

Ars Gratia . . .

By ROGER EBERT

On the extreme right, grave national danger

There must be something about television's magic eye that causes some conservatives to squirm.

William F. Buckley, the polished leader of respectable conservatism, nearly wore out his chair on the Jack Paar Show last Wednesday. As Buckley's sport coat crept higher and higher around his neck, there was even concern for his breathing on the part of some viewers.

The John Birch Society's Robert Welch — who is so far to the right that even Buckley labels him "irresponsible" — was so ill-at-ease on a "Meet the Press" program last year that he slid down in his seat until only a fringe of grey hair and two little eyes were visible.

We make this observation, not to compare the conservative Buckley with the reactionary Welch, but to focus attention on a common ploy of conservatives when they are backed into tight corners.

Quite often, they begin sputtering something about what the Founding Fathers "really had in mind," and confuse these highly hypothetical opinions with contemporary theories of government.

Welch, whose ridiculous motto "This is a republic, not a democracy — let's keep it that way" has already been given wide attention, is a master of vague historical references when asked to explain the faults of modern America.

Apparently Welch and many ultra-rightists believe that too much good 'ol Jeffersonian democracy will lead America directly into the hands of the waiting Communists. Since democracy seems to lead toward social legislation, and "everyone knows" that public aid to education and medical aid for the aged are "only a step" from socialism, Welch and his sidekicks preach against democracy as a "subterfuge" of the Communists.

We the people . . .

The comic book panel which decorates today's article is culled from a publication of the Louisiana State Sovereignty Commission, which apparently intended its distribution to be among the very young.

The publication, a comic entitled "We the People," is a professionally-produced story containing a boy, his dog . . . and raw bigotry.

As the comic begins, the little boy is seen giving the secret password to his club: "muner." He explains to his father that "Muner Club" membership means he's immune to "stuff like measles."

"Sounds great," his father answers, and then abruptly changes the subject: "Sounds like you're exercising your constitutional rights. Say, do you know anything about the U. S. Constitution?"

"Sure . . ." says the eight-year-old, and then proceeds to quote, verbatim, the entire preamble to the Constitution.

"Fine, son," his father says — apparently not impressed by this prodigious memory feat. "But I meant, did you understand it? Did you know that a lot of those people back there fought and died so that you could, well, form a 'muner' club?"

The comic book continues, in simplified and colorful language, to explain for little Louisiana kids that under the strict definitions contained in the Constitution, every state should have the right to administer its own schools.

The comic does not specify which part of the Constitution justifies school segregation, but neatly implies that the right to administer and the right to segregate are the same.

"There are a lot of people," the



father warns, "who think even our state-owned schools, and a lot of other things, all ought to be run out of Washington . . ."

So far, the comic hasn't mentioned segregation by name. But the father explains that "some federal judges have ordered races mixed in schools, whether either wanted it or not."

"You mean like in Little Rock?" the youngster asks. "But colored people have nice schools. Lots of them are better than ours. Wouldn't it be fair to have separate schools just so long as they were equal?"

"That's exactly what a federal court held, for many years. And we all got along just fine," says the father.

Why did the courts change their minds? The comic pins the blame on Communists, who are "trying to stir up trouble." (See the reproduction accompanying this article.)

The comic ends with the father explaining, "The situation is getting more and more serious. I want you to grow up in the kind of country the writers of the Constitution wanted you to have . . ."

A matter of definition

Definitions can be twisted to fit almost any theory, and by confusing states' rights with the rights of individual citizens, the state government of Louisiana has found moral "justification" for a fight against federal integration laws.

There is probably not a nation in the world that is unaware of the shocking blot on human dignity which accrued at Little Rock. For the three out of four human beings whose skins are not white, there is a very vivid object lesson in the stonings, lynchings, voting outrages and kangaroo courts which have disgraced the South for years.

The comic book is a small part of the total picture. Everywhere we turn, liberals are being attacked and responsible conservatives like Buckley are being drowned in the rising tide of fear and hate propaganda from the extreme right.

The rightists say they are "against" Communists. But in this area they are pathetic and inept. Their real talent is opposing progressive legislation with threats of smear attacks.

Who in the House dares vote against HUAC? Who in Louisiana dares overthrow segregation without being labeled as a Communist? Even in California, a supposedly enlightened state, the campaign of fear has advanced from the smear to the bomb, and no one knows what will follow next. Gen. Edwin Walker's decision to run for governor of Texas on the single plank of anti-Communism is a graphic illustration of the strength of this hysteria.

Let us redefine our national purpose. Let us stand up to the bigotry of minority hate groups. Let us seek our ideals, and put them into action, before we are trapped forever in the hell of Robert Welch's dictatorial "republic."