So, What is this Thing Called Political Cartooning?

By Alan Moir

It's been an explosive year for political cartooning, especially with the violence after the publishing of the Danish cartoons.

So, what is this thing called 'political cartooning'?

Today I'm going to give a short potted history of this curious little profession, not an academic, detailed history, but more of a look at the highlights and influences from the view of a working cartoonist. How it all led to where we are today.

So what has the World Cup got to do with all this?

Nothing at all. This is a drawing done by a cartoonist about 12 years ago for the Iranian magazine *Farad*. It was illustrating an article about the poor state of Iranian soccer.

The cartoonist was sentenced to 50 lashes, a hefty fine, and 11 years imprisonment. His crime ?

The authorities ruled that the footballer depicted bore a resemblance to the late Ayatolla Khomeini as a youth. The artist denied this, saying about half of young soccer players wore beards. But to no avail.

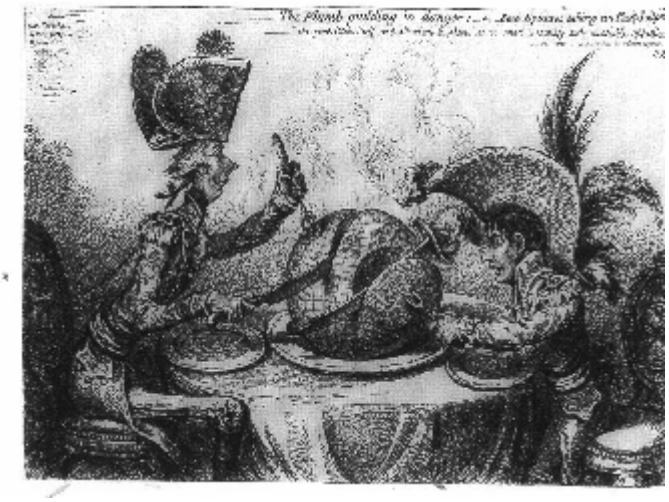
Much as many politicians may wish it, cartoonists in Australia and NZ tend not to get sentenced to lashings.

Generally those in power prefer to be seen to have a sense of humour, in fact often gritting their teeth and requesting the original.

So this is the difference between working in a democracy and in an autocracy or dictatorship.

How have we come to this state in the democracies where cartoonists are not thrown into jail, no matter how hard they try?

It comes from a long history and from two streams, Europe and the United States.



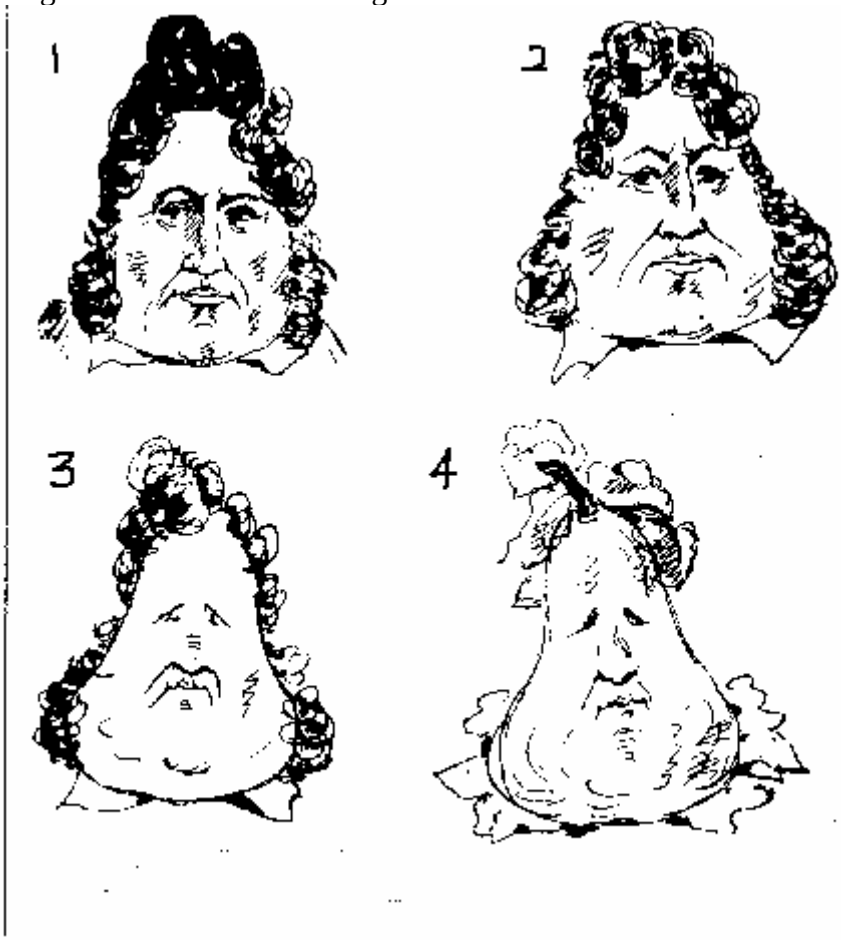
Europe;
One stream of political cartooning as we know it in Australia, began in the mid 18th century in London, with the distribution of pamphlets. Cartooning and pamphlet newspapers started about the same time, and gradually merged in the 19th century.
Cartooning hit its peak in this era during the Napoleonic Wars of the early 19th century. In fact there was a kind of ‘cartooning war’ between Paris and London, with the artists distributing cartoons attacking the other, often smuggling them for distribution in the apposing capital.

