

# Violence Threat Against Short Must Not Go Unchallenged

(AN EDITORIAL)

Three people, Mrs. Helen Short and her two small children, Carol Ann and Barry, lost their lives as the result of a fire of unknown origin in their Fontana home December 16. The husband, O'Day H. Short, is still in hospital suffering from third degree burns.

A coroner's inquest, held on Thursday of last week, confined itself to an attempt to determine the immediate causes of the fire, and refused to admit testimony dealing with threats of physical violence reported by Short two weeks before the tragedy.

The Sentinel has no desire to make unsubstantiated charges of malicious arson or premeditated murder against any individual or group.

At the same time, in view of the fact that Short reported to a number of people, including a representative of the Los Angeles Sentinel that he had been threatened with violence shortly before the tragedy, a full investigation into the threats themselves is mandatory.

Responsibility for such an investigation rests in the first instance on District Attorney Jerome B. Cavanaugh of San Bernardino county. In the event that Cavanaugh takes no action, then California's Attorney General Robert W. Kenny has an obligation to the people of this state to make a thorough-going probe not only into the immediate causes of the explosion, but also into the actions and activities of all those who were in any way involved in the threats.

Two deputy sheriffs, Joe Glines and "Tex" Cornellson, reportedly visited Short prior to the fire, told him he was "out of bounds," and warned him that "neighbors" had complained of his presence on his own property.

As law enforcement officers, these deputies should have explained to such complaining neighbors that the Shorts had every right to live on their property and that right would be protected. Instead it appears that these officers attempted to bring pressure to bear against the Shorts to deprive them of their constitutional rights.

It is to be hoped that the self-styled "vigilante" committee had no hand in starting the fire that has cost three lives. But vigilante threats are serious in themselves, whether or not there is any direct connection between these particular threats and this specific fire.

If threats of this kind go unchallenged, and those who made the threats are not even questioned, then law and order no longer exists, and vigilante violence becomes the rule.

The danger is one that extends far beyond the limits of Fontana itself or even of San Bernardino county.

Full light must be thrown on this incident, or colored citizens and members of other minorities will be safe nowhere in California.