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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

VISUAL STRATEGIES OF ANTI-FASCIST,
ANTI-IMPERIALIST POSTERS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN
AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

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BY

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As an organized political group the
communists have done nothing to damage
our society a fraction as much as what
their enemies have done in the name of
defending us against subversion

Murray Kempton

"What Harvey did"

America comes of middle age
(1963)

The existence of a world without God
seems to me less absurd than the presence
of a God, existing in all his perfection,
creating an imperfect man, in order to
make him run the risk of hell

Armand Salacrou

"Certitudes et incertitudes"

Theatre (1943)6

Education consists mainly in what we
have unlearned

Mark Twain

Notebook (1935)

Sometimes a scream is better than a thesis

Emerson,

Journals (1836)

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INTRODUCTION

There can only be revolution where there is a conscience.

Graffity written during French student revolt May '68

The dissemination of ideas and information in any society is always an important aspect of the development of that society. According to Marxist theory the flow of history and the growth and interrelation of ideas and institutions are all shaped by the evolution of the mode of production.

In a modern capitalist society the dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideas is indispensable to the creation of a genuine communist society. The basis of the relations of production under a socialist system is the social ownership of the means of production. Here

the relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces, for the social character of the process of production is reinforced by the social ownership of the means of production.¹

This is the opposite to the basis of the relations of production under the capitalist system. In this case the means of production are controlled by capital and not the workers in production. These workers, the wage labourers are deprived of these means and in order not to die of hunger are obliged to sell their labour power to the capitalist and to bear the yoke of exploitation.

The systematic spreading of revolutionary ideas is termed agit-prop or agitation and propaganda. In Lenin's "What is to be done" this term agitation-propaganda is explained -

By propaganda we would understand the revolutionary elucidation of the whole of the present system or partial manifestations of it irrespective of whether it is to be done in a form intelligible to individuals or to broad masses. By agitation in the strict sense of the word we would understand calling the masses to certain concrete actions, facilitating the direct revolutionary intervention of the proletariat in social life.

The intervention I am involved with is cultural and this thesis is about the cultural intervention of posters in pre-revolutionary society and their continued use in socialist societies to continue the work of raising the consciousness of people within the socialist framework.

Posters are an ideal form of agit-prop as they are a cheap, easily produced medium for spreading ideas. Their reproductibility facilitates a wide distribution and they can be displayed almost anywhere. I will deal with the visual strategies that are used in different times with different techniques and the effectiveness of their use. I believe that these posters are most effective when the most modern, up-to-date techniques and forms are employed. I will discuss the strategies used in the different

situations and how they are affected by the forms and techniques available.

Revolutionary posters generally fall into two categories, those of actual revolutionary times and those produced in pre- and post-revolutionary times for agitation and education respectively.

These posters are anti-fascist and anti-imperialist as they reflect the struggle of people for self-determination and freedom from exploitation from within and without i.e. the intervention of imperialist powers.

I will commence with a brief history outlining the development of the revolutionary poster and I will proceed to deal with them under the category of "posters produced under pressure" and "the poster as an educational medium".

Footnotes (Introduction)

- 1) History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), p. 126

A BRIEF HISTORY

The earliest known poster of protest and revolution is the 'ninety five theses' nailed to the church door in Wittenberg by Martin Luther in 1517. Luther charged that the money received from the sale of indulgences was going to Rome for the building of a new basilica for St. Peters. The new technique of printing, the movable metal type, invented by John Gutenberg of Mainz in 1447 enabled copies of the ninety five theses to be distributed throughout Germany. The invention of individual letters cast in metal meant that the characters could be arranged and rearranged as many times as desired. This drastically reduced costs and brought about a revolution in communication and education. Out of a need to spread information and orders quickly the 'proclamation' or broadsheet was soon developed and used by the monarchies of Europe to their own ends.

To make the most of the new medium and to impress the rank and file, the proclamation was divided into sections, subsections and paragraphs. Usually a crest was put at the end, the symbol of the issuing authority. The proclamation started with "Whereas" or "By the powers invested in me" and ended with a signature and date. A seal was printed at the bottom to give an air of finality. The proclamation style became an accepted convention, the printed counterpart of a speech from the throne and could be released simultaneously over a very large area.

The proclamation became an instrument of the government and was used for imposing curfews, reporting outrages, the shooting of hostages, incitement to disaffection and non-cooperation.

Throughout the history of its use the proclamation became a handy all-purpose instrument of persuasion. The counter-proclamation, one of the earliest forms of the protest poster spoke back in the same voice of authority by mimicking the conventions used in the proclamation style. When King George V issued a declaration of war, a famous counter-proclamation appeared on the walls of Dublin with an anti-conscription pledge. In Ireland people were familiar with the counter-proclamation - for long periods it was the only articulate voice of opposition. As it developed, it became bolder and stronger in form and content using bold face italics and underlinings, shouting out the rhetoric and polemics of the times. They were nailed to barndoor, walls and trees, warning people against treacherous activities such as ignoring calls to anti-landlord actions:

Let him be marked out as one with whom no person should hold friendly social relations, no one should buy from him or sell to him. No one should speak to him. Let him be shunned as if he were covered with some horrible loathsome disease,...¹

When a situation was clearly defined, such as this one, the writers of the counter-proclamations could let themselves go with colourful writing. Boycotts were often

the subject of counter-proclamations such as 'Boycott them' and 'Hold the rents' (Fig. 1) in the 1870s.

Another famous Irish anti-imperialist proclamation was the Easter 1916 proclamation (Fig. 2) of the provisional government of the Irish republic declaring the sovereignty of the Irish people. Printed the day before the taking of the GPO it was read aloud by Patrick Pearse, a 36 year old lawyer and teacher, the commander-in-chief of the republican government. The tone of the proclamation was hardly hysterical and had a conscious sense of occasion, using very real and earnest language. The proclamation began

Irish men and Irish women, in the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom....²

and continued stating rights and guarantees for the Irish people of the declared Republic. The gravity and significance of this document led the British government to order the execution of all its signatories.

The pictorial poster came into its own in the last decades of the 19th century. By the early 1900s it was an accepted idiom of communication and had begun to evolve its own visual grammar. The technical development of lithography allowed full scale mass production of the visual image. Lithography allowed for the faithful reproduction of

HOLD THE RENTS!
 Who are the GAOLERS of
CHAS. STEWART PARNELL & MICHAEL DAVITT?
 Not MR. GLADSTONE or BLUNDERING BUCKSHOT, but
YOURSELVES, IRISHMEN!
 Who are content to seek and accept paltry REDUCTIONS, and to let
 the men who won them for you, —aye, and who will win much more, if
 you will but follow them faithfully,
ROT and DIE in BRITISH DUNGEONS!
IRISHMEN!
 When the cowardly and the selfish tell you not to mind the "Suspects,"
 but to do the best you can for yourselves, REMEMBER that the beggarly
 "shillings in the pound" you get as "Reductions" are STAINED with
 the LIFE
BLOOD OF JOHN DILLON,
 WHO IS DYING FOR YOU.
 And that the clink of the vile money in your pockets is the RATTLE of
THE CHAINS OF MICHAEL DAVITT,
 For you SLAVING in PORTLAND PRISON.
 Here is what the hireling LONDON "TIMES," your deadliest foe, and
 GLADSTONE'S well-beloved organ, say of you:—"The amelioration already
 visible in the state of Ireland after a little more than three months of severe
 and firm administration of the Coercion Act affords NO GROUND FOR
 REJOICING, but rather for PERSEVERING in the SAME COURSE. It
 would be manifestly foolish to suspend coercive measures the moment they
 are beginning to
"PRODUCE THE DESIRED RESULTS!"
(THE PAYMENT OF RENTS.)
IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN!
 Some of you have already Double-Locked the Dungeon Doors on your
BEST AND TRUEST FRIENDS:
 WILL YOU LET COERCION PROVE A FINAL SUCCESS?
GOD FORBID!