The best cartoons, though, were those that stood back a little, taking a broader view.
The greatest cartoonist of this era in London were; Hogarth, Cruikshank, the Rowlandson brothers, and, perhaps best of all, James Gillray.

The cartoon shown is one of Gillray’s finest, showing Napolean and the then British PM Addington carving up the world between them.

These cartoons were the first attempts to put huge international events into a nutshell. They were also refreshingly bright compared to the stuffy, stilted art fashions of the time.

This cartoon is also by Gillray, showing William Pitt the Elder, a later PM, raiding the Bank of England to finance the war against France.



Meanwhile, across the channel, French cartooning was going through similarly lively times, and led to a court case in 1831 which set a precedent that changed the way in which cartooning in the west was accepted.

In the late 1820s Louis-Philippe (also known as the Citizen King) came to power. He immediately set about relaxing the defamation and sedition laws that were stifling the press. Ironically this led to a flush of cartoons ridiculing him, especially by the publisher/cartoonist Philipon, and Honor Daumier.

In 1831 Louis Philippe sued for defamation, the charge being 'For Going Too Far'. Philipon had been caricaturing him as a pear, 'la poire' at that time referring to someone or something foolish. We still have a similar reference today in the phrase "going pear-shaped".

The case dragged on for months, causing great hilarity throughout Europe, especially in France's European rivals, and the cartoons were published and republished all over the continent.

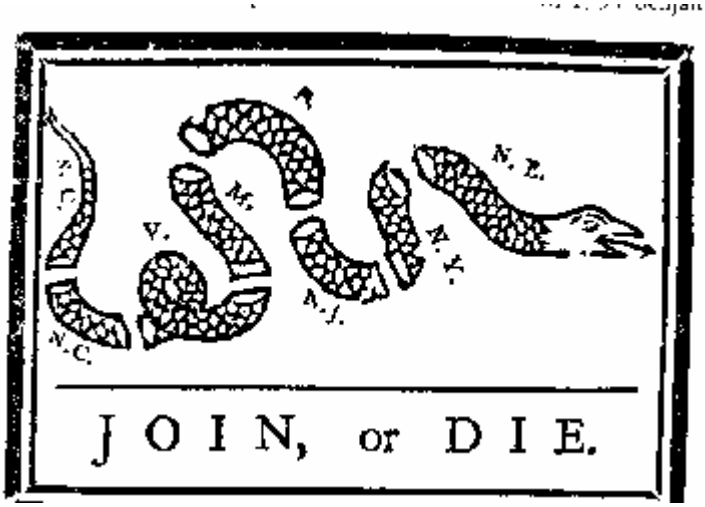
At one stage Philipon stood up and sketched the King, who was in the court-room, to prove he did resemble a pear.

That is the drawing behind me.

The king won the case and Philipon was sentenced to six months jail. The court also ruled that there could not be any more drawings of pears published.

So in the next issue of Philipon's magazine "Le Charivari", the results of the court case were published with the type formed in the shape of a pear.

The king had made an enormous fool of himself, and it became a convention among the ruling classes of France, and later most of Europe, to accept ridicule rather than be seen not to have a sense of humour. This later became a tradition and was important in the development of the 'free-press' in the gradually forming democracies.



