

Getting the Guns off the Street

Like all the Chief Executives who have preceded him, President Ford is against crime. Speaking to the International Association of Police Chiefs the other day, Mr. Ford took note of the still increasing crime rate and deplored it.

The President urged police officials to give "high priority" to violent crimes in the cities. There, he said, "is where crime does the most damage to our whole urban structure." True enough, except Mr. Ford—like other Presidents—shied away from mentioning the chief instrument of this damage—guns.

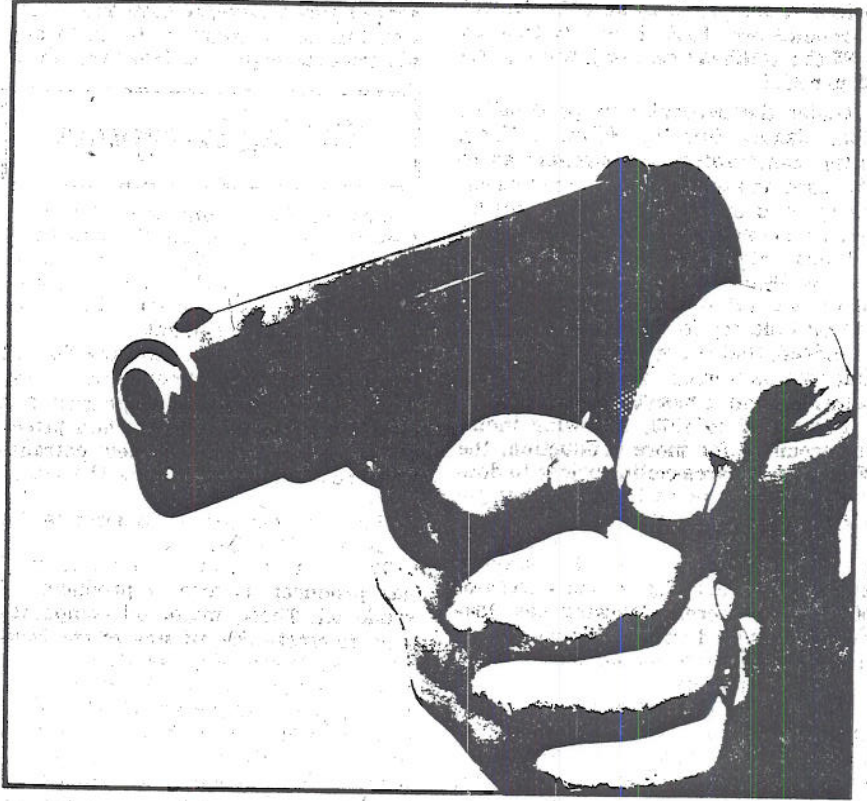
There is a simple test for politicians who say they are concerned over the shootings of so many Americans every year. If they refuse to support gun-control laws, they are not to be taken seriously.

Since Mr. Ford emphasized his concern over violence in the big cities, he might find it worthwhile to listen to Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. Speaking for the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Mr. Daley urged Congress to pass legislation "which would take the guns away from every private person."

He said that as far as he was concerned, "the only purpose of a handgun in unauthorized hands is to kill." He also asked why Congress hasn't passed a strict gun-control bill and then provided the answer.

"There is the influence and lobbying pressure of the National Rifle Association," he said. "There is no doubt about the organization being financed by gun manufacturers and dealers in addition to the revenue from membership dues." Another voice of experience is Boston Police Commissioner Robert di Grazia, who says there are now 40 million handguns in the United States with over 2 million more being sold each year. "The gun," he says, "is no longer merely the instrument of crime; it is now a cause of violent crime."

The commissioner reports that of the 11 Boston police officers shot in recent years seven were killed with handguns; and of the 17 wounded in the same period, 16 were shot with handguns. Policemen, of course, are



not the only victims of these vicious weapons.

In the last decade, America suffered 95,000 gun murders, 100,000 gun suicides, 700,000 gun woundings and 800,000 gun robberies. In the last five years, gun murders rose 5 percent over the previous five years; gun robberies went up 75 percent, gun murders of policemen rose 90 percent.

Canada, Japan, Australia and 29 European countries have strict gun controls, and their firearms violence rates are incomparably lower than America's. England, for instance, had only seven handgun murders in 1971, while the United States had 8,991 in the same year.

Private ownership of handguns must be banished from this country, declares Police Commissioner Di Grazia. "I am not asking for registration or licensing or outlawing cheap guns," he

says. "I am saying that no private citizen, whatever his claim, should possess a handgun. Only police officers should."

While it goes without saying that the outlawing of firearms would not in itself solve the nation's crime problem, it can also be said that no country has ever controlled gun crime without gun control. And it's never too late to start.

James B. Sullivan, a board member of the National Council for a Responsible Firearms Policy, puts the case this way:

"Let us adopt this social reform 142 years after gun registration was adopted in England, just as we adopted old-age insurance 55 years after Germany, a minimum wage 44 years after New Zealand and unemployment insurance 24 years after Great Britain."