

THE IRISH POLITICAL CARTOON  
FINAL YEAR THESIS  
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## FORWARD

I would consider this thesis to be at the preliminary draft stage. The subject had not been researched before and although adequate visual material was available no other references could be found. I had therefore to devote a considerable amount of time to preliminary research. It took time finding out nothing had been written on the subject! Because of this I had to compile my own history of Irish cartoons. Originally I had intended the history to be ancillary to the main body of the thesis but due mainly to lack of time there appears to be an emphasis on the historical aspect. I have only touched on the present day cartoonist although I had hoped to investigate him more and have only begun to analyse the cartoon.

## POLITICAL CARTOONS IN IRELAND

" The comic mechanisms inherent in allegory are transformed by the apparently simple formal means of caricature where realism is maintained under the cloak of exaggeration and distortion."

All over the World the cartoon has become a major form of mass communication, a potent force in moulding public opinion often overcoming language barriers to be understood internationally. In the journalism of politics the cartoonist has always had a certain edge over the writer. His statements are by definition unequivocal, without ambiguity; they can be the ultimate simplification. Nobody asks for argument from a drawing. Cartoonists can synthesise a mood in a moment, and the easiest mood for any artists to encapsulate is that of indignation. Politics therefore provide lots of scope.

Ireland would appear to be a country ripe for the political commentator especially the political cartoonist but a study of our cartooning history was to disprove this.

## HISTORY

Although the political satirist/cartoonist had become well established in Europe by the late 17th Century Irish cartoons were only beginning to emerge as late as the 1880's. Our visual tradition, in the field of painting, sculpture and engraving had not been significant up to this period either and would have had an influence on our reluctance to use visuals as a means of communication. Of course this would not have been the only reason. Engravings were being mass produced in England for sale to an increasing population. Printing presses were being adapted all the time and it would only have been the larger more elaborate press that would have printed detailed illustrations, including the cartoon. Ireland had no such large readership and it was only when the actual printing presses were being ~~mass produced~~ mass produced and were cheaper that we were able to print line drawings.

The political climate in Ireland was also responsible. Political parties and thus their ~~their~~ respective periodicals were becoming established. The "Freeman's Journal" although established first in 1780 was really in its stride in the 1880's. It was the first to produce an illustrated supplement and was followed closely by the "United Ireland's" almost identical publication. They were both ~~Nationalist~~ Nationalist papers and the supplements contained political cartoons and nothing else. They were extremely popular and "were eagerly awaited and often carefully preserved" in Irish homes.

The style of illustration was very similar to that adopted by their English counterparts namely the 'Illustrated London News', 'Graphic' and 'Punch'. They were basically academic drawings mostly bad academic drawings. They were heavily Nationalistic and the message was always blatantly clear. The illustrations appeared with an explanatory footnote often further supplemented with several lines of verse. The pictures were littered with symbolism. The usual issues involved were Home Rule, Co-Ercion, Evictions etc. and these were spelt out clearly on all the props uses. They were mostly quite serious and did not indulge in the subtlies of satire.

Apart from these comparatively short lived supplements, they lasted about 20 years, Irish newspapers did not believe in fostering the cartoonist. A search through the files of our daily papers, 'The Irish Times' founded 1859, 'The Irish Independent' 1905 and the 'Irish Press' 1931 proved disappointing. The Irish Times in particular produced pages after pages of arid grey type rarely relieved by any graphics. Until quite recent years like English 'quality' newspapers they rarely included pictures not to mention the 'vulgar' cartoon. No doubt a hangover of a Victorian tradition of literacy which decreed pictures to be unrespectable. They did not demand the same intellectual effort as words to make their communication. They encouraged perhaps mental laziness which in time could lead to more serious moral collapse! Their English counterparts with their passion for compartmentalizing, the middle-class

Victorian let the Illustrated London News take care of the week's news pictures and Punch the numerous ones.

Whereas the Irish Times continued until recent years to avoid using graphics the 'Press' and 'Independent' were a little bit more adventurous, and did have a token sense of humour. They ran cartoon strips, American syndicated cartoon strips. One particular series they ran was particularly funny. It was by an American strip cartoonist, Carl Anderson and was distributed by 'King Features Syndicate Inc.' which though written in English had, seemingly to satisfy our cultural needs, the captions translated into Irish!

Did the newspapers actively avoid the political cartoon? It could not <sup>have been</sup> from want of suitable material. With an evolving political system happenings of the day cried out to be commented on. Were the papers being extremely cautious? The 'Press' for instance was founded by Eamon De Valera the 'Chief' of the Fianna Fail party. The paper of course was to toe the proverbial party line and perhaps dared not risk letting a political cartoonist draw attention to the political arena in which Fianna Fail was attempting to carve for itself a secure niche.

#### 'THE DUBLIN OPINION' 1922 - 1968

It was founded by Arthur Booth and Charles Kelly in March 1922. Its policy was a clear and simple one and one which it adhered to (very successfully) through the years of publication. It wished to "interest and amuse our readers and if there must be 'Free Staters and 'Republicans' we hope our pages may be as entertaining for the one as for the other". It

saw itself as a mildly scathing journal following the basic principle that humour is the safety valve of a nation and that a nation which has its values right will always be able to laugh at itself:

" We have always an unflinching belief in Ireland, all of it, and in the people of Ireland, all of them, and we wanted to make 'Dublin Opinion' a journal that could come only out of Ireland. A humorous Journal in the nature of things, in humorous opposition to whatever government may be in power. That is, we think, as everybody would wish it to be"

By attempting to please all of the people all of the time it has been criticised for being too soft centered. It never did provide an outlet for the hard hitting political cartoonist. There was a kind of inverted constructiveness in humorous opposition but only so long as that opposition has good-will for its base.

Nevertheless through the years 1922 - 1968 it established for itself a style and type of humour all its own which proved extremely popular. One could have been led to believe up to its publication that Irish cartoons were almost non-existent and had suddenly 'emerged' overnight. But there is no doubt that talent did exist to comment with wit and clarity on Irish affairs.

One of the most famous of the Cartoonists to emerge from this journal was the prolific Charles E. Kelly (C.E.K.) one of the founders of 'Dublin Opinion'. He produced an enormous amount of highly topical and very funny drawings and in many ways his work personifies the essence in style of 'Dublin Opinion'. He

His most famous contribution it would be agreed would be 'Ceili in the Kildare Street Club' / ~~but~~ <sup>fig. 1</sup> his series on the Government's new ministrys would be a close second. They were produced during the tentative stages in the establishing of Governmental Departments in the 1920's and 30's fig. . 2 to fig. 7 The teething troubles are depicted beautifully. A few other gems are worth including figs. 7 - 12

Rowel Friers, for many years a contributor to the Dublin Opinion, will stand out for his deft draftsmanship and illustrative ability and of course his fertile wit. Originally his cartoons were non-political but in more recent years he has become more and more of a political animal due no doubt to the fact that he lives in Northern Ireland. His earlier works have a cheerful inconsequenciality - overcrowded beaches, forgetful elephants, garden parties at Stormont.



## CONCLUSION

The foreword pointed out that this document must be considered as a preliminary thesis. The major shortage of prior research and the difficulties of acquiring information are the main reasons for this. Similarly the conclusions must be considered as preliminary.

My interest in taking up this particular topic was based on a desire to consider the indigenous Irish visual tradition - an extremely inadequate tradition. With a rich history of music and dance and a comparatively modern, but equally strong, literary and theatrical tradition. Ireland seems remarkably depleted in the area of plastic arts. Only recently has Irish fine art escaped from the restrictions of sterile academism (as represented by the R.H.A.) and now seems dominated by current trends of British and American art. There would appear to be very little Irish fine art which could be described as indigenous. This clearly has had a major effect on Irish design. Combined with this depleted visual tradition has been the domination of expanding Irish industry by foreign capital meaning that most goods made in Ireland are designed abroad.

Opinions to explain the visual illiteracy of the Irish range from accusing them of being basically lacking as a race in visual sense (shades of Eysenck) to the concept that objective political conditions of domination by Britain had meant that plastic arts had an association with Britain and a consequent weakness in tradition and in authority in independent Ireland..

It was my basic premise in starting this thesis that it should be possible to trace an identifiably Irish visual tradition in the context of Irish political cartooning. So far I have only been limitedly successful. In broad terms the conclusions that can be drawn would be that Irish cartooning in general is comparatively poor, that the main responsibility for developing Irish cartoons lies with the political newspapers (e.g. Irish People, United Irishman etc.), that the single major contribution to Irish cartooning must be the Dublin Opinion, that despite their base in political cartooning modern-day Irish cartoonists are not concerned with their limited traditions or in general with political cartooning (see addended interviews)

CARTOON SUPPLEMENTS 1880's & 1890's



**THE TWO POLICIES FOR IRELAND.**

**EVICTING LANDLORD.**—Hallo, police, warder, stop thief! Can't I do what I like with my own?  
**NEW CHIEF SECRETARY.**—Not quite. This is barbarous. It must not go on.