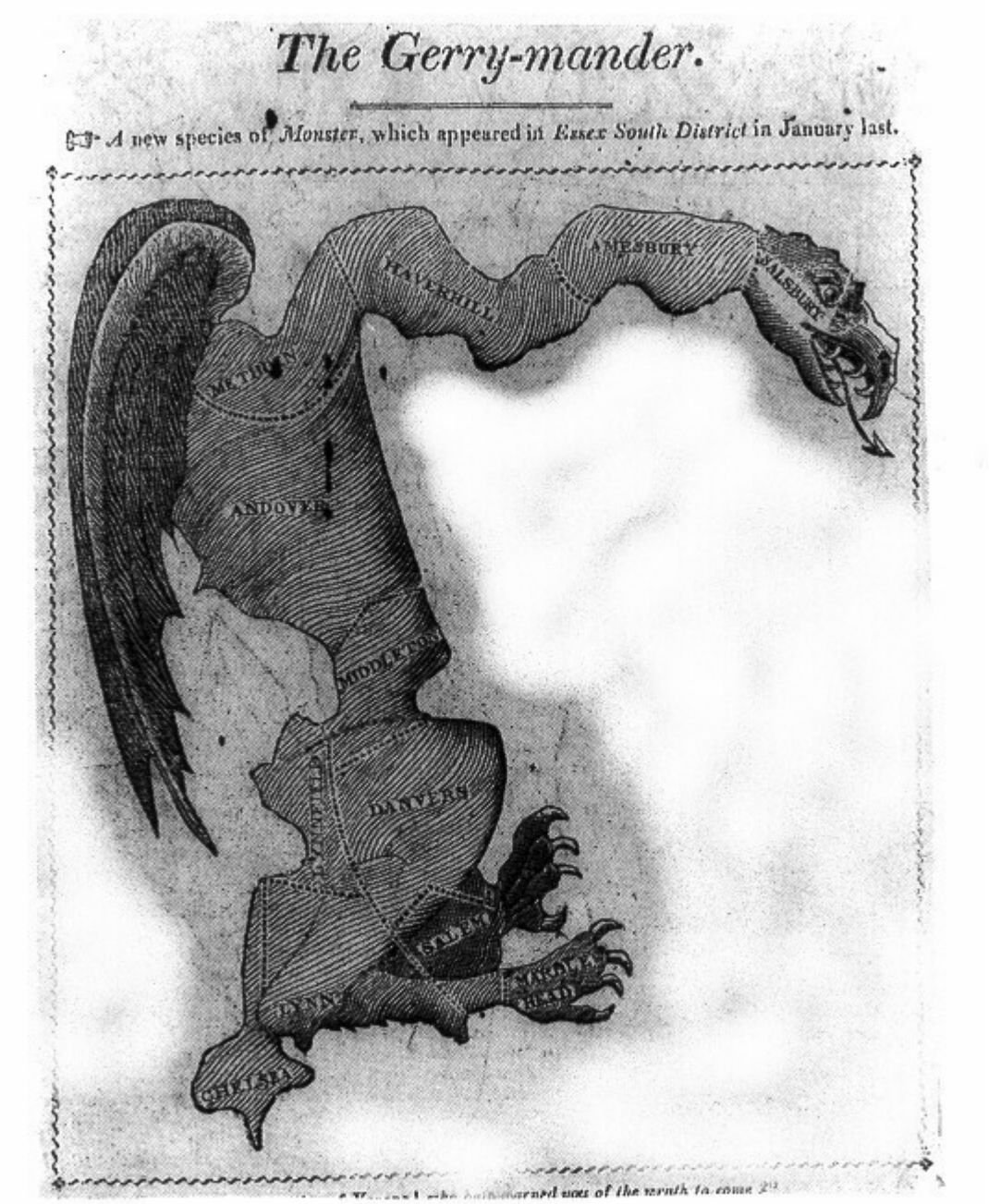
America.

At the same time there were similar developments in America . During the campaigns to gain independence, cartoons were used as rallying calls. This cartoon shown was the first political cartoon published in America, in 1754, more than 20 years before Independence. It shows a call for unity between the Colonies.

The cartoonist was Benjamin Franklin.

This was a cartoon from 1772 depicting a view of the so-called Boston Massacre in 1770. It is said to be the most influential picture in American history, used as propaganda with tens of thousands of prints published and distributed in the lead up to the Wars of Independence.

