

Power Struggle for Klan Control

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CHARLOTTE, N. C. —

When Imperial Wizard Robert Shelton and Grand Dragon J. Robert Jones return from prison they may find their "invisible empire" all but gone.

The United Klans of America, Inc., was already heading into a sharp decline when the two top leaders were given one-year federal prison sentences earlier this year for contempt of Congress.

And during their absence there has been a power struggle for control of the Klan—and more importantly, it seems, the Klan's money.

Klansmen in every state are hanging up their robes, reliable Klan watchers report. Even the state organizations of the UKA in the Deep South are finding it hard to keep a respectable membership.

Mississippi once boasted of more than 1,800 Klan members, plus an assorted collection in various other groups. The splinter groups have died and Klan roles show less than 100 today.

The home office of the United Klans is in Tuscaloosa, but there are only about 225 Klan card holders in the entire state of Alabama.

Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee and Florida all are losing members rapidly. Some state organizations have been dissolved.

One of the most crushing blows came last month when North Carolina Klansmen tied 350 membership cards to a 16-foot cross and burned them to protest the "dictatorial policies" of the United Klans.

"This is the only way I know of, without getting out of the Klan, to fight the takeover from Alabama," said Tom Morris, vice president of the North Carolina

diana who complained of the same thing.

Bryant said he hopes to keep his followers until Jones is released.

"Unless the klanspeople band together in North Carolina and say we're going to hold North Carolina together, come hell or high water, it's going to completely destroy the klan," he said.

The struggle for power obviously upsets top Klan lead-

ers who have made a handsome living of the organization. But the average Klansman is getting his fill of the UKA for something closer to home—money.

Seldom is there a time in the klan when the local unit, the state organization or the national office isn't asking for money. And there have been few results for the dollars invested.

Klansmen, reports said, are also aware now of the

lax accounting procedures that characterizes most klan finances.

The final straw in North Carolina and other states was Sexton's call for Klan units to "begin emptying your treasuries" to support a united (legal) defense fund.

Sexton said \$12,500 was needed to pay the legal fees of Arthur Hanes of Birmingham, Ala., one-time attorney to James Earl Ray. Hanes

Klansmen.

Presiding over the card-burning ceremony was Joe Bryant of Charlotte, who is acting head of the North Carolina Klan while Jones is in prison.

Bryant said the break was primarily caused by attempts by Melvin Sexton, executive administrator of the United Klans while Shelton is in prison, to assess the North Carolina Klan \$50,000 to set up a permanent defense fund for Klansmen.

"We're protesting in the same sense of the federal government taking over the rights of states to self govern," said Bryant. "Now the United Klans of America is doing the same thing."

Bryant said he has behind him an imperial officer, province leaders, members of his state board and about 10 unit chiefs—enough to take about half of the North Carolina Klan population away from the UKA national office.

The break of the North Carolina UKA "realm" strikes at the very life of the UKA for she has been national's richest and most productive child.

Shelton once admitted, "We can hang on as long as we've still got North Carolina. But when we lose that we are through."

The day is here, Klan observers say.

In the peak year of 1966, 9,000 men and women belonged to the UKA in North Carolina. Now there are just over 1,000 card carriers.

Where weekly cow pas-

ture rallies once drew up to 2,000 people and as much as \$225 when the hat was passed, attendance is less than 200 today. Fewer than a dozen rallies have been held this year.

In his heyday Robert Jones was able to fill the position in North Carolina that was taken by George Wallace in Alabama and Lester Maddox in Georgia.

The flamboyant traveling salesman became the spokesman for racists.

But even a year ago Jones was beginning to feel a pinch. It didn't show in his buoyant attitude but in the dwindling crowds and the paltry results of the collection bucket.

Those who watched the skyrocket rise of the Klan said that arrests of Klansmen—though convictions were few—also played a part in the decline.

Wives became intolerant when Klan "pranks" could lead to a year or two in jail. Employers also didn't like the publicity of Klansmen in their employ, observers said.

"The klanspeople of North Carolina are dissatisfied with the illegal takeover of every state organization by the United Klans of America by one man—Mr. Melvin Sexton," Bryant said.

Sexton was named executive administrator by Shelton when he left for jail.

Bryant claims Sexton is using the office to fill his own bank account at the same time he takes "dictatorial" control of the state organizations.

Bryant said he has heard from klansmen in Maryland, Mississippi, Virginia and In-

Speeds Its Decline

was hired to defend 17 Klansmen charged with misdemeanors after a shootout with blacks in an eastern North Carolina town.

"I opposed this," said Bryant. "First of all the Klanspeople of North Carolina weren't allowed to vote on this.

"When you start doing this, well, it is just the same thing our forefathers came to the United States to get

out of, taxation without representation."

Units were told to kick in from \$200 to \$500 or forfeit their charters, Bryant said.

"We have some units that don't even have \$200," Bryant said.

While Bryant has been throwing the old "state's rights" argument back at his national office, Sexton introduced a note of irony, too.

He accused Bryant of

using "Communist, civil rights tactics" in going to the news media and exaggerating the extent of his troubles. Sexton also denied any mishandling of funds and said the money (about \$27,500 is involved) could be accounted for.

While the membership is drifting, there is no chance that Jones or Shelton—if they return to the Klan—will lose all their following.



ROBERT M. SHELTON JR.
... his empire shrinks