1) HOLD THE RENTS, NOTICE ISSUED
 DURING THE LAND WAR CALLING FOR
 A BOYCOTT AND WITHHOLDING OF RENT
 IRELAND C 1880.

light painted tones unlike woodcuts where cross-hatching of lines was needed to create a somewhat cruder similar effect. Copies could be produced in great numbers because unlike woodcut and engraving the master block did not become worn down.

By 1914 high standards of production efficiency were attained and this medium was used in the Great War. The lithographic poster found itself enlisted. The emotional effectiveness of propagandistic illustration was discovered by the graphic artists of the countries involved and put to full use to enlist people to fight for their country.

In Russia the poster was mobilised for revolution and it played an important part as 75% of the population were illiterate. The poster wasn't just an adjunct to persuasion, it was a centre point and had the added impact of the personal conviction of famous Russian artists such as Lizitsky, Rodchenko, Orlov and Mayakovsky. After the revolution, as the pressures from the enemy without and the enemy within grew stronger, posters were produced to combat the demands of the Cossacks, erstwhile supporters of the Tsar and the old regime - "Who's side are you on. Theirs or ours?" was the slogan of one poster.³ The perils of illiteracy were also tackled - "The illiterate is a blind man, failure and disaster await him" reads another poster.⁴

More and more these posters were used as a back up to

POBLACHT NA H EIREANN.
THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE.

SEAN Mac DIARMADA. THOMAS MacDONAGH.

P. H. PEARSE. EAMONN CEANNT.

JAMES CONNOLLY. JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

educational health and relief programs. In 1921 a terrible famine in the Ukraine and Volga affected 30 million people as the grain crop failed. Posters were produced to exhort others to help the famine victims. Moors stark poster 'Help' (Fig. 3) and Simakov's 'Remember the hungry' are fine examples. A campaign directed towards women exhorted them to take up their role in productive society. Posters urged the end of prostitution and the acceptance of women into the factories.

Lunacharsky wrote in 1900:

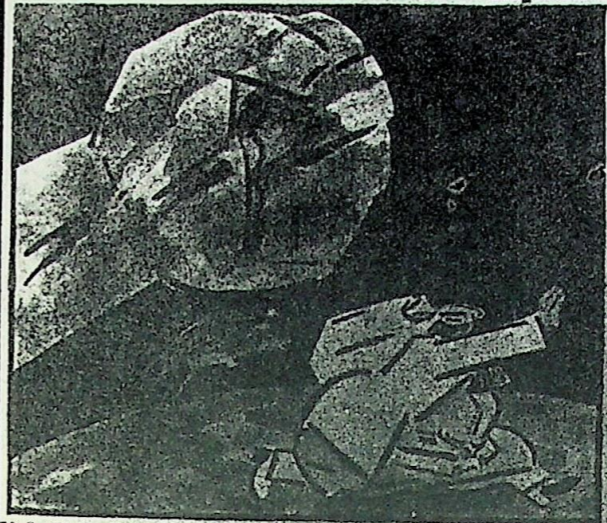
Revolution brings with it ideas of a wonderful depth and inner appeal. It inflames feelings of heroism and self-sacrifice. If revolution can give art a sword then art must give revolution its service.⁵

The artists of the revolution aimed at simplicity and directness and achieved great popularity.

Topical events were reflected and commented upon in the Rosta posters in a humorous way. These posters, drawn in a childlike style, in series of imagery like comic strip cartoons, were designed to get the message of the revolution across to people, the majority of whom could not read. Other forms of mass propaganda included ships and trains taken over and decorated with visual and textual information which travelled into inaccessible parts of the country.

During the First World War, Germany came close to a

ГЛАВ РЕВОЛЮЦИИ



РАЗДАВИТ ГЛАВА ДЕРЕВНИ



ПОМОГИ

general strike. Insurrectionary broadsheets were issued by a large socialist force which existed in Germany at the time, but they were countered by numerous government posters calling for calm, to protect hearth and home from the 'Red Terror'. Calling for the 'suppression of anarchy' slogans such as 'rallying around the Fatherland' were commonly used to whip up nationalist fervour. The suffragette movement was also gaining strength and in 1914, 'Womans Day' (Fig. 4) a poster designed by Karl Staedler as part of a national Red week was clearly seen by the Kaiser as subversive and was suppressed in Berlin by the police who described it as "offensive to the authorities".⁶

One of the first posters to use a photograph was by John Heartfield who was later to become well known for his anti-fascist cover designs of 'A.I.Z.' and 'Photo-Illustrie' in fascist Germany of the 30s. In 'Vote list 5' (Fig. 5) the photograph of a hand, fingers outstretched, as if poised to grab something was produced for the Communist Party of which John Heartfield was a member.

In China in 1947 Mao Tze Tung led the Chinese Communist Party to victory over Chiang Kai Chek's nationalists, bringing the most populous country on earth under the Red flag. After a period of dependency on Russian aid, the Chinese began to regard Mao as a true inheritor of the Marxist-Leninist tradition and Peking as the principal capital of proletarian revolution. The art style of the Chinese posters was socialist realism. It represented



INTERNATIONAL DAY BY KENNEDY JONES
 LER. MUSEUM IN MUNICH FOR WOMEN
 1914



5 VOTE LISTS BY JONES
 DEACTIFIED THE HAND
 HAS 5 FINGERS, WITH 5 YOU
 SEIZE THE ENEMY! POSTER
 FOR THE ELECTIONS 20 APRIL
 1933 GERMANY

people and places in a realist figurative manner and derived its inspiration from Russia. Socialist realism was deemed by Stalin as the art style which reflected the attitude of the party toward art, which set out to abolish the last remnants of elitism, by taking a decisive step away from non-representational art and banning artists who worked in this manner. The Chinese revolutionary posters are reminiscent of vintage Hollywood billboards as the workers and peasants are portrayed like the muscular heroes of the wide screen action films, exuberantly holding up the Red Book of chairman Mao.

After the Cultural Revolution in 1967, the Chinese, in an effort to break from Soviet influence, tended to revert to traditional forms giving them suitable ideological content unlike in Cuba where alternative forms have at least not been discouraged. In August 1961, 2 years after the Revolution took place in Cuba, Fidel Castro wrote in 'Words to the Intellectuals'

The Government must be willing to provide them (the artists) with the opportunity and freedom to express themselves within the revolution.⁷

Three themes were expressed, firstly the promise of freedom within the revolution, secondly the plea for patience if the artist does not feel this is enough and thirdly the recognition that art can aid the revolution by uplifting the people. The government backed up these statements with continually growing subsidies and scholarships. The main producer of posters in Cuba is O.S.P.A.A.A.L.

