

Political Assassins Are Not

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THERE WILL be more assassinations, and attempted assassinations, of American political leaders in the next several years. Studies of the patterns of violence indicate that once an outbreak occurs, it tends to repeat itself at other places and times at an accelerating pace until the wave runs its course.

This holds for slum riots, which have been increasing rapidly ever since Watts, and for student rebellions, whose rate has been escalating since Berkeley. It also holds for political assassinations, beginning with the murder of John F. Kennedy in 1963.

While attention has been focused on the assassinations of two of the greatest white and black Americans of this generation, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., other political leaders of very different persuasions and stature have also been killed, reinforcing the pattern. These include Malcolm X and George Lincoln Rockwell of the American Nazi Party.

The Real Trigger

UNFORTUNATELY, there is no way known to social science to stop this wave. There has been much talk of the sick society, of the need to

reduce violence in general, to overcome hate, to unite the country. While all these goals are, of course, worthy, the tragic truth must be faced: political assassinations are linked only indirectly to the general state of the Nation.

They are usually done by mentally unstable individuals who, while they are egged on by a national climate that fosters hate and violence, are more directly triggered by earlier killings that set the pattern. (As they mull over them, they rehearse their own acts.)

It must also be noted that the many causes of aggression and tensions in our lives cannot be readily eliminated. Such measures as full justice for black Americans, peace in Vietnam, a reconciliation between youth and the older generation will probably be realized only gradually.

The Ubiquitous Gun

THERE IS ONE thing that could be done much more rapidly: congressional approval of comprehensive gun-control legislation. Most experts on the subject agree that while political assassinations could not be completely eliminated, their number could be greatly reduced if this country had firearms restrictions similar to those in Britain, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Israel and most other democracies.

First of all, most assassins obtain their weapons only shortly before they use them, when they are already in an agitated state of mind. (Eighty-one per cent of all killings may be classed as impulsive and not premeditated). One reason why there are almost no political killings and far fewer homicides in general in the other democracies (0.11 per 100,000 in Sweden and 0.05 in Britain as compared to 2.7 in the United States) is that they require a "cooling off" period if a gun can be bought at all. That is, a person has to get a permit before he can buy a gun, explain why he needs it and, if approved, wait a few days before he obtains it.

Alternative 'Inefficient'

IT IS TRUE, of course, that even a sharp reduction in the number of firearms in the United States would not stop all assassinations; Molotov cocktails and knives would still be available. But such weapons are much more difficult to wield, rarely cause multiple fatalities, often wound rather than kill and can be warded off by one or two bodyguards.

So effective gun curbs are needed, yet none of the more than 60 bills introduced since John F. Kennedy's assassination has reached the floor. (The gun control clause in the bill finally

Finished

passed last week simply prohibits mail order sales, of hand guns and their over-the-counter sale to minors, insane persons and convicted felons.)

A Mighty Minority

A HARRIS SURVEY in October found that 71 per cent of Americans wanted tight Federal control of firearms sales. The White House and much of the press support this position. It is opposed, however, by one of the most powerful lobbies in American history, spearheaded by the National Rifle Association and backed by many gun collectors, sportsmen and super-patriots.

The supporters of gun legislation have so far moved "incrementally," that is, suggesting a few small steps at a time, apparently in the hope of not provoking the gun lobby. What is needed, however, is a comprehensive gun permit measure aimed at reducing sharply the number of firearms in private hands.

It may be said that it is politically naive to hope for such a result, but only when the level of arms held privately in the United States reaches a level similar to that of the other democracies will our homicide rate drop to theirs and political assassinations be as rare here as they are in Western Europe.



American roulette.