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## You'll Buy the Guns

Well, old buddy, you who fought so hard to outlaw hand guns, it looks like you'll wind up buying a Saturday night special after all.

The bill to prohibit these cheapie pistols, instruments of so many street stickups and kitchen killings, has a catch — and not a safety catch either.

All the Saturday night specials now on the shelves of gun shops or in the warehouses of wholesalers and manufacturers will be bought by the federal government, which means with your tax money.

The people in the gun trade are guaranteed they won't lose a dime.

Maybe that's why they haven't raised much of a howl against the bill.

Maybe that's also why factories continue to crank out these pot-shot weapons even while the bill moves toward passage.

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THE CONGRESSIONAL zeal to take care of the gun merchants goes along with the prevalent view in Washington that those who peddle dangerous merchandise should be the last to bear the consequences for their actions.

This regulatory ambivalence goes back at least to the cigarette scare. Although the government eventually banned cigarette commercials from the air and required a warning notice on each pack, farm supports for tobacco growers continued apace, and there is even a roundabout U.S. subsidy for cigarette advertising in other countries, as a way to unload the American tobacco surplus.

More recently, a bill slipped through the House to take the sting out of the cyclamate clampdown by compensating any firm that got stuck with a supply of the stuff or a product containing it.

That particular lump of legislative sweetening is now before the Senate, where a shrewd maneuver to pass it without a hearing almost succeeded.

The Food and Drug Administration is imbued with the same spirit of gentleness toward the merchant gentry.

No longer able to ignore evidence that the cattle-feed additive, DES, contained elements hazardous to humans, it placed a ban on the stuff — but the ban doesn't go into effect until next January.

That gives manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers, cattlemen — anyone with his money tied up in the DES pipeline — plenty of time to feed the stuff to cattle and eventually of course to you.

Better your health that suffers than their pocketbooks. At least that's how the Food and Drug Administration sees its duty.

Its behavior is reminiscent of the high water mark in courage it achieved last year when it drew up a list of toys that could kill a child and banned them from the market.

That brave step also had a delayed action fuse. It didn't go into effect until after Christmas.

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THE CASE for reimbursing manufacturers of Saturday night specials has an extra twist, since the major beneficiaries will be fast-buck operators who went into the business with the likelihood of a ban already casting a strong shadow.

Most of these cheapie guns used to be imported. American arms makers didn't bother. Then, in 1968, as part of a milktoast gun control law, Congress banned their import.

With that the temptation became too great and American manufacturers jumped into the breach, assuring every street hoodlum and barroom braggart he needn't lack for cordite courage.

Since 1968 American manufacturers of Saturday night specials have pushed their production from virtually zero to one million a year.

It is these opportunists you and I will pay off if the House goes along with the gun control bill passed by the Senate.