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The Radical Right lives in a world divided between a kingdom of good and a kingdom of evil. If one is in the realm of good, there can be no compromise with the surrounding forces of darkness.

Among the many dissident socio-political movements of the 1960's, none is more important and potentially dangerous to the United States than that group of organizations that the press and public have come to know as the Radical Right. Yet because of certain demands of time, space, and newsworthiness, the mass media have not done a very good job of covering such organizations. Or, rather, their coverage has been a sometime thing.

Early in the Kennedy years, when the John Birch Society first surfaced, there was an immense fuss in the press over right wing extremism. Later, interest in the topic died down, only to be revived during the 1964 presidential campaign. After the Johnson victory, concern with the subject waned again, and though it has returned sporadically, there has been little systematic reporting about it. Yet all through the sixties, the Radical Right has continued to grow in terms of membership, finances, circulation of publications, and sponsorship of films, and radio and TV programs. Because it has been increasing in size and scope, and because it is a frightening phenomenon—one that threatens the processes of democracy—the Radical Right should be examined and assessed from time to time.

The term Radical Right obviously covers a host of organizations and people. Included are Robert Welch and the John Birch Society, Billy James Hargis and his Christian Crusade, Fred Schwarz and the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, Kent and Phoebe Courtney and their Conservative Society of America, the Minutemen, and such individuals as Dan Smoot, Clarence Manion, Edgar Bundy, and Ezra Taft Benson. There are, of course, many more. Indeed, one rightist directory contains more than 1,000 groups and individuals who could be included, though many of its orga-

nizations consist of little more than one man and his trusty mimeograph machine.

Listing names, of course, does not define the nature of the Radical Right—a problem which political scientists and sociologists have been struggling with for several years. Anyone who has, in turn, struggled to read the results of their efforts usually gains little enlightenment. For their definitions tend to be terribly specialized and so heavily larded with social-scientific jargon that they cannot easily be translated into English. Rather than getting bogged down trying to define the Radical Right, it seems more profitable to look at some aspects of the way the Right views the world. This approach can give insight into its past, present, and, perhaps, its future development.

A first point is one that may have become obscured because of the Right's apparent interest in politics in 1964 and since. That is the fact that, basically, the Right is anti-political. There is no room in the world of the extremists for the give-and-take of normal, democratic politics. Robert Welch has said that democracy is a perennial fraud, and he and his cohorts have mounted a campaign to prove that the United States is a republic, not a democracy. When you read the works of the Right, however, it becomes obvious that its leaders do not believe in republicanism either—at least not republicanism as we have known it in the U.S.—republicanism in which men of different parties can agree to disagree and can compromise on political issues.

There is a very simple reason why the Right is anti-political. On every issue its leaders believe themselves in possession of the Truth—always with a capital "T." Knowing the Truth, they naturally cannot compromise on programs, for to do so would be to taint themselves with falsehood which they hold to

be synonymous with evil.

As it was before 1964, the view of the Radical Right remains today basically Manichaean. It lives in a world divided between a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness—a realm of good and one of evil. And if one is in the realm of good as the Right knows it, there can be no compromise with the surrounding forces of darkness.

A good example of this is the experience of Barry Goldwater. Before the 1964 presidential campaign, many rightists urged him to run. Later, because he was willing to accept some of the welfare state programs such as social security and the income tax, he was denounced by them. His views gave evidence that he really did not belong in the kingdom of good.

CRUSADERS NEVER COMPROMISE

This is not to say that men of the Right will not continue to run for office. But if elected, and if they stay true to their principles, such men cannot engage in politics as we know it—that is, the art of compromise. Crusaders (some of their organizational names suggest they think of themselves as such) do not compromise—they annihilate their enemies.

A second important aspect of the Radical Right is its view of historical causation. In the view of the extremist, nothing ever happens gratuitously. Concerned with the great events of history, the Right has a simple explanation for virtually all the things that have happened in the 20th century, or at least since the income tax amendment. Every unfortunate event (and this includes almost everything) has somehow been caused by the dark, menacing, satanic Communist conspiracy, whose ultimate purpose is the enslavement of all mankind—especially Americans. The stock market crash of 1929, the growth of organized labor and of the welfare state, and the election of Eisenhower are all results of the conspiracy.

Recently a new theory has begun to permeate the Right. First enunciated by Robert Welch a little more than a year ago, it claims that an evil conspiracy of men has been manipulating the world since *before the French Revolution*. In this view communism is simply a manifestation of a larger group of “insiders,” as Welch calls them.

