

# When the Klan Rules

## The Giant Begins to Rule Us

By STANLEY FROST

**T**HE really vital strength, the true hope or menace, of the Ku Klux Klan lies in politics. It is there that it can produce the greatest effect, cause the most stunning impact on our lives, exert the deepest influence on the Nation. Its social, economic, and spiritual activities, its terrorism and boycotting and possible violence, are important enough in all conscience and will make or break thousands of lives, but compared to what it may do in politics they are trifles. For through politics the Klan may rule America.

It has already started; it expects to make its rule secure and as complete as it wishes within a single year!

This hope is no wild dream. In sober truth there is a very fair chance that the Klan may succeed. It will surely go far toward it, though just how far no one can even guess till the smoke has blown away after the November elections. But its success will be startling unless there comes one of those miracles which are always possible in politics, and almost never happen. In fact, the chance for a sweeping Klan victory—no matter which party wins—is about as good as the chance for Coolidge to be elected. This does not imply that he is the Klan candidate—it has not yet picked its man—but illustrates how well justified is its hope that it will win in the play of skill and run of luck in our great National game.

The Klan's political power is already large, for, as was pointed out in the first article of this series, it has elected men of its choice to controlling places in six States, has dominated the elections in half a hundred Congressional districts, and has won complete victories in many hundreds of towns, counties, and small cities, to say nothing of throwing the whole political world into spasms. It has already shown power, in short, about three times that of the Non-Partisan League and double that of the Populists in their best days.

But this is only the beginning. At the coming elections the Klan expects—not merely hopes, but confidently expects—to win more than twenty States, most of the local elections inside those States and hundreds outside them.

This is far from impossible. The Klan's present political power was won

**T**HE Klan hopes to have a controlling voice in our National Government. It hopes to have twelve million members by election time. Will these hoped-for twelve millions act upon the "Word" of the Klan?

with far fewer and far less well-disciplined members than answer its roll-calls to-day. Two years ago in the Congressional elections it had less than 200,000 votes. Last fall, when it scored so heavily, it had about 3,000,000. To-day it has some 4,500,000, and by election time it confidently counts on having 12,000,000. This doubtless includes many unhatched chickens, but even if the Klan growth continues at the average rate of the last three months—and the rate has increased steadily during that time—it will have close to nine million! And nine million votes is more than a third of the largest vote ever cast. Cleverly used, it can get almost anything. When we recall the influence that has been exerted by the two million German hyphenates or the three million Jews, the possible power of nine million Klansmen, or even of eight or seven or six or five, begins to be clear.

### *Out for Victory*

**T**HE Klan intends to win. Its leaders believe that a victory will give it freedom from the persecutions and prosecutions which have plagued it so far, give it a chance to consolidate its power and trim off its excrescences and make certain internal reforms they dare not attempt yet, and let it prove to the world the worth of its theories and programme. More, they believe that they will have difficulty in even holding the organization together without a victory, and that it is absolutely necessary if they are to keep on growing. They realize, too, how fast their mushroom growth will crumble under any adversity. For all these reasons they are gambling heavily on this one card.

So they have focused all their efforts

on politics. They do not admit it, but I am convinced that this is the true explanation of several of the present abuses in the Klan: the acceptance of riffraff members, the carelessness about collecting dues and even initiation fees, the tolerance of grafters and self-seeking leaders in minor places. All will help till and at the election, therefore all will be tolerated till then; then the Klan can clean house.

This explains, too, the tremendous pressure behind the kluxing which is absorbing most of the funds of the order, the devotion of the great secret information service to the collection of political "dope," the transfer to Washington of most of the high executives (headquarters remains at Atlanta, but little is done there), and the busy establishment of a Klan-controlled press, and a dozen other lesser symptoms. If the Klan fails to achieve political ambitions, it will not be for want of using every ounce of strength it possesses.

So far as local elections and local governments are concerned, the control which the Klan seeks is practically absolute; there are limitations on its National ambitions which will be explained in the following article. And in these local campaigns the chief difficulty that the Klan has and will have is not so much with its opponents as inside its own ranks.

