GRAPHIC WARRIORS
International War Cartoonists, 1792–1945

by MARK BRYANT

Abstract

Over the past three centuries satirical artists have often been overlooked in the histories of international conflicts. At best their images have been used to decorate the pages of scholarly treatises but even then their names have frequently been omitted and very little information has been given about their lives. This brief survey highlights some of the greatest international cartoonists and caricaturists working from the time of the Napoleonic Wars until the end of the Second World War. More than 70 artists are mentioned from 15 countries, including Australia, France, the Czech Republic, Germany, Holland, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, the UK and the USA.

Keywords: war, cartoon, caricature, international, satire.

In 1805, Napoleon Bonaparte, stung by constant personal attacks from British cartoonists, wrote to Joseph Fouché, his Minister of Police: "Have caricatures made: An Englishman, purse in hand, entreating the various Powers to take his money, &c... The immense attention which the English direct to gaining time by false news shows the extreme importance of this work".[1]

Similar opinions by other military and political leaders have been expressed about other wartime cartoonists and caricaturists over the past three centuries, yet satirical artists (with some notable exceptions) have often been overlooked in the histories of international conflicts. At best their images have been used to enliven the pages of scholarly treatises but even then their names have frequently been omitted and very little information has usually been given about their lives.

The history of international war cartoons and caricature can be traced back at least to the graphic satirists of the 17th century but the first professional exponents only began to emerge in Europe during the wars that followed the French Revolution. The first and most important of these was James Gillray (1756-1815). The son of a former soldier, Gillray had first-hand experience of warfare himself as he was present as an artist in Flanders during the Duke of York's campaign in 1793. Though not the first to caricature Napoleon, Gillray was the creator of the image of him as the diminutive "Little Boney", and his print "The Plumb Pudding in Danger" (26 February 1805), showing British Prime Minister William Pitt and Napoleon carving up the globe, is one of the most famous political cartoons of all time. Another cartoon of success was *The Hand-Writing upon the Wall*, alluding to the Old Testament story of Belshazzar's Feast and indicating that Bonaparte's time is up (Fig. 1).

Technically speaking, these are not cartoons but caricatures (from the Italian, *caricare*, to overburden or exaggerate), a style of drawing that can trace its origins to Ancient Egypt. The word "cartoon" (from another Italian word, *cartone*, a sheet of paper or card) was originally applied to designs or templates for tapestries, mosaics or fresco paintings. Its more widely used modern sense dates from 1843 and derives from a *Punch* spoof by John Leech (1817-64) of a competition for pictures to decorate the walls of the new Houses of Parliament in London. Entries in the form of classical-style cartoon designs were exhibited in Westminster Hall and Leech attacked this as a waste of public money at a time when Londoners were starving. His drawing "Cartoon No. 1: Substance and Shadow" (15 July 1843) showed ragged and disabled figures viewing the exhibition. Further "Cartoons" on social problems appeared over the following weeks and eventually the regular full-page topical drawing became known as "The Cartoon" (and its artist as "The Cartoonist"). By association the word gradually came to be applied to comic or satirical drawings generally.

---

[1] Quoted J.H. Rose, Introduction to A.M. Broadley, *Napoleon in Caricature* (1911), i, pp. xxxii f.

Another significant caricaturist who emerged in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars was George Cruikshank (1792-1878) (Fig. 2). Indeed, his first published print was actually a war cartoon, "Boney Beating Mack and Nelson Giving Him a Whack!!" (19 November 1805). It appeared when he was only 13 years old and featured the Austrian General Mack surrendering to Napoleon and Admiral Nelson presenting Britannia with the remains of the combined French and Spanish navies after the Battle of Trafalgar. The Irish cartoonist William O'Keefe produced a notable cartoon in 1796, "Prepared for a French Invasion", on which British Prime Minister William Pitt and King George III, are seen preparing to fend off a boatload of French devils (Fig. 3).

Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827), meanwhile, not only produced some powerful political prints, such as "The Two Kings of Terror" (November 1813) and "The Corsican and His Bloodhounds at the Window of the Tuileries Looking Over Paris" (16 April 1815) – both featuring Napoleon and the figure of Death – but also created the first ever war cartoon character, Johnny Newcome, a newly commissioned British officer serving in the Peninsular War.