- The organisation of solidarity with Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is a propaganda agency with the purpose of co-ordinating activities and acting as a communications centre for its Third World members. The organisation sponsors days of solidarity with various groups and countries around the world and its posters are printed in four languages, in keeping with its internationalist philosophy.

Footnotes (A Brief History)

- 1) Posters of Protest and Revolution by M. Rickards,
Introduction.
- 2) This poster is exemplary in that it is directed to
both Irish men and women.
- 3) Posters of Protest and Revolution by M. Rickards,
Introduction.
- 4) Ibid.
- 5) Art in Revolution, Arts Council, p. 13.
- 6) Posters of Protest and Revolution by M. Rickards,
Introduction.
- 7) 'Broad and the Rose' from The Art of Revolution:
Castro's Cuba by Lugald Stermer.

POSTERS PRODUCED UNDER PRESSURE

In times of crisis when an issue takes on the form of a mass boycott, demonstrations, occupations, or develops into a revolution, posters become the only tool of the oppressed for spreading urgent protest or revolutionary information. As the authorities control the general media, they inevitably turn these into weapons to persuade, undermine, attack and order people to give up their struggle. So posters, easily and cheaply produced, become the only means of providing counter-information. In times of pressure the character of the counter-proclamations changed considerably. The information was simplified and defined, dictated by the changes of strategies in the struggle in response to the proclamations of the authorities. Generally these posters were printed hurriedly by underground, illegal groups under very dangerous conditions. The heat of the moment is most poignantly apparent in the quality of some of these posters. The urgency of the situation is conveyed by fumbled printing, omitted letters and under or over inking of the impression and there is always the hazard of last minute changes of policy resulting in some posters having actual gaps in the designs as now useless information or orders become inoperative. The unnecessary characters are removed without an overall change in design. In other situations the different sentences and slogans of the designs were molded and reproduced to be sent off to the different printers in the struggle to ensure that there would be no mistakes

and a uniformity of policy. The main strategies of these posters were to mimic the bold authoritarian style of the proclamations to give them an equal amount of authority and strength of purpose, at times outdoing the boldness of the original proclamations themselves. In one case (Fig. 1) nearly every sentence is made up from different typefaces, with the boldest being words like "Hold the rents" and "Irish men", the latter being used to evoke patriotism and solidarity. The variation in typeface was probably due as much to imagination as to deficiencies in the quantity of letters in each available typeface. The poster threatens that opportunists will "rot and die in British dungeons!" and uses martyrs to the cause such as John Dillon and Michael Davitt to induce guilt in those who might even consider capitulating and paying their rent with 'God forbid'! as the last line of attack; condemnation to fiery hell itself!

Although printing techniques improved in the following decades posters produced under pressure remained in the style of the broadsheet due to the fact that it was the cheapest, most informative and easily produced style of poster in times of revolution. The pictorial poster was used, though, when in 1921 in Russia a severe famine broke out in many provinces due to harvest failure. The gross output of agriculture was only half the pre-war output of the poverty stricken Tzarist days. To make matters worse, Kulak revolts broke out in many provinces using the terrible economic situation and the discontent

of the peasants for their own purposes (the Kulaks were rich farmers who refused to take part in the collectivization of agriculture). The Bolshevik government had already tried to ally itself to the peasant class by giving them a portion of the grain confiscated if they helped to crush the Kulaks who were resisting the government's collectivization plan. Two posters of 1921 show the immediacy and desperation of the situation - Kolin-sky's poster "The fist of the revolution smashing the Kulak" (Fig. 6) and Dimitri Moor's "Help" (Fig. 3). In the former, the fist is used as a symbol of the workers collective power smashing the counter-revolutionary enemy personified by the profiteering Kulak. He is represented as fat, with a well cut jacket and tunic, with watch and chain and a pack of food or possessions over his shoulder running in fear with his arms outstretched. The poster uses these symbols to inspire fearlessness and courage in their fight by portraying the Kulak as a pathetic obese coward. The figure in Moor's poster "Help" is also running with arms outstretched but this time it is the tragic figure of a famine victim shouting for help. The background is also stark, completely black except for one broken stalk of wheat to signify the crop failure. The figure is portrayed as a traditional peasant with a long beard and bare feet. The poster is extremely emotive in impact and evokes pity yet renders explicit the extreme urgency of the appeal for food and aid. Formally the figure is isolated by flat areas of colour which directs our attention completely into the peasant and then

downwards to the text written accross the lowest part of the poster in bold letters. The urgency of the crisis at this time is shown by the barest amount of information given in these posters. Using the simplest most effective symbols and minimum text it is reproduced using only one colour and one printing. Lack of finance for paper and inks also necessitated the development of simple designs that would maximise the quantity of posters produced. It was important that the message of each poster was obvious from the pictorial elements alone as seventy-five percent of the population were illiterate and would not understand the content of the poster, therefore it depended on the image to make the message fully clear to everyone.

This method of producing posters quickly and cheaply took on a whole new dimension in the Paris May revolt in 1968. The political situation in France had been developing to a crisis point, with strikes by agricultural workers followed by general discontent in the factories over pay and working hours. Productivity had risen during the sixties but none of the workers had benefited. Student unrest escalated with large demonstrations against American involvement in Vietnam. These soon developed into demonstrations against De Gaulle and the policies of his government in solidarity with the workers. After student attacks on American offices, the Paris riot police were called in and made things worse by using brutal methods of crowd control. This resulted in street

barricades and an occupation of the Sorbonne university. The Atelier Populaire i.e. Peoples Workshop was set up in the Beaux Arts of the Sorbonne. The purpose of the Atelier was to produce posters, an inevitable development from the sloganized graffiti which had appeared on the walls of the university.

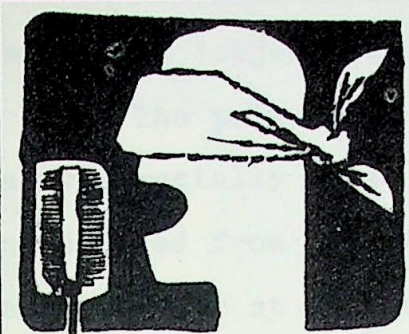
The students felt it was necessary to print posters which would be displayed all over Paris, as another form of resistance, it was the only medium they had access to, through which they could answer the allegations and verbal attacks made by the right wing government. This government owned and controlled the powerful mass media of newspapers, radio and television in France. Unlike other media the poster gives people a greater capacity for interpreting and understanding the message. The time element in transmission on television and radio is controlled by producers, but with a poster it is the viewer who controls his or her viewing time. Furthermore it is possible to avoid the newspapers, television and radio but it is quite difficult to avoid posters.

The students initially printed leaflets to explain their position, but when they turned to pictorial posters using silkscreen the workshop soon took off, with an estimated 120,000 posters being produced throughout the strike. Over 380 different designs were produced with editions averaging around 300 for each design. The production floor was highly organised. Six rooms were used by the atelier,

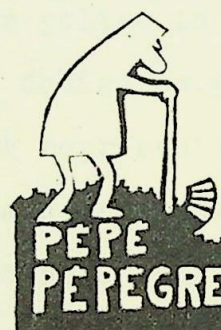
one for design, one for production where the silkscreens were constructed and four rooms for printing the posters. Although originally lithography was used to print them it soon proved to be far too slow, producing an average of 20 posters per hour. Turning to silkscreen the students upped this average to about 250 prints per hour. Assigned posterers collected their allotted quantity of posters in the morning and set to work pasting them up around the city whilst other posters were distributed to union groups and factory committees.