**LITTLE RANDY** (Caampion Comique in the favourite new Orange Pantomime).—  
 Blest if it aint the Bobby! (Skedaddles.)



**THE ASS IN THE LION'S SKIN.**

Beastly Balfour, finding that he excites nothing but contempt when he appears in his own character, steals a lion's skin, and in that disguise, tries to terrify Pat.  
Pat.—“ Why! you wretched looking beast, the moment I set an eye on you I knew you were an ASS—and to teach you not to be so foolish again—take that!—and that!!—and that!!!”



The Brave Mr. BALFOUR running away from his Press Prosecutions.



THE CABINET TRICK.

WILLIAM GLADSTONE, the renowned Wizard of the North, in his new and original Cabinet Trick, by Special Command of the Queen, now about to be performed at the Theatre Royal, St. Stephen's:—"How will he get out of it?"

'THE DUBLIN OPINION'





Fig. 1 Ceili in Kildare Street Club



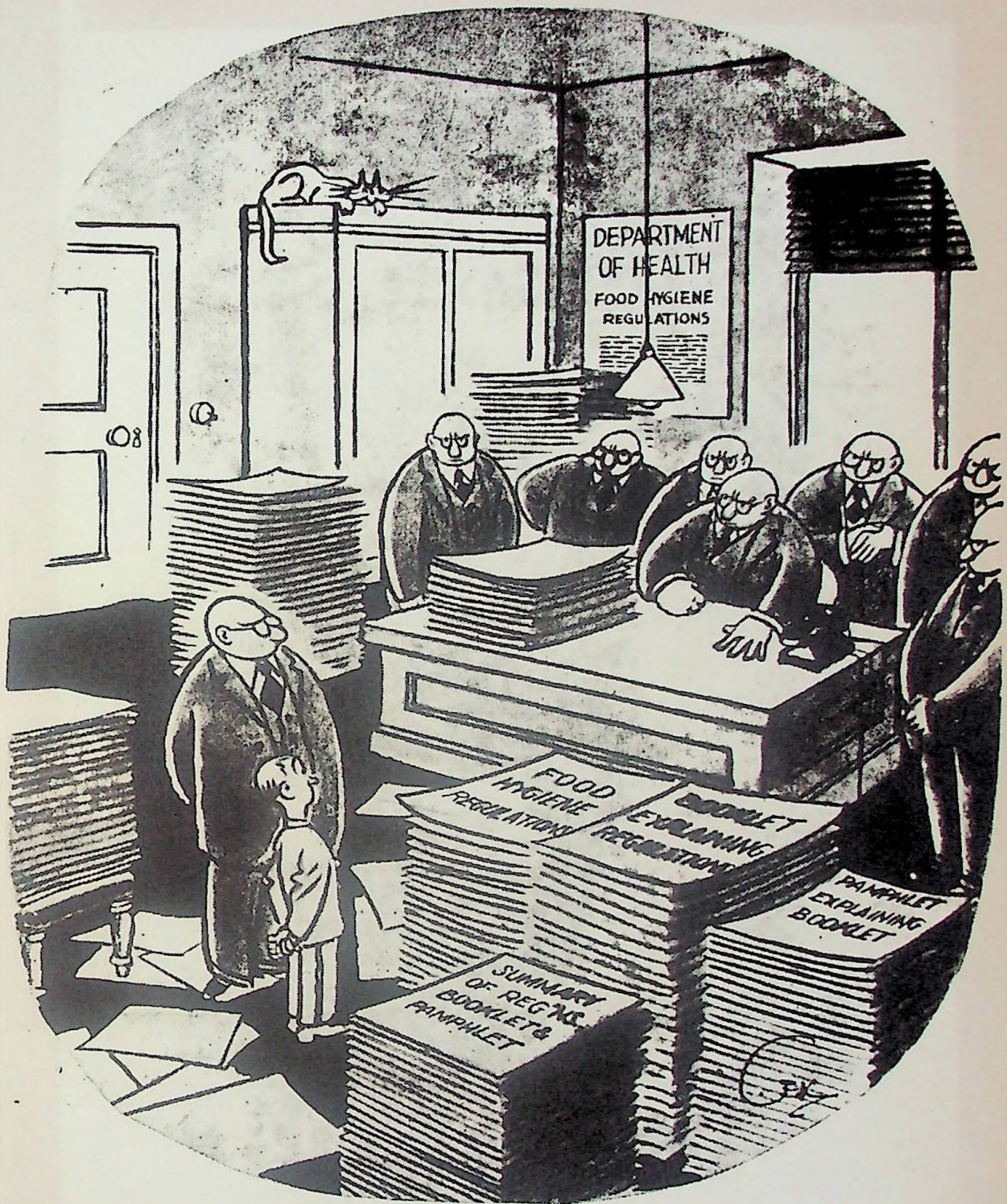
THE NEW MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
 (As imagined by our Grazegeornian Correspondent)

Fig. 2



**THE NEW MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WELFARE**  
*(As imagined by our Grangeogorman Correspondent)*

Fig. 3



" This young brat has the infernal impertinence to say that the entire regulations could have been boiled down to  
' THE SHOP MUST BE KEPT CLEAN AND THE FOOD COVERED ' "

Fig. 4



THE MINISTER WANTS THE FILE

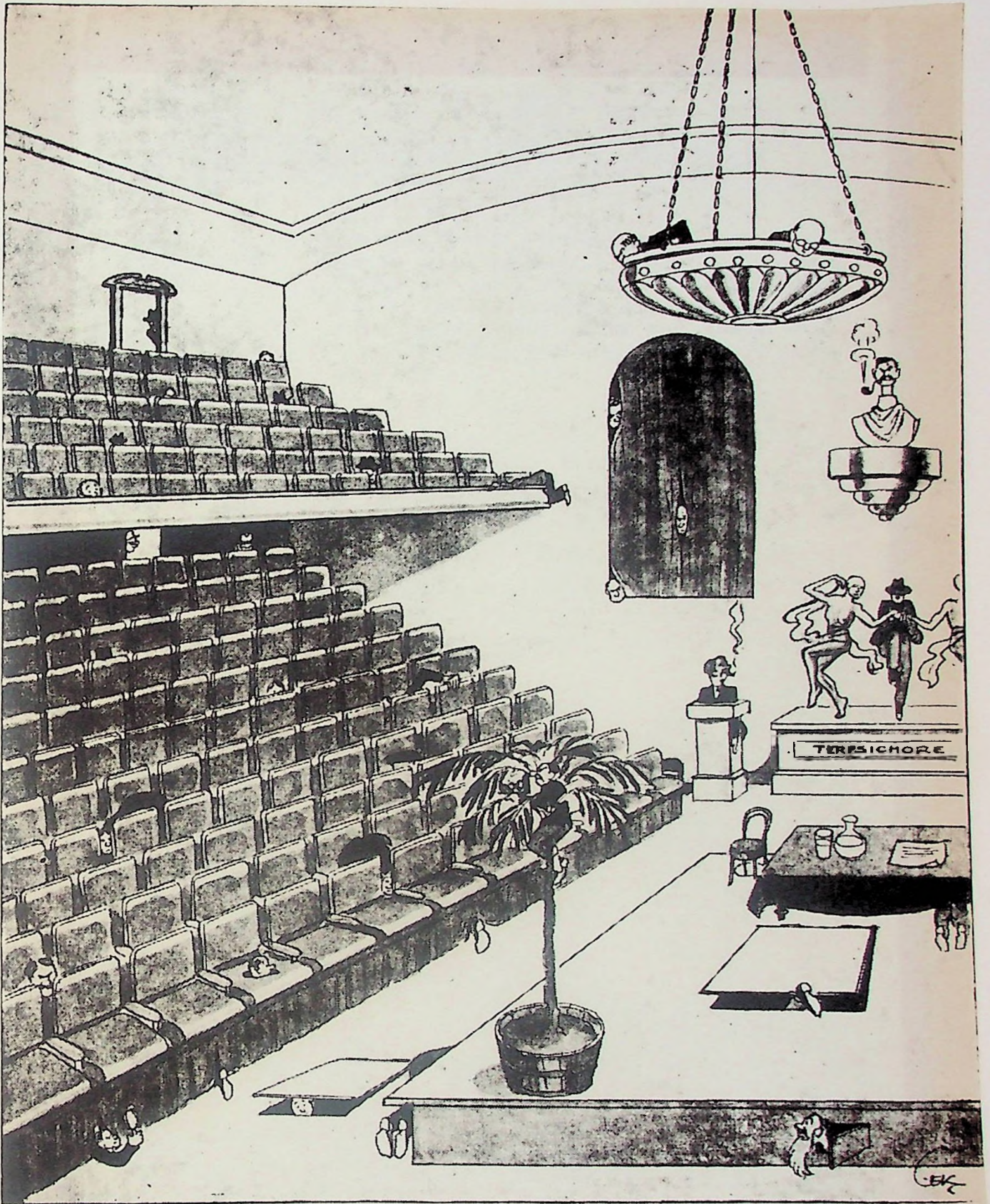
Fig. 5



THE DAIL TAKES PRACTICAL STEPS TO SATISFY ITSELF ABOUT THE COST OF LIVING

Fig. 6





THE DETECTIVE DIVISION HOLD THEIR ANNUAL MEETING.



