

The Lessons of Greensboro

Rarely in recent American history has a case of political murder attracted so much attention as the Greensboro, North Carolina, massacre of November 3, 1979. On that day, millions watched televised replays of Klansmen and Nazis methodically shooting five people to death at an anti-Klan rally called by the Communist Workers Party.

The Klan and an array of other fascist organizations have reemerged as a countrywide force. Embodying the militarism and white supremacy that are the traditional cornerstones of American patriotism, the Klan is *stronger now* than at any point in the last generation. Conservative estimates place its hardcore membership at 15,000 people; its support network in the hundreds of thousands; and its base of sympathy from one to two million.

Today, after two trials—one for murder in 1980, and one for violating the civil rights of the demonstrators which ended on April 15, 1984, the Klan-Nazi alliance is free, certified innocent of all charges. Now, with only the civil trial for financial damages to the families of the dead remaining in the courts, it's time for the movement to discuss the lessons of Greensboro.

The Courts and the Justice Department

These days most work in relation to Greensboro, and to the anti-Klan struggle in general, is aimed at pressuring the government to "Ban the Klan" and bring racist criminals to justice. The track record of these efforts is heavily weighted in favor of the white supremacist movement. Closely paralleling the defeats of civil rights by the Supreme Court, the Klan has won ruling after ruling protecting its right to flourish. Against overwhelming evidence, the courts and juries have handed them two major victories in Greensboro. Cleared of murder, and recently of federal civil rights violations, the killers are now heroes of the racist movement. The impact of these verdicts goes far beyond whether or not anyone thinks the Klan has a constitutional right to "free speech." Not only have the courts sanctioned armed terror by the rightwing; they have successfully covered up the fact

that the massacre was the result of a Klan-Nazi, police and federal conspiracy.

It is now public knowledge that the racists were led to the rally site by Ed Dawson, a police and former FBI informant. The cops, who left the scene to "take a lunch break" moments before the Klan arrived, remain untouched by the courts. The Federal government's secretive Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, whose agent Bernard Butkovich infiltrated the Klan-Nazi alliance prior to the killings, enjoys immunity. This situation is very dangerous; it mirrors the protection given to the FBI during the Civil Rights movement, when its agents regularly worked with the Klan to attack activists fighting for Black freedom.

The Justice Department deliberately prosecuted the Federal civil rights trial of the Greensboro murderers on grounds so narrow that an acquittal was certain. Instead of the usual statutes, they chose a rarely-used law demanding proof that the attacks were motivated by "racial hatred." Thus, the Klan was able to argue that their violence was motivated by anti-communism, not racism—and therefore, "legal." At the trial, the attorney for one of the Nazis argued: "Roland Wayne Wood is a patriotic citizen just like the Germans were. The largest ethnic minority in the country are Germans. Many of you on the jury have German blood. This court sits on a tract of land owned by a German family. Across the street there is the bust of a German man. The German people are always with us... The Germans gambled everything and lost all in opposition to communism. Aren't they a lot more attractive now than they were forty years ago at the end of the war? These defendants are patriotic citizens, just like the German citizens. That's why they went to Greensboro, to stop the communists."

In this period, when the U.S. is again entering a time of extreme anti-communism, it is no coincidence that this was the basis of the Klan-Nazi defense. The guilty didn't walk to freedom through a legal loophole. They were provided a way out by the government which killed two birds with one stone. The legal point was made that communists aren't protected by civil rights laws, and the *genocidal anti-Black* character of the fascists was obscured.

The Klan is anti-communist because communists fight for justice, equality, and Black liberation. The Klan murdered the CWP leaders because as communists, they were involved in day-to-day work against

white supremacy and in support of Black liberation. Their success at closing down a Klan film showing of "Birth of a Nation" in China Grove, NC, and their advocacy of Black people's right to armed self-defense against racist attacks inspired anti-racist activists across the country. This is why the Klan and the government murdered the CWP members—not because they raised the slogan, "Death to the Klan!"