In the design room, slogans were approved by a committee and students submitted visual designs to suit each slogan. Readability and effectiveness were considered the most important criteria. Numerous sketches were submitted by the student body, some were rejected and others accepted by the student committee so that not only was the process of art evaluation democratized but so was its production. The posters were used to attack the police (Fig. 7) De Gaulle (Figs 9, 10, 11, 12) and the mass media (Fig. 8) but they were also used to show the co-operation and solidarity between the student and the worker. Some of the posters consisted of text only (Fig. 13) while others were purely pictorial (Fig. 14). In the poster 'La police vous parle tous les soirs a 20H' (Fig. 15) i.e. the police speak to you every evening at 8:00, both the media and the police are attacked. It shows the usual image of the police with dark glasses, helmet and rifle speaking into a microphone. The poster refers to the evening eight

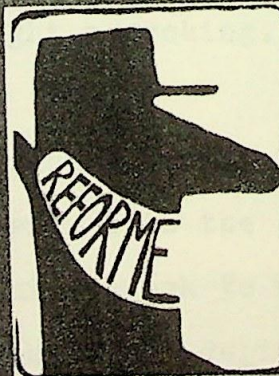
FRONTIÈRES
REPRESSION



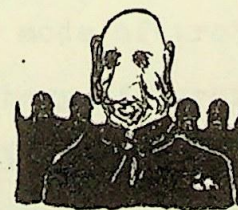
INFORMATION
LIBRE



NON A L'ASSOCIATION
CAPITAL-TRAVAIL



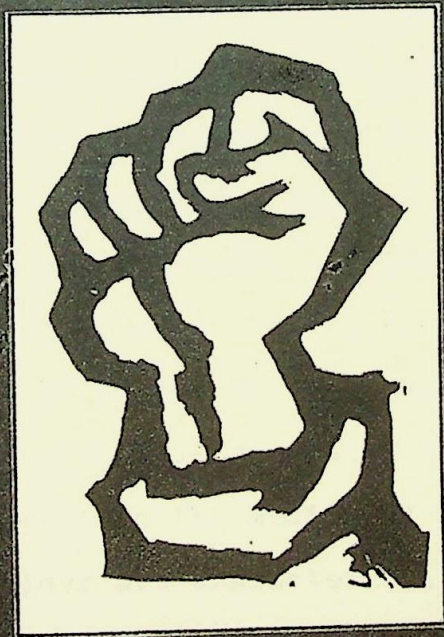
LA PEGRE



o'clock news and implies that the newscasters themselves are policemen, as the so-called 'objective' news contained an anti-workers bias. The police are represented as an ominous fascist army especially as we see nothing of them as people, being covered from head to toe with riot gear. Their fascist behaviour at demonstrations, viciously attacking demonstrators would justify such depictions of the police force. Other attacks such as equating the CRS with the SS (Fig. 13) had a "perfectly serious use in de-mystifying and de-legitimizing repressive authority"¹ and redefined the police from being a security force into a public aggressor. They are presented as a threat which creates an angry response and at the same time initiates an awareness of the true role of the police in society. The formal graphic, black and white design heightens the oppressive character of the figure represented. The black border enclosing the figure and text gives the policeman a claustrophobic, unimpeachable quality. It is a strong, shocking image, especially to those whose personal image of the police might be somewhat different yet it is very effective and thought provoking.

Caricature was another mode of presentation used by the students with the strategy of turning De Gaulle into a laughing-stock to mobilise people against the government. De Gaulle was depicted in different posters as an old man (Fig. 9), a machine (Fig. 10), a reformist (Fig. 11) and as a gangster (Fig. 12). The rash of attacks on De

CRS
SS



Gaulle broke out when, on May 23rd 1968, the worried leader appeared on television to announce a referendum to decide whether De Gaulle or the people of France should run the government. The referendum was considered by the strikers to be a sly method of undermining the strike and the attacks became increasingly vicious. The stock symbols of a large long nose and peaked cap were used again and again in different designs to represent De Gaulle. Even though these were emotive attacks, they were all essentially quite true; he was relatively old; he was representative of the rich capitalist bourgeoisie, typically introducing meagre reforms only when people are forced into actual struggle and like all would-be autocrats controlled and directed a fascist repressive force to consolidate his position. The symbols are reduced to their most basic shapes and metamorphosed into one symbol yet remaining instantly recognisable. This shows that once an object and its use are generally known, even a simplified version of the shadow of that object sets off a process of memory and recognition. The knowledge of this fact is evident in many of the designs and is exploited on a formal level to create the simplest recognisable shapes. The use of simple shapes was due in part to the medium of silk screen where flat areas of colour are characteristic to the medium. The childlike simplicity of the Atelier style sometimes concealed the seriousness of the content but there is a 'down to earth' quality about the posters which demonstrates the positive, non-elitist approach of the Atelier



15) THE POLICE SPEAK TO YOU
EVERY EVENING AT 8:00,
FRANCE 1968.

Populaire. Even the medium of silkscreen can be used by anyone after minimal instruction and was the best choice in this struggle where the only limitations were ink and paper and a high level of skill was unnecessary. In times of pressure access to commercial high quality techniques would be highly unlikely, so one must make the best of what is available. The context of a revolutionary situation makes demands on people to work together as a collective force and pool their ideas to produce and develop innovative strategies and forms to communicate their anger and resistance to oppression by the ruling classes.

Footnotes (Posters under Pressure)

- 1) The Art of Revolution by Susan Sontag, Introduction to The Art of Revolution: Castro's Cuba by Dugald Stermer.

to sell i.e. advertising, or to recruit, as in the two World Wars. In pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary times these posters take on a more polished and leisurely appearance. This is because they arise out of a need to spread revolutionary ideas, as it is inherent in socialist ideology that people learn about the problems that face them and then take up the struggle to free themselves from the forces of oppression. They intervene culturally against other media which are used by the bourgeoisie to maintain the status quo. In post-revolutionary posters the stress is increasingly on consolidating the gains of the revolution and solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. Although the former - i.e. pre-revolutionary poster - is more prevalent today, with poster workshops using silkscreen quite common, post-revolutionary posters used in this manner go back to Russia after the Revolution of 1917 when artists like Vladimir Mayakovsky began producing satirical window posters, called *okna* posters. *Okna* was the abbreviated form of *okna* (window) and the posters were the abbreviated form of the Russian Telegraph Agency, and appeared in the windows of empty shops and vacant business premises.

The posters were silkscreen printed. This method enabled large quantities to be produced efficiently unlike the

THE POSTER AS AN EDUCATIONAL MEDIUM

There has been a long and well defined history of revolutionary posters used as educational tools. Most other posters were created to give orders i.e. proclamations, to sell i.e. advertising, or to recruit, as in the two World Wars. In pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary times these posters take on a more polished and leisurely appearance. This is because they arise out of a need to spread revolutionary ideas, as it is inherent in socialist ideology that people learn about the problems that face them, and then take up the struggle to free themselves from the forces of oppression. They intervene culturally against other media which are used by the bourgeoisie to maintain the status quo. In post-revolutionary posters the stress is increasingly on consolidating the gains of the revolution and solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. Although the former - i.e. pre-revolutionary poster - is more prevalent today, with poster workshops using silkscreen quite common, post-revolutionary posters used in this manner go back to Russia after the Revolution of 1917 when artists like Vladimir Mayakovsky began producing satirical window posters, called Rosta posters. Rosta was the abbreviated form of the Russian Telegraph Agency, and appeared in the windows of empty shops and vacant business premises.

