Ezra Taft Benson and Mormon Political Conflicts

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FROM THE 1950S TO THE 1980S Ezra Taft Benson was at the center of a series of political conflicts within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1943 he became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. With church president David O. McKay's permission, he served as Secretary of Agriculture to U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower from 1953 to 1961. Benson's autobiography and official biography openly present the national controversies involved with his service as Secretary of Agriculture.[1]

Less known is the quiet conflict between Secretary Benson and politically conservative LDS administrators and general authorities in Utah. As early as 1953, First Presidency counselor J. Reuben Clark said he was "apprehensive of Bro Benson in Washington." By 1957 Clark and Apostle Mark E. Petersen agreed to instruct the church's *Deseret News* to "print the adverse comment" about Benson's service as Secretary of Agriculture.[2] The

1. *Time* 61 (13 Apr. 1953): cover, 13; *Time* 67 (7 May 1956): cover, 30; "GOP Committee Members Propose Benson Resign," *Arizona Republic*, 13 Dec. 1959, Sect. 2, 1; "Irate Benson Says He's Not About To Quit Job," *Arizona Republic*, 15 Dec. 1959, 3; Ezra Taft Benson, *Cross Fire: The Eight Years with Eisenhower* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1962); Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987), 253-359; also Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, "Eisenhower and Ezra Taft Benson: Farm Policy in the 1950s," *Agricultural History* 44 (Oct. 1970): 369-78; Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier, *Ezra Taft Benson and the Politics of Agriculture: The Eisenhower Years, 1953-1961* (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1975); Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier, "Religion and Reform: A Case Study of Henry A. Wallace and Ezra Taft Benson," *Journal of Church and State* 21 (Autumn 1979): 525-35.

2. Henry D. Moyle diary, 24 Mar. 1953, archives, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter LDS archives); J. Reuben Clark ranch diary, 29 Oct. 1957, Clark Papers, archives, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. In citing manuscript sources, I give priority to public availability. For manuscripts in restricted archives, my typed transcriptions and photocopies are also sources.

next year several general authorities and church administrators expressed personal opposition to Benson. In March 1958, Apostle Harold B. Lee said that Benson needed "humbling" to serve "properly . . . as a member of the Council of the Twelve."[3] In July Ernest L. Wilkinson, Brigham Young University's president, wrote that Benson "espouse[s] certain principles which are utterly inconsistent with the feeling of the Brethren."[4] During the next several months Apostle Hugh B. Brown actively (and successfully) campaigned for the Democratic candidate in Utah's U.S. senatorial race, and against Benson's support of the incumbent Republican.[5]

Criticism of Secretary Benson even included the First Presidency. In 1958, Counselor Clark said, "I did not think the Secretary of Agriculture would yield to argument," in conversation with the chair of the Utah Cattlemen's Association and the chair of the National Wool Growers Association. By 1960 Clark complained that "Sec'y Benson's policies have about extinguished the small farmer and small cattleman."[6] Clark's view was shared by the other counselor in the First Presidency, Henry D. Moyle.[7] And in 1961 Wilkinson observed that "President McKay for the moment is displeased with some things that Brother Benson has done."[8] However, it is unclear whether Benson even knew that his fellow general authorities disapproved of his policies as Secretary of Agriculture. For example, J. Reuben Clark concealed his disapproval in public statements about Benson. In conversations and correspondence with Benson, he also muted his dissent.[9]

On the other hand, almost as soon as Ezra Taft Benson returned to Utah from Washington, D.C., in 1961, he became involved in a well-known

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3. Ernest L. Wilkinson diary, 7 Mar. 1958, photocopy, David John Buerger Papers, Western Americana, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

4. Ibid., 7 July 1958; other criticisms of Benson's politics are in entries of 13 Sept., 11 Dec. 1957, 12 Feb., 2 May, 21-29 June 1958, 20 Oct. 1959, 29 Nov. 1960, and 13 May 1963.

5. F. Ross Peterson, "Utah Politics Since 1945," in Richard D. Poll et al., *Utah's History* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 516.

6. Clark, memorandum of conversation with "Chairman Hopkin," Don Clyde, Lawrence Johnson, Hugh Colton, Howard J. Clegg, Ted Crawford, and Art Woolley, 18 Apr. 1958; Clark farm diary, 5 June 1960; also more of Clark's criticism of Benson's policies appears in Clark office diary, 11 May 1953, 1 July 1957, 31 Mar. 1958, Clark Papers.

7. Thomas G. Alexander, *The Forest Service and the LDS Church in the Mid-Twentieth Century: Utah National Forests as a Test Case* (Ogden, UT: Weber State College Press, 1988), 7-8, 20-21.

8. Wilkinson diary, 9 Aug. 1961.

9. Clark office diary, 9 Apr. 1953; Clark memoranda of his conversations with Benson, 21 Mar. 1955, 1 July 1957; Clark, remarks to special Welfare Plan meeting, 1 Oct. 1955; Clark to Benson, 21 Jan. 1953, 30 Sept. 1956, 19 July 1960, Clark Papers. I tried unsuccessfully to obtain Benson's perspective on the Mormon hierarchy's criticism of his service as Secretary of Agriculture. See n11.

conflict with senior members of the Mormon hierarchy. His official biographer declined to write about this controversy, and that silence is equally true in the biographies of every other general authority who was prominently involved.[10] Despite this conflict's significance for modern Mormonism and the national publicity it received, this story is either absent or muted in histories of the LDS church. Because these matters are significant to the internal dynamics of the operations of the LDS hierarchy, this essay examines at length Apostle Ezra Taft Benson's conflicts with other general authorities which began in the 1960s.[11]

Ezra Taft Benson and the John Birch Society

At issue was Ezra Taft Benson's anti-Communist[12] crusade and his unrelenting effort to obtain or imply LDS church endorsement of the John Birch Society. Founded in December 1958, the Birch Society was named for an American soldier killed by Chinese Communists ten days after the end of World War II.[13]

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10. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, viii. The various biographies of David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner, and Mark E. Petersen are also either silent about their participation in the Benson controversy or only indirectly allude to it.

11. Aside from Elder Benson's public addresses, his statements to the media, and a few comments to his friends or associates, my analysis lacks his perspective about his controversies with other general authorities from the 1960s to the 1980s. I tried unsuccessfully to obtain from relevant sources Benson's personal perspective in these matters. For example, Reed A. Benson decided not to share his and his father's perspective about the matters discussed in this essay. Likewise, prominent Utah members of the John Birch Society J. Reese Hunter and David B. Jorgensen declined to provide me their perspective. Also, D. Arthur Haycock, former First Presidency secretary and long-time associate of Ezra Taft Benson (see below), declined to give me an interview about the apostle's support of the Birch Society and about what Haycock described as "alleged differences between Brother Benson and the other Brethren." However, my study quotes views in defense of Ezra Taft Benson, his son Reed, and others, and quotes pro-Birch opponents to Benson's critics in the Mormon hierarchy.

12. I follow the practice in many of my sources of capitalizing "Communism" and "Communist," even though lowercasing is preferred. However, where the terms are lowercased in original quotations, I lowercase them.

13. Robert H. Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Belmont, MA: Western Islands, 1961), vii; Welch, *A Brief Introduction to the John Birch Society* (Belmont, MA: John Birch Society, 1962); John H. Rousselot, *Beliefs and Principles of the John Birch Society* (statement to Congress, 12 June 1962) (Belmont, MA: John Birch Society [1962]); "What Is the John Birch Society? The Truth May Surprise You!" (paid advertisement), *Salt Lake Tribune*, 11 Dec. 1965, 18; Welch, *What Is the John Birch Society?* (Belmont, MA: John Birch Society, 1970); Robert W. Lee, "The John Birch Society At Age 25," in the Birch Society's *American Opinion* 26 (Dec. 1983): 1; Susan L. M. Huck, "Founding of the Society," and Robert W. Lee, "How Robert Welch Developed His Views on Conspiracy in America," *American*

Philosophical heir of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and of U.S. senator Joseph McCarthy, the Birch Society became the most significant grass-roots organization to express the "Great Fear" of Communist triumphs internationally and of Communist subversions in America after World War II.[14]

Opinion 28 (Mar. 1985): 16, 69-76, 153-72. For alternative views of John Birch's death, compare Welch, *The Life of John Birch* (Chicago: Regnery, 1954), with "Different Views on [John Birch's] Death," *New York Times*, 4 Apr. 1961, 18, "Who Was John Birch?" *Time* 77 (14 Apr. 1961): 29, and "How John Birch Died," *New York Herald Tribune*, 25 Nov. 1962.

The principal archival holdings on the John Birch Society are at its archives in Appleton, Wisconsin, which has official documents as well as the personal papers of Robert H. Welch, the society's founder. However, research access is limited at the Birch archives, and the Welch papers are presently unorganized for research. Therefore, the most important archival resource for independent researchers interested in the Birch Society is the Conservative/Libertarian Manuscript Collection, Special Collections, Knight Library, University of Oregon at Eugene. The University of Oregon's collection includes the papers of such prominent Birchers as Thomas J. Anderson, T. Coleman Andrews, Augereau G. Heinsohn, and E. Merrill Root. Also, see the Knox Mellon Collection on the John Birch Society, Special Collections, Research Library, University of California at Los Angeles; William J. Grede papers (restricted until 1999) and Clark R. Mollenhoff papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Madison; Sterling Morton papers, Chicago Historical Society.

14. For the general context of the domestic fears of Communist subversion, see David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); also Robert K. Carr, *The House Committee on Un-American Activities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952); Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties: A Cross-section of the Nation Speaks Its Mind* (New York: Doubleday, 1955); Ralph S. Brown, *Loyalty and Security: Employment Tests in the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958); John W. Caughey, *In Clear and Present Danger: The Crucial State of Our Freedoms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Herbert L. Packer, *Ex-Communist Witnesses: Four Studies in Fact Finding* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1962); Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 1963); J. Allen Broyles, *The John Birch Society: Anatomy of a Protest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); Donald J. Kemper, *Decade of Fear: Senator Hennings and Civil Liberties* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1965); Earl Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington: From the New Deal to McCarthy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); Walter Goodman, *The Committee: The Extraordinary Career of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968); Arthur V. Watkins [U.S. senator from Utah], *Enough Rope: The Inside Story of the Censure of Senator Joe McCarthy By His Colleagues: The Controversial Hearings that Signaled the End of a Turbulent Career and a Fearsome Era in American Public Life* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969); Allen J. Matusow, *Joseph R. McCarthy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); "The Era of the John Birch Society," in Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 249-87; Murray Burton Levin, *Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Athan G. Theoharis, *Seeds*

Benson described the Birch Society as "the most effective non-church organization in our fight against creeping socialism and godless Communism." He added, "I know their leaders, I have attended two of their all-day Council meetings. I have read their literature. I feel I know their program."[15]

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of Repression: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of McCarthyism (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971); David Brion Davis, ed., The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion From the Revolution to the Present (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), esp. 327-48.

Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Internal Security, 1946-1948* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972); Eric Bentley, *Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been?: The Investigation of Show Business by the Un-American Activities Committee, 1947-1958* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Richard O. Curry, *Conspiracy: The Fear of Subversion in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972); Cedric Belfrage, *The American Inquisition, 1945-1960* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973); Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis, eds., *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974); F. Ross Peterson, "McCarthyism in the Mountains, 1950-1954," in Thomas G. Alexander, ed., *Essays On the American West, 1974-1975* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1976); Michael R. Belknap, *Cold War Justice: The Smith Act, the Communist Party, and American Civil Liberties* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977); Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (New York: Random House, 1978); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980); Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Viking Press, 1980); Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982); Stanley I. Kutler, *The American Inquisition: Justice and Injustice in the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Athan G. Theoharis, ed., *Beyond the Hiss Case: The FBI, Congress, and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton, *The Rosenberg File: A Search for the Truth* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983); Peter L. Steinberg, *The Great "Red Menace": United States Prosecution of American Communists, 1947-1952* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*, 2d. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987); Thomas G. Patterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1930-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jeff Broadwater, *Eisenhower and the Anti-Communist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Diana Trilling, "How McCarthy Gave Anti-Communism a Bad Name," *Newsweek* 121 (11 Jan. 1993): 32-33. As Secretary of Agriculture, Benson reflected that concern in his *The Threat of Communism [and] World Brotherhood*, published by the LDS church's Deseret Book Company in 1960.

15. Benson's first official public endorsement of the Birch Society appeared in "Reed A. Benson Takes Post In Birch Society," *Deseret News*, 27 Oct. 1962, B-5; "Reed Benson Takes Post With John Birch Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 Oct. 1962, 24; and was repeated in "Benson-Birch Tie Disturbs Utahans [sic]," *New York Times*, 4 Nov. 1962, 65; "Benson's Praise of the Birchers," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 Mar. 1963, 16; "Elder Benson Makes Statement," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 16 Mar. 1963, 2; *The Pink Book of the John Birch Society* (Belmont, MA: John Birch Society, 1963); "The John Birch Society: A Report," *Advertising Supplement to Los Angeles Times*, 27 Sept. 1964, 14; and "Socialism Warning

On the other hand, even such well-known political conservatives and anti-Communists as Barry Goldwater, William F. Buckley, Russell Kirk, and Ronald Reagan described the Birch Society as "ultraconservative," "right-wing," "extremist," "paranoid," "fanatic fringe," or "lunatic fringe."[16]

Anti-Communist activism split and polarized American conservatives from the 1950s on. The Birch Society became an important manifestation of that conservative polarization.[17] In the early 1960s national officers, council

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Sounded: Elder Benson Hits Liberals," *Deseret News*, 12 Feb. 1966, B-1. His reference to attending Birch training seminars is in "LDS Apostle Backs Up Birch Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 Jan. 1966, B-14.

16. "Goldwater Disagrees With John Birch Theories, Is Impressed by Members," *Sacramento Bee*, 30 Mar. 1961, A-16; Russell Kirk's statement about "fanatic fringe" appears in his and Benjamin L. Masse, "The Birchites," *America: National Catholic Weekly Review* 106 (17 Feb. 1962): 643-45; Barry Goldwater introduced into *Congressional Record—Senate* 109 (1 Oct. 1963): 18453-55 a talk which lumped the Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan with the "so-called radical right" (18454); "Barry Disagrees With 3 Bircher Stands," *Sacramento Bee*, 22 Oct. 1963, A-6; William F. Buckley, Jr., "Real Responsibility Lacking Still With Birchite Members," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 6 Aug. 1965, A-4 [which dropped "paranoid" from his description of Birch "drivel" in his syndicated column]; "Bouquet for Buckley," *Christian Century* 82 (25 Aug. 1965): 1028; Buckley [with supporting contributions by Goldwater, Kirk, and others], "The John Birch Society and the Conservative Movement," *National Review* 17 (19 Oct. 1965): 914-20, 925-29; Ronald Reagan's statement about the Birch Society's "lunatic fringe" is quoted in "Reagan Criticizes Birch Society and Its Founder," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 Sept. 1965, Pt. I, 3, also quoted in Fletcher Knebel, "The GOP Attacks The John Birch Society," *Look* 29 (28 Dec. 1965): 74; Goldwater to Harvey B. Schechter, 31 Oct. 1966, endorsing Schechter's pamphlet *How To Listen To A John Birch Society Speaker*, photocopy in J. D. Williams papers (folder and box numbers not yet finalized), Western Americana, Marriott Library. These anti-Birch critics had already established their conservative, anti-Communist credentials in Buckley and L. Brent Bozell, *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1954); Buckley, *The Committee and Its Critics: A Calm Review of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (New York: Putnam, 1962); Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Shepherdsville, KY: Victor Publishing Co., 1960); Russell Kirk, *A Program for Conservatives* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1954); Kirk, *The American Cause* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1957); Ronald Reagan, with Richard G. Hubler, *Where's The Rest of Me?* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965), 157-84, 192, 199-200, 297-312. The books by Buckley, Kirk, and Goldwater appeared in the lists of "Approved Books" following *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (July 1961) in *The White Book of The John Birch Society for 1961* (Belmont, MA: The John Birch Society, 1961).

17. Of the labels given by mainstream conservatives to the Birch Society, I use "ultraconservative" and "right-wing" as the most neutral terms for a controversial movement. However, some Birch Society advocates resent being called ultraconservative or right-wing, even when these labels are used by conservatives like Buckley (see Buckley, "Birch Society Members Indignant at Buckley," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 17 Aug. 1965, A-4; *The John Birch Society Bulletin* [Dec. 1967]: 24-25; Medford Evans, "Welch and Buckley" in the John Birch Society's *American Opinion* 28 [Mar. 1985]: 89-106). For example, W. Cleon Skousen wrote: "Very often it is popular to resist any Constitutional reform by calling it 'rightist' or 'ultraconservative.' However, it is obvious that the elimination of socialist principles from the American system and the re-establishment of the American eagle in the

members, "Endorsers," and editorial staff of the Birch Society were also directors of the following conservative organizations: America's Future, the American Committee for Aid to Katanga Freedom Fighters, the American Security Council, Americans For Constitutional Action, the Christian [Anti-Communism] Crusade, the Christian Freedom Foundation, the Church League of America, the Citizens Foreign Aid Committee, the Committee of One Million (Against the Admission of Red China to the United Nations), the Conservative Society of America, the Dan Smoot Report, the For America: A Committee for Political Action, the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists, the International Services of Information, the Liberty Lobby, the Manion Forum, the National Economic Council, the National Education Program, the Veritas Foundation, the We, the People organization, and the Young Americans for Freedom.[18]

Less than a year after the Birch Society's founding, Ezra Taft Benson was in close association with at least one of the society's highest leaders. In September-October 1959, Benson took Thomas J. Anderson with him as a member of his entourage on an official trip to Europe, including a visit to the Soviet Union. At that time, Anderson was publisher of *Farm and Ranch* magazine as well as an influential member of the new Birch Society. By the time he accompanied Benson on a trip to the Far East in November 1960, Anderson was a member of the national governing council of the Birch Society.[19] By 1961, Ezra Taft Benson had established an association with the

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balanced center of the political spectrum is neither right-wing extremism nor ultraconservatism" (Skousen, *What Is Left? What Is Right?: A Study of Political Extremism* [Salt Lake City: Freemen Institute, 1981], 22. See also Jerreld L. Newquist's specific denial that the John Birch Society is ultraconservative or right-wing in Jerrald [sic] L. Newquist, "Liberty Vs. Creeping Socialism: Warns Of Internal Threats," *Deseret News*, 21 Dec. 1961, A-12). See below for Ezra Taft Benson's association with Skousen and the Freemen Institute, and for Newquist's edition of Benson's talks, as well as Skousen's association with the Birch Society.

18. Douglas Kirk Stewart, "An Analysis of the Celebrity Structure of the American Right," M.S. thesis, University of Utah, 1962, 6, 11, 25-26; *The Patriots* (Cleveland, OH: Precis Press, 1963), 28; National Council of Civic Responsibility, Press Release, 22 Sept. 1964, 1-5, copy in Williams papers; Editors and Advisory Committee of the Birch Society's *American Opinion* (1961-64); also the files on the organizations cited in the text, on the Birch Society, and on other ultraconservative organizations in J. Bracken Lee Papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library. Although not technically a member of the Birch Society, Bracken Lee became a member of the society's Committee of Endorsers in 1961 and a member of *American Opinion*'s Editorial Advisory Committee until November 1966. See Lee to Robert Welch, 19 Jan. 1961, Lee papers; *American Opinion* 9 (Nov. 1966): inside front cover. Lee was Utah's governor (1949-57) and Salt Lake City mayor (1960-72).

19. "Benson Took Birchite on Tours," *Washington Post*, 12 July 1961, D-11; "The Council," *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Feb. 1960): 2. Neither Benson's *Cross Fire* nor Dew's *Ezra Taft Benson* says that Anderson was part of the secretary's entourage on these two trips. However, Benson prints (606-608) Anderson's account of their visit to Russia, and

Birch Society, and would soon refer to its founder Robert H. Welch affectionately as "Dear Bob."[20]

Benson's developing association with the Birch Society represented a reversal of the position he had taken during his early years as Secretary of Agriculture. In 1954 he publicly condemned "the hysterical preachings of those who would destroy our basic freedoms under the guise of anti-communism." This was generally understood to be Benson's attack on the excesses of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.[21] But eight years later Benson wrote that McCarthy "rendered a service in emphasizing the insidious threat of the Communist influence in government."[22] Benson's odyssey from anti-McCarthyism to neo-McCarthyism is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is necessary to recognize that he made such a transition. Although Benson was never a member of record, his wife Flora and sons Reed and Mark all joined the Birch Society.[23]

Immediately after his official trip with the Birch council member in 1960, Benson proposed to Brigham Young University's president that his son Reed Benson be used for "espionage" on the church school campus. To Apostle Harold B. Lee, Reed explained that as a BYU faculty member, "he could soon find out who the orthodox teachers were and report to his father." After resisting Apostle Benson's proposal for Reed's employment, Ernest Wilkinson countered that "neither Brother Lee nor I want espionage of that character."[24]

Reed Benson had already organized student surveillance at the University of Utah during the 1959-60 school year. For example, he asked a conservative freshman to provide him with the names of students who were active in liberal causes on the state campus. This student also enrolled in a political science course taught by professor J. D. Williams in order to

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Dew quotes (344) part of that article.

20. Due to the partially processed condition of the Robert Welch papers, I was unable to obtain the dates of Benson's earliest correspondence with the Birch founder. However, they were associated by the end of 1961. See Ezra Taft Benson, "Biographical Notes," Dec. 1961, and Benson's "Dear Bob" letter, 10 Dec. 1970, Welch papers, archives, Birch Society, with photocopies in my possession.

21. "Benson Aims New Blast At M'Carthy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 June 1954, 1.

22. Benson to H. Roland Tietjen, president of the Hawaiian LDS temple, 22 May 1962, archives, Lee Library.

23. My telephone interview with Byron Cannon Anderson, 18 Jan. 1993. As an undergraduate, Anderson became a member of the Birch Society through his association with Reed Benson.

24. Wilkinson diary, 29 Nov. 1960. Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 203, mention Reed Benson's offer but not his father's support of the "espionage" proposal. Wilkinson's diary indicated that Ezra Taft Benson first made the proposal which Reed later outlined to Harold B. Lee.

monitor this liberal Democrat's classroom statements. This student-spy adds that "I transferred to Brigham Young University, where I was involved in the same sorts of things."[25]

Apostle Benson's call in November 1960 for "espionage" at Brigham Young University reflected two dimensions of the national leadership of the John Birch Society. First, their long-time preoccupation with university professors as Communist-sympathizers ("Comsymps").[26] Second, the Birch program for covert "infiltration" of various groups.[27] Apostle Benson's encouragement for espionage at BYU would be implemented periodically during the 1960s and 1970s by members and advocates of the John Birch Society (see below for 1965, 1966, 1969, 1977).

As early as the fall of 1961 some rank-and-file Mormons learned that Benson's anti-Communism had created a rift in the Mormon hierarchy. Benson proclaimed to the October 1961 general conference: "No true Latter-day Saint and no true American can be a socialist or a communist or support programs leading in that direction."[28] Upon inquiry by a politically liberal Mormon, First Presidency counselor Hugh B. Brown replied in November that a Mormon "can be a Democrat or a Socialist and still be a good church member." Brown added that "he had just had a talk with Bro Benson" who was "on the carpet in regard to his political sallies of late."[29] In December 1961, however, the politically conservative president of BYU, Ernest Wilkinson, noted that Benson was privately criticizing "the socialistic tendencies" of Counselor Brown. Wilkinson added that the two general authorities were already in "a vigorous dispute" about anti-Communism.[30]

That same month the LDS *Church News* printed Benson's talk in which he affirmed that "the internal threat to the American way of life is in the secret alliance which exists between the more advanced Social Democrats

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25. Byron Cannon Anderson interview; *Directory: University of Utah, 1959-1960: Faculty, Students, Employees* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1959), 34. See notes below for Anderson's involvement in the 1966 BYU student spy ring.

26. For example, *Collectivism on the Campus: The Battle For the Mind in American Colleges* (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1955), by E. Merrill Root who became a founding member of the "Committee of Endorsers" for the John Birch Society and an associate editor of the Birch Society's *American Opinion*. For professors as "Comsymps," see Robert Welch, "Through All the Days To Be," *American Opinion* 4 (June 1961): 34-35.

27. Max P. Peterson, "Ideology of the John Birch Society," M.S. thesis, Utah State University, 1966, 116, 132; also "Birchers Infiltrate Police, Trigger Freedom Issue," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 Nov. 1964, 13.

28. Benson, "The American Heritage of Freedom: A Plan of God," *Improvement Era* 64 (Dec. 1961): 955.

29. Brown statements, as quoted and paraphrased in Frederick S. Buchanan diary, 27 Oct. 1961, photocopy in my possession. Buchanan walked in Brown's office just as Benson was leaving.

30. Wilkinson diary, 21, 29 Dec. 1961.

and the hard-core Communist conspiracy." He claimed that there was an "insidious infiltration of communist agents and sympathizers into almost every segment of American life." Benson added that "Social Democrats" in America were "in government, education, communications and policy making bodies. There they remain today, occupying some of the highest offices in the land."[31] Prior to the talk Benson also told reporters that current U.S. president John F. Kennedy was "very soft in dealing with the Communist threat."[32]

Immediately after press reports of Benson's talk, Counselor Brown asked the editor of the *Deseret News* to write him a detailed briefing on the John Birch Society.[33] Two weeks later Brown responded to an inquiry about the Birch Society by writing that "we [the First Presidency] are definitely against their methods." On the heels of Benson's widely publicized talk, Brown continued that "we do not think dividing our own people, casting reflections on our government officials, or calling everybody a Communist who do[es] not agree with the political views of certain individuals is the proper way to fight Communism." He added that LDS "leaders, or even members, should not become hysterical or take hasty action, engage in discussions, and certainly should not join these [anti-Communist] groups, some of whom, at least, are in for the money they can make out of it."[34] In

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31. Benson, "Is There A Threat To The American Way of Life?" *Deseret News "Church News,"* 23 Dec. 1961, 15, reprinted as *The Internal Threat to the American Way of Life . . . Talk Given at the Shrine Auditorium, Los Angeles, California, December 11, 1961* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 30-31, and in Roland L. Delorme and Raymond G. McInnis, eds., *Antidemocratic Trends in Twentieth-Century America* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969). Benson quoted portions of his recent talk in an official statement, "Speech Misinterpreted By King, Benson Says," *Deseret News*, 16 Dec. 1961, B-5; "Benson Rips King 'Challenge,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 Dec. 1961, 7. Although his newspaper disclaimer said this referred to the Social Democratic Party of Russia in 1903, the *Church News* publication of his talk showed that Benson's talk emphasized (15) the present American context: "Many people have wondered if the Marxist concepts of Fabian Social Democrats have deeply penetrated the United States. In truth they have. . . . There they remain today, occupying some of the highest offices of the land." He added that "the Communists and the Social Democrats don't want us to examine this internal threat, but I believe we should."

32. "Benson Says JFK Soft on Reds," *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, 12 Dec. 1961, A-3; also "Kennedy Aides Held Soft on Reds," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Dec. 1961, Pt. III, 1; "U.S. Red Peril Emphasized By Elder Benson," *Deseret News*, 12 Dec. 1961, A-1, A-7; "Benson Warns of 'Secret Alliance,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 12 Dec. 1961, 3. However, Benson's talk itself made no reference to Kennedy.

33. O. Preston Robinson, editor and general manager of the *Deseret News*, to Hugh B. Brown, 14 Dec. 1961, "as per your request," in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society," box 48, Edwin B. Firmage Papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library.

34. Brown to Mrs. Alicia Bingham, 28 Dec. 1961, carbon copy in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

February 1962, Benson cancelled at the last minute his appearance on a television program titled, "Thunder on the Right." Some Mormons credited this to Brown's influence.[35]

Counselor Versus Apostle

In fact, this conflict between First Presidency counselor Brown and Apostle Benson became a running battle in the Mormon hierarchy. In rebuttal to the publicity of Benson's remarks the previous December, Brown instructed the LDS general priesthood meeting in April 1962: "The degree of a man's aversion to communism may not always be measured by the noise he makes in going about and calling everyone a communist who disagrees with his personal political bias." Then in a more direct allusion to his dispute with Benson, Brown said, "There is no excuse for members of this Church, especially men who hold the priesthood, to be opposing one another over communism . . ." In an obvious allusion to the Birch Society, Brown concluded: "Let us not undermine our government or accuse those who hold office of being soft on communism. . . . [or] by destroying faith in our elected officials under the guise of fighting communism."[36]

Brown's rebuttal to "soft on communism" came directly from newspaper reports of Benson's December 1961 talk. One Mormon wrote that "Bro. Brown certainly was talking to Benson when he warned the Priesthood Saturday about the dangers of extremism & of charging our leaders as dupes of the Communist conspiracy."[37] Of his April 1962 conference remarks, Brown confided: "While we do not think it wise to name names in our statements of Church policy, the cries which come from certain sources would indicate that somebody was hit by some of our statements and that was what we hoped would be the result."[38] Almost immediately after Brown's remarks at April conference, Benson renewed his public warnings about Communist influence in the United States.[39]

Because of this Brown-Benson dispute, BYU's president Wilkinson told President McKay in June 1962 that "President Brown is giving aid and comfort to the enemies of what should be sound basic Mormon philosophy."[40] In October, first counselor Henry D. Moyle said that second coun-

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35. Buchanan diary, 22 Feb. 1962.

36. Brown, "Honor the Priesthood," *Improvement Era* 65 (June 1962): 450.

37. Buchanan diary, 7 Apr. 1962.

38. Brown to Morley Ross Hammond, 25 Apr. 1962, photocopy in Williams Papers.

39. "We Must Protect U.S.: Ezra Benson Sounds Warning," *U.S. News and World Report* 52 (23 Apr. 1962): 20.

