

At Least Charlie Brown Is Still Sacred

by Stewart Saxe

Canadian University Press

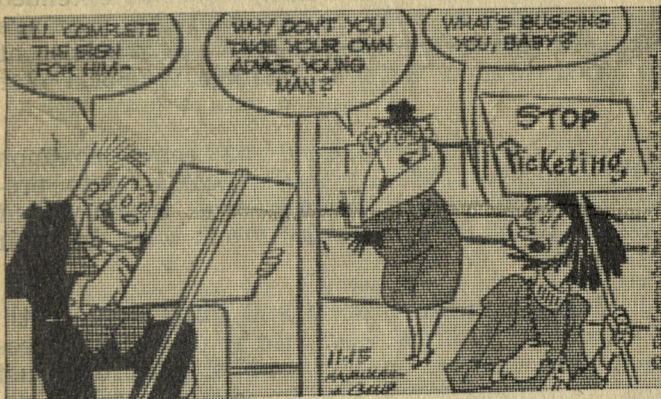
If you are given to believing that large-scale plots are being formed to oppose social change — you might turn very quickly to the daily newspapers for proof.

Not to the news or editorial pages, prime candidates though they might be for such a theory, but to the comic section.

Almost unanimously, the daily and coloured weekend comic strips have found some way to attack student radicals and the hippie sub-culture over the last year. While often supporting the war in Vietnam and mirroring the class distinctions of North America.

And there are some reasons why it's not so very funny.

Buz Sawyer, Terry and the Pirates, Li'l Abner, Apartment 3-G, Smidgens, Flintstones, Wizard of Id, On Stage and of course Dick Tracy are a few of the common strips that have had their turn, sometimes many turns, attacking the two dissident groups.



While hippies may get constant barbs thrown at them, Smidgens for one is always upset that they've picked his flowers to give away or that they smell so bad, the real attacks are saved for the radicals.

And, in fact, those attacks have been so common that it's hard to put down to coincidence just because one believes there's no conscious plot.

Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that a plot is closer at hand than one might think.

In 1966 the United States' leading comic strip writers were all summoned to a meeting with state department officials.

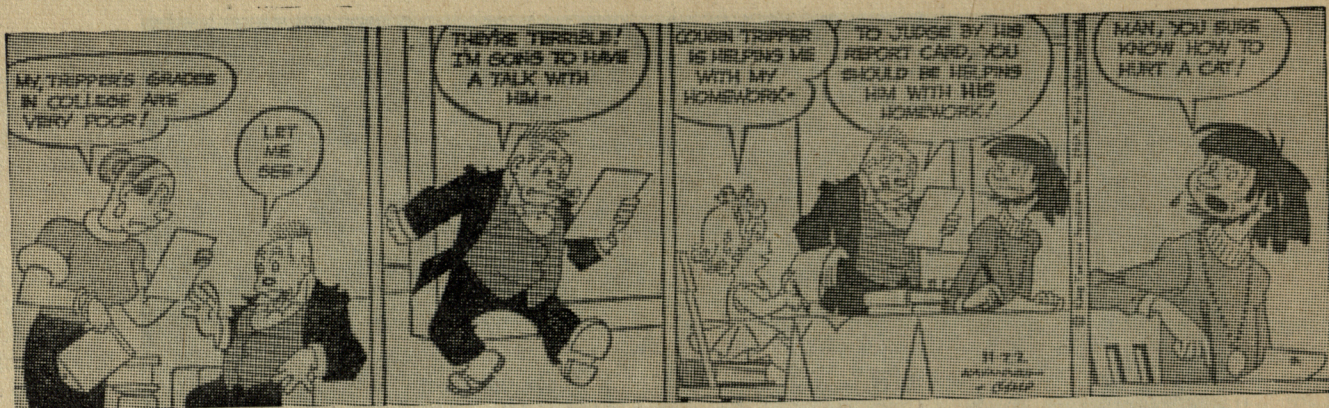
The officials pointed out to them that they had an important part to play in formulating US public opinion on Vietnam. They were then asked to help support this policy. There was very little dissent expressed at the meeting.

But this hardly explains their united stand on the wider aspects of the attack against social dissenters. Actually the explanation is closer to hand.

The comics are searching for stories based on the more unusual or exceptional things that pass by one's life, for stories based on the bigger news events of the day, and for subjects it can ridicule.

