Evans and Novak

New Orleans States-Item 2 Dec 67

Miss. Klan More Prepared for Terror Than Ever as New Bombings Reveal

WASHINGTON—A new reign of nightrider terror in Mississippi, unnoticed beyond the state's borders, is proving that reports of the death of the Ku Klux Klan are somewhat exaggerated. On the contrary, the Klan is very much alive.

Indeed, the epidemic of well-planned, perfectly executed bombings and burnings during November points to a new crisis of law - and - order in the Deep South. Nor is this any death rattle. Though scarcely the mass - membership organization of a few years ago, the KKK in Mississippi is more finely organized than ever for terror.

Ironically, one trigger to the new crisis was an event hailed as the Klan's death knell: the conviction on Oct. 20 by a federal jury in Meridian of seven Klansmen for conspiracy in the murder of civil rights workers.

Federal Judge Harold Cox, an arch-segregationist with a low boiling point who presided over the Meridian trial, blew up over courthouse hallway talk by Klansmen threatening to use "dynamite" to retaliate.

Accordingly, Judge Cox attached a provision to the bonds for three convicted Klansmen. "If any explosives are used in any sort of violence in the 45 counties in the southern district of Mississippi . . . this bond is thereupon revoked and cancelled," Judge Cox ruled.

Some crowed that the Klan was dead. But others, including federal officials, feared the judge might actually, though unwittingly, be inciting the KKK to violence. They were right. Klansmen began a new terror campaign to call Judge Cox's bluff.

The judge's ban was defied on Nov. 15 in Laurel, when the home of a Negro minister, active in voter registration, was damaged by a bomb.

Three days later, the Jackson home of a white Methodist layman sympathetic to civil rights was bombed.

Three days after that, bombers in Jackson struck the home of a Jewish rabbi.

Two Head Start centers in Lincoln County and a poverty office in Kemper County were burned down the same week. Judge Cox has remained silent.

But the threats of a single judge cannot be fully blamed for the new wave of terrorism. Just before the Meridian convictions, nightriders bombed first the cottage of the white dean of mostly Negro Tougaloo College and then a Jackson synagogue.

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Thus, the largest trigger may not be the Cox order at all but the Democratic primary runoff of Aug. 29, which nominated (tantamount to election) Rep. John Bell Williams for governor.

As we reported from Mississippi last February, law-enforcement officials were concerned that election of a white supremacist — such as Rep. Williams — would embolden the Klan.

Gov. - elect Williams has strongly denounced the latest bombings. However, three leaders of Americans for Preservation of the White Race, an extremist group tied into the Klan, donated money to the Williams campaign and the APWR press agent is a Williams adviser.

At the Meridian trial, some defendants and their attorneys sported "Williams for Governor" buttons.

Other Mississippians fighting for law-and-order think only John Bell Williams can achieve that goal. And for him to show the required strength may require pressure from the Mississippi business interests —and from federal authorities in Washington.

(Dist. 1967, by Publishers-Hall Synd.)