



Americanism's Standard-bearer

How often has public calamity been arrested on the very brink of ruin by the seasonable energy of a single man?... One vigorous mind without office, without situation, without public functions of any kind.... I say one such man confiding in the aid of God, and full of just reliance in his own fortitude, vigor, enterprise, and perseverance, would first draw to him some few like himself, and then that multitudes hardly thought to be in existence, would appear and troop about him. — Edmund Burke

To those familiar with the life, words, and works of Robert Welch, it must seem that Mr. Burke's lines above, though penned in 18th-century England, were written precisely and prophetically with this great 20th-century American patriot in mind. In that calamitous century, a great many heroic men arose in every land to fight the good fight — and to rally others in the fight — against organized evil, against totalitarian tyranny. Many of these valiant heroes perished in the brutal fray, their noble deeds known only to God, and their selfless sacrifices unremembered and unsung by their countrymen.

Robert Welch recognized, as an "heir to the ages," and as a debtor to these courageous souls, a sacred obligation to carry on their fight. It was with a profound sense of duty to God, family, and country, and with a firm determination to stop, reverse, and rout the global advance of Communism, specifically, and collectivism, generally, that, in 1958, he founded The John Birch Society and dedicated the remainder of his life to this purpose.

Renaissance Man

Robert Welch was a true genius, a child prodigy who began reading at two, tackled algebra at age six, read all nine volumes of John Clark Ridpath's formidable *History of the World* at age seven, and entered the University of North Carolina at age 12. He was a genuine "Renaissance Man," a world traveler, conversant in several languages, and an avid, lifelong student of history, language, philosophy, economics, mathematics, science, geography, chess, poetry, classical literature, politics, and other subjects.

The life of this remarkable man began at the turn of the century, on December 1, 1899, on a farm in Chowan County, North Carolina. He was schooled at home by his mother, Lina Welch, who not only nurtured young Robert's precocious intellect and love of knowledge, but also instilled in him good habits and strong moral convictions. Honesty, a strong work ethic, good manners, respect for one's elders, responsibility, generosity — these and other virtues were fused into the character of Robert Welch at an early age. When he entered high school at 10, he was already far advanced, academically, beyond the level of his older classmates.

Robert Welch entered the University of North Carolina at age 12, and graduated at age 16 in the top third of his class — despite a couple years when his grades fared poorly due to his frequent skipping of classes to pursue his interests in poetry, French literature, and chess. Meanwhile, the United States had entered World War I and so, at 17, he enrolled at the U.S. Naval Academy, probably the only plebe ever to start at Annapolis with a college degree already in hand. In 1919, with the war over and other interests beckoning, Robert Welch resigned from the academy. After two years, he ranked fourth in a class of nearly one thousand cadets.

It was off to Cambridge, Massachusetts, then, and Harvard Law School for the young scholar. There Welch would clash repeatedly with Marxist law professor Felix Frankfurter, whom Franklin D. Roosevelt would later appoint to the Supreme Court. After two and a half years at Harvard Law School, Welch determined to launch out into the business world. With a recipe for fudge and less than a



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hundred dollars capitalization, he launched his candy manufacturing enterprise. Later, he joined his younger brother James' candy firm, the James O. Welch Company, as its vice president. Over the years, he became a recognized leader in the business community, serving as vice president of the National Confectioners Association and chairman of the Education Committee of the National Association of Manufacturers.

In 1946, Welch journeyed to England to study the destructive impact on that country of its socialist Labor Government. He was alarmed and distressed by the pursuit of similarly destructive policies by our own federal government. He was even more alarmed by the foreign policies of the Truman State Department, which were betraying our allies and assisting the establishment of Communist regimes in Europe and Asia.

In 1951, following President Truman's unjust firing of General Douglas MacArthur, Welch penned his first major political work, entitled *May God Forgive Us*. It had begun as a lengthy letter to a friend outlining the calamitous results of America's post-World War II policies and the global Communist advance. Welch sent copies to several friends and was soon besieged with requests for additional copies. He had several hundred copies printed up, which resulted in requests for *tens of thousands* more. We were at war with the Communists in Korea, and Welch's incisive analysis of America's defeats and retreats so soon after our victories over Germany and Japan struck a responsive chord with the American public. In 1952, conservative book publisher Henry Regnery began printing *May God Forgive Us* in book form, and before year's end had sold 200,000 copies. Virtually overnight, Robert Welch had become one of America's top-selling anti-Communist writers.

In 1954, Robert Welch's second explosive book, *The Life of John Birch*, appeared. He had stumbled across the amazing story of this American military hero and Christian martyr while conducting research in the congressional committee files in Washington, D.C.

