this insanity but fight for the right to indulge it.

I hope you'll support this urgent effort. Someone's life will surely depend on it. Perhaps yours.

Sincerely,

Carroll T. Dozier, D.D.
Bishop of Memphis

Even if you can't contribute today, please be sure to give us your answers to the survey questions on the back of this card.

National Coalition to Ban Handguns

100 Maryland Avenue, N.E. Washington, D.C. 20002

I'm convinced — America can't live with handguns. Enclosed is my check, payable to NCBH, to help you carry on your work in behalf of handgun control.

\$25 \$15 \$50 \$100 \$500 \$1,000 Other \$

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NEXT?