# BRIGHTER POLITICS



**P**OLITICS AT THE MOMENT ARE AS FLAT AS A CHILD'S NOSE AGAINST A SWEET SHOP WINDOW. CARTOONISTS ARE LIVING MAINLY ON CHEWED PENCIL. THIS IS UNETHICAL, UNREASONABLE AND FAIRLY UNPARDONABLE. THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH OUR PUBLIC MEN COULD RECTIFY THIS STATE OF THINGS....



FOR INSTANCE, A MINISTER MIGHT OPENLY CONTRADICT THE TAOISEACH,



OR DEPUTY McGILLIGAN MIGHT OPENLY AGREE WITH HIM, WHICH MIGHT BE EVEN MORE CATAclySMIC!



THE TAOISEACH MIGHT SUDDENLY ADOPT A NEW STYLE OF WEARING APPAREL,



OR, ALTERNATIVELY, ADMIT THAT HE WAS WRONG IN WHAT HE SAID ON SOME POINT OR OTHER.



DEPUTY OLIVER FLANAGAN MIGHT ASK A QUESTION WHICH WOULD EMBARRASS EVEN DEPUTY OLIVER FLANAGAN,



OR DEPUTY DILLON MIGHT, IN THE MIDDLE OF A SPEECH, HESITATE, STAGGER, AND FAIL TO FIND THE RIGHT WORD.



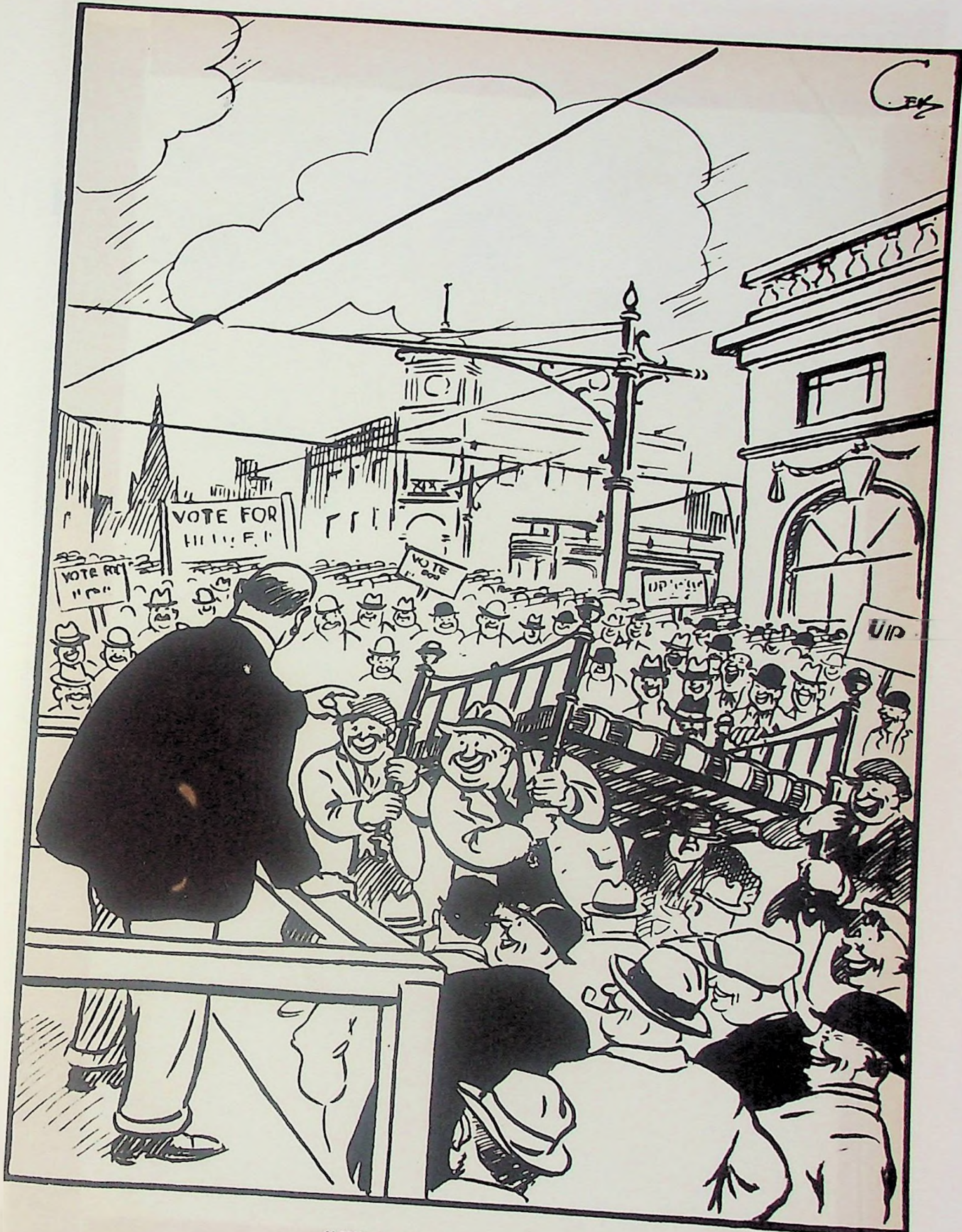
MR. SEAN T. O'KELLY MIGHT MAKE ANY REMARK IN HIS OLD, PLATFORM STYLE ON ANY MATTER WHATSOEVER,



OR THE WHOLE LOT OF THEM MIGHT RESORT TO SOME KNACKER'S YARD AND RUN SOME **REAL** DEAD HORSES.

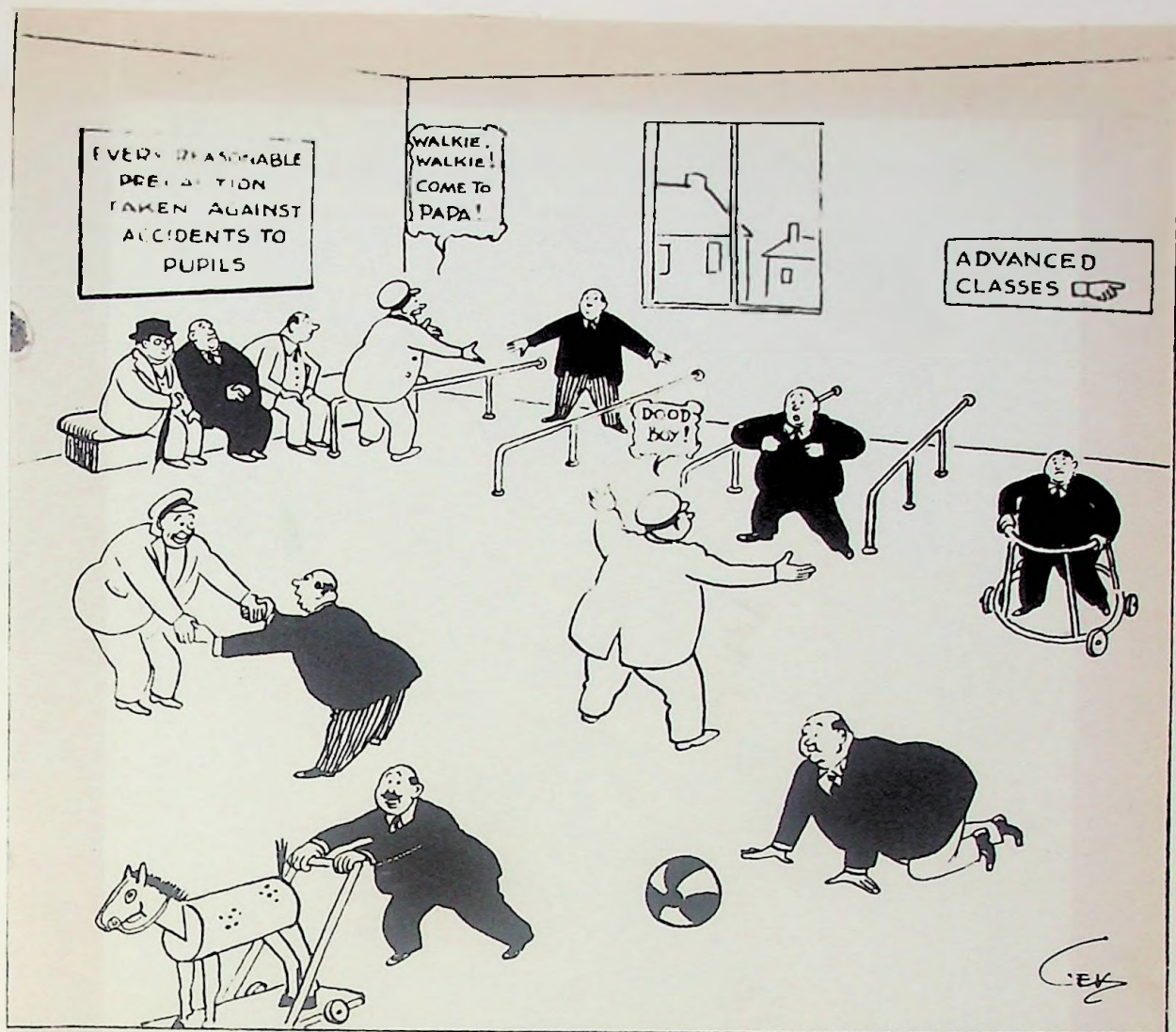
Fig. 9

CEK



"What's this?"  
"It's the bed you were under in 1916!"