The most numerous of the various breeds of parasites with which the Klan is afflicted is composed of cheap politicians who see a chance to get jobs or graft they have been unable to reach in ordinary politics, or to hold on to places or profits they are in danger of losing. Blatherskites, crooks, grafters, chronic kickers, chronic candidates, criminals dependent on political pull, has-beens and all the flotsam of political life have grabbed at the Fiery Cross as a hope of salvation. They are so obstreperous that one political observer told me that in his State the whole Klan movement was "an attempt of the political scrap-heap to seize the Government." Along with these, too, there has gone into the Klan a swarm of fanatics and world-savers who are trying to get it to support every known crack-brained and half-baked reform. Witness the "monkey bill" to prevent the teaching of evolution, which was

passed in Oklahoma with Klan support, and the attempt to suppress all private schools in Oregon.

This noisy and pestiferous crew, however, do not represent either the great body of the Klan or its National leadership. They are apparently tolerated, as such are always tolerated in new political movements, for the sake of their votes. It was their presence in the Progressive party, I believe, which led Roosevelt to coin the term "lunatic fringe." Certainly the Progressives gathered up a mighty following of them, and of the political hoboes as well.

In fact, there are many other ways in which the Ku Klux movement resembles the Progressive party. It contains about the same basic elements of partly dissatisfied and partly idealistic middle-class folk, as well as the same fringes. Its gatherings give the same appearance and feeling. It is strong in about the same parts of the country, and it sings "Onward, Christian Soldiers" just as indefatigably as the Bull Moosers did. It has much of the same naïve, inexperienced, youthful vigor.

All these conditions in the membership limit not only the programme of the Klan in politics, but also the demands it may make on candidates, bosses, or men in office. Its political record so far shows that it has very largely respected these limits. It can seldom nominate its own man, for example, as that would aid one party or the other. It cannot pick the men whom it is going to support on any party basis, but only on the basis of their ability and willingness to support the Klan programme and their general fitness.

### *The Man or the "Pet Idea"*

THE church-going quality of most Klansmen makes personal character unusually important for candidates in Klan territory, and is likely to enforce more than usually decent administration from officials. It also gives the Klan a political morality rather above the average, which is no very great praise. There are cases of course, as in other similar movements, when very decent citizens overlook all other qualifications in a candidate except his support of their pet ideas. This has caused some curious situations, like those in the Anti-Saloon League campaigns where the churches have united behind men who were complete scalawags except for their willingness to vote for prohibition.

The Klan very naturally will support Klansmen where possible, but it has often refused to do this, and has even voted for non-Klansmen (in at least one case for an anti-Klan man) when it thought them better, even against Klan

members. But I have learned of no case where it gave support to a man who was not a native, white, Protestant. It takes pains to see that there is at least one such in every electoral contest.

When the Klan does move in politics—that is, when it takes a hand in the selection or election of candidates or in influencing officials—it brings to bear a pressure such as almost no other organization, even one of the great parties, can apply. All its organized unity, all its ability to strike suddenly and in the dark, all its secret information and its terrorism, are even more effective here than in ordinary life, for politicians are by nature a very timid tribe. The Klan, too, can use not only this stunning political battle-ax; it can add to that the whole social and economic power described in the last article. Political bosses, it is true, often use similar additional means of coercing candidates and officials, but few are ever able to do it with a tithe of the force, and none of them with the demoralizing terrorism, that the Klan commands.

### *When Is Advice Not Advice?*

IN politics, as in boycotting, the Klan claims no actual control over its members. It does not officially tell them how to vote, any more than it tells them to withhold trade from a business man. It merely gives them information, sometimes advice, and they are "free to act upon it as they see fit." It also "educates" them as to the desirability of acting on this information and advice.

I asked Dr. Evans how far the Klan controls the political action of its members.

"None whatsoever, so far as actual control is concerned," he replied. "No obligation of a Klansman, nothing in his oath or understanding, requires of him or contemplates that he shall accept the information and educational facts presented to him through the Klan as final. The whole thought is to develop a mind that will express itself through an electorate fully informed.