French caricaturists of this period tended to remain anonymous because of strict censorship laws, as did artists in countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy which were then ruled by the French Empire. A similar situation existed in Russia and it was not until Napoleon's fateful campaign of 1812 that a long ban on caricature was lifted, and Ivan Terebenev (1780-1815) and others began to produce satirical prints, some of which were copied or adapted in Britain by Cruikshank and Rowlandson.

There were also very few German war cartoons before the French were defeated at Leipzig in 1813, after which Johann Gottfried Schadow (1764-1850) and others produced some powerful images. Notable among these was "The Triumph of the Year 1813" (January 1814) by Johann Michael Voltz (1784-1858), which featured Napoleon's head composed entirely of dead bodies. It allegedly sold 20,000 copies in a single week, was reproduced and/or adapted overseas, appeared on pottery designs and is even referred to in *The Trumpet Major* (1882), Thomas Hardy's novel of the Napoleonic Wars[2].

In the 19th century prints began to be replaced with satirical magazines. *Punch* was launched in 1841 and the first major conflict covered by its artists was the Crimean War. One of its most famous cartoons from this period was John Leech's "General Février Turned Traitor" (Fig. 4) (10 March 1855), commenting on the death of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia. Another *Punch* artist, John Tenniel (1820-1914) – the first cartoonist ever to be knighted and later famous as the illustrator of Lewis Carroll's "Alice" books – made his reputation during the Indian Mutiny with "The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger" (*Punch*, 22 August 1857), which was later reproduced as a popular print. Tenniel also drew some poignant anti-Union cartoons during the American Civil War, while the North's main supporter was Thomas Nast (1840-1902) of *Harper's Weekly*. Lincoln himself even described Nast as "our best recruiting sergeant... his emblematic cartoons have never failed to arouse enthusiasm and patriotism".[3]

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, and the subsequent short-lived Commune, took place during the heyday of some of France's greatest satirical artists. Amongst these were Honoré Daumier (1808-79) whose pre-war "The European Balance of Power" (*Le Charivari*, 3 April 1867) was described by the art historian Ernest Gombrich as a "masterpiece". Others included Cham (Amédée de Noé, 1819-79) and Alfred Le Petit (1841-1909). Faustin (Faustin Betbeder, 1847-after 1914) also produced some particularly gruesome drawings such as "The Blood Harvest of 1870" (1871) (Fig. 5), featuring a skeletal figure attempting to cover itself with newly harvested bloody grapes.

Britain's colonial wars in Africa, Afghanistan and elsewhere at the end of the 19th century were not only covered by the more familiar *Punch* cartoonists but also by other weekly magazine artists such as Gordon Thomson of *Fun*, (Fig. 6) William Boucher of *Judy*, John Proctor of *Moonshine* and others. (Bound volumes of many of these magazines, as well as a complete set of *Punch*, can be found in the open-access stacks of the London Library.) However, it was not until the Boer War (1899-1902) that staff cartoonists on daily newspapers began to appear, notable artists in Britain including J.M. Staniforth (*Western Mail*) and Francis Carruthers Gould (*Westminster Gazette*).

The Boer War also attracted significant attention from a wide spectrum of international graphic satirists, and those working for the European press (especially in Holland, France and Germany) were highly critical of Britain's actions. Particularly savage in their attacks were the Frenchmen Charles Léandre and Caran D'Ache, the Dutchman Johan Braakensiek and the artists of German magazines such as *Simplicissimus* and *Kladderadatsch*.

---

[2] Thomas Hardy, *The Trumpet-Major*, Papermac edition (1971), p. 217.

[3] Albert Bigelow Paine, *Th. Nast: His Period And His Pictures*, The MacMillan Company (1904), p. 69.

Fig. 1. **The Hand Writing Upon the Wall**, James Gillray, 24 August 1803.