Fig. 10



INTERESTING DUBLIN ENTERPRISE. SCHOOL FOR TEACHING BUSINESSMEN TO WALK WHO HAVE AT LAST HAD TO LAY UP THEIR CARS OWING TO WITHDRAWAL OF PETROL RATION

Fig. 11

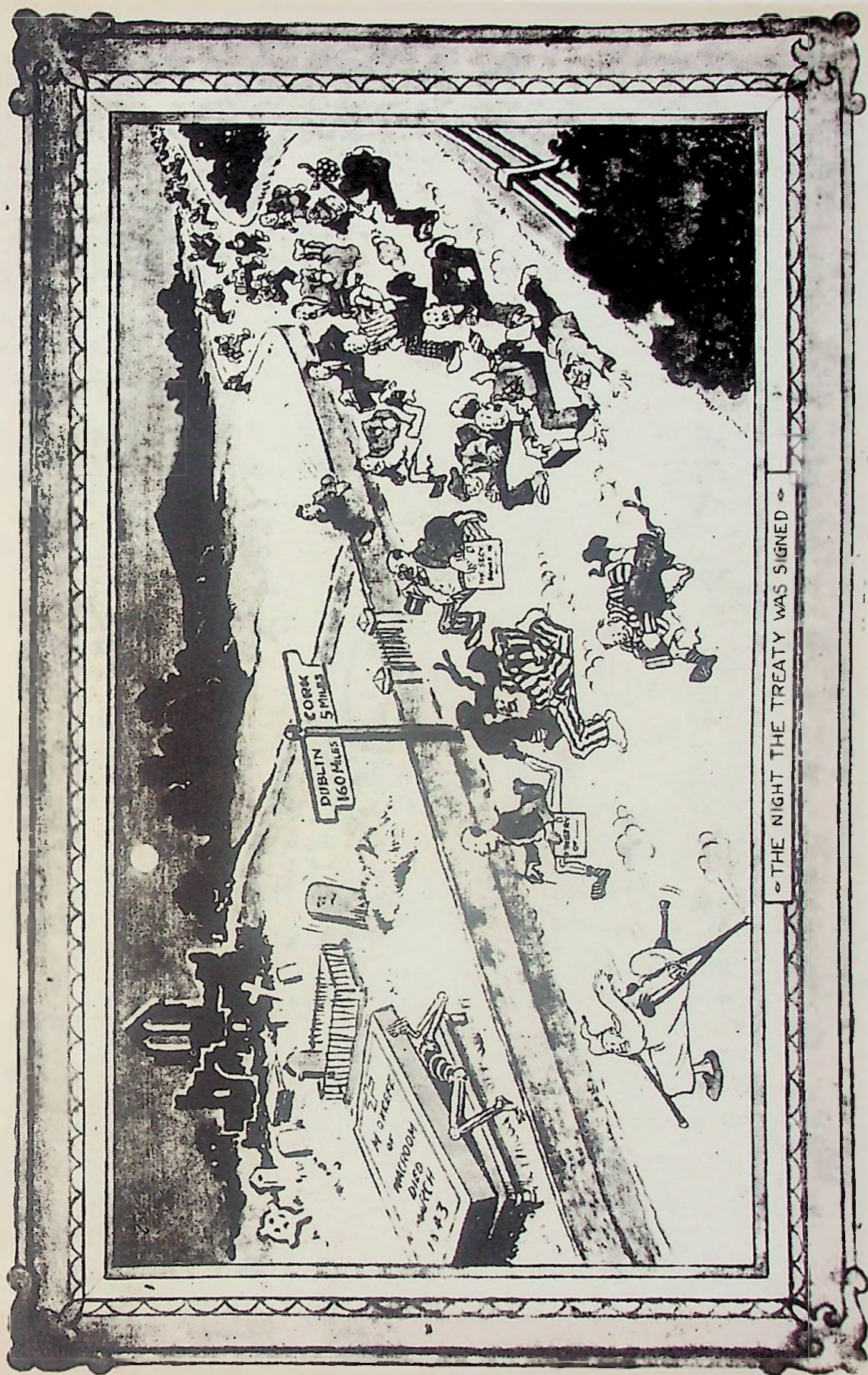
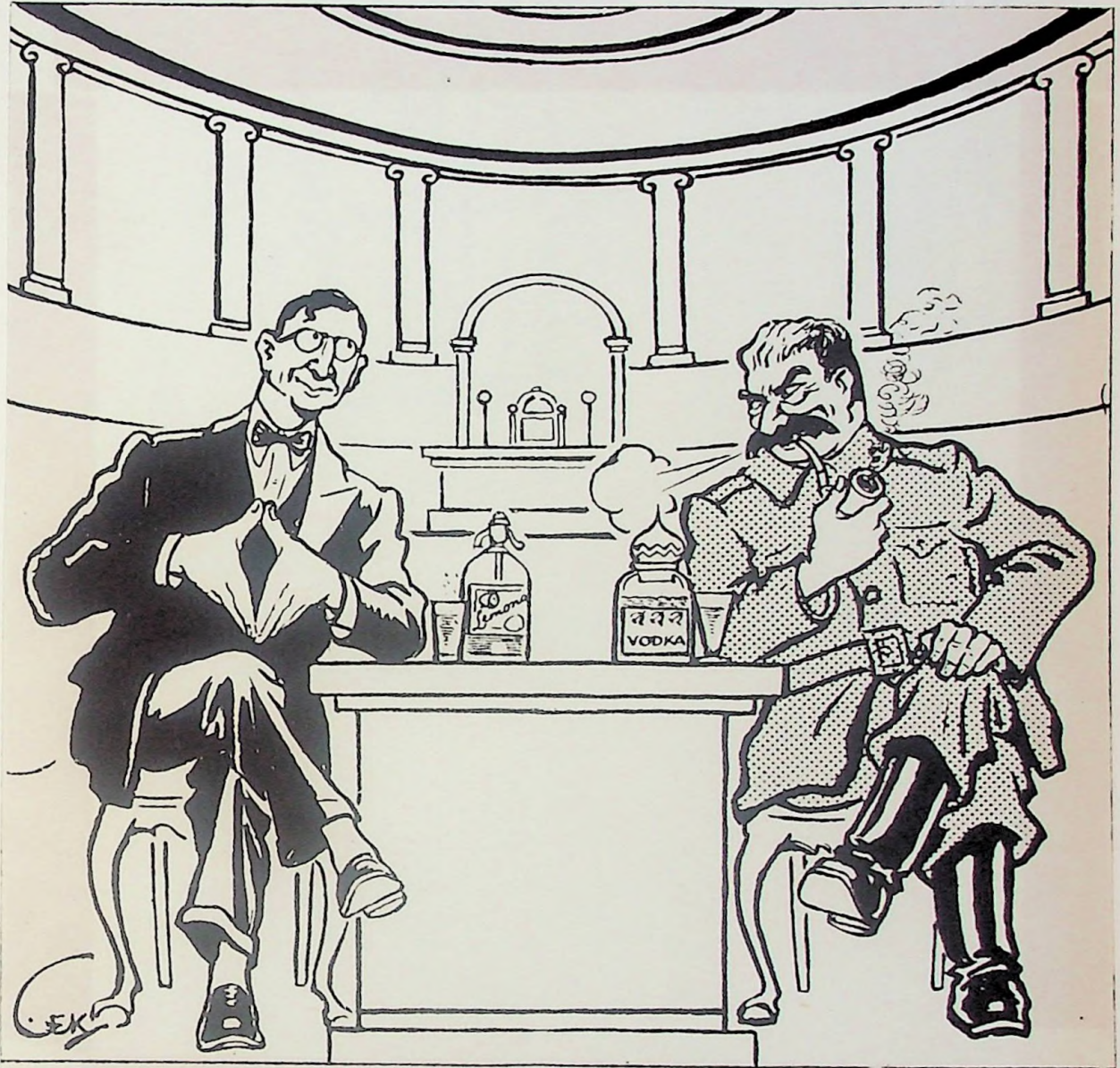


