

worldview

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GOBLINS ON THE POLITICAL SCENE

In one of his novels, E. M. Forster offers an imaginative interpretation of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. We hear, distantly at first but ever nearer and with gradual recognition, the sound of goblins walking across the face of the world. There is a sudden joyous gust and they are swept away. But once again they appear, reassert themselves, and stride across the world as if they possessed it utterly. And once again they are swept back. The ending is joyful, but we are left with the knowledge that the goblins have been here—and that they can return.

Whatever its merits as applied to the symphony, this description provides a useful analogue for our national political scene, across which various goblins have walked in recent decades. This issue of *Worldview* is concerned with some of these goblins, the extremists within our society. While they may make their entrance on the political stage from either side, most recently they have issued from the Right wing. McCarthyism remains, of course, the most serious and disturbing of these manifestations. But it has now been succeeded by the John Birch Society and its counterparts, and the late Senator has been followed by such lesser lights as Robert Welch and that sad man General Edwin Walker. In a full-scale discussion distinctions would be in order, but it would remain true that what divides these people is less important than what unites them.

What these movements and these men have in common is not only their declared opposition to communism—which they share with millions of other Americans—but their ability to see conspiracy and treason wherever they direct their attention—an ability which most other Americans, fortunately, do not share.

It is tempting to dismiss the ultra-Rightists now attracting attention as apolitical people who are projecting personal problems into public affairs, to point out that none of them has the position and force of successful demagogues of the

past, and to emphasize their apparent decline and anticipated collapse. But this is a temptation to which we must not yield. To borrow a phrase that Bishop Edward Swannstrom applied to Catholics of the radical Right, these people share an outlook which is a "national disease." Given a particular national crisis or a setback in international affairs, it may flare up and prove as virulent as McCarthyism, a disruption which shook the highest offices in the land. If it would be a mistake to regard the extremists on the Right as a united, well-trained cadre, it would be equally foolish not to recognize them as symptoms of a condition that could get dangerously worse.

The political climate which is ours today is likely to be ours for some time to come. Communism is a danger whose end we cannot soon foresee. The issues which, in a sense, called the radical Right into existence are issues we will be struggling with for years to come. What is demanded in such times is continued effort at the task of intellectual clarification—to say, for example, what communism is, what it threatens, and how it can best be opposed and countered.

Mr. Herman Reissig and Father John Cronin, two men who have spent years studying and combatting communism, have devoted themselves to just this task in pamphlets which are reviewed elsewhere in this issue. That these efforts will not always have a sympathetic reception, that they will encounter real opposition, is clear from the critical attitude of their reviewer. But at least the issues here are joined on grounds that invite reasonable discussion, where slogans and labels are revealed for the shoddy currency they are. If the extremists are to be prevented from attracting undue attention and energy to their foolish and dangerous antics, it is this kind of conversation—in which we invite our readers to participate—that must be encouraged.