Not everyone talks in terms of this grand

conspiracy. Not every rightist has accepted the idea that the French Revolution, the American Civil War, the institution of the Federal Reserve system, World War I, the Russian Revolution, the Depression, the rise of Hitler, the New Deal, World War II, the assassination of Kennedy, and the election of Sam Yorty were all due to this immense conspiracy. But since so many can believe that every President since FDR has been consciously serving Communism, there is little to keep them from accepting this newer theory.

While some people on the Right have been pushing the world conspiracy backward in time, others recently have been casting their nets wider. All sorts of social change have come to be seen as manifestations of the same conspiracy. Recently rightist publications have labeled all of the following as part of the Communist attempts to soften up the U.S. for a Red takeover: public health programs, fluoridation of water, civil rights demonstrations, police review boards, student movements, hippies, flower children, marijuana, LSD, the death of Marilyn Monroe, underground newspapers, teenage disturbances on the Sunset Strip, and rock-and-roll music. Indeed, the latter is thought to be the most fiendishly clever scheme the Communists have yet devised for conquering America. The Right has proved to its own satisfaction that such music produces “artificial neuroses” in teenagers, “preparing them for riot and ultimately revolution to destroy our American form of government.”

PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES—IN ONE BAG

To say that any specific position taken by the Radical Right is, a priori, absurd is certainly not true. There may be sound reasons for agreeing with some rightist views. One may feel that teenage music is noisy, or that review boards hurt law enforcement, or that the Los Angeles *Free Press* is a badly written, semi-pornographic rag. Similarly one could find good reasons for opposing President Johnson's policies, or for thinking that the whole New Deal was misguided, or even for disliking the income tax. What is different about the mind of the Radical Right is that it insists on associating together the things it does not like. It ties them all up within one bag and pro-

claims that they are all part of a master conspiracy to undermine America and the world.

The means of proving that these various phenomena are Communist-directed vary, but none of them would stand up in a court of law. Three known radicals in a demonstration of 50,000 can prove to the Right that it is a Communist enterprise. On the other hand, the *absence* of any radicals could be considered as the most devastating proof of all. Only the Communists could have such superb control of events that they could plan a demonstration in which no known radicals took part.

To show you how the mind of the Right works, a prediction is in order. Benjamin Spock has recently been indicted for his anti-draft activities. Some people feel that the trouble with teenagers today is that they were raised according to Dr. Spock's teachings, which, they believe, lead to lack of responsibility. Undoubtedly, someone eventually will put these arguments together and find that Dr. Spock originally wrote his book under the direction of Communists with the express purpose of raising irresponsible teenagers who would be attracted by communism.

A third aspect of the Right's world view is that it is basically apocalyptic. Most rightists foresee a day of Armageddon on which the forces of evil and good will battle to the death. The day for such a showdown is drawing closer. A few years ago Fred Schwarz said that the Communist takeover date for the U.S. is 1973, and so far as is known he hasn't revised his opinion. Robert Welch has predicted that it will happen in "just a few more years." Naturally the rightists are girding themselves to keep the Communists from being successful, though it is only a small minority of fringe groups like the Minutemen who are stockpiling arms to use on this day of reckoning.

VIOLENCE—WHO FIRST?

How the final struggle will be precipitated is not made clear. Extremist leaders usually eschew violence, yet their own publications make it seem unlikely that the Communist conspiracy will precipitate an open battle. For example, the 1967 John Birch Society "scoreboard" showed that of 141 countries, fully 108 were more than 50 percent Communist-controlled, while 54 were 80 to 100 percent Com-

munist-dominated. The United States, rated only 20 to 40 percent Communist on the first Birch scoreboard in 1958, is now listed as 60 to 80 percent. This is a rather puzzling statistic when you consider that the Birch Society (which numbers close to 100,000) has been congratulating itself on the good job it has been doing combating the Communist menace. It would seem that the conspirators are doing so well that violence would be unnecessary, and one is left with the feeling that it could, possibly, come from the Right.

ON THE RIGHT—HOW MANY?

Although the Radical Right has been growing through the sixties, it is hard to be precise about its total number of adherents. Hundreds of radio stations carry the weekly messages of rightist leaders, presumably reaching millions of people. Hundreds of thousands subscribe to various extremist publications, and probably larger numbers affiliate themselves with the positions of the Right. Knowing this, one must ask: How can so many Americans believe that Dwight Eisenhower was a Communist, or that Negroes have no legitimate grievances, or that doctors in favor of fluoridation want to soften the brains of Americans?