"The actual strength of the Klan," he went on, "depends upon the extent to which Klansmen have been educated to their duties as citizens and on how they respond to information given by Klan officials. This is always uncertain, but experience indicates that these are generally accepted, and will be so as long as they represent in the minds of the Klansmen themselves true American ideals."

So far as I can learn, Dr. Evans is correct in saying that the Klan does not give orders, but information. Certainly it has much information to give, and takes great pains in putting it out. Since it is secret, it would easily be possible to

give false information of a kind that might be exceedingly dangerous, but I cannot find that it does so, at least so far as actual candidates are concerned.

I have learned of several instances in which it has circulated just before an election a report on candidates much like the reports put out by Citizens' Committees and similar bodies. I saw one such and have reports on others. They were all startlingly detailed, intimate, and exhaustive, but rather amazingly fair. The one I saw was put out in Oklahoma in the heat of a bitter fight, but there was no trace of partisanship visible. It gave both the personal and political record of each man, his affiliations in business, society, religion, and politics, and his relations with the Klan. I was particularly impressed with the fact that when a man had joined the Klan under circumstances which indicated that his purpose had been to get political support that fact was indicated. In several such cases the advice was that he should be beaten. So far as I could judge by that report, it was a valuable and trustworthy guide for any voter.

Incidentally, even if the advice given is bad, the training given voters by this system is a very considerable service to the community. If the Klan should succeed in teaching its members to judge candidates on any other basis than that of "regularity" and back-scratching and pie-gathering ability, it would do much for the future of democracy.

### *Waiting for the "Word"*

THE actual political attitude of Klansmen as I have seen them appears to be much more docile and dependent than Dr. Evans states, however. Even on the night before election they are likely not to know what they are going to do at the polls; they are "waiting for the word." Possibly this is merely the information and advice Dr. Evans described, but the attitude was that of soldiers waiting for and ready to carry out orders. So it seems that in political practice, as it was with the application of a boycott, it makes little difference in results whether "the word" is a command or a bit of information or advice.

There is, on the other hand, some doubt about how far the Klansmen will follow the lead given. In one case in Oklahoma a Klansman and a man whom the Klan opposed, running on the same ticket, finished only a few hundred votes apart. There have been other cases where the apparent voting strength of the Klan was *nil*. But these are exceptions, possibly due to lack of "education" or some more subtle factor; they do prove that the Klansmen seem to feel under no obligation to follow their leaders in

politics beyond a point which they—the individual Klansmen—determine for themselves. This is important in showing the limits of the Klan leaders' power.

In general, however, in nearly ninety per cent of the cases I have been able to check, the Klan apparently has cast a practically solid vote. This is increasingly true, and the Grand Dragon of Oklahoma told me that by next fall the entire membership would be educated and "ready and able to make proper use of information given them." Dr. Evans adds that the Klan usually casts more than its own vote.

"We have found by experience," he remarked, "that when a Klan issue is raised or when the Klan becomes active in a political campaign the actual pro-Klan vote will be much larger than the numerical strength of the Klan itself, and sometimes many times as large." It should be added that the Klan officials declare that the Klan itself has never been allowed to become an issue, or a Klansman to run as such, unless an attack had been made on it. I have not found a case in which this was not true.

When it comes to the actual power of the Klan in political action, the fact that it is not a party, does not want full control or offices, and therefore does not need an actual plurality of votes, gives it great advantages toward the results it does demand. It leaves room for deals; for politicians to submit and yet save their faces. And a minority, willing to swing to either party a solid block of votes, is in a far better position to get those results than even a party majority would be. The Anti-Saloon League has given the most convincing proof of this. Such a body can threaten both sides, quite likely secure pledges or dictate nominations on both sides, and be secure of victory whichever wins. If either party or candidate balks, it can usually swing enough votes to beat him.

