More Angry Men
Militias Are Joining Jury-Power Activists To Fight Government
Tax Protesters, Survivalists Benefit From Message: Jurors Can Ignore Law
'Red' Beckman's Revenge

BY WADE LAMBERT
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When 11 Branch Davidians went on trial for murder last year, the jurors were mailed pamphlets telling them they needn't convict if they didn't want to—regardless of the law.

This was surprising on two counts: The judge had already informed the jurors that their identities would be kept secret and also that they had an absolute obligation to follow his legal instructions.

But the Fully Informed Jury Association, which mailed the pamphlets, learned the jurors' names after a supporter followed them to a secret parking lot and jotted down their license-plate numbers. And the group invoked history to contradict the judge: For centuries, it wrote, juries have fought bad laws by vetoing wrongful prosecutions.

The group's view that jurors have this power, and should be told about it, has attracted many mainstream supporters in recent years. They say so-called jury nullification reflects the citizen's right to check occasional abuses by the government. So respectable is this idea that lawmakers in 22 states have introduced jury-power legislation proposed by FUA.

Part of the Arsenal

But FUA's attempt to influence the Branch Davidian case reveals the group's other, more unsettling side: Many of its officials and followers are active in the militia movement, which considers jury nullification a key part of its antigovernment arsenal. The government can exercise no power over its citizens if jurors refuse to enforce the government's laws, militia leaders say. And it doesn't take a majority to neutralize all tax and gun laws—just a few stubborn jurors.

FUA officials have distributed jury-nullification materials to potential jurors in cases involving Rudy Stanko, a white supremacist who has called for a "holy war" against Jews and blacks, and Randy Weaver, whose standoff with federal agents became a rallying cry for the militias. (Mr. Stanko was convicted of selling cattle without inspection certificates; Mr. Weaver was convicted on minor charges but acquitted of murder.)

FUA officers also held one of the first protests of the federal raid on the Branch Davidian camp in Waco, Texas. And when the jury acquitted the defendants of all murder charges in February 1994, the group sent the jurors another mailing, this time thanking them for their verdicts.

On April 19, FUA officials were back at the site of the camp for a two-year-anniversary memorial; there, they learned of the Oklahoma City bombing, which authorities believe was motivated partly by revenge for the Waco raid.

M.J. "Red" Beckman, a leading FUA theorist and militia activist from Billings, Mont., says he now hopes to see FUA's principles put to work in the bombing case. "Wouldn't it be interesting," he asks, "if, when they impanel a grand jury to investigate this terrible thing in Oklahoma City, the grand jury came out and said we will not investigate things in Oklahoma City without also having an investigation of Waco?"

Like many in the militia movement, he says he believes the bombing was "a government operation" because "they needed something desperately to be able to point the finger at the militia."

Such statements have led Christine Kaufmann, executive director of the Montanana Human Rights Network, to conclude that "FUA is an organizing tool for right-wing extremist groups." The network, which monitors hate crimes in the state, has only recently turned its attention to FUA's connections to extremists.

Don Doig and Larry Dodge, two Montana men who are members of the Libertarian Party and who founded FUA in 1989, agree that FUA and the militia movement share many concerns about government power. They say gun shows and survivalist conventions have become among the most popular forums for FUA. People in the militia movement "are more constitutionally inclined," says Mr. Dodge, who now lives in Dallas. "We get a lot of support from people who are concerned that the Constitution is being trashed, particularly the right to defend yourself with your own guns."

The connection between the two movements is hardly new, adds Mr. Doig, who lives in the trailer that also serves as FUA headquarters in Helmville, Mont., population 30. The FUA "Jury Power" kit that was mailed to the jurors in the Branch Davidian case is based on a Citizens Rule Book that has long circulated in the Patriot movement, of which the militias are a part. "We just took the thing to a whole other level," he says. "FUA broadened the appeal."

The Citizens Rule Book quotes the Bible
as often as it cites the Founding Fathers and states that there is a "great deal of suspicion" about whether the 12th Amendment, which ended slavery, is legally ratified. Although they don't refer to slavery specifically, "There is some doubt as to whether some others of [the amendments] were legally ratified," says Mr. Doig.

The source for such claims, and the author of some of the most controversial material distributed by FUA, is Mr. Beckman, an imposing figure at 6 feet 4 inches tall, with a sonorous voice and bushy red sideburns. Messrs. Doig and Dodge warmly call him the "granddaddy" of FUA.

"We're headed for major adjustments in this country. Major adjustments," says the 66-year-old former hubcap salesman and small-time rancher who is one of the most popular lecturers on the far-right radio circuit. "Some people come either from the jury and grand jury, or they will come by violence and bloodshed. ... We need to have the militia out here in this country. Major adjustments," says Mr. Beckman's self-published books and videos are snapped up at militia gatherings. "Handwriting on the Wall" video is listed in the Militia of Montana's catalog along with a how-to book on breaking people's bones with their own hands.

In the videotape, Mr. Beckman urges followers to use their votes on grand juries and trial juries to effect political change. "We don't have to have this absolutely impossible majority that it takes to control the Congress to get rid of that bad law," he says in the video, referring to the fact that a single juror can prevent the unanimous verdict needed to convict. "We don't need a majority to elect a president who will sign a law that eliminates the Internal Revenue Service and the graduated income tax."

Mr. Beckman, who lost his house last year after a 20-year battle with the IRS, contends that 12 unidentified bankers routinely rig the U.S. presidential elections. He also claims that the "law of grammar," something akin to the literal interpretation of the Bible, dictates the real meaning of tax statutes and the Constitution.

His 1984 book "The Church Deceived" describes Jews as followers of Satan who control today's "our government, our major media, our banks and legal profession." The book, which is listed for sale in some FUA brochures, says: "They talk about the terrible holocaust of Hitler's Nazi Germany. Was not that a just punishment upon a people who believe Satan is their god?"

Mr. Beckman contends that his views aren't anti-Semitic. "I have a serious problem with any religion that would rule the people - we just have to get the word out."

"Handwriting on the Wall" FUA's ties to the far right are most conspicuous in its home state of Montana. Driving through Billings in his Dodge van, past newly painted swastikas on the walls of the Billings Visitor Center and another building, Mr. Beckman contends that his own power by the federal government have driven people into the militia movement. "The militias are made up of victims," he says. "They see the handwriting on the wall."

Together, FUA and militia members are pushing for state legislation requiring judges to tell juries explicitly that they can declare the law's directions as null and void. So FUA's jury bill has passed the Oklahoma House of Representatives, the Arizona Senate and legislative committees in Utah and Montana.

Mr. Beckman's involvement with the militia movement led the Montana Human Rights Network to fight the FUA bill this year. After the bill was approved by the state House Judiciary Committee, it was defeated on the House floor. "Our concern about it was pretty much red Beckman and his ties to all of this," says Ms. Kaufmann, of the state Human Rights Network.

Camala Webb, a prominent militia organizer in Bozeman, is another force behind the militia-FUA alliance. FUA's Montana coordinator until a few weeks ago, Ms. Webb stirred up controversy in Montana for trying to build "our government, our major media, our banks and legal profession." The company that FUA keeps on the fringe are also strong. FUA's Montana coordinator until a few weeks ago, Ms. Webb stirred up controversy in Montana for trying to build "our government, our major media, our banks and legal profession." The company that FUA keeps on the fringe are also strong. FUA's Montana coordinator until a few weeks ago, Ms. Webb stirred up controversy in Montana for trying to build "our government, our major media, our banks and legal profession." The company that FUA keeps on the fringe are also strong.

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