

PEN Sketches seeks to record some of the rich tradition of cartooning in South Africa which has always provided fertile ground for political caricature. Regrettably some of our leading cartoonists have left the country, but *Review* will track them down in future issues.



TONY GROGAN ON CARTOONS

AMERICAN politician, Boss Tweed of Tamany Hall, said at the height of Thomas Nast's cartoon crusade against him in 1870: "I don't care what they print about me. Most of my constituents can't read anyway – but it's them damn pictures!"

An eminent columnist once remarked with some envy that I was able to say far more effectively with a few lines what it took him two hundred carefully chosen words to say.

What is it about a cartoon which gives it a particular potency to convey a message with such impact, immediacy and directness? I think it is because the visual image exploited with wit, imagination and originality is able to sum up the mood and essence of an issue or event and present it to the reader in a highly dramatised, entertaining and exaggerated form making a powerful and lasting impact on his emotions and imagination. ☞



PEN SKETCHES

CONTINUED

The ingredients of a political cartoon are the art of caricature, the message or point of the cartoon, and the image the cartoonist uses to project it.

Caricature is the maliciously or humorously distorted representation of an individual so as to capture not only his likeness but also the essence of his personality and what he stands for.

I deliberately choose to draw politicians, regardless of how powerful or formidable they are, as rather absurd little puppets rather than as monsters. Somehow they become less paralytically terrifying when presented in this way.

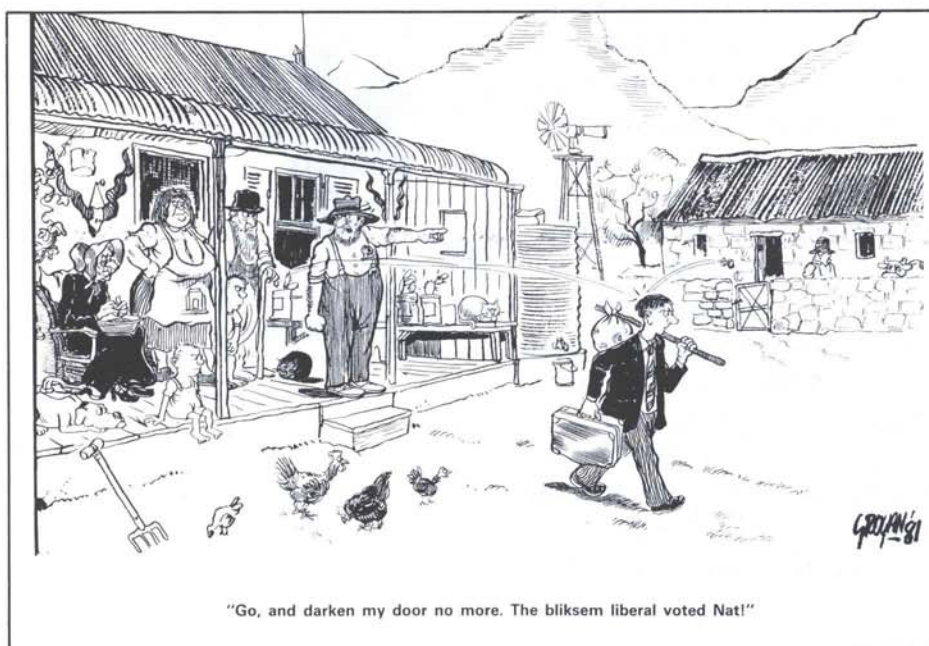
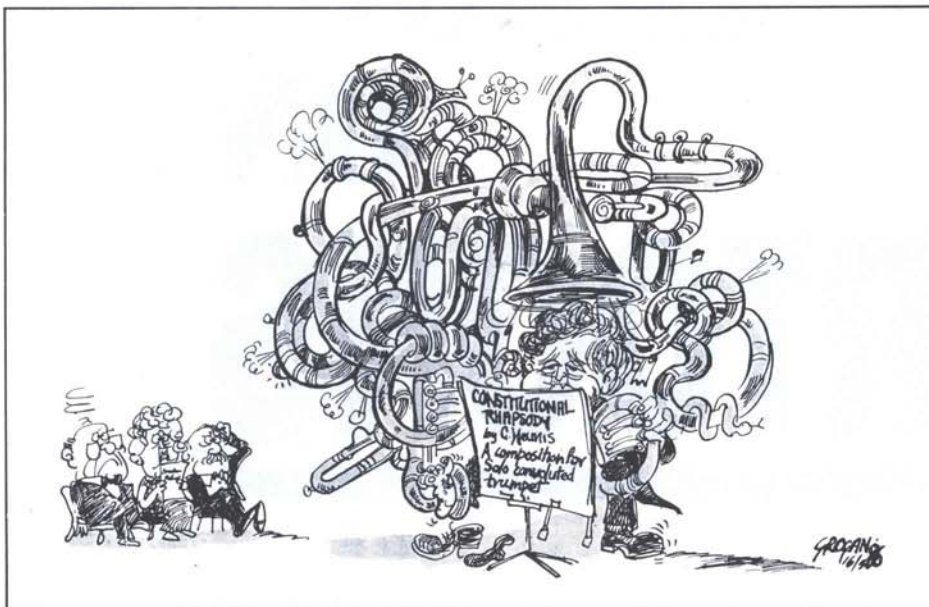
In this respect, the cartoonist is aiming at a deeper truth which has to do with the transitory nature of political power. He constructs his stage and allows the political marionettes of the day to strut and fret their parts before they disappear into the wings as so many once powerful politicians have done. I need mention no names.