The political law on which this minority power—the power of any minority—is based is the very A B C of American politics, yet so often forgotten that I may be pardoned for recalling it. It is that *control of one-half of the movable or floating vote in any electorate gives political control*. For example, in most elections the two great parties are fairly evenly balanced, party loyalty holding something like forty per cent of the voters to each. The election, then, will be decided among the remaining twenty per cent, and any one who controls one vote more than half of them can throw victory whichever way he pleases. The man who wins must take his orders both before and after election.

The actual figures vary, of course, but the fact always is that victory does not

depend on winning a majority of the voters, but a majority of those who are not party-bound. Hence it is that any small and compact minority is usually able to get what it wants. The Klan's strength is that it has gathered such a minority.

But the Klan's weakness is in the one exception to this rule; rather in its corollary. This is that the minority power fails as soon as there is formed another group, equally large, and determined to vote against the first group. If the two balance, both can be ignored. In practice this seldom happens. Pro-Germans, for example, were long able to act as a unit, while the rest of us were divided over tariff, conservation, or some other matter. In local politics the "liquor vote"—and to-day the "bootleg vote"—can win easily in any campaign which divides the electorate on any other issue. Our politics has thus become full of minority groups for which there is no offset; racial, religious, business, farming, labor, or what not, each without any corresponding group of "antis." Politicians and office-holders cater to them all; they must, for if one is lost there is nothing to take its place.

### *Opposition that Breeds Opposition*

IN the case of the Klan, however, this law of opposition groups works with full force. The Klan automatically raises up its opponents; more accurately, it is an opposition group itself, its chief object being to strike at certain of the groups already active, so that its balancing blocs are ready-made. Many politicians, therefore, believe that they can win by defying the Klan and rallying all these groups behind them. As this is written there are indications that the Northern Democratic leaders—Murphy, Sullivan, Taggart, and their allies—are preparing to do this. Their plan is certainly logical, for in the cities where their main strength lies the bulk of the vote is alien, Jewish, or Catholic, and, naturally, anti-Klan. It is worth a smile in passing to note that most of the Klan leaders and probably a slight majority of their followers are Democrats.

This rallying of alien elements has been the means of defeating nativistic movements several times since Jefferson first did it just after 1800. The Democratic party did it in the forties, and again in the fifties against the Know-Nothings. With our present large alien element—the last Census showed nearly four and a half million alien-born citizens of voting age, to say nothing of the children of aliens and the native Jews and Catholics, who will naturally take sides against the Klan—it is evident that this

policy stands a large chance of success. Nationally, and is certain of success in many localities. The evils of an election based on these group divisions are too obvious to need reciting. The possible result in government by an alien, anti-American alliance is also clear.

When I pointed out to Dr. Evans that the Klan by uniting these groups was likely to insure, not only its own defeat, but the defeat of the very principles of Americanism for which it is standing, he minimized the danger. He declared that the very characteristics which have prevented the different National and religious groups from becoming assimilated would also prevent their joining for any effective action. This may be true in some ways, but there is already plenty of evidence that they are willing to join at least to beat the Klan.

It is in meeting this opposition that the Klan's secrecy comes to its highest value, for the alien groups cannot unite against Klan candidates unless they know whom the Klan is supporting, and they are barred from uniting on openly alien candidates of their own because of the certainty that this would drive all Americans into the Klan ranks, insuring its victory. So they must work on the defensive, also in secrecy. But they have not and cannot possibly have the solid and effective organization of the Klan.

Their task, then, is a hard one. They must select their candidates from among men who may already be Klansmen, work with groups which may include Klan members, convince the Americans among their followers that the men so selected are good Americans and the alien groups that the same men are pro-alien. And they must determine from among all the various candidates offered which one or ones are favorable to the Klan and concentrate opposition upon them.

The last problem is the most baffling, for the Klan will not label its candidates. It has learned that lesson already in elections where open Klan support has solidified opposition to the men it wanted elected. To-day its candidates are, when it seems desirable, as secret as the organization itself. In one recent case the Klan press openly attacked the very man for whom "the word" finally went out. This system is peculiarly effective in primaries where several candidates are running and will often nominate pro-Klan men on both tickets. It will not be needed in many places, of course. Probably in most sections where the Klan operates its strength will be so great that it can fight best in the open. But when the fight is made behind a hood it will be baffling.

