

Birch Society Is Shaken by 'Acrimonious Disputes'

by JOHN H. FENTON

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BOSTON, Aug. 27—The John Birch Society is being shaken by "acrimonious disputes" that have kept the founder, Robert H. W. Welch Jr., flying around the nation seeking to restore harmony.

The situation was serious enough for Mr. Welch to devote the first two pages of the August bulletin to members to a discussion of his oft-repeated question, "Which would you rather do, win your argument with some fellow Bircher or win our war against the Communists?"

Citing Plutarch and the Bible to point out the dangers of discord, Mr. Welch asserted:

"In many cases the trouble has grown out of the efforts of some individual or group to utilize the membership or the organizational structure of the John Birch Society with personal purposes, or private ways, that have nothing to do with the basic aims and program of the society itself."

Claims 100,000 Members

The ultraconservative society, which claims a national membership of about 100,000 in 5,000 chapters, had an operating budget in 1965 of approximately \$5-million.

Ostensibly dedicated to the eradication of Communism, the society frequently has been in the news through intemperate statements by some of its officers and members and through differences of opinion between members of its hierarchy and Mr. Welch.

In the society's basic manual, known as the Blue Book, Mr. Welch wrote:

"The men who join the John Birch Society in the next few months or few years are going to be doing so primarily because they believe in me and what I am doing and are willing to accept my leadership anyway . . . We are not going to have factions developing on the two - sides - to - every - question theme."

Resign or Be Put Out

The founder also wrote:

"Those members who cease to feel a necessary degree of loyalty (to me) can either resign or will be put out before they build up any splintering following of their own inside the society."

There have been indications in recent years that the executive committee, made up of four members of the 24-member national council, has been at odds with Mr. Welch's monolithic concepts.

But neither council members nor some of the society's severest critics look for any sudden crumbling of the organization.

The latest internal strife to come to light involves the recent resignation of two mem-



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Robert H. W. Welch Jr.

bers of the national council, Dr. Revilo P. Oliver and Slobadan M. Draskovich.

Rousselot Comments

John Rousselot, national director of public relations, said by telephone from San Marion, Calif., the other day that both men had been critical of some society policies for about a year. But he said both were entitled to their own opinions and "so had expressed themselves."

Dr. Oliver, a classics professor at the University of Illinois, had made some statements in a Boston speech July 2 "on what was considered to be a different opinion from the society on Jews," said Mr. Rousselot. He said some Jewish members of the society had objected.

In the speech, Dr. Oliver raised the specter of a Jewish conspiracy's being responsible for the moral decay of Western man, whom he regards as the flower of civilization.

Dr. Oliver addressed a session of a three-day New England Rally for God, Family and Country over the Fourth of July weekend at the Statler Hilton Hotel in Boston.

Gordon D. Hall, a Boston authority on extremists of both left and right, said he attended the rally and that Dr. Oliver was given a roaring, standing ovation at the end of his speech by the 1,000 persons in the ballroom. Moreover, Dr. Oliver was invited to moderate a panel discussion later, said Mr. Hall.

Negroes a Target

In the speech, Dr. Oliver also took potshots at Negroes. And his language about protesters against the war in Vietnam and against the University of California at Berkeley included "degenerates . . . scum . . . dregs . . . savages . . . debased . . . squealing animals . . . dear little cockroaches . . . howling mobs . . . parasites . . . the lazy illegitimate."

The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith has asserted that "anti-Semitism is an inherent problem of the John Birch Society which it has made excuses for but has failed to exorcise

over the whole of the society's seven years."

Dr. Oliver resigned on Aug. 15 and Mr. Draskovich the following day. The latter, according to Mr. Rousselot, did not feel that the society had "enough projects going" to further its aims. The public relations director noted that some members thought "there are too many projects."

While Dr. Oliver declined to discuss his resignation, Mr. Draskovich predicted that other members of the policymaking council "may call it quits soon."

Mass Dissension Doubted

But Robert H. Montgomery, a Boston lawyer who is a member of the council, disagreed about mass dissension.

"I don't think it is very serious, although I don't speak for the society or the council," said Mr. Montgomery. "The two resignations were over differences of policy and some of those were misrepresented, but we are used to that."

"But we are many individuals and everyone of us is a conservative," Mr. Montgomery went on, "and each individual does his own thinking; I think there will be a little fuller explanation of the differences in the September bulletin."

In the August issue, Mr. Welch recalled Plutarch's story of Scilurus, who on his deathbed demonstrated to his 80 surviving sons how difficult it was to break a bundle of 80 sticks but how easy to break one at a time.

"Not that I am any Scilurus, nor that the bickering among our members has yet landed me on my deathbed," wrote Mr. Welch, "but for the past week, by sweating in lines at the standby counters of the overcrowded airlines that are not on strike, I have been fighting my way from one city to another where acrimonious disputes are raging among our members."

"And about all that I usually accomplished, of course, in trying to pour oil on these troubled waters, was to get myself completely spattered with oil."

In all cases, Mr. Welch told his members, "once the dispute has reached sizable proportions, the accusations on both sides tend to become unreasonable, blind, bitter and extensive."

"So that, following the Biblical precedent, we would have to chop the baby in two in order to find out to which mother it really belongs; and the poor baby, in these situations," Mr. Welch said, "is the John Birch Society."