



Dawson Teachers' Union

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**This Owl Hoots reviews the efforts of the Dawson Committee for Gun Control over the past year, highlights key issues and developments and invites all faculty to participate in a federation-wide letter-writing campaign this September.**

### ***The Dawson Committee for Gun Control***

This week we will be facing the first anniversary of the shooting that took place at Dawson on September 13, 2006. Last year this event spurred some of us in the Dawson community to become involved in the Dawson Committee for Gun Control. Teachers, support staff, professionals, students, as well as those injured and the family of Anastasia De Sousa launched a campaign to sensitize government representatives to the importance of strengthening gun control.

### ***Lobbying efforts with the federal government***

As we learned more about the issue of gun control in Canada, we understood that last fall the federal government sought to weaken the gun control legislation already in place. Weakening gun control was not what most Canadians wanted, particularly after September 13. As far as we understood it, it appeared that the government's motivation for this change was in response to the active and passionate gun lobby.

With the support of the Board of Governors and all the unions of the college, the Dawson Committee for Gun Control set out to create its own lobby for responsible and strong management of gun control. We met with leaders of all federal opposition parties, and the federal Minister of Public Safety. We went to Ottawa for a lobbying day and a press conference with leaders of the opposition. Members of the committee engaged in numerous media interviews and events in order to highlight the relevance of the issues. A letter campaign was launched in which many of you participated by finding out the facts about gun control and sending individual letters to elected representatives and newspapers.

We believe we stayed the plans of the Conservative government to introduce new legislation which would undo many of the provisions of progressive gun control legislation passed in 1995.

Unfortunately, the government in power simply changed its strategy and continued an amnesty for those who defy the law and fail to renew their licenses or do not register their weapons. This decision was not even subject to a vote in Parliament where it could have been defeated. In effect, funds for gun control from licensing and registration have dried up necessitating continued cutbacks to the service. This renders comprehensive and effective gun control in Canada a sham.

### ***Success: Effective response from the Quebec government***

Last June, the government of Jean Charest, through the Ministries of Justice and of Public Security, led by Jacques Dupuis, announced its intention to propose legislation to strengthen the regulations addressing gun control that are within Quebec's jurisdiction.

The *Projet de Loi 9*, which the premier named Anastasia's Law, targets owners of restricted weapons, including handguns and some semi-automatic firearms. Features of the law allow for more screening and control of restricted and some semi-automatic weapons, and more screening and control of gun licensing.

For example, the proposed law requires any owner of a restricted weapon to be an active member of a gun club, and the law places new responsibilities on gun club owners to report any suspicious, aggressive or inappropriate behaviour to authorities who can verify the gun owner's capacity to be licensed and revoke it if necessary. Any owners of restricted firearms who do not frequent gun clubs will be required to relinquish their guns. Membership in a club is believed to reinforce responsible gun ownership and allows for some public monitoring of firearms and gun owners, given the clubs' new responsibilities.

The law would create the legal obligation of school personnel and authorities to report any behaviour by individuals that communicates risk of gun violence. Explicit clarification of the responsibility of professionals, particularly those in health and social services, to signal to appropriate police authorities any behaviours indicating risk for gun violence is also stated in the law.

Complementary policy provisions commit public funding to strengthening the role of the Chief Firearms Officer, as well as to improved monitoring of illegal gun trafficking in Quebec. The Quebec government also sent a formal letter to the federal Minister of Public Security, Stockwell Day, to demand that the federal government maintain the integrity of the gun registry in full.

The Dawson Committee for Gun Control is extremely pleased with the Quebec government's prioritization of public safety and the serious attention they have devoted to the problem of gun control. It is encouraging to see elected representatives respond to public concerns promptly and directly.

### ***More lobbying needed***

The *Projet de Loi 9* has yet to be passed in the National Assembly. We cannot underestimate the tenacity of the gun lobby, and we cannot predict what objections to gun control they may erect in the debate that may ensue. Those of us who care about making our environment as safe from gun violence as possible must continue to make our voices heard by our elected representatives. They need to support the *Projet de Loi 9*.

All of us, including the Quebec government, need to continue to pressure the federal government:

- to maintain registration of all firearms
- to cancel the amnesty to gun owners who flout the law regarding registration and renewal of licensing

### ***The problem of unrestricted firearms:***

There are 1.6 million unrestricted firearms in Quebec and they account for most of the gun deaths taking place in this province. Only about 3% of firearms in Quebec are restricted; an additional 3% are prohibited. However, 94% of all firearms in Quebec are not addressed by the legal controls proposed in this Quebec legislation.

All guns are dangerous, all guns can end lives. Let us not forget that the powerful gun used in the Polytechnique shooting, a rifle, remains an unrestricted semi-automatic weapon to this day, part of that 94% not covered by the proposed Quebec legislation. The *Projet de Loi 9*, though

commendable in many ways, does not address the need to control the presence of these weapons in our society.

These weapons are under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

We need to let the federal government know we still want registration of all weapons, including unrestricted firearms, as we want to prevent unstable or violent individuals from possession of any type of firearm.

### ***The problem of amnesty for registration and renewal of licensing***

The federal government has continued an amnesty for registration of firearms and renewal of licensing, including suspension or even reimbursement of nominal fees. One consequence is that Firearms Centres that administer the provisions of the Firearms Act have had their budget severely undermined. This makes it difficult for gun owners who want to be compliant with the law (ex. calling for information leads to 30 minutes on hold). We also need adequate resources to maintain the information contained in the registry, or the cost of establishing the registry would be wasted.

### ***A FAC letter campaign on the first anniversary of the Dawson shooting***

At the last *Assemblée federative*, our union federation voted to support Dawson College on the anniversary of the shooting through a letter campaign supporting the strengthening of gun control, including the maintenance of the complete gun registry and the rigorous screening for administration and renewal of gun licensing.

Given the announcement of the *Projet de Loi 9*, the Dawson Committee for Gun Control would recommend the inclusion in the letter campaign of the need for elected officials to support the proposed legislation in Quebec.

We invite you to participate in a renewed letter-writing campaign on the anniversary of the shooting. This allows us to commemorate and honor the individuals and families of those who were killed or injured on September 13, 2006, by trying to prevent further tragedies of gun violence in our schools and communities. For some of us, letting our voices be heard by those who make decisions can also make constructive use of our frustration and sadness surrounding the violence our college experienced that day

Please send an email to Mary Hlywa at [mhlywa@dawsoncollege.qc.ca](mailto:mhlywa@dawsoncollege.qc.ca) if you would like the information package with facts about gun control, sample letters and a list of up-to-date addresses for target politicians. You are also invited to come to the DTU office to meet with Mary for any information or

assistance in constructing your letter.