Fig. 2. **Snuffing Out Boney!**, George Cruikshank, 1 May 1814.
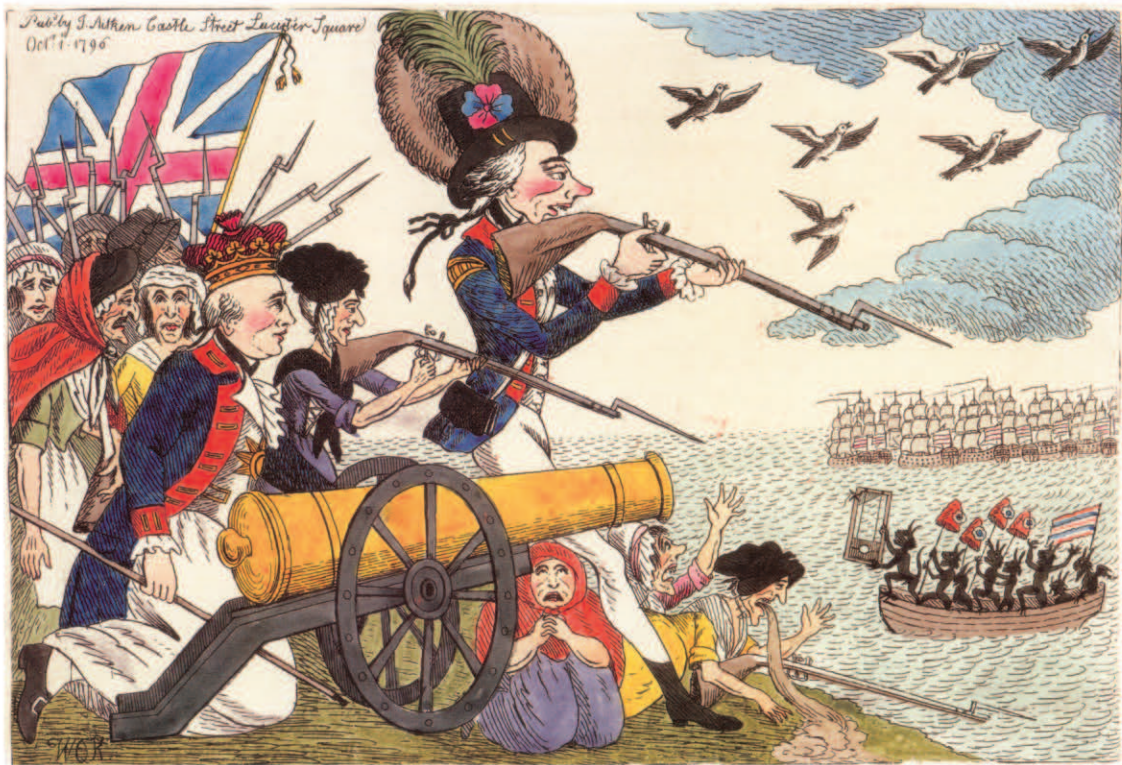
Fig. 3. **Prepared for a French Invasion**, William O'Keefe, 1 October 1796.

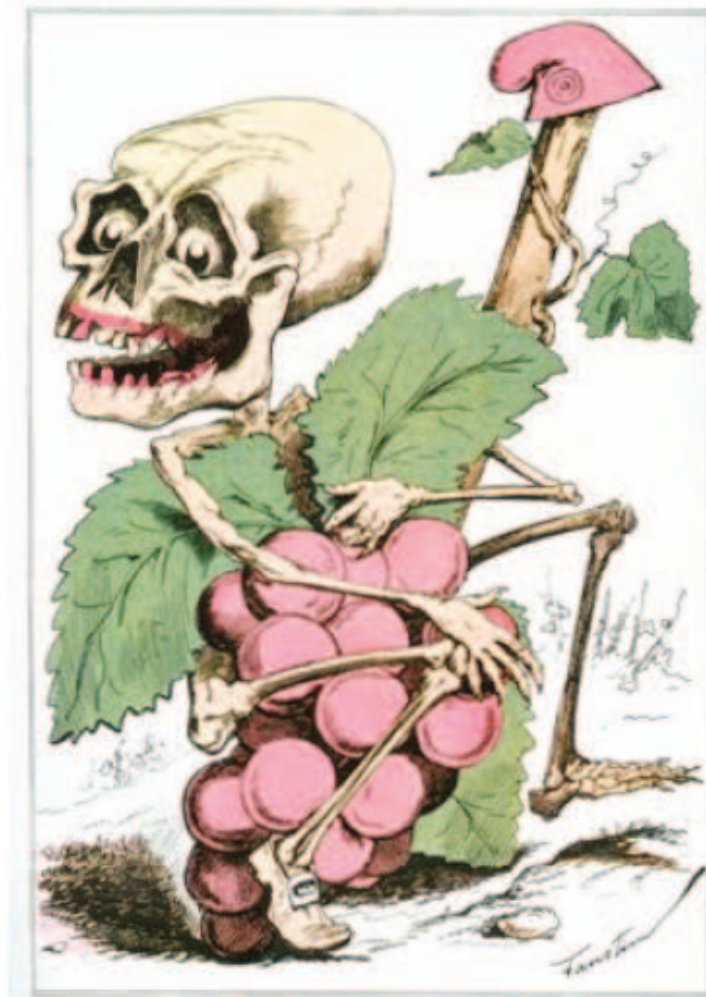Fig. 4. **'General Février' Turned Traitor**, John Leech, *Punch*, 10 March 1855.

