

An Audience with Wayne LaPierre

On Monday 17th June, the Kings College Library, London played host to Wayne LaPierre from the (US) NRA in an event organized by The Sportsman's Association. The event focussed on our experiences of firearms licensing, with a view to raise awareness of the real impact licensing can have on lawful firearms owners. It was my honour and privilege to be in attendance, and although attending in a personal capacity, I would like to share the experience through Firearms UK with our supporters.

Upon arrival at the library the guest list was checked, and I was granted entry, only making a short stroll before being greeted by a security team and a metal detector, being the figure head of such a large and important organization I was naive not to expect such scenes, though I was a little surprised by the discretion that was apparent. Once cleared I was guided past the hall, the location of the event, to await in a room labelled 'Audience'. The room gradually filled, and conversations could be heard on an array of topics including calibre choice, shooting locations and licensing issues. Everyone was very smartly turned out, and fit well within the grand splendour of such a magnificent building.

The time for refreshments and introductions was soon over and we were ushered upstairs to take our seats in the hall. There were enough seats for perhaps fifty people and I didn't notice any remaining unoccupied. The bright lights and the cameras soon set the tone for a very well organized and professional event, that I will not be quick to forget.

The well-known shooting enthusiast, commentator, and founder of Positive Shooting, Mike Yardley was the first to speak and covered the historical context of British firearms laws, from the right to bear arms in the English Bill of Rights (1688) to the present day. Taking each development in turn, Mike highlights the false belief that the 1920's Firearms Act was introduced as a means to combat crime, when in fact, it has been shown to have been introduced through fears of Communism.

He continues into 1996, describing the tragedy of Dunblane, which was the tipping point that lead to the "hand gun ban" by the Labour Government in 1997, as our Sandy Hook. A law, (1997 Firearms Amendment Act) that has had no impact on armed crime, yet has hurt many innocent citizens, through loss of jobs, business, hobbies and possessions spanning generations and is still being felt by sportsman and women in the UK today, who fuelled by persecution by the media and politicians may, as suggested during the event, struggle to get bank loans or be denied car insurance, solely because their line of work or interests involves firearms or the shooting sports.

In response Mr LaPierre would make a point he re-iterated throughout, that politicians lie and break their promises. They may very well assure you that any list of firearms owners may not be used in the confiscation of firearms, but as we've seen in the UK and elsewhere that is exactly what it comes down to. He also made the same distinction that UK shooters have been saying for years "Just because a criminal uses a firearm, that's no reason to take them away from law abiding citizens".

Next up was Mike Wells the general secretary for the Sportsman's Association. He tells the story of the founding of the Sportsman's Association during the fight against the "hand gun ban", and of approaching the (UK) NRA who at that time were "not interested", a view that is sadly all too common amongst shooting organizations within the UK, rather than uniting to protect all of our sports and associated rights, we are fragmented and have thus far suffered greatly because of it.

Mr Wells then went on to outline some of the major differences between the US and the UK with respect to firearms and the restrictions imposed upon lawful shooters by the licencing system. He highlighted that we no longer have a lawful authority to purchase and own firearms for the purpose of self-defence, and referenced examples of the authorities targeting him without founding to persecute him because of his status as a licenced firearms owner and his position as the head of the Sportsman's Association. He summed up saying "the police don't want private firearms ownership at all".

Mr LaPierre responded jokingly that perhaps "the elites" should surrender their arms and to "put up a gun free sign on Buckingham Palace". The room responded with soft laughter, he continued summarizing that "the elites" should surrender their arms, that is what they are trying to force upon the law abiding citizens.

The discussion between speakers and Mr LaPierre continued, covering as many angles of the issue as air time allowed. At this point a significant yet often unheard point was made by Mark Scoggins, Solicitor; "any law should be based on evidence, not public opinion, not what is trending on Twitter..." Sadly the opposite is true when it comes to gun control. The government and like-minded organizations are waiting in the wings to jump on any tragedy and use it to further their own agenda towards civilian disarmament; this is especially true with the 1997 Firearms Amendment Act. Mr LaPierre responded with "You can't legislate morality... the problem is self-inflicted, we go after the good guys". He's right of course, laws only affect the law abiding, and criminals have both the capacity and the will to ignore any laws.

