

# DIALOG



## Cartoons, clichés, and clenched fists or a cartoonist's lament

I've been doing some thinking recently about left political art and would like to share some thoughts with *ITT* readers. Just what makes for honest and effective political art? Since I'm most familiar with them, let's look at editorial cartoons first.

The requirements of editorial cartoons ironically define its limits and account for its power. The necessity to distill a complex political situation down into a single image incorporating, at most, a handful of figures and a few props means that a good editorial cartoon must risk oversimplification for the sake of impact.

Editorial cartoons have played no small role in promoting that favorite American habit of reducing politics to personalities. The grin of a Carter or the scowl of a Nixon are far easier to capture and dramatize than the dry impersonality of "Foreign Policy." Likewise, the raw conflict between moral black and white is grist for the cartoonist's mill in a way that nuances of grey can never be. Thus the Cold War was a boon to mainstream cartoonists while Detente is often merely confusing.

An examination of the symbolic language of political cartoons is particularly relevant to those concerned with art from a left perspective. Most cartoonists rely on symbolic clichés in their work (Uncle Sam, for instance) simply because no better alternatives have been proposed. Even if symbols like John Q. Public or the stogie-smoking congressman do not really reflect reality, they keep getting used because they've stood the test of time and are immediately recognizable to most of us.

The task of left artists working with cartoons is to get to the heart of a situation, portray the essential kernel of truth and comment on it. If it can be done humorously, all the better. The function of left poster or flyer art, by way of contrast, is slightly different: to catch the passerby's eye, build support for an event, group or point of view, and encourage participation or sympathy.

The challenge before artists in either area is to avoid simplistic statements—and this may mean the jettisoning of

some hoary left clichés. Few cartoonists (myself included) have escaped the use of horrific world-enveloping menaces (be they Octopuses of Imperialism for the left, or Cobras of Communism for the right) when portraying the "enemy." In fact most of these symbols (spiders, beasts, wolves, arch-villains, etc.) have been used interchangeably by the left and right in characterizing each other.

Even if such symbols are sometimes justified—the fact remains that they are no longer potent in mobilizing public opinion one way or the other. Whether due to increased sophistication or jaundiced apathy, your average citizen simply does not believe them when they are used.

Another set of clichés in need of reexamination are clenched fists, upraised arms and flag-waving demonstrators. On posters or in left newspapers these clichés are supposed to move others to action—yet such symbols resonate only in the skulls of those who already agree with them, (a small minority of those seeing them). Such "radical" art is mainly self-affirmation by the artist and his or her peers. It is an expression of the artist's appreciation of directed anger, of unified resistance, of the emotional thrill of demonstrating . . . but as persuasion it is ineffective.

Another cliché is a figure holding high a rifle. This, it is assumed, will strike a chord of response in the poor viewer's breast. Why this should be is never explained. Pictures of revolutionaries brandishing guns are, in fact, a form of political pornography that arouses revolutionaries who imagine themselves heroically in the place of the "people's soldiers" on the posters. But as with the thrill experienced by a flasher, the audience is unmoved.

One reason commercial advertising is so successful is its utter pragmatism—its willingness to do what "works"—to target an audience and speak to it in its own language. Few ads try to reach everyone; advertisers realize that is impossible. Yet "radical" propaganda finds it ethically necessary to "appeal" (however ineptly) to all (blacks, whites, women, gays, Indians, latinos, etc.) for to leave anyone out would be racist, sexist, etc. This heightens the likelihood that none will be reached except the already committed.

Most "radical" art is thus caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. It tries to appeal to everyone with imagery that interests almost no one. In a weird cultural imperialism in reverse, we find Marxist-Leninist groups importing and using socialist-realist imagery from China, Vietnam, or Albania in an apparent attempt to

influence Americans. Not only is this hopeless to begin with (not to mention incredibly unimaginative) but it fails to take into consideration the fundamental fact that Americans are among the most visually sophisticated and satiated people in the world. Ideological wall-posters that are gobbled up in China would be absolute stiff here. Why then think that the art that accompanies those wall posters will be any more appropriate here? One wonders.

If our poster and visual art suffer from inappropriate "militant" clichés, the problems with political cartoons are somewhat different. By trying to describe and distill instead of motivate, the cartoonists avoid having to appeal to everyone, but they are still faced with the use of clichés for symbols. Here the most difficult task is making a few key figures represent diverse groups or concepts.

