

Gun Curbs Abroad Are Found Strict

By ALAN KREBS

Proponents of stricted gun-control legislation have asserted that of all the civilized nations of the world, only the United States gives its citizens the "right to bear arms."

A survey by The New York Times shows that in Britain, France, Belgium, the Soviet Union, Italy and West Germany ownership of firearms is considered a privilege, not a right, and the privilege is subject to strict legislation.

This fact was noted by President Johnson last week when, in the aftermath of the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, he called again for strict controls on private ownership of guns.

"Each year in this country, guns are involved in more than 6,500 murders," he said. "This compares with 30 in England, 99 in Canada, 68 in West Germany and 37 in Japan." In addition, guns in private hands, estimated to number 50 million to 200 million, were responsible for 10,000 suicides and 2,600 accidental deaths last year.

The President noted bitterly that in America, firearms—handguns, rifles, and shotguns—are as easy to obtain as "baskets of fruit or cartons of cigarettes."

Nobody in Britain may have a firearm by night, according to a spokesman for the Home Office, and anyone who wants one even for hunting must go through a complicated procedure of applying for a certificate before he may even purchase one.

British Require Certificate

Britain's Firearms Act of 1937 requires that a person who wants to buy a gun must obtain a certificate from the police chief in the area in which he lives. The police chief "must satisfy himself that applicant is not by reason of a criminal record prohibited from possessing a firearm and is not in any other way likely to endanger the public safety or peace."

A dealer, after seeing the applicant's certificate, must register all transactions involving guns and ammunition, giving the serial number of the weapon, and pass on the information to the local police station. Failure to do so subjects the gun dealer to six months imprisonment.

The purchase of guns by mail order, which would be severely curbed in proposed legislation in the United States, is permitted in Britain, but with the

same restrictions that apply to personal purchases. It is illegal to pawn firearms in Britain. In this country, most states allow the pawning of weapons with little or no controls.

Proposed gun control laws considered by Congress in the last three years would adopt some of the British provisions, such as a requirement that guns sold be registered with the Treasury Department. Opponents of the legislation, led by the National Rifle Association, an organization of gun-fanciers and sportsmen, have maintained that this would result in troublesome red tape.

Laws Strict in France

French gun laws are strict and unambiguous. They stipulate that arms purchasers must be over 21. Mail order sales are banned and all gun sales must be registered. To obtain a permit to buy a gun, the applicant must undergo a background investigation that is long and thorough. It can take as long as six weeks.

In France only the police and licensed guards are permitted to carry loaded firearms. Private persons with properly registered revolvers cannot carry them on their persons under any circumstances.

A Frenchman on his way to a firing range or a pheasant hunt, if he is carrying a gun, cannot even stop for a glass of wine along the way. He must go direct, and his gun must be carried in a box or carrying case, in the trunk and not the glove compartment of his car. Both the clip and firing bolt of the gun must be removed.

Gun-control laws in Italy are similar to those in France. As in France, the applicant must be at least 21 years old, and a certificate of police clearance and registration of the weapon are required.

Shooting Crimes Rare

In Spain, the procedures make it even more difficult to buy a gun. An applicant must tell the director general of security why he wants one, and the director general may deny the request without giving a reason.

After the Spaniard gets a purchase permit and buys his gun, he must register it with the nearest post of the Civil Guard, the *gentarmerie* of Spain, which issues him a "guia," or guide, which must be carried with the license when the weapon is used. Only cartridges for the weapon may be bought at one time, and all purchases of ammunition are entered in the guia.

Crimes in which shooting is involved are said to be rare in Spain.

The Soviet Union's crime rate is unrelated to gun ownership. Private ownership of rifles and revolvers is punishable by as much as two years imprisonment, and press reports indicate that knives are the weapons most often used in homicides.

In most of the Soviet Union, hunters may buy shotguns, but in the far north and Siberia, rifles may be bought with a special permit. They must be registered with the police.

In West Germany, there has been only one case of attempted political murder since World War II. That was the attempt on the life of Rudi Dutschke, the extremist student leader, eight weeks ago.

"Well-reputed and trustworthy citizens" may buy handguns in West Germany, but only if they cite plausible reasons such as a "dangerous" profession or isolated, "dangerous" living quarters, according to the German Firearms Law.

For pistols, the law also demands a purchase permit and another permit just to carry the weapons outside one's own premises. Rifles may be bought by permit, with the stipulation that the permit be renewed every three years. Purchase permits are retained by the gun dealer, whose records are regularly inspected by the police.

Belgium's laws are strict, but several murders have been carried out with a .22 caliber rifle that is made in Belgium by Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre. This weapon is exempted from the otherwise tough restrictions on firearms possession, and this is generally attributed to the influence of the manufacturer, the huge Societe Generale group of enterprises. This holding company controls about a third of Belgian industrial activity.

For all pistols and rifles other than the .22, a buyer must obtain a permit signed by the Belgian equivalent of a district attorney, after local police have conducted a thorough investigation of the applicant, which takes one or two months. No weapons are sold through mail order houses.

In Belgium, which has a population of 9.3 million, there were only 71 murders in 1965. The figure also includes murders committed with weapons other than firearms.