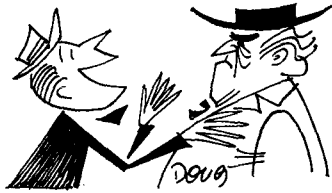


Trade Winds



You realize that the distillers, the doctors, the veterans and almost everyone has a lobby in Washington, but do you know that the humorists now have one?



This January, for the first time in the history of the nation, a Humor Lobbyist will register as such and the walls of the House and the Senate will reverberate with his laughter. He is Jim Atkins, representing the National Laugh Foundation, a powerful federation of comedians, gagwriters both amateur and professional, joke-tellers, and laugh-makers of every hue.

The purpose is to bring humor into politics, in a constructive way, so that humor is used by our lawmakers as a weapon for the public good. Jim Atkins has not formulated his campaign in great detail, but I did learn that he hopes that Congressmen will include more gags and punch lines in their speeches. That is admittedly just a beginning; for the long-range view, the Humor Lobby looks forward to somehow influencing President Johnson to be funnier during his second term in the White House.

The man who initiated the program is George Q. Lewis, founder and director of the twenty-year-old National Laugh Foundation. I talked with Lewis, whose middle name is Quipp, after he had returned from Washington where he, Atkins, and two other funnymen, Gil Eagles and Kenny Burke, had just made their lobbying plans in a gag-filled motel room a stone's throw from Capitol Hill. I found Lewis in a small rehearsal hall on 45th Street off Broadway, where he was conducting his Comedy Workshop, a course for gagwriters and comedians that has gone on twice a week for years. The Workshop gives these struggling humorists the chance to try out their material and get a reaction, as well as to judge what others are doing. Professor Lewis conducts the classes.

The so-called jokes fly thick and fast at the Comedy Workshop. At the Roundtable, where writers compare their work, one young author read a script about buying a trailer and going

on a trip. The salesman points out that the sunken living room is due to a flat tire. When the driver reaches the Rockies, "it is so cold that the tourists are selling blankets to the Indians." After the reading the other gagwriters rip into it and criticize or praise it, as the case may be.

The second half of the semi-weekly Workshop takes place on the stage, where comics get up and deliver themselves of a twelve-minute monologue. The night I was there the Big Blackout came in for attention.

"New York didn't need a Lindsay, it needed a Beame," one guy cracked.



Richard Burke's Blackout line was, "where were you when the lights went on?" Another comic went on: "I just got a letter from a friend of mine; he's still in the subway. . . . Fellow I know in the village was lighting a reefer when the whole city went dark. 'Man, this is living!' he cried. . . . I got on a bus and got off at 42nd Street; my hat and coat got off at 57th. I don't know where my pants got off. . . . When I wanted to get home I just sat in an ashcan and waited for the garbage truck to take me uptown. . . . It was so black a pickpocket in an elevator stole \$10 out of his own pocket. . . ."

When a stand-up comedian is finished with his routine at the Workshop, Professor Lewis asks the class for criticism, and sometimes they'll go over the lines carefully as though they were college students studying Shakespeare. "On that gag about getting off the bus at 42nd and your hat and coat going to 57th, that's a good one. But leave out the pants line. It's a red herring and you don't need it," someone volunteered after the dialogue above.

Howard Bloom, a high school math teacher who is a writer and a performer in his spare time, came to a line about his Japanese gardener who had "a yellow thumb," and someone in the audience shouted out, "and he gave you the American flu!" When Professor Lewis was remarking on how important it is to be topical, a student asked, "Topical?"

What's topical?" and someone else replied, "He means fish jokes. You know, topical fish."

Another comic based his monologue on this theme: "I was an only child. Do you know what it means to be an only child? It means you don't have any brothers or sisters . . . I went to a camp for only children. In fact, I was the only child there . . . How would you like to have baby fat at seventeen? . . . I had to wear so many clothes that I never caught cold in the winter. I caught prickly heat instead. . . ."

After twelve minutes of that the comic came in for a blast of criticism. He stood on the stage while the class said, "Your material lacks truth . . . You're not sympathetic . . . We can't identify you with what's happening . . . You change your interpretation too often. . . ." The comic, wearing a bright blue shirt open at the collar, a black corduroy jacket, long hair and glasses, finally protested vehemently.