Fig. 12



" Ten past four—any time now we ought to know what kind of a Budget he's cooked up "



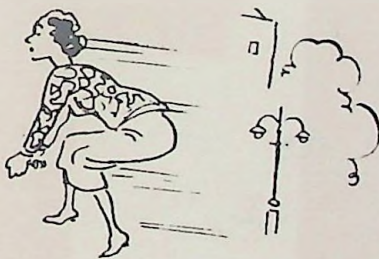
" BETWEEN OURSELVES, DEV, RUSSIA HAS NEVER QUITE FORGOTTEN THAT  
ARTICLE IN ' THE SKIBBEREEN EAGLE. ' "



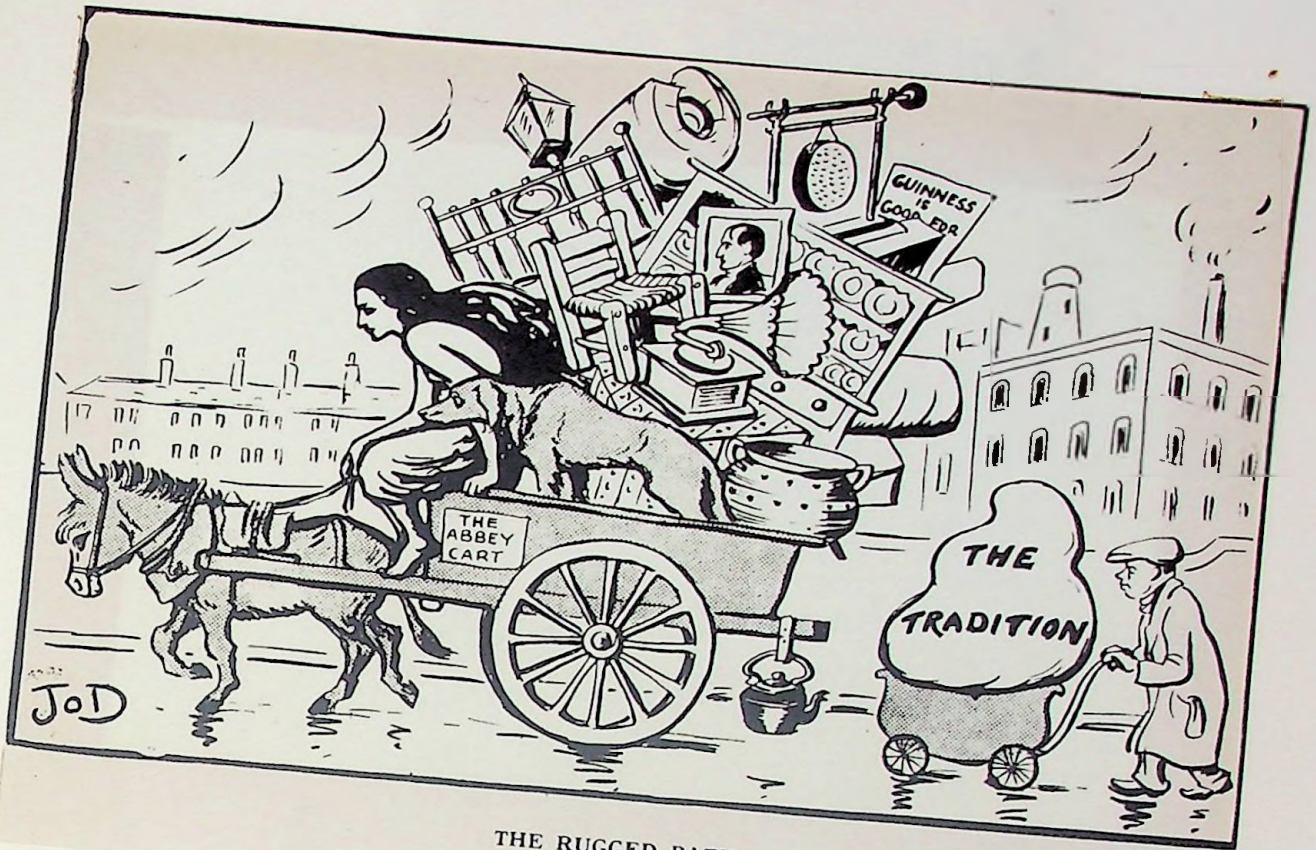
VISITOR: "I wish to interview Lieutenant General Michael J. O'Regan, the Officer Commanding in this area."  
 SENTRY: "Hey there, Mike, you're wanted!"



"Coupons . . . Glimmer-men . . .  
 Units . . . A-A-A-Ah!"



THE SLICK CYCLE THIEF, or the girl who cycled on for a hundred yards before she realised that her bicycle was stolen.



THE RUGGED PATH

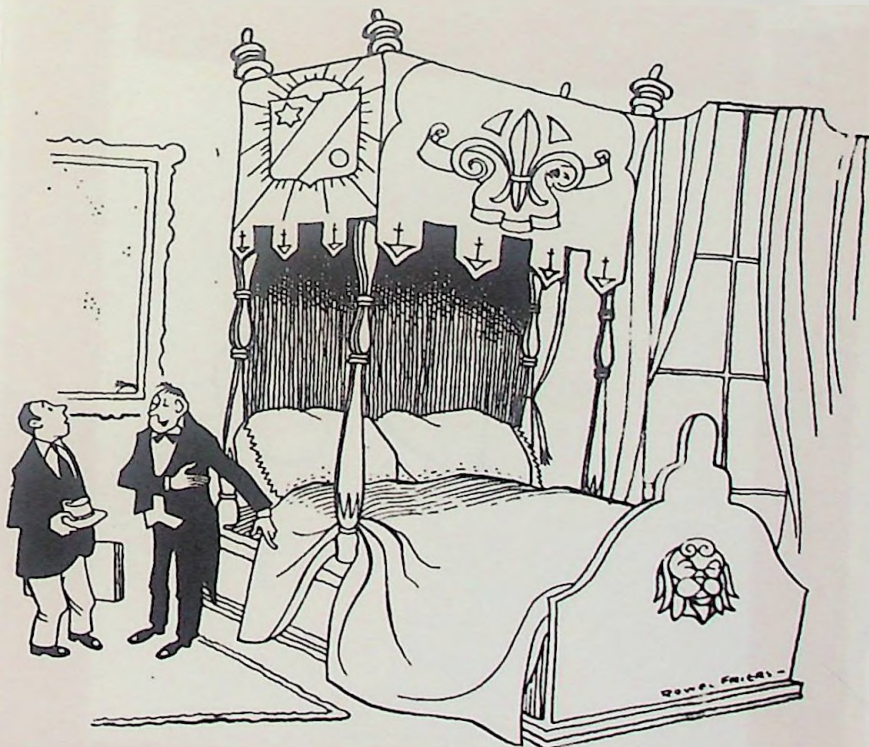


"I don't know how it is, but ever since me eighty-fifth birthday somehow or other I don't seem to be able to take the same interest in Ten Year Plans for Agriculture."

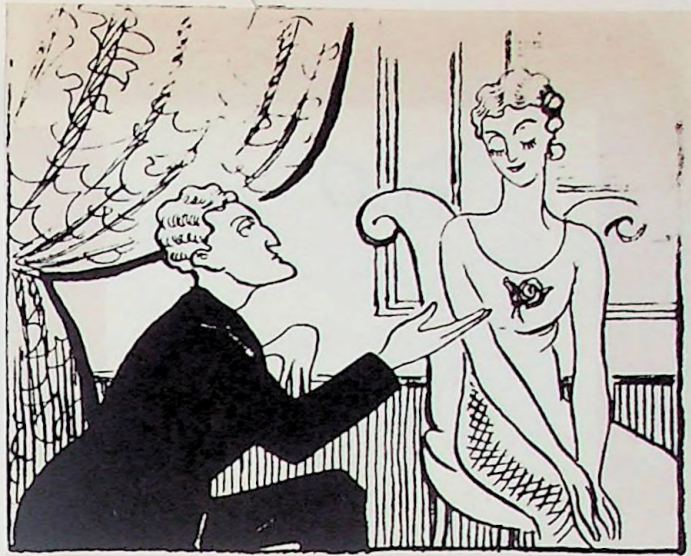




"Arrived all right. Am staying at Gresham."



