Welch Cites Need For Radical Action

By FRYAR CALHOUN and EUGENE KEILIN

"Welcome, patriots!" said the master of ceremonies, and the not unflattered members of the audience rose to their feet to greet Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society, self-appointed defender of Americanism, and outspoken prosecutor of worldwide Communism.

At Houston's Music Hall the president of a local Sons of The American Revolution chapter set the theme of the evening by reminding his listeners that American government is based on a belief in God and that all men are created equal, not made so by government.

The John Birch Society may appear to be a product of a nationwide trend to the right, but Welch and his ideas fail to appeal to the rank-and-file conservative.

His supporter is a different kind of person. The subscriber to the Welch philosophy accepts totally and unquestioningly certain assertions which many Americans consider highly debatable.

For example, he is likely to believe (1) that absolute capitalism is divinely ordained, (2) that the U.S. government is rushing headlong toward a worldwide socialist state, (3) that the Supreme Court is Communist-infested and that Earl Warren must be impeached, (4) that liberal thought is almost always a vehicle of Communist expression, (5) that the intellectual's loss of contact with reality explains his aversion to patriotic anti-Communist groups such as the Birch Society.

IT IS THE acceptance of such premises which nurtures and develops the Welch philosophy in the minds of its adherents.

These people, then, are fully convinced that the Communist threat within our borders is so real, so imminent, and so substantial that only immediate action can restore the American system.

How has Robert Welch presented his case in order to elicit this response? His message is a mixture of isolated facts, unproven but—to some—plausible assertions, and an emotional-religious-patriotic call for action; he capitalizes on the uneasiness and insecurity of many Americans about the Communist threat.

THESE PEOPLE seek to overcome their frustrating sense of helplessness by rallying around a leader who offers them a personal, active role in the struggle. Once they have accepted Welch's dictum that the large and ever-increasing Communist infiltration in our government has rendered it incapable of providing effective opposition to the danger, they strike out in all directions. Issues become black and white.

Welch's absolute concepts of good versus evil have a direct effect on the attitudes of his followers. In the eyes of the Birch member, he and his allies, aligned under the standard of truth and justice, are called to combat against the sinister forces of the enemy. This absolutism has its roots in the medieval ideas of the conflict between God and Satan for the destiny of man and in the Crusader's notion that men serve God by joining battle with His antithesis. Welch exhorts his followers to read Romans 3:12: "... Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

THE MEDIEVAL analogy is strengthened by the almost feudal, vassal-lord relationship between Welch and the members of his society, over whom he exercises monolithic control. On pages 188-159 of the Blue Book, Welch says, "The John Birch Society is to be a monolithic body. A republican form of government or of organization has many attractions and advantages, under certain favorable conditions. But under less happy circumstances it lends itself too readily to infiltration, distortion, and disruption. And democracy, of course, in government or organization, as the Greeks and Romans both found out... democracy is merely a deceptive phrase, a weapon of demagoguery, and a perennial fraud."

Welch advocates his dictatorial policies because of the effectiveness which it lends its organization, because "We are not going to be in the position of having the society's work weakened by raging debates. We are not going to have factions developing on the two-sides-to-every-question theme." (page 161)

WELCH JUSTIFIES this system by pointing out the voluntary nature of the society: should (Continued on Page 4)
(Continued from Page 2) a member disagree with his policies, the member could resign. But this solution is oversimplified. Society members believe that active, aggressive leadership is the key to defeating Communism; therefore, to leave the organization would be to give up the fight.

The fact remains that the John Birch Society, an organization which aspires to national prominence, has rejected the basic principles of parliamentary government, democracy, and the worth of individual expression. Do our liberties so weaken us that we must abandon them in order to win the battle against Communism? And having done so, what system shall we then adopt?

THE BIRCH SOCIETY relies for its success on its—and therefore Welch's—ability to discover and expose Communists among us. And Welch is not lacking in confidence in his prowess: "Now there are ways of sizing up both individuals and organizations in this battle, which come only with experience, a knowledge of the interlocking pieces and personalities, and a feel for the way the Communist work. And while of course I can make mistakes, too, I know . . . that I have a fairly sensitive nose in this area." (pp. 160-161)

WHAT FEW "MISTAKES" to which Welch may admit will be counted as inconsequential, despite the irreparable damage done to people and institutions. Welch openly advocates McCarthy-like techniques. In his speech at the Music Hall, Welch declared that "basically, there was nothing wrong with McCarthy's methods from the point of view of the patriotic American." Section Four of the Blue Book presents his suggested methods for convicting Communists by "implication," using tactics which are admittedly "mean and dirty."

Welch's proposals are hardly modest. He asks only that he be the guiding force of a monolithic body whose purpose is to define Americanism and to expose its enemies; he dismisses responsible methods as inefficient. And, curiously, he takes these measures in the guise of a defender of liberty. He is fond of this excerpt from Kipling:

"All we know of freedom, all we need to know,
This our fathers won for us, long and long ago."
Think about it.
Is this all we need to know?