Nor is there much chance that the opposition can checkmate the Klan

through finding in advance what it intends to do. They could do this easily if the Klan plans had to be confided in advance to the whole membership, for a leak would be almost certain. But the Klan need take no such risk. With its members waiting for "the word," that word can be held back till the last moment, often till the last hour before the polls close, when it will be far too late for any opposition to act. The Klan's system of passing information has been perfected to a point where, I am assured, the entire membership can be reached in less than two hours after the machinery is started. There are over 5,000 offices kept open day and night to make this possible.

Altogether it seems that in this very complex situation the great solidity and the amazing organization of the Klan

give it the advantage. If it does get the nine million members it may reasonably expect, it will also have an advantage in numbers. With these advantages it is quite justified in believing that at least so far as local elections are concerned it can count on a very satisfying measure of success—very satisfying indeed.

The one thing that is clear is that in the coming campaign there will be a mass of underground politics, hidden issues, hypocritical candidacies, and general wool-pulling and lying such as the country has never seen. The blame for this at first thought rests on the Klan, which has caused the crisis. It seems, however, that in fairness the real blame must go back to the politicians and groups which for years have been dickering, openly and secretly, with other minority groups, by the same filthy methods. The political

crimes committed at the demand of the German vote, the Catholic vote, the Jewish, Italian, Polish, Negro or Irish vote, have been so many and have become so notorious that they have automatically aroused opposition. Not all members of the races and religions named belong to these group-voting blocs, by any means, but the blocs are there, and have been used in many vicious ways by unworthy leaders. The Klan in politics is only the more or less accidental vehicle of the very necessary and righteous attempt to thwart them.

These groups are active in National as well as local politics, and the Klan follows them there. The situation and chances in that field are rather different, but even more important. They will be the subject of the next, and last, article—"The Plan to Capture Washington."

# A Little City with Big Ideas

The Story of how Middletown, Ohio, Found Itself

By SHERMAN ROGERS

Industrial Correspondent of The Outlook

"I WANT to see labor occupying seats on the floor of major community organizations. In other words, I want them on the inside rubbing elbows with the business men, helping guide the destinies of the city they live in, instead of being on the outside looking in and wondering what it is all about."

The Convention of Chamber of Commerce Secretaries, gathered in New Orleans, gasped for an instant when Dwight E. Smith, Secretary-Manager of the Middletown, Ohio, Chamber of Commerce, made the above remark. Instantly there was a storm of questions. Most of the secretaries agreed that it was a great idea, but they were just as vigorous in their declaration that it could not be done in an industrial city.

"Why not?" Smith thundered. "In an industrial city about eighty per cent of the total population is composed of manual workers and their families, and they are the very people who are going to gain most by added civic improvements, and they are going to suffer most if money raised for civic purposes is not properly expended. Right now, as a rule, about ten per cent of a city's population is represented in the Chamber. And what has been the result in a city of



D. E. Smith, Secretary of the Middletown Civic Association

under a hundred thousand? Why dodge the issue? Why not look it in the face? Labor has always been suspicious of the average commercial organization that represents the business men of a city. Not having access to the floor, they naturally become suspicious of the real

intentions and the real ideals that the Chamber of Commerce generally stands for.

"What is a Chamber of Commerce? It is an organization of business and professional men assembled to promote the best interests of a great city. I believe that in a large city the Chamber of Commerce should remain as it is to-day constituted—a body of business and professional men organized to promote the interests of commerce; but I believe that the average city of 100,000 or less is over-organized, there being too many organizations attempting to perform the same service. In the small industrial city, in my judgment, there should be a unified organization co-ordinating civic, social, industrial, commercial, and agricultural interests under one community management. And if a single reason can be advanced as to why those who compose a large majority of the population of a community should not occupy seats in this centralized community body, I'd like to hear it."

No one offered any serious objection, but several reiterated the remarks that had already been made, that, while it sounded good, it would be extremely difficult to put into actual practice.

"I'll give you my whole argument in