The cartoonist was Paul Revere.



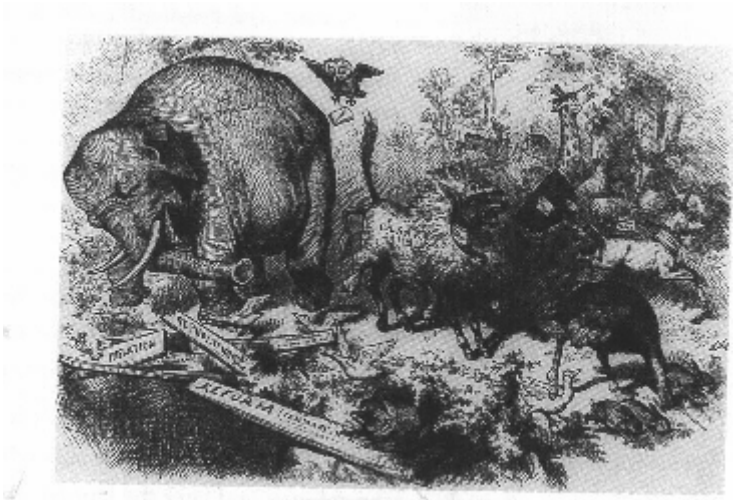
This is a very famous cartoon published in Massachusetts in 1812 by the cartoonist Tilsdale.

The Massachusetts government had realigned the boundaries in Essex County to guarantee Massachusetts Governor his re-election.

The cartoon shows the voting districts in the shape of a salamander, a mythical dragon-like monster that couldn't be defeated.

The Governor's surname was Gerry, so the cartoon was labelled, "the Gerry-mander"

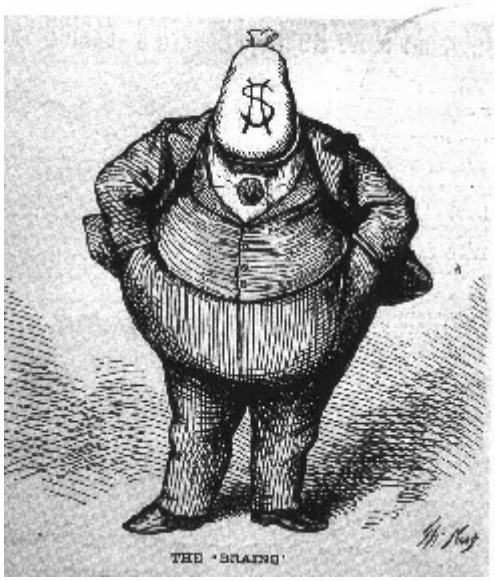
Thus a new political word was born.



THE THIRD TERM PANIC

We jump a few years to the period around the Civil War. This era showed the development in US cartooning of political symbols, in particular referring to the Parties.

This cartoon by arguably America's most famous cartoonist, Thomas Nast, is the first to depict the Republican Party as a rampaging elephant. The Democrat donkey, also here, had been around for a year or two, and this was the first cartoon to depict them both. These caricatures became so ingrained over the years as symbols that the Parties eventually adopted them, rather than try to fight them.



THE "BOSS"

Thomas Nast was also famous for his relentless campaign against the Democrat Party Machine controlled by the group known as Tammany Hall. This group was led by the mind-bogglingly corrupt figure called "Boss Tweed", who, in a three year period from 1870 is estimated to have embezzled $200m, in 1871 values !

The New York Times and Harper's Weekly with Nast cartoons ran a long campaign against him. The public used to queue, waiting for copies of the latest Nast cartoon of Tweed.

The period after the Civil War was one of social upheaval for the United States, political, industrial, an era of pioneering, mining, railways, idealism and corruption. A great time for satirical magazines. And they flourished, with the help of a New Technology which was to transform newspapers and their relationship with the political process forever.

The photo-engraving process.
It doesn't sound much, but it allowed illustrations to get away from the old hand-engraving techniques, where an artist would draw his picture onto a wooden block which then sent to an engraver. The results were slow and usually very stilted, often taking several days.

Photo-engraving allowed the picture, which could now be drawn in pen or brush, to be photographed and the photo etched onto a metal plate. This meant almost instant publication, so that newspapers and magazines could respond immediately to political issues. And directly from the artist.

This led to the growth of a host of feisty satirical magazines across America responding to the tumultuous events. Some of them became very popular, and one of them "Puck" was to have a big influence in Australia.

