President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Chief Justice Earl Warren were communist agents.

Most Birchers concealed their membership, and the general public first became aware of the society's existence in January 1961, when Thomas M. Storke, veteran publisher of the *Santa Barbara News-Press,* exposed some of its activities in his newspaper. In 1962 Storke received a Pulitzer Prize for distinguished achievement in journalism "for calling public attention to the efforts of the semisecret John Birch Society to wage a campaign of hate and vilification." The *Los Angeles Times* published its own attack on the Birchers in March 1961. Nevertheless, the organization continued to grow in several parts of the country, and most of all in southern California. Wealthy businesspeople and retired military officers joined it in considerable numbers. Two Republican members of the House of Representatives from southern California avowed their membership in the Birch Society.

To Richard Nixon, who was planning to run for governor of California in 1962, the fantastic doctrines of Welch and his followers were a serious embarrassment. Nixon felt that the Birch Society was "the monkey on the elephant's back" and that if he accepted its support, the result would be the best-financed but most disastrous campaign in the state's political history. Therefore, he publicly repudiated the Birchers and stated that there was no place in the Republican party for anyone who charged that Eisenhower was a Communist. Nixon could hardly have done otherwise. He was indebted to Eisenhower for two terms as vice president and for the Republican presidential nomination in 1960. Nixon's attempt to dissociate himself from right-wing extremism cost him some of his right-wing support. Nixon then made a desperate effort to use his old issue of left-wing extremism against Governor Edmund G. Brown. But his campaign charge that Brown, a Roman Catholic, was "soft on communism" was absurdly unconvincing.

Another discreditable tactic backfired when Leone Baxter concocted a scheme, approved by Nixon and his campaign manager H. R. Haldeman, for a postcard poll pretending to come from an actually nonexistent group of Democrats and condemning the California Democratic Council as pro-Communist. Democratic leaders discovered and denounced this fraud, and 10 years later would recall it as a "warm-up for Watergate."

Throughout the 1962 campaign, Nixon gave an irritating impression of arrogance and overconfidence that disenchanted many who had once voted for him. Many also disliked his apparent intention to serve only 2 years as governor and then use the office as a stepping-stone to the presidency in 1964. In the election on November 6, 1962, Brown defeated Nixon by nearly 300,000 votes. On the morning after the election, Nixon appeared at a press conference, unshaven and distraught, and delivered a rambling attack on the press, blaming his defeat on unfair reporting of his campaign. A few weeks later, he announced that he would leave California to become a partner in a law firm in New York City.

The split between the moderates and the right-wing extremists continued to bedevil the Republicans in 1964. At the Republican national convention in San Francisco, the large California delegation, headed by ex-senator William F. Knowland, clinched the nomination for ultraconservative senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona.

California Republicans were badly split in the 1962 gubernatorial campaign. The bitter loser, Richard Nixon, vowed never to be a candidate again. (*Courtesy of the* Sacramento Bee.)

It was widely reported that at least a hundred of Goldwater's delegates were Birchers. In an apparent reference to the Birch Society, Goldwater included in his acceptance speech a statement that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice" and that "moderation in the pursuit of justice is not a virtue." His supporters at the convention cheered wildly, but the words had an opposite effect on millions of voters in the television audience. In the election in November, President Lyndon B. Johnson defeated Goldwater, both in California and in the nation, by the widest margins given to a presidential candidate since 1936.

Thus, in 1964 the Democrats seemed firmly entrenched both in Washington, D.C., and in Sacramento, but the political sands were soon to shift again. Lyndon Johnson was about to ruin his presidency with a disastrous war in Southeast Asia. And the screen and television actor Ronald Reagan had attracted considerable interest with a widely televised fund-raising address that was the highlight of the campaign for Goldwater.