

Last Round on Guns

Attorney General Ramsey Clark is right when he says: "Those who stridently call for law and order yet oppose or ignore gun control fail to face the issues, fail to protect the public. . . ." That is the nub of the matter as the Senate today returns to the unfinished business of passing a real firearms law.

Actually, only a fraction of such a law—but an essential fraction—now comes before the Senate. It is the Dodd bill to ban the interstate mail-order sale of rifles and shotguns. An equivalent measure has been approved by the House but with crippling amendments that would destroy its effectiveness.

These amendments—one of the prices paid to pry the bill out of Senator Thurmond's hands in committee—should be removed by the Senate. They include a new definition of a gun "dealer," which could qualify almost anyone to purchase firearms by paying the Treasury Department a \$10 fee. There is also a new definition of a "collector," fee also \$10. One of the most obvious means of control—the interstate sale of rifle and shotgun ammunition—is ignored. In a blatant concession to the rifle lobby, the bill would allow interstate shipment of firearms and ammunition to persons belonging to the National Rifle Association. Join the N.R.A. and be exempt from the law. If this and some of the other amendments are included in the Senate bill as well, it would be better to have no law rather than one that is meaningless.

Next week the Senate will consider amendments which definitely ought to be added. These cover licensing and registration of firearms. The plan of gun-control advocates is to get at least handguns and their owners registered and licensed if the long gun efforts fail.

"If we are serious in our professions of concern about crime, and especially violent crime," Attorney General Clark told the Senators this week, "then let us move directly against the favored weapon of the lawless—guns." To do less would be hypocrisy and obeisance to the lobbyists.