40. Wilkinson diary, 3 June 1962, described a memorandum of what he was going to say privately to McKay on 6 June.

selor Brown spoke to a Democratic convention in Utah only "because Brother Benson had given a political tirade that needed answering."[41] A few days after Benson publicly endorsed the Birch Society, Brown himself wrote in November 1962 that he was "disgusted" by Benson's activities "in connection with the John Birch Society," and if they did not cease, "some disciplinary action should be taken."[42]

Transcending personality, the Benson-Brown conflict reflected deep political divisions in the generally conservative LDS church and in the more diverse nation at large during the tumultuous 1960s.[43] Both men had a

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41. Wilkinson diary, 29 Oct. 1962, referred to a Democratic state convention "two years ago." However, in Buchanan diary, 27 Oct. 1961, Brown said that in response to Benson's conference address that month, "he'd be speaking to the States Democratic leaders in order to set them straight on the position of politics in the church."

42. Brown to Gustive O. Larson, 11 Nov. 1962, in answer to Larson's letter of 1 Nov., folder 12, box 10, Larson Papers, archives, Lee Library. The letter did not name Benson specifically, but his identity is clear from the circumstances surrounding the correspondence. Larson's "outline diary" notes (box 1, folder 19) for 1962 referred to "Bensonizing & Skousenizing" before Brown's letter, and "Pres Brown and Birchers etc" after the letter. A carbon copy of Larson's original letter to Brown on 1 Nov. 1962 is in Eugene Campbell Papers (folder and box numbers not yet finalized), archives, Lee Library. Larson's letter referred to an unnamed member of the "L.D.S. officials" who was associated by a recent newspaper article with the Birch Society. This obviously was the newspaper report of Benson's formal endorsement of the Birch Society which appeared in "Reed A. Benson Takes Post In Birch Society," *Deseret News*, 27 Oct. 1962, B-5; "Reed Benson Takes Post With John Birch Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 Oct. 1962, 24.

43. For the national context, see Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968); Benjamin Muse, *The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power, 1963-1967* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1969); Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); David Burner, Robert D. Marcus, and Thomas R. West, *A Giant's Strength: America in the 1960s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971); James A. Geschwender, *The Black Revolt: The Civil Rights Movement, Ghetto Uprisings, and Separatism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Thomas Powers, *The War at Home: Vietnam and the American People, 1964-1968* (New York: Grossman, 1973); Alexander Kendrick, *The Wound Within: America in the Vietnam Years, 1945-1974* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1974); Tom Shachtman, *Decade of Shocks: Dallas to Watergate, 1963-1974* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1974); Donald D. Warren, *The Radical Center: Middle Americans and the Politics of Alienation* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976); Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Charles R. Morris, *A Time of Passion: America, 1960-1980* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988); Kim McQuaid, *The Anxious Years: America in the Vietnam-Watergate Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Patrick Lloyd

political agenda—not uncommon in church leaders.[44] However, Benson was notable for the manner in which he tried to mobilize both the LDS church president and general membership behind his own political agenda.

In the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, Apostle Benson's son Reed became coordinator for the Birch Society in Utah. His announcement was coupled with his father's first public endorsement of the Birch Society.[45] Seven months earlier, a ward bishop (and future general authority) had complained that Reed violated the First Presidency's policy against political use of chapels by speaking to a stake meeting about the "currently popular, militantly anti-communist movement of which the speaker is the leading spokesman."[46]

Such activity infuriated both counselors to David O. McKay. "It is certainly regrettable," Brown wrote in November 1962, that Reed Benson "is permitted to continue to peddle his bunk in our Church houses. The matter was brought sharply to the attention of the President by Brother Moyle during my absence . . ."[47] That same month, Henry D. Taylor, an assistant to the Twelve Apostles, said that "in his judgment [Reed] Benson was the laughing stock of Salt Lake" for his Birch activism.[48] Someone even

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Hatcher, *The Suicide of an Elite: American Internationalists and Vietnam* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990); Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking Press, 1991).

44. Although Hugh B. Brown is not the focus of this essay, the dimensions of his own agenda as a church leader appear in Eugene E. Campbell and Richard Poll, *Hugh B. Brown: His Life and Thought* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975); and Edwin B. Firmage, ed., *An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988).

45. "Reed A. Benson Takes Post In Birch Society," *Deseret News*, 27 Oct. 1962, B-5; "Reed Benson Takes Post With John Birch Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 Oct. 1962, 24; "Ezra Benson's Son Takes Birch Society Post," *Sacramento Bee*, 27 Oct. 1972, B-7; "Benson-Birch Tie Disturbs Utahans [sic]," *New York Times*, 4 Nov. 1962, 65; "LDS in Capital Rap Reed Benson Talk," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 Dec. 1962, 7; "Reed Benson Replies to News Dispatch," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 Dec. 1962.

46. Richard P. Lindsay, on letterhead of Taylorsville Second Ward Bishopric, to David O. McKay, Henry D. Moyle, and Hugh B. Brown, 20 Mar. 1962, carbon copy in Williams Papers. Lindsay's handwritten note to J. D. Williams at the end of the carbon copy reads: "I'm sure this sounds soap boxish but the latter talk referred to cost me one whole night's sleep. Everyone seems to profit in the hard sell book business—One of these days write a sequel called 'Conscience of a Liberal.'" For Lindsay's later appointment to the Second Quorum of Seventy, see *Deseret News 1993-1994 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1992), 36.

47. Hugh B. Brown to Richard D. Poll, 26 Nov. 1962, in response to Poll to Brown, 20 Nov. 1962, photocopies in my possession.

48. Henry D. Taylor statement, as reported in Richard M. Taylor to Richard D. Poll, 7 Nov. 1962, photocopy in my possession. Assistant to the Twelve was a general authority

burned a Nazi swastika in the lawn of Reed Benson's house shortly after his appointment as state coordinator for the John Birch Society.[49]

Nevertheless, the Birch Society's Utah membership tripled in the next six months after Reed Benson's appointment as state coordinator. A year later Reed also became coordinator for the Mormon counties of southern Idaho. Two years after his initial appointment, the younger Benson left Utah to become the Birch coordinator in Washington, D.C. Eventually, Reed A. Benson became the national director of public relations for the John Birch Society.[50] In addition to introducing Birch beliefs to Mormons, Reed Benson also convinced the national Birch Council to open its meetings with prayer.[51]

Meanwhile, Ezra Taft Benson tried unsuccessfully to get President McKay's approval for the non-Mormon president of the Birch Society to speak at a session of LDS general conference.[52] Failing that, Benson endorsed the Birch Society during his talks at stake conferences and preached Birch themes in general conference sermons.[53] In fact, Benson's official

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calling from 1941 until it was absorbed into the newly formed First Quorum of Seventy in 1976. See below for Taylor's account of Apostle Harold B. Lee's rebuke of Benson in front of other general authorities.

49. "Vandals, Reds, Loaded Queries Plague Utah's Bircher Benson," *Portland Oregonian*, 19 May 1963, 16, with photo of Reed beside the swastika vandalism.

50. "Benson Son Leads Rightists in Utah," *New York Times*, 19 May 1963, 55; "Benson's Son Claims He Has Tripled Utah Birch Membership," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1963, A-1; T. George Harris, "The Rampant Right Invades the GOP," *Look* 27 (16 July 1963): 20; "Benson and Birch: Politics Or Religion?" *University of Utah Daily Utah Chronicle*, 3 Dec. 1964, 2; "Utahn Heads Birch Office in Capital," *Deseret News*, 16 Dec. 1964, A-13; Jules Witcover, "Bircher Benson," *The New Republic* 152 (8 May 1965): 8-9; "Washington Report . . . Birchers Settle In," *Life* 58 (18 June 1965): 43; "Birch Society Opens Washington Office Friday," *New York Times*, 14 Sept. 1965, 20; "John Birch Society Representative Reed Benson," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 19 Sept. 1965, A-6; "Mormons and Politics: Benson's Influence Helps Keep Growing Church on Conservative Track," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 Aug. 1966, 1; "Gets Birch Job," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 May 1967, B-4; Reed A. Benson to Dean M. Hansen, 22 May 1967, in Dean Maurice Hansen, "An Analysis of the 1964 Idaho Second Congressional District Election Campaign," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967, 50, 221.

51. Reed A. Benson to Tom Anderson, "*PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL*," 3 July 1963, Anderson Papers, Knight Library, University of Oregon at Eugene.

52. Referred to in minutes, LDS archives, of meeting on 15 March 1966 of David O. McKay, N. Eldon Tanner, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Mark E. Petersen in Huntsville, Utah.

53. Byron Cannon Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," senior paper, University of Utah, June 1966, 8-13, photocopy in Western Americana, Marriott Library; Alison Bethke, "BF [Before Falwell], EB [Ezra Benson]," senior paper, Professor Marvin Hill's History 490, Brigham Young University, 9 Apr. 1984, 6, 8, photocopy in Williams Papers. This study refers frequently to Byron Cannon Anderson's 1966 paper, written while he was chair of a Birch Society spin-off group called Citizens for Honest Government. Anderson's interview, 18 Jan. 1993, states that he was a member of the Birch Society, and the organization was also led by such prominent Mormon Birchers as J. Reese Hunter and Mark E. Anderson. In

biographer calculated that during the decade of the 1960s "fifteen of his twenty general conference addresses [or 75 percent] focused on one or more of these [political] topics."[54]

By October 1962, Benson's partisan talks at general conference were resulting in public dissent by LDS university students. In response to Benson's conference statement that "No true Latter-day Saint can be a socialist or a communist," a University of Utah student from Norway countered that "more than half" of Norwegian Mormons vote for the socialist Labor Party. This student concluded: "I am glad the president of the Church has taken a stand against Communism. But I do not think it is the responsibility of any other speaker in the tabernacle to give his own political opinions regarding welfare states." In equally public responses, other LDS students attacked this Mormon undergraduate for criticizing Benson.[55]

The Benson-Brown controversy was less public at Brigham Young University, yet equally intense. By the fall of 1962 members of the Birch Society's national council and editorial advisory committee had been speakers at BYU's "Forum" assemblies which were attended by a majority of students. This reflected the pro-Birch sentiments of BYU's president. On the other hand, anti-Birchers on the BYU faculty formally complained to Hugh B. Brown that the administration had arranged for national leaders of the Birch Society to address the student body.[56] After giving a "political" talk to a multistake meeting of BYU students in November 1962, religion professor Glenn L. Pearson told one of his students that Benson's support

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1970, Hunter and Cannon became founding editor and assistant editor of *The Utah Independent: The Conservative Marketplace of Utah* which was written by and for Mormon members of the Birch Society. See Byron Cannon Anderson, "Open Letter to Utah Citizens," Mar. 1966, folder 5, box 184, Frank E. Moss papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library; "Young, But Eager, He Looks for Political Chance," *Deseret News*, 30 Sept. 1965, B-1; "Welch Raps 'Senseless' U.S. Policy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Apr. 1966, B-1; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah"; "David O. McKay: Prophet-Patriot," and staff list, *Utah Independent*, 12 Feb. 1970, 1-2; "Birch Society PR Speaker," *Utah Independent*, 9 Apr. 1970, 1; "What Is The John Birch Society," *Utah Independent*, 28 May 1971, 6-7, 9; "The Communist Attack on The John Birch Society," *Utah Independent*, 21 Apr. 1972, 4-7; "Birchers Ask Economic Sanctions on Communists," *Utah Independent*, 19 May 1972, 4; and the regular column from Birch headquarters in Belmont, Massachusetts, which was officially named "The Birch Log" as of *Utah Independent*, 5 Aug. 1976, 3.

54. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 366-67. For an academic summary of Birch themes, see Peterson, "Ideology of the John Birch Society."

55. Kjell Nilsen, letters to the editor, *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 22 Oct. 1962, 2, and 26 Oct. 1962, 2, to which Allen Mickelsen and Jim Wanek responded in *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 24 Oct. 1962, 2, and 25 Oct. 1962, 2.

56. Richard D. Poll to Hugh B. Brown, 13 Dec. 1962, photocopy in my possession; "The Council," *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Feb. 1960): 2; John Birch Society's *American Opinion*.

of the Birch Society was a mission from God. Then, described by BYU's president as "the most untactful person I have heard," Pearson said that Brown was "a Judas in the First Presidency." The student concluded that a church court should excommunicate Counselor Brown.[57]

Such controversy on Utah's campuses appalled general authorities who did not want young Latter-day Saints to regard the Birch Society or its philosophy as a measure of one's faith. However, Benson skillfully created a public environment which left the First Presidency and his fellow apostles only five difficult options: remain silent, privately rebuke him, publicly endorse his views, publicly repudiate his views without naming him, or publicly repudiate him by name. On various occasions from the 1960s to the early 1980s, the hierarchy ambivalently adopted each of the five possible responses to Benson's political crusade.

In January 1963 the First Presidency broke its silence. Their announcement stated: "We deplore the presumption of some politicians, especially officers, co-ordinators and members of the John Birch Society, who undertake to align the Church or its leadership with their political views."[58] This was a not-too-subtle reference to Benson's son Reed, the Utah Birch coordinator. Three days after the First Presidency announcement, Elder Benson spoke at a rally endorsed by the Birch Society in Boston. Newspapers reported this as a defiant embarrassment to the LDS church.[59]

Some Mormon members of the Birch Society criticized the First Presidency for its January 1963 statement. For example, one pro-Birch Mormon informed President McKay that she loved him as a prophet, but that the

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57. Wilkinson diary, 4 Nov. 1962; conversation reported to me by the student in November 1962, during which time I was also enrolled in Pearson's missionary preparation course. The student supported the views of the Birch Society, of Benson, and of Pearson. Pearson's political tracts included *The Constitution versus the Bill of Rights* (Provo, UT: N.d.); *Freedom of Speech and Press* (Provo, UT: N.d.); *Socialism and the United Order or the Law of Consecration* (Provo, UT: 1962[?]); *The No-Plan Plan* (Provo, UT: [1967]); *Public School Philosophy—State Religion* (Provo, UT: 1967[?]); and also Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 196, about Pearson. Benson made a public allusion to Brown as Judas in general conference a year after Pearson's remark. See discussion of October 1963 general conference, below.

58. "Church Sets Policy on Birch Society," *Deseret News*, 4 Jan. 1963, B-1; also "Mormon Head Clarifies Stand on Birch Society: McKay Lashes at Those Who Try to Align Church With Group's Partisan Views," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 Jan. 1963, Pt. I, 5; "LDS Leaders Reject Any Idea of Link Between Church, Birch Society," *Sacramento Bee*, 4 Jan. 1963, A-10; "Birch Tie Flatly Denied By LDS," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 4 Jan. 1963; "Reprint of Statement From the First Presidency," *The Messenger: Distributed By the Presiding Bishopric of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah*, Feb. 1963, 1.

59. "Ezra Taft Benson Addresses Rally," *Deseret News*, 7 Jan. 1963, A-3; Drew Pearson, "Benson Embarrasses His Church," *Washington Post*, 22 Jan. 1963, B-23; "Church Embarrassed Over Ezra Taft Benson Stand," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 22 Jan. 1963, 4.

church president had inadvertently "given much aid and comfort to the enemy." She concluded that "this statement by the First Presidency regarding the John Birch Society and Reed Benson . . . might have an ill effect on the Missionary work."[60] Such letters stunned even the normally hard-crusted first counselor Henry D. Moyle, who wrote: "When we pursue any course which results in numerous letters written to the Presidency critical of our work, it should be some evidence we should change our course." Only five days after the statement's publication, the first counselor apparently now had second thoughts about the First Presidency's anti-Birch statement.[61]

Therefore, it is not surprising that President McKay (always sensitive to criticism) also expressed concern by 31 January that "the First Presidency probably went a little too far" in its Birch statement. McKay's personal secretary confided that he was disturbed by "at least 25 letters vigorously protesting the statement of the First Presidency on the John Birch Society—many of them very intelligent letters."[62]

Two weeks later, the church president instructed his secretary, Clare Middlemiss, to send a reply to Mormon Birchers[63] who criticized the First Presidency statement. The letter affirmed: "The Church is not opposing the John Birch Society or any other organization of like nature; however, it is definitely opposed to anyone using the Church for the purpose of increasing membership for private organizations sponsoring these various ideologies."[64] On the other hand, second counselor Brown felt the presidency had

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60. Nancy Smith Lowe to David O. McKay, 10 Jan. 1963, MS 5971 #1, LDS archives, photocopy in my possession.

61. Moyle to J. D. Williams, 9 Jan. 1963, Williams Papers. Frank H. Jonas, political scientist at the University of Utah, interpreted Moyle's words as the reasoning which led to the First Presidency's statement (Jonas, typed document, 83, in the John Birch Society section of a longer manuscript for which the first portion is missing and its title presently unknown, Jonas Papers [folder and box numbers not finalized], Western Americana, Marriott Library). It is true that liberal Mormons had long encouraged the First Presidency to issue a statement against the John Birch Society (e.g., Richard D. Poll to Hugh B. Brown, 22 Jan. 1962, photocopy in my possession). However, I have found no evidence that anti-Birch Mormons had "written to the Presidency critical of our work" for not issuing such a statement prior to January 1963. On the other hand, negative letters about this statement had reached the First Presidency's office before Moyle wrote this letter of 9 January.

62. Wilkinson diary, 31 Jan. 1963. Three weeks before learning this, Wilkinson had already written that "I think you ought not to read too much in the statement of the First Presidency" (Wilkinson to Richard D. Poll, 7 Jan. 1963, Wilkinson Papers, Lee Library, photocopy in my possession).

63. "Bircher" and "Birchers" are terms members of the Birch Society apply to themselves, as in *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Oct. 1992): 6, 14, 20.

64. Middlemiss to Nancy Smith Lowe, 15 Feb. 1963, MS 5971 #2, LDS archives, photocopy in my possession; also identical statement in Middlemiss to Robert W. Lee, 1

not gone far enough in its January 1963 statement.

The Birch Society's *Bulletin* for February 1963 gave Brown a reason to attack Benson's support of the group. The last "agenda" item was titled, "Write to President McKay." The *Bulletin* urged Mormon Birchers to write letters (in envelopes marked "Personal and Confidential") explaining why they had joined the society. The Birch *Bulletin* further suggested that the letters thank McKay for his own anti-Communist statements and praise "the great service Ezra Taft Benson and his son Reed (our Utah Coordinator) are rendering to this battle, with the hope that they will be encouraged to continue."[65] The Birch Society saw this as a defensive response to the First Presidency's recent statement. However, to anti-Birch Mormons the February *Bulletin* appeared as an effort to subvert the statement and to encourage continued criticism of the presidency by Mormon Birchers.

Benson added an ironic personal touch to the February Birch announcement. That same month he sent newly-called apostle N. Eldon Tanner a copy of Benson's *The Red Carpet: A Forthright Evaluation of the Rising Tide of Socialism—the Royal Road to Communism.* As a Canadian cabinet officer, Tanner had been a member of the Social Credit Party. He therefore fell under the book's blistering condemnation for "Social Democrats" and even moderate socialists like Tanner.[66]

Growing Polarization

Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner's uncle, did not appreciate what appeared as Ezra Taft Benson's snide humor toward Tanner. Nor did Brown like the Birch Society's effort to lobby President McKay on Benson's behalf. In March 1963 Brown told reporters that Benson was not "entitled to say the church favors the John Birch Society." Brown added that "we [the First Presidency] are opposed to them and their methods."[67] Barely a week later Benson published an acknowledgement that his support of the Birch

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Aug. 1963, in *Congressional Record—Senate* 109 (6 Aug. 1963): 14172; "Stand of LDS On Birch In 'Record,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Aug. 1963, A-2; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 11. Before becoming Reed Benson's assistant in Washington, D.C., Robert W. Lee served as a chapter leader, section leader, and volunteer coordinator of the Birch Society in Salt Lake City. See "S.L. Man Takes Capital Post With Birchers," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 11 Nov. 1964, B-11.

65. *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Feb. 1963): 28-29; also summarized in George Rucker memorandum, 17 June 1963, folder 5, box 636, Moss Papers.

66. Benson, *The Red Carpet* . . . (Derby, CT: Monarch Books, 1963), inscribed to "Eldon" on 2-12-63, copy in Special Collections, Lee Library; G. Homer Durham, *N. Eldon Tanner: His Life and Service* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982), 57-89. Benson's book was originally published during 1962 in Salt Lake City by Bookcraft.

67. "'LDS Oppose' Birch Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 Mar. 1963, 5; "Brown Says Church Opposed To Birch Society, Methods," *Provo Daily Herald*, 5 Mar. 1963, 12.

Society was "my personal opinion only." Benson's statement went on to quote the church president as being "opposed to anyone's using the Church for purposes of increasing membership" of the Birch Society or other anti-Communist organizations.[68]

Benson was obviously under orders from the First Presidency to publish this March 1963 statement. Aside from second counselor Brown's well-known criticism, two months after Benson's statement first counselor Moyle said Benson "just didn't have any reason" in his anti-Communist crusade.[69] Benson's March 1963 disclaimer ran counter to his efforts before and after that date to align the church with the Birch Society. A week after his letter, newspapers reported that more than a thousand LDS members of the Birch Society had written church headquarters with complaints or requests for clarification. The media may have obtained that information from McKay's secretary, Clare Middlemiss, who supported the Birch Society.[70] In fact her pro-Birch orientation became the source of complaints by rank-and-file Mormons to the First Presidency.[71]

By March 1963 most Utah Mormons knew that Ezra Taft Benson was at the center of a controversy with both of the church president's counselors. This disturbed church members who were accustomed to reassurances of the harmony and unity among general authorities. Public evidence of this conflict was especially confusing to Mormons who shared Benson's enthusiasm for the Birch Society. As one of Brown's biographers wrote, "[I]n the minds of quite a number of the Church members the goals of the Church and the John Birch Society were identical and they joined the John Birch Society feeling that they were in a religious crusade against communism and had the blessing of the President of the Church and other Church leaders in so acting."[72] For example, bishops and other local LDS officers who were members of the Birch Society had circulated petitions in LDS meeting houses in support of the Birch Society's proposal to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren and remove him from the U.S. Supreme Court.[73]

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68. "Benson Declares His Birch Society Support Has No Bearing on Church, *Sacramento Bee*, 14 Mar. 1963, A-2; "Elder Benson Makes Statement," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 16 Mar. 1963, 2.

69. Wilkinson diary, 13 May 1963.

70. "Benson Clarifies Views On Birch Society Stand," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 Mar. 1963, A-11; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 10-11; U.S. senator Frank E. Moss to U.S. representative Ken W. Dyal, 2 Mar. 1966, folder 5, box 184, Moss Papers.

71. "CROSS REFERENCE SHEET," Mrs. Joyce M. Sowerwine letter, 25 Nov. 1966, "re: Claire Middlemiss & John Birch Society," in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

72. Eugene Campbell's typed draft of Hugh B. Brown biography, chapter titled, "Responsibility Without Authority—The 1st Counselor Years," 11, Campbell Papers.

73. "The Movement to Impeach Earl Warren," *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Aug.

By April 1963 the Benson controversy was also creating dissent among European Mormons. An LDS bishop visiting from Scotland was "shocked at Ezra Taft Benson's attack on socialists" in his conference talk. "If socialists are the same as communists, then all we're left [in Britain] is the Tories." The bishop vowed "to tell the people in Scotland about Ezra's comments."[74]

Although Mormon Birchers later became famous for "espionage" at Brigham Young University, anti-Birch Mormons were also involved in similar subterfuge. LDS bishop and political scientist J. D. Williams referred in May 1963 to "one of my 'spies' in the local Birch Society in Salt Lake City." He felt justified in this approach toward "the Birchers, who hate me . . ."[75] For Mormons on both sides, the Birch controversy had become poisonous. One of the directors of an LDS institute of religion wrote: "May a dumb spirit possess Bro. E.T.B."[76]

In September 1963 Benson gave a talk in Los Angeles praising Birch Society founder Robert H. Welch. Unlike his earlier praise for Welch, Benson delivered these remarks to a meeting officially sponsored by the Birch Society and attended by 2,000 Birchers.[77] He began his talk by

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1961): 5; George T. Boyd (associate director of the LDS Institute of Religion in Los Angeles) to the First Presidency (with copy to Benson), 14 Dec. 1961, photocopy in my possession, regarding "'Hang Earl Warren' Then—an Apology," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 Dec. 1961, A-4. In answer to Boyd's similar letter to Brown, 22 Sept. 1961, about Mormons promoting the Birch Society in church meetings, Brown replied to Boyd on 6 October that the entire First Presidency "hope some action can be taken to reduce or control the unwise actions of some of our people there [in Los Angeles] and in other parts of the Church." Copies of both 1962 letters are in Mormon Americana M208, Ala #44, Special Collections, Lee Library, also MS 2260, LDS archives.

74. Quoted in Buchanan diary, 10 Apr. 1963.

75. J. D. Williams to James M. Whitmire, 21 May 1963, carbon copy in Williams Papers. Reed Benson had already targeted Williams for classroom surveillance at the University of Utah.

76. George T. Boyd, associate director of the LDS institute of religion in Los Angeles, to "Dick" [Richard D. Poll], undated but written ca. 18 Oct. 1961 and answered 24 Oct., photocopy in my possession.

77. Benson, *"Let Us Live to Keep Men Free": An Address . . . at a Patriotic Testimonial Banquet for Robert Welch, sponsored by Friends and Members of The John Birch Society at the Hollywood Palladium, Los Angeles, California, September 23, 1963* (Los Angeles: N.p, 1963); "2000 Hail Welch As 'Great Patriot,'" *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 24 Sept. 1963, A-18; "Birch Society Dinner: Elder Benson Hits A-Treaty," *Deseret News*, 24 Sept. 1963, A-4; "Benson Extols Founder of John Birch Society," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 Sept. 1963, 2; "Birch Chief Applauded by Benson," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 24 Sept. 1963, 4; Richard Swanson, "McCarthyism in Utah," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1977, 138-39. For an earlier example of Benson's public endorsement of Robert Welch, see his remarks to students at the University of Washington in "Ezra Taft Benson Sees Reds 'Everywhere,' Lauds Birchers," *Seattle Times*, 1 May 1963, 15.

announcing: "I am here tonight with the knowledge and consent of a great spiritual leader and patriot, the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, President David O. McKay."[78]

Welch had just published his most controversial book, *The Politician.* It accused former U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower of being "sympathetic to ultimate Communist aims, realistically and even mercilessly willing to help them achieve their goals, knowingly receiving and abiding by Communist orders, and consciously serving the Communist conspiracy, for all of his adult life."[79] Benson publicly implied endorsement of the allegation. Privately, he had already sent copies of Welch's anti-Eisenhower book to general authorities like Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith.[80]

Benson's public praise for the Birch president brought the church controversy into national attention in September 1963. An LDS congressman from Idaho publicly condemned the apostle. Representative Ralph R. Harding told Congress in September that Benson was "a spokesman for the radical right." The congressman charged Benson with using his apostleship to give the false impression that the church and its people "approve of" the Birch Society.[81] Not satisfied with this public rebuke, Harding also privately lobbied liberal Mormons to "let President McKay and the other leaders of the Church know of your opposition to Ezra Taft Benson's activities on behalf of the Birch Society."[82] Dwight Eisenhower then entered the controversy by praising the congressman's criticism of the former

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78. "Benson Urges Americans: 'Stand Up For Freedom No Matter What The Cost,'" *The Freedom Press,* 9 Oct. 1963, 7-8, reprint (Belmont, MA: The John Birch Society, 1963), copy in folder 4, box 245, Moss Papers. The Birch Society reprinted Benson's talk.

79. Welch, *The Politician* (Belmont, MA: Belmont Publishing Co., 1963), 278; William P. Hoar, "Welch and Eisenhower," in the John Birch Society's *American Opinion* 28 (Mar. 1985): 54-55. Eisenhower never sued Welch for libel or defamation of character, but for a libel suit against the Birch Society, see Elmer Gertz, *Gertz v. Robert Welch, Inc.: The Story of a Landmark Libel Case* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992).

80. Benson to Smith, 31 July 1963, in copy of Welch's *The Politician,* Special Collections, Lee Library; Hansen, "Analysis of the 1964 Idaho Second Congressional District Election Campaign," 50.

81. Harding speech, *Congressional Record—House* 109 (25 Sept. 1963): 17208-209, reprinted as *Ezra Taft Benson's Support of John Birch Society Is Criticized* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963); "Idaho Congressman Hits Benson Speech," and "Birch Official Gives Statement on Benson Talk," *Deseret News,* 26 Sept. 1963, A-3; "Legislator, a Mormon, Scores Benson for Birch Activities," *New York Times,* 26 Sept. 1963, 29; "Mr. Harding's Risk," *Idaho State Journal,* 27 Sept. 1963, 4; "Idaho Congressman Hits Benson Speech," *Deseret News,* 26 Sept. 1963, A-6; "Ezra Benson And The Mormon Church," *Lewiston (Ida.) Morning Tribune,* 29 Sept. 1963, 4; Hansen, "Analysis of the 1964 Idaho Second Congressional District Election Campaign," 51; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 11-12, 54.

82. For example, Ralph Harding to Richard Poll, 30 Sept. 1963, photocopy in my possession.

president's cabinet member. Benson's support of the Birch Society was now a national issue.[83]

Anti-Birch Mormons were not comforted by the fact that President McKay confirmed to the media that he had given Apostle Benson permission to speak at the Welch testimonial.[84] BYU's former student body president wrote in September 1963 about the difficulty of separating Benson's partisan statements from his church position. Rex E. Lee observed, "It is regrettable, however, that Brother Benson has detracted from his effectiveness as a Church leader through his active support of the John Birch Society." This future president of Brigham Young University continued, "I have found myself periodically called upon to remind my friends, usually without success, that when Elder Benson acts to promote the ends of extremist organizations and leaders he is not declaring Church doctrine." The following month a BYU professor of English wrote: "Even my conservative friends on the faculty are disturbed by Elder Benson's Birch activities . . ."[85]

With all the national publicity, the conflict intensified at BYU. In October the Missionary Training Institute president (a son-in-law of Apostle Harold B. Lee) expressed concern about covert efforts to convert LDS missionaries to the Birch Society. He indicated that "he will resist efforts on the part of some of the young zealots among the missionaries to indoctrinate their colleagues in political extremism."[86] A month later a BYU student criticized the Birch Society while he was getting a haircut and was verbally attacked by Birchers who happened to be in the barber shop. Afterwards, they reportedly harassed him with phone calls in the middle of the night and vandalism of his apartment.[87]

Elder Benson next used the October 1963 general conference to defy his Mormon critics. Immediately after Brown was sustained as first counselor, Benson's conference sermon relayed a covert subtext to both supporters and detractors. On the surface, the talk referred to the excommunication of

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83. Eisenhower to Harding, 7 Oct. 1963, photocopy in folder 2, box 4, David S. King Papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library, and in folder 22, box 5, Buerger Papers. Eisenhower's letter was first quoted in "Ike, LDS Leaders Thank Harding For Anti-Birch, Benson Speech," *Idaho State Journal*, 20 Feb. 1964, 1; "Ike Praises Idaho Solon For Benson Criticism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 Feb. 1964, A-4.

