The Posses Comitatus Are Coming On Strong

On March 6th, Minuteman Robert DePugh will convene the third annual "Patriots Leadership Conference" in Kansas City, Mo. A possible location is the Muehlebach Hotel where Liberty Lobby staged a banquet in his honor two years ago, following his release from federal prison.

The March event is being advertised in Armed Citizen News, official publication of the National Alliance to Keep and Bear Arms, DePugh's current operational base. Presumably anyone with the $35 advance registration fee can attend, but a substantial proportion of the Patriots are almost certain to be members of the Posse Comitatus, the fastest growing movement on the Right.

A similar conference was held last month in Denver's Regency Inn. It was billed as the National Tax Strike and Posse Comitatus Convention. For the $25 registration fee ($35 for couples), those present got three full days of speeches.

Don Perry, who was the chief promoter, reports 400 attended.

Perry, an accountant by day, is actively involved with the Denver County Posse Comitatus by night. He says the Denver organization has 25 members, and that Posse in two neighboring Colorado counties are somewhat larger.

SIMILAR POSSE outcroppings have sprung up in all sections of the country except the South, where armed citizens can get together in Ku Klux Klan operations,* and the East.

Last year the FBI put the total membership in the various Posses at 0,000. Posse promoters claim it is many times that. No actual count is possible. By definition, these are local organizations, and must remain such in the Posse's elaborate rationale.

Whatever the actual figure, there is no doubt that the number of citizens keeping or prepared to bear arms is growing, and the Posses include—but are not limited to—members of the familiar Radical Right organizations.

The term, Posse Comitatus stands for "power of the country," and the Posses are composed of individuals who believe that armed private citizens must stand ready to exercise this power.

THE ORIGINAL promoter appears to be Henry L. (Mike) Beach of Portland, Ore. He is a mild-mannered 71-year-old former laundry equipment salesman who back in the 1930's was a member of William Dudley Pelley's pro-Nazi Silver Shirts. Beach operates a kind of Posse parent organization called the Citizens Law Enforcement and Research Committee, working closely with Mrs. Jane L. Button, publisher of a rightwing monthly, The Voice of Liberty. Newsweek found that Beach mails out "Christian Posse" charters for $21 and sells sheriff badges to charter members for $6.50.**

He also distributes a Bluebook which, in early editions, said that public officials who fail to toe the mark "shall be removed by the posse to the most populated intersection of streets in the township and at high noon be hung by the neck . . . ."

Beach has since dropped that paragraph as "too controversial," but says a coat of tar and feathers can be helpful "in such cases."

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* David Duke, national director of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, is on record as endorsing the posses. "We get their material and funnel it to our groups," he told Newsweek.


FRANCIS E. GILLINGS, above, chairman of the Stockton, Calif., Posse Comitatus, stands in front of a poster advising that the citizens law enforcement body intends to enforce no trespassing regulations. Gillings, arrested after allegedly trying to keep United Farm Workers Union organizers out of the fields, was quoted as saying, "There is no greater law firm than Smith & Wesson, especially if backed up by a 12-gauge injunction."