Fig. 5. **The Blood Harvest of 1870**, Faustin Betbeder, 1871.

Fig. 6. **Taming the Crocodile**, Gordon Thomson, *Fun*, 26 July 1882.

Fig. 7. **Shameless Albion**, Jean Veber, *L'Assiette au Beurre*, 28 September 1901.

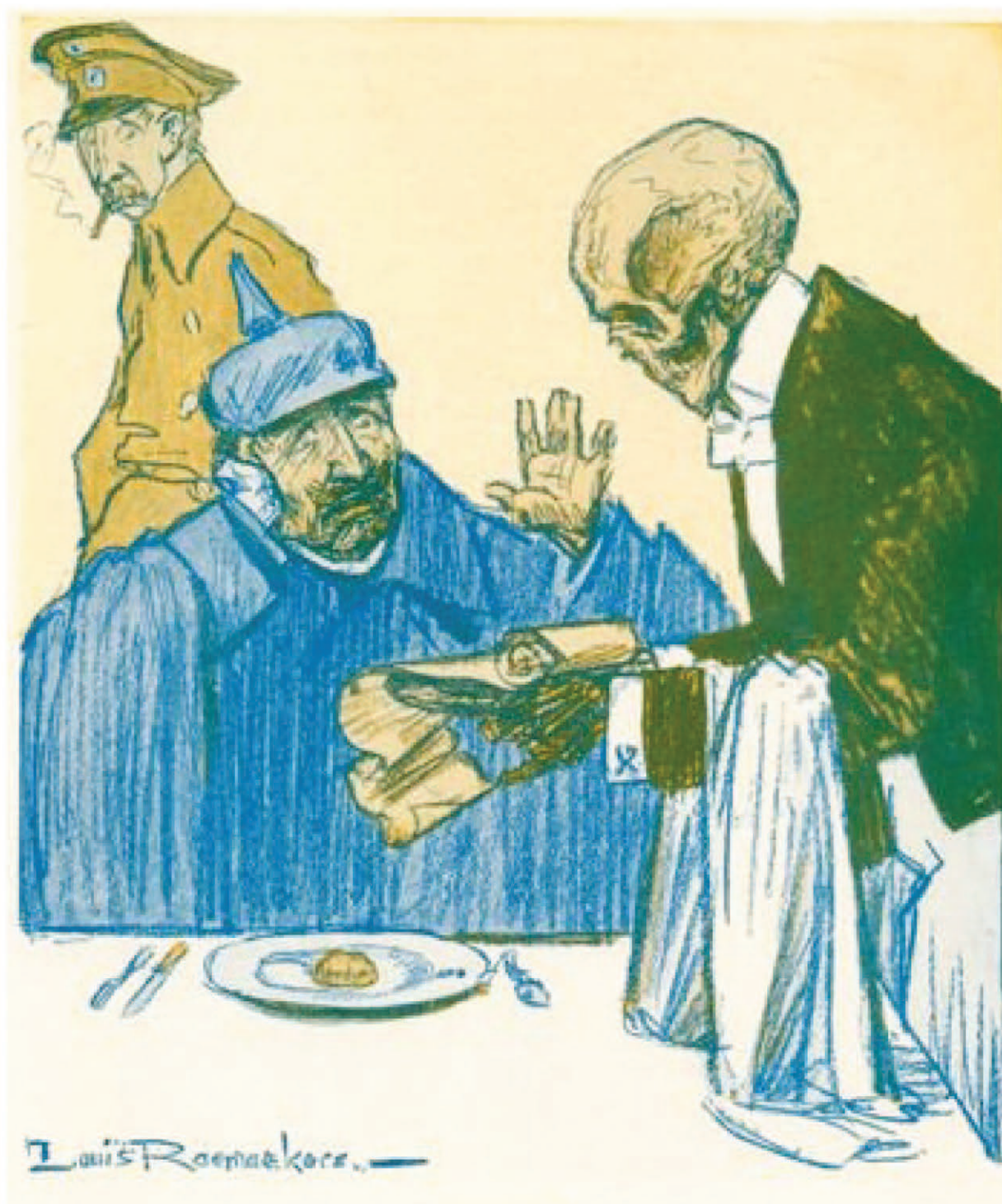Fig. 8. **The Path of Glory**, E.J. Sullivan, from *The Kaiser's Garland* (1915).