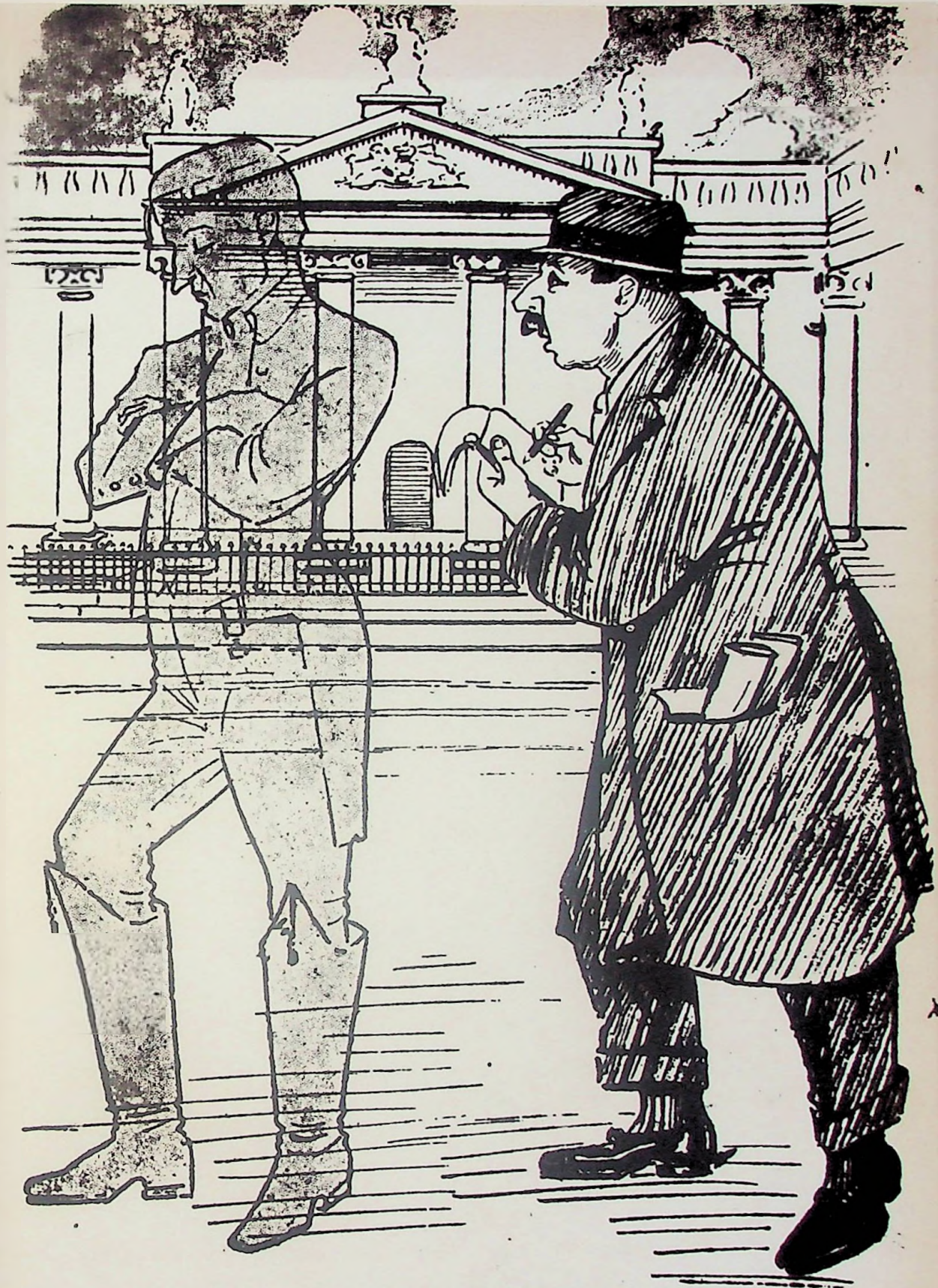
"First the family was decimated by the Normans, then they were smothered by the Cromwellians, and, finally, the Estate Duty got them."



"I have an ancient name, a reputation for honour and integrity, a large and well-ordered estate in the country, and eight pounds of tea."



(Cover Cartoon, October 1923)



NEWSPAPER REPORTER : " And now, Sir, your epitaph ? "  
SHADE OF ROBERT EMMET : " NOT YET ! "

*Drawn by Arthur Booth.*

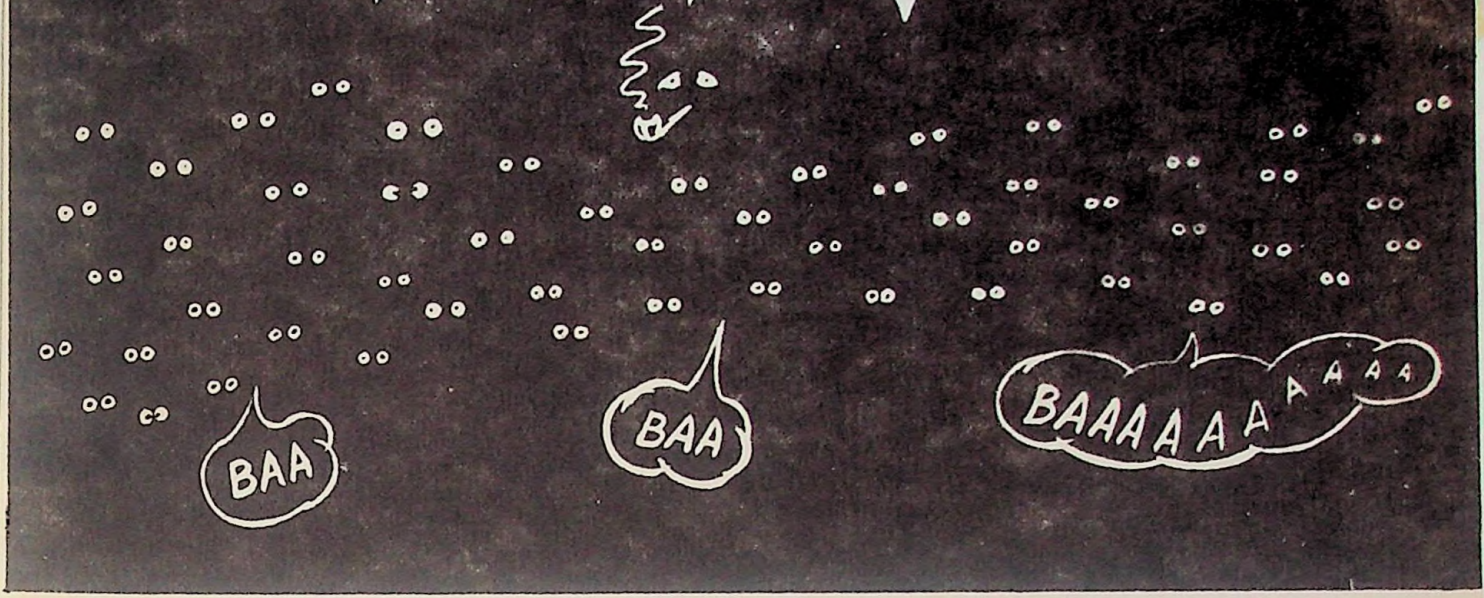
*(Our First Cartoon, March, 1922.)*

THE UNITED IRISHMAN  
WHO HAVE LOST OUR DAY...

THE UNITED IRISHMAN

FIT

"WE'RE POOR LITTLE LAMBS  
WHO HAVE LOST OUR WAY..."



FIANNA FÁIL (THE REPUBLICAN PARTY !!!)

*\*The Dailinations\**

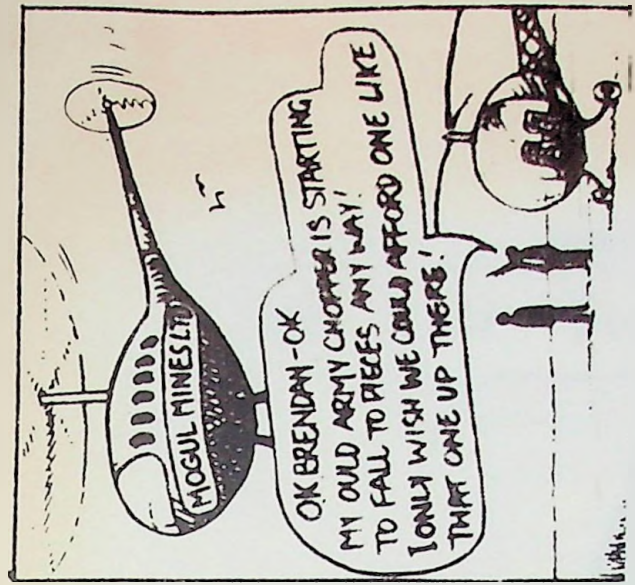


WELL I'M SORRY FOR SHOUTING AT YOU LIKE THAT MR. DONEGAN, BUT ANYWAY IF YOU GO UP IN THAT AT THE MOMENT THE BRANCH ARE LIABLE TO SHOOT YOU OUT OF THE SKY! THEY GET JUMPY IF THEY EVEN HEAR THE SOUND OF A HELICOPTER!

IRISH HELIPORT LIMITED



-ANYHOW IF YOU ARE GOING UP TO MONAGHAN TO CANVASS FOR VOTES YOU DONT WANT TO REMIND THEM OF HELICOPTERS, NOW DO YOU? WHY DONT YOU TAKE ANICE SHINEY MERCEDES INSTEAD?



