

Gun violence, no easy solutions

EDITORIAL

EVEN BEFORE SUNDAY'S mass shooting on Toronto's Danforth Avenue, this has been a year of unprecedented violence in the city, with firearms a factor in most of the deaths and injuries.

The common thread is obviously gun ownership in a city whose police once weren't routinely armed. Today, there's clearly no doubt that guns have found their way into the wrong hands, including those of gang members who have been responsible for most of the 200-plus shootings and the 28 fatal ones before Sunday's lethal rampage.

Appropriately, all three levels of government seem to be committed to doing something about it, although talks Monday among Premier Doug Ford, Toronto Mayor John Tory, Police Chief Mark Saunders and former chief Bill Blair didn't provide anything resembling a road map.

Mr. Blair, who only a few days earlier became Canada's first Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, may find himself having to take a leadership role for the federal Liberals in trying to reduce both gun imports and ownership by gang members. But with a federal election coming next year, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau may not want to take actions that would cost him a lot of votes in Western Canada, where gun ownership is often seen as a sacred right.

Perhaps the most insightful comment following Sunday's shooting came from Mayor Tory.

'I've said for some time that the city has a gun problem, in that guns are far too readily available to far too many people,' he said Monday. 'You've heard me ask the question of why anybody would need to buy 10 or 20 guns, which they can lawfully do under the present laws. And that leads to another question we need to discuss: Why does anyone in this city need to have a gun at all?'

The Mayor acknowledged that reducing the number of legal guns won't prevent such tragedies. 'But even if we can prevent one of these incidents then, in my view, it is a discussion worth having and having very soon.'

Premier Ford seemed to be taking a position more in line with that of the federal Conservatives, who got rid of the long gun registry and made it easier for anyone to purchase firearms, when he suggested that the answer lies in harsher sentences for those convicted of firearms offences.

The problem we have with that option is not just a lack of evidence that it has worked in the United States but the simple fact that gun-toting criminals of every type don't see themselves getting caught. Locking up the few who do get caught and throwing away the key will simply mean added costs for the poor taxpayer.

As for both Sunday's shooting and last April's van attack, both obviously require inquiry into the mental condition of the two killers and the means employed to get the weapons they used.

In both cases, the inquiries should also look into the role played by the Internet. We do know that the van driver, 25-year-old Alek Minassian, had no prior criminal history but before the rampage apparently made a Facebook entry identifying himself as an 'incel,' (an involuntary celibate) and praising Elliot Rodger, a similarly inclined mass murderer behind the 2014 Isla Vista killings in California.

Was it purely a coincidence that the two killed Sunday night were female, and that while the family of the gunman, identified Monday as Faisal Hussain, 29, described him as having been seriously mentally ill, with lifelong psychoses and depression, there was also no apparent prior history of criminality?

Clearly, there's no way anyone can guarantee there will be no repetition of either type of attack, and we should be thankful that more

lives weren't lost, as would have been the case if Sunday's shooter had been armed with an AK-47 and fired from the relative safety of a rooftop.