The posters were silkscreen printed. This method enabled large quantities to be produced efficiently unlike the

woodcut process used in the earlier Lubok prints. Shapes could be cut out of paper and used as stencils when stuck to the underside of the screen. A squeegee, a piece of wood with rubber inlaid lengthways is pulled down the screen, forcing the ink onto the paper. This is a simple process to learn and operate. Woodcut, on the other hand, demands more skill, training and hard work and it is much more difficult to construct a woodcut press than a silk-screen, which is merely a wooden frame with a fine mesh stretched over it.

The posters consisted of slogans, instructions, poetry, combined with bold graphic emblems and figures. They generally were structured into sequences of 4 - 6 - 8 - 12 or 14 narrative pictures, captions or verses and silkscreened in three or four colours. This style was influenced by earlier coloured woodcuts known as 'Lubok' (Fig. 16), a popular folk form also using a simple graphic technique with text. This format was utilised to present information and instruction in political, economic and military matters. It was a revolutionary situation that caused this radical development of a typical folk tradition. The necessity of enlisting the support of the peasants in the fight against the White Guards, yet in a manner that could be understood in a society with low literacy, meant that the designs had to be 'readable' whether the text was there or not.

One Rosta poster 'Defeat the White Guard' (Fig. 17) reads:



16) HOW THE MICE BURIED THE CAT, LYBOK WOODCUT, USSR, C. 1725



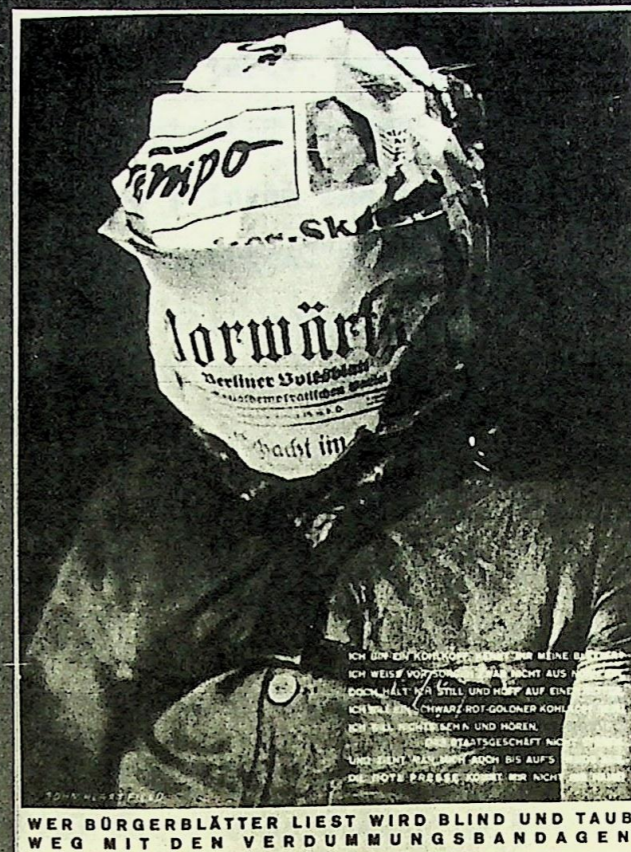
17) DEFEAT THE WHITEGUARD
BY VLADIMIR MAYAKOVSKY, USSR,
1920.

- 1) If you don't completely defeat the White Guard
- 2) the White Guard will get back up on his feet again.
- 3) If you deal with the pan i.e. the enemy, with arms folded
- 4) Wrangle (the White general) will raise his hand against the worker.
- 5) Without reinforcing the Red flag
- 6) we shall never be able to throw away our guns.

This commentary is similar to a primary school reader and is in keeping with the childlike form of the pictures which are very lively and have a 'modern' edge to them. This is due partly to the technique of screen printing which tends towards defined flat areas of colour and partly to the influence of suprematism, an art movement concerned with reducing an image to its most basic form of pure geometric shapes. In the first picture of the series the familiar fist of the collective strength of the people, with a star on the cuff, wallops a White Guard over the head. He is portrayed with eyes bulging with shock and sharp triangular teeth to convey the viciousness of the counter-revolutionary. The ease with which all this is conveyed demonstrates to people how equally easy it is to defeat the enemy by joining together in a show of strength when they appear. In the next image a White Guard is represented carrying a whip and a gallows pole. He also wears a red uniform but with the symbols of the crown and the cross. This is an extremely clever juxtaposition of colours and symbols. The 'Red' Guard is nothing but a fat counter-revolutionary bearing the symbols

of the Church and the Tzar. While not carrying a gun with which to attack people as might be expected, but a whip symbolising repression and death experienced under the autocracy of the Tzar. The images continue showing a Red Guard with arms folded as a gun sticks into a fallen enemy. This is a warning that without his gun he is weak and susceptible to attack, as the next image shows. The last two images in the series show a strong Red worker with his gun in hand. He is depicted as fighting away foreign armies who would try to seize the flag and hoist their own. Throughout the pictures the worker is conveyed as strong if he/she works together, warned to be ever vigilant, to be proud of their flag and to use the gun to protect it if necessary. I am quite sure that response to this poster was positive as optimism and strength are inferred by the bright colours and the lively depiction of the characters. This strategy of appealing to national pride and their victory over capitalism was one which appealed to people. They had worked hard to build socialism in their country, Russia had been ruined by two wars and was resurrected without any financial support from other surrounding countries who isolated it when attacking with their armies had failed.

With the development of photography came the development of new visual strategies in posters. The photomontage work of John Heartfield (Fig. 18) stands out as being the strongest anti-fascist propaganda produced in its time. Photomontage was the technique of collaging together



18) THOSE WHO READ BOURGEOIS NEWS-
PAPERS BECOME BLIND AND DEAF BY
JOHN HEARTFIELD, GERMANY 1930

photographs culled from different sources. Inspired by the Revolution in Russia, Heartfield joined the Communist Party in Germany and used his graphic skills, learnt during a period spent as a commercial artist, to produce posters for the party, and later designed covers for the "Workers Illustrated Paper". Heartfield knew the mass effect of the printed image and strove for the widest possible distribution. His method was to take a photograph used by Nazi propaganda, a "literal visual quotation" and confront it with the social facts that it is supposed to conceal. This causes a shift of meaning and forces the viewer into an active role of participation. This is so because when we see a photograph, what is represented is real, and exists in an objective world due to the mechanical reproduction of reality by the camera. But photographs contain a range of symbolic cues which are interpreted and decoded depending on the culture of the viewer. What Heartfield does is to manipulate 'reality' by a conscious arrangement of cut-out photographs and in so doing manipulates their meaning on the level of what they symbolise. Heartfield intervenes culturally by forcing the viewer from an unconscious process of decoding into a conscious process of decoding, therefore participating in an active sense and so the viewer becomes a reader putting the different 'words' together to understand quite clearly the meaning of the 'sentence'. In advertising symbols are manipulated to persuade, but Heartfield uses symbols to convince, with the objective reality of photography as a starting point. The end product, a photo-

montage to undermine the propaganda and ideology of fascism. Heartfield's montages are extremely emotive in impact but this strategy was necessary to combat the emotive anti-intellectual excesses of fascist propaganda masterminded by Goebbels for the National Socialists in Germany in the early thirties.

