

PEN SKETCHES



"I SEE BUTHELEZI AND MANDELA ARE FINALLY GOING TO MEET."

DOV FEDLER

"The task of the cartoonist is to be insulting to everyone, criticise mercilessly – but equally"

ONLY recently have I realised that I always wanted to be a political and social commentator. Yet, as far back as I can remember, I have had this fantasy of being a comic-strip artist. The cartoonists whose work I most enjoy are all comic-strip artists. I have based my drawing techniques on tips I picked up from studying the drawings of Will Eisner, Walt Kelly, Jules Feiffer, Milton Caniff and Chester Gould, names not generally known by newspaper audiences. The names they might respond to are GILES, MAC and LOW.

I have always wanted to create a comic strip like L'il Abner or Pogo, where the villains are integrated into the fabric of the comic strip and become three-dimensional characters. The most memorable example of this kind of transmutation is



Joe McCarthy as Wiley Cat in Pogo. Nothing in political cartooning has ever captured the essence of menace better than that.

And so I have, from time to time, produced comic strips with the vague hope that one day King Features Syndicate or some such body would syndicate something of mine. Then and only then will I have arrived at being a successful cartoonist.

What is the role of the cartoonist? How do I see the future of the art form surviving in the New South Africa?

I always try to extract the core of a subject. Jokes are better when extracted and not imposed. When discussing an idea with my editors, the conversation, and often the argument, revolves around "What are we trying to say?" "Is what we say accurate?" and "Does it apply in reality?"

PLEASE TURN OVER



My main source of inspiration is listening to the opinions of people on current events. I am a good listener and many people talk to me. I was born and bred in Johannesburg and have lived here for almost 52 years.

How do I see the art form surviving in the New South Africa?

Dwight MacDonald, a great American critic, published a journal called *Politics in the 1940's*, and on referring to it he wrote, "We need specialists in abuse, technicians in vilification, expert mud-slingers." That is a maxim that should apply to any South Africa – New or Old.

In the New South Africa, Pretoria-stroika has allowed the media to open up somewhat and thus it has become easier to criticise and cast a more leisurely arm to sling mud and hurl at the New Utopia. What is uncertain is what the quality of our future leadership will be.

The dangers of mudslinging now are very real. Afrikaner nationality has to be addressed and not mocked. Equally, black aspirations have to be accommodated. Cartoonists should hover above it all and act as referee. What cartoonists must uphold is the principle of "Do unto others..." It will not be an easy time for cartoonists because at some time or another, one is going to offend other sensibilities for supporting a particular point of view – because everyone is right at some time. And so the task is to be insulting to everyone, criticise mercilessly – but EQUALLY.

If I believe in anything, I believe in the absolute fallibility of everything. If that "everything" has anything to do with politicians, then not only is failure certain, it cannot fail to fail.

In all the time I have been producing political cartoons (my first cartoon was of Neil Armstrong stepping onto the moon), it is only now that I realise I had, in fact, created cartoon characters that satisfied me as much as anything I had admired in L'il Abner and Pogo. Politicians make the inhabitants of Okefenokee swamps and Dogpatch appear as sober as judges.

I have a personal distaste for all politicians of all persuasions. I distrust every word or statement that they utter. I cannot understand what motivates men to raise banners and flags and extol some man-made theory as being the only way to a better world. Such behaviour seems to me to spring from a comic page rather than from reality and every day it seems my cynical attitude is vindicated. But on the drawing board back in the second dimension, I love all the characters. It is with deep regret that a cartoonist says



goodbye to a PW Botha – Ah! Those lips! That finger!!!

But what is this? Look folks! Whose fist is that poking holes in the ozone? Who comes to save us now?