Fig. 9. **The Bill**, Louis Raemaekers, 1918.

Fig. 10. **It is true, my Kaiser, that at Anvers, the Belgian soldiers cut the dams and flooded you?**
– Uncle Franz, it was horrible: look, even now, I feel my feet are wet, Ary Murnu, *Furnica*, 21 October, nr. 8, an XI.

Fig. 11. **What is an 'Aryan'? He is Handsome as Goebbels**,
Boris Efimov, 1941.

One of the most virulent anti-British artists of the war was Jean Veber (1864-1928) of *L'Assiette au Beurre*. His drawing "L'Impudique Albion" (Fig. 7) ("Shameless Albion", 28 September 1901), featuring the face of King Edward VII imprinted on the naked bottom of Britannia, led to the magazine being banned by the French government.

World War I saw a resurgence in gruesome "hate" cartoons, drawn in particular by Britain's Edmund Sullivan (1869-1933) (Fig. 8), the Australian Will Dyson (1880-1938) and the Dutchman Louis Raemaekers (1869-1956). Indeed, Raemaekers' drawings were so inflammatory that he was put on trial for endangering his country's neutrality. Later, when the German government offered a reward for his capture, dead or alive, he fled to London. Here his work so impressed Prime Minister Lloyd George that he persuaded him to go to the USA in an effort to enlist American help in the war (Fig. 9).

Other powerful cartoonists of the First World War included the Frenchmen Abel Faivre and Jean-Louis Forain, the Italians Giuseppe Scalarini and Golia (Eugenio Colmo), the German Gustav Brandt, the Romanian Ary Murnu (Fig. 10), the Mexican Ernesto Cabral, the Portuguese Tomas Leal da Camara, the Polish Georges D'Ostoya, the Spanish Picarol (Josep Ferrer), the New Zealander Blo (William Blomfield), the Dutchman Albert Hahn, and Luther Bradley of the USA, amongst many others.

On the lighter side, it was also during the Great War that H.M. Bateman (1887-1970) and William Heath Robinson (1872-1944) had considerable success (the phrase 'Heath Robinson contraption' entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1917). Cartoon poster artists also played a significant part. These included two published in 1914: "Kitchener Wants <u>You</u>" by Alfred Leete (1882-1933), later adapted by James Montgomery Flagg in the USA (with Uncle Sam replacing Lord Kitchener); and "Arf a Mo", "Kaiser" (featuring a grinning Cockney soldier lighting his pipe before engaging the enemy) by Bert Thomas, who was awarded an MBE for his wartime drawings.

The following year "Old Bill" Busby, the long-suffering Tommy character created by Bruce Bairnsfather (1887-1959), first appeared in the *Bystander* magazine. Though criticised in Parliament as "these vulgar caricatures of our heroes" Bairnsfather's drawings were popular with the troops and his "One of Our Minor Wars" (Well, if you knows of a better "ole, go to it!", 24 November 1915), is one of the most famous war cartoons of all time.

Cartoons about the lot of the ordinary soldier, sailor or airman continued to be popular in World War II. In the USA these included those featuring Willie and Joe by Bill Mauldin (1921-2003). Like Bairnsfather's earlier creations, Mauldin's characters were criticised by the authorities (General Patton said they looked like "goddamn bums") but were well received by the "dog-face" troops on the frontline. Mauldin was even awarded a Pulitzer Prize. It was the first time that the award had been made for work on a military paper and he was then (aged 23) its youngest ever winner.