Photography is also used in Chinese anti-imperialist posters. These posters printed in the early sixties, protesting against American involvement in Vietnam, are a development from Chinese wall newspapers. The technical advancement of photo stencils is used again here but in a different style to Heartfield's montages; the emphasis is on photographs, yet with more text than is usual for a poster. The photographs are presented whole or cropped but not cut up in the manner of a collage. They are laid out in a tight formal composition with flat areas of colour used as a background for captions and text. Like the earlier Rosta posters the information is presented as a series of pictures.

The photographs become representations of reality i.e. factual evidence of the real life situations, but also become symbols of that struggle, similar to the Rosta posters the symbols are manipulated by careful choice of what photographs are used. Quotes from Mao Tse Tung form an important part of the text -

All reactionaries are paper tigers. Remember - the style of the reactionaries is fearsome... In the long

run, the real power does not belong to the reactionaries but to the people

states one poster (Fig. 19) with five photographs about Vietnam. In the upper half centre is a cut-out photo of president Johnson with his neck in a noose, a symbol for his involvement in Vietnam. The necessity for collage is minimised and used as a small part of the poster with three-quarters of the whole area of the poster devoted to photographs which show Jet fighters leaving an aircraft carrier, symbolising American attack and aggression; a demolished building - destruction; troupes on Vietnam territory - American imperialism; an American soldier setting a Vietnamese house on fire - terrorism and finally a large boardroom with men in suits in discussion - capitalists planning new strategies. So what at first might seem a random collection of photographs is actually a logical narrative about the facts of American imperialism in Vietnam and the photographs are there to prove it. Whereas the Rosta posters were limited to drawn symbols and emblems to convey information and ideas, photography is now used. The more extensive use of text implies a much higher literacy level, yet the poster can still be visually 'read' if the text is taken away. President Johnson with his head in a noose is the only consciously determined element in form, whereas the other images are consciously determined in content.

This factual approach, reminiscent of newspapers, is directed at an educated audience who are used to reading

newspapers and digesting information for self-education and learning in an informed way about the world around them. In my opinion this use of imagery and text is very important as modern techniques and forms are employed. In a situation where the majority of people are literate, the information should be presented to people to think about and digest for themselves. The appeal is to the viewers intellect not just to the emotions. Among educated people it is not sufficient to explain ideologies and figureheads in terms of 'good' and 'evil' since this approach can only perpetuate superstition and ignorance.

Chinese anti-imperialist posters are also produced for international distribution with text printed in three or four different languages. These posters convey an internationalist philosophy of solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles being waged around the world. They are excellent quality off-set litho reproductions of painting combined with text. The paintings depict people as strong and determined carrying guns to show the lengths they are willing to go to for self-determination. The symbols of traditional costumes are used, to show that indigenous culture is encouraged and that the enemy is not the peoples of other countries and cultures but the system of capitalism which exploits all peoples indiscriminately.

In a poster of 1967 "US imperialism must get out of all places it occupies" (Fig. 20) people of at least eleven countries are represented rising forward, guns in hand

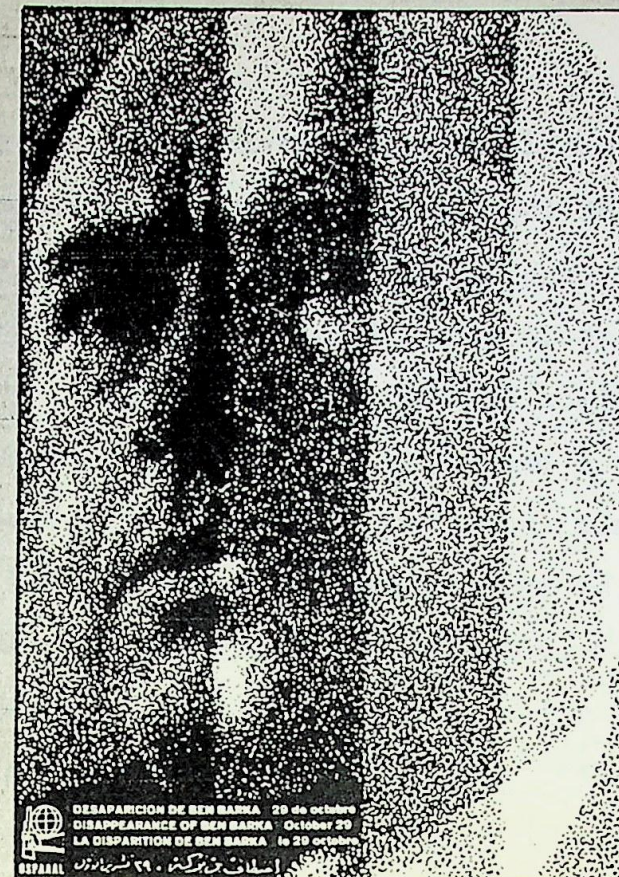


Resolutely Support the Anti-imperialist Struggles of the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America.
Soutenir fermement la lutte anti-impérialiste des peuples d'Asie, d'Afrique et d'Amérique latine
Firme apoyo a la lucha ant imperialista de los pueblos de Asia, Africa y América Latina

20) US IMPERIALISM MUST GET OUT OF ALL
PLACES IT OCCUPIES. CHINA 1967

as if in war. Their anger and strength is conveyed by the symbols used: raised fists and open mouths while their faces are set, teeth clenched in determination. The most prominent figure is a negro, the most discriminated against in many societies, depicted in the bright colourful robes of his national dress, carrying a gun with the broken chains of enslavement still attached to his wrist. His face and eyes are livid with anger as he rushes forward. Women are also depicted carrying guns as their role is equal to their menfolk in the struggle for liberation. The text reads "Resolutely support the anti-imperialist struggles of the peoples in Asia, Africa and Latin America" in English, French and Spanish. These three places take up nearly half the land mass of the whole world, exposing the extent of US imperialism. The theme of 'the family of man and woman' is used to invoke solidarity and promote questioning of one's own position, as well of the position of others, outside of one's own experiences. This is unlike the propaganda of the bourgeoisie who portray these people in a threatening way, as savages who can't look after their own affairs. Meanwhile the neo-colonialism of bank loans with high interest rates, bleed these countries dry leaving them with terrible poverty and famine which is then exasperatingly presented as an 'act of God'.

Solidarity is also a theme of Cuban posters, most of which are produced by O.S.P.A.A.L., the organization of solidarity with Asia, Africa and Latin America. Such as the



21) DISAPPEARANCE OF BEN BARKA,
CUBA, 1967.



22) WHY A WAR IN VIETNAM,
CUBA, C 1967.

poster "The Disappearance of Ben Barka (Fig. 21) about a Moroccan leader presumed murdered whose assassins have never been found. A mezzotint is used in tones from black to grey to visually depict Barka disappearing. "Como en Vietnam" (Fig. 22) is a poster of solidarity depicting a Vietnamese in black and white and a speech bubble with a colourful picture of a Vietnamese woman harvesting wheat in a future time when Vietnam is freed from American imperialism. Posters are also produced by an internal propaganda agency C.O.R., Commission for Revolutionary Action, such as 'The Heroic Guerilla' (Fig. 23) commemorating Che Guevara and the 10th anniversary of the Revolution, part of "Revolucion" (Fig. 24) a clever series of posters incorporating the letters of "Revolucion" into the design of the posters with a wide range of photographs to commemorate different events in post-revolutionary Cuba.

