

New York Times's Global Edition Is Ending Daily Political Cartoons

By Steve Lohr, June 10, 2019

The New York Times announced on Monday that it would no longer publish daily political cartoons in its international edition and ended its relationship with two contract cartoonists.

Two months earlier, The Times had stopped running syndicated political cartoons, after one with anti-Semitic imagery was printed in the Opinion section of the international edition.

In a statement, James Bennet, editorial page editor, said The Times was “very grateful for and proud of” the work that the cartoonists, Patrick Chappatte and Heng Kim Song, had done for the international edition over the years.

“However,” Mr. Bennet added, “for well over a year we have been considering bringing that edition into line with the domestic paper by ending daily political cartoons and will do so beginning July 1.”

Mr. Chappatte wrote on his website on Monday that after more than two decades of contributing a twice-weekly cartoon, “I’m putting down my pen, with a sigh: that’s a lot of years of work undone by a single cartoon — not even mine — that should never have run in the best newspaper in the world.”

The syndicated cartoon that prompted the most outrage was a caricature of Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald J. Trump.

The Times issued an apology, saying the cartoon was “clearly anti-Semitic and indefensible.” One of The Times’s Op-Ed columnists, Bret Stephens, denounced the cartoon and wrote that The Times should “reflect deeply on how it came to publish anti-Semitic propaganda.”

In his statement, Mr. Bennet said The Times would “continue investing in forms of opinion journalism, including visual journalism, that express nuance, complexity and strong voice from a diversity of viewpoints.”

He noted that last year, for the first time in its history, The Times won a Pulitzer Prize for political cartooning — a series that told the story of a Syrian refugee family.

The Guardian comment after the end of daily cartoon in the NYTimes

The New York Times political cartoon ban is a sinister and dangerous over-reaction

Martin Rowson, June 12, 2019

April, it seems, really is the cruellest month for the New York Times. On 25 April, its international edition (formerly the International Herald Tribune) ran a cartoon by the Portuguese cartoonist António Moreira Antunes, previously published in the Lisbon paper Expresso and depicting Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a guide dog leading a blind Donald Trump. In the way of cartoons, the Netanyahu dog had a blue Star of David (presumably meant to signify the Israeli flag) dangling from his collar, while Trump wore a yarmulke.

There was an instant outcry condemning the cartoon's antisemitic imagery, including in articles and editorials in the New York Times itself. As a result, the paper has decided it will no longer publish any political cartoons in the international edition (the NYT domestic paper dropped cartoons several years ago) and is terminating its contracts with in-house cartoonists Heng and the multi-award winning Patrick Chappatte. In a statement released on Tuesday, the paper announced that it would "continue investing in forms of opinion journalism, including visual journalism, that express nuance, complexity and strong voice from a diversity of viewpoints".

This is a gross overcorrection, even though the outcry had some justification. While you can just about get away with claiming the blue Star of David signifies the state of Israel rather than Jewish people in general, the signification of Trump's yarmulke is impossible to argue away: the implication is clearly that the US president has been "Judaised" by the dirty Israeli dog, both of which are common antisemitic tropes of the type notoriously published in cartoon form in the Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*.

As the Labour party knows to its cost, antisemitism is the most insidious of racisms and cartoonists in particular need to be increasingly careful when engaged in otherwise wholly justified images belabouring the actions of the Israeli government. This isn't just to avoid online lynch mobs; we also need to nuance our work to make it absolutely clear that we're condemning the Israeli government's actions because they are rightwing nationalists (currently bizarrely cosying up to Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, a blatant antisemite), and not because they're Jewish.

But let's get back to cartoons. The New York Times "disciplined" the unnamed editor responsible and announced that it would no longer be publishing any syndicated cartoons provided by CartoonArts International. But that wasn't enough, and now the NYT cartoons are no more. Just like any other commercial enterprise, the New York Times can do what it likes, and I look forward to seeing some scathingly satirical tie-dyes in the pages of its international edition. But this cuts deeper than an over-reaction to an ill-judged cartoon. Cartoons have been

the rude, taunting part of political commentary in countries around the world for centuries, and enhance newspapers globally and across the political spectrum, in countries from the most tolerant liberal democracies to the most vicious totalitarian tyrannies. As we all know, they consequently have the power to shock and offend. That, largely, is what they're there for, as a kind of dark, sympathetic magic masquerading as a joke.

That's also why the Turkish cartoonist Musa Kart is in jail, why the Malaysian cartoonist Zunar was facing 43 years imprisonment for sedition until a change of government last year; why five cartoonists were murdered in the offices of Charlie Hebdo in January 2015; why dozens of British cartoonists – including William Heath Robinson – were on the Gestapo death list. And why, for that matter, when in the late 1950s the London Evening Standard ran a cartoon by its Jewish cartoonist Vicky attacking the death penalty, this so shocked and outraged a GP in Harrow that he wrote to the paper regretting that Vicky and his family had escaped the Nazis.

