

LINDSAY APPEALS FOR GUN CONTROL

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Bids Mitchell Lend Support
to New Federal Legislation
Curbing Hand Weapons
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By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

Mayor Lindsay, citing the murders of nine New York City policemen this year, appealed formally yesterday to Attorney General John N. Mitchell, to support new Federal legislation to halt the traffic in handguns.

In a letter to the nation's top law enforcement official, the Mayor said the problem, "has increasingly become a nationwide phenomenon," with more than 560 policemen slain in the country over the last decade, three-quarters of them by handguns.

"Only firm Federal action can halt this flourishing commerce in death and violence," Mr. Lindsay asserted, reiterating previous appeals.

"Continued Federal inaction jeopardizes the lives of police and citizens across the nation. That is why I ask your help. Action now is essential."

Guns on Rise Here

The Mayor's plea, which was made public by City Hall before the Attorney General's office received the message in Washington, comes amid an outbreak of particularly shocking murders in the city and amid indications that, because of major loopholes in the Federal Gun Control Act of 1968, the number of firearms in the city continues to rise.

Tuesday, as Mr. Lindsay informed the Attorney General, he and other city officials at

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tended the funeral of Patrolman Patrick Nugent, who was shot and killed Friday night when he surprised three men holding up a Queens luncheonette.

Patrolman Nugent was the ninth city policeman killed this year and the eighth to be slain by an illegal handgun.

Last Thursday, two elderly men were shot to death in hold-ups in Queens and Brooklyn. Friday, a 60-year-old concentration camp survivor and candy store owner was shot dead and his wife wounded by two young men with guns.

Sunday, a driver was shot to death in midtown when he tried to speed away in his car from a gunman who tried to rob him. Tuesday, the assistant manager of a Bohack supermarket in Brooklyn was shot and killed by a robber because he fumbled too much in opening the safe.

While these murders are not necessarily indicative of any sudden increase in violent crimes in the city since they may average out in the long run, they do appear to be symptomatic of what law enforcement officials believe is a continuous and dangerous increase in the number of firearms in the city.

Weapon Count Uncertain

There are now about 350,000 legally registered shotguns and rifles and more than 25,000 legally owned pistols in the city—not counting police weapons. The number of illegal weapons is all but impossible to estimate.

"There are probably millions of guns—literally—floating around illegally," said Lieut. Charles Rorke, who commands the ballistics laboratory in the Police Academy and examines many of the more than 9,000 illegal firearms seized annually.

Policemen on the street believe that there are more illegal guns around these days than ever before.

"Everybody's got a piece," said one plainclothes man recently, exaggerating to make his point. On one block he passed, Prince Street off the Bowery, he said there were so many guns in the hands of residents there that he would be afraid to enter the street.

It is not only a local phenomenon: The United States as a whole probably has one of the most heavily armed populations on earth, with about 24 million handguns, 35 million rifles and 31 million shotguns in private hands. The number is growing by several million a year.

Here in the city, more than 100,000 New Yorkers have received permits to own rifles and shotguns since the city's registration law went into effect in February, 1968. The average permit-holder owns 2.7 long guns.

An applicant must assert only

that he is over 18 years of age and has no criminal record or history of mental disease. He need give no reason for wanting the gun.

To obtain a pistol permit here, on the other hand, an applicant must have a good record as well as a vital reason for needing a handgun—that he handles large amounts of money or serves as a guard, for example. Only 23,000 New Yorkers have such permits now.

However, according to local and Federal law enforcement agents, the firearms problem is not with these legally registered weapons—there has not been a single intentional slaying with a duly registered long gun, and only a small number with registered pistols, officials said—but with the non-registered handguns.

The main problem, the agents say, is the cheap and ubiquitous "Saturday night special," a pistol so named, it is thought, because of its use in weekend domestic disputes as well as crimes.

Often made of pot metal—not tempered steel—and notoriously inaccurate, such guns can cost as little as \$1 to

manufacture. They sell illegally on the street for as low as \$5, although they usually go for \$10 or \$15. By contrast, a well-made pistol will cost upwards of \$50 from a dealer.

Such cheap guns are a major factor in the rise in firearms murders from 219 in the first half of 1970 to 245 the first six months of this year. The number of guns used in assaults has also risen—from 7,941 in the first half of last year to 11,477 in the same period this year, keeping pace with the over-all increase in assaults.

About 20 per cent of the illegal firearms seized are of this type, police officials said.

According to Federal law enforcement officials, two of the three larger manufacturers of these handguns are in the New York area. Criterion Die Machine Company of 141 Wooster Street is said to be producing 50,000 pieces annually for itself and 50,000 for a Florida concern, Valor Import Corp. of Hialeah.

Imperial Metal Products, Inc., of Islip, L. I., produces about 500,000 of the pistols annually, the sources said. The third concern, Firearms Import Export of Miami, was also reported to be producing close to half a million pistols a year.

None of the officials of the companies consented to interviews.

Since the Federal Gun Control Act of 1968 in effect barred

the import of all but sport guns, these manufacturers, the Federal officials said, usually import cheap, imprecise metal parts in hundredweights, contending that they do not constitute weapons. The parts are then refined and assembled, here.

Because the market for pistols is so stringently limited in the city by the permit requirement, the local concerns ship their guns to licensed dealers in other states.

Guns Find Way Back

From there they find their way back, often illegally. Although the 1968 Federal law bars persons from one state from buying guns in another—only registered dealers can transact across state lines—it is easy enough for unscrupulous buyers to give false names and addresses.

Because state regulations on who can and cannot buy guns vary considerably, advocates of stricter firearms controls contend that a Federal law establishing one nationwide standard is necessary.

Bills introduced in Congress by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts Democrat; Representative Emanuel Celler, Brooklyn Democrat and Representative John M. Murphy, Staten Island Democrat, among others, would outlaw handguns for all but sportsmen and special permit-holders.