84. "Birchers Reply to Harding On Benson's Coast Talk," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 26 Sept. 1963, A-3.

85. Lee to Ralph R. Harding, 30 Sept. 1963, and Ralph A. Britsch to Ralph R. Harding, 8 Oct. 1963, photocopies in folder 2, box 4, King Papers.

86. Reported in Richard D. Poll to Ralph Harding, 31 Oct. 1963, photocopy in my possession.

87. "Harassment Campaign Follows Political Argument," *Provo Daily Herald*, 24 Nov. 1963, 10. For the Bircher tactic of harassment phone calls, see Peterson, "Ideology of the John Birch Society," 115.

early church leaders and warned of the need to detect error today: "For even the Master followed the will of the Father by selecting Judas." In warning current Mormons not to be deceived, Benson quoted Brigham Young against deception by persons "speaking in the most winning tone, attended with the most graceful attitudes." Benson warned against those who "support in any way any organization, cause or measure which, in its remotest effect, would jeopardize free agency, whether it be in politics, government, religion, employment, education, or any other field." He then concluded with a long plea against the threats of socialism and Communism.[88]

BYU's Ernest Wilkinson felt that the "Judas" reference specifically referred to Benson's "running controversy with President Brown." Brown was known as one of the most eloquent speakers in the church and as a defender of liberalism and socialism. Brown also recognized Benson's subtext. "I don't think I'm going to be excommunicated," the new first counselor told Wilkinson right after the conference session ended. Wilkinson saw Benson's October 1963 talk as further evidence of the animosity between Brown and Benson. "The feeling is very intense between them," BYU's president recorded; Brown wrote of being "surrounded by enemies or opponents."[89]

Then Benson went on to urge his conference audience to "come to the aid" of anti-Communist "patriots, programs and organizations." Three weeks later the First Presidency announced they were assigning Benson to preside over the church's European mission in December. The media immediately described this as a "reprisal" or "exile" for Benson's virtual endorsement of the Birch Society at general conference.[90]

Mission-Exile

In fact, Hugh B. Brown gave the public good reason to regard the 1963 mission call as linked with Ezra Taft Benson's support for the Birch Society.

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88. Benson, "Be Not Deceived," *Improvement Era* 66 (Dec. 1963): 1063-65. Compare with the "Judas" reference to Brown by a BYU religion professor, cited above.

89. Wilkinson diary, 4 Oct. 1963; Brown to Gustive O. Larson, 2 Oct. 1963, copy in folder 15, box 11, Larson Papers, also copy in Campbell Papers. Aside from Benson, Brown resented the influence on President McKay by Clare Middlemiss and Thorpe B. Isaacson who shared much of Benson's philosophy.

90. "Elder Benson To Direct Europe Mission," *Deseret News*, 24 Oct. 1963, A-1; *Improvement Era* 66 (Dec. 1963): 1065; "Mormons To Send Benson Overseas," *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 1963, 18; "Apostle Benson Denies Being Sent Into 'Exile' for Political Views," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 29 Oct. 1963, A-7; "Mormon Church Sends Benson to Europe," *U.S. News and World Report* 55 (Nov. 1963): 12; "Mormon Church Is Gaining in Strength Despite Tensions," *New York Times*, 27 Dec. 1965, 18; Hansen, "Analysis of the 1964 Idaho Second Congressional District Election Campaign," 52; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 372.

The day after the announcement of Benson's mission assignment on 24 October, Brown warned a BYU audience against "extremists and self-styled patriots who label all those who disagree with them as Communists." Then in a more obvious allusion to Benson, he said that the First Presidency "deplore any attempt made by individuals to ascribe to the Church personal beliefs which they entertain." Newspapers observed that Brown's "remarks were taken as a rebuff to Mormon apostle Ezra Taft Benson who has repeatedly expressed his admiration for the John Birch Society and its founder, Robert Welch."[91]

Two days after Brown's published criticism, Benson publicly reasserted his support for the Birch Society. In an address to southern whites of the New Orleans Stake on 27 October, he condemned U.S. presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy for sending federal troops to aid school integration of African-Americans in the South. Then the apostle praised the Birch Society to the Louisiana conference.[92] A few days later, the Idaho representative who had repudiated Benson in Congress now gloated to the press: "The leadership of the Church was inspired in this calling. I think he'll make a wonderful mission president if he can get away from the Birch Society."[93] Privately Congressman Harding wrote that "prospects in the Church do look brighter with the assignment of Ezra Taft Benson to Europe."[94]

This 1963 foreign mission added to the controversy swirling around Benson. He told reporters that the assignment was not a "rebuke." President McKay eventually released an official denial that this mission was "because of Elder Benson's alleged activities with the John Birch Society."[95] However, leaders at church headquarters revealed that the intent of this mission was in fact to remove Benson from the American political scene.

McKay's son was the first to indicate Benson's mission was a censure. When his father privately told Benson of the mission assignment on 18 October Robert McKay wrote to Congressman Harding: "We shall all be relieved when Elder Benson ceases to resist counsel and returns to a concentration on those affairs befitting his office. It is my feeling that there will be an immediate and noticeable curtailment of his Birch Society activi-

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91. "Church Leader Rebuffs Self-Styled Patriots," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 26 Oct. 1963, 9; also "President Brown Supports U.N., Hits Extremists," *Deseret News*, 26 Oct. 1963, B-1.

92. "Stake Conference Assignments," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 19 Oct. 1963, 4; "Benson, Graham Rip Wheat Sale," *Deseret News*, 28 Oct. 1963, A-6; "Benson Says Black is Red," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 29 Oct. 1963, 1.

93. "Harding Says Benson Move 'Wise,'" *Idaho Daily Statesman*, 1 Nov. 1963, 20.

94. Ralph Harding to Richard D. Poll, 6 Nov. 1963, photocopy in my possession.

95. "Benson Says: New Duties Not 'Rebuke,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Oct. 1963, A-4; "Church Denies Mission Rumors," *Deseret News*, 21 Feb. 1964, A-8; "Letter Denies Rebuke in Benson Call," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 Feb. 1964, C-11.

ties." Robert McKay was his father's secretary during trips to stakes and missions outside Utah, and would later read the ailing president's talks to general conferences.[96] "The letter in no way reflects my view that Elder Benson is not a good apostle of the church," Robert McKay explained after newspapers published his letter. His clarification added that "in my own opinion Elder Benson would be better able to serve the church when he is free of Birch Society ties."[97]

A week later, U.S. under-secretary of state W. Averill Harriman asked Hugh B. Brown how long Benson would be on this European mission. Brown reportedly replied: "If I had my way, he'd never come back!"[98] In introducing Harriman to BYU students, Brown also took a swipe at Reed Benson, who was employed by the Birch Society. The *Deseret News* published his comment: "A lot of this nonsense gets disseminated by the professional, self-styled anti-Communists who make a comfortable living scaring people all over the country and who have a financial stake in making the Communists look stronger than we."[99]

Joseph Fielding Smith then identified Benson's mission as intentional exile. The Quorum of Twelve's president wrote to Harding on 30 October: "I think it is time that Brother Benson forgot all about politics and settled down to his duties as a member of the Council of the Twelve." Smith concluded this letter, "He is going to take a mission to Europe in the near future and by the time he returns I hope he will get all of the political notions out of his system."[100]

The same day as Smith's letter, student conflict erupted at the Univer-

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96. Robert R. McKay to Ralph R. Harding, 18 Oct. 1963, photocopy in folder 2, box 4, King Papers, and in folder 22, box 5, Buerger Papers; quotes from letter first published in "Ike, LDS Leaders Thank Harding For Anti-Birch, Benson Speech," *Idaho State Journal*, 20 Feb. 1964, 1; "Ike Praises Idaho Solon For Benson Criticism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 Feb. 1964, A-4; also Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 12. Robert McKay's letter was printed in full in "Bill Hall's Political Scratchpad," *Idaho State Journal*, 23 Feb. 1964, 4. For 18 October as the date on which President McKay told Benson of his mission assignment, see Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 372. For Robert R. McKay, see Francis M. Gibbons, *David O. McKay: Apostle to the World, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. 1986), 333; *Improvement Era* 69 (Dec. 1966): 1131, 1152; *Improvement Era* 70 (June 1967): 22, 80, 109; *Improvement Era* 70 (Dec. 1967): 33, 87, 107; *Improvement Era* 71 (Dec. 1968): 34, 108; *Improvement Era* 72 (June 1969): 116; *Improvement Era* 72 (Dec. 1969): 24, 110.

97. "Ike, LDS Leaders Thank Harding For Anti-Birch, Benson Speech," *Idaho State Journal*, 20 Feb. 1964, 1.

98. Brown statement to Harriman and Richard D. Poll in Salt Lake City, 25 Oct. 1963, quoted in Poll's letter to D. Michael Quinn, 13 Aug. 1992. For the visit of Harriman, Brown, and Poll in Provo, see photograph in *Provo Daily Herald*, 27 Oct. 1963, 3.

99. "President Brown Supports U.N., Hits Extremists," *Deseret News*, 26 Oct. 1963, B-1.

100. Smith to Harding, 30 Oct. 1963, photocopy in folder 2, box 4, King Papers, and in folder 22, box 5, Buerger Papers.

sity of Utah over Benson's speech to the New Orleans Stake against federal integration of schools. One of Benson's defenders accused the university's newspaper of an "anti-rightist crusade." For almost a month the *Utah Chronicle*'s editorial page was dominated by the Benson controversy, until President John F. Kennedy's assassination in November finally superseded it.[101] On 22 November, Counselor Brown wrote that Reed Benson "is entirely out of order, does not represent the Church's position, although he claims to do so because his father has the position he has . . ."[102]

By the eve of Elder Benson's departure for Europe in December 1963, the controversy's bitterness was public property. Some rank-and-file Mormons threatened to picket Benson's farewell talk at the LDS tabernacle in Logan, Utah, because his remarks "will most likely be an attempt to again build up the John Birch Society."[103] When stake leaders "became skittish" about letting him use the tabernacle for this talk, Benson said he would "hold the meeting in a tent, if need be."[104]

As his critics anticipated, Benson's talk in Logan was an endorsement of the Birch Society. Early in his remarks, he referred to the "Communist attack on the John Birch Society."[105] A textual analysis also revealed that, without citing his source, 24 percent of Benson's talk quoted verbatim from the *Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, and another 10 percent paraphrased this publication.[106] Benson's talk also repeated such Birch Society themes as the American civil rights movement was "phony" and actually "part of the pattern for the Communist take over of America."[107] On the other hand,

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101. Clark King and Richard Littlefield in *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 30 Oct. 1963, 4, answered by Frank G. Adams and Gary Henrichsen (who used the phrase) in 4 Nov. 1963, 2, rebutted by King and Littlefield in 6 Nov. 1963, 4, who were in turn rebutted by Corydon Hammond in 8 Nov. 1963, 4, who was answered by King and Littlefield in 14 Nov. 1963,: 2. Editorially, the *Daily Utah Chronicle* published a cartoon (31 Oct. 1963, 4) which depicted Benson's mission assignment as a banishment by Uncle Sam, not the LDS church presidency, which Gary Henrichsen then criticized in his letter to the editor of 4 November. In response the editors published an even more insulting cartoon of Benson (21 Nov. 1963, 2).

102. Hugh B. Brown to Ernest Cook, 22 Nov. 1963, photocopy in my possession.

103. "Group Decides Against Picketing Benson Talk," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 3 Dec. 1963, A-7.

104. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 372-73.

105. Benson, "We Must Become Alerted and Informed: An Address by Ezra Taft Benson At A Public Patriotic Meeting," Logan, Utah, 13 Dec. 1963, 2, transcript, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

106. B. Delworth Gardner, N. Keith Roberts, E. Boyd Wennergren preface to an annotated typescript of Benson's "We Must Become Alerted and Informed," Utah State Historical Society. In the margins of this annotated typescript are the page numbers of the *Blue Book* from which Benson's talk quoted or paraphrased.

107. Benson, "We Must Become Alerted and Informed," 10; also, "Elder Benson Links

J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had publicly stated: "Let me emphasize that the American civil rights movement is not, and has *never* been, dominated by the communists."[108]

Benson's statements against the civil rights movement worsened the LDS church's negative public image during the 1960s. Most Americans regarded Mormons as racists because of the church's policy of refusing to confer priesthood on anyone of black African ancestry.[109]

Benson's parting message at the Logan tabernacle in December 1963 also sounded inflammatory. The apostle predicted that within ten years the

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Reds to [Civil] Rights Furor," *Deseret News*, 14 Dec. 1963, B-5; "Communism Moving In on U.S., Benson Warns," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 Dec. 1963, 28. Compare with Ross R. Barnett, governor of Mississippi, "The Rape Of Our Constitution and Civil Rights," in the Birch Society's *American Opinion* 6 (Sept. 1963): 20-23; John Rousselot, "Civil Rights: Communist Betrayal Of A Good Cause," *American Opinion* 7 (Feb. 1964): 1-11.

108. J. Edgar Hoover, remarks to the Pennsylvania Society in New York City, 12 Dec. 1964, in *J. Edgar Hoover on Communism* (New York: Random House, 1969), 130 (emphasis in original). He added, *"But there are notable exceptions*—dangerous opportunists and morally corrupt charlatans who would form an alliance with any organization, regardless of its nature, to advance their own power and prestige" (emphasis in original). Also see "Hoover Asks Vigil Over Extremists: Warns on 'Opportunists' in the Rights Movement," *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 1964, 79.

109. For publicity of this issue shortly before Benson's remarks, see "NAACP Calls S.L. Protest Over Rights," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 Oct. 1963, 32; "Give Full Civil Equality to All, LDS Counselor Brown Asks," and "Negro Group Lauds LDS Rights View," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Oct. 1963, 1, 6; Jeff Nye, "Memo from a Mormon: In Which a Troubled Young Man Raises the Question of His Church's Attitude Toward Negroes," *Look* 27 (22 Oct. 1963): 74-79. For studies of the historical background and 1960s controversy over the church's priesthood restriction, see Armand L. Mauss, "Mormonism and Secular Attitudes Toward Negroes," *Pacific Sociological Review* 9 (Fall 1966): 91-99; Dennis L. Lythgoe, "Negro Slavery in Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 39 (Winter 1971): 40-54; Brian Walton, "A University Dilemma: B.Y.U. and the Blacks," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6 (Spring 1971): 31-36; Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 8 (Spring 1973): 11-68; Ronald K. Esplin, "Brigham Young and Denial of the Priesthood to Blacks: An Alternative View," *Brigham Young University Studies* 19 (Spring 1979): 394-402; William G. Hartley, "Saint Without Priesthood: The Collected Testimonies of Ex-Slave Samuel D. Chambers," and Newel G. Bringhurst, "Elijah Abel and the Changing Status of Blacks within Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12 (Summer 1979): 13-21, 22-36; Newell G. Bringhurst, *Saints, Slaves, and Blacks: The Changing Place of Black People Within Mormonism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Armand L. Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharoah's Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (Fall 1981): 10-45; Lester E. Bush, Jr., and Armand Mauss, eds., *Neither White Nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984); Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 297-303; Jessie L. Embry, "Separate but Equal? Black Branches, Genesis Groups, or Integrated Wards?" and Mark L. Grover, "The Mormon Priesthood Revelation and the Sao Paulo, Brazil Temple," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23 (Spring 1990): 11-37, 39-53.

United States of America will be ruled by a Communist dictatorship which "will include military occupation, concentration camps, tortures, terror and all that is required to enable about 3% of the population to rule the other 97% as slaves." Benson promised such dire consequences "unless we join with those small but determined and knowledgeable patriots." He added: "Words will not stop the communists." Benson said that the U.S. government was becoming so Communistic that American citizens "can no longer resist the Communist conspiracy as free citizens, but can resist Communist tyranny only by themselves becoming conspirators against established government."[110]

Nationally-syndicated newspaper columnist Drew Pearson quoted that breath-taking phrase and interpreted it as Benson's invitation "for Americans to overthrow their government."[111] One newspaper editorial claimed that "Drew Pearson wronged the former agriculture secretary by misinterpreting what he said at Logan."[112] However, Pearson's quote was accurate and his interpretation fit the context of Benson's extraordinary missionary farewell talk which rallied Americans to battle Communism "even with our lives, if the time comes when we must . . . before the Godless Communist Conspiracy destroys our civilization."[113]

Utah's Democratic senator, a Mormon, described Benson's Logan address as "a disgraceful talk." Senator Frank E. Moss also complained to Counselor Brown that Benson had arranged for copies of the talk to be distributed from the apostle's office at church headquarters.[114] At the same time, other Mormons wrote the First Presidency with similar complaints that this "literature [is being] mailed from 47 East South Temple."[115]

As for the mission call itself, at a church farewell on 14 December Reed Benson complained that his father had been "'stabbed' in the back."[116] The Twelve's president was present to hear the younger Ben-

110. Benson, "We Must Become Alerted and Informed," 8, 9, 10.

111. Drew Pearson, "Benson's Cure for Communism," *Washington Post*, 4 Jan. 1964, D-31, reprinted as "Ezra Taft Benson Hints: 'It Is Time To Revolt,'" in such newspapers as the *Times-Democrat*, 4 Jan. 1964.

112. "Setting The Record Straight," *Fullerton News Tribune*, 11 Jan. 1964, 24, quoted in Salt Lake City Citizens Information Committee, *Comments and Corrections*, No. 3 (15 Jan. 1968): 8. Fullerton is located in politically conservative Orange County, California.

113. Benson, "We Must Become Alerted and Informed," 10-11; also summarized in "Face Facts of Red Peril, Benson Asks," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 14 Dec. 1963, 6; "Benson Urges Vigorous Battle On Communism," *Logan Herald-Journal*, 15 Dec. 1963, 1, 3.

114. Frank E. Moss to Ray R. Murdock, 19 Feb. 1964, and Moss to Hugh B. Brown, 19 Feb. 1964, folder 3, box 122, Moss Papers.

115. "CROSS REFERENCE SHEET," Raoul P. Smith, Keith L. Seegmiller, and Ralph Harding letters, Feb. 1964, in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

116. Wilkinson diary, 14 Dec. 1963; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 372, gives a very different

son's remark that his father's mission call was a back-stab. Nine days later, Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: "I am glad to report to you that it will be some time before we hear anything from Brother Benson, who is now on his way to Great Britain where I suppose he will be, at least for the next two years. When he returns I hope his blood will be purified."[117] Two months later, in February 1964, newspapers printed Smith's caustic assessment, and the Quorum of Twelve's president made a public disclaimer which actually verified the political motivations for Benson's assignment to Europe: "I meant that when he returned he would be free of all political ties."[118]

Louis Midgley, a BYU political scientist, published an anti-Birch editorial in the school's *Daily Universe* in May 1964. He concluded: "It is little wonder that the First Presidency has taken steps to warn Church members not to try to align the Church or its leadership with the partisan views of the Welch-Birch or any similar monstrosity." This resulted in President McKay's instructions to stop future discussion of the Birch Society in the *Universe*.[119]

Mormon church leaders overestimated the foreign mission's moderating influence on Benson's political zeal. While on his European mission Benson authorized the Birch Society to publish a talk he had prepared as an endorsement of the society. In addition, he authorized the society to publish his photograph on the cover of its magazine in October 1964. This issue of the Birch organ also favorably reviewed Benson's just-published *Title of Liberty* and observed that he "is a scholar and a patriot, [but] he is primarily a man of God." Benson also authorized the Birch magazine to publish his "The Christ and the Constitution" in December.[120] At the same time, Reed Benson increased his role as his father's surrogate for the Birch Society and published full page ads in Idaho of Apostle Benson's endorse-

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view of the reaction of Benson and his family to this mission assignment.

117. Wilkinson diary, 14 Dec. 1963; Joseph Fielding Smith to Congressman Ralph Harding, 23 Dec. 1963, photocopy in folder 2, box 4, King Papers, and in folder 22, box 5, Buerger Papers. Apostle Smith's letter was first quoted in "Ike, LDS Leaders Thank Harding For Anti-Birch, Benson Speech," *Idaho State Journal*, 20 Feb. 1964, 1; "Ike Praises Idaho Solon For Benson Criticism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 Feb. 1964, A-4; also Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 12.

118. "Ike Praises Idaho Solon For Benson Criticism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 Feb. 1964, A-4.

119. "Birch Society Reviewed By Prof. Louis Midgley," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 22 May 1964, 2; David O. McKay to Earl C. Crockett, 4 June 1964, Wilkinson Papers, photocopy in my possession; Louis Midgley to Ray C. Hillam, 11 Aug. 1966, folder 10, Hillam Papers, archives, Lee Library, and box 34, Buerger Papers; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 196-97.

120. Benson, *An Internal Threat Today* (Belmont, MA: American Opinion [1964]); the Birch Society's *American Opinion* 7 (Oct. 1964): cover page and 43-44, 97; Ezra Taft Benson, "The Christ and the Constitution," *American Opinion* 7 (Dec. 1964): 41-45.

ment of the Birch Society.[121]

Benson's other Bircher son also advanced his father's anti-Communist and pro-Birch crusade publicly during this mission-exile. In 1964, Mark A. Benson compiled a collection of his father's talks for a Deseret Book Company publication. Nearly every sermon referred to the threat of Communism, and the book also mentioned the Birch Society's president five times. By contrast, before their mutual involvement in the Birch Society, Reed Benson had compiled a book of his father's sermons which discussed Communism only three times.[122]

The November 1964 election in Idaho is one measure of the effect of the Benson controversy on the mass of faithful Mormons. U.S. representative Harding, who had condemned Benson in Congress, publicly praised his exile to Europe, and circulated the anti-Benson letters of church leaders, was defeated that fall for re-election. Harding and others saw his defeat as a result of Mormon voters' distaste for public criticism of LDS leaders and as evidence of Birch Society influence.[123]

To the contrary, an analysis of election returns from 1960 to 1964 shows that Harding overwhelmingly retained the support of Mormon voters. In fact, in Madison County with its 91.7 percent Mormon population, the number of votes for Harding actually increased from 1960 to 1964, despite his public criticism of Benson.[124] In other words, public criticism of Benson in the 1960s seems not to have alienated a large majority of faithful Mormon voters. They may have shared Harding's dismay at the apostle's endorsement of the Birch Society.

By January 1965 nationally prominent Mormon journalist Jack Anderson was reporting that the First Presidency was exasperated with Reed Benson's role as his father's surrogate for the Birch Society.[125] In response

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121. Jack Anderson, "Reed Benson Spreads Birch Gospel," *Washington Post*, 15 Jan. 1965, B-13.

122. Benson, *Title of Liberty*, comp. Mark A. Benson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964), with references to Robert Welch on 1, 12, 36, 39, and 40. Compare to Benson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, comp. Reed A. Benson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1960), with references to Communism on 163, 208, and 328.

123. "Solon Embarrassed By Letter Publication," *Deseret News*, 21 Feb. 1964, A-8; "'Release Unauthorized,' Solon Says of Letters," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 Feb. 1964, C-11; "Idaho Writers Say Letters Were Widely Circulated," and "Bill Hall's Political Scratchpad," *Idaho State Journal*, 23 Feb. 1964, 1, 4; "How Could He Lose?" *Idaho Daily Statesman*, 5 Nov. 1964, 1-2; Harding to Frank H. Jonas, 8 Dec. 1964, Jonas Papers; Jack Anderson, "Birch Society Influence Defeated Ralph Harding," *Blackfoot News*, 15 Jan. 1965, 4, also printed as "Reed Benson Spreads Birch Gospel" in *Washington Post*, 15 Jan. 1965, B-13; Lynn Broadhead to Dean M. Hansen, 15 June 1967; Swanson, "McCarthyism in Utah," 143.

124. Hansen, "Analysis of the 1964 Idaho Second Congressional District Election Campaign," 53, 57, 183, 185-86, 206-10.

125. Anderson, "Reed Benson Spreads Birch Gospel."

to an inquiry by a Mormon Bircher about this allegation, Clare Middlemiss replied that "neither Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Council of the Twelve nor his son, Reed Benson, have been rebuked by the church." Barely concealing her own pro-Birch sentiments, the church president's longtime personal secretary added: "Reed Benson, a member of the church in good standing, used his own intelligence and free agency in accepting his position with the John Birch Society." The Mormon Bircher almost immediately released this endorsement to the press.[126]

Although out-flanked by the church president's secretary in this instance, first counselor Brown resumed his philosophical battle with Benson a month later. "All of us are one hundred percent against Communism in all its phases," Brown wrote in February 1965, "but the leaders of the Church are not convinced that any conspiracy exists within our own country."[127]

In contrast, while visiting Utah in April 1965, Benson reemphasized to general conference that there was a national conspiracy focused in the civil rights movement. This was in obvious response to the call of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for a prayer march in Salt Lake City "to ask the LDS Church to use their influence for moral justice in regards to civil rights."[128] Benson told general conference:

> Before I left for Europe I warned how the communists were using the civil rights movement to promote revolution and eventual takeover of this country. When are we going to wake up? . . .
>
> Now, Brethren, the Lord never promised there would not be traitors in the Church. We have the ignorant, the sleepy and the deceived who provide temptations and avenues of apostacy for the unwary and the unfaithful.

Again, Benson continued to assert Communist domination of the civil rights movement, even though the FBI's director had publicly denied such domination just months before Benson's conference talk.[129] In addition, the

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125. Anderson, "Reed Benson Spreads Birch Gospel."

126. Clare Middlemiss to Kent Brennan (ca. 20 Jan. 1965), quoted in Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 14; also published in "No Church Rebuke Given to Bensons," *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, and reprinted by the Salt Lake City Citizens Information Committee, *Comments and Corrections*, No. 3 (15 Jan. 1968): 8, which inaccurately dates the *Chronicle* article as 15 January 1965, three days *before* Brennan's original letter to McKay.

127. Brown to Mrs. W. E. Daddow, 23 Feb. 1965, LDS archives, photocopy in my possession.

128. "NAACP Calls March for LDS Appeal," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Mar. 1965, A-18; "Marchers Pray At LDS Doorstep," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 8 Mar. 1965, 1.

129. J. Edgar Hoover, remarks to the Pennsylvania Society in New York City, 12 Dec.

last section of Benson's talk recalled his negative allusion to Hugh B. Brown at the October 1963 conference.

Newspapers also regarded Benson's April 1965 statement as a challenge to Brown's earlier endorsement of "full civil rights for any person, regardless of race, color or creed."[130] Asked about Benson's talk, Brown replied "tartly" to reporters that the apostle "speaks strictly for himself. My statement is the official Church position. It was personally approved by President McKay . . ."[131] The official publication of April 1965 conference talks deleted Benson's reference to LDS "traitors," as well as his assessment of the civil rights movement as Communist and revolutionary.[132]

While in Utah for general conference, Ezra Taft Benson also complained to BYU's president that "many of our political science and economics teachers are teaching false doctrine." This was a month after the Provo "section leader" of the John Birch Society began receiving reports from a Birch student majoring in economics about his "covert surveillance" of BYU's "liberal professors," including professor Richard D. Poll. BYU's Wilkinson concluded that Apostle Benson had received this information through his son Reed.[133]

However, Wilkinson was also receiving separate reports from this same BYU-Birch student about Poll.[134] Professor Poll had already publish-

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1964, in *J. Edgar Hoover on Communism*, 130; *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 1964, 79.

130. "Give Full Civil Equality to All, LDS Counselor Brown Asks," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Oct. 1963, 1; Hugh B. Brown, "The Fight Between Good and Evil," *Improvement Era* 66 (Dec. 1963): 1058; Sterling M. McMurrin, "A Note on the 1963 Civil Rights Statement," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12 (Summer 1979): 60-63.

131. "Benson Ties Rights Issue to Reds in Mormon Rift," *Washington Post*, 13 Apr. 1965, A-5.

132. "President McKay Emphasizes Individual," with subheading for Elder Benson's talk: "Restored Gospel," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Apr. 1965, A-5; compare with *Improvement Era* 68 (June 1965): 539. However, in 1968 Deseret Book Company published (and reprinted in 1969) Benson's *Civil Rights: Tool of Communist Deception*, 3, which stated: "The so-called civil rights movement as it exists today is used as a Communist program for revolution." The addition of "used as" softened his original words.

133. Wilkinson diary, 7 Apr. 1965; Edwin B. Morrell (chair, Department of Political Science), John T. Bernhard (dean, College of Social Sciences), Ray C. Hillam (associate professor, political science), Larry T. Wimmer (assistant professor, economics), Louis C. Midgley (associate professor, political science), and Richard B. Wirthlin (associate professor, economics), "Events Related To the Covert Surveillance of Faculty Members, Subsequent Investigations of and Accusations Against Said Faculty, and Attempts to Resolve the Matter 'Within the Family,'" 1, folder 1, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers; John P. Sanders statement, 5 Aug. 1966, folder 10, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers. See discussion of "espionage" at BYU for 1960 above, and below for 1966, 1969, and 1977.

