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Mr. Welch and His Public

The John Birch Society was founded in 1958 by Robert H. W. Welch, Jr., a retired Boston fudge manufacturer who was born 62 years ago near Edenton, N. C. Almost exactly a year ago it began to attract limited attention through public meetings, including a series at Kinston, N.C. By April of 1961 it had become a favorite subject of serious discussion in the national press.

Most of those early articles about the society centered on Mr. Welch's statement that General Eisenhower, Milton Eisenhower, the late John Foster Dulles, and Allen Dulles, who then was head of the CIA, are or were members of the Communist underground. They also emphasized that the society was campaigning for the impeachment of Chief Justice Warren and had broader interests—repealing the income tax, withdrawal from NATO, and opposition to foreign aid, the United Nations, and the social gospel.

Now Mr. Welch is running into criticism. William Buckley, Jr. re-

cently rebuked him in the *National Review*, which is a pillar of conservatism. Perhaps more significantly, in Berkeley over the weekend the California Republican Assembly, the state party's policy-making body, adopted a proposal by former Vice President Nixon condemning Mr. Welch.

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Why has it taken so long for Mr. Welch's ridiculously extreme position to bring him even this much disrepute? The answer may be that it has taken this long for the Far Right movement to begin to mature. As *Look* magazine recently observed, "Organizations on the Right are springing up like dandelions on a May morning." Solid conservatives no doubt wish they seemed more responsible at the top. Practical politicians can approach them only through intelligible leaders. The point made elsewhere on this page by Thomas O'Neill, that a political distinction is being drawn between Mr. Welch and the Birchers, is a sound and meaningful one. The Right is not evaporating.

The secret nature of the John Birch society makes hazardous any speculation on the probable affect of criticism upon Mr. Welch's tenure. In the organization he created, he now is supremely at the top. And the 26 men who make up the national council below him include some, like Clarence Manion and T. Coleman Andrews, who in the past have not exactly been straws before the shifting breezes of opinion.