

# Newark's White Vigilante Group, Opposed by Governor, Sees Itself as an Antidote to Riots

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NEWARK, June 23—According to Gov. Richard J. Hughes, Anthony Imperiale, the head of the North Ward Citizens Committee, is a "potential threat to peace and law and order in New Jersey."

To the grand dragon of the New Jersey Ku Klux Klan, he is a former dues-paying member—a claim that Mr. Imperiale denies.

To the New Jersey branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, he is the monolithic leader of a "secret, uniformed, paramilitary organization composed solely of white persons dedicated to opposing by force and violence attempts on the part of the Negro American to achieve equality."

But to hundreds of Italian youths in the North Ward here, he's known affectionately and respectfully as "The Big T," a barrel-chested pot-bellied construction worker and Black Belt karate instructor who, according to his followers, can cleave a cinder block with his elbow and withstand the full impact of a wooden folded chair being broken across his back.

For his own part, Mr. Imperiale, a toupeed 39-year-old former private detective, believes his image here has been grossly distorted.

### Racist Label Decried

"I'm called a bigot, a racist, a night rider, a vigilante and all the rest," he complained during the early hours yesterday as he completed an uneventful automobile patrol of the North Ward and the outer fringes of the nearby Negro Central Ward.

"We're supposed to be night riders, and you might call us vigilantes, but we resent that in a way," he said as he eased his black 1959 Cadillac sedan to a halt in front of the Imperiale Association of Judo and Karate, headquarters of the citizens' committee at 647 North Seventh Street here.

The building is a one-story cinder-block office where Mr. Imperiale dispenses free karata lessons to his followers, mostly youths, in a small gymnasium in the rear and commands 10 to 25 automobile patrols that the North Ward Citizens Committee and other similar groups in Newark send out nearly every night.

"Vigilantes are usually out to lynch somebody," explained Mr. Imperiale who lives on a quiet, integrated street. "But we're

not to lynch anybody. Our job here is not to act as police officers, but just to see that our families can come home from church, schools, subways and stores in peace.

"But if they [Negroes from the Central Ward] come to burn our homes this summer, we'll shoot to kill," he warned through the smoke of his third cigar of the evening.

### 'Just Constant Fear'

"Do you know what it all means?" he exclaimed with a wave of an enormous fist. "It means that joy is gone out of the world. There's no more laughter, just constant fear.

Newark is just like a Western town held at bay by the bad guys until the decent guys like us do something about it."

Mr. Imperiale said it was fear, in part, that prompted him to form his citizens committee after Negro rioting in the Central Ward last July, in which 26 persons were killed.

For nearly a year now, Mr. Imperiale has been leading his committee in confronting Negro militants at City Council meetings, vociferously championing dogs for the police and calling, at white citizens' rallies throughout the city, for law and order.

For months he has been directing a highly organized, mobilized patrol in which white youths, most of them wearing dark green construction hard hats with "N.W.C.C." painted on them in white, ride in cars equipped with two-way radios over carefully planned routes. On Friday and Saturday night there were 21 patrols scattered throughout white neighborhoods in the city.

### No Incidents Reported

But the weekend was just like every one since his patrols began at the start of the year. Not one serious incident was

reported by any of his patrol cars, except for the usual police searches of his vehicles for weapons.

Along with the street patrol, the committee conducts an escort service and once in a while helps the police search for suspects, even though this is officially frowned upon in police headquarters.

Governor Hughes also frowns upon Mr. Imperiale and his followers, who, Mr. Imperiale claims, number about 5,000, with about 100 members paying dues of \$2 a month. In a letter to Edwin B. Forsythe, the Republican State Senate presi-

dent, the Democratic Governor urged "in the strongest possible terms" the enactment of a bill that would outlaw the North Ward Citizens Committee and abolish its patrols before the Legislature adjourns tomorrow.

### Court Ban Sought

Meanwhile, the New Jersey branch of the American Civil Liberties Union is seeking a Federal Court order that would abolish Mr. Imperiale's organization.

As for Mr. Imperiale's alleged former Klan membership, John Behringer, the New Jersey

grand dragon, says that he "re-inducted" Mr. Imperiale into the state Klan at a ceremony in his West Caldwell home on April 19, 1967.

"I had my red robe and red mask on," Mr. Behringer, a 37-year-old former police officer, said in an interview.

However, Mr. Imperiale called Mr. Behringer a "liar" and denied ever taking the Klan pledge.

"I went there to discuss giving those guys karate training, and that's all," he said. "And do you know, I even offered them a special group rate but the deal fell through."