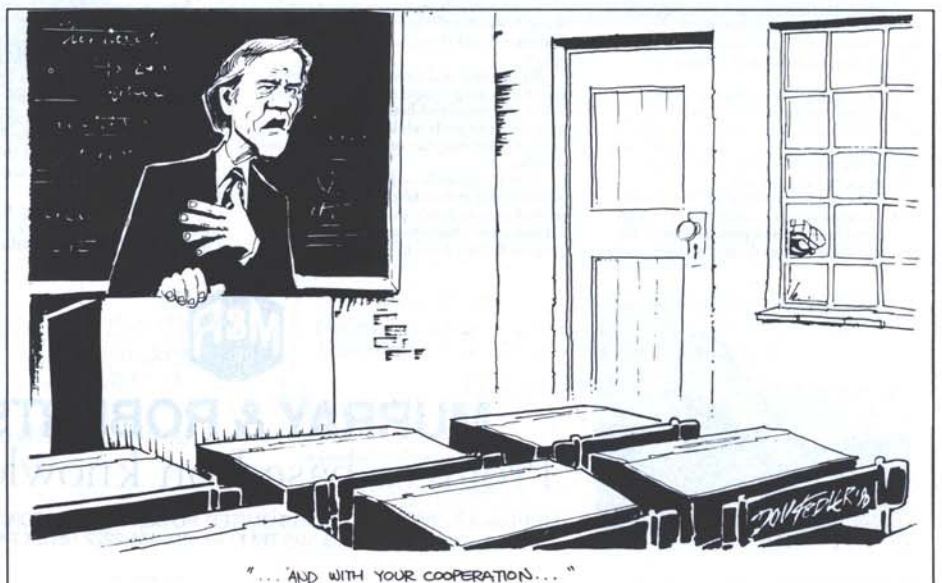
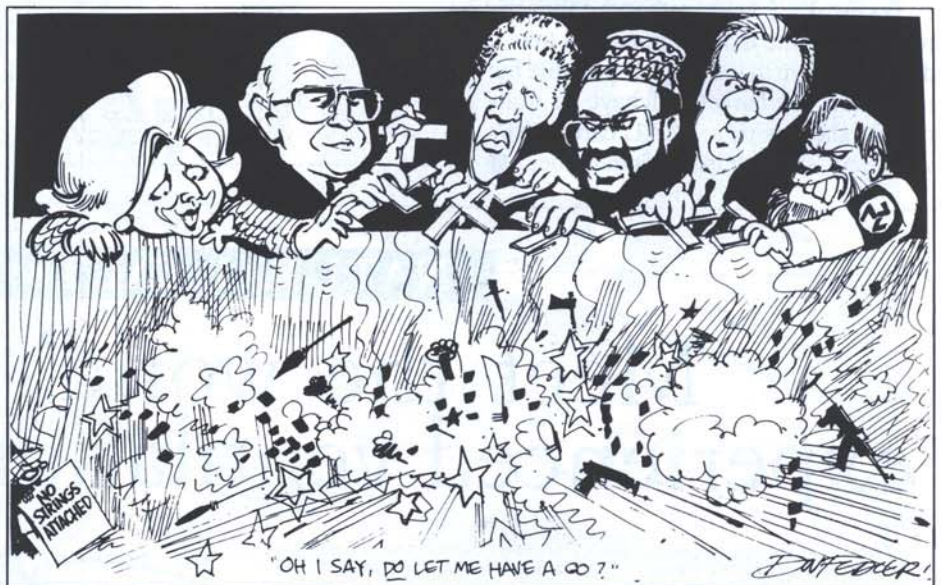
It was with a particular reason that I single out Nelson Mandela. With that single choice, I offend the ANC. My next statement makes me unpopular with the Inkatha Freedom Party. The reason I pick on Mr Mandela as a major target (so much so that even my editors advise me to back off) is that he is our first real black politician. This is not a political opinion but an accurate one – I hope. History will bear the testimony of its veracity.

In order to make the New South Africa a healthy place in which to cultivate a real democracy, we are going to need more specialists of abuse, technicians in vilification – because what the New South Africa should learn from the history of the continent is what the New South Africa does not want, and that is a dictatorship. Yes, a change is as good as a holiday. However, we do not want Third Reichs that may go on for 1 000 years.

What I find that I have done here is write a political essay with very little mention of caricature and drawing. Having done that, I have emerged with a tangible philosophy. And I'm not the first cartoonist to hold this opinion. Jules Feiffer said, "The reason I do what I do is because I still think change is possible."

