

The Fearless Spectator

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Guns and Democracy

IF YOU ARE under the impression that you live in a democracy, give a thought to the subject of guns.

The question before the nation, since the assassination of President Kennedy, has been whether we should license guns as we license that other lethal instrument, the automobile.

In the years since JFK's death, there have been many polls of the general public on this question. Each of these polls indicates that about four-fifths of the public desires effective registration of guns. But nothing happens.

Congress will not grant it. The President is against it, despite his commitment to what he calls law and order. The Attorney General maintains that control of guns is not a matter for his department, but for the Treasury.

Congress passed a phony gun control act in 1968, as full of holes as cheesecloth. Under this form of "control" 2.5 million handguns are being manufactured or imported each year. Gun sales have INCREASED since the gun control act went into effect.

In 1968, according to the Eisenhower Commission, firearms accounted for 61 of 64 of the police killed that year (handguns, 46). In 1969 police killed that year numbered 86, of which 83 were killed with firearms (handguns, 67).

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THAT MEN should object to licensing their guns



As they would, and must, their automobile, is surely a sign of deepseated unreason. What makes an automobile different from a gun, to these men?

There is increasing reason that the success of the gun lobby — called the National Rifle Association — in frustrating the wishes of the American people about gun control, is based on the fact that the whole thing is tied up with sex. To far too many men, the gun is a virility symbol. As such, it is both beneath and beyond reason.

W. H. Auden, in his recent marvelous commonplace book, "A Certain World," states this thesis in blunt and extreme terms. All males, he said, "without exception, whatever their age, suffer from penis rivalry." He is certain, he added, that "this trait has now become a threat to the future existence of the human race.

"... Today our phallic toys have become too dangerous to be tolerated. I see little hope for a peaceful world until men are excluded from the realm of foreign policy altogether and all decisions concerning international relations are reserved for women, preferably married ones."

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IF YOU HAVE ever been on the receiving end of letters from the gun nuts, as I have been, you will recognize that you are dealing frequently with a lunatic segment in otherwise sane and sound men. To ask these men to treat their guns in the same legal manner as they treat their automobiles, is to touch at some deep and disturbing part of their nature.

We had better recognize these disconcerting facts if ever we are to have majority rule on gun control. When the Great American Showdown comes, the one we are all waiting for with some kind of excited terror, the weapons in the showdown will be mostly unlicensed guns.

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FURTHER IRRATIONALITY. The one thing which the law and order boys have in common is that they are opposed to gun control. This despite the fact that uncontrolled guns favor the side of revolution and crime, above the police. Vide, the figures on police dead by firearms, a trend which is likely to get worse before it gets better. New York's Chief of Police, Patrick Murphy, favors strict gun control to protect his own men. The gun lobby excoriates him.

All of us who are not besotted by our Remingtons or our Mausers know that the pullulating trade in firearms is just about the greatest threat to law and order in our land. Give everybody a gun, and we will all be safe. If you believe this, you are aiding and abetting a civil war.