As Kart said at his trial, cartoonists are like canaries in the coal mine – when they come for us, you know the politics is getting toxic. But we're not just subject to the shallow vanity of tyrants or the fury of mobs. The greatest threat to cartoonists has always been the very newspapers we parasitise on. When the accountants moved in on the US newspaper industry in the 2000s, the first employees to go were the cartoonists, just like most newspapers that get closed down aren't shut by governments but by their proprietors. Nor is it just money. I've been "let go" more times than I can count (the worst case was when the Times sacked me to make more room for Julie Burchill's column, though in a previous incarnation on the Guardian's personal finance pages in the 1980s I was redesigned off the page and replaced with what was charmingly called "a creative use of white space").

We are, in short, expendable. Nonetheless, the New York Times' decision is particularly irksome in its intoxicating combination of cowardice, pomposity, over-reaction and hypocrisy. As I observed at the beginning of this article, April is the cruellest month for the New York Times, as its much vaunted (and self-promoting) claim to be America's "newspaper of record" was dealt an almost fatal blow when it was revealed in April 2003 that its star reporter Jayson Blair was a serial plagiarist who had fabricated many of his stories. You'll note, however, that the paper did not stop using reporters altogether in order to rebuild its reputation. Nor did it issue a statement announcing that it would "continue investing in forms of news journalism, including textual journalism, that express nuance, complexity and strong voice from a diversity of viewpoints" and then fill its pages with copy from, say, accountants and astrologers. Although after the dumbness of this decision, just give it time.

Martin Rowson is a cartoonist and author

The new age of the political cartoons

The New York Times ends daily political cartoons, but it's not the death of the art form

The New York Times has announced it will no longer be running daily political cartoons in its international edition, amid a continuing controversy over anti-Semitism in its pages. This brings the international paper in line with the domestic edition, which stopped featuring daily political cartoons several years ago.

It follows an earlier decision to end syndicated cartooning (“syndicates” represent collectives of cartoonists, looking to have work placed in a variety of publications). The Times said that a “faulty process” and lack of oversight led to a syndicated cartoon of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump (which was condemned by many as anti-Semitic) slipping through the net on April 25.

The decision has caused international consternation and prompted doom-laden predictions about the death of cartooning, or even of free speech itself. The paper’s former in-house cartoonists – Patrick Chappatte and Heng Kim Song – have taken to Twitter and the web to defend their careers and their profession.

But this decision should be seen less an overreaction by a newspaper frightened of (of all things) bad press, than a wake-up call. It’s a moment to acknowledge the new realities of cartooning, globally. As The Times’ editors have asserted, this has been a long time coming.

Indeed, the writing has been on the wall for at least a decade. The hallowed cartooning traditions of the 20th century cannot continue without facing up to fundamental changes in the industry. Although this decision doesn’t spell the end of cartooning as we know it, this may very well be a tipping point for the global cartooning industry.

A borderless world

Chappatte has said: “Cartoons can jump over borders.” But I’d go further: for cartoons, there are no longer any borders. There haven’t been for about a decade or so. And cartoonists have to understand that what they produce for one set of readers in one particular context will inevitably now be seen by people far away, with a very different set of views.

Remember the 2005 controversy over the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten? Initial low-level grumbling soon turned into worldwide outrage. Of course, it took a full decade for the worst reaction to manifest itself.

The French satirical weekly, Charlie Hebdo – which had not only reprinted the original Danish cartoons, but continued to print deliberately offensive anti-Islamic cartoons in subsequent years – was firebombed in 2011, and then the unthinkable: the shootings at the magazine’s offices in January 2015.

The point is that globalisation and information technology have changed the business of cartooning. Cartoonists wedded to the old-school, in-house ways of the 20th century can throw tantrums about free speech as much as they like. If they do not recognise the way the world has changed – and is changing – then they will be left behind as their profession moves forward.

History is not on their side. Just as 18th-century copperplate engravings were replaced by lithograph prints, and standalone caricatures were replaced by cartoons in 19th-century humour magazines, and they in turn by 20th-century newspaper cartoons, the web cartoon has well and truly arrived in the 21st century.

A recent example of a web-based cartoonist is Badiucao, the Chinese-Australian artist who instigated the global movement to recreate the famous “tank man” image in memory of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

So, although a blow to an older way of doing things, The New York Times decision won’t halt the ever-greater expansion of cartooning in its online form. The Times hasn’t really been known for its cartoon content (and actually been quite dismissive of the artform, historically).

The Portuguese anti-Netanyahu cartoonist – António Moreira Antunes – doesn’t even work for the Times. He is one of an army of cartoonists who work without borders, without much of the self-censorship that has always characterised the profession, and without the limitations of the past.

That comes at a cost: job security, a greater reliance on volunteer labour, and a decline in professionalism. But it’s where the future lies.

Paradoxically, the syndication that has been such a part of US cartooning culture for more than a century may provide a model for the future of the profession. The great press barons of the early 20th century – Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst (“Citizen Kane”) – were among the pioneers.

Rather than individual papers employing in-house staff cartoonists, the syndicate model looks remarkably like the “gig” economy of freelancers and short-term contracts. The Times has dealt with Cartoon Arts International – founded in 1978 – for many years. By divesting itself of that relationship, it may actually be taking a backward step.

But beyond this one paper, cartooning will continue. Talented artists will continue to create brilliant comments on the news of the day; less talented amateurs can always knock up a truly witty meme. Check your Facebook or Twitter feed – there’s more cartooning happening now than ever.

Richard Scully, *The Conversation*, June 16, 2019