134. David J. Whittaker and Chris McClellan, "The Collection: Description," 1, register of the Hillam Papers; Stephen Hays Russell to Ernest L. Wilkinson, 26 Apr. 1965, Wilkinson

ed a detailed critique of W. Cleon Skousen's anti-Communist book, *The Naked Communist*. Aside from skewering Skousen, Poll had also repudiated the American anti-Communist movement.[135]

Unknown to the public, Hugh B. Brown had encouraged Poll to prepare this published condemnation of Skousen's book "in the hope that we may stem this unfortunate tide of radicalism." This despite the fact that President McKay had already recommended *The Naked Communist* to a general conference: "I admonish everybody to read that excellent book of [Salt Lake City Police] Chief Skousen's."[136]

Poll had also joined with twenty-one other BYU professors in publicly condemning John A. Stormer's *None Dare Call It Treason* as "this piece of fanataicism." Poll was the one who publicly responded to complaints by BYU's ultraconservative students about this statement.[137] At the time Stormer's book was "in sales and in loans, the most popular book" within the Birch Society.[138] On 27 April 1965, Wilkinson wrote to Apostle Benson's

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diary also referred on 11 July 1965 to "papers" which were "proof of accusations against Richard Poll."

135. Richard D. Poll, *This Trumpet Gives An Uncertain Sound: A Review of W. Cleon Skousen's THE NAKED COMMUNIST* (Provo, UT: Author, 1962), 3, listed his objections to the book as "the inadequacy of its scholarship. The incorrectness of its analysis of Communism. The inaccuracy of its historical narrative. The unsoundness of its program for governmental action. The extreme partisanship of its program for individual action. The objectionable character of the national movement of which it is a part." On the ultra-conservative, anti-Communist movement, Poll wrote on pages 12-13: "Much of the market for *The Naked Communist* is in connection with "Anti-Communist Seminars," "Freedom Forums," and "Project Alerts," in which inaccurate history and negative programs are expounded in an evangelical blend of fear, hatred and pulse-pounding enthusiasm. Participants are admonished to study Communism, and they end up buying tracts by Gerald L. K. Smith and his racist cohorts, confessionals of ex-Communists, spy stories and other volumes which excite more than inform. They are aroused to *fight Communism*, and they end up demanding U.S. withdrawal from the UN and the firing of teachers who advocate federal aid to education. They are solicited to contribute to the Anti-Communist crusade, and they end up subsidizing pamphlets calling for the repeal of the income tax and the impeachment of Chief Justice Warren."

136. Brown to Richard D. Poll, 10 Jan. 1962, photocopy in my possession; Brown's role in this anti-Skousen publication also appears in Poll to George T. Boyd, 24 Oct. 1961, Poll to Hugh B. Brown, 18 Dec., 23 Dec. 1961, 6 Jan. 1962, photocopies in my possession; and Poll memorandum to Ernest L. Wilkinson, "Subject: Correspondence with President Brown on the Anti-Communist Problem," 23 Dec. 1961, Wilkinson Papers, photocopy in my possession; David O. McKay, "Preach the Word," *Improvement Era* 62 (Dec. 1959): 912.

137. "Faculty Members Deplore 'Fanaticism' of Booklet," *Provo Daily Herald*, 23 July 1964, 14; "None Dare Call It Treason Causes Sincere Concern," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 23 July 1964, 2; "Students Take Issue With 'None Dare Call It Treason' Critics," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 28 July 1964, 2; "Poll Answers Student Letters," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 30 July 1964, 2.

138. "Birchers Extend Membership Drive to East Coast," *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 1964,

son Mark for "any specific information that will be helpful to me respecting Richard Poll and his associates . . ."[139] This demonstrates Wilkinson's belief that Mark A. Benson (also a Bircher) was involved with his brother Reed in BYU campus espionage which their father had proposed five years earlier.

Benson's April 1965 conference talk created another outburst among students at the University of Utah. One LDS student wrote a letter to the *Utah Chronicle* that Benson "told a damned lie" when he instructed LDS general conference that Communists controlled the NAACP. This caused a predictable backlash of editorial letters by students loyal to the Birch Society or to Benson.[140]

A few weeks after April 1965 general conference Reed Benson publicly endorsed Robert Welch's accusation that U.S. president Eisenhower had been a Communist agent.[141] Then the loyal son probably consulted Apostle Benson in advance about his apparent plan to use the Birch Society to disrupt the next general conference with rumors of a violent demonstration by African-Americans. Ezra Taft Benson's official biography is silent about Benson's and his son's devotion to the Birch Society but observes that in 1965-66 Reed Benson "continued to be involved in the fight for freedom

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139. Ernest L. Wilkinson to Mark Benson, 27 Apr. 1965, Wilkinson Papers, photocopy in my possession; also Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 203, for other quotes from the letter.

140. Leon Johnson, "Benson Told A 'Damned Lie,'" *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 12 Apr. 1965, 2, which he admitted was "too intemperate," in 16 Apr. 1965, 2, but then reaffirmed by asking, "did Elder Benson violate the Ninth Commandment when he said the civil-rights movement is being used by the Communists?" The *Chronicle* did not print a response to Johnson's letters but did publish in 14 Apr. 1965, 2, two long letters by Larry Langlois and Norman P. Jessee in defense of Benson's recent speech. For Benson's remarks which sparked this controversy, see "President McKay Emphasizes Individual," with subheading for Elder Benson's talk: "Restored Gospel," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Apr. 1965, A-5, and discussion below.

Among general histories of the NAACP available to Benson at this time was Langston Hughes, *Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1962). Benson maintained this view despite the previously published findings of Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 170, that the Communist party "continued its ambivalent attitude toward the NAACP, sometimes eagerly seeking support, at other times bitterly attacking the Association and its leaders. The NAACP increasingly has regarded the party not as a challenger but as an irritant and a source of embarrassment. Particularly has this been the case since 1955." See discussion below for Benson's continued assertion of Communist domination of the American civil rights movement, despite public statements to the contrary by the director of the FBI.

141. "Reed Benson Says Welch Was Correct in Calling Eisenhower Communist," *Provo Daily Herald*, 22 Apr. 1965, 2.

which his father supported . . ."[142]

Race-war Rumors during October 1965 General Conference

Three factors led to Reed Benson's apparent plan to disrupt the October 1965 general conference of the LDS church. First, he wanted to demonstrate the truth of his father's censored statement about the civil rights movement. Second, the annual convention of the NAACP in July 1965 passed a unanimous resolution asking all Third World nations "to refuse to grant visas to missionaries and representatives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . . until such time as the doctrine of non-white inferiority is changed and rescinded by that church and a positive policy of support for civil rights is taken."[143] To father and son this proved the civil rights movement was evil because it was anti-Mormon. However, in May the Salt Lake City chapter of the NAACP had called for the national resolution in apparent response to Apostle Benson's statement a month earlier that the civil rights movement was Communist and revolutionary.[144] As the final catalyst for Reed Benson's plan, the Watts riot of African-Americans erupted in Los Angeles in mid-August 1965.[145]

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142. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 391.

143. "Critical of Church: NAACP Studies Action," *Deseret News*, 2 July 1965, A-6.

144. "Benson Ties Rights Issue to Reds in Mormon Rift," *Washington Post*, 13 Apr. 1965, A-5; *Seattle Times*, 5 May 1965, 13; "NAACP Asks Foreign Bar of Missionaries," *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 6 May 1965, 1, 3, 4; Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 May 1965, 6, Microforms, Marriott Library. I could not find any reference to this in *Deseret News* or *Salt Lake Tribune* for May.

145. For discussion (some of it hysteric) of the African-American riot at Watts in 1965 from various perspectives, see California Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, *Violence in the City: An End or A Beginning? A Report* (Los Angeles: Governor's Commission, 1965); Jerry Cohen, *Burn, Baby, Burn! The Los Angeles Race Riot, August, 1965* (New York: Dutton, 1966); David O. Sears, *The Los Angeles Riot Study: The Politics of Discontent: Blocked Mechanisms of Grievance Redress and the Psychology of the New Urban Black Man* (Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles, 1967); Robert E. Conot, *Rivers of Blood, Years of Darkness: The Unforgettable Classic Account of the Watts Riot* (New York: Morrow, 1968); U.S. Congress, *Subversive Influences in Riots, Looting, and Burning: Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, Ninetieth Congress, First (Second) Session*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968-69), vols. 1 and 3 on the Watts riot; United States, Kerner Commission, *Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968); Lillian R. Boehme, *Carte Blanche For Chaos* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1970); Ralph W. Conant, *The Prospects for Revolution: A Study of Riots, Civil Disobedience, and Insurrection in Contemporary America* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1971); David O. Sears, *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); James W. Button, *Black Violence: Political Impact of the 1960s Riots* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

Reed Benson escalated both the Birch conflict and racial tensions in Mormonism with a memorandum to all Birch Society chapters in Utah on 2 September 1965:

> It is common knowledge that the Civil Rights Movement is Communist controlled, influenced and dominated. . . . Our founder and guide, Mr. Robert Welch, has instructed us that when necessary we must adopt the communist technique in our ever present battle against Godless Communism. It is urged that in the coming weeks the Utah Chapters begin a whispering campaign and foster rumors that the Civil Rights groups are going to organize demonstrations in Salt Lake City in connection with the forthcoming LDS conference. . . . A few well placed comments will soon mushroom out of control and before the conference begins there will be such a feeling of unrest and distrust that the populace will hardly know who to believe. The news media will play it to the very hilt. No matter what the Civil Rights leaders may try to say to deny it the seed will have been sown and again the Civil Rights movement will suffer a telling blow.[146]

President McKay's nephew, Quinn McKay, recognized the letter's signature and regarded it as genuine. During a four-month period, he attempted several times to get a statement from Reed Benson denying that he was the author of this September 1965 letter: "Two-and-a-half weeks ago I wrote a third letter, stating that if I heard nothing from him I could only arrive at one conclusion. I have heard nothing."[147]

Reed Benson's instructions to the "Utah Chapters" of the Birch Society were only one part of the society's effort in August-September 1965 to use the Watts riot as a way to undermine the American civil rights movement. On 17 August the society's "Major Coordinators" sent instructions to all the Birch officers in California to take "immediate action" to "expose the so-called Civil Rights Movement." On 1 September 1965, the day before Reed Benson's letter, a follow-up letter instructed Birch Society leaders in Los Angeles County to "take advantage of the current situation" as a means of repudiating civil rights activism.[148]

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146. Reed A. Benson, "Memo to the Utah Chapters," 2 Sept. 1965, on letterhead of the John Birch Society, photocopy in Williams Papers; Quinn G. McKay to J. D. Williams, 20 May 1966, Williams Papers.

147. Quinn G. McKay statement, 25 Apr. 1966, in J. Kenneth Davies, *Political Extremism Under the Spotlight* (Provo, UT: Young Democrats and Young Republicans of Brigham Young University, 1966), 21. McKay did not name Reed Benson specifically in his talk but described the rumors of September 1965 and paraphrased the letter that "all who belong to this group do all they can to foster a whispering campaign that there would be a racial demonstration at General Conference." McKay named Reed Benson specifically in his letter to J. D. Williams, 20 May 1966, Williams Papers.

148. D. Richard Pine and Charles R. Armour to "All Coordinators, Section Leaders and

Reed Benson's instructions were also consistent with the cover story of *The John Birch Society Bulletin* for September 1965: "Fully expose the 'civil rights' fraud and you will break the back of the Communist Conspiracy!" Robert Welch concluded the article: "And we repeat once more: It is on the 'civil rights' sector of their total [Communist] front that we now have the best chance there has been since 1952 of setting them back with some really effective blows. Let's put our best into the job."[149]

The strategy of Reed Benson and the Birch Society succeeded in creating near-hysteria in Utah during September 1965. One study observes that "hysterical rumors swept the Utah community, concerning the imminence of demonstrations and riots" at the upcoming LDS general conference.[150] The biography of Harold B. Lee, then an apostle, notes that "there were rumors of blacks invading Salt Lake City to take vengeance upon the Saints and the Church."[151] The Salt Lake police got caught up in the rumors and telephoned Hugh B. Brown that "four carloads of negroes armed with machine guns and bombs were reported coming to Salt Lake City for the purpose of inciting a riot and particularly to destroy properties on the [Salt Lake] temple block."[152]

Soon rumors of September 1965 claimed that African-American terrorists had targeted all of Salt Lake City. Reflecting Reed Benson's instructions to Utah members of the Birch Society, one rumor claimed that "2,000 professional demonstrators and Black Muslims will be imported to this area under NAACP sponsorship." Other widely circulated stories were that "all plane flights from Los Angeles to Salt Lake are chartered by 'Watts Negroes,'" and that "3500 'transient Negroes' have already arrived in Salt Lake." As a result, the Utah National Guard began "riot control" maneuvers.[153]

Chapter Leaders in California," 17 Aug. 1965, and D. Richard Pine to "Coordinators, Section Leaders and Chapter Leaders—L.A. County," 1 Sept. 1965, in Harvey B. Schechter, *How To Listen to a John Birch Society Speaker*, 3d. ed. rev. (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1967), 25-26; Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster, *The Radical Right: Report on the John Birch Society and Its Allies* (New York: Random House, 1967), 12; Lipset and Raab, *Politics of Unreason*, 268. For the position of Major Coordinator, see Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, 152.

149. *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Sept. 1965): cover and 23. The October *Bulletin* (dated 30 Sept. 1965): 2, concluded its reminder about the Birch battle with the African-American civil rights movement: "And in setting out seriously on this gigantic endeavor, we have really stirred up the animals."

150. David Leslie Brewer, "Utah Elites and Utah Racial Norms," Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1966, 143.

151. L. Brent Goates, *Harold B. Lee: Prophet & Seer* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985), 378.

152. Campbell, "Responsibility Without Authority—The 1st Counselor Years," 8.

153. "NAACP Says 'Too Fantastic' Rumors of Demonstrations," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 27 Sept. 1965, 20; "Race Riots in Utah?" *Daily Utah Chronicle*, 28 Sept.

The NAACP issued an official statement which tried to instill calm in Utah but also accurately identified Birchers as responsible for the September 1965 race-war hysteria in Utah. "The NAACP deplores the malicious and totally irresponsible rumors circulating in many sections of the state to the effect that Negroes are planning a riot at the LDS conference," the statement began. Then the statement continued that the NAACP had "reason to believe the rumors started with certain right-wing societies that make a practice of scaring people."[154] The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith specifically condemned the Birch Society's "despicable actions" in seeking to inflame anti-black fears "while southeast Los Angeles was aflame in mid-August, 1965."[155]

Although there were no race riots or demonstrations at October 1965 general conference, the Birch Society's role in fomenting this race-paranoia turned some Mormons implacably against the organization. At the time, the Birch Society's official magazine made no comment about the effort to disrupt LDS conference. However, after giving its perspective on the Watts riot by Reed Benson, the Birch Society's October magazine referred to all black immigrants to the United States today as "Savages" in a separate article on current immigration.[156] *The John Birch Society Bulletin* for October 1965 also referred to civil rights activists and Martin Luther King as "the animals."[157] Later that month Utah's Republican U.S. senator, Wallace F. Bennett, publicly repudiated the Birch Society.[158] This was a significant change from Bennett's more sympathetic position two years earlier, when the conservative senator inserted into the *Congressional Record* the previously cited letter from President McKay's secretary: "The church is not

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154. The first part of my quote is from the version of the statement in "NAACP Chapter Claims Riot Report 'Malicious,'" *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 28 Sept. 1965, A-6; the second part is from the version in "Rumors of Riot Hit By Area NAACP," *Deseret News*, 28 Sept. 1965, B-1; "NAACP Assails Rumors of Protest at LDS Meet," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Sept. 1965, 18.

155. Schechter, *How To Listen to a John Birch Society Speaker*, 24; also Barbara Hogan, *The Shake-Up America Campaign: Who's Who and What's What in the Massive John Birch Society Propaganda Effort to Fan the Flames of Racial Tension* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for American Democracy [1967]). The bias of these publications is as strident as that of Birch Society publications. Their value lies in the quotes from Birch writings to demonstrate the society's approach toward the American civil rights movement.

156. Reed Benson and Robert W. Lee, "The Federalist" (concerning Watts), and Robert H. Montgomery, "From the North," (concerning immigration), in the John Birch Society's *American Opinion* 8 (Oct. 1965): 65-66, 69-70; also Gary Allen and Bill Richardson, "Los Angeles: Hell In The City of The Angels," *American Opinion* 8 (Sept. 1965): 1-14.

157. *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Oct. 1965): 2.

158. "Birchers As Group, Unwelcome," *Deseret News*, 27 Oct. 1965, F-1; "Bennett Joins in Rebuke of John Birch Society," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 Oct. 1965, A-4.

opposing the John Birch Society . . ."[159]

Return from Exile and Renewal of Birch Activism

Nevertheless, early in December 1965 McKay's secretary, Clare Middlemiss, endorsed Ezra Taft Benson's continued anti-Communist crusade. She wrote a church member: "President McKay has further instructed me to tell you that Elder Ezra Taft Benson has not been rebuked by the Church . . . and, since Communism is a definite threat to the eternal principle of free agency, it cannot be considered that he is 'out of line' when discussing it in talks."[160] That was all Benson needed to justify his renewal of strident, anti-Communist activism. According to a pro-Birch interpreter of the Benson controversy, "Ezra Taft Benson returned to Salt Lake and continued his conservative patriotic speeches and his close association with the John Birch Society."[161]

By the end of December 1965 other general authorities vetoed an effort by one of Benson's intermediaries to have the Birch Society's president speak at Brigham Young University. Those voting against the proposal were Apostles Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, Delbert L. Stapley, Marion G. Romney, and LeGrand Richards. That unanimous vote reflected First Presidency counselor N. Eldon Tanner's statement to a political science professor: "We certainly don't want the Birch Society to get a hold on the BYU campus."[162] Tanner had served as a counselor for the past two years since Henry D. Moyle's death.

In January 1966 Benson endorsed the Birch Society and its program at stake conferences and at the LDS institute in Logan, Utah.[163] This disturbed

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159. *Congressional Record—Senate* 109 (6 Aug. 1963): 14172; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 10-11.

160. Middlemiss to Russell F. Dickey, 8 Dec. 1965, photocopy in Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," appendix.

161. Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 15.

162. Board of Trustees, Executive Committee minutes, 16 Dec. 1965, archives, Brigham Young University, photocopy in my possession; Wilkinson diary, 21 Dec. 1965; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 197; N. Eldon Tanner statement in the mid-1960s to J. Kenneth Davies as reported in Davies interview by Gary James Bergera, 24 Dec. 1984, photocopy in my possession; also identical quote in Davies telephone conversation with me, 6 Jan. 1993. However, Apostle Delbert L. Stapley's vote against the Birch Society president as a BYU speaker should not be construed as evidence of his disagreement with Benson's political views. For example, Stapley wrote a woman that "we are drifting towards the socialized state," and sent her copies of Benson's conference talks on Communism (Stapley to Mrs. W. E. Daddow, 19 Feb. 1965, LDS archives, photocopy in my possession).

163. "LDS Apostle Backs Up Birch Group," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 Jan. 1966, B-14; "Speak Up! Says Ezra to Save Your Soul and Maybe Your Country," *Fact Finder* 24 (28 Feb. 1966);

Utah's Republican senator, a devoted Mormon. Senator Wallace Bennett urged David O. McKay's son to persuade the church president to disassociate himself from Benson's "very clever statement about your father which would seem to give your father's endorsement" to the Birch Society.[164] At the end of the month the Birch Society released its *Bulletin* which announced that Benson would speak at a testimonial for Robert Welch in Seattle on 19 February "with the full approval of President McKay of the Mormon Church."[165]

A week before attending that Birch meeting Benson spoke about the Birch Society to a standing-room-only crowd at the Assembly Hall on Salt Lake Temple Square. He charged that "a minority bloc of American liberals [had] formed a propaganda coalition with the Communists . . . [and] drew the line of fire away from the Communist Conspiracy and to focus the heat of attack on the patriots." Benson added that this conspiracy of liberals and Communists "decided to level practically their entire arsenal on The John Birch Society."[166]

These remarks had already been published by the Birch Society's national headquarters two years before Benson delivered them on Temple Square. They were a verbatim restatement of a speech Benson had prepared for an Idaho "Freedom Forum" as he was about to depart for his European Mission presidency in December 1963.[167] By repeating these words about the Birch Society in his February 1966 talk on Temple Square, Benson indicated that his mission exile had not taken "all of the political notions out of his system," as the Quorum of Twelve's president had hoped.[168]

Benson then told this February 1966 meeting on Temple Square that he had read the Birch Society's *Blue Book*, Robert Welch's *The Politician*, and

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Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 6.

164. Wallace F. Bennett to David Lawrence McKay, 21 Jan. 1966, folder 3, box 24, Bennett Papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library; also Wallace F. Bennett, *Why I Am A Mormon*, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964).

165. *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Feb. 1966): 30.

166. Ezra Taft Benson, "Stand Up For Freedom," address to the Utah Forum for the American Idea, Assembly Hall, Temple Square, Salt Lake City, 11 Feb. 1966, typescript, 9, 11, Vertical File, Special Collections, Marriott Library; "Benson Hits Liberals' 'Conspiracy': Assails Plots, Propaganda," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 12 Feb. 1966, 17.

167. Compare with the Birch Society's publication of Ezra Taft Benson, *An Internal Threat Today* (Belmont, MA: American Opinion, [1964]); also Benson, "An Internal Threat Today" (paid advertisement by Concerned Citizens and Treasure Valley Freedom Forum), *Idaho Statesman*, 19 Jan. 1964, B-7, and typescript of the address prepared for the Treasure Valley Freedom Forum, Boise, Idaho, 19 Dec. 1963, transcript, 6-7, 10, folder 1, box 122, Moss Papers.

168. Joseph Fielding Smith to Ralph Harding, 30 Oct. 1963.

recommended that the audience subscribe to the Birch Society's official magazine *American Opinion*. His talk even included the mailing address. Of his support for the Birch Society, the *Deseret News* added Benson's comment to the Mormons on Temple Square: "It has been very unpopular to defend this group," he said. "But I can remember when it was unpopular to defend my own church."[169]

Such equations of the Birch Society with the LDS church were part of what antagonized general authorities like Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner, Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Mark E. Petersen against Benson. On 18 February, a week after Benson's Assembly Hall talk, the First Presidency decided that a picture "of Pres. McKay not to appear on cover of American Opinion Magazine."[170] Prior to his talk, Benson had obtained McKay's permission for the church president's photograph to appear on the cover of the April issue of this official magazine of the Birch Society. The First Presidency thought their mid-February decision would end the matter. It did not. (See below.)

During a visit at church headquarters the last week of February, Senator Moss found "a number of the Brethren boiling pretty good" about Benson's recent talk. These general authorities "decided that Brother Benson's Assembly Hall speech should not be printed in the Church News. This was the decision until it was found that President McKay had already approved its printing and his office had directed the Deseret News to print it."[171]

However, Benson's opponents in the hierarchy did manage to delete "without permission" the Birch Society references from the version of Benson's talk published in the *Church News* on 26 February.[172] Nevertheless, Hugh B. Brown and his allies were unable to prevent the television broadcast of Benson's Assembly Hall speech. This broadcast converted some Mormon viewers to assert: "No longer do we question the motives of

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169. Benson, "Stand Up For Freedom," 13-14; "Benson Hits Liberals' 'Conspiracy': Assails Plots, Propaganda"; "Socialism Warning Sounded: Elder Benson Hits Liberals," *Deseret News*, 12 Feb. 1966, B-1; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 385.

170. "Copy of First Presidency minutes digest 2-18-66," in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

171. Reported by U.S. senator Frank E. Moss to U.S. representative Ken W. Dyal, 2 Mar. 1966, folder 5, box 184, Moss Papers. Moss wrote that this assessment was based on conversations a week earlier with "the Brethren." However, his Daily Activity Log refers to meeting with only one current general authority—Hugh B. Brown on 22 February (box 713, Moss Papers).

172. "Stand Up For Freedom: Partial Text Of Talk Given to S.L. Group By Elder Benson," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 26 Feb. 1966, 10-12; Duane Price to D. Michael Quinn, 9 Aug. 1992, summarizing his meeting with Benson in April 1966. Price was a supporter of Benson's position on the Birch Society. Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 35n29, alluded to the censorship of the talk in the *Church News*.

the John Birch Society."[173]

To provide a context for the hierarchy's negative reactions to Benson's 1966 activities, the evaluation of two of his Mormon supporters may be helpful. BYU president Ernest Wilkinson had already attended three days of private indoctrination by the president of the Birch Society, and had resolved "to press forward for more training along this line at the BYU." Fellow conservative W. Cleon Skousen had already published a defense of the Birch Society and was an official speaker for the Birch Society in 1966, even though he was not formally a member of the organization.[174]

In April 1966, Wilkinson and Skousen conversed about the Birch Society: "We would probably agree with 90% of their principles but we both believe that Ezra Taft Benson has made some tactical or procedural errors in trying to vouch President McKay in on everything he has done . . ."[175] Even his biographer refers to Benson's "single-minded concerns and convictions."[176] These reservations by Benson's ardent Mormon supporters give better perspective for the position of those general authorities who did not share his views about the Birch Society.

The "Crisis" of April 1966 General Conference

The BYU president's reference to Elder Benson's "tactical errors" involved the apostle's coordinated effort to align the LDS church with the Birch Society during the April 1966 general conference. Early in the year, Benson had secured President McKay's permission for Benson to introduce the Birch Society president as keynote speaker in the church's Hotel Utah during general conference. This resulted in developments which shocked members of the First Presidency.

First, on 2 March they learned that the Birch Society's March *Bulletin*

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173. Mr. and Mrs. W. D. Luke, "Motives Unquestioned," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 10 Apr. 1966, A-16.

174. Wilkinson diary, 19-22 Aug. 1965; W. Cleon Skousen, *The Communist Attack on the John Birch Society* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing Co., 1963), and list of speakers of the "American Opinion Speakers Bureau" in the Birch Society's *American Opinion* 9 (May 1966): 109. Skousen stated: "I am not a member of the John Birch Society and never have been," in *Behind the Scenes: A Personal Report to Pledged Freemen from W. Cleon Skousen* (Salt Lake City: The Freemen Institute, 1980), 1, photocopy in folder 25, box 17, Buerger Papers. This full publication citation is necessary whenever this source is used, because his other *Behind the Scenes* were monthly periodicals. By 1962 Skousen was at the center of a controversy with fellow Mormons over anti-Communism. See Richard D. Poll, *This Trumpet Gives An Uncertain Sound*, and Skousen's *My Reply to Dr. Richard D. Poll and His Critique of The Naked Communist* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Publishing Co. [1962]).

175. Wilkinson diary, 13 Apr. 1966.

176. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 374.

encouraged Birch members to write "Personal and Confidential" letters to President McKay and to his two new counselors, Joseph Fielding Smith and Thorpe B. Isaacson.[177] The next day Apostle Benson notified the Twelve's president that President McKay had approved the apostle's acceptance of all invitations to speak at testimonials for the Birch Society's president, Robert Welch. "I feel no compunction to make the Church popular with liberals, socialists, or communists. I do feel responsible to tell the truth," Benson wrote. Of the fact that Mormons were joining the Birch Society and Birchers were becoming Mormons, he added: "and those who love the truth will embrace it without compromise and that is exactly what is happening."[178] On that same day, the entire First Presidency decided that "Elder Benson to be told not to mention Birch Society."[179]

Less than a week later, on 8 March, J. Reese Hunter, chair of the Welch dinner meeting, mailed a "Dear Brethren" letter to stake presidents and bishops inviting them to attend "with your counselors and wives." Hunter had also introduced Apostle Benson's February speech on Temple Square.[180] Then the First Presidency learned that despite its mid-February decision the Birch Society's magazine was going ahead with plans to publish President McKay's photograph. In March, the Birch magazine sent a letter to all Utah subscribers that its upcoming cover photograph of McKay was intended "to favorably impress your Mormon friends."[181] It is not clear whether the First Presidency had instructed Apostle Benson to inform the Birch Society of this February decision or had notified the society directly. Either way, their decision was being ignored.

In early March, anti-Birch Mormons were outraged to learn of these Birch preparations for general conference. In response, some even circulated a proposal which urged anti-Birch Mormons to petition the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve's president for the "removal of Benson from the Quorum of the Twelve." According to this "OPERATION CHECKMATE" handout, Benson's transgressions were "flagrant insubor-

177. *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Mar. 1966): 22-24; "CROSS REFERENCE SHEET," 2 Mar. 1966, in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

178. Ezra Taft Benson to Joseph Fielding Smith, 3 Mar. 1966, MS 4940, LDS archives. This was Benson's defense against the criticisms expressed in a letter to all general authorities from Ken W. Dyal, LDS congressman from California.

179. "Copy of First Presidency minutes digest 3-3-66," in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

180. J. Reese Hunter to "Dear Brethren," 8 Mar. 1966, LDS archives, photocopy in Williams Papers; Utah Forum For the American Idea, "Program," 11 Feb. 1966, Williams Papers.

181. Philip K. Langan to "All Friends of *American Opinion* in Utah," Mar. 1966, quoted in Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 27-28.

dination," "pulpit misuse," and "demeaning the President of the Church by callously taking advantage of his advanced years."[182]

By 15 March 1966, the First Presidency defined the situation as "a crisis." Second counselor N. Eldon Tanner, the Twelve's president Joseph Fielding Smith, and Apostle Mark E. Petersen held an emergency meeting with David O. McKay at his home in Huntsville, Utah. Tanner read the Hunter letter and observed that "KSL, at the request of the John Birch Society, was rebroadcasting the address given recently by Brother Benson in the Assembly Hall, in which address he gave strong endorsement to the John Birch Society." The church president said that it was necessary to issue a statement disassociating the church from these activities. Then "President McKay suggested that Elder Benson might not be assigned to stake conferences if he referred to the John Birch Society. The President then said that Elder Benson should be instructed not to discuss the Birch Society in any meeting, and that he should not advocate this group."[183] First counselor Hugh B. Brown was not present at this meeting to express his views or direct its outcome.

