

'I used to belong to Greenpeace, the Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Federation until I started studying what's happening.'

(club) Jeanne Soderman, Capitola
r Organization - 1990-1994 *3-30-95*

Birch Society rises again

By KATHY KREIGER
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Jeanne Soderman used to call herself an environmentalist.

Neal Alchalabi comes from the Libertarian persuasion and laughs as he says he's "sort of an environmental Nazi."

Mark Kaplan is big into the militia movement, and teaches his sons the Constitution.

All three found something to like Wednesday at the first meeting of the fledgling Santa Cruz chapter of the John Birch Society.

Founded in 1958 by wealthy candy maker Robert Welch, the group made a name for itself in the '60s as a group of ultra-patriots who saw Communists under every bed.

Today, the newly organized Santa Cruz chapter is evidence of the group's nationwide revival.

"For most of my life I thought they were kooks," said a Soquel doctor, one of the two dozen people at the meeting. He did not want his name used, he said, because of the stigma and because he's heard of other people getting rocks thrown through their windows. "Then I realized they were saying what I had been thinking."

Apparently he's not alone. Nationally, the group boosted its membership by 79 percent between 1993 and 1994, according to Dr. David Morris, the society's field representative for this part of California. He did not mention membership figures.

"People are looking for answers, for sure," said Morris, a low-key speaker who didn't hesitate to poke fun at the society's image. Passing around a sign-up sheet, he noted, "No one will see this, except people from Mars."

Soderman, a Capitola businesswoman who sells exercise equipment, is set to head Santa Cruz's new chapter of the group started by Welch to defend America's freedom from the so-called red menace of Communism.

"I used to belong to Greenpeace, the Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Federation until I started studying what's happening," she said. Now she believes those are manufactured situations. "What they're doing is creating crises. A hell game. We look one way,

they're doing something else the other way. I'm very concerned our freedoms are being taken away."

Even with Soviet-style Communism on the ropes, however, Birchers today are nowhere near ready to declare victory.

"The need for the John Birch Society is now greater than ever," said a video shown by the group Wednesday night.

Communism was only a trumped-up threat, said the video, and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall was actually a carefully crafted strategy to neutralize and disarm the West.

"The USSR was made in the USA," said the video. Americans were given to believe they had to choose between nuclear annihilation and Communist enslavement.

The point was to lead the court of public opinion to a third choice: one-world government.

And the authors of that strategy — the real enemy — are still hard at work, the Birchers say.

That would be the "100-year-old self-perpetuating conspiracy of megalomaniacs intent on becoming the rulers of the world," according to the video.

"There is a shadow government behind our so-called governments," Soderman said. "The insiders. You can call them Marxists, communists, socialists, but their ultimate goal is one-world socialist government."

Morris said there is a special urgency to the group's efforts. The conspirators know the Birch Society is on to them.

"Things are accelerating so fast," he said. Economic chaos, environmental regulation and social unrest are all part of the plan, he said. "... They're pushing for the year 2000."

The Society sees its role as educational, and it works primarily through newsletters, magazines, videos and one-to-one outreach. It sees the U.S. House of Representatives as critical, because of that group's ability to raise and spend money.

"We need to strip our enemy of tax dollars," said the video.

The Society tracks the voting records of congress members and targets for defeat those who vote

Please **BIRCH** — BACK PAGE

0 — Thursday, March 30, 1995 — Sentinel

Birch Society

Continued from Page A1

for more government and more taxes. It opposes any infringement on Constitutional-given rights, and "works to expose the conspiracy."

Not everyone saw it as an out-and-out conspiracy.

Rather, said the Soquel doctor, it may be more a "commonality of interest" among the ultra-rich.

Some of those attending Wednesday's session said they probably won't join, but they respect the group for its fact-based use of original documents.

"He can be right wing, and I can be left wing, but we can both agree under the Constitution," said Alchalabi.

Often viewed as ultra-conserva-

tive, the society has no special love for Republican Newt Gingrich, or talk-show host Rush Limbaugh.

"Newt Gingrich is very, very dangerous," said Soderman. "... The Republicans and the Democrats have been taken over by the ultra-rich, the insiders. Newt Gingrich is putting up a good talk, but he is totally controlled by the ultra-rich."

Morris elaborated. "We don't need a Contract With America," he said. "We have one." The audience knew where he was going and answered in unison: "The Constitution."

As to Limbaugh, Soderman said, "He has his good points. But I think he's been taken aside and told, 'Mr. Limbaugh, there are cer-

tain things you don't talk about.'"

Soderman may no longer call herself an environmentalist, but she agrees with local environmentalists opposed to the proposed underwater sonar testing.

"It's not for global warming," she said. The true purpose of the proposed scientific study is something very different. Nickel, cobalt and other minerals have been found in the ocean floor, and big corporations are set to lease the mineral rights.

"The ocean is going to be given to the United Nations. We believe most of this money will go to fund the world army. And (the testing) will really hurt the humpback whales. They navigate with the low sounds."