

## Funnies on Capitol Hill

The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities, which has been quietly doling out a modest few millions since it was established in September 1965, passed a sort of milestone in recent weeks: one of its grants was assailed and ridiculed on the floor of Congress as a wanton waste of the taxpayers' money.

This was the way it happened. On 8 February, the House was going through the periodic ritual of debating whether to raise the ceiling on the national debt. In the end, it always raises the ceiling, because, as all members know, the government would otherwise have to stop sending checks to many of their constituents. But the occasion provides an opportunity for a good deal of vigorous rhetoric, and members queue up to take their turns at the microphone.

When a turn came for Paul Fino, the Bronx, New York, Republican, it is possible that he was using a speech left over from the last Congress, for he devoted a fair portion of the brief time allotted him to the now-cancelled Project Mohole, ripping into it as though it were still burning up American dollars. "Then there is Operation Mohole—better known as 'operation rathole'—," he proclaimed, "by which our money is being poured down a hole somewhere in the earth's crust to keep the geology trade employed."

Fino was followed by Durward G. Hall, Republican of Springfield, Missouri, who had fresher findings to deploy against increasing the debt ceiling. Hall told his colleagues that he had discovered that the Arts and Humanities Foundation had agreed to lay out \$8789 to the University of California, at Santa Barbara, "for a study of comic strips."

"Federal grants of this nature," he said, "are one more reason why the Johnson administration suffers from a credibility gap, and why the Congress should not approve another increase in the debt ceiling until this administration learns to distinguish between what is essential and what is utter nonsense. . . . If refusal to raise the debt ceiling means the Federal check to the University of California will bounce, then I say let us bounce it off the heads of those who have the temerity to approve grants like this at a time when the President is asking Congress to approve a 6-percent increase in taxes and cut back interstate defense highway construction." Proceeding with his attack, Hall asked, "Is there anyone in the House chamber who will admit to appropriating money for a comic book study?" Apparently there were multitudes so willing, for a bit later the bill to raise the debt ceiling passed, 215 to 199.

Inquiry revealed that the grant, for David Kunzle, in the department of art, at Santa Barbara, was for supporting the continuation of what is planned ultimately to be a three-volume study of the development of the comic strip since the late 15th century. According to a spokesman for the Foundation, the first volume, which carries the study to the early 19th century, is ready for publication. The grant will support work on the second volume, covering the period 1826–1896.

Following Hall's attack, Barnaby C. Keeney, chairman of the Foundation, wrote to the Congressman that "both the cartoon and the comic strip have been of considerable importance in the course of American history, and they have their background in the 18th and 19th centuries. . . . I think it is important that we understand the background of this sort of popular art, not for art's sake, but simply as a better way of understanding ourselves better."

Hall replied that he was fond of comic strips and often wished they were more widely read. "If more members of the Supreme Court read Dick Tracy regularly, and became aware of the growing crime rate in America, perhaps we would not have some of the decisions which have created such a flourishing climate for the rising crime rate." But he said he did not see why the federal government should finance scholarly research on the subject.—D.S.G.

in general, helped to create a climate in which a budgetary attack on higher education seemed politically feasible. Nonetheless the governor's present attitude toward the university does not seem primarily punitive or moralistic; it is, if anything, primarily fiscal. Education is an extremely expensive item in the state budget. Together with welfare, it accounts for about 83 percent of General Fund spending. Playing the ratio game of which he is evidently fond, Reagan discovered that, while university enrollment had increased 118 percent over the last decade, state support had grown by 213 percent. This simple head-count approach omits recognition of the fact that graduate students, of which the university has had rising numbers, cost more to educate than undergraduates, and it fails to account for changes in purchasing power of the dollar. But Reagan appears to take the count as *prima facie* evidence that the costs of higher education are getting out of hand.

Perhaps equal in importance to the fiscal considerations is the fact that Reagan is very much outside the alliance of business interests and educators that for many years has heavily influenced most decisions affecting public education in California. Reagan had not so much as met Clark Kerr, who, as university president, was in many ways the keystone of the alliance, before he was elected governor. His friends, associates, and advisors are people whom no one in the old ruling circles seems to know. Reagan's advisors are described loosely as "from the southern part of the state," "in oil," or "conservative." But, as far as education is concerned, even those closest to the university, whose business it is to keep track of such matters, do not know exactly who the advisors are or what they think. The main exception to the anonymity rule is Max Rafferty, the crusading, conservative Superintendent of Public Instruction. Rafferty is said to advise Reagan on educational affairs, but his is by no means a presence in which the former establishment finds any comfort. As for the others, while they are difficult to pin down, a number of negative deductions about their views can be made. First, they resent the privileged position traditionally occupied by the experts, professionals, and intellectuals associated with the university, and do not necessarily believe that education should be left to the educators. And, second, they do not take for granted the former gospel that