Two days later the First Presidency published a denial of any sponsorship of the Welch dinner and emphatically stated that "the Church has no connection with the John Birch Society whatever."[184] McKay stopped publication of his photograph in the Birch magazine and withdrew his permission for Benson to introduce the president of the Birch Society at its meeting during April conference.[185] Undeterred, Benson had the Birch magazine

182. "OPERATION CHECKMATE," original typed document, Williams Papers, also photocopy inscribed, "J D Williams, March 14, 1966," folder 2, box 124, Robert H. Hinckley Papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library. Although undated, this document was drafted after the J. Reese Hunter letter of 8 Mar. 1966 (which "OPERATION CHECKMATE" referred to) and before the First Presidency statement of 17 March, which was the kind of official statement recommended by "OPERATION CHECKMATE," 4.

183. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 259; minutes of meeting on 15 Mar. 1966 with David O. McKay, N. Eldon Tanner, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Mark E. Petersen in Huntsville, Utah.

184. "Church Tells Position On Dinner for Bircher," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 17 Mar. 1966, A-10; "Notice To Church Members," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 19 Mar. 1966, 2; "So Much For Mr. Welch," *Rocky Mountain Review*, 17 Mar. 1966, 4.

185. For other discussions of these events, see Wilkinson diary, 22 Mar. 1966; "Birch Dinner in Salt Lake City Vexes Mormons," *New York Times*, 8 Apr. 1966, 28; "Mormons and Politics: Benson's Influence Helps Keep Growing Church on Conservative Track," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 Aug. 1966, 1; J. D. Williams, "Separation of Church and State in Mormon Theory and Practice," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Summer 1966): 50; J. D. Williams, "Reply to Letter of Garn E. Lewis," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Winter 1966): 8; Epstein and Forster, *The Radical Right*, 200-201; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 15-16, 22-25, 27-29; Bethke, "BF [Before Falwell], EB [Ezra Benson]," 15-16; Gibbons, *David O. McKay*, 381-82, 383.

print a photograph of deceased first counselor J. Reuben Clark. The Birch organ stated that Clark was "one of the earliest and most outspoken 'alarmists' in America concerning the menace and the progress of the Communist Conspiracy."[186]

Benson attended the Birch Society dinner in April 1966 without speaking, although his name was on the program as a speaker. Others at the dinner gave him a standing ovation. The *Salt Lake Tribune*'s report included a photograph of Benson sitting next to the Birch president. BYU's president had declined the invitation to substitute for Apostle Benson in introducing Robert Welch. Even Benson's muted attendance at the Welch dinner infuriated anti-Birch Mormons, including the wife of Utah's incumbent Democratic governor.[187]

Robert Welch's talk praised Benson as "one of the really great men of our times." Also in describing the Birch Society's "recruiting efforts," Welch said that "we have no better members, or more permanently dedicated members of the Society, than those who owe their first loyalty to the Mormon Church."[188] Of this, newspapers reported that the Birch Society regarded Mormons as "a very good recruiting ground."[189]

To counter such a perception, McKay, at the emergency council meeting on 15 March, had authorized one of Benson's opponents in the Quorum of Twelve to publicly attack the Birch Society by name.[190] Mark E. Petersen (widely known as the unsigned editorial writer for the *Deseret News "Church News"*) had, in fact, criticized the Birch Society for years without actually naming it.

"From time to time organizations arise ostensibly to fight communism, the No. 1 opponent of the free world," Petersen had written in 1961, but concluded that "it is not good for citizens to align themselves with flag-waving groups which may bring them into difficulty." Three months later,

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186. John Birch Society's *American Opinion* 9 (Apr. 1966): cover page, and 112.

187. Wilkinson diary, 22 Mar. 1966; "Welch Raps 'Senseless' U.S. Policy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Apr. 1966, B-1, with photo on B-2; "Birch Dinner in Salt Lake City Vexes Mormons," *New York Times*, 8 Apr. 1966, 28; Hugh W. Gillilan, "500 Misled Americans," and Mrs. Calvin L. Rampton, "JBS' Tasteless Violation," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 10 Apr. 1966, A-16, with reply by J. Reese Hunter, "Answers Mrs. Rampton," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 13 Apr. 1966, 18; also Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 1, 16.

188. Robert Welch, "Dinner Meeting at Hotel Utah Introductory Remarks—April 7th, 1966 by Robert Welch," mimeograph, 1, Special Collections, Lee Library; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 25-26, 35n32, cites this as a publication of the American Opinion Bookstore in Salt Lake City.

189. "Birch Dinner in Salt Lake City Vexes Mormons," *New York Times*, 8 Apr. 1966, 28, published as "Welch Says Mormons Make Good Birchers," *Minneapolis Tribune*, 9 Apr. 1966.

190. Meeting minutes of 15 Mar. 1966.

he more directly alluded to the Birch Society:

> Some groups and persons have attacked certain Americans . . . by casting doubt on their loyalty . . . they have set themselves up as judges of who is loyal and who is "un-American." They [i.e., Robert Welch] have accused certain men [i.e., Dwight D. Eisenhower] of being "unconscious agents of communism" . . . they have attributed national blunders not to errors in judgment but to evil motives. . . . [B]y blaming our problems on certain scapegoats, they can keep us from manfully recognizing the real problems—internal as well as external . . ."[191]

Less known was the fact that Counselor Brown had collaborated with Apostle Petersen in the 1961 editorials of the *Deseret News* against the anti-Communist movement.[192]

Now in March 1966 Petersen's editorial proclaimed that the LDS church has "nothing to do with racists, nothing to do with Birchers, nothing to do with any slanted group." This 1966 editorial further warned Mormons to "avoid extremes and extremists."[193]

The response of Mormon members of the Birch Society was predictably negative to Petersen's 1966 editorial. A former LDS mission president and current "section leader" of the Birch Society hand-carried a letter to McKay that "many people are confused and shocked by the recent editorial in the Church News, entitled: 'Politics and Religion.'"[194] A Birch member in Ari-

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191. "Let Us Not Be Carried Away," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 29 July 1961, 16; "What Americanism Must Mean," *Deseret News*, 28 Oct. 1961, A-10; also "A Question For Americans," *Deseret News*, 30 Nov. 1961, A-18. Welch's views on Eisenhower circulated in manuscript until 1963 but were cited in the media as early as 1960. See textual reference to *The Politician* above. *Deseret News "Church News,"* 15 Jan. 1984, 3, said that Mark E. Petersen "had written the editorials since the beginning of the weekly publication in 1931." Peggy Petersen Barton's *Mark E. Petersen: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 114, also noted her father's role in the church's editorials but made no comment about his editorial views on the Birch Society.

192. Richard D. Poll to Hugh B. Brown, 23 Dec. 1961, referred to their previous discussions of the "substantial involvement on your [Brown's] part in the *Deseret News* editorials and other aspects of this question."

193. "Politics and Religion," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 26 Mar. 1966, 16. Although opposed to the Birch Society, Apostle Petersen also warned Mormons against "creeping socialism and its companion, insidious, atheistic communism." See his "New Evidence For the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era* 65 (June 1962): 457.

194. Mark E. Anderson to David O. McKay, 5 Apr. 1966, MS 3744, LDS archives, photocopy in my possession; also Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 17. Mark Anderson did not mention the *Church News* editorial in his letter to the editor, *Deseret News*, 14 Apr. 1966, A-18, about church statements concerning the Birch Society. For Mark E. Anderson's role as a Birch Society "chapter leader," as a "section leader" over several chapters, and for his promotion to state coordinator four months after his letter to McKay,

zona wrote a letter to "all of the General Authorities," which said "Brother Petersen's article was a tragic and regrettable mistake," and added a few lines later that the "Communists and their dupes have directed their attacks and smear campaign against the John Birch Society . . ." Petersen's editorial was "a shocking smear I'm sure the Church doesn't condone," according to a "Letter to the Editor" which the *Deseret News* refused to print. This Mormon Bircher concluded: "Elder Petersen owes an apology to the readers of the Church News for the unwarrantable and unauthorized innuendos."[195]

Instead of an apology, Apostle Harold B. Lee continued the anti-Birch assault during the April 1966 general conference. Six years earlier, Lee had publicly endorsed Benson's campaign against "radical and seditious voices."[196] However, Benson's alignment with the Birch Society had turned Lee into one of the junior apostle's most determined critics in the Twelve. By 1963 Lee privately said Benson labelled as a Communist "anyone who didn't agree with Brother Benson's mind."[197]

In response to recent events, Lee's April 1966 conference talk was a thinly veiled assault against the Birch Society. Lee said, "We hear vicious attacks on public officials without the opportunity being given to them to make a defense or a rebuttal to the evil diatribes and character assassinations." He added "that the sowing of the seeds of hatred, suspicion, and contention in any organization is destructive of the purpose of life and unbecoming to the children of God."

Even more stunning to the Mormon audience aware of the controversy, Apostle Lee's general conference talk also publicly criticized Apostle Benson. Without naming his apostolic subordinate, Lee next told the April 1966 conference, "I would that all who are called to high places in the Church would determine, as did the Apostle to the Gentiles, to know and to preach

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see "Welch Raps 'Senseless' U.S. Policy," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Apr. 1966, B-1; Mark E. Anderson to Robert Welch, 5 June 1966, with copies to Ezra Taft Benson, Reed Benson, John Rousselot, and Frank Marisch, photocopy in Williams Papers; "Birch Society 'Signs Up' LDS Leader," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Aug. 1966, B-3; "Who Is Mark E. Anderson?" *Utah Independent*, 2 June 1972, 8. For description of the Birch Society's organizational structure, see Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, 151-52; "The John Birch Society: A Report," *Advertising Supplement to Los Angeles Times*, 27 Sept. 1964, 7-8; Gerald Schomp, a former state coordinator, *Birchism Was My Business* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970), 158.

195. Joe H. Ferguson to "All General Authorities," 16 Apr. 1966, 4, with postscript to "Mark" (Mark E. Anderson), photocopy in my possession; excerpts from Blaine Elswood to the editor of the *Deseret News*, 29 Mar. 1966, files of the *Deseret News* offices, cited in Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 4-6, and in Frank H. Jonas typed document, page 81, in the John Birch Society section of a longer manuscript for which the first portion is missing and its title presently unknown, Jonas Papers. Also "Letters to the Editor," *Deseret News*, 28 Mar. 1966, A-18, 13 Apr. 1966, A-8.

196. Lee, introduction to Benson, *So Shall Ye Reap*, vii.

197. Wilkinson diary, 13 May 1963.

nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified." Then Lee darkly added: "The absolute test of the divinity of the calling of any officer in the Church is this: Is he in harmony with the brethren of that body to which he belongs? When we are out of harmony, we should look to ourselves first to find the way to unity." Apostles Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Mark E. Petersen had already indicated that Apostle Ezra Taft Benson was not in harmony with his quorum.

Apostle Lee concluded this April 1966 conference address with a devastating assessment of the unnamed Ezra Taft Benson. "A President of the Church has told us where we may expect to find false leaders: First, The hopelessly ignorant, whose lack of intelligence is due to their indolence and sloth," Lee noted. Then he continued, "Second—The proud and self-vaunting ones, who read by the lamp of their own conceit; who interpret by rules of their own contriving; who have become a law unto themselves, and so pose as the sole judges of their own doings."[198] This "insinuation" (so described by Lee's biographer) was a far more direct condemnation of Benson than Benson's "Judas" allusion to Hugh B. Brown at general conference less than three years before.[199] Brown had immediately recognized the personal reference in Benson's remarks, and no doubt Benson was equally astute as he listened to Lee's April 1966 talk.

Within days after this controversial April 1966 conference, the son of a previous First Presidency counselor publicly called Benson "the most divisive influence in the church today."[200] A few weeks later, the nationally distributed *Parade* Sunday supplement observed: "Ezra Taft Benson has consistently supported the John Birch Society's recruiting drives among Mormons." Without exaggeration, *Parade* also informed its millions of readers that Benson's political activism "has introduced as a result a divisive element in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."[201]

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198. *April 1966 Conference Report*, 64-65, 66, 67, 68. Byron Cannon Anderson's pro-Birch, 1966 study, "Church and Birch In Utah," did not list Lee as one of the general authorities opposed to the Birch Society (31), nor was there any mention of Lee's conference talk in Anderson's extensive discussion of the controversies involving the Birch Society during April 1966 conference (15-19, 22-29). The day after Lee's address, Benson's April 1966 conference talk was on Jesus Christ and lacked the political content of his previous conference sermons. But Benson returned to political themes in future general conference sermons. In *Cross Fire*, 586-87, Benson said there was no difference between his religious beliefs and political convictions.

199. My telephone conversation on 7 Nov. 1992 with L. Brent Goates. He described his father-in-law's April 1966 conference address as "an insinuation" concerning Benson but declined to comment further on the differences between the two apostles. Goates, *Harold B. Lee*, makes no reference to the dispute.

200. H. Grant Ivins, "Most Divisive Influence," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 11 Apr. 1966, 18. His father was Anthony W. Ivins, First Presidency counselor from 1921 to 1934.

201. Walter Scott, "Personality Parade," *Parade*, 15 May 1966, 2, supplement to such

The Mormon hierarchy's divisions over the Birch Society were even the subject of a remarkable panel discussion at Brigham Young University on 25 April. A "standing-room-only audience" listened as David O. McKay's nephew referred to the recent Welch banquet as a "gathering of the clan," and referred to the "Dear Brethren" letter promoting it as "a deceitful device." Alluding to the controversies of the previous month, Quinn McKay observed: "What do we do when General Authorities do not see eye to eye on political issues? Which do we follow? If each of the General Authorities were to speak on 'The Contributions of the John Birch Society' you would no doubt hear some rather contrasting views. Then which apostle would one quote?" McKay's nephew then referred to the Reed Benson letter which had ignited the race hysteria preceding the October 1965 conference.[202]

The role of Benson and the Birch Society in the tense atmosphere of the two previous general conferences led to a blistering condemnation by a nationally known Mormon in May 1966. Robert H. Hinckley, former assistant secretary of the U.S. commerce department, chair of the Civil Aeronautics Administration, and vice-president of the American Broadcasting Company, criticized the Birch Society in an address to students of the University of Utah. He lambasted the society's "collective slander, which now seems to have become standard operating procedure for some Birchites," and also "the semi-secret chapters that parallel Communist cells, the use of front groups, the tactics of infiltration, [and] the use of the big lie." Hinckley also identified Ezra Taft Benson as part of the "leadership of the Right Wing" in America. The full text of this assessment appeared in the *Congressional Record* in June 1966.[203]

Apostle Benson simply shrugged off such criticism from regular Mormons and even from his fellow apostles.[204] President McKay's address at

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newspapers as *The Oregonian*, copy in Special Collections, Lee Library. *Salt Lake Tribune* was the only Salt Lake City newspaper that carried *Parade*, but the microfilm copy of the *Tribune* does not include this Sunday supplement.

202. Quinn G. McKay, statements in Davies, *Political Extremism Under the Spotlight*, 12, 19, 20-21. The "standing-room-only" reference is from the description of the meeting on the inside front cover.

203. Robert H. Hinckley, "The Politics of Extremism," in *Congressional Record—Senate* 112 (13 July 1966): 15584, 15583; Hinckley, *The Politics of Extremism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1966); "Hinckley Blasts Extremists," *Provo Daily Herald*, 25 May 1966, 14; "Says Birchers Copy Reds," *Deseret News*, 25 May 1966, A-12. For Hinckley's background in Mormonism, civil government, and business, see Robert H. Hinckley and JoAnn Jacobsen Wells, *"I'd Rather Be Born Lucky Than Rich": The Autobiography of Robert H. Hinckley* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 1, 15-22, 75, 78, 125, 139; Billy Wayne Winstead, "Robert Henry Hinckley: His Public Service Career," Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1980.

204. He did not ignore such criticism, however. Benson to Robert H. Hinckley, 27 May

conference left church members "free to participate in non-Church meetings which are held to warn people of the threat of Communism."[205] The Birch Society's *Bulletin* later published this statement.[206] In Benson's eyes, McKay's April 1966 conference statement was a personal vindication by the only church leader who mattered.

Although Benson waited six months to respond to his critics in the hierarchy, some Mormon Birchers felt that the negative publicity of April 1966 conference required a rapid response. Members of the society in Seattle released a statement which addressed such questions as "Is the Church opposed to the John Birch Society?," "Has Brother Benson been rebuked by the Church?," "Is Brother Benson out-of-line in discussing communism in Church talks?," and "Has Reed Benson been rebuked by the Church?" To each of these questions, Seattle Birchers responded in the negative.[207] Two months before April conference, Benson had spoken at a Welch testimonial there "with the full approval of President McKay of the Mormon Church."

On the other hand, some liberal Mormons saw Apostle Lee's April 1966 conference talk as a sign of an approaching termination of Benson's political activism. "When Pres. McKay dies Ezra Taft won't last a year," a bishop from Logan, Utah, said. "Pres. Smith or Elder Lee will not hesitate to put him in his place if he continues his political preaching." "If this happens," the bishop predicted, "it may turn out that Benson will refuse to give up his Americanism campaign and will be dropped or resign from the Quorum."[208]

The 1966 BYU "Spy Ring"

Two weeks after the "crisis" in Salt Lake City over the dinner for Robert Welch, a Birch crisis of a different kind was developing fifty miles south in Provo, Utah. On 19 April 1966, BYU's Ernest Wilkinson asked his admin-

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1966: "I cannot believe that a man with your background and experience would make the errors attributed to you in the attached item from the Deseret News of May 25th" (folder 2, box 124, Hinckley Papers).

205. *Deseret News "Church News,"* 16 Apr. 1966, 7; *Improvement Era* 69 (June 1966): 477 as "nonchurch."

206. *Bulletin of The John Birch Society* (Jan. 1967): 24-25.

207. "Authoritative Answers To Questions Concerning Anti-Communism," mimeographed statement [after April 1966 from its references to general conference talks], Americanism Discussion Group, 3624 56th Avenue, S.W. Seattle, Washington, 98116, copy in Special Collections, Lee Library. Jerreld L. Newquist lived in Seattle during this period and may have been the source of this mimeographed statement. See Newquist to Richard D. Poll, 7 Mar. 1967, photocopy in my possession.

208. Quoted in Buchanan diary, 7 Oct. 1966.

istrative assistant to organize a group of "conservative" students to "monitor" professors who were regarded as Communist sympathizers. Nearly all of these BYU professors had publicly condemned the John Birch Society. Among them was political scientist Louis Midgley whose anti-Birch article in the *Daily Universe* had resulted in a muzzling of the student newspaper two years earlier. Several of these targeted professors had also signed the public condemnation of the Birch best-seller *None Dare Call It Treason*. For a year Stephen Hays Russell, student-leader of this "spy ring," had already been reporting to the local Birch Society chapter and to Wilkinson about some of these professors.[209]

On 20 April Russell organized a dozen other Birch students in a room of BYU's Wilkinson Center. A non-student chapter leader of the Birch Society acted as guard for this organizing meeting of the BYU spy ring, the only time all would be together at once.[210] These student-spies included the president of BYU's Young Americans For Freedom, three other members of YAF, and also Cleon Skousen's nephew. Academically, their majors included economics, political science, history, Asian studies, math, and zoology. What linked all these student-spies was their participation in the Provo chapter of the John Birch Society.[211]

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209. Whittaker and McClellan, "The Collection: Description," 1-2, register of the Hillam Papers; Stephen Hays Russell to Ernest L. Wilkinson, 26 Apr. 1965; Richard D. Poll to Wilkinson, 24 June 1965, defending himself against the complaints by Russell and E. Eugene Bryce, Wilkinson Papers, photocopy in my possession; Morrell, Bernhard, Hillam, Wimmer, Midgley, and Wirthlin, "Events Related To the Covert Surveillance of Faculty Members," 1-2; "Birch Society Reviewed By Prof. Louis Midgley," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 22 May 1964, 2; "Faculty Members Deplore 'Fanaticism' of Booklet," *Provo Daily Herald*, 23 July 1964, 14; "None Dare Call It Treason Causes Sincere Concern," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 23 July 1964, 2; also Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 207-208.

210. Interview of Ronald Ira Hankin by Ray C. Hillam and Louis C. Midgley, 17 Sept. 1966, Provo, Utah, transcript, 4-5, signed at the bottom of each page by Ronald I. Hankin, folder 5, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers; "Birchers Spied On Professors, Hialeah Student Said," *Miami Herald*, 3 Mar. 1967, A-32; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 208.

211. Stephen Hays Russell acknowledged choosing ten students to assist in the "monitoring," yet his reservation for the room was for twenty persons and chairs. Fellow-spy Ronald Ira Hankin consistently claimed that Russell selected fifteen to twenty students to monitor the BYU professors. However, less than fifteen student-spies have been identified: Stephen Hays Russell was the group's leader; Michel L. Call was YAF president; Curt E. Conklin, Ronald Ira Hankin, and Lyle H. Burnett [not Barnett] were YAF members; and the other BYU student-spies in 1966 included Everett Eugene Bryce, Lloyd L. Miller, Mark Andrew Skousen, Lisle C. Updike, and James H. Widenmann [not Weidenman]. Although not in published lists of BYU students in 1966, the following were also listed by BYU professors as part of this spy-ring: Byron Cannon Anderson, Ted Jacobs, and James C. Vandygriff. Anderson was a student at BYU in 1964-65 and summer of 1965. See Russell, "Y Center Activity Schedule," 20 Apr. 1966; Russell statement, 13 Mar. 1967, p. 4; Hankin

One of these Birch student-spies had been involved in the 1965 monitoring of Professor Richard Poll and had publicly accused Poll at that time of having a Communist subversive speak to his classes. Another member of the 1966 group had complained to Wilkinson in 1965 about Poll's negative reviews of Skousen's *Naked Communist* and of *None Dare Call It Treason*. Still another had recently complained to President McKay that Poll was "the most vocal leader of this opposition" to "Bro. Skousen and Elder Benson."[212] In 1966, this "covert surveillance" included efforts by these BYU-Birch students in correspondence, classroom questioning, and private meetings to extract "pro-Communist" views from their professors. Some students used hidden tape-recorders to record these statements as "evidence."[213]

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interview, 4, 14; Ray C. Hillam to Clyde D. Sandgren, 22 July 1966, "Re: Reports by Vandygriff and Russell"; Russell N. Horiuchi "To Whom it may concern," 11 Aug. 1966; Ray C. Hillam "To Whom It May Concern," 15 Aug. 1966; Hillam, "Complaints Against Jim C. Vandygriff," 16 Sept. 1966; Larry T. Wimmer statement, 30 Jan. 1968; Morrell, Bernhard, Hillam, Wimmer, Midgley, and Wirthlin, "Events Related To the Covert Surveillance of Faculty Members," 2; Ben E. Lewis, Earl C. Crockett, and Clyde D. Sandgren to Ray C. Hillam, 15 May 1969, 3, in folders 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers; *1966 Banyan: The Yearbook of the Associated Students of Brigham Young University*, 293, and "Student Index," 500-29; *B.Y.U. Directory, 64-65*; *B.Y.U. Summer School Directory, 1965*; *B.Y.U. Directory, 1965-66*; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 208.

Mark Skousen was a son of Cleon Skousen's brother Leroy B. See *1966 Banyan*, 523; *Skousens In America: James Niels Skousen and His Two Wives . . .* (Mesa, Arizona: Lofgreen Printing Co., 1971), 85, 87. Later he became the author of such publications as *Tax Free: All the Legal Ways to Be Exempt From Federal, State, and Social Security Taxes* (1982), and *Dissent on Keynes: A Critical Appraisal of Keynesian Economics* (New York: Praeger, 1992). Michel L. Call's 1973 master's thesis for BYU's political science department was "The National Education Association as a Political Pressure Group." A year later James Vandygriff completed a master's degree in BYU's Department of Church History and Doctrine.

212. E. Eugene Bryce, "Campus Speaker Affiliated With Subversive Groupings," *Provo Daily Herald*, 20 Apr. 1965, 10; Poll to Wilkinson, 24 June 1965, defending himself against the complaints by Bryce; Lisle Updike to Ernest L. Wilkinson, 5 May 1965, Curt Conklin to David O. McKay, 29 Jan. 1965 [1966], also referred to in Clare Middlemiss to Ernest L. Wilkinson, 3 Feb. 1966, Conklin to Wilkinson, 16 Feb. 1966, all in Wilkinson Papers, photocopies in my possession.

213. Whittaker and McClellan, "The Collection: Description," 2, register of Hillam Papers; Stephen Hays Russell to Ernest L. Wilkinson, 26 Apr. 1965; Morrell, Bernhard, Hillam, Wimmer, Midgley, and Wirthlin, "Events Related To the Covert Surveillance of Faculty Members," 5; Richard D. Poll to Ray C. Hillam, 12 Sept. 1966, folder 10, Hillam Papers, also box 34, Buerger Papers; minutes of meeting of BYU administrative officers with Ray C. Hillam and Stephen Hays Russell, 16 Sept. 1966, 5, folder 4, Hillam Papers, also box 34, Buerger Papers; Hankin interview, 17 Sept. 1966, 30; "Birchers Spied On Professors, Hialeah Student Said," *Miami Herald*, 3 Mar. 1967, A-32; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 209. For similar tactics elsewhere, see "Hell Breaks Loose In Paradise: This 'Textbook' Hides A Tape Recorder To Trap a Teacher," *Life* 54 (26 Apr. 1963): 73-84.

The student-organizer of this 1966 surveillance emphasized his association with Ezra Taft Benson. "On one occasion, the head of the John Birch Society in Utah County took me to the Church Office Building at Salt Lake City to meet Apostle Ezra Taft Benson," Russell later wrote. "I was introduced to Brother Benson as a 'key conservative student at Brigham Young University.'"[214] At the group's initial meeting, Russell told his Birch associates that "the General Authorities" authorized this espionage. Later, he specified several times that "Brother Benson was behind this."[215] Russell even reported the BYU spy-ring's findings to Ezra

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214. Stephen Hays Russell, *Personal History of Stephen Hays Russell* (N.P., 1983), 99, photocopy in my possession.

215. Hankin interview, 17 Sept. 1966, 6-7; also David M. Sisson statement, 17 Sept. 1966, folder 10, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers.

Stephen Hays Russell, the student-leader of this group, signed a 1967 statement which made no reference whatever to the John Birch Society or to Ezra Taft Benson, even though the Birch connection appears in other sources. See Stephen Hays Russell statement, 13 Mar. 1967, typescript, signed at the bottom of each page by Stephen Hays Russell, folder 9, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers. Also, Russell's "Statements By Stephen Hays Russell on 'The 1966-67 Student "Spy Ring"' Section of the Book *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* by Bergera," 23 Dec. 1986 (photocopy in my possession), does not challenge the book's assertion that the student-spies were connected with the John Birch Society. However, page 1 of this 1986 statement refers to Russell's association with the Birch chapter leader in Provo.

There are clear factual discrepancies in Russell's statements about the 1966 student "monitoring." During the official university inquiry on 16 Sept. 1966, p. 7 (folder 4, Hillam Papers, also box 34, Buerger Papers), Russell denied that he was a member of the John Birch Society. Ernest L. Wilkinson memorandum, 20 Sept. 1966, 3, photocopy in my possession, also shows that Russell told Wilkinson he had resigned from the Birch Society, whereas he told Wilkinson's assistant that he had never been a member. In demonstration that all his above statements were false, Russell's 1983 *Personal History*, 99-110, acknowledges that he had been a Birch member since January 1965 and makes no reference to his alleged withdrawal from membership prior to the spy scandal. On page 5 of the September 1966 inquiry, Russell also denied that he was "part of an organized group of students," yet his 1967 statement, 1983 *Personal History*, and 1986 "Statements" describe how he organized this group for faculty "monitoring." Russell's 1986 "Statements" claimed that the student-spies submitted only two reports "within two weeks of each other," but his *Personal History*, 109, claimed "reports were submitted just once." To the contrary, Wilkinson's diary shows that he received the first report on 29 April, and his papers contain a written report, dated 24 May 1966, on Professor J. Kenneth Davies by student-spies Lyle Burnett and Stephen Hays Russell. Seven other professors were on the original list of targets.

Russell's 1967 statement acknowledged on page 3 that "if I 'got caught' at this, official university reactions would be that I was acting on my own," and on page 9 that Wilkinson expected Russell to be the "scapegoat" (also Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 211). Although he implicated Wilkinson and two of Wilkinson's assistants already named by fellow-spy Hankin, all of Russell's other statements about BYU espionage were obviously intended to shield others beyond the BYU administrators who were involved. For example, Russell's statements did not name the students he selected to help spy.

Taft Benson.[216]

On 29 April 1966, the diary of BYU's president acknowledged his receiving the first "voluntary report from certain students" about "certain liberals on the campus."[217] After discovering the details of this "Spy Ring" from its participants and from meetings with Counselor N. Eldon Tanner and Apostle Harold B. Lee, one of BYU's vice-presidents confided that "the real home of the group was ETB."[218]

By the end of September 1966 the BYU "spy ring" had unraveled as its principal members confessed their participation to BYU faculty, administrators, bishops, and general authorities.[219] Due to their belief that Apostle Benson was involved in this BYU "spy ring," general authorities like N. Eldon Tanner and Harold B. Lee declined to pursue the matter rigorously.[220] They rejected demands for Wilkinson's resignation and merely asked BYU's president to apologize privately to the professors targeted for this espionage.[221] Media coverage of the scandal was already embarrassing enough to the LDS church.[222] This was the best-known manifestation of

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216. My interview on 16 December 1992 with a person (name withheld by request) who was a highly placed official at LDS church headquarters in 1966. While I was asking about other matters involving Ezra Taft Benson, this source brought up the BYU espionage and volunteered Stephen Russell's name as the person who forwarded the "spy ring's findings" to Benson. The source provided this information without any prompting on my part. This forwarding of the spy ring information to Benson was also implied in Hankin interview, 17 Sept. 1966, pp. 6-7, and Sisson statement, 17 Sept. 1966, folder 10, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers.

217. Wilkinson diary, 29 Apr. 1966. This verifies the statement of Ronald Ira Hankin and David M. Sisson on 17 Sept. 1966, folder 10, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers: "During the last week of April we visited Stephen Hays Russell in his dorm in Deseret Towers.... During our visit Stephen told us he would be visiting President Wilkinson soon. . . . Later the same evening Stephen told me, Ron Hankin, that he was going to turn the report over to the President within the next three or four days."