The caricature says much about the nature and the character of the politician. I used to draw PW Botha as a rather bemused and irascible Elmer Fudd. This was because as a statesman I saw him as out of his depth and not up to the task of negotiating the political minefield which was South Africa in transition in the eighties.

One of my most successful parodies was casting the President in the role of the little king in Brad Parker's strip cartoon, *The Wizard of Id*. Somehow there was a close parallel with the jumped-up little autocrat. Louis le Grange, the ham-fisted Minister of Law and Order whose boot was in his mouth more or less as a permanent fixture, fitted permanently into the role of the dim, gormless knight, Sir Rodney.

The second ingredient of the cartoon is the comment or message that underpins the cartoon. This reflects the cartoonist's attitude or stance.

Ideally the cartoonist is not a propagandist who serves the cause of a particular political party or pressure group. He is there as an impartial observer to provoke, to ask the awkward



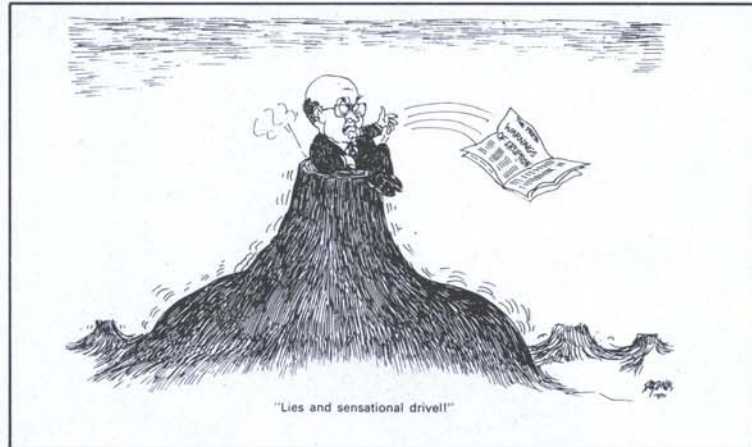
question and challenge our presumptions and prejudices.

Ideally the cartoonist's credo should be that of Czechoslovakia's poet-president Vaclav Havel who said that when he sees injustice, he takes the side of justice, when he sees lies he takes the side of truth and when he sees nonsense he takes the side of sense. There have been and remain ample opportunities to exercise these principles in South Africa's fraught political situation.

Once the cartoonist has decided on the message he wishes to make, he then has to invent or discover a scene, tableau or visual metaphor which will illuminate the political point.

This is the most difficult part of the process. Here the cartoonist has to allow his imagination to take flight and allow images, thoughts and memories to flow freely through his mind.

He might search for historical or allegorical parallels, or association with current events, always searching to place the characters in incongruous and bizarre settings in order to highlight and dramatize the message and make it amusing at the same time.



The cartoons featured on these pages first appeared in *The Cape Times*, where Tony Grogan is resident cartoonist

This is always the aim – to make a point using ridicule and lampoon, hopefully to raise a laugh, while at the same time, getting the message across as simply and directly as possible.

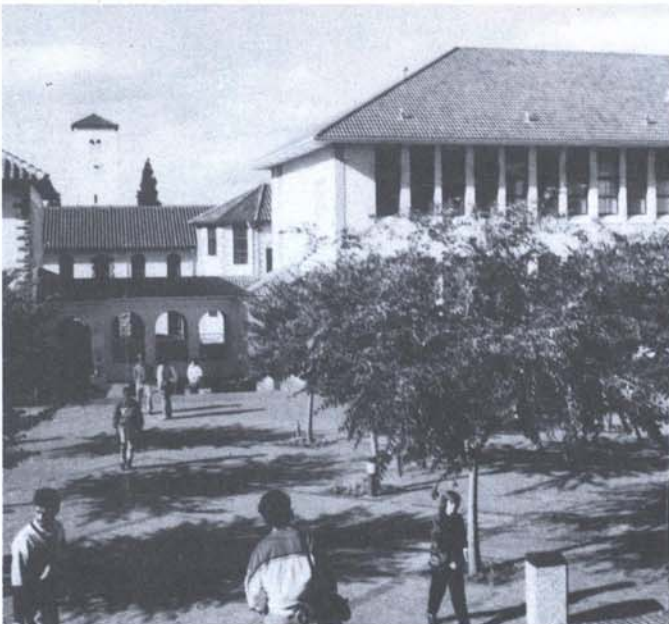
The absurdity, hypocrisy and deceit of the Apartheid system have yielded wonderful material for the cartoonist's pen as has the convoluted logic and dizzy gobbledegook which has been used to explain its demise.

For years Apartheid continued to thrive after being declared dead by one political luminary after another, and

Chris Heunis's contorted rambling illuminations on TV were a joy to any satirist. How I miss the man.

Today the political landscape is changing. The old sureties have disappeared and the targets are no longer clearly defined. FW de Klerk is a far subtler and more elusive target than the imperial tub-thumper, PW Botha. But new targets are coming to view and the prospect of continuing, what I hope will be considered valid and perceptive comments on this shifting and confusing scene, is a daunting but exciting challenge.

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