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Guns Out of Control

What will it take to arouse Congress to pass a real gun-control law? A few hours after the crack of rifle and automatic weapons fire had resounded over Cleveland and police had fallen dead from sniper bullets, the House and the Senate Judiciary Committee in Washington were doing all they could to weaken the gun bills. If the purpose of legislation is to insure "law-and-order," how can legislators fail to back up the strongest possible controls that would help to end these deaths in the streets?

The Senate Judiciary Committee reported out what can only be branded a phony bill. Although there is a ban on mail-order sales of long guns and a limitation on over-the-counter sales to out-of-state residents, the crippling amendments to the bill in effect say, "We really didn't mean it."

Example 1: Any person who says he intends to go into business as a "dealer" can pay the Treasury Department \$10 for a license and exempt himself from the supposed law, then purchase lots of guns.

Example 2: Any person who says he is a "collector" can pay a \$10 license fee as such—and buy himself some old Thompson submachine guns, then put them in working order.

Example 3: Worst of all, although interstate mail-order sales of ammunition is forbidden, an exception is allowed for rifle and shotgun ammunition—which takes the bill two steps backward because only handgun ammunition is controlled.

The Senate Judiciary bill in this form now goes briefly to the Commerce Committee, where it is possible, some of the damaging amendments can be modified.

Meanwhile, the House yesterday approved its version of the same bill, with its own weakening provisions—enough of them to make National Rifle Association advocates say they "can live with it." To which one Congressman rightly added, "Tens of thousands of Americans can die with it."

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