

# Exploiters of Grief

N-12/30

"We can expect them to use the shock, grief, and confusion of the American people, resulting from the assassination of our President, as an opportunity for pushing their own plans faster." Thus, in a full-page advertisement in The New York Times and a dozen other U.S. papers, the extreme right-wing John Birch Society warned, last week of what "the Communists" were up to. Actually, the warning described just what the Birch Society itself was up to—and in its own ad.

In typical Birchese, the ad purported

to prove that the Communist Party had ordered President Kennedy's assassination. And that, it said, proved "tragically but conclusively" that the Birchers had been right all along. "The time has come," said the Birch ad, "for every red-blooded American to react as such." Readers doubtful about how to react were invited to send money.

**Protest:** Many readers protested against the sale of space to the Birch Society so it could try to exploit the death of a man it had vilified in life—and as a pro-Communist or appeaser at that. Indeed, his murder caught the Birchers issuing the December number of their magazine, American Opinion, with references evidently so abusive to the late President that they called back and suppressed the whole press run.

Right up to his death, the Birchers' magazine had been vitriolic in its attacks on Mr. Kennedy. An article in the September issue said that a physical beating administered to President Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, would be "a fine thing for our country." Last June, a piece by Westbrook Pegler even expressed regret over the failure of the 1933 assassination attempt on Franklin D. Roosevelt (Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak, who was killed, "stopped the bullet which might have saved the world," Pegler wrote).

In the furor over the newspaper ad, which cost about \$35,000, the Birchers' founder and head, Robert Welch, was silent. One of his lieutenants, Col. Laurence E. Bunker of Wellesley, Mass., denied the ad was intended to drum up money or members. But the society leadership got its stories mixed up. The Birchers' Western district governor, John Rousselot of Los Angeles, explained that the "terrible national tragedy" was well timed for Birch purposes. "We were going to kick off the expanded nationwide [membership] program at the beginning of the year," he said, "... so we just moved up the starting line a bit."

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