Welch intensified his study of global political developments, including trips to many foreign lands to see firsthand what was happening. He became friends with some of the leading anti-Communist leaders of the world and developed contacts that would prove vitally important in years to come. In 1955, he visited President Syngman Rhee of South Korea, who later wrote to him: "I must confess I did not know we had such a staunch ally and champion as you in America." He also met with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in 1955, and again 10 years later.

By 1956, Welch knew he must do more in the fight to save America, and so he left the candy business to publish a "now-and-then magazine" called *One Man's Opinion*. As the circulation to his journal skyrocketed and demands for coverage of more issues increased, Welch changed the title of his publication in 1958 from *One Man's Opinion* to *American Opinion* to accommodate the contributions of other authors. *American Opinion* (the immediate predecessor to *The New American*) quickly became the premier forum of analysis and commentary for America's top anti-Communist, free market thinkers and writers.

Founding the JBS

But Welch knew that much, much more must be done to stop and reverse the deadly course on which America was heading. Following Edmund Burke's counsel, this "one vigorous mind without office, without situation, without public functions of any kind," determined to "first draw to him some few like himself."

Late in 1958, Robert Welch extended invitations to 17 influential and respected men to meet him for a



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two-day presentation on an urgent matter. Eleven of the 17 accepted and joined him in Indianapolis on December 8th and 9th. This group was heavily represented by former officers of the National Association of Manufacturers who, through their association with Welch, had gained a great deal of respect for his knowledge of contemporary affairs. His in-depth, two-day survey of the state of the world was a brilliant but grim examination of the current Communist/collectivist threat to America and the Free World. He did not pull any punches about the total inadequacy of the myriad of anti-Communist organizations opposing the Communist juggernaut. "At present," said Welch, "we are in the position of trying to defeat a disciplined, well-armed, expertly commanded army with a collection of debating societies. And it can't be done."

The constantly changing, elected leadership, parliamentary structure, and democratic methods of most voluntary organizations could not possibly provide the kind of efficiency, effectiveness, and steadfastness of purpose that would be essential to succeed in this fight. Only completely determined, solid, monolithic, principle-based leadership could provide an organization protected internally against infiltration, splintering, and inside fighting. At the conclusion of this presentation, Welch announced his plan to begin building a national, grassroots, education/action organization that *would* be capable of defeating the enemy arrayed against us. He intended to name it, he said, after John Birch, whose heroic qualities exemplified everything that was good about America and mirrored exactly the noble character traits that would be necessary for victory in this epic struggle. And so began The John Birch Society, an organization Welch led for the next quarter of a century.

World events soon vindicated many of the predictions and warnings presented by Welch at that founding meeting (the transcript of which became *The Blue Book of The John Birch Society*). He had told the Indianapolis attendees, for instance: "If you have any slightest doubt that Castro is a Communist, don't. If he is successful, time will clearly reveal that he is an agent of the Kremlin."

But Welch did not wait for "time" to reveal what was already obvious. In the February 1959 issue of *American Opinion*, he published a concise but withering exposé of Castro's Red bona fides. That was followed in April with the entire issue of *American Opinion* devoted to fully documenting "the fact that Castro was, and all of his adult life had been, a vicious, lying, brutal, murdering Communist." If such a statement seems self-evident today, please be informed that at the time Comrade Fidel was being celebrated as an *anti-Communist*. According to the Eisenhower administration, the *New York Times*, the U.S. State Department, Harvard University, *Reader's Digest*, and virtually the entire Establishment media chorus, Castro was the "George Washington" of Cuba.

The same chorus heaped scorn and ridicule on the Birch Society founder for daring to besmirch their darling Fidel, and for two years kept bleating their unalloyed praises of the new Cuban "liberator." Some of these self-anointed "experts" continued their adulation even after Castro, having consolidated his power, himself came forward to boast that he was indeed a Communist and had been one all along. All of which went a long way toward establishing the credibility of Robert Welch and the Birch Society with all who had eyes to see. Moreover, the American people were becoming more and more outraged and were demanding to know how it could be that our government had made yet another terrible mistake, this time installing a Communist dictator on our very doorstep.

In its first months of existence, the Society scored a major victory by organizing a nationwide protest against the 1959 Eisenhower-Khrushchev Summit and the exchange visits in Moscow and Washington planned for the two leaders as a send-up before the summit. The JBS hastily organized the Committee Against Summit Entanglements, with Robert Welch serving as chairman. The committee ran full-page



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ads in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Dallas News*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, *Arizona Republic*, and scores of other newspapers throughout the country.

Public reaction was so favorable to the Birch ad campaign, and so unfavorable to President Eisenhower's overtures toward the "Butcher of Budapest," that Khrushchev's anticipated propaganda coup was a crashing failure and the Eisenhower return visit to Moscow was called off. Once back in Moscow, a furious Khrushchev delivered a scathing speech reporting on his visit. "There are forces in the United States working against us," he said. "They must be publicly whipped, subjected to the torments of Hell!"

