

No Firearms Blackmail

The outcry against the senseless and indiscriminate sale of firearms is finally being heard in Congress. For the first time, there seems a real prospect for passage of a strong gun-control bill.

But let no letter-writers or other aroused citizens delude themselves with the thought that the fight is won. Already—after the Kennedy assassination as after the King assassination, when all efforts were voted down—Congressional forces are girding against a truly effective law.

A kind of blackmail effort for a weaker gun-control measure was tried yesterday by Senator Dirksen and Representative Ford, the Republican leaders who have regularly opposed strong gun curbs. In a joint news conference, they tried to blunt the new wave of popular pressure by blaming the President for not putting his signature at once on the omnibus crime-control bill.

That bill would not begin to do the job. Its title on firearms includes only handguns; it excludes rifles and shotguns. Furthermore, unlike several bills newly introduced, it contains no provision for licensing new guns and registering guns already owned.

If the President signed the omnibus crime-control bill, the heat would be off for passage of a more adequate gun bill at this session. Congress would go

home. But if the President vetoes the bill—which, as we have pointed out again and again, also contains bad provisions on wiretapping, bugging and many other elements of police procedure—Congress would be forced to consider a strong gun-control measure. That is what it will do if the people continue to make their voice heard.