OK BRENDAN - OK MY OULD ARMY CHOPPER IS STARTING TO FALL TO PIECES ANY WAY! I ONLY WISH WE COULD AFFORD ONE LIKE THAT ONE UP THERE!

MOGUL MINES LTD

*\*The Dailinations\**



HELLO MISTER HEATH SIR! THIS IS LIAM O'NEAVE, PRIME MINISTER OF EIRE SPEAKING. EXCUSE ME FOR RINGING YOU SIR, BUT IT'S ABOUT THE LITTLE JOHN WYMAN SCANDAL YOU HAVE PUT ME IN A TERRIBLE SPOT, SIR.



MR. COSGRAVE??? BUT I THOUGHT MISTER TEE SHOOK WAS EIRE'S PREMIER! TELL YOU WHAT, I'LL CALL OVER NEXT WEEK AND WELL STRAIGHTEN OUT THE MESS - EH? - HAVE TO RUSH, I'M VERY BUSY, CHEERIO, TRA LA, GOOD SHOW, DAY DAY ETC. ETC.

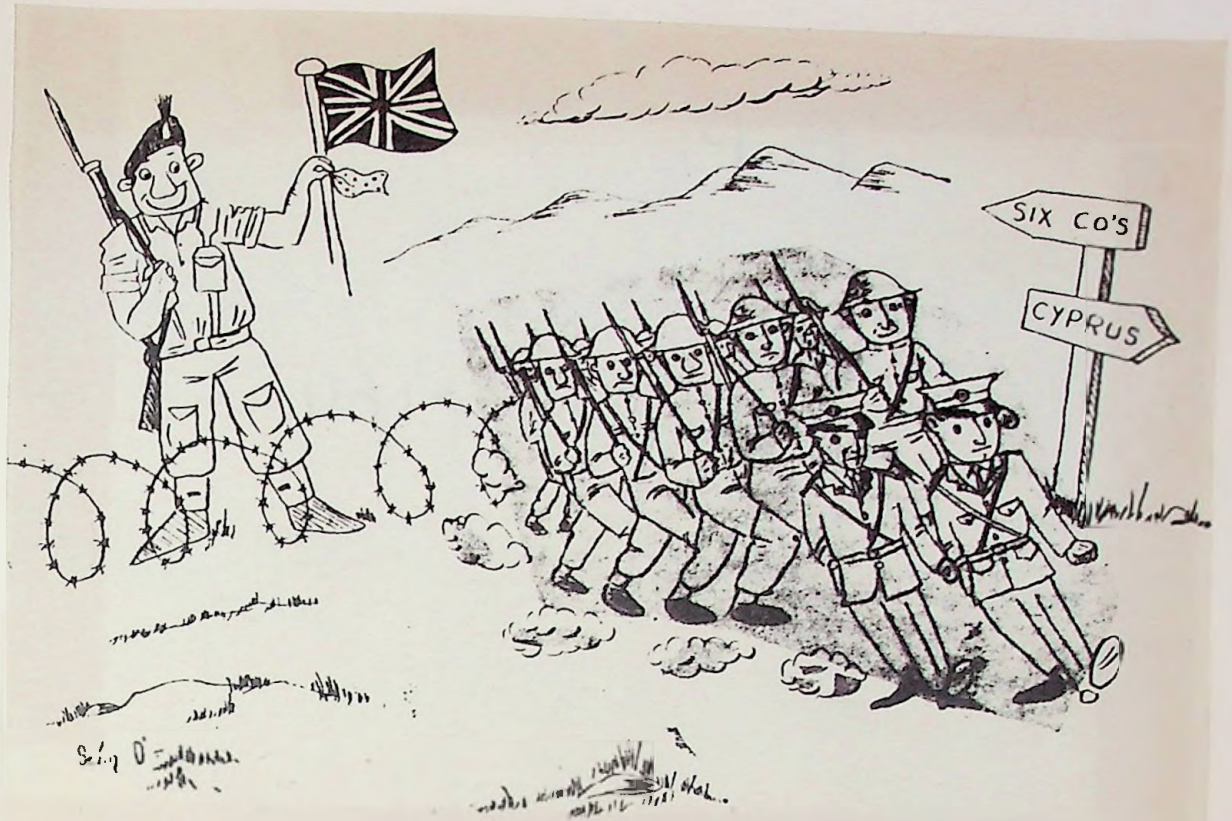


BUT THIS IS GREAT! HEATH COMING HERE! SUCH HONOUR! IF ONLY HE OUL DACOULD IF SEE ME NOW!

CLICK!

# The Last Feather in His Cap





"War-battered dogs are we, gnawing a naked bone;  
Fighters in every clime—every cause but our own."



"THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD!  
BLANDFORD CAMP — FEBRUARY 1958"





THE BOSS



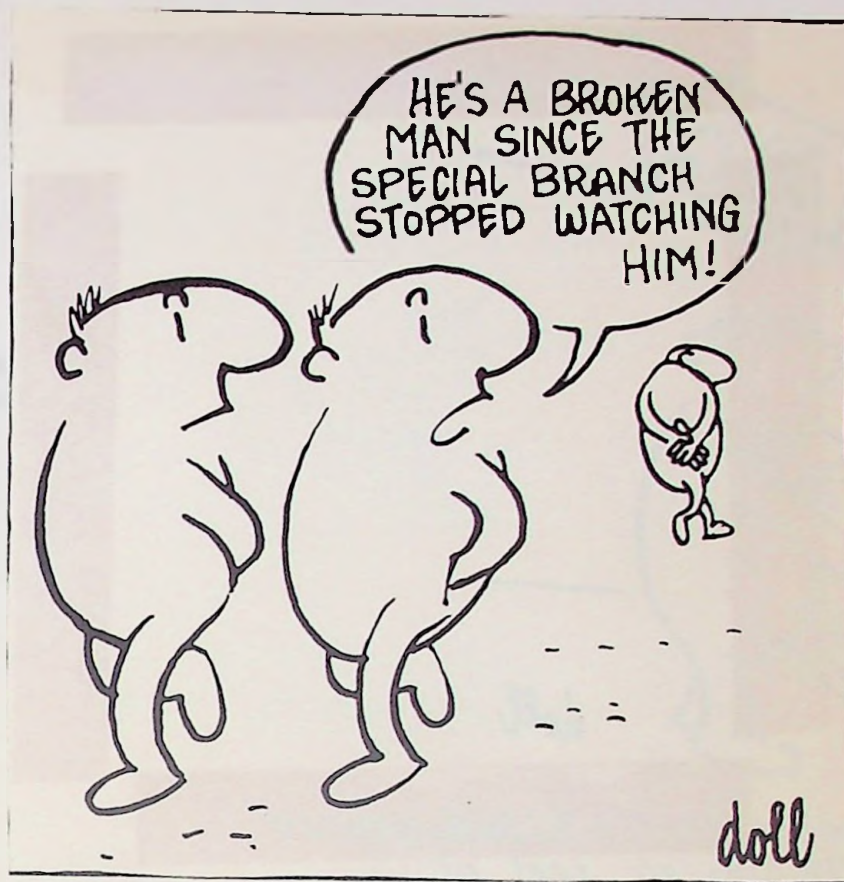


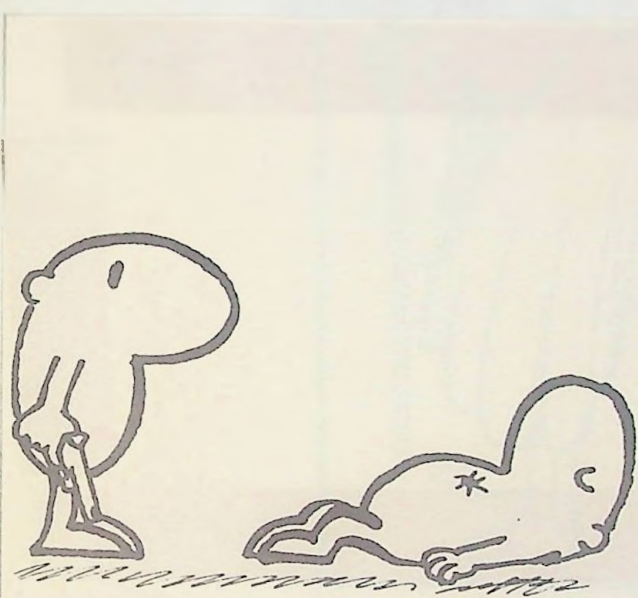
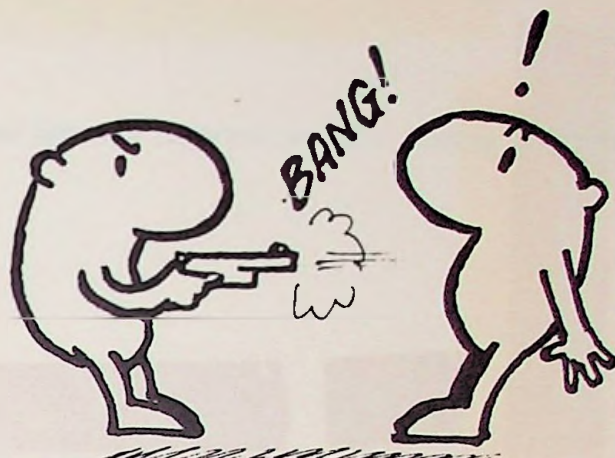
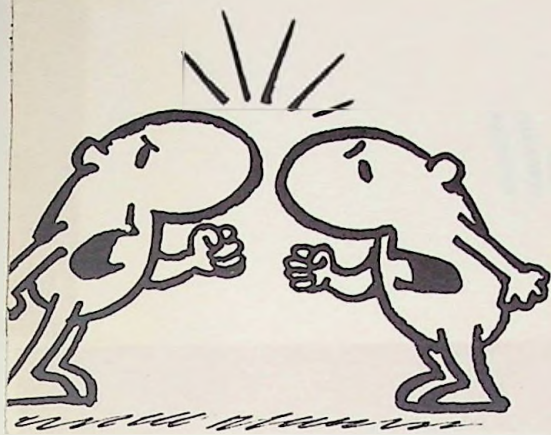
"SOMETHING TELLS ME THAT I'M NOT SAFE UP HERE ANY MORE..."