For instance, I received some (not unthoughtful) criticism several months back for an *ITT* cartoon where I portrayed "Unions" as a somewhat muscular white male (an admittedly rather dull cliché of 20th century cartooning). Was this not unsatisfactory in that the unions in question included blacks and women, for example, as well? Was, perhaps, a white male symbol implicitly racist and sexist, no matter what the intent?

Probably so, yet it is hard to hypothesize acceptable single-figure symbols that are simultaneously all-inclusive, specific and effective. Cartoons of necessity deal with few figures . . . turning every cartoon into a crowd scene might guarantee a token symbol for all—but would soon prove so unwieldy as to discourage the most diligent cartoonist. The single-figure solutions that come to mind: sexless, raceless nebulas; multi-colored, multi-sexed androgynes (ala Hindu goddesses); geometric shapes, etc.; all lack a certain something. The problem remains, and will be with us until we achieve a society of equality, where *any* figure would stand for all. Meanwhile, using men, women and minorities as interchangeably as possible (while avoiding confusion) seems the best approach.

Creating a revolutionary culture in non-revolutionary times means walking a tight-rope between the inaccessible and the banal . . . between giving people what we think they need and what they think they want. There's no single solution or formula for the task. When in doubt, try something new and risky. The old clichés guarantee nothing but boredom.

—Jay Kinney  
San Francisco

## The social composition of the French Socialist party is as important as the intentions of its leaders

The key question in the discussion of internal political developments in the French Socialist party (*ITT*; Sept. 7) is whether it will back off from its alliance with the Communists before the 1978 elections, or from implementation of the Common Program at a point when a transition from capitalist to socialist society is the order of the day.

We ought to be wary of too mechanically interpreting tactical setbacks for the SP's left (the CERES group) as an arrow pointing toward 'betrayal' by Mitterand. Marxists place primary emphasis on social forces in

making history—and so how the SP's base is apt to behave in the complex political configurations that surround the forthcoming elections is equally important.

To begin with, the Socialist voters are young (a third are under age 34). Many of them have been formed politically in the events of 1968 and in the alliance with the Communist Party since 1972. A full third of the blue-collar workers, as well as a third of the white-collar employees in France now vote Socialist. (Many of these belong to the Communist led trade union federation: 29 percent of the members of the C.G.T. support the Socialist Party at the voting booth.)

This suggests—as does the underlying phenomenon that the resurgence of the Socialists has come about precisely through their alliance with the French Communist Party—that a substantial part of the SP is oriented toward common action in making a transition toward socialism.

On the other hand, there is a sector of the Socialist Party that is hostile to the Communists and less favorable to nationalizations and other structural reforms. After all, a fifth of the current Socialist voters supported the center against Mitterand in 1974! And it is certainly possible that some who wish to prevent the overthrow of French capitalism will adhere to the Socialist Party precisely to pressure it from within to attenuate its support for the Common Program.

Of course, the creation of a left majority requires winning over a considerable number of those who previously supported the bourgeois parties, so this development is undoubtedly a positive one. But it indicates that there is an internal volatility inside the Socialist Party—consequent to its heterogeneity—that the Communists may not be able to contain. Given the "cult of the personality" around the charismatic Mitterand, this danger becomes all the more acute.

Furthermore, the leadership of the Socialist Party gives pause. Unlike the Communists, where manual workers play an essential role in political leadership, the SP has *no* workers among its leading national organ, parliamentary group, or mayors. Overwhelmingly the direction of the SP is in the hands of government functionaries (especially teachers and college professors). While it is true that these men largely come from families of modest means—but white-collar and professional homes, not proletarian ones—they have achieved a very high degree of personal "upward social mobility" through superior education.

What we see therefore, is a heterogeneous base led by a homogeneous and narrow stratum. The debate at the Convention between the CERES group and the majority was one carried on among a particular sector of the French intelligentsia. I think, therefore, it would be a mistake to draw too sweeping conclusions from it as to what is apt to happen if the left attains power in France.

So far, at least, no one has been able to predict the circumstances under which transitions to socialism succeed or fail. While we do know some limiting conditions, the question ultimately turns on the combativity and coherence of the working class, along with the disintegration of the hegemonic bloc led by the capitalists.