The Publisher/Editor/ Cartoonist of Puck was Joseph Kepler, who was quick to take advantage of the new freedoms the technology allowed. His cartoons were dynamic and direct.

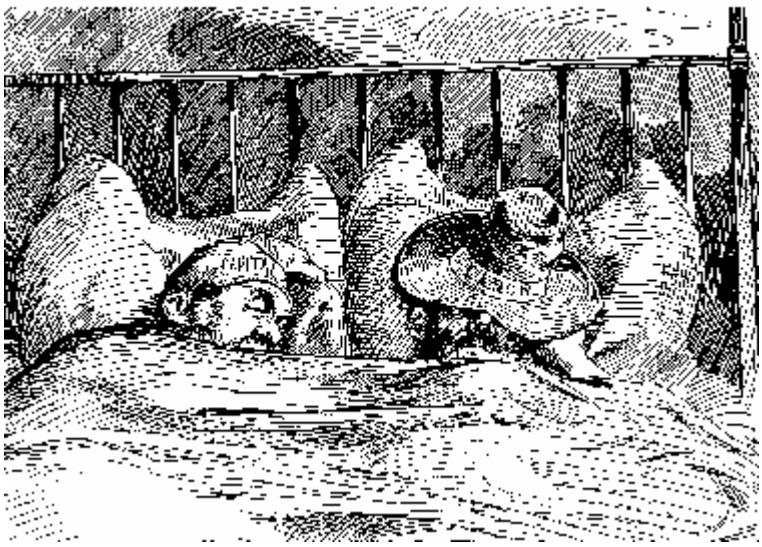
The illustration shown, though it may look old fashioned now, was striking in its time.

This one shows the Senate, with a group of enormous moneybags with faces, at the of the Senate, labelled “Steel Trust”, “Copper Trust”, “Oil Trust”etc.

What I like, though, is a little remark at the top, which to me was typical of this new dashing style of comment, and a predecessor of the type of comments Australian cartoonists would come to use.

The remark says: “This is a Senate, of the Monopolists, by the Monopolists, for the Monopolists”

Direct, witty, and hard hitting.



These magazines found their way to Australia, and in 1880 a couple of businessmen started their own in Sydney, and called it “The Sydney Bulletin”, now simply “The Bulletin”.

The first editor of “The Bulletin”, William Traill, set off to the US to try to find a cartoonist, and some of this new-fangled technology, and came back with Livingstone Hopkins, an established, tub-thumping cartoonist who had photo-engraving equipment.

Hopkins was to stay just 3 years, but remained in Australia until his death in 1927.
The new nation appealed to him. It must have been an exciting time on the Bulletin for the artists and writers during the late 1880s and through the 90s with the immense questions facing the coming young nation; A Republic or a Constitutional Monarchy ? Would all States join? Universal Suffrage? This was the era pioneering era of mining, droughts, depressions, the development of the Labour Movement… all grist for the cartoonists’ mill.

I’ve chosen this example of Hop’s work, he did nearly 20,000 for the Bulletin in the end, because it seems apt. It shows the figures of Capital and Labour in a bed together, keeping a close on each-other.

This is an incidental cartoon from this period which amused me, showing the dangers of professionalism on cricket.

In 1884 Traill went to England hoping to find another cartoonist, and had nearly given up. But whilst at St Stephan's Church he was given the church's newsletter, The St Stephen's Review, in which appeared a few little sketches by a young struggling artist from Leeds who was trying to eke out a living in London. It was exactly what Traill wanted, and he signed up the 21 year old Phil May on the spot.

Phil May only spent 3 or 4 years in Australia, mostly in Melbourne, but was deeply struck by the open and genuine egalitarianism he found here, in contrast to the stifling class division he had found in England, especially in London. His cartoons weren't directly political, but he enjoyed wandering the streets recording the daily life of the people of Melbourne, in his own uniquely relaxed and self taught style.

He was also an astonishingly good caricaturist: this one, of Sir Henry Parkes was drawn about 1888, but could have been drawn yesterday, its lines are so fresh and relaxed. He was only about 23.