One of the consequences of relying on the government and courts to stop the Klan is the corresponding decline in militant anti-racist work by white organizations. Even before the full extent of the conspiracy which led to the killings in Greensboro was known, the demonstrators were blamed for bringing it on themselves. Raising the slogan, "Death to the Klan!" was called provocative and mobilizations to confront racists were deemed suicidal and adventurist. There are important issues and debates over tactics involved here, but the net effect of these criticisms and whispering campaigns in the movement was to deny the need to confront the Klan. Forces committed to building a militant movement were isolated, and support for the Black struggle declined.

The CWP itself began to look to the government for justice. CWP members testified before the Grand Jury "investigating" the incidents in the vain hope that the truth would prevail. This proved to be an error. The FBI learned a great deal about the CWP—and we all know what happened to the truth.

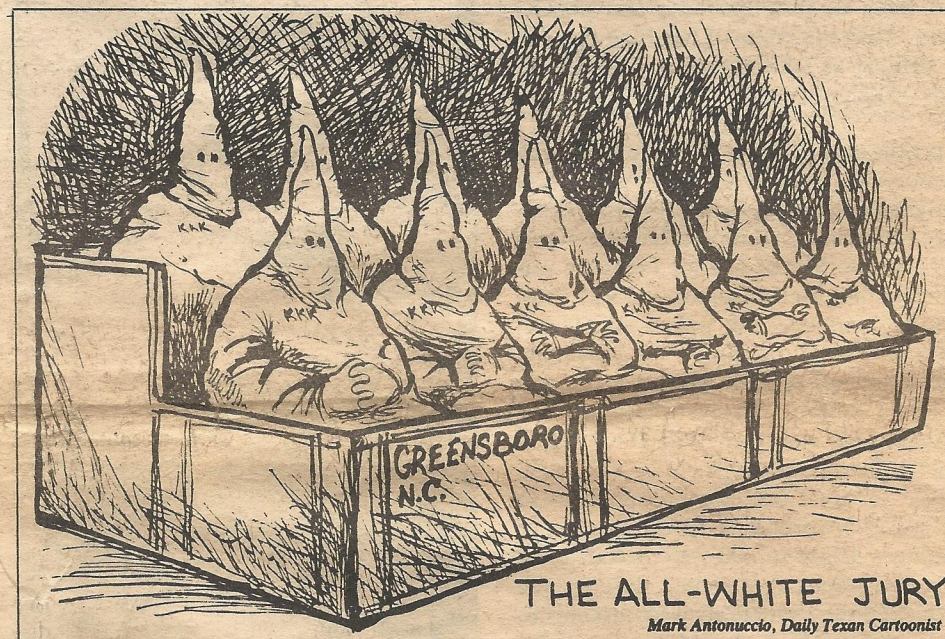
Building the Anti-Racist Movement

For the Black Nation and all colonized people within the U.S., the situation is growing worse. Legal and social gains won over the past two decades are being wiped out as a prelude to greater exploitation and population control. Reagan has proven adept at selling this package to the majority of white people. *Far from being an incident isolated from this process, Greensboro was very much a factor in it.*

While hundreds and at times thousands of people have come out to demonstrate and fight the Klan, we have been unable to transform this energy into a lasting national movement. The creation of such a movement has been a basic demand made by Black people to anti-racist whites for the hundred years since the Klan first appeared. In 1984, as the Black liberation struggle rebuilds, we are faced with the need to develop an anti-Klan movement among whites which will support the battle for Black liberation, self-defense and self-determination.

Now as the Klan and its allies draw strength from the drive toward war and white supremacy, we need a mass movement that will resist. If Greensboro can teach us nothing else, it is that we must rely on ourselves and not the government or the courts to stop the Klan. And that we must strengthen, rather than turn away from, the militancy of a fighting movement.

That's our opinion. What's yours? Write and we will publish a debate on this issue.



THE ALL-WHITE JURY

Mark Antonuccio, Daily Texan Cartoonist