Too narrow a "political" focus, an unfortunate tendency in some *ITT* commentary, tends to underestimate the underlying class and social forces that are decisive for major political transformations. Wherever possible we should integrate these diverse phenomena into an overall perspective on historical change. In this regard, some reporting from the "base" in factories and offices would be a helpful supplement to the articles now appearing.

—Ed Greer  
Chicago



# LIFE IN THE U.S.

## The Shaping of Technology—Part II

# Creating the college factory

by David F. Noble

*During the first few decades of the 20th century the processes of modern science and technology were brought under control by private capital. Last week's article, Part I, traced the ways in which corporate interests organized industrial and university research in their interest. This article will look at their effect upon the educational system.*

Until relatively late in the 19th century colleges and universities were dominated by classicists and clerics, both of whom shared a disdain for the practical arts and money-making enterprise. Colleges tended to remain removed from the steadily expanding realm of industry, with its noisy shops and less noisy counting-houses.

They were ill equipped to keep pace with the rapidly changing industrial state of the art and students were generally given instruction in obsolete methods with outdated equipment. Engineering educators of the period were preoccupied with enhancing their academic position and emphasized scientific theorizing and mathematics at the expense of practical training.

Perhaps most importantly, graduates were imbued with the aristocratic arrogance of a university elite, the entrepreneurial spirit of laissez-faire capitalism, or the scientific zeal for untrammelled inquiry—traits that hardly suited them for efficient, loyal employment as subordinates in authoritarian corporate enterprise.

### Corporation schools.

In response the major industrial concerns employing college graduates as engineers set up their own in-house schools. These "corporation schools" were designed to habituate college graduates to industrial employment, to give them additional technical training and the proper business point of view, to teach them how to follow orders.

The importance of these schools in the training of generations of engineers should not be underestimated. In electrical engineering, for example, the college graduate during the first three decades of this century had of necessity to become a "testman" at Schenectady, or a "special apprentice" at Pittsburgh in order to complete his professional training. Along the way he usually learned to see the world as his superiors at G.E. or Westinghouse saw it.

In addition to their actual educational function the corporation schools constituted an important phase in the evolution of modern personnel management; pioneering in methods of testing, rating, selecting and classifying graduates, of "scientifically" fitting the man to the job.

In a very practical way the in-house training programs of these early corporate enterprises were the models for higher education as a whole in the 20th century.

### Changing the colleges.

In the first two decades of this century the attention of corporate educators shifted back to the established colleges and universities. They began to see as their most pressing task getting the corporations out of the education business, which meant they had to get the colleges and universities to do the job "right" the first time.

Operating through such agencies as the National Association of Corporation



Corporate educators succeeded in getting the corporations out of training engineers by getting the universities to take over the job.

Schools (NACS, forerunner to the American Management Association) and the Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education (SPEE), they strove to transform the universities into efficient processing plants—"factories" as they usually referred to them—for the production, selection, and distribution of the human material required by industry.

A major step forward in that process was the cooperative education movement, begun in the engineering school of the University of Cincinnati in 1907, and pressed ahead enthusiastically by NACS and SPEE.

"The aim of the course," Dean Herman Schneider boasted, "is not to make a so-called pure engineer; it is frankly intended to make an engineer for commercial production . . . This system will furnish to the manufacturer a man skilled both in theory and practice, and free from the defects concerning which so much complaint is made."

The cooperative course successfully brought the school into the shop; students spent alternating periods in the factory of a cooperating firm and in the classroom of the school. In this way, students were able to get the "proper" business point of view, the necessary habits of industrial discipline and corporate subservience while still in school.

The movement spread rapidly throughout the country, at the prompting of both industrialists and corporate reformers among engineering educators. By the 1920s variants on the cooperative plan were introduced at such schools as M.I.T., University of Pittsburgh, Northeastern, Tufts, Drexel, Case, Union College, Marquette, New York University, Antioch and Harvard, and included liberal arts students as well as undergraduate engineers.

### Testing and classifying.

While the cooperative education movement established closer industry-education interaction, other corporate reform innovations had the purpose of rationalizing the "processing plants" themselves.

The corporate educators were ardent

promoters of testing programs and efficient selection, rating and classifying processes. Charles Mann, the author of the first national study of engineering education in the U.S. (sponsored by SPEE and funded by the Carnegie Foundation) explained the primary purpose of introducing testing into the schools, in an address to NACS in 1914:

"The one point that I want to bring out clearly to you," Mann stressed, "is that definite objective tests which define the type of ability which you wish to have developed are the most valuable, not only to yourselves as employers in selecting your help, but also as your most powerful means of controlling what is done in the school."