He returned to London after some illness, and was an instant and lasting success with a series of books with his new style of drawing and was widely imitated throughout Fleet St, and abroad. He wasn't Australian, but he quickly took on and transferred that feel for Australian egalitarianism back to Fleet St

The
uffragett
ED BY CHRISTABEL PANKHURST.
The Official Organ of the Women's Social and Political Union.
VOL. I. FRIDAY, JANUARY 31, 1913. Price 1d. Weekl

THE BRAVOES OF WESTMINSTER.

A whole group of Australasians followed May to London in the early years of the 20th century.

Ruby Lindsay and her husband Will Dyson moved to London in 1911, and quickly became involved in the politics.

Australia and NZ had been pioneering young democracies for over a decade now, and had been introducing many fundamental social reforms for several years, reforms that had not brought the sky tumbling down. Probably the most important of these was the principle of a genuine Universal Suffrage. Women weren't going to get the vote in the UK until 1928, the US 1920, and the stuffy left-overs from the Victorian era got the young Australasians' blood boiling.

Ruby help set up "The Suffragette" magazine with Christabelle and Emily Pankhurst, illustrating most of the covers with very punchy cartoons. Unfortunately she died in the influenza epidemic of 1919.

Her husband , Will Dyson, meanwhile, had became the darling of the fashionable left-leaning Bloomsbury Group, the chardonnay quaffers and latte sippers of the time. He went to the Western Front as an Official War Artist during WW1, and an exhibition of his work has been shown recently in Canberra.

He gained much fame, and infamy, for his anti-German propaganda during the war, but his most famous cartoon was drawn afterwards in 1919.

It was of the Treaty of Versailles, which is said to have been too harsh on the Germans and perhaps propelled them into WW2.

It shows here several leaders leaving the Treaty Conference, with one of them saying “Curious, I seem to hear a child crying”

To the side of the doorway is a child crying, he has the label “1940 Class”. A haunting prediction, and the cartoon was republished many times leading up to WW2.

Dyson's replacement on the Bulletin was a young NZer, the 20 year old David Low. Low developed a very simple drawing technique, partly to overcome the poor newsprint available during WW1. He cut down on unnecessary 'cross-hatching", preferring a Japanese style of brush-stroke. He combined with this a disarming humour, which disguised a rapier-like incisiveness.

He made his name when PM Billy Hughes went to England in 1916 for the Imperial Conference. Hughes was away for several months, and Low 'recorded' the trip week by week in a hilarious series.

This cartoon depicts Hughes arriving in London, and it shows his new simple strong style..

THE FIREBRAND AND THE FOSSILS

This cartoon was his most famous, also of Hughes at the Imperial Conference. But it was to show the political sophistication of the young Low, still only 25. It is labelled “The Firebrand and the Fossils”, at first seemingly making fun of Hughes’ temper, but gradually dawning that the true ridicule is aimed at the “Fossils”, the British Cabinet of the time, a reflection of Low’s Australasian background.

Low moved to London in 1920 and was an instant hit.

He became extremely popular, but it was his attacks from the early 1920s on the rise of Hitler that were to make him great. Despite several attempts to censor him, Low fought an almost lone war on Hitler and the Nazis

Michael Foot, Editor on the Standard from 1938 later said; “Low contributed more than any other single figure and as a result changed the atmosphere in the way people saw Hitler”

In 1937 the Nazis even tried to put pressure on the British Government to restrain Low from satirizing Hitler.

Lord Halifax, representing the British Government, had a secret meeting with Goebbels as part of the appeasement process, to hear his complaints about criticisms appearing in the British press, especially Low’s cartoons.

On his return Halifax told Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the Standard; “You cannot imagine the frenzy these cartoons cause. As soon as a copy of the Standard arrives it is pounced on for Low’s cartoon, and if it is of Hitler, telephones ring, tempers rise, fevers mount, and the whole government system of Germany is in uproar. It has hardly subsided before the next one arrives.

We in England can’t understand the violence of the reaction!”

THE ANGELS OF PEACE
DESCEND ON BELGIUM

Another Low, with typically powerful drawing assisted by a typically ironic line; “The Angels of Peace Descend on Belgium”

Trying to cartoon in tyrannies though is very different. Cartoonists have to conform as propagandists, or flee.

Let’s look at the two most infamous dictatorships of the 20th Century.

First the Soviet Union.

Under Stalin, only propagandists survived as political cartoonists, the most prominent in Moscow over the 20th Century being Boris Efimov, greatly influenced by Low's style. He used to smuggle correspondence out to Low telling him of the true nature of Russia under Stalin, but as a cartoonist he was able only to be mildly critical of the USSR.

