

DO WE WANT A REIGN OF TERROR?

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Editorial by Editor Carroll E. King

Will it require an atrocious murder – a series of holdups – a veritable reign of terror to jar the smug, self-satisfied citizens of Johnson City, Tennessee into a realization of what is going on within the city?

You who are self-centered in your own affairs and are not interested so long as your life, your property or your well being is not disturbed, will probably glance through this editorial and comment that we are exaggerating the state of affairs. But are we? And are you competent to judge? Have you been following events closely as it relates to the welfare of the city and its citizens? **Do you fully appreciate the tenacious grip the criminal and undesirable element is getting on Johnson City?** Do you want the outside world to begin to see daily stories of lawlessness rampant in Johnson City? DO YOU?

Certainly you don't. But your very apathy at this time when a crisis in the battle between law and order and the forces opposing it is at hand, is nothing more nor less than encouragement to the **“underground” organization which is seeking to strangle Johnson City.**

Even the city fathers, the Council and the Commission, do not fully appreciate the true situation. Of that we feel sure for if they did they would see to it that the police department was adequately equipped to oppose the lawless element.

TODAY JOHNSON CITY is overrun with criminals; would be criminals; thieves, thugs, gunmen, dope-peddlers, and other undesirables who working hand-in-hand with the liquor ring have so spread their evil influence that its effect has reached even into the juvenile element and more than a score of little boys are striving to emulate the lawbreakers who are apparently being “glorified” in Johnson City and Washington County.

Our very courts are apparently inoculated with the general tone of apathy; else they would hand out sentences sufficiently severe to make a would-be evildoer hesitate before perpetrating a crime. But the sentences are so light and it is apparently so very easy to escape the penalties of the law that the criminals scorn any fear of punishment.

WHAT IS THE ACTUAL situation in Johnson City today? We have an efficient, clean, well administered police department made up of good, average citizens. These men are sworn to defend the lives and the property of the citizens of Johnson City at the risk, or sacrifice, if need be, of their own lives. For this service they receive somewhat

less pay than that of a skilled laborer. But it is not the payoff which we speak. The officers do not complain – they go ahead at all hours of the day and the night, doing their duty. But to what end?

They apprehend a criminal. Perhaps someone's life is saved. And then a skilled attorney, operating through the mazes and technicalities of the law and employing other aids, extricates his client from the toils of the law and he goes forth to commit another crime. Why is it that it is so hard to secure a jury in Washington County that is not unfriendly or apathetic toward law enforcement? And with each trial the maze of handicaps with which the police department is burdened, is increased.

DO OUR CITIZENS realize that every day it is being made harder for the police officers to perform their sworn duty to protect lives and property and to prevent crime? Do they realize that their own homes, or their own lives, or the life or honor of members of their own families might be the next thing jeopardized and that if they continue their present apathy the police department will soon be so handicapped and thwarted that they could expect no succor?

A police officer is supposed to prevent crime. He should make an arrest when an intent is in evidence and not wait for the actual commission of the crime. But according to the arguments of our "brilliant" criminal lawyers, and the apparent attitude of a great majority of our citizens it will soon become necessary for the policemen to wait until he sees the crime committed before he does anything.

Furthermore, they apparently would have it that an officer stand idly by and allow himself to be shot at, and perhaps killed, without defending himself. Only recently a citizen asked an officer to enter a house and arrest a man. The officer asked that the citizen swear out a warrant in compliance with the law. The citizen replied, "Why they might shoot me for doing it!" "Well," said the officer, "If I enter that house without a warrant they could kill me!" "**But you're paid for it,**" was the reply of the citizen. Certainly! But however willing the officers may be to risk their lives in enforcing the law, they cannot do so effectively without the support and the co-operation of the citizens of Johnson City.

TODAY IN JOHNSON CITY there is a skilled police officer who is living under the black threat of death. Several times during the past few weeks a **certain criminal** has tried to "get" him. Twice he almost did so. With the handicaps now imposed upon the police department that officer is forced to stand idly by and take no steps to protect himself. And why has he been threatened? **Because he enforced the law and made an arrest which did not meet the approval of the man being arrested.**

We have but recently seen two officers found guilty of manslaughter in a case which today is attracting widespread attention because of counter charges which claim that manufactured evidence was introduced. This new phase has not yet had the attention

of the courts. But if it be proved that such methods have been followed, then it is high time that a house-cleaning take place.

Next Saturday three officers will be before the courts for defending themselves against the attack of a gunman. Two of the officers narrowly escaped death. **Today it is rumored that a veritable maze of testimony is being prepared to “glorify” the gun-wielder and to penalize the officers.**

IT HAS NOW REACHED THE POINT where no police officer can respond to a call for help until an investigation has been made to determine whether or not it is a “private fight” or a “personal killing” or a “justifiable crime.” Calls coming to the police station must be carefully investigated else the officers will be up in court for trespassing, or breaking and entering; or some other trumped up charge. Calls for officers must necessarily explain the nature of the offense, its location, who is making the call and other vital information. Yet, to go to the other extreme, a complaint was this week filed by two reputable citizens that a police officer had asked too many questions when they called for an officer and that he had embarrassed them by asking their names. Is that the kind of citizen who makes up the mass of Johnson City?

We trust they are but few. Yet it is typical. The sheriff and his organization and the police department are called at all hours of the day or night – many times to find the charges trivial or the case just one of personal spite. If they make no arrest they are criticized. If they do make an arrest they are penalized. **The dry organizations demand enforcement of the laws, but if the officers encounter resistance they dare not use force or then will be confronted with the penitentiary.**

If a felony is committed the public expects the officers to apprehend the offenders. But if shots are exchanged the officers are in danger of arrest for defending their own lives, or for carrying out their duty. They are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

IN NO OTHER CITY IN THE UNITED STATES would this condition be permitted. In Canton, Ohio, a similar situation prevailed until a group of upright, sincere and honorable citizens took matters into their own hands. But in Canton, the police department was besmirched and the citizens were handicapped. Here in Johnson City is a police department of which any small city might well be proud, but the citizens of the city are not supporting it.

Even the Council and Commission seem to feel that the police department can get along with anything – second hand or discarded. They are expected to run down rum runners – yet the police patrol (car) cannot be operated and the other car is a dilapidated wreck. They are expected to quell riots, yet there is not a riot gun in Johnson City, and some of the officers do not even have revolvers.

It is a shameful state of affairs and a blot on the good name of Johnson City. It is positively NOT exaggerating to say that unless the citizens of this city get behind the

police department and the citizens of the county get behind the sheriff's office and cooperate and assure them of their support, it will not be long until Johnson City will be stunned by the commission of some horrible crime, or will be prostrate beneath a crime wave of major proportions. It is time that the good citizens were up and doing. The Johnson City newspapers are taking no one's word for conditions. **They have investigated and know.** What are you going to do about it?