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Rifle Group Leads Charmed D.C. Life

WASHINGTON—The American public doesn't know it, but it is directly supporting one of the most potent lobbying groups on Capitol Hill—the National Rifle Association.

Shortly after President Kennedy's assassination, legislation was introduced in Congress putting relatively mild curbs on trade in firearms and requiring them to be registered. The Senate bill introduced by Tom Dodd, D-Conn., was approved by the Firearms Manufacturers of Connecticut and was chiefly aimed at the mail-order business in foreign arms.

Nevertheless, nearly four years after Kennedy's death, this relatively mild legislation has not passed. Reason: The National Rifle Association. Congressmen say that they have been flooded with letters, phone calls and personal visits from this persuasive and potent lobby. They have bowed to its pressure despite the following facts which the public doesn't know:

1. The Rifle Association is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization which, unlike other tax-exempt institutions, is permitted to lobby. If other tax-exempt organizations lobby, their tax-exempt status is removed. But the NRA has special exemption.

2. The Rifle Association receives a subsidy from the Defense Department totaling \$2,717,300 a year. It's supposed to use this money to train American citizens in target practice, not indirectly to lobby before Congress.

3. Indirectly this subsidy may contribute to big city rioting this summer. Sen Ted Kennedy, D.-Mass., has called the attention of the Defense Department to the fact that the "Revolutionary Action Movement" in New York, which had formed the Jamaica Rifle and Pistol Club as a cover for the possession of illegal weapons, had plotted the assassination of national civil rights leaders.



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"This club," charged Sen. Kennedy, "apparently was affiliated with and received a certificate of endorsement from the National Rifle Association, and thus under present regulations was entitled to participate in the civilian marksmanship program of the Defense Department."

4. The National Rifle Association is using Camp Perry, Ohio, for its annual target practice, at the expense of the taxpayers, at the very same time the camp is needed as an overflow for boys, to prevent big city riots.

Rep. Charles Vanik, Cleveland Democrat, has requested the Defense Department to make Camp Perry available as a summer camp for 5,000 underprivileged boys. Vanik argued that the failure to provide summer jobs for the youth of Ohio cities made it imperative to use Camp Perry on the shores of Lake Erie.

Vanik had discovered the major participants in Cleveland rioting have been youngsters aged 8 to 15. Last month the million-dollar Gidding School in the Cleveland Hough area was burned down by youngsters armed with homemade firebombs. Rep. Vanik has raised \$100,000 locally to finance a summer camp program for 1,500 underprivileged children, but asked the Defense Department to open Camp Perry for 5,000 more.

The answer was: "No." The reason was: "The National Rifle Association's target competition."

The 8,000 participants in this rifle match travel to and from Camp Perry at public expense and are billeted on the camp grounds free of charge.

Pentagon officials admit that in this day of anti-ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, target practice is a long way from being as important as when the NRA subsidy was first voted in 1916 at the beginning of World War I.

Nevertheless, Camp Perry will resound to the crack of rifle shots this summer while the slums of Cleveland will resound to the crack of firebombs.

Note 1—In Washington Vice-President Humphrey has persuaded the National Guard to open up armories in various parts of the country as youth recreation centers this summer. Humphrey argued that the armories were used for National Guard only once a week and could be used as recreation centers six nights a week. The Vice-President also persuaded the Pentagon to send 16 service bands to play concerts in the poorer sections of Washington instead of exclusively in front of the Senate and the Lincoln Memorial.

Note 2—When this column asked the National Rifle Association for the amount of subsidy it received from the federal government, it hesitated. Money paid by taxpayers is supposed to be a matter of public record and not a secret. However, a reply has not yet been received from the NRA. The figure had to be obtained from the Defense Department.

Sen. Bobby Kennedy has told friends that when Lyndon Johnson was vice-president, he had advised President John F. Kennedy against going to Vienna for a summit meeting with Khrushchev. Today, says Bobby, Johnson not only has held a summit meeting with Premier Kosygin but is anxious to hold more. . . . President Johnson has asked the State Department to prepare a detailed report on all the Vietnam peace feelers received in Washington. He wants each feeler traced from its original source to its ultimate disposition, presumably to show the doves how he has explored for peace. . . . Pope Paul has sent a personal emissary to discuss with President Nasser the Catholic proposal for putting Jerusalem under international control. The Pope urged support for his idea that the Holy City should belong to the world, not to any one country.