Few other political cartoonists existed except as propagandists.

There is one 'cartoonist' though worth mentioning because of their curiousity, and power as propagandists against Nazism.

In 1923 three young cartoonists met in an art school in Moscow and devised what they thought was a scheme to avoid prosecution for defamation. These were the early days before Stalinism took hold, and there was still a semblance of a legal system in existence. Each would draw just a part of a cartoon, so that none could be said to have drawn the whole. They also combined parts of their names to the collective name "Kukryniksy". This was fairly naive considering what Stalin was to become.

However they survived and became very good caricaturists.

They shot to fame though on the emergence of the Nazis in Germany and they were employed by Pravda and Krokodil, the satirical paper.

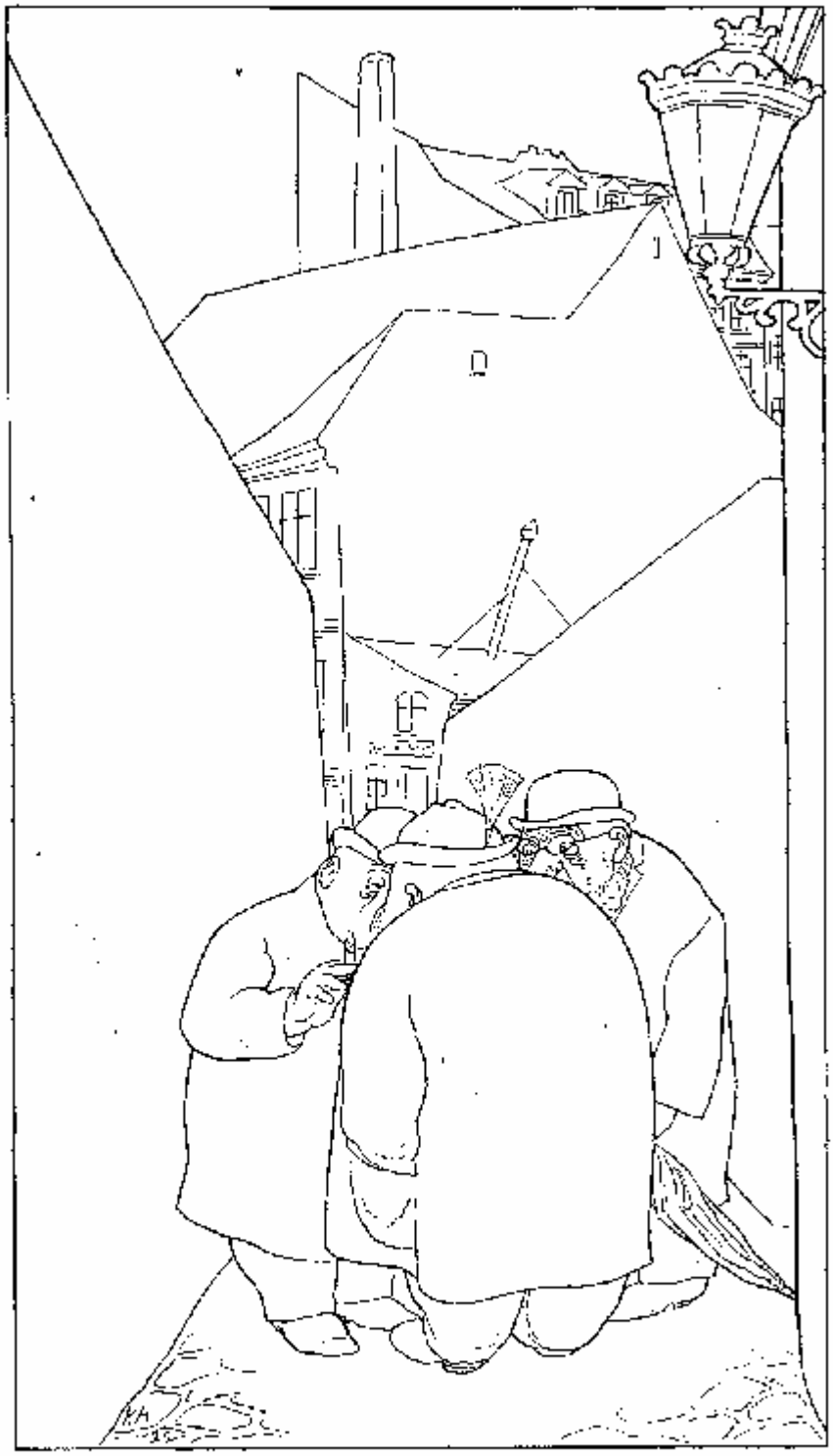
Their technique was simple and mostly wordless, ideal as propaganda, and their work was widely used as anti-Nazi posters through the cities.

