

Rednecks white cells

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The Ku Klux Klan might be in decline in the United States but its bitter seeds are bearing fruit in other places - including Adelaide. VIVIENNE OAKLEY reports.

TWO international white supremacist groups, including the infamous Ku Klux Klan, are known to be active in Adelaide, thousands of kilometres from their roots in the south of the United States.

Anonymous post office boxes in the western suburb of Welland and the more urbane Unley south of the parklands offer contact with the groups, which also use new technology by preaching their racist message over the Internet.

While almost 140 years after it was established, the KKK - with its hooded uniform, burning crosses and links with racial violence - is declining in membership in the US, it has spread its teachings to fringe groups across the globe.

CONTINUED OVER PAGE

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From previous page

A small group of members has claimed to be active in Australia since 1999. A new report, assessing the influence the KKK has on Australian extremist activity and the threat the group poses to society, was released this month.

Written by Benseon Apple, research director of Jewish organisation B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission, the report says two branches of the klan operate in Australia - the Imperial Klans of America - Realm of Australia (IKA) and the Australian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (K-KKK). In the US, the klan has splintered into factions, with different chapters having different rules, political agendas and philosophies towards religion.

Mr Apple says it is difficult to estimate the total number of KKK members in Australia because, it is believed, some people have joined US-based klans and pay their dues over the Internet.

He believes there is only a small number of followers here but says the klan presents problems with social harmony, particularly in rural and regional areas where there is a precarious relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

"The very existence of a group modelled on the infamous US KKK is enough to instil fear among minorities, especially Aborigines," he says.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which is hosting a national conference on racism in Sydney in March, received 267 complaints under the Racial Discrimination Act in 2000-01. A spokeswoman for the commission says none of those was about race-based material on the Internet - with one of the difficulties being nominating who was responsible for posting it on the site.

Australia's Racial Discrimination Act makes it illegal for a person or group to do anything involving a distinction based on race or descent which impairs any human right or fundamental freedom. The act also prohibits offensive behaviour based on racial hatred.

The March conference marks the beginning of consultations to develop a national plan of action that will direct anti-racism efforts in Australia over the next decade. One of the issues to be discussed will be the Internet and racial material.

Mr Apple says the emergence of the KKK is a new direction for Australia's racist fringe and has shown the power of new technologies, particularly the Internet, in facilitating a globalisation of their message. "The Internet has exposed local racists to the ever-growing number of overseas racist ideologies and activities, and to a network of enthusiasts abroad, to which until recently many had little access," Mr Apple says. His report states the IKA is the largest klan in the US, with 19 chapters in 13 states. It claims the Australian arm is headed by Sydney-based Peter Coleman, who runs a mail-order business specialising in military memorabilia. Contacted by The Advertiser, Mr Coleman has denied being involved in the group, saying he left the organisation 18 months ago.

But another man named in the report, Sydney resident David Palmer, claims to be the Imperial Wizard of both branches of the KKK in Australia. The semi-retired electrician says he will not discuss membership numbers but claims it is an "invisible empire".

"It's a secret organisation," he says. "Membership is growing all the time."

Mr Palmer, 63, says attention from government authorities has forced the organisation to become very secretive but members use the Internet to communicate: "We are looking after the interests of the Aryan people. We would like to see a situation where the population of non-Aryan people in Australia is not allowed to get above 10 per cent."

He says the group also wants Aboriginal people to be given separate homelands "and allow them separate development".

Mr Palmer, who says the organisations have members in South Australia, says they are not affiliated with any klans in the US because of FBI crackdowns on the groups there.

"They have raided offices there and seized membership lists. Because of that, we decided, in order to be more confidential, we would keep separate," he says.

While the robes, hoods and cross-burning ceremonies are part of the Australian structure of the organisation, he says, they don't condone violence unless it's in self-defence.

An Imperial Klans of Australia web page provides a post office box number in Welland for anyone wanting more information about the KKK. Australia Post is unable, for privacy reasons, to reveal who pays for the box or even if it is still active. On the website, there are claims the Australian IKA is a "Christian Identity Patriotic Organization".

"We are not about hate as the media would have you believe (sic)! We are Christian Identity!" the web page reads. "There is a path being paved for the White Race and things will continue (sic) to go down hill for Our Race until you stand and say that (sic) it I have had enough! We of the Ku Klux Klan are unapologetically (sic) committed to the interest and values of the White Race! We are determined to maintain and enrich our cultural and racial heritage. We are growing fast and strong because we have NEVER compromised (sic) the Truth!"

A KKK web page based in the US says the klan's political agenda includes drug-testing welfare recipients, closing America's borders and outlawing homosexuality and interracial marriages.

Mr Apple says the organisation in Australia has become more cohesive and organised in the past two years, particularly with the Internet exposing a greater number of people to their ideologies.

A second international organisation preaching white supremacy - the World Church of the Creator - offers on its web page to provide membership or more information through a post office box in Unley. WCOTC is a "racial religion" which has the prime goal of "the survival, expansion and advancement of the white race".

Openly stating they are racists and anti-Semites, the group through its "White Man's Bible" teaches members to hate and destroy its enemies. The Illinois-based organisation's "battle cry" is RAHOWA, which stands for "RAcial HOly War", and the group has been involved in a number of violent attacks in the US.

The Internet site for the World Church of the Creator also monitors and comments on news in Australia, including developments at the Woomera Detention Centre and last week's proposal for a safe house for children roaming the streets after dark in Port Augusta.

Mr Apple says that in the US the WCOTC and the KKK are not aligned. The first group believes Jews concocted Christianity as a way of polluting the white race while the latter claims it is a Christian group. He says there is no sign that either group has anything more than "a handful" of members in SA or has been involved in any organised violence.

In fact, the KKK's central web page specifically contains a warning to all "Klansmen and Klanswomen" that the organisation will not tolerate illegal acts of any sort. "We cannot and will not be responsible for any member committing any illegal acts," it says.

"We have many people that are counting on us and we cannot afford to be locked up, broken down or continually starting over."

And, Mr Apples says, there is no evidence of either the IKA or the K-KKK sponsoring acts of physical violence in Australia. But in the past the group has perpetrated a plethora of violent acts against blacks and other groups in the US.

The KKK was created in 1865 by Confederate veterans of the US Civil War as a response by citizens in the southern US states to the postwar policies aimed at desegregating life in the south.

Mr Apple says thousands enjoyed the anonymity of putting on a sheet and a mask before committing assaults, mutilations, lynchings, floggings, shootings, robbery, rape, arson and murder.

"The KKK initially sought to attack blacks, though it later focused on all perceived threats to white Protestant American life, including Jews and Catholics," he says.

Because of infighting, civil litigation and the introduction of hate-crime legislation, membership in the US is now believed to be down to no more than 3000 followers.

Meanwhile, Australia has seen sporadic outbreaks of isolated KKK activity since the end of World War II. The heartland for the organisation has always been in southern

Queensland and northern New South Wales, with a particular emphasis on rural communities.

Caption: Montage (color): ku klux klansman, colonel light's vision statue Photo: world church of the creator ku klux klan propaganda Some of the material on the World Church of the Creator website ``humour" section.

Edition: 1 - STATE

Section: Features

Page: 065

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