218. Louis C. Midgley to Ray C. Hillam, 11 Nov. 1966, regarding a conversation of Edwin B. Morrell, Richard B. Wirthlin, and Louis C. Midgley with Earl C. Crockett on 9 November.

219. See previously cited documents.

220. Midgley to Ray C. Hillam, 11 Nov. 1966, and comment on this letter in the inventory of Whittaker and McClellan, "The Collection: Description," register of Hillam Papers.

221. Whittaker and McClellan, "The Collection: Description," 5, register of Hillam Papers.

222. "Free Forum Filled With 'Charges,'" *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 1 Mar. 1967, 1; "BYU Denies Campus 'Spy' Story," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 Mar. 1967, C-4; "Birchers Spied on Professors, Hialeah Student Says," *Miami Herald*, 3 Mar. 1967, A-32; "Wilkinson Admits 'Spy Ring' Existence at 'Y,'" *Provo Daily Herald*, 14 Mar. 1967, 1, 4; "Patriots On the Campus," *The New Republic* 156 (25 Mar. 1967): 12; "Spies, J[unior]. G[rade].," *Newsweek* 69 (27 Mar. 1967): 112; also "Y. Teachers Blast 'Spy Scandal Coverup,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 Dec. 1976, B-3; Ron Priddis, "BYU Spy Case Unshelved," *Seventh East*

Ezra Taft Benson's six-year-old encouragement of "espionage" at Brigham Young University. It would not be the last.

Elder Benson's Public Response to Critics in the Hierarchy

Ezra Taft Benson used October 1966 general conference to begin an extraordinary response to his hierarchy critics at the previous conference. "There are some who apparently feel that the fight for freedom is separate from the Gospel. They express it in several ways, but it generally boils down to this: Just live the gospel; there's no need to get involved in trying to save freedom and the Constitution or stop communism." Then in an obvious reference to himself and other general authorities, Benson said: "Should we counsel people, 'Just live your religion—there's no need to get involved in the fight for freedom?' No we should not, because our stand for freedom is a most basic part of our religion . . . " He added: "We will be given a chance to choose between conflicting counsel given by some," and he observed: "All men are entitled to inspiration, but only one man is the Lord's mouthpiece. Some lesser men have in the past, and will in the future, use their offices unrighteously. Some will, ignorantly or otherwise, use it to promote false counsel; some will use it to lead the unwary astray; some will use it to persuade us that all is well in Zion; some will use it to cover and excuse their ignorance."[223] A Mormon in the audience regarded Benson's conference talk as "referring to Hugh B. Brown."[224]

However, the First Presidency counselors and Twelve's president regarded Benson's October 1966 conference talk as a criticism of every general authority except David O. McKay. "From this talk," Counselor N. Eldon Tanner noted, "one would conclude that Brother Benson and President McKay stand alone among the General Authorities on the question of freedom." The Twelve's president Joseph Fielding Smith "agreed heartily with Tanner's objections to the talk in general." Counselor Brown added that Benson's October 1966 conference "talk is wholly objectionable because it does impugn the rest of us and our motives when we have advised the people to live their religion and stay away from extremist ideas and philosophies." Benson had asked for approval to "mimeograph his talk for wider distribution" which the First Presidency

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Press, 14 Mar. 1982, 1, 11-12; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 207-17; Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, *America's Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984), 232-33.

223. Ezra Taft Benson reading copy of his general conference talk, 2 Oct. 1966, photocopy in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

224. Buchanan diary, 3 Oct. 1966.

disapproved.[225] Still, the presidency ultimately allowed the official report of conference to print Apostle Benson's talk virtually unchanged.[226]

Such publication was by no means certain when Benson addressed students at Brigham Young University's "devotional" meeting on 25 October. Because BYU devotional talks were separately broadcast and published, he decided to repeat his conference talk and expand upon its criticisms of the unnamed members of the LDS hierarchy.

At BYU Benson made it plain that the context for his remarks was the anti-Birch statements of anyone besides David O. McKay. "Do we preach what governments should or should not do as a part of the Gospel plan, as President McKay has urged? Or do we refuse to follow the Prophet by preaching a limited gospel plan of salvation?" Alluding to the disunity in the hierarchy, Benson affirmed: "We cannot compromise good and evil in an attempt to have peace and unity in the Church any more than the Lord could have compromised with Satan in order to avoid the War in Heaven." He then quoted the church president's April conference statement in favor of anti-Communist organizations, and observed: "Yet witness the sorry spectacle of those presently of our number who have repudiated the inspired counsel of our Prophet . . . It is too much to suppose that all the Priesthood at this juncture will unite behind the Prophet in the fight for freedom." Rather than ascribing this disunity about his anti-Communist crusade to honest differences of opinion, Benson described his church opponents as inspired by Satan:

> Now, Satan is anxious to neutralize the inspired counsel of the Prophet, and hence, keep the Priesthood off-balance, ineffective, and inert in the fight for freedom. He does this through diverse means, including the use of perverse reasoning. For example, he [Satan] will argue: There is no need to get involved in the fight for freedom. All you need to do is live the Gospel. . . . It is obvious what Satan is trying to do, but it is sad to see many of us fall for his destructive line.

His next remarks tightened his reference more clearly to the church's presiding quorums. "As the Church gets larger, some men have increasing responsibility, and more and more duties must be delegated. . . . Unfortunately some men who do not honor their stewardships may have an

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225. N. Eldon Tanner to Joseph Fielding Smith, 31 Oct. 1966, Hugh B. Brown to David O. McKay, 9 Nov. 1966, with notation in Brown's handwriting of First Presidency decision on 16 Nov. 1966, all attached to Benson's reading copy of his October 1966 conference talk, and all in "Hugh B. Brown's File on the John Birch Society."

226. See Ezra Taft Benson, "Protecting Freedom—An Immediate Responsibility," *Improvement Era* 69 (Dec. 1966): 1144-46, and compare with the previous quotes from his reading copy.

adverse effect on many people. Often the greater the man's responsibility, the more good or evil he can accomplish. The Lord usually gives the man a long enough rope . . . There are some regrettable things being said and done by some people in the Church today."

After quoting to his BYU audience the warning by J. Reuben Clark about "ravening wolves" who "wear the habiliments of the priesthood," Apostle Benson made it clear he was referring to his fellow apostles: "Sometimes from behind the pulpit, in our classrooms, in our Council meetings, and in our Church publications we hear, read or witness things that do not square with the truth. This is especially true where freedom is involved." He concluded: "Some lesser men in the past, and will in the future, use their offices unrighteously. Some will lead the unwary astray . . ."

At the conclusion of his talk Benson let the BYU students know he was referring to general authorities immediately below the church president in authority. "Learn to keep your eye on the Prophet," Benson said. "Let his inspired words be a basis for evaluating the counsel of all lesser authorities." He concluded this remarkable assault on his fellow members of the hierarchy with the only understatement of his BYU talk: "I know I will be abused by some for what I have said."[227] Even the censored publication of this BYU talk retained many of Benson's critical allusions to presidency counselors and apostles.[228]

One professor called Benson's BYU address "a really violent anti-Lee talk," and even pro-Birch Wilkinson regarded the talk as "a little extreme."[229] However, this BYU address in October 1966 was not simply Apostle Benson's public response to Harold B. Lee's sermon "from behind the pulpit" of April 1966 conference. This was also Benson's answer to Mark E. Petersen's anti-Birch editorials "in our Church publications." It was a warning about first counselor Hugh B. Brown ("the greater the man's responsibility, the more good or evil he can accomplish"). In sum, this BYU address was Ezra Taft Benson's dismissal of the anti-Birch statements of any general authority "in our Council meetings" and against "the counsel of all lesser authorities" beneath President McKay. His counter-assault on his unnamed critics in the LDS hierarchy was even more extraordinary than

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227. Audio tape of Ezra Taft Benson, "Our Immediate Responsibility," devotional address to students of Brigham Young University, 25 Oct. 1966, available from BYU Media Services in 1992.

228. Ezra Taft Benson, "Our Immediate Responsibility," *Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Extension Publications, Division of Continuing Education, Brigham Young University, 1966), esp. 8, 13-14.

229. Louis C. Midgley to Ray C. Hillam, 11 Nov. 1966, folder 12, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers; Wilkinson diary, 25 Oct. 1966. For Wilkinson's statements in support of Benson's political sermons and anti-Communist crusade, see his diary entries for 3 June 1962, 6 Apr. 1965, 25 Oct. 1966, 23 Sept. 1975, 18 Sept. 1976.

Harold B. Lee's conference talk against the unnamed Apostle Benson. Benson's BYU devotional talk in October 1966 was the clearest evidence that he saw himself and President McKay as fighting alone in a battle for freedom and anti-Communism against all the other general authorities who had fallen for Satan's "perverse reasoning" and "destructive line."

The Bid for the White House, 1966-68

With Benson's permission, three weeks after the April 1966 general conference a national committee announced that it was preparing a campaign to elect him U.S. president in 1968. As part of its ten-year plan, this "1976 Committee" nominated Strom Thurmond, conservative U.S. senator from South Carolina, as Benson's vice-presidential running mate.[230]

A former state coordinator wrote that Birch president Robert Welch "was the guiding light behind" this 1976 Committee.[231] National leaders of the Birch Society comprised 59 percent of this committee, including its chair and two vice-chairs. Most other committee members were probably lower-ranking Birchers.[232] Benson's 1976 Committee was a classic demonstration

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230. "Presidential Draft for Elder Benson?" in *Deseret News*, 3 May 1966, A-1; "Group Seeks Benson for Race in '68," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 May 1966, 6; "Benson Hints Door Open In '68 Race," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 May 1966, A-14; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 383. Also Epstein and Forster, *The Radical Right*, 53-55, 142; Bethke, "BF [Before Falwell], EB [Ezra Benson]," 16-17; "Mormons and Politics: Benson's Influence Helps Keep Growing Church on Conservative Track," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 Aug. 1966, 1.

231. Schomp, *Birchism Was My Business*, 159-60.

232. Of the thirty-four officers and members of this original "1976 Committee" at its formation in 1966, fourteen were members of the national council of the John Birch Society, its "top advisory body in matters of organization and policy." The Birch council members on Benson's election committee were Thomas J. Anderson, T. Coleman Andrews, John T. Brown, Laurence E. Bunker, William J. Grede, Augereau G. Heinsohn, Fred C. Koch, Dean Clarence Manion, N. Floyd McGowin, W. B. McMillan, Robert H. Montgomery, Thomas Parker, Robert W. Stoddard, and Charles B. Stone. In addition, K. G. Bentson, Robert B. Dresser, and Charles Edison were members of the 1976 Committee and also on the editorial advisory committee for the Birch Society's *American Opinion*. John W. Scott was a Birch Society member in 1966 and joined the editorial advisory committee in 1978. Bonner Fellers and Edgar W. Hiestand had been on the Committee of Endorsers in 1962, and continued to be heavily involved with the Birch Society throughout the 1960s. See The 1976 Committee, *The Team You Can Trust To Guide America, the Best Team for '68: Ezra Taft Benson for President, Strom Thurmond for Vice-President* (Holland, Michigan, [1966]), 12, and compare with list of national council members in Robert W. Lee to J. Bracken Lee, 17 Jan. 1966, on letterhead of The John Birch Society, folder 18, box 70, Lee Papers, and with editorial staff and advisory committee in *American Opinion* 9 (Jan. 1966): inside front cover; (May 1966): inside front cover; (Oct. 1966): inside front cover; 21 (Sept. 1978): inside front cover; John H. Rousselot, "Honorable Edgar W. Hiestand," *American Opinion* 8 (Nov. 1965): 113. *The Team You Can Trust To Guide America*, 15, noted that its list of books in support of this candidacy are available "from any American Opinion bookstore." Probably typical of

of Welch's philosophy of creating "fronts"—organizations that merely had the appearance of independence from the Birch Society which formed and directed them.[233] In effect, the Birch Society was nominating Benson for the White House. In August 1966, Hugh B. Brown told two BYU professors that Benson had "a letter from President McKay endorsing his candidacy." Brown said "it would rip the Church apart" if Benson released the letter to the public as part of the presidential campaign.[234]

Of this, Benson's biographer tells the following. As early as October 1965 Benson had asked the church president for permission to campaign as U.S. presidential candidate. McKay told him not to campaign actively but did not require him to decline the efforts of others to draft him as a presidential candidate. Benson decided to withhold knowledge of any of these discussions from his own quorum which learned of his possible presidential candidacy from the newspaper announcement in May 1966.[235]

In contrast to his private request of McKay which led to the draft movement, Benson told the *Boston Globe*'s religion editor: "It is strictly a draft movement about which I am personally doing absolutely nothing." The *Church News* immediately reprinted this.[236] Benson told newspapers in March 1967 that he regarded the draft movement as "almost frightening, yet humbling." He also told reporters in March 1967, "I have no desire to run for political office."[237] Coincidental with this Birch-led effort to elect Benson as U.S. president, a month later Apostle Mark E. Petersen wrote an editorial in the *Church News*: "Political extremists sow seeds of hate and discord. Extremism among them can hardly be less dangerous on one hand than on the other. Both can lead to dictatorship."[238] However, within a few months, Benson's supporters began circulating petitions to place his name on the ballot for the upcoming national election.[239]

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the 1976 Committee members who had no national Birch office, William L. McGrath was identified as a member of the John Birch Society in Group Research Reports, "Individual Index—Cumulative (7/1/63)," copy in folder 4, box 9, King Papers.

233. Welch, *Blue Book of The John Birch Society*, 73: "We would organize fronts—little fronts, big fronts, temporary fronts, permanent fronts, all kinds of fronts."

234. Brown interview by Richard Wirthlin and Ray Hillam, 9 Aug. 1966, 3, transcribed 11 Oct. 1966 "from Rough Draft Notes," folder 6, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers.

235. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 383-84, 386, 392-93.

236. "'Strictly a draft'—Elder Benson," [subheading] *Deseret News "Church News,"* 28 Jan. 1967, 6.

237. "Benson Finds Draft Crusade 'Humbling,'" *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 11 Mar. 1967, 9; "Benson Says No Interest in '68 Draft," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 12 Mar. 1967, C-6.

238. "Tendency Toward Extremes," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 15 Apr. 1967, 20. For Petersen as the author of these unsigned editorials, see n172 above.

239. "Group Acts to Draft Benson in '68 Race," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 1 Nov. 1967,

In the midst of these presidential "draft" activities, the First Presidency and apostles were critical of Benson's association with such ultraconservatives as Billy James Hargis. In an early report of the two men's joint participation in anti-Communist rallies, even the *Deseret News* had identified Hargis as one the nation's "segregationist leaders."[240] Counselor Brown informed a church member in May 1967 that "numerous others" had complained about Benson's continued association with Hargis and the apostle's implied endorsement of his segregationist views. The First Presidency "are taking it to the Twelve as soon as Brother Benson returns from Europe as we prefer to have him present when the matter is discussed." Brown gave the reassurance that Benson's "activities in this connection will be curtained [curtailed]."[241]

Benson continued to preach the Birch message. At a meeting in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in September 1967 he said that "the so-called civil rights movement as it exists today is a Communist program for revolution in America." He repeated that assessment in his general conference talk the next month.[242] The same year Benson also approved the use of a recent talk as the "forward" to an overtly racist book which featured the decapitated head of an African-American on its cover. The authors of *The Black Hammer: A Study of Black Power, Red Influence and White Alternatives, Foreword by The Honorable Ezra Taft Benson* wrote that the apostle "has generously offered this address as the basis for the introductory remarks to 'The Black Hammer.'"[243] Benson had given this talk to the anti-Communist leadership school of segregationist Hargis who had published it in his magazine.[244]

A-12.

240. "Ezra Taft Benson Addresses Rally," *Deseret News*, 7 Jan. 1963, A-3. For Benson's recent participation with Hargis and his Christian Crusade, see "This Week! 5 Great Nights of Christian Leadership Training: Christian Crusade Leadership School—Feb. 20-24," advertisement in *Tulsa Daily World*, 19 Feb. 1967, photocopy in Williams Papers. For background on Hargis, see John Harold Redekop, *The American Far Right: A Case Study of Billy James Hargis and Christian Crusade* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968).

241. Brown to Burns S. Hanson, 11 May 1967, carbon copy cross-referenced to "Hargis, Billy James," in "Hugh B. Brown File on the John Birch Society."

242. Benson address, 29 Sept. 1967, in his *Civil Rights: Tool of Communist Deception*, 3; "Mormon Leaders Heard By 25,000," *New York Times*, 2 Oct. 1967, 52; *Improvement Era* 70 (Dec. 1967): 35, softened Benson's restatement of his position about the civil rights movement. However that censored 1967 statement was almost identical to the *Deseret News*, 14 Dec. 1963, B-5, report of Benson's assessment of civil rights.

243. Wes Andrews and Clyde Dalton, *The Black Hammer: A Study of Black Power, Red Influence and White Alternatives* (Oakland, CA: Desco Press, 1967), 13, a copy of which is in the Church Library, Historical Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

244. Ezra Taft Benson, "Trade and Treason," *Christian Crusade* 19 (Apr. 1967): 22-24.

Although they did not identify themselves as Mormons, *The Black Hammer*'s authors (who lived in the San Francisco Bay area) referred on the dedication page to "all the Elders of the California North Mission for their interest and prayers." Their bibliography listed seven anti-Communist books including ones by Benson and W. Cleon Skousen. Two of *Black Hammer*'s pro-Communist sources were cited as reprints by the John Birch Society's *American Opinion*, and page 78 encouraged readers to "pass on your current copy" of that Birch magazine. Page 91 also encouraged "every Negro" to study the "conservative philosophy" of Robert Welch.

Consistent with Benson's own statements, *The Black Hammer* (which he now tacitly endorsed) dismissed as Communist-directed all organized efforts for civil rights. On pages 32 and 35, the book warned about "the violent revolt which is part of the 100 year-old Communist program for the enslavement of America," and about the "well-defined plans for the establishment of a Negro Soviet dictatorship in the South." On page 51, *The Black Hammer* said: "The media would have the American public believe that the Black Power movement, with all its 'militant overtones' (as the media so affectionately describes it) is frowned upon by the 'moderate civil rights leadership'—more specifically, Martin Luther King. This is pure hogwash." Page 83 referred to "the Negro's need for complete subservience to the Great White Fathers in Washington." However, the authors insisted on page 90 that they were "ready and willing to take any Negro by the hand and help him into an era of self-proprietorship that every deserving American can achieve."

It does not seem coincidental that Benson endorsed this book in the midst of the Birch Society's effort to put him on the 1968 presidential ticket. He may have endorsed *The Black Hammer: A Study of Black Power, Red Influence and White Alternatives* to provide leverage with another presidential aspirant, George C. Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama.

Not until President McKay specifically instructed him to do so in February 1968 did Benson report to the Twelve about the behind-the-scenes efforts on behalf of his presidential candidacy. This was more than two years after he began exploring this possibility with McKay and with the national leaders of the Birch Society who headed "The 1976 Committee."[245]

Benson redelivered this "Trade and Treason" address on 14 April 1967 to a joint meeting of Rotary, Lions, and Optimist clubs in Yakima, Washington. A transcript of this talk, with accompanying letter from Benson to Frank H. Jonas, 18 Aug. 1967, is in Jonas Papers; also printed after Benson re-delivered it at the Highland High School, Salt Lake City, 9 June 1967. See "Benson Talk To Close 'Idea' Series," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 June 1967, B-13.

245. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 397-98; The 1976 Committee, *The Team You Can Trust To Guide America*; Epstein and Forster, *The Radical Right*, 53-55, 142; Bethke, "BF [Before

This was consistent with an assistant Secretary of Agriculture's observation that as an administrator Benson "asked advice from no mortal person."[246]

It is unclear whether Benson informed fellow apostles on 15 February 1968 of the most recent twist of his aspirations regarding the U.S. presidential campaign. Lacking sufficient support from the Republican leadership, Benson had negotiated to become the vice-presidential candidate in George C. Wallace's third-party challenge. Wallace formally announced his third party candidacy on 8 February, but as early as November a vice-president of the John Birch Society's "publishing and distribution arm" had resigned that position "to actively campaign for George Wallace." The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that Apostle Benson also supported Wallace.[247]

On 12 February Wallace formally wrote David O. McKay for his "permission and blessings" and "a leave of absence" for Apostle Benson to be Wallace's vice-presidential candidate. Two days later McKay sent a "confidential" letter in response to Wallace's request for Benson to be the third-party's vice-presidential candidate. The church president denied Benson's request to be Wallace's running-mate and pointedly told Wallace that "you no doubt have received word from Ezra Taft Benson as to my decision . . ."[248]

Amid these efforts for Benson's presidential candidacy is the Quorum of Twelve's perspective. Almost as soon as he returned from his European mission in 1965 Benson began discussions leading toward his candidacy for the U.S. presidency. He never volunteered that information to a quorum meeting or to the quorum's president. Three weeks after the humiliation they knew he experienced at April 1966 conference, the apostles learned from the newspapers that Benson was a likely presiden-

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Falwell], EB [Ezra Benson]," 16-17.

246. J. Earl Coke, "Reminiscences on People and Change in California Agriculture, 1900-1975," 111, interviews by Ann Foley Scheuring, 1976, Oral History Center, Shields Library, University of California at Davis, with copy in Special Collections, Lee Library. While Benson was Secretary of Agriculture, BYU's president observed: "Apparently, however, Benson stands aloof from all his advisors, and they are afraid to tell him [what they think]" (Wilkinson diary, 13 Sept. 1957).

247. Willard S. Voit announcement, 17 Nov. 1967, in *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Dec. 1967): 26-28; "Wallace In Race; Will 'Run To Win,'" *New York Times*, 9 Feb. 1968, 1; "Benson Backs Wallace Stand," *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 Feb. 1968, 3, based on an undated interview with Benson by a reporter with Reuters news service.

248. George C. Wallace to David O. McKay, 12 Feb. 1968, and David O. McKay to George C. Wallace, 14 Feb. 1968, photocopies in Wilkinson Papers, photocopies in my possession; also Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American Melodrama: The Presidential Campaign of 1968* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), 694; Dennis Wainstock, *The Turning Point: The 1968 United States Presidential Campaign* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1988), 164; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 221.

tial candidate. That stunning news inevitably appeared as Benson's defiant answer to Harold B. Lee's conference address. That impression was heightened by Benson's October 1966 counter-attack on his critics within the hierarchy.

Then Benson continued his remarkable silence with the other apostles for two more years of the effort to make him U.S. president. He attended their weekly meetings without once mentioning the efforts being made to propel him out of quorum activity and into the White House. What the apostles learned about Benson's candidacy, they read in the newspapers. When he finally informed a quorum meeting of those efforts in February 1968, Benson made it clear he did so only upon McKay's insistence. That was the day after the church president had privately ended Benson's political hopes by confidentially reaffirming to George Wallace that the apostle was unavailable as his vice-presidential candidate. It is difficult to see any deference or collegiality in these obviously strained relations of Benson with the rest of the Quorum of Twelve in the 1960s.

Two months after President McKay quashed Benson's hopes of being Wallace's vice-presidential running mate, a white man assassinated America's most famous black civil rights leader, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. In response to U.S. president Lyndon Johnson's designation of 7 April as a national day of mourning for Reverend King, Apostle Benson immediately prepared a statement for distribution which complained that "the Communists will use Mr. King's death for as much yardage as possible." Benson's hand-out continued that "Martin Luther King had been affiliated with at least the following officially recognized Communist fronts," and listed three organizations. Benson was simply repeating the Birch view of King.[249] Asked about this hand-out, Counselor

249. Ezra Taft Benson, "Re: Martin Luther King," 6 Apr. 1968, photocopy in my possession; compare with Jim Lucier, "King of Slick," in the John Birch Society's *American Opinion* 6 (Nov. 1963): 1-11; Alan Stang, "The King And His Communists," *American Opinion* 8 (Oct. 1965): 1-14; Gary Allen, "America: How Communist Are We?" *American Opinion* 10 (July-Aug. 1967): 9. For a variety of perspectives on King, see Lionel Lokos, *House Divided: The Life and Legacy of Martin Luther King* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969); William R. Miller, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: His Life, Martyrdom and Meaning for the World* (New York: Wybright and Talley, 1968); David L. Lewis, *King: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Stephen B. Oates, *Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); James P. Hanigan, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Foundations of Nonviolence* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986); James A. Colaiaco, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Apostle of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Richard Donald Ouellette, "The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr., 1965-1968," senior honors thesis, University of Utah, 1992. See discussion

Brown replied that Benson's "views do not coincide with the opinion of the majority of the General Authorities and we regret that they are sent out." The first counselor added: "However in President McKay's state of health we cannot get a retraction and must, I suppose, await a change in leadership before definite instructions can be given regulating such items of interest."[250]

Hugh B. Brown's Rebuttals

Mormons of the 1960s often witnessed Counselor Hugh B. Brown following Apostle Benson's talks with rebuttal sermons.[251] For example, in his talk to BYU's devotional in May 1968 Benson accused the U.S. Supreme Court of treason. He added that "a prerequisite for appointment to high government office today is one's past affiliations with communist fronts or one's ability to follow the communist line." Benson's address to BYU students also quoted three times from the Birch Society's official magazine, including references to "black Marxists" and "the Communists and their Black Power fanatics."[252]

In response, the father of one BYU student complained to the First Presidency that Benson had turned BYU's devotionals "into a sounding board for vicious, political interests."[253] In 1968 this father was typical of most LDS church members. A survey of more than 700 Mormons that year showed that 58 percent regarded the Birch Society as "not supporting Declaration of Independence principles."[254] First counselor Brown replied to the student's father: "We have had many such letters protesting the speech made at the B.Y.U. recently and we are trying to offset and curtail

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of Martin Luther King national holiday, below.

250. Hugh B. Brown to John W. Bennion, LDS bishop of the Elgin Ward, Chicago Stake, 29 May 1968, photocopy in my possession.

251. R. Tom Tucker, "Remembering Hugh Brown," *Sunstone* 12 (May 1988): 4; Gottlieb and Wiley, *America's Saints*, 108.

252. Benson, "The Book of Mormon Warns America," address at Brigham Young University devotional, 21 May 1968, transcript, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, Vertical File, Special Collections, Marriott Library, and transcript in Moss Papers; also "Road to Anarchy: Benson Blisters Supreme Court," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 22 May 1968, A-11; "Benson Warns on Commies in Talk at BYU Assembly," *Provo Daily Herald*, 22 May 1968, 24. I could find no reference to Benson's talk in the 21-22 May editions of *Deseret News* and *Salt Lake Tribune*.

253. Robert O. Trottier to David O. McKay, 22 May 1968, with copies to Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner, and Ezra Taft Benson, photocopy in Vertical File for Ezra Taft Benson, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

254. Afton Olson Miles, "Mormon Voting Behavior and Political Attitudes," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1978, 164-65. Broken down by political affiliation, this anti-Birch view was shared by 86 percent of Mormon Democrats, 64 percent of Mormon independents, and 43 percent of Mormon Republicans.

such expressions."[255]

Brown then delivered a BYU commencement address which was a direct attack on Benson's sermon there only ten days earlier. "Beware of those who feel obliged to prove their own patriotism by calling into question the loyalty of others," Brown began. As a clear response to Benson's quotes to BYU students about African-Americans from the Birch Society magazine, Brown concluded: "At a time when radicals of right or left would inflame race against race, avoid those who preach evil doctrines of racism."[256] To many Mormons it was no doubt a disturbing situation for a First Presidency counselor to publicly advise Mormons to "beware" and "avoid" the unnamed Apostle Ezra Taft Benson.

Brown's general assessment of right-wing extremists merely restated the views of the FBI director. J. Edgar Hoover told Congress that "extremist organizations parade under the guise of patriotism, anticommunism and concern for the destiny of the country." However, "behind this veneer" the FBI director found deeply-felt racial hatreds and anti-Semitism. Hoover continued: "While pretending to formulate their own particular theories for improving our Government in solving complicated social, political and economic problems, the extremists merely offer emotionally charged solutions to the gullible and unthinking person who craves for the simple answer. They call for improved government, yet continually defame those in high office."[257] Although the FBI director did not name the Birch Society, Mormon political liberals like Brown and moderate conservatives like Utah's senator Wallace F. Bennett felt Hoover's description fit the Birch Society.

Despite the controversy, Benson continued to enjoy national respect as an "elder statesman." One of his 1968 talks on government was published by the influential periodical *Vital Speeches of the Day*. It was republished in an academic journal.[258]

Brown continued to "offset" Benson's political talks at BYU by follow-

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255. Brown to Trottier, 24 May 1968, photocopy in Vertical File for Ezra Taft Benson, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

256. Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 259-60.

257. Hoover statement to the U.S. House appropriations subcommittee, 10 Feb. 1966, in *Congressional Record—House* 112 (27 Sept. 1966): 24028. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith analyzed Birch anti-Semitism in "The John Birch Society," *Facts: Domestic Report* 14 (Nov.-Dec. 1961). In the 1940s-50s J. Reuben Clark, Ezra Taft Benson, and Ernest L. Wilkinson were exchanging anti-Semitic publications and views (D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1983], 226, 321n24; Clark to Wilkinson, 5 Feb. 1949; Clark to Wilkinson, 9 Nov. 1955; Benson to Clark, 9 Dec. 1957; Clark to Benson, ca. 9 Dec. 1957).

258. Benson, "The Proper Role of Government," *Vital Speeches* 24 (15 June 1968): 514-20, also reprinted in *Agricultural Engineering* 49 (Aug. 1968): 469-71.

ing him with rebuttal sermons. While that gave grim satisfaction to some liberals, Ernest Wilkinson expressed a sentiment shared by Mormons of various political views: "If President McKay was vigorous enough to do it, I am sure he would call both of them in and talk to them about this, and especially President Brown for his critical personal [a]llusions."[259]

It is true that Brown barely concealed his antagonism for Benson in the rebuttal sermons the First Presidency counselor delivered in response to the apostle.[260] As cited previously, Brown's private statements and letters also showed his deep hostility toward Benson, which he even expressed to non-Mormons. Benson was more circumspect about expressing his personal views of Brown. One close associate affirms: "I doubt you could find anybody who ever heard Brother Benson speak negatively about Hugh B. Brown."[261]

Brown was also blunt about his frustration that McKay would not allow an official repudiation of Benson. After Benson described U.S. government "welfare-state programs" as a "Communist-planned program of deception" in his October 1968 conference talk, the Mormon director of a government welfare program complained to the First Presidency. Brown replied: "Others of us feel much the same as you do but the President has not seen fit to check or refute the statements by the person involved and our hands are therefore tied. Be assured, however, of this, that what this man said does not represent the position of the Church with respect to the subject of government aid, etc."