There is no easy answer to this question. Psychologically oriented scholars have talked about a paranoid mentality affecting such people, and this explanation seems to have a kind of truth to it. One thing we know for certain is that today there are more people involved in the Right than just the wealthy businessmen, retired military officers, and little old ladies in tennis shoes that were believed to make up early Birch Society membership.

Scholars have identified rightist adherents from all walks of life, including many professional men and white collar workers with college educations. It is also known that there is a high correlation between support of the Right and fundamentalist Protestantism. Certainly this is partly because of the black-white style of thinking common to both groups.

One partial explanation for the success of the Radical Right is that it provides a simple and, in its own terms, coherent explanation for the chaotic conditions affecting the U.S. Once a person accepts this world view, all sorts of disturbing phenomena fall neatly into place.

The Negro revolution, the rebelliousness of youth, the increasing tax burden, the rising crime rate, and the seeming impotence of government in dealing with these problems are simply and neatly explained by the conspiracy theory. The terrible complexities of modern life, which frighten everyone to some extent, vanish from view, and the rightist believer is left with the feeling that he alone knows the real enemy—an enemy that presumably can be combated by men of stern morals if they remain true to eternal principles. And how much better to have a *real* enemy than to have to think about the hundreds of complex causes of Negro dissatisfaction, or chronic unemployment, or changes in sexual morality.

FINDING AN ENEMY

Such simplified thinking is not indulged in only by the Radical Right. Much of America's anti-communist feeling in recent years has sprung from the same mentality. This is *not* to say that no Communist menace has ever existed. But if one considers how often American leaders have labeled any native disturbance in foreign lands as Communist-inspired, how many Southerners have blamed racial discontent on the work of "outside agitators," how many university administrators have found student unrest to be caused by "non-students," how many police chiefs have labeled demonstrations as Communist-led, how many government officials have found dissent from their programs to be unimportant because some "Reds" were present among those dissenting, then it becomes obvious that more Americans than just rightists prefer blaming troubles on a particular enemy to taking a good, hard look at the social, political, and economic causes of such troubles.

It is difficult to tell just why certain people adhere to the Radical Right. Scholars have debated the socio-psychological backgrounds of participants without being able to reach any definitive conclusions. One thing we know is that the rightist mentality is not one peculiar to our time or even to our country. Similar conspiracy theories and apocalyptic visions existed in the U.S. in the 19th century when the Masons and the Catholics had the finger of suspicion pointed at them. During medieval

times hundreds of millennial sects flourished, all with much the same feeling of conspiracy and impending apocalypse that we find in the Right today. Such sects appeared in periods and in societies where traditional norms and relationships were disintegrating, leaving many people rootless, desperate, and frightened by the world around them. The parallel to today is striking. It leads to the conclusion that as long as the U.S. continues to have the kind of social change and even chaos it has had recently, the Radical Right will be able to hold onto many of its members and perhaps even to increase its influence.

The ideas and beliefs of the Radical Right may seem farfetched and even humorous, and its members may appear to be deranged. Their attempts to impeach Earl Warren, or repeal the income tax, or to label Martin Luther King a Communist may even seem unworthy of serious consideration. Yet the Right *is* capable of doing much harm. On the national level it can confuse and disrupt election campaigns with its spurious charges and thus keep our attention from focusing on the real and critical problems besieging us. On the local level it can have a detrimental influence on such institutions as school systems and libraries. Already some of these have been purged of books and programs teaching about such "Communist" dangers as the United Nations.

EXTREMISM INTO "NORMALITY"

There is also a larger way in which the Radical Right can be a threat. One does not have to make comparisons between *Mein Kampf* and Robert Welch's *Blue Book*, but neither should anyone ignore the fact that a number of powerful, militant groups in the 20th century were originally considered no more than collections of crackpots. For when socio-economic conditions become disrupted; when war, depression, or other calamities traumatize societies; when man, suffering from a crisis of faith, becomes unable to endure the burdens that an impersonal, corporate society places upon him; the desire to believe that evil forces are responsible for one's anxieties and troubles can become overwhelming. In such a situation, the extremism of a relatively small group like the Radical Right has a chance of becoming the "normality" of a nation.