Comic writers on the average are of course just that — an average group of people endowed with a little more creativity in a particular field.

But when it comes to social consciousness and awareness there's no reason why they should be any different than the kind of people they work with — and the kind of neighbors their salaries place them beside — and indeed they're not.



CAPP-ITAL PUNISHMENT

Al Capp responded violently on a recent panel show to the suggestion that he's changed from the anti-right political stance he'd shown a few decades earlier — that he'd gone over.

"When American democracy was threatened by extremism from the right — by isolationism and conservatism — I attacked the right; now America is challenged by extremism from the left and I'll attack it and expose it just as vehemently," Capp said.

How much more representative a statement could possibly be collected from a person of Capp's economic and social position? Radical positions are attacked not on content but just for being radical.

Capp wraps his attack on the student activists and hippie groups up in one group — Students Wildly Indignant about Nearly Everything. SWINE for short.

The SWINE, who are always dressed poorly, and carrying meaningless signs, who have a constant entourage of flies and of course smell, allow Capp to include his attack on political activism and non-conformist youth cultures in one great parry of his pen.

They march anywhere, always without reason, and are given to the crudest inconsistencies — Capp's main point.

Carrying signs labelled "Non-violence," they will be violent — demanding better university education they have either never been to classes or are dropouts — calling for distribution of private property to the people they keep it all themselves or destroy it and of course, the means of producing more goods.

DIRTY RADICALS SMASHED

Apartment 3-G has been much more subtle than Capp — a man who hardly seems capable of subtlety.

The comic strip about three young woman living in an apartment together has just finished a series that involved the girls' friendly next-door neighbor and confrère — Professor Papagoras (Subtle name, ah).

Professor Papagoras had just become acting president of his university when the local underground paper threatened to publish a picture of him with his arm around one of the 3-G girls.

The incident was originally harmless of course — but you know how pictures can look.

Papagoras stands firm through this and further trials though he does lose his calm just once when he strikes a student, who had been previously attacking him in a demonstration, and hospitalizes the fellow.

During the crisis Papagoras' young assistant, who trusted and respected the underground journalists at first, comes to learn that high-sounding

motives often hide very low goals and sneaky methods. Coming to his senses he is finally able not only to bring the editors of the underground magazine to justice, but also the unscrupulous political agitator who was really behind the whole thing from the beginning.

And, if that's not enough, he captures the unscrupulous agitator just as he's about to do in a beautiful girl he had used to get Papagoras in a

compromising situation — actually innocent but there were cameras again — for another attempt to destroy the man.

There is no stated reason for all this — political agitators are known nowadays for wanting to bring down the country by destroying university presidents one by one and by using well-motivated though mis-directed young college students and junior faculty.

The lessons that can be learned from this one "comic" strip series are unlimited.

1. Good ideals, even when they are truly believed by most involved, are no excuse for any kind of extra-legal action because there are unscrupulous political agitators really manoeuvring the scene.

2. We must not hesitate to attack those individuals who preach radical change even when it seems to make sense because there are deeper things hiding in the shadows.

3. We must understand when the authorities are driven to violent action and know that they really regret it.

4. We must realize that younger people, even faculty, are led astray but most will return if handled firmly.

5. We must overlook occasional extra-legal action on the part of the authorities because they are fighting such dirty underhanded opposition.

6. We must remember that radical actions actually stop the changes the liberals wanted to make because they are busy doing battle and must give no ground.

It tends to all seem fairly unimportant — hidden away in the back sections of our newspapers, but it isn't really so.

These comics will be part of the overall communication process that will entrench in people's minds these views of what the new movements are all about.

Combined with similar distortions on the news pages and editorial pages, the comics will be the method by which people are turned against even listening to the activists or the youth subculture.

It wouldn't take any conscious plot — not so long as this kind of distortion can happen so thoroughly — automatically.

The comics of course have their own contradictions. It's inevitable because they take a liberal stance.

Cmidgens is a good example.

Between complaining about the hippies the strip is constantly commenting on the alienation of modern life — of the common man's feeling of uselessness.

But no analysis is presented — there are no suggestions that there are real reasons for this situation or real cures.

Like the other sections of the paper, the comics limit themselves to commentary on the phenomenal aspects of our life and its problems. They never seek the roots of those problems — they never suggest solutions.

For seeking the roots of the problem is radicalism — better to have blind faith in the unstudied, mystified, process of the status quo.