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## New Jersey

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# Organized crime buys electoral district

by Vin Berg

An hour or so before he left office in mid-January, former Governor Brendan Byrne of New Jersey signed into law a new congressional redistricting bill. As usual under Byrne, organized crime had cut itself another nice little piece of the pie.

The immediate beneficiary in this case was Adam Levin, who headed Byrne's Department of Consumer Affairs. Levin is the son of the late real-estate magnate, Philip J. Levin, whose rise to multimillionaire operator status occurred in the service of Mr. Meyer Lansky.

Young Levin designed a brand new, wildly gerrymandered congressional district, and as one of his last acts in office, Brendan Byrne gave it to him.

The saga of the Levins casts light on the process of destruction of New Jersey's once-powerful Democratic Party machines, and their replacement by the synthetic "new breed" of politician who is not a product of the party, but of narcotics money, and is responsible to no constituency, except organized crime. This might be called the "Jerry Brown" model after the current California Governor, whose father, Pat Brown, was heir to an organized-crime fortune in the Bay Area, went "legit" by marrying the daughter of a police chief, and then used his organized-crime connections to make himself, and then his son Jerry, California's governor. Interestingly, many of the names—Meyer Lansky, Sidney Korshak, et al.—that turn up in the background of the California Browns also turn up in the background of the New Jersey Levins.

The "Jerry Brown" model has advanced in New Jersey since the mid-1960s, when a series of vicious scandals were launched by then U.S. Attorney Herbert Stein. The beheading of the constituency-based Democratic Party begun then culminated in Abscam, and the frame-up and attempted ruin of the state's most effective and popular politician, Sen. Harrison Williams.

Brendan Byrne's redistricting plan included an entirely new congressional district, 70 miles long as a crow-flies—if the crow is drunk. It stretches from the urban port center of Elizabeth down to the academic community of Princeton, plunging still further south until abruptly swinging back up into Monmouth County. It

includes towns from *five* previous congressional districts.

Adam Levin had gone to a computer and selected those areas with the strongest profile of young, liberal Jewish voters. That produced the new 7th C.D. The needed "yes" votes from the legislature were bought with \$500 checks to local Democratic Party officials "in memory of my dear father."

### The 'dear father'

Philip Levin was a wheeler-dealer in real estate and liberal Democratic circles in New Jersey, and was known as a generous supporter of needy county machines. He was also much more.

Meyer Lansky's biographer, Hank Messick, had these observations: "Levin, a self-made millionaire, owed much of his success to his syndicate connections. . . . Young Levin went into the real-estate business and made it rather quickly. In some law-enforcement circles, he was considered a front for such shy syndicate wizards as Meyer Lansky. Much of the land he sold for huge profits was in Florida and had been purchased by syndicate figures in the decade following the collapse of the great Florida boom of the twenties."

Using the proceeds of his real-estate operations, Levin bought so heavily into Gulf & Western (\$22 million) that he was made president of G&W's real estate subsidiary, Transnation.

Key in Levin's purchases were two Chicago race-tracks. Levin also hired on as "labor counsel" to Sidney Korshak, the notorious mob elder statesman. In 1970, during hearings of the Illinois Racing Board, agents of the Illinois Bureau of Investigation revealed that Transnation had bought a Mexican hotel, Acapulco Towers. At the time he bought it, it was infamous as the hideout of Meyer Lansky, the international drug-traffic czar. The following year, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Transnation had made illegal contributions totalling \$100,000 to leading Illinois Republicans while its racetrack licenses were still under consideration by a Republican-controlled racing board.

Levin testified in court that it was Sidney Korshak who told him whom to pay and how much. Levin and Transnation were convicted, and given a \$25,000 fine.

Now, with the aid of Brendan Byrne, under whom New Jersey's industry was unravelled in favor of race tracks and casinos, the mobster's son, Adam Levin, created his own congressional district and purchased it from the legislature. If Levin wins the 7th C.D., there is no question who will own one more Congressman. And if this synthetic "new breed" of politician is to be moved aside and the state's Democratic Party rebuilt, the fight to exonerate Senator Harrison Williams from a frame-up by Justice Department elements with Lansky-ties of their own will be the key.