Those torments were not long in coming. The Communist attack was launched on February 25, 1961, with a lead smear in *People's World*, an official newspaper of the Communist Party, under the headline "Enter (from stage right) the John Birch Society." The Society found itself falsely accused of racism, anti-Semitism, fascism, Nazism, Ku Kluxism, and the entire litany of defamatory labels. Birchers were called paranoids, extremists, radicals, super-patriots, hatemongers, bigots, subversives, lunatics, and fanatics.

Like the defamatory attacks against the JBS carried in *Pravda* and other Soviet publications, the *People's World* article would have had little effect on its own, since few Americans read it, and fewer still placed any credibility in an openly Communist publication. However, when *Time* magazine, and then much of the rest of the mainstream media, quickly followed with a sustained torrent of screeching tirades echoing the same charges as the *People's World*, it was evident to all knowledgeable anti-Communists that the Society was in for a smear the likes of which had not been seen since Senator Joseph McCarthy had been singled out for similar treatment a decade earlier.

Insider Reaction

Joining in the vicious attacks on the Society were many of the Establishment politicians, industrialists, and financiers who had been longtime apostles of appeasement of and cooperation with Communism. But they were not, as far as anyone knew, members of the Communist Party. What exactly was their relationship to the Communists and how could they be properly designated? Through his own intensive historical research, and that of many others, Welch came to understand that the Communist Conspiracy was but the overt, militant arm of a much larger and older conspiracy.

In fact, the bloodline of the Communist Conspiracy ran directly back to the French Revolution of 1789 and to the secret group that orchestrated the bloody events of that period, the Order of the Illuminati. Founded in Bavaria in 1776, this occult, criminal cabal was dedicated to the destruction of Christendom and the establishment of a "new world order" under the global dominion of its secret brotherhood.

In his famous 1964 speech, "More Stately Mansions," Robert Welch outlined the history of this incredibly ruthless "Master Conspiracy," of which the Communists are only the most visible and openly militant arm. This was developed further in his brilliant 1966 essay, "The Truth In Time," and in subsequent essays in *The John Birch Society Bulletin* and *American Opinion*. In his 1966 essay he introduced the term "Insiders" to identify the inner, ruling clique of this satanic conspiracy.

The Insiders and Communists were (and are) not much perturbed by the many anti-Communist and patriotic groups that restrict their opposition to the "field of ideas." What they can't tolerate is individuals and groups who expose the Communists and the Insiders behind and above the Communists.

The Insiders realized almost immediately that the JBS was not just another "debating society." They were facing a monolithic organization of highly educated, highly motivated constitutionalist activists



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carrying out a concerted, coordinated action agenda under the direction of a very capable and determined leader who could not be bribed, corrupted, intimidated, or diverted. They understood that Robert Welch was not bluffing when he said, “We do not intend to devolve into any loose organization, but to become a more tightly knit and more effective brotherhood with every passing month. We know what we want and where we are going, and we mean business every step of the way.”

Moreover, this organization did not get diverted and bogged down in politics. “Education is our total strategy and truth is our only weapon,” Robert Welch repeatedly reminded members of the Society. He had the wisdom to recognize that the prerequisite for any positive, long-lasting political progress was the creation of an informed electorate. And that could only be created through a core base of activists who are committed to constitutional principles above political personalities and party agendas. Welch soon established a nationwide network of local chapters guided by a full-time, paid field staff, a book publishing arm, bookstores, audio and film production, a speakers bureau, specialized ad hoc committees, and a host of other weapons of truth for this educational army.

Lasting Legacy

In 1983, just days before the Soviets shot down the airliner that was taking him to Korea, Congressman Larry McDonald — who had become chairman of The John Birch Society earlier that year, the same year Welch (then 83) transferred the reins of leadership — stated of his mentor: “As a true pioneer, Mr. Welch has cleared the land, removed the stumps, and helped to push out of the way the boulders that were before us. It is now time for us to develop the field, enrich the soil, and prosper for the benefit of future generations of Americans and other heirs of our once great civilization.” Welch suffered a stroke by year’s end — just days after the Society’s 25th anniversary celebration at which, in poor health, he mustered the strength to bid his farewell. He passed away in January 1985.

“Every day we see confirmation of the wisdom and warnings of Robert Welch,” says G. Vance Smith, the current CEO of The John Birch Society. “I am especially impressed with his extraordinary foresight in creating a principle-centered organization that could withstand incredible smears as well as the test of time. Mr. Welch recognized, even if others did not, that the mere publication of truth was not sufficient to rout the Conspiracy. The dissemination of truth will have its desired effect only when it is put to use as part of an organized concerted action program, with thousands of dedicated members pulling together.”



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