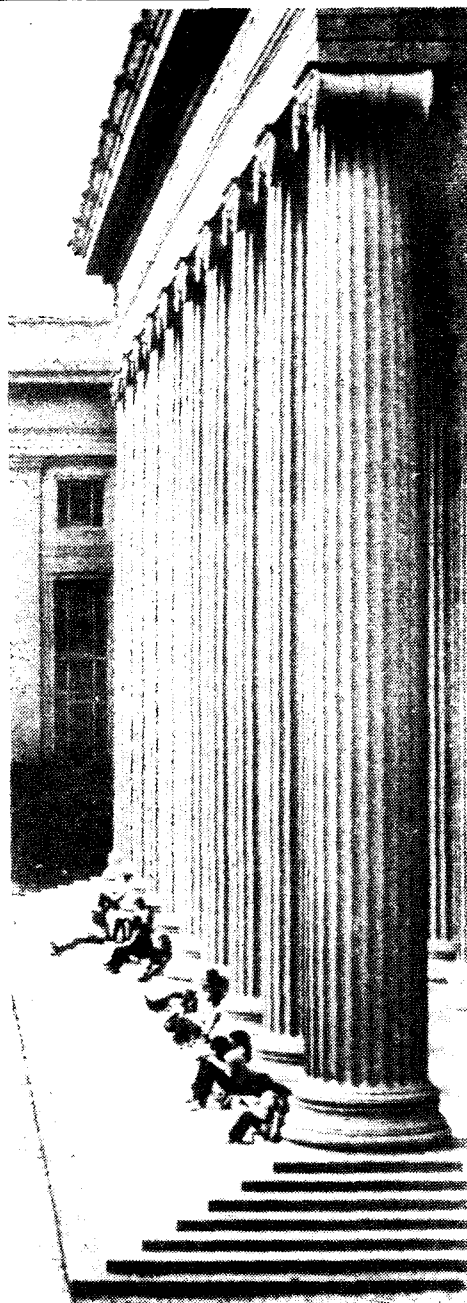
The development of testing procedures for evaluating the aptitude of students, advanced considerably by the corporation schools, was paralleled by the creation of mechanisms for selecting and distributing the educational products. The first placement bureau in an American university, for example, was established at Kansas State College by G.E. engineer Andrey A. Potter, who served as both dean of engineering and president of the local Chamber of Commerce.

### Big push during WWI.

The biggest push toward the rationalization of higher education came during WWI. During the war the nation's colleges came under the authority of the War department Committee on Education and Special Training. The committee was composed of corporate educators from firms like Westinghouse and Western Electric, as well as leaders from SPEE, all of whom had donned uniforms for the duration.

With the authority of the War department behind them these corporate educators were able to introduce many of their educational innovations with relative ease, while conditioning a good many other educators to produce according to specifications, industrial as well as military.

After the war the corporate reform of higher education was continued under other auspices: the National Research



Council, SPEE and, perhaps most important, the new American Council on Education (ACE).

Dominated from the outset by War department committee members Samuel Capen and Charles Mann, both prime movers in corporate educational reform, ACE quickly became the chief sponsor of the new "science of education," and promoter of testing in the schools. (ACE testing programs coalesced eventually into the Educational Testing Service.)

### Revolution and counter-revolution.

Thus, it was during the first half of the 20th century, and at the initiative of "reformers" from science-based industry, that American colleges and universities were retooled to fit the contours of a corporate, technological society.

As in the mythical Land of Oz, the Wizards of our technological society have been human—particular people working to achieve what they believed to be a rational, humane, "better" social order. They were, in a sense, agents of both a revolution and a counter-revolution.

On the one hand corporate reformers from science-based industry were moved by "destiny," seeking to foster scientific progress and thereby reduce human toil and misery. On the other hand they were moved by the specific historical needs of corporate capitalism, striving to channel scientific progress along lines that were compatible with the requirements of corporate stability and expansion.

In their work the contradiction between science and commerce, between technical rationality and market irrationality—the tension that Marx and Veblen thought would ultimately tear capitalism apart—collapsed and softened in practice. Modern technology—the people as well as the things—became a vehicle of corporate power, an extension of authority, a reinforcement of existing social relations.

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