One would draw the faces, one the body and the third, the colouring.

Their work was astonishingly powerful. And even more curiously during the German invasion they were separated and sent to different fronts as war artists. But they still each sent cartoons to the newspapers, each drawing the whole picture as he thought the others would draw, and each signing it with the collective signature "Kukryniksy". This drawing was in late 1944 showing the Russian 'pincer' trapping Hitler. Very powerful as propaganda.

This cartoon shows the editors of Krokodil in 1945 tipping the Nazi remnants out of the magazine. At the top of the picture you can see a ‘self-portrait’ of the trio.

Innere Politik



„Solang die Juden am Rhein stehn, sag' i, geht's koa Ruh' im Land!" — „Geh, hör' auf, dös san do die Franzosen." — „Sooo — da geh amal in a Hitler-Versammlung, der sagt dir's nacha scho', wer die sind."

National Politics. "I say that as long as the Jews are occupying the Rhine, we~~'ll have~~ no peace and quiet." "Oh, get off it, it's the French that are there." "Yeah? Just go to one of Hitler's meetings—he'll tell you who they are." [Jan. 3, 1923.]

KAI

In Germany in the early 1900s there were several satirical papers in circulation, the most famous being “Simplicissimus” , which published such greats as George Grosz, Karl Arnold, Bruno Paul and Olaf Gulbrannson.

Simplicissimus wasn’t afraid to satirize the Nazis throughout the 20s as this cartoon from 1923 shows.

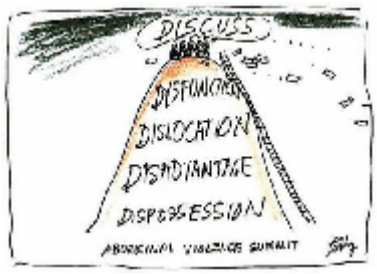
It’s by Karl Arnold, and has three men whispering in an alley. One is saying “It’s not the French who are occupying the Rhineland, it’s the Jews!” Another man says “Oh come off it, who says this?!” Just go to Hitler’s meetings, he’ll tell you the truth!”

The Nazis took over Simplicissimus after they had taken power, and ordered the cartoonists to draw anti-Semitic cartoons. Grosz, Bruno Paul and Karl Arnold fled the country, others vanished never to be seen again. Olaf Gulbrannson stayed, drawing as required until the magazine was closed in 1944.

In late 1933 after he had become Chancellor, Hitler sat down with his Foreign Press Secretary and devised a book to refute all the more famous anti-Hitler cartoons that had appeared through Europe over the previous 10 years. They called the book “Tat Gegan Tinte” (Facts versus Ink), and it included about 80 of the better known cartoons. The idea was to include a Nazi ‘gag-line’ that would turn the cartoon around onto the cartoonist.

The example shown was a Dutch cartoon from mid 1933, called “Hitler’s Nightmare”, showing Hitler surrounded by prominent European Jews, haunting him. Underneath, taking up about 10 lines, is the Nazi gag-line.

The Nazis had their ways and means of making you laugh. I'm glad Hitler didn't take over the world !



After WW2 cartoonists wordwide generally followed the Low style of simplicity and wit, especially in the democracies.

Gradually the different countries have added their own influences and approaches. I won't discuss modern Australian cartooning in detail here, but the one great influence from the mid 1960s was the arrival of Bruce Petty and his loose lined and laconic wit.

Bruce added a new way of looking at political cartooning.

Now not only about politicians, he introduced whimsical way of looking at the institutions of democracy; eg the Public Service, education, law, religion defence etc, sometimes all together, with an ease that hadn't been seen here before.

It broke down barriers for cartoonists and opened up a whole new range of topics.

It's a small proud little profession, especially for the Australasians because of their contribution to cartooning during the first half of the 20th Century

As we've seen, political cartooning pre-dates true democracy by many years, and cartoonists were at the pointy end of Democracy's creation, and they've always been at the front of the front line in its defence.