Extreme right prison gang suspected in Texas killings

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3 April 2013

US federal and state authorities are continuing their investigations into the shooting deaths of Kaufman County, Texas District Attorney Mike McLelland and his wife, Cynthia, whose bodies were discovered by friends on Saturday.

The McLellands were apparently murdered the night before at their home in semi-rural Forney, Texas, some 20 miles east of Dallas. A local television station reported that police found 14 shells from a .223 caliber rifle at the crime scene.

McLelland's chief felony prosecutor, Mark Hasse, was shot and killed in broad daylight on January 31 outside the Kaufman County courthouse. After Hasse's death, McLelland's house was patrolled by a sheriff's deputy, but the special security detail was later discontinued.

No connection has yet been uncovered between the killings, but a federal law enforcement official told *USA Today*, "Given the profile and the position of [McLelland], you start with that theory until you have discounted that connection … The way it appears is like an assault on the rule of law."

Scott Burns of the National District Attorneys Association told the media, "[I]t is a very rare thing for a prosecutor to be murdered in the line of duty—very rare. And it is unprecedented for two in the same county to be murdered in a two-month period. It is simply unheard of."

Authorities have no motives or suspects at this point, but investigators are considering the possibility that the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT), a white supremacist prison gang, may be responsible. Kaufman County authorities were involved in a US government-led investigation that resulted in the indictment in November 2012 of 34 leading members of the ABT on murder, conspiracy, arson, assault, robbery and drug trafficking charges. Ten of those indicted could face the death penalty if convicted.

"Hasse," noted the *Los Angles Times*, "was shot on the day he was publicly credited for assisting with the successful prosecution of members of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas."

In December 2012, the Texas Department of Public Safety, after making a retaliation assessment, circulated a bulletin that read in part: "High-ranking members [of the ABT] ... are involved in issuing orders to inflict 'mass casualties or death' to law enforcement officials who were involved in cases where Aryan Brotherhood of Texas are facing life sentences or the death penalty."

The Aryan Brotherhood of Texas originated in the state's prison system in the 1980s and espouses a racist and neo-Nazi ideology. Its activities to this point, however, have been principally criminal—drug dealing, theft, extortion, identity theft—rather than political.

Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) wrote earlier this year: "The Aryan Brotherhood (AB) is a large, white supremacist prison gang that is infamous for its violence and its sprawling criminal empire, which also is highly active outside the nation's prisons. A related group, the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT), is known to be particularly violent, and prosecutors in that state have been aggressively moving against its members for several years now."

The American media is playing down the fascist ideology of the ABT and treating the possibility of its involvement, in the Hasse-McLelland murders as a purely retaliatory, criminal action. If, in fact, there is such involvement that may be the case, but numerous ABT members have been charged with politically motivated hate crimes outside prison walls.

The SPLC's Potok details numerous cases involving

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ABT members, including the "most infamous racially motivated murder since the civil rights era … in 1998, when three white men, two of them ex-cons, tied a black man, James Byrd Jr., to the back of their pickup truck with a logging chain, dragged him to death over three miles of country roads outside Jasper, Texas, and then deposited his shredded remains in front of a predominantly black cemetery. One of the ex-cons testified at his trial that he and one of his accomplices had both joined the ABT for protection from black inmates while they were incarcerated. When he rejoined society, his arms were covered with Aryan Brotherhood tattoos, including one depicting a black man being lynched."

The neo-fascist outfit was also deemed responsible for the gunning down of a Bangladeshi immigrant working at a Texas gas station, in October 2001, as part of "the backlash against Arab-Americans that followed the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks … Mark Stroman, later convicted of the killing, was an ex-convict member of the Aryan Brotherhood (ABT) of Texas."

In November 2011, Steven Scott Cantrell, 26, of Crane, Texas, was sentenced to 450 months in prison by a US district judge for hate crimes committed in December 2010. Cantrell set fire to several buildings, including a predominantly African American church as part of an effort to kill a disabled man, a house belonging to someone Cantrell believed to be Jewish and a gym patronized by Mexican Americans and African Americans and owned by a white man married to a woman of Mexican descent.

According to the Justice Department, the crimes were part of "a series of racially-motivated arsons that Cantrell perpetrated … in his attempt to gain status with the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas."

If the ABT has now escalated its activities to include the assassination of elected officials such as McLelland, this has a political significance.

On March 19, the state of Colorado's prison chief, Tom Clements, was murdered at his home. The suspect in the crime was white supremacist Evan Spencer Ebel. Ebel, member of the 211 Crew gang, died in a shootout with police in north Texas on March 21.

Right-wing terrorist violence has increased in the US in the past two decades, a malignant expression of the growth in social tensions. Two years ago, Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was wounded and Federal Judge John M. Roll and five others were killed near Tucson, Arizona by a deranged man, influenced by Tea Party-type rhetoric.

Then there is the shooting in Newtown, Connecticut last year by a gun enthusiast who killed 26 people, including 20 children. While the motives of the killer, Adam Lanza, are yet to be entirely clarified, he reportedly modeled himself on Norway's fascistic mass killer, Anders Behring Breivik. The latter killed 77 people in July 2011, including 69 at a Labour Party youth camp.

At the time of the Giffords shooting in January 2011, the WSWS pointed to the Oklahoma City bombing carried out by Timothy McVeigh, the anthrax attacks in 2001 and the murder of Kansas physician Dr. George Tiller by an anti-abortion fanatic in 2009.

The WSWS noted: "For more than 40 years, the Republican Party has appealed to and allied itself with racist and fascistic forces in order to shore up its base of support. The corporate-controlled media has assiduously sought to promote a right-wing political atmosphere."

In each of these cases of right-wing terrorism, the connection, direct or indirect, between the extremist groups and sections of the political establishment has been ignored or obscured. So too has the general social environment—characterized by endless war oversees, the promotion of militaristic violence and the deepening social and economic crisis within the US.

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