

## perspectives

# Klan verdict poses challenge to movement

By Lyn Wells

Atlanta, Ga.—“A license to kill.” This is the meaning of the not guilty verdict of the Klansmen and Nazis in Greensboro this month. It was said by Atlanta’s mayor, Maynard Jackson, who, facing a tense racial situation here, has no reason to exaggerate. It was also said by Dr. Joseph Lowery, non-violent leader of SCLC, knowing that such statements may well rouse people to their own self-defense.

The meaning of the Greensboro verdict was not lost on North Carolinians. In the week following the all-white jury’s decision, a rally and vigil at Duke University drew nearly 500; over 600 protested at the University of N.C., Chapel Hill; and at Dur-

ham’s predominantly Black North Carolina Central, over 700 students rallied.

In Greensboro itself, more than 900 people led by Black A&T University students marched silently downtown from their campus, to protest the rise of the “New Right,” racism and the acquittals. A number of the old-line Black leaders, who had discouraged protests last February, were present and clearly disgusted with the judicial institutions they had asked people to put their faith in before.

Many people were shocked that such murderers would be set free by the courts, especially when the killings were witnessed by millions of TV viewers last Nov. 3 on national

news. Surprise, though, is unwarranted—particularly following a similar not guilty verdict last summer in Chattanooga, Tenn. There three Kluxers were let off after confessing to the shooting of four older Black women on the city’s streets in broad daylight.

The Greensboro verdict will convince many who previously discounted the charge of government complicity with the Klan and the Nazis. As Leah Wise, spokeswoman for the National Anti-Klan Network, put it at a news conference following the verdict, “The whole trial proved that the state, local and federal governments had little interest in justice.” It was around that contention that the Network based



**GREENSBORO LAST FEBRUARY saw 7,000 condemn Klan killings. (Call photo)**

its Feb. 2 Mobilization of over 7,000 in Greensboro earlier this year.

Consider the record: the North Carolina state prosecutor dropped conspiracy charges which would have been aimed at the entire group of Klansmen and Nazis, no matter who fired what shots. The judge

limited testimony to the period of less than 10 minutes of the actual shooting, keeping out vital testimony that would have proved premeditation. The prosecution never called as witnesses either the federal

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agent who had infiltrated the Nazis and attended the pre-killing meetings, nor the Greensboro policeman who was in the lead car of the Klan caravan.

Just these actions alone, plus an all-white jury susceptible to the Klan's self-defense argument, made the verdict predictable.

"The context for the Greensboro massacre of Nov. 3 and the acquittal is the atmosphere of racist hysteria," stated Wise, an atmosphere which the government, the media and the entire establishment is promoting.

What can be done? many have asked. There have been numerous actions and rallies against the Klan in the past year, including a very successful one recently in Pittsburgh, where the entire Pittsburgh Steelers football team signed a support message to the rally. The event enjoyed broad support from labor, the Black community, and many churches in the area.

## NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

But the National Anti-Klan Network feels that these efforts alone and disconnected will not be able to stem the tide. A highly sophisticated campaign, ongoing and national in scope, must be developed which draws on every strength in order to combat the Klan, the Nazis and the New Right.

A week before the verdict in Greensboro, the Network's executive committee met to plan grassroots work, legislative efforts, direct action, and media campaigns aimed at affecting public opinion and government action.

The Network's second annual conference was scheduled for Washington, D.C., on Jan. 31 and Feb. 1. The issue of government-Klan complicity will be further explored. Emphasis at the conference will be placed on developing effective community organizing techniques at local levels—especially geared toward unionists, educators, high school students and churches.

The National Anti-Klan Network is presently conducting a grassroots campaign nationally to bring pres-

sure on Congress to hold public hearings into renewed Klan-Nazi violence and the government's failures to make use of existing laws to prosecute.

The Network's legal taskforce is distributing thousands of postcards to be sent to Congress demanding such hearings. A "Spring Offensive" in Washington is planned, combining this work with direct action on a national level. The details of that will be flushed out at the upcoming conference.

## NETWORK EXPANDS

The efforts of the Network have borne fruit in the past year. The leadership grouping has expanded itself to include educators and trade union leaders as well as its original activist forces like the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, Southern Organizing Committee, Southern Conference Educational Fund, and the National Anti-Racist Organizing Committee, as well as the Law Center for Constitutional Rights.

At the initiative of the Network, school curriculum is being developed for students in high schools, programs are being developed for radio, TV and other media work. The multi-faceted approach and the commitment to put aside ideological differences in order to build the widest possible movement—these are the very things which are essential if the anti-Klan movement is to grow and have any tangible effect on the country.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The election of Reagan and the recent renewal of Klan and New Right activity pose some real challenges to the Left and working-class movement. Can we fashion our work and energy in such a way as to combat this right-wing offensive? Will the Left play a significant role in spurring on these broader efforts like the National Anti-Klan Network, particularly being active in taking them among the white working population?

Will it rise to the occasion in fighting Klan efforts, especially where apathy or cowardice among

traditional liberal leaders has postponed responses and where initiative is badly needed? Will it bring its clarity on the nature of the system and its workings into the anti-Klan movement, where naivete and illusions are bound to be widespread?

There is a last challenge posed by these events, both to organized labor and to the Left: Will they develop immediate program and imaginative vehicles to reach those working- and middle-class groupings who are being affected by the Right's efforts?

There is no reason why the Right should be able to parade successfully as the champions of the common man in the fight against taxes, inflation and "getting the government off our backs." It is both narrowness and the influence of classic liberal thinking that have left the people's forces virtually impotent in the face of these challenges. Fear of government cutbacks in fighting for gains can no longer remain an excuse for mounting sustained work on these issues, nor can disdain for people who have some racist ideas prevent us from penetrating these fronts.

A large commitment of resources must be devoted to building groups such as the National Anti-Klan Network as well as the new militant Black organizations springing up in response to the wholesale assault on Black rights. But just as important, we must rise to the challenge of providing an alternative that can muster the discontent, disillusionment and economic hardship that is producing the anger now being tapped by the Right.

The success of the anti-Klan and anti-racist work, and in fact the future of a united workers' movement, will be greatly affected by whether or not the Left has the political maturity to meet this challenge.

*Lyn Wells is a member of the Executive Committee of the National Anti-Klan Network and a staff organizer for the Greensboro Feb. 2 march.*