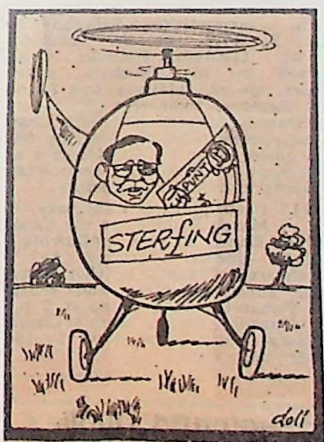
PRESENT DAY CARTOONISTS







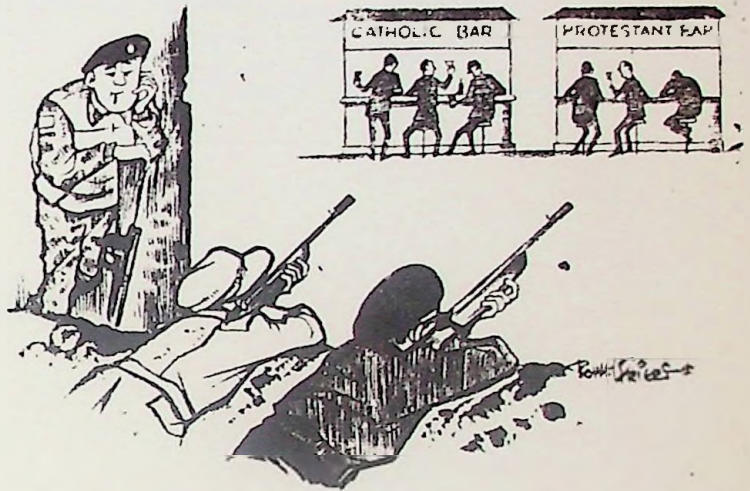
NOW YOU'LL BLOODY LISTEN!



"It would be madly unsafe to get out now"







- 1. The first part of the report...
- 2. The second part of the report...
- 3. The third part of the report...
- 4. The fourth part of the report...
- 5. The fifth part of the report...
- 6. The sixth part of the report...
- 7. The seventh part of the report...
- 8. The eighth part of the report...
- 9. The ninth part of the report...
- 10. The tenth part of the report...

APPENDIX

- 1. The first part of the appendix...
- 2. The second part of the appendix...
- 3. The third part of the appendix...
- 4. The fourth part of the appendix...
- 5. The fifth part of the appendix...
- 6. The sixth part of the appendix...
- 7. The seventh part of the appendix...
- 8. The eighth part of the appendix...
- 9. The ninth part of the appendix...
- 10. The tenth part of the appendix...



## QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Why did you first begin using cartoons?
2. How did your style develop, any particular influences?
3. What about art training, any comments?
4. Did your cartoons follow a certain theme - e.g. politics, caricatures of personalities etc.?
5. How did you begin working commercially as a cartoonist?
6. What is involved with working commercially? What type of brief is given, are ideas approved first, rough submitted - any censorship? Any backlash from politicians?
7. What about ideas, what are the difficulties. Do re-occurring themes (in politics for example) cause ideas to dry up?
8. Do you think cartoonists are taken seriously?
9. Are political cartoonists particularly political or does the subject of cartoons provide the most scope for cartoonists?
10. Why are there so few Irish Cartoonists?
11. Are cartoonists seen as second rate artists?
12. What about Ireland's cartooning tradition - what do you know of our history of cartoons?
13. Any other comments?

I I really don't know,

II At one stage I was much influenced by Gerald Scarfe I liked what he could say with faces and bodies, he really turned me on to Ralph Steadman in a strange way, what I got from them coupled with whatever I already had myself is I suppose responsible for one particular style, which I now use less and less,

III I had no training, when I was at the college I tried with Jimmy Cogan to get a course going with Martin Tondor, we had one visit and that was it, looking back perhaps it was just as well,

IV I never wanted to <sup>do</sup> political cartoons, the sort of thing that was expected just didn't interest me, I did caricatures but the more I developed them the less they were liked, some were rejected because they were deemed to be too vicious, and I wouldn't dilute them,

V A lady friend at the time decided she would have to do something with me, and that included finding outlets for the cartoons, which she did, and I just took it from there,

VI One of the greatest dangers involved working commercially is selling yourself (no pun intended) you end up as I have done, just putting other people's rubbish on paper, for which you are credited - and rightly so, I don't do roughs, Briefs can take any form

written and/or verbal, if they suit me I work to them, not I, just do what I think is best, and they can take it or leave it. Of late I've been getting a lot of push back going too close to the bone in some spots cartoons, but so what,

III The ideas haven't stopped coming yet, where they're coming from, and how they come is something else, I don't think I can answer you here, but I would suggest that the Surrealist areas of involvement, that a little of a dash of lateral thinking would be close to the mark,

IV No I don't think so, as far as I'm concerned it's just part of being me,

V I really can't speak about other cartoonists and I don't understand the second part of the question

VI Same as Tom's answer,

VII Perhaps, if they're seen at all,

VIII What about it? I only know what I read in the funny papers,

IX Unlucky for you,

Billy

14  
② From the earliest times I was noted for puns, jokes etc. as I had discovered that this was a good way to get laughs, avoid being struck by larger people, etc. The chief thing to remember is the immediacy. It's the next quickest way to get a reaction to telling a one line joke but becomes a permanent item, and, at its best, necessarily a personal one.

③ Initially by stealing from Ronald Searle my style soon borrowed boldly from Quentin Blake and André François. I then stole in this order, McLachlan, Albert, Folkers, and later Ralph Steadman, who led me on to draw. Only in the last 18 months could I be said to have attained a distinct personal style both in the humour and the (hopefully) slicker style.

④ I cannot say with what success attempts to teach cartooning have met. It's a lone job. You've got to make a point of view for yourself. You get so you can draw anything in a few lines. You keep files.

⑤ I never deal in politics. Too serious or too silly. On the rare occasions where caricature is used I just did it to draw the guy. Then someone added the caption. That's why my political gags are so bad. That's why I stopped doing them.

⑥ Endless submission to magazines. After 2 years of rejection the Old Dublin Opinion took me up. Six months later people came. Hibernia, smaller magazines and so on. Then freelance jobs turn up. As linguists. Ad agencies etc. Good draughtsmen aren't necessarily cartoonists. One is a specialist, a consultant.

⑦ I do my own censorship. Any cartoon can be sold though not necessarily here. If one has to risk in the impermissible anywhere however, the cartoon's a good place to do it. (SEE DRAKE FOR MORE ABOUT THIS.) Briefs are generally lousy. I never submit roughs and like to read a finished drawing in. I'm impatient with changes. If it looks OK I leave it but I may draw 3 or 4 versions till I like what I have myself.

25 x 14  
2  
50 x 7  
350

Reading, television, other cartoons. That's how to get ideas. It sets the mind going on the flight lines. I try to avoid clichés. A recent gag was inspired by a line from an L.P. I was listening to and suddenly saw another side to.

A. No. I don't it's a sore point. B. Both.

As I don't know I refuse to reply.

There's no graphic tradition in Ireland. The wit's verbal and a picture deprives an Irishman of the chance to say a thousand words.

Only by second rate people.

C.E. Kelly I suppose. Jack B. Yeats cartooned as W. Bird in Punch in the 20's and produced some work far ahead of its time. De Vere White wrote a piece on this aspect of the painter in the Irish Times about a year back. There might be something for you in that.

Unfortunate fails. People don't see the joke or worse still do see it and don't laugh. The money can be terrible. You get caught up in drawing and lose the spontaneity. You can end up illustrating the line instead of making it an integral part of the gag. That's the hardest thing of all.

Tom.