Next Mr LaPierre asked a very important question, and those involved in the shooting sports know the answer; "are there people who should have stepped up, but who sat down?" Within the UK, the answer in my opinion is a resounding yes, and that needs to change. The fear over losing yet more of our rights, more of our freedom, more of our possessions... more of our jobs and business was felt throughout this entire event and was brought into the discussion from a majority of the speakers. To address these fears and concerns we need to unite and support each other in the defence of the shooting sports and firearms ownership, only whilst united can we make a significant challenge to the constant attacks against the lawful firearms owners, sportsmen and women within the UK and beyond.

The remaining speakers reinforced the impact of licensing on law abiding citizens. Lucy King, 33 and an ex-lawyer added that she has had a good experience with her local police so far but has "great fears for the future". Mike Shepherd an honest firearms dealer and collector spoke of his experiences with the police, during his arrest and subsequent imprisonment in the high security prison; Belmarsh. He had his historic gun collection seized by police and was vilified by the press only to be acquitted and is now seeking compensation. Lawful firearms owners and sports

shooters have long been demonized in the UK, both by the political class and the media, which has built up a total lack of understanding and even fear of law abiding firearms owners by members of the public, an example of this was given by a lady speaker who was hesitant to pick up her children from school in hunting attire, having just been shooting.

The trend of overzealous police, imposing and battering for an increased amount of restrictions without lawful reason or authority was further stressed by Steve Jones, town and district councillor and director of London Shooting Club; who commented on how the police tried to persuade him to surrender certain calibres from his firearms licence, without reason or precedent other than they just wanted him to; to meet their own opinions of what was right. It was suggested that the process [of acquiring a license] is designed to prevent people from going through the process, rather than to focus on filtering out those who are not suitable to own firearms. Victoria Knowles, 29 added to the discussion “I am a women working within the shooting industry, we are bound by so many regulations now, and it only seems to get worse. We can't bear arms for self-defence, if we have an intruder in our homes we can't protect ourselves and risk going to prison if we do. It's a crazy situation where criminals seems to have more rights than the law abiding and I really fear for the future.” Mr LaPierre agreed, addressing the audience, “does it sometimes seem that, it's almost like the criminals have more rights?” The room responded with a clear “Yes”.

Young shots were also represented by Nathan Little, 21, who at the age of 18 became one of the youngest people in the country to setup and manage his own shoot. He spoke on his growing concerns about the vague licencing laws in the UK and the threat that this possess to legitimate sportsmen and women. He also noted, as did many speaker his fear for the future, and his abhorrence of the way shooting sport and gun crime have been confused in the media, and a general media bias against shooting.

Time was very short at this point, and unfortunately not everyone had time to speak, the speakers contributions were drawn to a close by the following quote “It's not about the right to keep and bear arms, it's about the right to have rights”.

It was both worrying and empowering listening to all of the speakers and being in an audience so supportive of the right to civilian firearms ownership and the shooting sports. Worrying because the majority shared my own fears of what's to come in the future of the UK, what more threats will we face, and will our jobs and past times survive to pass on to future generations. Yet, it was also very empowering, everyone who spoke was clearly very passionate about their sport and their rights, and that passion was a breath of fresh air from the apathy and lack of interest I am normally exposed to. It is my hope, through Firearms UK I can help unite the various factions within the shooting sports of the UK and tap into this passion to not just prepare for the next threat but to start winning back lost ground.

Finally I would like to thank all of the organizers, everyone who was in attendance, and of course Mr LaPierre himself.

Thank you.

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Firearms UK is an online campaign aiming to protect gun ownership for law abiding citizens in the UK and to encourage unity and positive action within the shooting community.