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Society's Aims Defended by Rep. Hiestand

By Don Irwin

WASHINGTON, Mar. 31.—Two California Republican Congressmen vigorously defended today their membership in the John Birch Society and urged a Congressional inquiry to refute "smears" about the arch-conservative group.

The society's open Congressional advocates were Reps. Edgar W. Hiestand and John H. Rousselot, both representatives of sections of sprawling Los Angeles County. Both said they know of other Congressional members of the controversial group, but declined to name them.

Both friends and foes of the society urged investigation of its militant opposition to individuals and proposals which the society links with communism. But there was no such inquiry on the immediate horizon.

Rep. Francis E. Walter, D., Pa., chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, questioned his group's jurisdiction on the ground the complaints against the society deal with alleged libels against individuals, including former President Eisenhower, and not with moves against the government.

Sen. Thomas J. Dodd, D., Conn., promised to ask for an investigation at the next meeting of the Senate Internal Security subcommittee, of which he is a member. The subcommittee's influential—and conservative—chairman, Sen. James O. Eastland, D., Miss., declined comment on the proposal.

Complaints Sent In

At the Justice Department, there was said to be "concern" about the number of letters, averaging upward of fifty daily, complaining about the society's political activities and attacks by some John Birchers against individuals who disagree with the society's approach.

The department's Internal Security Division was said to be reviewing the situation, but here were no signs of a formal investigation reportedly because there are no complaints of statutory violations that would give the department jurisdiction. Charged with protection both of internal security and civil liberties, the department is, vaguely

The uproar about the society, detonated yesterday by protests on the Senate floor, evoked new accusations that former President Eisenhower is a "conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy" from the society's founder-leader, Robert H. W. Welch Jr. Mr. Welch, a retired Belmont, Mass., candy manufacturer, talked with The Associated Press this evening after a day of "unavailability" to reporters.

Rep. Hiestand called a heavily televised news conference this morning to defend the society's members as "rugged individualists, dedicated to patriotism and determined in their fight against communism." He denied that it is either secret or neo-Fascist.

"Home Chapter" Member
The seventy-two-year-old, five-term Congressman, who retired as a chain-store branch manager before entering Congress, said he had been one of the early members of the society's "home chapter," founded two years ago by Mr. Welch, whom Rep. Hiestand called "the founder."

At once affable and vehement, Rep. Hiestand fielded barbed questions without a fumble as he expressed what he called his "personal views." (He did concede, however, that he had spoken by telephone yesterday with "the founder.")

Rep. Hiestand challenged the validity of quotations from writings by Mr. Welch which describe former President Eisenhower as "a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy." The quote is taken out of context from an article "The Founder" wrote seven years ago, Rep. Hiestand said, and doesn't involve the society's "principles."

Furthermore, he said, he personally didn't agree with the statement. To further questions, he said he can't agree with Mr. Welch that Allen W. Dulles,



whom the controversial John Birch Society is named. He was killed by Chinese Reds in 1945.

chief of the Central Intelligence Agency, should be removed as a Communist tool, or with other John Birchers who propose impeachment of Chief Justice Earl Warren on the same ground.

These "disagreements," Rep. Hiestand said, show that the society is a group of "rugged individualists" not subject to "thought control by some dictator." They have no bearing, he said, on its primary mission, which he defined as voluntary action to combat all manifestations of communism and to inform the nation of them. He said the society is dedicated to "less government, individual rights and a better world."

It is because the society's "success" in these activities has "begun to hurt," he said, that it is being "smear'd" by "pro-Communists."

Asked how the society's activities had begun to "hurt," Rep. Hiestand replied that he wasn't well enough informed to say, but that "the record shows" when an anti-Communist group begins to hurt, it begins to be "smear'd." Communists, he added, are in "the far background" of this attack, while those in the foreground are "fine people."

The group's principles are spelled out, he said, in a "blue book" written by Mr. Welch which he described as "available." When reporters said they hadn't seen one, the Congressman said he was sorry his was at home.

Not a Secret Society
Denying that his society is secret, Rep. Hiestand said its rolls aren't public because members might be subject to persecution which they couldn't take because most of them are "little people."

He told a questioner he had "no knowledge" of charges that California units of the society had asked students to report on activities of teachers. He conceded some questionnaires had been sent out that asked "personal questions," but said they "shouldn't be countenanced."

Reminded that J. Edgar Hoover, director of the F. B. I., has warned against fighting communism with "vigilante groups," Rep. Hiestand said he thought that was "sound" and denied that the John Birch Society is covered by that definition.

"Might be Others"

Asked to name other members of the society in Congress, he named only Rep. Rousselot, but indicated that there might be others.

Reached by telephone in California, Rep. Rousselot said he had joined a Los Angeles unit of the society last fall and is "proud to be a member" of what he defined as "basically a study group."

Rep. Rousselot said he knew of two other Congressmen who are members of the society and believed there were more. He refused names.

The freshman Congressman, who formerly served as information director of the Federal Housing Administration, said he would "welcome" an investigation of the society to "clear the air." If his experience is any guide, he said, an inquiry will show that John Birch meetings are devoted to serious discussion of the techniques of communism, documented with reports by the F. B. I., the Justice Department, the Un-American Activities Committee and the Senate Internal Security subcommittee.

Rep. Rousselot defended the society's controversial letter-writing campaigns directed at members of Congress. He said such letters had been directed against Federal aid to education and still-pending Democratic-backed proposals to set up uniform Federal standards for state unemployment insurance programs.

N. A. M. Censured Society
The National Association of Manufacturers disclosed yesterday in New York it had in effect censured the John Birch Society in a board resolution adopted last September.

Charles R. Sligh Jr., executive vice-president of the N. A. M., said the three former N. A. M. presidents listed as members of the council of the controversial society participated in drawing up the resolution which was passed unanimously.

The resolution did not mention the society or its founder and leader, Robert Welch, by name. But Mr. Sligh said it was passed after disclosure that Mr. Welch had called Gen. Eisenhower a Communist.

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