

STRICTER GUN LAW TERMED UNLIKELY

Mansfield Doubts Congress
Will Heed Johnson Plea

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WASHINGTON, June 7—Preliminary soundings of Congressional leaders indicated today that, despite intense lobbying by the White House, Congress was not prepared to heed President Johnson's urgent plea yesterday for legislation extending gun controls to include a ban on mail order sales of rifles and shotguns.

The crime control bill sent yesterday to the White House bans only mail order sales of hand guns—a prohibition inserted into the bill by the Senate and accepted by the House.

In pushing for additional controls, the Administration is seeking to capitalize on the emotional reaction to the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and what it regards as rising public sentiment for stricter controls over gun sales.

If it moves quickly enough, the White House believes, it can generate enough political pressure to push a stronger bill through a reluctant Senate.

Mansfield Doubtful

But the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Montana, expressed doubt in an interview that the Senate, which has already rejected the Administration proposal, would reverse itself.

Senator Mansfield is a key figure in the Administration maneuvering being directed personally by the President. The Administration's only hope of obtaining its bill is to swing Mr. Mansfield and some other Western liberals and moderates around to its ideas.

But the Senator made clear that he remained opposed to controls over interstate sales of rifles and shotguns. The Senate, he said, "made a good start" in enacting controls over hand guns, and what is needed now, he continued, is "more control at state and local levels."

He expressed some resentment at the President's apparent implication that opponents of stronger gun control legislation were responding to lobbying of the National Rifle Association and other gun groups. The President, in a statement yesterday, said that "the voices of the few must no longer prevail over the interests of the many."

Senator Mansfield emphasized that "I have had no contacts with the National Rifle Association, and I don't even know who its officers are."

Rural Views Reflected

In Congressional circles there is a belief that the White House and others tend to exaggerate the influence of the "gun lobby." The National Rifle Association, it is acknowledged, is well organized and has its spokesmen in Congress. But the Western and Southern Senators, who form the coalition against gun control legislation, also are reflecting views of their rural constituencies, it is pointed out.

Politically, the critical time for passing the Administration's gun control measure was in mid-May, when the Senate was debating the gun control section of the crime bill. But at that point, according to Congressional sources, the Administration was not lifting an effective hand to defend its proposal, which was defeated 53 to 29.

Rather, the White House and the Justice Department were concentrating their lobbying on defeating a Republican proposal to allocate the bill's Federal assistance to police forces through bloc grants to states. Eventually the Administration lost on the bloc grant issue, and in the process it failed to strengthen the gun control provision or to bar controversial sections in the bill overturning a Supreme Court decision and authorizing large-scale wiretapping.

The Administration's ineffectiveness then, in the opinion of many Congressional liberals, was typical of the political ineptness that followed the crime bill through Congress. In retrospect, it appears to many legislators that the bill, ostensibly designed to deal with disorder and violence in the streets, is the product of a disorderly legislative process, on the part of both the Administration and Congress.

As the House was preparing

to rush through the Senate bill yesterday, William M. Colmer, Democrat of Mississippi, chairman of the Rules Committee, protested that the House was committing a "grievous error of legislating under conditions of expediency." He expressed doubt that "1 per cent of the members of the House have read the Senate bill and know what is involved in it."

This asserted ignorance of the bill apparently extended even to members who were serving as floor managers for it. When James G. O'Hara, Democrat of Michigan, for example, asked whether the Senate measure authorized money for riot control and prevention, the floor managers shrugged their shoulders in silence.

The legislative problems started in the Senate Judiciary Committee, which proceeded to load down the Administration's so-called "safe streets" bill, passed last year by the House, with various controversial sections, including wiretapping, repeal of Supreme

Court decisions and gun controls.

After voting on the gun control section in a hectic meeting, the committee, composed of 16 lawyers, spent two weeks of negotiations through the staff to decide what exactly it had voted to do.

On the floor, the Senate, in the final hours of a month-long debate, accepted by voice vote an admittedly hastily drawn amendment by Senator Russell B. Long, Democrat of Louisiana, making it a crime for any veteran who was "other than honorably discharged" from military service to possess a firearm.

Johnson Expected to Sign

When it was pointed out in the brief debate on the amendment that some veterans had been discharged under honorable conditions but without an honorable discharge, Senator Long replied that this detail could easily be "ironed out" in a Senate-House conference.