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The Editor Notes

Some Matters of Fact

By ALBERT NIBLING

As we ponder the implications of the mushrooming John Birch Society, on which we printed a series of United Press International stories the past three days, an old story comes to mind of the old Quaker who said to his wife: "Sometimes I think everyone is crazy except thee and me, and sometimes I wonder about thee."

The connection is this: too many people today tend to brand persons they don't agree with as Communists, Red, or some form of radical.

Without trial or hearing, a pat implication of guilt is attributed to others because of their religion, their politics, and too often the color of their skin or point of origin.

This seems to us to be the outstanding trait of those who have started John Birch Societies in 34 states. The John Birchist is encouraged to condemn, to heckle, to destroy, somewhat in the off-hand secret way of a Ku Klux Klan. He tends to be a vigilante without badge.

Robert Welch, the founder, is the focal point of the recent widespread publicity about the organization.

The foregoing opinion is supported by a statement made by the attorney general of California last week in which he said that "fanatical groups to the extreme right" must be as closely checked as the Communists "for they are equally dangerous to democracy."

This official, Stanley Mosk, gave these tests for an organization which advocates an extremist doctrine:

1. Does the organization attack churches and schools with blanket accusations?
2. Does it attack other traditional American institutions with wild, unsupported charges?
3. Does it label everyone with whom it disagrees politically as un-American or subversive?
4. Does it try to re-write modern history by blaming American statesmen for wars, communism, depression and other world ills?
5. Do the spokesmen of the group appear more interested in the size of their money collections than in the principles they purport to espouse?

The John Birch Society isn't the only extremist group which could stand indicted on all or most of these points. There have been others. Still others will come along.

But one difference appears to stand out with the Birchists: many of the supporters of the movement are affluent, people of wealth and community standing. Most gifts to the group are in denominations of thousands of dollars. If the gutter variety of radical has associated himself with the organization, he has kept in the background, which would be easy to do since all membership rolls are secret. An individual may identify himself as a member but he gives out nothing on his fellow members, or the size or scope of his activity. A lifetime membership costs \$1,000.

Extremist methods are not a monopoly of fanatical fringe groups, either right or left.

Politicians, and sometimes political parties, make use of irresponsible innuendo and accusation to gain their ends. Sometimes government investigative groups exceed their authority and trespass on the premises of the courts.

The Birchists are tarring statesmen with the brush of treason. Some they have so labeled are ex-President Eisenhower, the late Secretary of State Foster Dulles, CIA chief Allen Dulles, and others. One of the organization's great rallying cries is to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren.

Unsupported accusation appears to be the main weapon in their arsenal. They take the cue of the late Senator Joe McCarthy and name without proof their victims.

Such tactics are not new. The Communists are masters at that art. So were Hitler, Mussolini, Castro and all their imitators.

The Birchists are so prevalent in California that both the executive and legislative branches of the state government have launched investigations. Voices of protest have been heard in the U.S. Senate.

Texas is said to be one of the more active areas. Units have been known active in Dallas, Austin, Houston and Amarillo. Many Texas newspapers have taken strongly enquiring stands.

Congressman J. T. Rutherford of the El Paso District in a newsletter to his constituents called statements of the Birchists' founder, Robert Welch "shocking and irresponsible."

Ben Ezzell, editor of the Canadian Record, heard the founder of the society in a recruiting film and commented: "He believes in a Supreme Being. And he believes he is it."

Dallas News Columnist Lynn Landrum, who usually takes a conservative slant, has been hitting hard at the Birchists. He speculates that if an investigation is called "Welch will come to the investigation prepared, not to defend himself but to make broadside attacks on everybody opposed to him."

Landrum further says: "This man Welch is a formidable man. He is no Bishop. Cannot be duped by bucket shop dealings. He is no McCarthy from the the wrong side of the tracks. He is polished and vocal. But he is no crackpot. He is dedicated to the proposition

that any way to smash communism is a good way, no matter how precious the incidental debris may be."

Welch seems to take the view that a democracy cannot cope with communism and that his society will use monolithic authoritarian methods.

The elusive nature of the organization is well-illustrated by the reaction of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the current hero of ultra-conservatives. In effect, the senator said he disagreed with many of the key things the Birch Society espouses, but added that a lot of good people in his home town (Phoenix) were interested in the organization. He added that the society was anti-Communist and it was hard to disagree with that.

Goldwater is the recipient of the society founder's praise. Welch said he'd like to see him president. The late Senator Taft and General MacArthur are considered great Americans.

Two California Congressmen admit membership. Two other Californians are in the vanguard of the critical statements being made against Birchism on the floor of the House.

A call has been made for a Congressional investigation of Welch's charge that Dwight D. Eisenhower is a card-carrying Communist.

We probably haven't heard the last of the Birch Society. Whenever the flag of super-patriotism in unfurled, marchers will fall in line. The pity is that so many well-meaning individuals are caught up in the emotional slipstream of the fanatic's frenzied passing.