The educational role of political graphics in Cuba is evident in the plethora of posters produced to supply usual commentaries on the main political events during the course of the year. They announce days of solidarity with foreign struggles, publicize rallies and international congresses and commemorate historical anniversaries. Cuban posters are known for their colourful, emotional, almost sensual approach with unparalleled stylistic eclecticism. Yet they are dignified and never detached. They are very decorative with the weapons of war also being incorporated and aestheticized. Their importance is recognized by the government who supply money in the form of

1967
GUERRILLERO HEROICO
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



23/11/67 - EL HEROICO GUERRILLERO CHE GUEVARA

grants and subsidies to the group involved in their production. Their use for public teaching is "to confirm, reinforce and further disseminate values held by the ideologically more advanced strata of the population"¹. The bright colours and lightness of forms verging on theatricality, serve to uplift people, to "express pleasure at certain ideas, moral attitudes and ennobling historical references"².

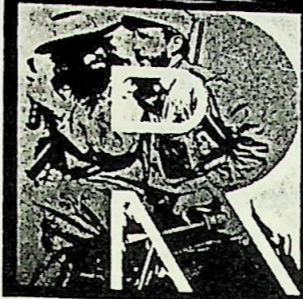
Especially in a poor society hit by economic scarcities imposed by the American blockade, the purpose of the posters is not just to build morale but to "raise and complicate consciousness - the highest aim of the revolution itself".³ They are put up all over the island and are used as decoration as they are decorative objects in themselves. But this does not detract from their educational role as learning becomes associated with the posters and takes on the positive aspects of the posters. It is a credit to this country that they can produce so much poster work considering their means, but the poster designers have yet to find their feet and take a more serious attitude to this powerful medium. It is necessary for them to understand the full potential of this medium and utilize it to its best so as to produce a more balanced poster of decoration and information with an indigenous style.

The educational values of revolutionary posters in a pre-revolutionary situation is exemplified by the Poster

1959

LIBERACION

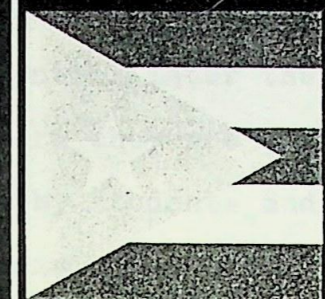
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1960

NACIONALIZACION

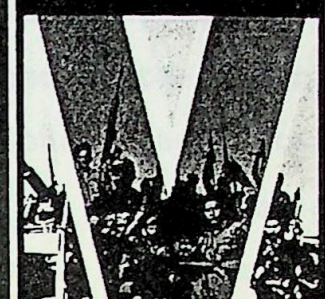
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1961

VICTORIA DE GIRON

DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1962

CRISIS DE OCTUBRE

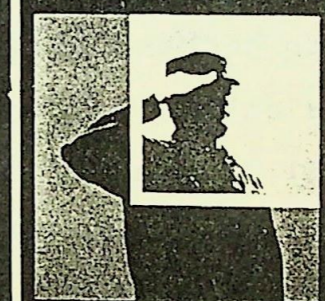
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1963

S.M.O.

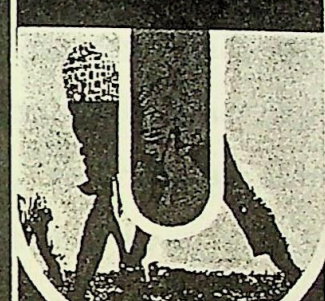
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1964

TRABAJO VOLUNTARIO

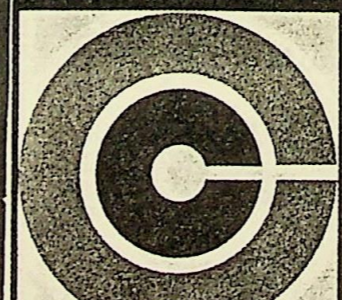
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1965

COMITE CENTRAL DEL PCC

DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1966

SOLIDARIDAD

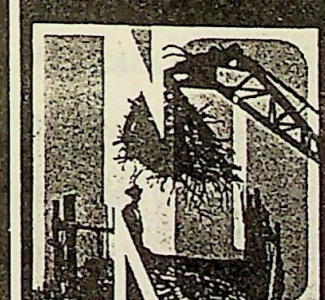
DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