Back in Britain, the walrus-moustached military buffoon "Colonel Blimp" also caused problems with authority and Winston Churchill himself tried to ban the 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (which was loosely based on the character) saying it was "detrimental to the morale of the army". However, Churchill was not against cartoons. In an essay published in 1932 he said that they were "a very good way of learning history"[4] and during the war he even presented an MBE to the Welsh cartoonist JON (William John Philpin Jones, 1913-92) for his "The Two Types" series about a pair of Eighth Army "Desert Rat" officers. Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis added that "They deserve to be remembered and honoured"[5] and General Sir Bernard Freyberg VC even went so far as to say they were worth "a division of troops".[6]

In Britain some of the best known humorous wartime artists included "Paul Crum" (Roger Pettiward) and Ian Fenwick (both of whom were killed in action), Pont (Graham Laidler), Nicolas Bentley, Joe Lee, David Langdon and Frank Reynolds. It was also Fougasse (Kenneth Bird) who created the "Careless Talk Costs Lives" wartime poster series and Osbert Lancaster who drew single-column topical "Pocket Cartoons" for the *Daily Express* – so-called because, like pocket battleships, they packed a punch despite their size.

World War II also produced some poignant political cartoons. Amongst the foremost Allied artists of this period were the double Pulitzer Prize-winning Americans Daniel Fitzpatrick (1891-1969) and Vaughn Shoemaker (1902-91), the Dutchman Leo Jordaan (1885-1980), the Australian Mick Armstrong (1903-78), the Polish-born Arthur Szyk (1894-1951), and the Czechs Stephen Roth and Adolf Hoffmeister. In addition

---

[4] Winston Churchill, *Cartoons and Cartoonists* in *Thoughts and Adventures* (1932).
[5] Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis, quoted in W.J. Philpin Jones (ed.), *JON's Complete Two Types* (1991), p. 7.
[6] General Sir Bernard Freyberg VC, quoted in W.J. Philpin Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

posters and books featuring cartoons by the Soviet Union's Boris Efimov (1900-2008) (Fig. 11), the Kukryniksi group and others were distributed in the UK and elsewhere to support the Soviet War Relief Fund.

Those working for British newspapers included George Whitelaw of the *Daily Herald*, Clive Uptton of the *Daily Sketch*, Sidney Strube of the *Daily Express*, the German-born Hungarian Vicky (Victor Weisz) of the *News Chronicle* and Leslie Illingworth of the *Daily Mail* (some of whose drawings were found in Hitler's bunker in Berlin after the war, date-stamped and catalogued by Joseph Goebbels).

Another notable wartime British cartoonist was Philip Zec of the *Daily Mirror*. His drawing, "The Price of Petrol Has Been Increased by One Penny – Official" (5 March 1942), depicting a torpedoed sailor clinging to a raft, was seen by the Government as subversive, unpatriotic and "Worthy of Goebbels at his best" (Herbert Morrison, then Home Secretary)[7] and for a time the *Mirror* was under threat of closure.

All these artists allegedly featured on the Gestapo's "black list" (of those to be executed if the Nazis invaded Britain) but perhaps the most prominent was the New Zealand-born David Low of the *Evening Standard* (who had also created "Colonel Blimp"). A left-winger working for a right-wing paper, his powerful black-and-white cartoons were drawn with a brush and indian ink in a fluid technique that was reminiscent of Japanese artists. The result was some of the most memorable cartoons of the war, especially "Rendez-vous" (1939) and the 1940 classics: "The Harmony Boys", "All Behind You, Winston" and "Very Well, Alone".

David Low's wartime editor on the *Standard* was Michael Foot, the future leader of the Labour Party. Born nearly 150 years after Napoleon, he would certainly have agreed with the French Emperor's comment on the "extreme importance" of the work of cartoonists, both in wartime and peace, and even listed Will Dyson as one of his "true prophets". The opening paragraph of his essay on Dyson in *Loyalists and Loners* (1986) sums up the impact of all the thousands of other international graphic warriors of the past three centuries: "Nothing to touch the glory of the great cartoonists! They catch the spirit of the age and then leave their own imprint on it: they create political heroes and villains in their own image; they teach the historians their trade..."[8]

It is a viewpoint to which I readily subscribe, especially when it comes to wartime cartoonists and caricaturists. These are not unknown soldiers. Their names should not be forgotten.

---

[7] Herbert Morrison, quoted in Cecil Thomas (Editor of *Daily Mirror*), letter to E.F. Herbert, 21 April 1942, reproduced in Hugh Cudlipp, *Publish and Be Damned! The Astronishing Story of the Daily Mirror (1953)*, p. 180.

[8] Michael Foot, *The Cartoonist Will Dyson*, in *Loyalists and Loners* (1986).