Counselor Brown concluded that Apostle Benson's "statements do not represent the position of the Church, but I am handicapped in that I cannot refute them because the President feels that each one should be free to express his own opinions. This seems to be unfortunate because, speaking from that pulpit and as one of the general authorities, each of us is supposed to represent the Church. There will be a change in this whole situation, we hope, before too long."[262]

However, Brown's hope for an official rebuke of Benson remained

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259. Wilkinson diary, 13 May 1969.

260. For example, in his rebuttal to the talk Benson had given at BYU, Brown clearly indicated that he did not think Benson had "maturity of mind and emotion and a depth of spirit . . . to differ with others on matters of politics without calling into question the integrity of those with whom you differ" (Campbell and Poll, *Hugh B. Brown*, 259).

261. My telephone interview on 8 December 1992 with Karl D. Butler who served as a special assistant to Ezra Taft Benson as Secretary of Agriculture. The two remained friends thereafter. See Benson, *Cross Fire*, 13-14, 23, 25, 38, 69.

262. Brown to Philip D. Thorpe, director of the Community Action Program in Provo, Utah, 18 Oct. 1968, carbon copy in Campbell papers, with attached copy of Benson's October 1968 conference address, "The Proper Role of Government," *Improvement Era* 71 (Dec. 1968): 51-53, with underlined passage on page 53.

unfulfilled even during the last, declining year of McKay's life. Benson's October 1969 sermon warned the LDS general conference against "Communist conspiracy, fellow travelers, and dupes." Those remarks appeared in the official report of the conference.[263]

Earlier that year Benson was involved in another effort at student espionage at Brigham Young University. In February 1969, W. Cleon Skousen instructed his niece to recruit BYU students as spies. As a student herself, she claimed that her uncle "had discovered there was an active communist cell on campus whose goal it was to destroy this university by 1970." She asked one student to infiltrate BYU's Young Democrats on Skousen's behalf. Anti-Birch professor Louis Midgley was also among the BYU faculty who "were 'high on the list' of suspects as being communist sympathizers on this campus and her words were that I was to 'talk with them and to try to get them to commit themselves.'" Cleon Skousen gave the information "to his 'superior' in Salt Lake City."[264]

Less than a year earlier, Apostle Benson had tried to make Skousen dean of the College of Social Sciences.[265] Skousen's efforts at campus espionage in 1969 collapsed after a faculty member wrote a memo urging him "to give *the lie* to this rumor . . . that you have organized a 'spy' ring to check on the alleged pro-Communist sympathies of professors."[266] Only one of these agent provocateurs, a political science major, confessed the espionage. This student stopped spying because he found no Communist sympathizers at BYU, and "I decided that I was involved in a questionable activity and that I should withdraw and cease to function as an agent in any way."[267] Again, this was not the last instance of Benson's support for student espionage on BYU professors.

Nothing in the generation since the 1960s can compare to the apostolic conflict involving Ezra Taft Benson. For supporters, his office as an apostle enhanced his Birch message. For detractors, this message diminished his apostleship. This situation continued unchanged as long as church presi-

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263. *Improvement Era* 72 (Dec. 1969): 69.

264. Phares Woods statement, 27 May 1969, 1-2, folder 16, Hillam Papers, and box 34, Buerger Papers. Daughter of Cleon Skousen's brother Ervin M., Cynthia Skousen was a first cousin of the 1966 student-spy, Mark A. Skousen. See *Skousens In America*, 86.

265. Ernest L. Wilkinson diary, 12 Apr. 1968; also Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 215. Benson had first suggested Glenn L. Pearson as dean. See discussion of Pearson, above.

266. Undated, handwritten memo from "M. G. F." [poss. Merwin G. Fairbanks, director of student publications] to "Cleon Skousen," with copies to ELW [Ernest L. Wilkinson], RKT [Robert K. Thomas], BEL [Ben E. Lewis], RJS [Robert J. Smith], and "Dan Ludlow," folder 16, Hillam Papers; emphasis in original.

267. Woods statement, 27 May 1969, 4; *BYU Directory, 1968-69*, s.v. "Phares Quincy Woods."

dent David O. McKay lived. For Benson apparently never actually asked McKay for permission to advocate the Birch Society but merely for permission to speak about "freedom." In Benson's thinking there was no distinction among the principles of freedom, the mission of the church, and the teachings of the Birch Society. He sincerely felt he had "a mandate from the prophet" for all of his political speeches.[268]

On the other hand, first counselor Brown regarded Benson's private meetings with McKay as manipulative. Brown's grandson and biographer notes:

> As President McKay became increasingly impaired by age, some church functionaries, with allegiances to the radical political right, tried to influence the president in ways that Grandfather [Hugh B. Brown], President [N. Eldon] Tanner, and Elder Harold B. Lee thought unwise and improper. These three men—Grandfather in particular—were often but not always successful in blocking those efforts to influence church policy.[269]

There is no question that Benson made what LDS authorities called "end runs" around the Quorum of Twelve and First Presidency counselors in order to obtain McKay's encouragement for his political activism. However, such "end runs" were common practice for general authorities and church bureaucrats during the McKay presidency.[270] Brown's perspective on Benson's lobbying was itself a partisan overstatement.

McKay's amenability to Benson's right-wing politics was not simply a result of the church president's physical and mental decline.[271] Less than a year after the organization of the Birch Society, McKay told general conference: "The conflict between Communism and freedom is the problem of our times. It overshadows all other problems. This conflict mirrors our age, its toils, its tensions, its troubles, and its tasks. On the outcome of this

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268. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 372, 385; Dew, "Ezra Taft Benson," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1992), 1:102-103.

269. Firmage, *An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown*, 142.

270. Specific use of "end run" terminology for this feature of McKay's presidency appears in J. Reuben Clark office diary, 22 May 1961; Wilkinson diary, 25 May 1967; Neal A. Maxwell oral history, 1976-77, 24-25, LDS archives; also Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark*, 128, 141-42. "End runs" seems to have characterized the adminstration of virtually every LDS church president whose final years were attended by physicial and mental infirmities.

271. Eugene Campbell's typed draft of the biography of Brown likewise stated: "Unfortunately some of those who seemed to favor the John Birch Society were close to President McKay . . . [who] . . . with his mental difficulties at times was not always able to see the issues as clearly as he would have done had he been younger" (see chapter titled, "Responsibility Without Authority—The 1st Counselor Years," 13, Campbell Papers).

conflict depends the future of mankind."[272] From that perspective, there was no extremism in Benson's campaign against what he perceived as Communist influence in America.

However, as soon as the Birch Society became an LDS controversy in 1961 McKay felt torn between his strong anti-Communist convictions and his desire to avoid entanglement of the church with anti-Communist organizations.[273] Both Benson and his opponents in the hierarchy played upon that ambivalence in McKay for nearly nine years.

Ezra Taft Benson in the Smith-Lee-Kimball Presidencies

Nevertheless, Ezra Taft Benson's political activism went into decline in the years following McKay's death in January 1970. His successors as church president were two apostles who had privately and publicly expressed their criticism of Benson. Presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Harold B. Lee severely restricted Apostle Benson's political activism from 1970 through 1973.[274] This fulfilled the first counselor's hope in 1968 that "a change in leadership" would end Benson's ultraconservative crusade.[275]

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272. *October 1959 Conference Report*, 5; also David O. McKay, *Statements on Communism and the Constitution of the United States* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964).

273. McKay diary, 17 Aug., 24 Aug., 19 Sept. 1961, LDS archives; Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark*, 190, 216; *Deseret News "Church News,"* 16 Apr. 1966, 7; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 18-19; James B. Allen, "David O. McKay," in Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 2:874. As early as May 1961 the *Deseret News* indicated the split developing among Mormons regarding the Birch Society. See editorial "How to Become a Millionaire: Start An 'Anti-Commie' Society," *Deseret News*, 2 May 1961, A-12, which Mark E. Petersen re-emphasized in "Let Us Not Be Carried Away," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 29 July 1961, 16; and contrast with Jerrald [sic] L. Newquist, "Liberty Vs. Creeping Socialism: Warns Of Internal Threats," *Deseret News*, 21 Dec. 1961, A-12. Also George T. Boyd to Hugh B. Brown, 22 Sept. 1961, with Brown's answer of 6 October, copies in Mormon Americana, Special Collections, Lee Library, Brigham Young University. Contrast the 1961 views of Petersen and Brown against anti-Communist propaganda with the following announcement in the LDS church's official *MIA Stake Leader* 13 (Dec. 1961): 3 of anti-Communist publications that "may be obtained from the All American Society, P.O. Box 8045, Foothill Station, Salt Lake City, Utah." At that time W. Cleon Skousen was a director of this All American Society office. See Stewart, "Analysis of the Celebrity Structure of the American Right," 29; All American Society of Utah, "What You Should Know About the All-American Society of Utah," 3, in Williams Papers.

274. However, it did not cease altogether. The Mormon-Birch *Utah Independent* announced Benson's addresses at Boston rallies in 1970 and 1972, where all the other speakers were either staff members of the Birch Society's *American Opinion* or long-time authors of its articles. See "Benson, Skousen Speak at New England Rally," *Utah Independent*, 9 July 1970, 1, and "Benson Is Guest of Honor," *Utah Independent*, 30 June 1972, 8, and compare to table of contents pages of previous issues of *American Opinion*, also the list of the Birch Society's national council in "The John Birch Society: A Report," *Advertising Supplement to Los Angeles Times*, 27 Sept. 1964, 7.

Not surprisingly, this turn of events appalled ultra-conservative Mormons, some of whom were outraged by the First Presidency's official condemnation of Mormons who had formed "Neighborhood Emergency Teams" in Utah. Apostle Benson announced that he had "no comment" about this March 1970 Presidency statement.[276] Therefore, just a month before general conference, ultra-conservatives were convinced that an anti-conservative First Presidency had muzzled Ezra Taft Benson.

Shortly after the presidency's statement against the ultra-conservative NET organizations, all local LDS leaders received an announcement which began: "There are dangerous sinister trends developing within the church due to the liberal factions gaining control." The announcement urged all "those of the conservative mind" to "cast a dissenting vote against the liberal factions" of "the First Presidency with its social-democrat thinking" on 6 April 1970. This would remove from office the new presidency of Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and N. Eldon Tanner, all of whom were known as opponents of Benson's ultra-conservative activism. In their place, this proposal claimed that "Brother Benson will sound the trumpet [—] and thousands, yes tens of thousands, will heed his call and stand forth ready to sustain and support the fight for truth, right and liberty." Thus a general conference vote of Mormon ultra-conservatives would propel Benson into the office of LDS church president in place of the current president and ahead of other senior apostles.[277]

Rather than dismissing this document as the work of a lone crank and giving it no further attention, Counselor Harold B. Lee publicly denounced it two days before the sustaining vote of April 1970 conference. He told the general priesthood meeting that "there is one vicious story to the effect that one of our General Authorities is allegedly being urged to present himself to lead the Church contrary to the Lord's revelation and to make people think there is some division among the authorities of the Church." Lee indicated that this petition and its supporting documents "are finding their way into our Relief Society meetings, into priesthood quorums, firesides, institutes, and seminaries." That was an extraordinary acknowledgement by Lee of the threat to the LDS church he perceived from ultra-conservative Mormons.[278] By contrast, the First Presidency did not publicize anti-Birch

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275. Brown to Bennion, 29 May 1968.

276. "Shun Vigilante Groups, LDS Urges Members," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 Mar. 1970, B-1.

277. "TO ALL STAKE PRESIDENTS INTERESTED IN TRUTH AND LIBERTY THIS CALL IS MADE," photocopy of typed document, undated, in folder 22, box 5, Buerger Papers, with signed copies by J. Wilson Bartlett in MS 2461, LDS archives, and in folder 3, box 124, Hinckley Papers.

278. Lee, "To the Defenders of the Faith," 4 Apr. 1970, *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970):

Mormons.[278] By contrast, the First Presidency did not publicize anti-Birch efforts four years earlier to have Benson expelled from the Twelve.

For supporters of this right-wing petition in 1970 it would have been more significant for Benson himself to publicly repudiate the circulation of this document and condemn the attitudes behind it. However, Benson remained notably silent about this widely circulated use of his name. "Despite continued threats of demonstrations," Harold B. Lee's biography observes, "not a single hand was raised in opposition" to the First Presidency on 6 April 1970. After the vote, Lee spoke against "the possibility of using political devices or revolutionary methods that could cause much confusion and frustration in the work of the Lord." The official photograph showing the Twelve's vote for the current First Presidency showed only three apostles, and the photograph centered on Ezra Taft Benson.[279] Rank-and-file Mormons noted that for the first time "in many years," Benson gave "his first non-political sermon" at this tension-filled conference of April 1970. They regarded this non-partisan talk as a result of specific instructions the apostle had received from the First Presidency.[280]

The newspaper published by Mormon members of the Birch Society was significant for what lay between the lines of its report of April 1970 conference. The *Utah Independent* began with the comment that church members will remember this general conference "for decades to come" and noted: "Despite persistent rumors to the contrary, no violence took place at the conference. No opposition was manifest by Church members when the names of general authorities were presented for sustaining." Of Lee's talk two days before this vote, the *Utah Independent* observed: "Special interest has centered around the talk given by President Harold B. Lee at the Saturday evening general priesthood session," and quoted excerpts. However, this Mormon-Birch newspaper made no reference to the part of Lee's talk which referred to the ultra-conservative proposal to vote against "the First Presidency with its social-democrat thinking," and to substitute Benson as new church president.[281]

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278. Lee, "To the Defenders of the Faith," 4 Apr. 1970, *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970): 64.

279. Goates, *Harold B. Lee*, 414; Lee, "The Day in Which We Live," and photograph of "Council of the Twelve" vote in "The Solemn Assembly," *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970): 28, 20.

280. Buchanan diary, 21 July 1970; Ezra Taft Benson, "A World Message," *Improvement Era* 73 (June 1970): 95-97, whose only political reference was prophetic: "The time must surely come when the Iron Curtain will be melted down and the Bamboo Curtain shattered."

281. Byron Cannon Anderson, "LDS General Conference Sustains Pres. Smith," *Utah Independent*, 9 Apr. 1970, 1, 4. Mormon Birchers had edited this newspaper since its founding in 1970. Its connection with the national society became obvious in 1976 when its

Not long afterward, the author of this article lost his job in the LDS Publications Department. His supervisor had told him that it was "inappropriate" for him to be a member of the John Birch Society and an editor of the ultra-conservative *Utah Independent*. When informed of this incident by the state coordinator of the Birch Society, Apostle Benson said he could do nothing to remedy it.[282]

While Harold B. Lee was in the presidency, he evidently even gave an embarrassing rebuke to Apostle Benson during a meeting of general authorities in the Salt Lake Temple. As reported by Henry D. Taylor, an Assistant to the Twelve, individual apostles were delivering formal presentations on various subjects to the assistants. Benson's assigned topic was the church's youth program, but he began presenting charts and quotes to show Communist influence in America and the need to teach anti-Communism to Mormon youth. Lee walked out while Benson was speaking, soon followed by the other apostles. Taylor and the other Assistants to the Twelve were the only ones who remained seated during Benson's presentation.[283]

Ernest Wilkinson and Benson both gave a less dramatic indication of the frustration felt by Mormon ultra-conservatives during the Smith-Lee presidency. BYU's president complained to Benson in April 1971 about not being able to establish "a chapter of the John Birch Society on our campus."[284] In April 1972 Benson told general conference listeners that "I would highly recommend to you the book *None Dare Call It Conspiracy* by Gary Allen." Allen was a member of the Birch Society and editor of its official magazine.[285] Benson's advice appeared in the report of his conference address by the Mormon-Birch *Utah Independent*, but the First Presidency deleted that recommendation from the official report of Benson's sermon.[286]

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regular column from national headquarters in Belmont, Massachusetts, was formally named "The Birch Log" as of *Utah Independent*, 5 Aug. 1976, 3.

282. Byron Cannon Anderson interview, 18 Jan. 1993.

283. Statement of Henry D. Taylor to his friend Mark K. Allen as reported in Allen interview, 3 May 1984, by Alison Bethke Gayek, photocopy in my possession. See above for Taylor's negative assessment in 1962 of Reed Benson's work with the Birch Society.

284. Wilkinson to Benson, 13 Apr. 1971, also follow-up letter of 4 May 1971, Wilkinson Papers, photocopies in my possession; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 190.

285. Gary Allen, *None Dare Call It Conspiracy* (Rossmoor, CA: Concord Press, 1971). For Allen's prominent role in the Birch Society, see his, "The Life and Character of Robert Welch," *American Opinion* 28 (Mar. 1985): 127, and Allen's permanent position as a "Contributing Editor" of *American Opinion* since September 1967

286. Benson, "Civic Standards for the Faithful Saints," *Utah Independent*, 14 Apr. 1972, 4; compare with censored version in *Deseret News "Church News,"* 8 Apr. 1972, 12, and *Ensign* 2 (July 1972): 59-61. On 12 December 1972, BYU professor J. Kenneth Davies reported

Three months later, President Joseph Fielding Smith died, followed in another seventeen months by the unexpected death of President Harold B. Lee. Hugh B. Brown had already been released as counselor. With the deaths of Smith and Lee, the First Presidency's most strident voices against Benson's ultra-conservatism were stilled.

Less than two months after Spencer W. Kimball became church president in December 1973, Benson's political crusade re-emerged. The two were ordained apostles on the same day, and Benson was now President of the Twelve and next-in-line to become LDS president. In February 1974 Benson resumed partisan warfare by announcing that the church might officially support political candidates. Then on the eve of the November election he publicly endorsed the ultra-conservative American Party and spoke at its rally on the Saturday before the election. This required the First Presidency to issue an immediate statement that "we take no partisan stand as to candidates or parties, and any person who makes representations to the contrary does so without authorization."[287]

Nevertheless, in 1974 there was a reversal of the policy against allowing BYU's *Daily Universe* to give any mention of the Birch Society. On 25 November the *Universe* published a favorable article about the Birch Society. The Smith-Lee administrations had continued the policy established by McKay in 1964 against "allowing" articles in the BYU newspaper about the Birch Society. In 1974 the student newspaper's content was still monitored by BYU's administration, but ultra-conservative partisanship no longer met the kind of First Presidency opposition that existed from Brown's appointment as counselor in 1961 to Lee's death in 1973.[288]

Still, there were limits to the Kimball administration's truce with ultra-conservative Mormons. For example, Benson's resurgent activism was unsuccessful during 1975 in obtaining approval for the Birch Society's

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that he had seen the original letter of Harold B. Lee, N. Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney about this matter to Bishop Delbert Warner (to whom Davies was a counselor). The Lee Presidency stated that Ezra Taft Benson had requested that the published version of his conference sermon delete his endorsement of Allen's book (Duane E. Jeffery memorandum, 12 Dec. 1972, photocopy provided in Jeffery to D. Michael Quinn, 9 Dec. 1992). In my view, the more likely scenario is that in April 1972 the Joseph Fielding Smith Presidency (in which Lee was a counselor) had immediately asked Apostle Benson to formally request this published censorship of his ardently felt endorsement.

287. "Support for Candidate Possible Some Day, LDS Apostle Says," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 Feb. 1974, B-1; "Benson Tells Party Support," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 Nov. 1974, 29; "Church Says Elder's Speech on Third Party 'Unauthorized,'" *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 4 Nov. 1974, A-10; "American Party told, 'Stand Firm,'" *Deseret News*, 4 Nov. 1974, B-14.

288. David O. McKay to Earl C. Crockett, 4 June 1964, and Crockett memorandum, 11 Dec. 1965, Wilkinson Papers, photocopies in my possession; LaVarr G. Webb, "In John Birch Society[,] Fanatics Are Hard to Find," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe "Monday Magazine,"* 25 Nov. 1974, 4-6, 10; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 196, 262-63.

president to be a speaker at BYU.[289] Such a request would not have even been possible during the Smith-Lee presidencies. This most recent refusal to sponsor the Birch president at BYU echoed an identical decision during the McKay administration ten years earlier.

Nevertheless, Kimball's more relaxed approach to Benson's partisanship gave the apostle increased leverage at BYU. For example, in May 1976 Benson carefully questioned BYU's president Dallin H. Oaks whether BYU was "friendly to solid conservative constitutionalists." A few days later Oaks told fellow administrators about "BYU's tenuous position in the silent contest with extremists of the right wing."[290]

After a string of talks which echoed themes of the Birch Society,[291] Benson spoke at the dedication of W. Cleon Skousen's Freemen Institute at Provo, Utah, in September 1976.[292] Five years earlier, Skousen had organized the Freemen Institute which initially attracted Mormon members of the Birch Society. Skousen named the organization after the Book of Mormon's "freemen." He renamed it the National Center for Constitutional Studies and moved its headquarters to Washington, D.C., as an ecumenical effort to attract conservative non-Mormons who had been put off by the Mormon orientation of the Freemen. Within a few years the membership in this spin-off of Utah's Birch Society shifted from 90 percent Mormon to more than half non-Mormon.[293]

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289. President's meeting, 22 Jan. 1975, archives, Brigham Young University, photocopy in my possession.

290. Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 221-22.

291. Benson, "Problems Affecting the Domestic Tranquility of Citizens of the United States of America: Sovereign Remedies For Our Diseases," *Vital Speeches* 42 (1 Feb. 1976): 236-43; "Elder Benson Warns of Communism's Threat," *Brigham Young University Daily Universe*, 25 Feb. 1976, 2; "Inflation, Reds Pose Peril, Benson Warns," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 Mar. 1976, B-5; "Ezra Benson: Will Mormons Go Political?" *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Apr. 1976, Pt. I, 5; "LDS Apostle Warns of Communism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 Apr. 1976, A-8; "Benson Attacks Welfare as 'Legal Plunder,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 June 1976, B-1; "Benson Deplores 'U.S. Support' of Communism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 28 June 1976, 18; "Pres. Benson Hits Detente: Policy Called Aid to Communism," *Deseret News*, 23 Aug. 1976, B-11; "Benson Lambastes Detente, Support of Communism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 28 Aug. 1976, Pt. II, 17.

292. Wilkinson diary, 18 Sept. 1976; "Pres. Ezra Taft Benson Speaks At Freeman Institute," *Utah Independent*, 23 Sept. 1976, 5.

293. "Freemen Institute a Burgeoning Political Force," *Deseret News*, 14 June 1980, A-7; *Behind the Scenes: A Personal Report to Pledged Freemen from W. Cleon Skousen* (Salt Lake City: The Freemen Institute, 1980), 2, photocopy in folder 25, box 17, Buerger Papers. This full publication citation is necessary, because his other *Behind the Scenes* were monthly periodicals. Also John Harrington, "The Freemen Institute," *Nation* 231 (16 Aug. 1980): 152-53; Linda Sillito and David Merrill, "Freemen America," *Utah Holiday* 10 (Feb. 1981): 34-43, 66-67, 70-75, (Mar. 1981): 33-40, 52-54; "Cleon Skousen: Humble Teacher or Apostle of the Right?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 2 Aug. 1981, B-6; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 220-21, 454n88; "Cleon Skousen: Controversial Dean of Utah's Conservatives,"

Former BYU president Wilkinson gave the invocation before Benson spoke at this dedicatory service of the Freemen Institute on 18 September 1976. As previously discussed, Skousen, Wilkinson, and Benson had been allied as advocates of the Birch Society for more than a decade. Now, for the first time, all three participated at an ultra-conservative political meeting also attended by the secretary to the LDS church president. The evident news black-out of this meeting in all the regular newspapers of Provo, Salt Lake City, and Ogden, Utah, apparently resulted from the fact that newspaper reporters were excluded from this dedicatory service of the Freemen Institute. Even the Mormon-Birch *Utah Independent* reported only Benson's attendance at the dedicatory service.[294]

D. Arthur Haycock, President Kimball's secretary, specifically linked the Birch Society with this ceremony at the Freemen Institute in September 1976. After Wilkinson gave the prayer at the Freemen dedication, Haycock confided to him on this day that "nearly all of them [the general authorities] believed in the concepts of the John Birch Society." That may have been an overstatement, but more importantly it showed that the Birch Society and Benson in particular had a partisan friend in the First Presidency's office. Haycock had been private secretary to Benson as Secretary of Agriculture and was a confidant and significant influence on President Kimball.[295]

Deseret News Utah Magazine, 9 Mar. 1986, 4; "Commission Stops Selling Skousen Text," *Deseret News*, 6 Feb. 1987, B-2; "Skousen's Flock Spreading the Word on Constitution," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 Apr. 1987, B-2; "Skousen Isn't About to Break His Ties to Rev. Moon," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Apr. 1987, B-1; "Skousen Stepping Down as President of Institute," *Deseret News*, 17 Sept. 1989, B-3; "Skousen Retires From Constitutional Studies Center," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 Sept. 1989, B-8; *Encyclopedia of Associations*, 27th ed. (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1993), s.v. National Center for Constitutional Studies (#14805); also Freemen Institute papers, Western Americana, Marriott Library.

294. Wilkinson diary, 18 Sept. 1976; "Pres. Ezra Taft Benson Speaks At Freeman Institute," *Utah Independent*, 23 Sept. 1976, 5. There was no advance notice or news report of this Freeman Institute dedicatory service in the *Deseret News* (17-20 Sept. 1976), or in the *Provo Daily Herald* (17-19 Sept. 1976), even though the meeting was held in Provo.

"Benson Chides Fiscal Policies," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 Sept. 1976, B-2, and "Benson Calls For Sounder Fiscal Policy," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 19 Sept. 1976, A-10, referred only to "the opening of a private political research organization in Provo," failed to identify the Freeman Institute by name, to give the significance of the meeting to the organization, or to mention the presence of W. Cleon Skousen, Ernest L. Wilkinson, and D. Arthur Haycock. Since the reports of Benson's talk in the *Tribune* and *Standard-Examiner* were identical, they were obviously press releases. Benson's office, rather than the Freeman Institute, probably provided the media with the press releases in order to avoid identifying the meeting as a Freeman Institute gathering. This avoidance of publicity was not typical of Skousen, the Freemen Institute, or Benson.

295. Wilkinson diary, 18 Sept. 1976; also D. Arthur Haycock's identical statement in his interview with me, 3 Aug. 1979; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 262; Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The*

However, Kimball demonstrated that he was not always willing to turn a blind eye toward the ultra-conservative activism of senior apostle Benson and his Mormon allies. Undoubtedly, Kimball's opposition was behind Benson's non-acceptance of the U.S. presidential nomination from the Concerned Citizens Party in 1976. Involving former members of the American Party (which Benson had publicly endorsed) and LDS members of the Birch Society, the "Concerned Citizens party will be dedicated to individual rights under the Constitution," and proposed to bring God "back into government."[296] Also Benson declined as "impractical and impossible" efforts by "a resurrected 1976 Committee" for him as vice-presidential candidate with former Texas governor John B. Connally as candidate for U.S. president.[297]

The last known instance of "espionage" at BYU and its apparent promotion by Ezra Taft Benson as an apostle occurred in 1977. Some students in Brigham Young University's Washington, D.C., seminar were recruited to "spy" on professors there. One of the student reports of faculty surveillance intended for Ezra Taft Benson's office instead ended up on the desk of Mark E. Petersen. After being informed of this "spy ring" by Apostle Petersen, BYU's president Dallin H. Oaks angrily referred to "that Birch Mafia that surrounds ETB." Apostle Benson had put William O. Nelson in charge of this most recent effort at BYU espionage.[298] Nelson was Benson's secretary in the Church Administration Building.[299]

President Kimball resolved this "spy scandal" with a decisiveness lacking in the more famous episode of 1966. He made the following statement to the school's Board of Trustees in December 1977: "We understand that a member or members of the Board directly, or through others, have sought evidence about alleged statements made by faculty members in courses taught on the BYU campus and have stated or implied that such evidence is to be used by a Church official in a so-called 'hearing.'" The church president's blunt statement concluded with a clear

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Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball . . . (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), xvii; Jack Walsh, "D. Arthur Haycock: Aide to Four Prophets," *Ensign* 14 (Aug. 1984): 22-27; Dell Van Orden and Gerry Avant, "Secretary to Five Prophets Called As Temple President," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 19 Jan. 1986, 6, 11; my interview on 5 Sept. 1992 with Rodney P. Foster, assistant secretary in the First Presidency's Office from 1974 to 1981.

296. "Party Qualifies For Utah Ballot," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 Mar. 1976, B-5; "LDS Official Says 'No' to Politics," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 25 Mar. 1976, B-4, and "Party Clarifies Stand on Benson Selection," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Mar 1976, 38.

297. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 446.

298. Duane E. Jeffery memorandum, 26 Oct. 1977, folder 28, box 6, Buerger Papers.

299. "LDS Official Acknowledges Church Monitors Critics," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Aug. 1992, D-1; "LDS Leaders Say Scripture Supports Secret Files on Members," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 Aug. 1992, B-1.

disapproval of such "surveillance of BYU employees."[300] Although he did not name senior apostle Benson as the BYU trustee who instigated this unauthorized BYU "surveillance," it was consistent with similar espionage attempts involving Benson for the previous seventeen years.