1968

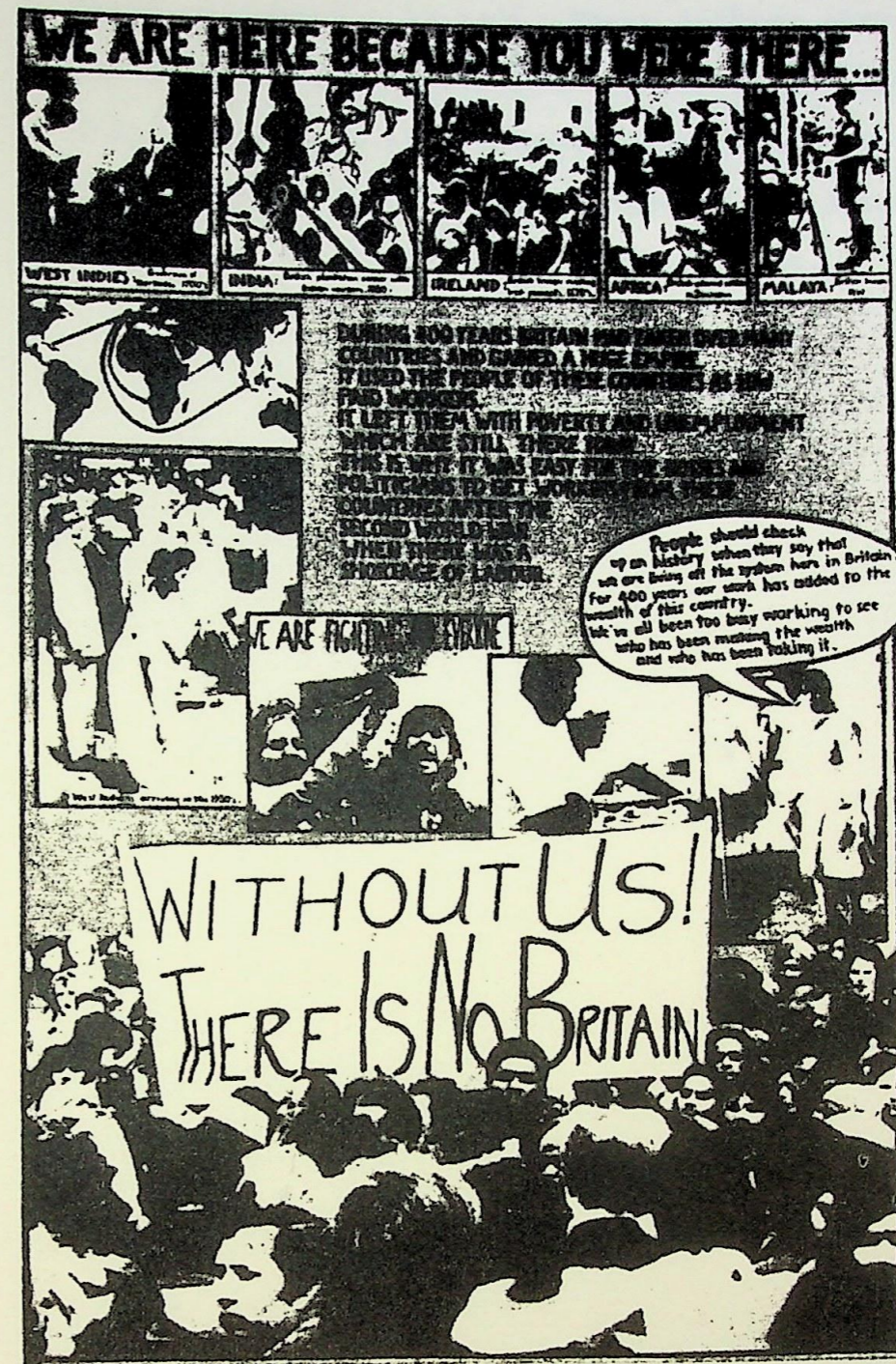
OFENSIVA:
LOS 10 MILLONES VAN

DECIMO ANIVERSARIO DEL TRIUNFO DE LA REBELION



Collective in London. The Collective has its roots in the sixties when individual members were influenced by the anti-Vietnam war movement, developing into posters for specific issues at home. They produced posters in support of demonstrators and worked with community groups as a resource centre. Later they returned to the interventionist posters they are producing today. The posters are distributed by students and others as information and consciousness raising material. Their work at present concentrates on sexist and imperialist attitudes in Britain, producing a series of posters called "Whose world is our world". Photographs and text are juxtaposed similar to the photographic Chinese posters but the layout is much looser in design. This is not to imply a loose attitude to content, these posters are rigorous in their explanations and information about the perseverance of imperialist attitudes towards black people such as "Without us! there is no Britain" (Fig. 27), showing up historically how false these ideas and attitudes are, undermining myths which are exploited by groups such as the National Front. The posters have been exhibited in schools around Britain, yet their dissimilarity to colour display charts used in schools is due to the different techniques with which they are printed, the former by expensive off-set litho, the latter by photographic silkscreen. This does not detract from their agitational value. The schoolchildren recognize the posters as "relating more to popular cultural material on the streets than to the traditional formality of most educational material".⁴

One poster, "Before the Europeans" (Fig. 26) containing imagery of paintings, buildings and sculpture and farming methods encircling a globe, also depicts a photographic image of a young black boy with a speech bubble saying "We are often told that before the Europeans discovered us we were uncivilized savages. This is not true." The explanation for this statement starts in the top part of this poster: "Before the Europeans had sailed far enough to find out that the world is round Great Civilizations and Peoples were thriving in lands such as India, Africa, the Americas and China." This explanation continues in the lower third of the poster in six clearly and simply written statements. The Collective felt the need to produce this work with a historical perspective because the dominant culture severs links with the past to create new myths and undermine the resistance of people to oppression; for example inciting racial hatred in times of unemployment blaming the black workers when it is actually caused by the capitalist system itself. By setting out historical facts in this way coloured children can learn about their past culture and tackle racism in a much more fluent manner. The use of photographs makes the objects real and their existence undeniable. Bright colours are used with a lively composition of the photographs to make the posters usually very exciting. I believe these posters to be another important step in the development of educational posters, as they deal with the myths in society and work against the untruths in the dominant ideology. They don't just tell you that something



26) WITHOUT US THERE IS NO BRITAIN BY THE FILM AND POSTER COLLECTIVE, BRITAIN C.1980.

is wrong or untrue, they give you a comprehensive analytical explanation as well. These posters address everyone and elicit positive response from people. Putting this information back into schools, the Collective intervenes into dominant based culture right at the point of its beginning: the biased educational system.

3) Ibid.

4) Consulting photography by Jo Eassey, p. 51.

Footnotes (The Foster as an Educational Medium)

- 1) The Art of Revolution by Susan Sontag, Introduction
The Art of Revolution: Castro's Cuba by Eugald Stermer.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) Ibid.
- 4) Committing Photography by Gu Braden, p. 51.

CONCLUSION

In times of pressure or revolutionary situations, posters are produced to give counter orders and counter information against oppressive forces. This is necessary to spread information and strategies, to intervene in culture and dominant ideology, to express and communicate ideas, as the mass media are owned and controlled by the ruling class. These are used as a tool against people to undermine and isolate resistance. I believe that the means of production of these posters depends on the resources available and the technology of those means i.e. Paris '68. In some cases printing presses are used, in others silkscreen presses. In desperate situations one is purely dependent on what is available. How many colours, prints and editions also depends on the particular nuances of each struggle, such as shortages of paper, ink and finance. The urgency of the need to communicate and actually have the posters on the wall can change hour by hour or day by day. The extensive use of text or the reduction of a message to a visual symbol depends on the strategies necessitated by the demands of the struggle. What is important is not what forms or techniques should be used, for they will be decided upon in the course of the struggle, but that there is enough basic materials, i.e. paper, ink etc. for the production of posters to at least be possible and their distribution and exposure to the public be executed immediately. Solidarity is created when the first physical manifestation of resistance is signified

by the presence and content of posters which literally cover the symbols of the old order eg. the buildings and monuments, with the slogans and symbols of a new order. (Fig. 28)

However, in less desperate times these forms, techniques and strategies can have far more scope. Finance is the only limit. I believe that in all cases the most modern techniques and forms available should be strived for. The level of approach should be based on the general intellectual level of the people and the forms should compete well with the other forms and techniques of posters already used in advertising etc.

In the Rosta posters we see the simplification of forms - the influence of a modern art movement and silkscreen used instead of woodcuts. John Heartfield knew the ins and outs of advertising and used the new techniques of photogravure for his photomontages which excelled in their ability to compete with other mass media such as other posters, magazines etc. The Chinese posters of the cultural revolution produced good photographic posters which were developed from earlier wall newspapers. They utilised this style and I feel this is an important development in approach as they tackle issues on a serious level of analytical explanation without being obscure or ambiguous unlike the emotional level of Heartfield's work, though I believe it was necessary for Heartfield to use these tactics to explode the myths of fascism. When people are



27) POLITICAL POSTERS IN PARIS 1968.

used to reading newspapers, this approach in posters should present no problems. The Cuban posters also tend to work on an emotive level but I like them for their purely colourful decorative value, although I would like to see more stress on text and information. Yet in Cuba the posters are not really competing with ads or newspapers, so they can afford to be more decorative.

The Poster Collective is somewhat limited by their technique of printing as they are competing against high quality colour off-set litho prints. Although they use text and imagery in a looser fashion than the Chinese posters, the issues they tackle are the most developed of poster art today. Colour is important in a world of colour television, colour magazines, colour videos and colour ads and I think they would greatly benefit if they could afford to have their posters printed with good quality commercial printing methods. An example of this is an IRA poster with a full colour photo and text currently on sale in Sinn Fein shops. The poster is reputedly the most popular of all the posters on sale which are mainly photo silkscreened images. People today are used to and expect a certain quality of image and one cannot possibly portray the immediacy of revolutionary activity in an outmoded form.

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