"But I *was* an only child in Chicago," he burst out, "I was a little fat boy who was beat up by the other kids and I came home bloody!"

"But we just can't see you as a fat little nebbish," someone declared. "You're a Broadway hipster, that's all."

"Even the glasses don't fit you," another student commented.

"But I can't see without them!" the comic cried. Then, desperately defending his routine, he said, "I want to ask



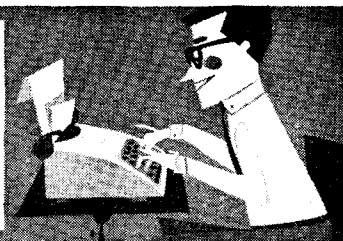
a lay person." But there wasn't one there; the hall was filled with funnymen only, and I heard them laughing and joking and topping each other's lines, as I walked out and into dull, unfunny Times Square. —JEROME BEATTY, JR.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S
KINGSLEY DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 1655)

V. L. RADER:
BENEATH A SOUTHERN SKY
(suggested by Lewis Gluck)

I like to think that Christ was born
Beneath a southern sky,
Where palms let down their
silver fronds
To weave a lullaby. . . .
Let others paint the sacred scene
With snowflakes drifting by.
I like to think that Christ was born
Beneath a southern sky.

Top of My Head



This Is Television, 1966

THE NETWORKS abjectly apologize for September, October, November, December, 1965 and promise that in September, October, November, December, 1966 they will strive to attain a higher standard of mediocrity.

• • •

NBC gave Dean Martin another year to try to straighten out.

• • •

In England all heck breaks loose when a performer during a TV broadcast uses a four-letter word. Around here all hell breaks loose when a TV performer gets a four-word letter—"Ratings low, show cancelled."

• • •

Get Smart had better.

• • •

Thirty-five years ago the Messrs. Paley, Stanton, Sarnoff became the proud proprietors of a class entertainment medium. TV 1966 finds them operating a rundown, second-run movie house open all night and showing B pictures along with quickie, two-reel comedies for which the Phoenixians will have to invent another letter.

• • •

The talent of the Smothers Brothers was.

• • •

"I wouldn't want to be quoted," quoted a TV network VP in the New York *Herald Tribune*, "and I tell you honestly that I hate to admit it, but I am certain you can put almost anything on television and the people will watch it." And you can put almost anything in a rating book and the Network VP's will believe it.

• • •

Dick Van Dyke leaves TV. Reggie Van Gleason stays.

• • •

As if *Gidget* and *Tammy* are not enough, the final ignominy of 1965 television came to us on the evening when the Rockefeller Plaza skyscraper Christmas tree was lighted. Before Mr. Steven

Rockefeller pressed the button he voiced a reverently articulated, pocket-sized sermon on the significance of the tree. For the small children gathered in the Plaza, he said it was a spectacle of a myriad lights.

"But," he concluded, "I hope the lighting of this tree has a greater meaning for you and I."

• • •

My Mother the Car was with us only long enough to get a ticket for being illegally parked on an obviously one-way street in a prime-time zone.

• • •

TV vice presidents preen and hold their heads high on natural shoulders as they contemplate their successful irrigation of what former FCC chairman New-



ton Minow proclaimed a "vast wasteland." They point with pride to the transformation of their parched earth into a veritable oasis of splendid growth.

Mighty oaks from tiny acorns have sprouted. A plush, thick carpet of dew-dripped grass and fragrant flowers, of luscious fruits and exotic spices, of ripened berries and acres of waving, golden wheat. An arid, vast wasteland transformed into field after field of nature's bounty bursting into a profusion of breath-taking color by these plodders in the networks' vineyards.

Now isn't that a lot of fertilizer!

• • •

The *John Forsythe Show* starring John Forsythe was ill starred.

• • •

OK Crackerby was KO'd.

• • •

It took a one-shot, half-hour literate and charming cartoon *Charlie Brown's Christmas* to show up the likes of *Gilligan's Island* for what it is—escapist stuff.

(Continued on page 108)

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