Barely a year later Kimball and his counselors found it necessary to counter the now-familiar pattern of Mormon ultra-conservatives to imply church endorsement. In February 1979 the First Presidency published a statement against "announcements [that] have been made in Church meetings of lectures to be given by those connected with the Freemen Institute."[301]

After another series of political talks, Benson was sufficiently confident to authorize the Birch Society to publish one of his talks in its February 1980 magazine.[302] At a meeting of the Freemen Institute on 23 February Benson next gave a major address.[303] Then at BYU three days later he delivered a "devotional talk" which proclaimed the right of the LDS prophet to speak and act politically. The First Presidency immediately issued a statement that Benson was misquoted. However, it was difficult to finesse his words for the capacity BYU audience in the 25,000-seat Marriott Center or for the thousands of other Utahns who listened to the broadcast on radio and television of Benson's "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets." To most observers, Benson's 1980 talk at BYU was a defiant announcement of his own future intentions as church president.[304]

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300. Minutes of Combined Boards of Trustees, 7 Dec. 1977, archives, Lee Library, photocopy in my possession; Bergera and Priddis, *Brigham Young University*, 223.

301. Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney to All Stake Presidents, Bishops, and Branch Presidents in the United States, 15 Feb. 1979, photocopy in folder 25, box 17, Buerger Papers.

302. "Free Enterprise Endangered, President Benson Warns," *Deseret News*, 17 May 1977, B-3; "Benson Hails Free Enterprise in 'Hill Cumorah Address,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 13 July 1977, A-9; "LDS Leader Offers Interpretation of Church and State Separation," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 25 July 1977, 19; "Socialism Growth in US Rapped by LDS Leader," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 25 Sept. 1977, A-24; "Pres. Benson Defends Free Market," *Deseret News*, 10 Dec. 1977, A-9; "Nation 'Spending Into Oblivion,' Pres. Benson Warns at LDS Meet," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 26 Mar. 1979, D-2; "Benson Rakes U.S. 'Subversives,'" *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 4 July 1979, A-14; Ezra Taft Benson, "A Warning to America," address to the California Constitutional Crusade, 9 Oct. 1979, transcript in folder 23, box 5, Buerger Papers; "LDS Official Decries Spread of Marxism," *Deseret News*, 27 Oct. 1979, A-7; "Apostle Calls For Return to Gold Standard," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 20 Jan. 1980, A-12; Ezra Taft Benson, "A Moral Challenge," in John Birch Society's *American Opinion* 23 (Feb. 1980): 41-54.

303. "Benson Urges Monetary Step: Re-Establish Metal Standard," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 25 Feb. 1980, B-2; "Gathering of Freemen Institute Draws Crowd to Arizona Resort," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 25 Feb. 1980, A-12.

304. Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals In Following the Prophets," transcript of his talk to BYU's devotional, 26 Feb. 1980, folder 24, box 5, Buerger Papers; *Devotional Speeches*

Predictably, the First Presidency was critical of Benson's 1980 BYU talk. On 5 March the presidency issued a statement that "we reaffirm that we take no partisan stand as to candidates or political parties, and exercise no constraint on the freedom of individuals to make their own choices in these matters."[305] However, the church's official spokesperson claimed that "there is no connection between this [First Presidency] letter and a speech by Apostle Ezra Taft Benson to Brigham Young University" a few days before.[306] Those connected with LDS church headquarters knew otherwise.

Kimball's son affirms that President Kimball bore no ill feeling toward his longtime associate but "was concerned about Elder Benson's February 1980 talk at BYU." The church president wanted "to protect the Church against being misunderstood as espousing ultraconservative politics, or—in this case—espousing an unthinking 'follow the leader' mentality."[307] A general authority revealed that Kimball asked Benson to apologize to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who "were dissatisfied with his response." Therefore, Kimball required him to explain himself to a combined meeting of all general authorities the following week.[308]

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of the Year (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1981); "Prophet's Word 'Law' Benson Tells Group," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 26 Feb. 1980, A-2; "Benson Backs Prophet on Politics," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 Feb. 1980, B-3; "Mormon Leader's Word Is Law—Benson," *San Jose Mercury News*, 27 Feb. 1980, A-2; "Interpretation of Speech Not Correct, Church Says," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 27 Feb. 1980, C-1; "Mormon Professor Says Benson Speech Was Plea Anticipating Rise to LDS Presidency," *Idaho State Journal*, 28 Feb. 1980, A-2; "U. Teacher Replies To Benson" and "Savant Hits 'Theocracy' He Says Benson Wants," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 28 Feb. 1980, B-1, B-3; "Pres. Benson Outlines Way to Follow Prophet," *Deseret News "Church News,"* 1 Mar. 1980, 14; "No. 2 Mormon Says Leader's Word is Law," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Mar. 1980, Pt. I, 35; "Benson Speech Stirs Speculation on LDS Changes," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*, 2 Mar. 1980, A-1, A-5; Sterling M. McMurrin, "Case for Vigilance," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 Mar. 1980, A-9; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 468-69.

305. First Presidency statement, 5 Mar. 1980, *Deseret News "Church News,"* 8 Mar. 1980, 3; "Church Policies and Announcements," *Ensign* 10 (Aug. 1980): 79.

306. *Salt Lake Tribune*, 9 Mar. 1980, C-31.

307. Edward L. Kimball to D. Michael Quinn, 14 Aug., 20 Aug. 1992, concerning discussions with his father in 1980. In 1980 President Kimball's wife Camilla also described "his displeasure with the speech" to her brother-in-law George T. Boyd. Boyd to D. Michael Quinn, 24 Sept. 1992.

308. In 1980 a general authority reported to George T. Boyd the apologies which Kimball required of Benson. Boyd's letter to me, 24 Sept. 1992, requested that I not identify the general authority for publication. Boyd (an in-law of Spencer and Camilla Kimball) also reported this conversation to BYU professor Duane Jeffery early in 1980. Telephone interview of Jeffery in David John Buerger diary, 14 Aug. 1980, folder 4, box 1, Buerger Papers. These reproofs were also reported in "What Mormons Believe," *Newsweek* 96 (1 Sept. 1980): 71, in "Thus Saith Ezra Benson," *Newsweek* 98 (19 Oct. 1981): 109; in Allen interview (with Henry D. Taylor as a general authority source different from the above), 3 May 1984, by Alison Bethke Gayek; and in my interview on 5 Sept. 1992 with Rodney P.

The entire Benson family felt anxious about the outcome of this 1980 meeting. They apparently feared the possibility of a formal rebuke before all the general authorities. Benson's son Mark (a Bircher and the Freemen Institute's "Vice President in Charge of Development") wrote him a note that morning: "All will be well—we're praying for you and *know* all will be well. The Lord knows your heart." The meeting went well for Benson who "explained that he had meant only to reaffirm the divine nature of the prophetic call." Ezra's biographer indicates that the most effusively supportive general authority in attendance was Apostle Boyd K. Packer: "How I admire, respect and love you. How could anyone hesitate to follow a leader, an example such as you? What a privilege!"[309] A few months later, Benson wrote to his "Dear Friends" on the Birch Society staff.[310]

President Ezra Taft Benson

By the time Ezra Taft Benson himself became church president in 1985, he no longer acted as a standard-bearer of the anti-Communist movement. After all, at eighty-six, Benson was the second oldest man to become LDS church president and already suffered dizzy spells, memory loss, and difficulty in public speaking.[311] Besides, the widespread paranoia and political passion of the 1950s and 1960s had died. Although still active in promoting anti-Communism in the 1980s, the John Birch Society now seemed irrelevant.[312] In 1989 the Utah leader of the Birch Society reported 700 dues-paying members.[313]

Benson's ascension occurred in the middle of America's conservative "Reagan Revolution." The church president saw this as a personal vindication.[314] The former publisher of *American Opinion* and director of public

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Foster, assistant secretary in the First Presidency's Office from 1974 to 1981.

309. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 469. For Mark Benson's position in 1980, see "Mark Benson Becomes Our New Vice President in Charge of Development," *Behind the Scenes* (Jan. 1980): [4].

310. Benson to "John Birch Society Staff," 30 May 1980, archives, Birch Society, with photocopy in my possession. This was in response to a get-well card with messages from each Birch staff member.

311. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 486-87.

312. "John Birch: Beware the One-Worlders," *Newsweek* 99 (15 Mar. 1982): 17; "The Lonely McCarthyites," *Newsweek* 103 (28 May 1984): 11; "The Birchers After Welch," *Newsweek* 105 (21 Jan. 1985): 38; "Robert Welch, RIP," *National Review* 37 (8 Feb. 1985): 20; "Once a Red, Always a Red: For Birchers, No Peace," *Newsweek* 116 (17 Sept. 1990): 36.

313. "John Birch Society Is Out of Spotlight, But It's Still Alive and Well in Utah," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 July 1989, B-10. The BYU library continues to receive copies of *The John Birch Society Bulletin* and its new magazine, *The New American*.

314. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 469-70. For the national context of the 1980s, see Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

relations for the Birch Society had already been appointed as one of U.S. president Ronald Reagan's special assistants.[315] Non-Mormon journalists astutely noted: "In the past [Ezra Taft] Benson's heavy-handed political maneuvering has antagonized numerous members of the [LDS] church, leading to fears of a major schism if he became president."[316] When he ascended to that office in November 1985, church officials insisted that Benson's political activism was "in the past."[317] Four months later, the *Salt Lake Tribune* noted that "President Benson's Fiery Conservatism Remains Quiet."[318]

Nevertheless, the Birch Society's new magazine immediately heralded the appointment of "the long-time Americanist patriot" as the new LDS president. "As in numerous past attempts to smear him and distract from his anti-Communist message, recent news articles have linked [Ezra Taft] Benson to The John Birch Society," the magazine noted two weeks later in its regular "American Hero" section. The Birch magazine then mentioned Reed Benson's affiliation and quoted President Benson: "I do not belong to The John Birch Society, but I have always defended this group."[319] The new

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1984); David G. Green, *The New Conservatism: The Counter-Revolution in Political, Economic, and Social Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Gary Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents At Home* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987); Sidney Blumenthal, *Our Long National Daydream: A Political Pageant of the Reagan Era* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right: Conservative Protestant Politics in America, 1978-1988* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Martin Anderson, *Revolution: The Reagan Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, Stanford University, 1990); Haynes Johnson, *Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

315. John H. Rousselot in *American Opinion* 7 (July-Aug. 1964): inside front cover, 10 (July-Aug. 1967): inside front cover; "Reagan's New Lobbyists to Business," *Fortune* 107 (30 May 1983): 36; Anderson, "Church and Birch In Utah," 21.

316. Bob Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, "Mormons to the Right," *San Jose Mercury News*, 1 Dec. 1985, 9; also "Possibility of Benson Heading Mormons Worries Some With Different Views," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Apr. 1976, Pt. I, 32; "Mormon Church Faces A Fresh Challenge . . . But Now, A Change of Leaders May Bring A Split In Its Ranks," *U.S. News & World Report* 95 (21 Nov. 1983): 61; "Conservative Seeking Leadership Worries Some Mormons," *Baltimore Sun*, 11 Dec. 1983, A-3; Gottlieb and Wiley, *America's Saints*, 247, 257; "Mormon Church Council Meets To Pick New Leader," *Dallas Morning News*, 11 Nov. 1985, A-4.

317. "New Chief of Mormons: Ezra Taft Benson," *New York Times*, 19 Nov. 1985, A-16; also Robert Lindsey, "The Mormons: Growth, Prosperity and Controversy," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 Jan. 1986, 46.

318. "President Benson's Fiery Conservatism Remains Quiet," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 Mar. 1986, B-2; "President Benson's First Year: Leader Stresses God, Not Politics," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 Oct. 1986, A-7.

319. "New Head of Mormon Church," *The New American* 1 (25 Nov. 1985): 9; Evans-Raymond Pierre, "The True Man of Principle: Ezra Taft Benson," *The New American* 1 (9 Dec. 1985): 56.

church president's son Mark A. Benson was still on the board of the Utah Birch spin-off, National Center for Constitutional Studies, and remained in that position through December 1986.[320]

Many faithful Latter-day Saints had disagreed with Apostle Benson's advocacy of the Birch Society for three decades, and some had openly opposed his political activism. Benson himself had publicly announced how one could disagree with one's supreme file leader and still loyally sustain such a leader. "The American people can respect their President, pray for their President, even have a strong affection for him, and still have an honest difference of opinion as to the merits of some of his programs," Benson once preached.[321] Politically that was certainly Benson's relationship with LDS presidents Joseph Fielding Smith and Harold B. Lee, who had both criticized his advocacy of the Birch Society and restrained his partisan activities during their administrations. In addition, during the McKay presidency Benson had even publicly dissented from the "program" of his file leaders in the Quorum of the Twelve.

Most important for the hierarchy, however, during the 1980s-90s there were no political liberals for Benson as church president to combat in the First Presidency or Quorum of Twelve. The hierarchy had learned a lesson from the public controversy about Brown and Benson. If you appoint a political liberal as an apostle, you invite conflict within the politically conservative hierarchy, especially if it contains a firebrand like Benson. Therefore, following the appointment of N. Eldon Tanner as apostle in 1962, moderate church presidents McKay, Smith, Lee, and Kimball appointed no more political liberals to the Quorum of the Twelve. The only Democratic apostles, Boyd K. Packer and James E. Faust, were not known as liberals.[322] In addition, Benson's appointments to the Quorum of the Twelve, Joseph B. Wirthlin and Richard G. Scott, lacked any background in ultra-conservative politics. His counselors Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson were political moderates.[323]

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320. *The Constitution: The Voice of the National Center for Constitutional Studies*, Nov. 1985, 4, Dec. 1986, 3.

321. Benson, "An Internal Threat Today" (paid advertisement by Concerned Citizens and Treasure Valley Freedom Forum), *Idaho Statesman*, 19 Jan. 1964, B-7, 11th para.; also typescript of the address to the Treasure Valley Freedom Forum, Boise, Idaho, 19 Dec. 1963, transcript, 2, Moss Papers.

322. Conversation in 1980 with Wayne Owens, recently returned LDS mission president, Democratic leader, and former U.S. congressman from Utah. Packer became an apostle in 1970, Faust in 1978.

323. *Deseret News 1993-1994 Church Almanac*, 15, 19; "Benson Heads Mormons, Enlists 2 Key Moderates," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Nov. 1985, Pt. I, 6; my interviews on 29-30 Aug. 1992 with Alan Blodgett, managing director of the LDS church financial department from 1969 to 1980 and managing director of the investment department from 1980 to 1985; my

One political loss Benson experienced during the Reagan years was federal adoption of Martin Luther King Day as a national holiday. In the 1960s Benson had identified King as a Communist.[324] After Reagan signed the law for King Day, Cleon Skousen's Freemen Institute observed that this national holiday honored "a man who courted violence and nightriding and broke the law to achieve his purposes; who found it expedient openly to collaborate with totalitarian Communism; and, whose personal life was so revolting that it cannot be discussed."[325] In deference to such views, conservative members of the Utah legislature in 1986 refused to allow the state to call this national holiday by King's name.[326] Although it is a state institution, the University of Utah's next academic *Catalog* officially called the holiday by Martin Luther King's name. By contrast, BYU called the holiday "Human Rights Day" until the fall of 1988.[327]

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interview on 2 Nov. 1992 with Lowell M. Durham, Jr., who was vice-president (and then president) of Zion's Co-operative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) from 1982 to 1990.

324. "Benson Ties Rights Issue to Reds in Mormon Rift," *Washington Post*, 19 May 1963, E-1, E-7. Benson told BYU students that the American civil rights movement was "Communist inspired" and that its unnamed leader was a Communist sympathizer, if not an actual Communist. The publication of this talk identified King in the index as this Communist civil rights leader. See Benson, *An Enemy Hath Done This*, ed. Jerreld L. Newquist (Salt Lake City: Parliament Publishers, 1969), 310, 361. See also discussion above of Benson's response to King's assassination.

325. Willard Woods, "Martin Luther King Day," *Freemen Digest*, Jan. 1984, 23; also Skousen and R. Stephen Pratt emphasized King's association with Marxists and Communists in their two articles, "The Early Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.," and "Reverend King's Ministry: Thirteen Years of Crisis," *Freemen Digest*, Jan. 1984, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20. Aside from guilt-by-association, the concluding sentence of Skousen's and Pratt's first article (14) was guilt-by-similar-interest: "As the King program got under way, Gus Hall, head of the Communist party USA, declared: 'For us, by far the most significant development is the escalation of mass protest movements by the American people.'"

In his telephone conversation with me on 15 January 1993, D. Arthur Haycock brought up Martin Luther King day as an example of false historical perspective. He stated that the nation had chosen to dishonor two admirable presidents—Washington and Lincoln—by eliminating their holidays and by substituting in their place a holiday for "a man who had sex with three different women the day he died." See previous text discussion for the pro-Birch statement of Haycock while he was secretary to the LDS church president.

326. The state of Utah uses the name "Human Rights Day" instead of Martin Luther King Day. For the difficult passage and renaming of Martin Luther King day in Utah, see *Deseret News*, 14 Oct. 1985, A-2, 13 Feb. 1986, A-1; *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 Feb. 1986, A-1, 28 Feb. 1986, A-5, 18 Mar. 1986, B-1. For the Utah legislature's continued disrespect toward the national King holiday, see "Martin Luther King Holiday or Not, Utah Lawmakers Convene Today," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 Jan. 1993, B-1; also companion article "Utah's Mix of Church and State: Theocratic or Just Homogenized?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 Jan. 1993, B-2.

327. *Bulletin of the University of Utah: General Catalog, 1987-88* (Salt Lake City, 1987), 4; *Brigham Young University Bulletin: General Catalog, 1987-1988* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1987), 18, listed it as "Human Rights Day"; *1988-1989 General Catalogue: Brigham Young University Bulletin* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1988), ix, listed

Like the Birch Society itself,[328] church president Benson continued to preach a conspiratorial view of American society into the late 1980s. "A secret combination that seeks to overthrow the freedom of all lands, nations, and countries is increasing its evil influence and control over America and the entire world," Benson told October 1988 general conference.[329]

In view of his preoccupation with conspiracies, it is probably not surprising that President Benson's administration encouraged a special church committee to monitor and maintain surveillance files on academics, intellectuals, and others assumed to be critics of the church. William O. Nelson, a veteran of Benson's abortive 1977 BYU spy ring, became the executive secretary of this "Strengthening the Members Committee."[330] A man who served as assistant secretary in the First Presidency's office from 1974 to 1981 had never heard of this committee's existence during the Kimball presidency.[331]

In June 1989 the Birch Society held a dinner and meeting of its national council in Salt Lake City but without the controversy of two decades earlier. It was a sign of the times that the *Salt Lake Tribune* barely mentioned the Birch council meeting, the first of its kind in Utah. However, it published a long article titled, "Are We Hearing Death Rattle of Communism?"[332]

Two months later Republican U.S. president George Bush awarded

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it as "Martin Luther King's Birthday holiday."

328. For example, Thomas R. Eddlem, "Bolshevism With a New Name," *The New American* 6 (3 Dec. 1990): 22, said that newly non-Communist Czechoslavakia's president Vaclav Havel, formerly imprisoned as a dissident by the Communist regime there, was actually "a key actor in one of the greatest deceptions of all time."

329. Benson, "I Testify," *Ensign* 18 (Nov. 1988): 87.

330. "LDS Official Acknowledges Church Monitors Critics," *Salt Lake Tribune* (8 Aug. 1992): D-1; "LDS Leaders Say Scripture Supports Secret Files on Members," *Salt Lake Tribune* (14 Aug. 1992): B-1; "Secret Files," *New York Times* (22 Aug. 1992): 9. Previously, maintaining such files on church members were usually *ad hoc* activities of the First Presidency's office, Presiding Bishopric Office, Mark E. Petersen's special committee, Correlation Committee, the Special Affairs Committee, and Ezra Taft Benson's office. Only the Church Security Department has had an on-going responsibility to maintain information files on "disloyal" or "potentially dangerous" Mormons and to conduct physical and photographic surveillance. Such intelligence gathering is conducted through what Church Security calls its "Confidential Services."

331. My interview on 5-6 September 1992 with Rodney P. Foster, assistant secretary in the First Presidency's office from 1974 to 1981, and member of the Temple Department at LDS headquarters from 1981 to 1989. For Benson's promotion of "espionage" at BYU, see discussion above of 1960, 1965, 1966, 1969, 1977.

332. *The John Birch Society Bulletin*, May 1989, 30; "Birch Dinner in S.L.," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 June 1989, E-5; "Are We Hearing Death Rattle of Communism?" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 18 June 1989, A-3.

the Presidential Citizens Medal to Benson. This was another personal vindication of Benson's decades of political activism.[333] Benson was the first man who became LDS president after decades of polarizing Mormons with public controversy.[334] Mormon members of the Birch Society also felt personal vindication in Benson's advancement as church president in 1985.

Conclusion

In 1991 Utah membership of the John Birch Society mushroomed as a result of U.S. president George Bush's proclaiming U.S. participation in a "New World Order." As part of the United Nations successful Gulf War, President Bush adopted a phrase used by ultra-conservatives for decades to identify the "collectivist" goal of the international conspiracy. By May 1991, Utah had 1,000 members of the Birch Society, an increase of nearly 50 percent from two years earlier.[335] In 1990 apocalyptic-minded Mormon members of the Birch Society had also organized "the American Study Group" which grew to 1,400 members within two months.[336]

This revitalization of Mormon Birchers occurred while their presidential advocate was slipping deeper into the decay of old age. President Benson was physically unable to speak at general conference from April 1990 on. At his last public appearances in 1992 he was a frail shell of the

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333. *Deseret News 1991-1992 Church Almanac (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1990)*, 315. This information was omitted from the *1993-1994 Church Almanac*, 370.

334. Some might cite Brigham Young, Heber J. Grant, or Joseph Fielding Smith as examples. Young's unpopularity and divisiveness began with his ascendance to the church presidency in August 1844, not while he was an apostle for nine years. As an apostle, Grant was unpopular with many Mormons on a personal level because of his business activities and emphasis, but he did not polarize Mormons while he was an apostle. As church president, however, Grant did polarize Mormons. This was manifested by the wholesale disregard by Mormons for Grant's political pronouncements, even on "moral issues" like Prohibition. The other likely candidate, Joseph Fielding Smith, was unpopular with some Mormons because of his well-known theological dogmatism for fifty years before his church presidency in 1970. However, there was only a quiet tension within the modern LDS church about Smith compared to the decades of widespread public controversy about Benson.

335. John F. McManus, "'A New World Order' Means World Government," *The John Birch Society Bulletin* (Nov. 1990): 3-14; "Birch Society Lauds 'Fertile Soil' In Utah," *Deseret News*, 13 May 1991, B-2; "Utah's Birchers Organizing To Fight Bush 'Conspiracy,'" *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 May 1991, B-1; "John Birch Society Skeptical of Communist Party Demise," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Sept. 1991, B-1; "'John Bircher' Recruits Join Fight Against New World Order," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 21 June 1992, B-1.

336. "Longtime Doomsayer Seeks 'Safety' Back in LDS Fold," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 24 Jan. 1993, B-6; also reference to the American Study Group in Malcolm S. Jeppsen, "We Shall Not Be Led Astray," 8, computer print-out, 25 Oct. 1992, photocopy in my possession.

strident partisan whom Mormons had known for decades.[337]

By the fall of 1992 Mormon advocates of Ezra Taft Benson's ultra-conservativism found themselves in a religious quandary. LDS church officers were suspicious of "those obsessed with the early speeches of LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson and who believe the ailing, 93-year-old leader has been silenced because his opinions no longer are politically popular." Such ultra-conservative Mormons were being excommunicated or disciplined in Utah and surrounding states. One of them protested, "We support President Benson 100%," but "there are some brethren who speak 180 degrees against him."[338] Such anti-Benson influence had characterized the Mormon hierarchy in the 1960s, but the scales had tipped in a dramatic way by 1992. Based on the instructions of a general authority in October 1992, stake presidents prepared a list of twenty warning signs of apostasy. Third on this list was "John Birch membership or leanings."[339]

Such an indictment against the Birch Society was not possible even while anti-Birch men like Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Harold B. Lee served in the First Presidency. During those years, Apostle Benson was embattled within the Mormon hierarchy, but his influence was too powerful to allow a linkage of Birchism with apostasy. This 1992 "Profile of . . . Troublesome Ideologies" was the ultimate evidence that the incapacitated Ezra Taft Benson had ceased to be the administrative leader of the LDS church.[340]

By Gordon B. Hinckley's own admission at October 1992 conference, the presidency counselors had taken over the helm of the LDS church. He denied that "the Church faces a crisis," just because he and Counselor Thomas S. Monson were the "backup system" for the incapacitated President Benson.[341]

However, their caretaker presidency represented a crisis for many

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337. *Ensign* 20 (May 1990): 1, 20 (Nov. 1990): 1, 21 (May 1991): 1, 21 (Nov. 1991): 1, 22 (May 1992): 1, 22 (Nov. 1992): 1; photographs in "LDS Historian Says Benson's Right-Wing Beliefs Caused Infighting, Church To Censure Speeches," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Aug. 1992, A-7, and in "Age Taking Its Toll On President Benson," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 Jan. 1993, C-1.

338. "It's Judgment Day for Far Right: LDS Church Purges Survivalists," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Nov. 1992, A-1, A-2. In "LDS Deny Mass Ouster of Radicals," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 Dec. 1992, 1, an official LDS spokesman denied only the estimate of "hundreds" of excommunications. See also "LDS Church Downplays Reports On Discipline," *Deseret News*, 4 Dec. 1992, B-1.

339. "Profile of the Splinter Group Members or Others with Troublesome Ideologies," photocopy in my possession. This list was based on instructions to stake presidents by Second Quorum of Seventy member Malcolm S. Jeppsen in his "We Shall Not Be Led Astray," especially on page 8 of his computer print-out, 25 Oct. 1992.

340. Also statements of Jack Lewis and D. Michael Quinn in KUER's broadcast of "All Things Considered," by National Public Radio, 4 Dec. 1992.

341. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Church Is On Course," *Ensign* 22 (Nov. 1992): 53.

Mormon ultra-conservatives. Hinckley and Monson were philosophical heirs of President Harold B. Lee's conviction (expressed in 1970) that Mormon ultra-conservatives have schismatic tendencies because of their willingness to brand anti-Birch general authorities as "Judases."[342] The LDS church's "purge" of ultra-conservatives was an ironic thirty-year anniversary of Reed Benson's appointment and Ezra Taft Benson's first public endorsement of the John Birch Society in October 1962.

The perspective of James "Bo" Gritz, a Mormon, on this point is crucial. As the ultra-conservative presidential candidate in the national election of 1992, most of the support for Gritz was in the "Mormon Culture Region"[343] centering on the state of Utah which alone gave him 28,000 votes.[344] Concerning recent pressures against Mormon ultra-conservatives, Gritz observes: "The critics I'm talking about are not little people but church authorities [who] have said what Ezra Taft Benson says before he was a prophet doesn't count."[345]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Mormon hierarchy wanted ultra-conservative Mormons to ignore what Apostle Benson was saying. They did not. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the Mormon hierarchy wanted ultra-conservative Mormons to forget what Ezra Taft Benson had said before he became LDS church president. They would not. One day the LDS church hierarchy will demand that Mormon ultra-conservatives abandon what their dead apostle-hero-prophet said about politics, Communism, and conspiracy. They never will.[346]

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342. See discussion above of the remarks by a BYU religion professor against second counselor Hugh B. Brown in November 1962, the identical allusion by Ezra Taft Benson on the day Brown was sustained as first counselor in October 1963, a similar assessment of Apostle Mark E. Petersen by Mormon Birchers in March 1966, and the ultra-conservative proposal in April 1970 to reject Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and N. Eldon Tanner as the First Presidency. For Hinckley and Monson as proteges of Harold B. Lee, see Gottlieb and Wiley, *America's Saints*, 59, 61.

343. For this term, see Wilbur Zelinsky, "An Approach to the Religious Geography of the United States: Patterns of Church Membership in 1952," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 51 (June 1961): 163-64, 193; D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Cultural Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (1965): 191-220; Samuel S. Hill, "Religion and Region in America," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 480 (July 1985): 137; D. Michael Quinn, "Religion in the American West," in William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, eds., *Under An Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1992), 146, 160.

344. "Hero-Turned Heretic? Gritz May Be Leading LDS Flock Into Wilderness," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 29 Nov. 1992, A-2.

345. "Ultraconservative Gritz Remains as Bold as Ever," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 7 Dec. 1992, B-2; also "LDS Zealots Muzzling Outspoken to Protect Tax Status, Gritz Says," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1993, B-1.

346. In his letter to the editor, "Stand Fast For Freedom," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 Dec.

For more than two decades as an apostle, Ezra Taft Benson testified in the name of the Lord—and with the tacit if not always informed approval of David O. McKay—in support of the political views of the John Birch Society. He expressed this as his apostolic testimony. Also, while addressing various congregations of Mormons, Apostle Benson specifically praised Birch publications and endorsed membership in the Birch Society. He clearly defined all of this as his personal mission from God. On the other hand, Benson's opponents in the Mormon hierarchy defined his support of the Birch Society and of ultra-conservatism as personal opinion at best and as misguided at worst. For rank-and-file Mormons who supported his views, God resolved this controversy by making Ezra Taft Benson the church's prophet and president. Within the context of LDS faith and priesthood, it is difficult to argue with that logic. After all, the First Presidency never publicly repudiated Ezra Taft Benson while he was an apostle, and instead permitted the Deseret Book Company, *Church News*, and official conference reports to print most of the partisan views he expressed.

Despite their disssent, the politically moderate general authorities allowed Ezra Taft Benson to become an enduring hero of ultra-conservatives. It now seems uncharitable for the LDS hierarchy to punish Mormon "true believers" for emulating this apostle's thirty years of rejecting political moderation.[347]

1992, A-13, Ken Noorlander explained that "certainly we must not hold invalid the teachings of President Ezra Taft Benson, even if they were made a few decades ago. . . . President Benson's admonitions and warnings are as valid today as when they were given. It matters not whether they are politically correct or religiously controversial.

"Though we as individuals may be titled as 'fringe radicals,' 'ultra-conservatives,' 'super patriots' and 'freemen,' we should not be overly concerned. When has the truth ever been the popular thing to believe?"

347. "Mormon Church Has Begun To Expel Many Extremists," *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 1992, 10. For my use of the term, see Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).