

Birch Society Head Says Reds Gain in Capital

Welch, Citing War, Asserts That Their Influence Is 'Stronger Than Ever'



The New York Times

Robert Welch, founder of John Birch Society, yesterday

Robert Welch, founder and leader of the John Birch Society, said yesterday that Communist influence in Washington "is stronger than ever before."

Mr. Welch, here for the ninth birthday dinner of the right-wing society, declined to identify any Communists in government.

Nonetheless, he said, Communist conniving, combined with foreign policy "idiocies" and Administration "stupidities," was "keeping our boys from winning the Vietnam war."

Mr. Welch, speaking at a news conference in the New York Hilton Hotel, said the major issues in the 1968 election would be Vietnam and "the massive aid given to our enemies," and urban riots.

An important issue, he said, will be the role of government poverty program workers in helping to bring on the rioting.

The white-haired, retired candy manufacturer, who is 68 years old, also spoke at a dinner at the hotel.

The John Birch Society, founded in December, 1958, to fight subversive Communism, was named for Capt. John Birch of the Office of Strategic Services, who was killed in 1945 by the Chinese Communists.

When pressed by reporters to elaborate on the Communists in government, Mr. Welch said, "It's not my job to point them out." In many cases, he said, it is impossible to identify them, although "you can see the physical evidences of their being there."

He said that "98 per cent of

our Federal employes are loyal Americans," but that the remaining 2 per cent included "many at the top level." He described President Johnson as "a liberal" who does "a lot of things" that "are playing into the hands of the Communists."

Asked about the impending departure of Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara from the Administration and its effect on the Vietnam war, Mr. Welch snapped:

"I would say anything would be helped by McNamara's leaving."

If subversion continues at its present rate, Communists could set up a police state here "in six or seven years," he said.

Mr. Welch, who refused to endorse any political candidate said he saw the role of the society as publicizing the Communist menace because "no conspiracy can survive if enough light is turned on it."

As to foreign policy "idiocies," he said that they were

the "effects of treasonable activities," including the shipping of wheat to feed armament workers in Poland. The wheat, he said, was unloaded in the same harbor that took on armament shipments to North Vietnam.

Mr. Welch conceded that the "net growth" of society memberships in the first eight months of 1967 was small. He attributed it, to a large extent, to calculated smear campaigns that frightened off potential members, making them fear social ostracism or loss of business opportunities.

Mr. Welch would say only that membership is "between 60,000 and 100,000." However, he said there has been a tremendous increase in ad hoc committees, formed by a few Birchers and made up of non-member "patriotic conservatives" to "tell the truth about civil turmoil" and to support local police.