
The Ku Klux Klan

by Victor L. Berger

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I have had letters (and even personal visits) from well meaning but shortsighted and ignorant men begging me “to go easy on the Klan” — “to put the soft pedal on the Klan” — and similar “good advice” — lest the Socialist Party suffer loss of votes on account of my attacks.

And then there were also some veiled threats.

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Well, here is my answer:

I consider the Ku Klux Klan an organization built upon race hatred and religious hatred. I know it to be anti-social and anti-American — a menace to rich and poor, to workers and capitalists alike. I believe the Klan to be an utterly venomous, cowardly, and despicable gang of marauders hiding under the cloak of secrecy and mysticism and patriotism.

If the Socialist Party of America would not scorn and reject Ku Klux Klan votes at any and all times — I would reject the Socialist Party.

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The Klan is the only proof of a yellow streak in the American people and particularly in the Anglo-Saxon race — which is very much inbred and degenerated in certain parts of the South that had little immigration and infusion of new and healthy European blood.

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The Klan finds special favor with the ignorant, illiterate, and shiftless Southerner, whose main occupation is the chewing of tobacco and whose greatest joy is the drinking of moonshine. This man absolutely believes that he belongs to a “superior race” because he was born in the land where the razor hog roams freely through the ill kept woods.

He feels particularly superior to the Dutchman (Hun), Swede, or any European foreigner (“furriner”), <missing line> and technical knowledge than all the gentlemen of that Southern county put together.

There are also jealous and vicious elements up North, however, who are very susceptible to an invitation to obtain exemption for their lawlessness by joining an “invisible empire,” whose members are oath-bound to protect each other against personal or public vengeance, in or out of court.

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Historically, the Ku Klux Klan does not only descent from its comparatively innocent namesake of the Reconstruction period, which first Klan was forcibly suppressed by federal legislation and by the federal troops — but its main roots are in the old Know-Nothing movement, the American Patriotic Party, so-called.

The Know-Nothings attained considerable strength in the '50s of the last century. They even put up a Presidential ticket and carried one state

— Kentucky. The Know-Nothings derived their name from the fact that they would answer all questions and all arguments with the phrase, “I know nothing.” They were also instructed to deny their adherence to the party.

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Nevertheless, the Know-Nothings did considerable damage in their day. They burned Roman Catholic churches in Louisville, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia, and killed many hundred Irish people in a riot lasting several days in Louisville. And remember, they also fought pitched battles with the German “turners” — that is, with the members of the German Gymnastic Association, who were “freethinkers.”

The Civil War, between the North and the South, put an end to the Know-Nothings. Many of them joined the Republican Party, others down South became violent Confederates.

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I am opposed to the Klan, not only because the Ku Klux Klan has made the fight on Socialism, trade unionism, the IWW, etc., one of its principle objects — as stated by the Great Hooded Hoodoo in Atlanta. Not only because the Klan has been guilty of murders and terrible outrages against railroad men during their recent strike. Not only because they have been unspeakably cruel against Jews, Catholics, and Negroes.

I am opposed because the mere existence of an organization like the Klan is a menace to the entire commonwealth. It seeks to substitute organized crime for organized government.

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At any rate, there can be no question but that a Ku Kluxer cannot hold a membership in the Socialist Party — not any more than that there

could be any question whether a rattlesnake could hold a “red card.”

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The Klan could have its origin only among illiterates and bootleggers of the South. It could only get a start among Georgia “crackers” and their nativistic and ignorant “broken down” Methodist and Baptist preachers.

The South, where moonshine distilleries are as frequent as public schools up North — that is the native soil and principal habitat of the Klan.

Even in the South, nevertheless, all the better elements, including the Free Masons, have also condemned the Ku Klux Klan and are organizing against these hooded gangsters — as all decent people anywhere would organize against a criminal gang of night prowlers.

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But some poor Protestant fanatics are trying the old APA dodge. They are putting up the scarecrow of Romanism — of Roman Catholic church domination.

Well — I have in the past opposed certain Roman Catholic aspirations. And whenever the Roman Catholics went into politics as Roman Catholics in order to promote certain claims or privileges for their church, I stood up openly and in broad daylight against them in the columns of the paper or on the platform of the meeting — not masked and not at night time with an armed and masked mob behind me.

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Take it all in all, however, I think the least and the last Roman Catholic priest is of more value to the community than all the Ku Kluxers of the United States combined.

The old church at its worst — during the

Middle Ages — never resorted to methods as are in vogue wherever the Klan dominates today — in the 20th Century — and in America.

And Martin Luther or John Knox would never start a Ku Klux Klan. They were no cowards.

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We are told by investigators that except for the main officials and organizers the Ku Kluxers are invariably accustomed to deny their membership in the Klan. They imitate the old Know-Nothings.

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There is a law in Oklahoma barring Ku Kluxers from jury duty.

But when Kluxers are called to jury duty the Klan teaches them to say under oath that they do not belong because their membership ceases automatically when on a jury, according to Klan theology. And it starts automatically when they cease to be jurymen.

Talk about Jesuits!

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And that they are also physical cowards is beyond question. Because, as Frank Putnam puts it: “Personal cowardice is the dominant trait in any man who rides abroad at night armed and masked — 20 to 1 — to satisfy his private grudges or to gratify his cruel criminal instincts.”

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