Cartoons must not be laboured works, bearing the weighty presence of a

PLEASE TURN OVER

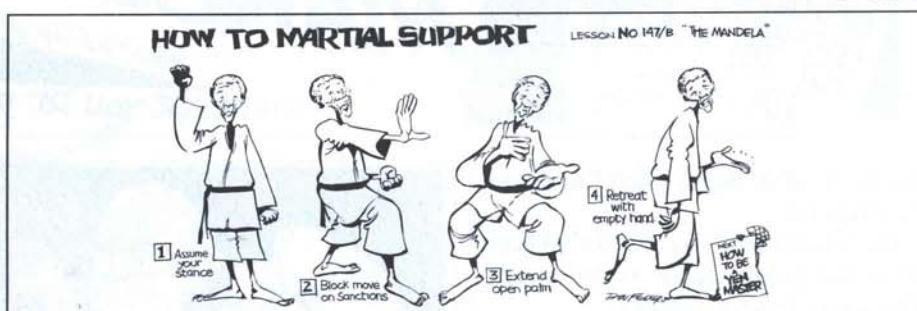
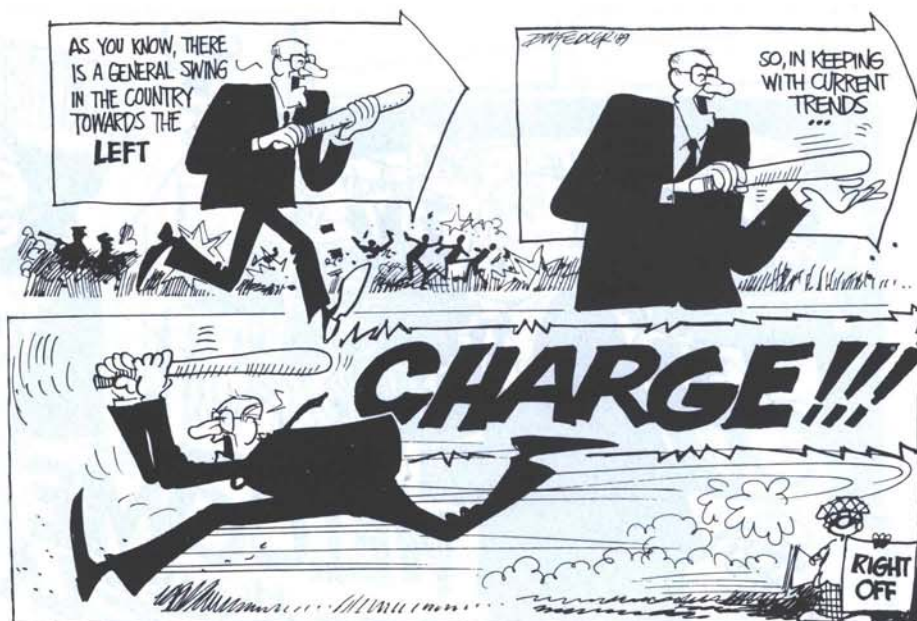


Rembrandt etching. No matter how great the cartoon is, it is always tomorrow's fish-and-chip wrapping.

Times are changing fast, the format of daily newspapers begins more and more to resemble the format of radio and television. Communication has to be instantaneous. It takes the eye time to linger over a Hogarth etching, moving into the millennium. That time is growing shorter. Audiences are becoming less and not more literate. What that means is that the sophistication of jokes and editorial standards are shifting to accommodate the capacity of the new audience to understand.

Journalism will be propelled into proper or impropaganda – for example, the reality of Aids and preservation of the environment are issues and causes that cartoonists could use to help build a better South Africa. However, cartoons that extol and praise the Supreme Head of Azania, whoever he or she might be, will not help the art of cartooning to thrive.

Personally I believe that the didactic route is the one that cartoons will take. I do still believe that change is possible but to remain in character, I have to draw myself short with a REAL cartoonist's view that "short change is inevitable." ●



NATURAL FACTS

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Using legs and mandibles to scratch, mould, push, carve and carry, termites move tremendous amounts of soil, grain by grain, as they excavate, construct and carry out repairs to the mound or tend their subterranean fungus farms.

Warm air generated by all this activity and countless termite bodies rises through innumerable ducts and passageways to the mound's 'attic'. From there it is ingeniously

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By opening and closing ducts termites are able to keep temperature fluctuations within the colony to between 2 and 3 degrees Centigrade while outside temperatures may rise or fall by 12 degrees or more.

Termite mounds — living monuments to social and industrial co-operation, second only to man's vastly more sophisticated ability to act with common purpose for the good of the community.

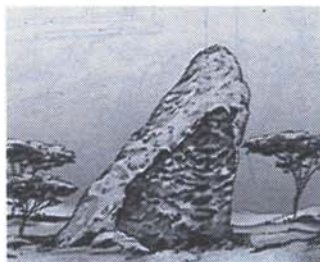


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