

SAM KEEN

Teaching About  
the U.S.S.R.

# Looking at Ourselves Looking at Each Other

To become wise, we learn to examine our own perceptions and those of others.

**W**hat has education to do with peace?

At first we learn from looking at the world. Later we learn from looking at the eyes through which we see the world. Experience begins with perception. Wisdom grows from an examination of perception.

Politics is the quest for power rather than truth; therefore, it makes use of propaganda to ensure the obedience and unconscious conformity of the majority.

Education should be an enemy of the unconscious life, a critic of propaganda, blind obedience, and thoughtless conformity. It is, therefore, revolutionary.

Lasting peace is more apt to come from education than from politics, from the quest for understanding than from the quest for domination.

If there is an avenue to peace, it probably lies in our capacity to look at ourselves looking at each other. For a moment let's put aside questions of geopolitics and examine our modes of perception. Let's notice how the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. perceive each other through the distorting lenses of images, metaphors, stereotypes. Be prepared to enter the world of political mythology where "isms" struggle, competing metaphysical visions of the world seek to establish their "truth," and good and evil empires clash by night.

*Left:* In 1886, 31 years before the Russian revolution, the American cartoonist Thomas Nast had already identified communism as the antithesis of capitalism. Communism kills the goose that lays the golden eggs; it strikes at the heart of what we consider the founda-

tion of economic value—capital.

*Right:* Looking at Wall Street, a communist cartoonist in the 1930s sees only a nation obsessed by abstractions, numbers, quantity, money—a giant without heart.

Art courtesy Sam Keen



*Left:* The Marxist reply to the charge that they are atheistic, therefore immoral, has always been: "You only pretend to worship God. What you really worship is the Almighty Dollar." Here the cartoonist portrays capitalism as merely another primitive cult that worships the false god of wealth.



*Right:* In this Pulitzer prize-winning cartoon from 1930, Edmund Duffy shows Russia as the enemy of Christianity. The self-proclaimed atheism of the Soviet state has never ceased to shock Americans. How can they not believe in the God we trust?

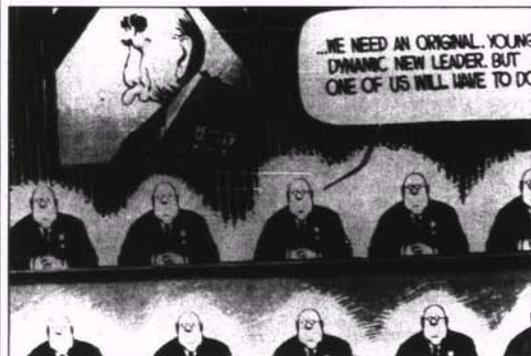


*Left:* Since America was founded by refugees from the tyranny of European monarchs, the ultimate horror for us is the notion that the individual exists only to serve the state. For us, "I" is primary. Frequently, as here, we por-

tray the Soviets, leaders and common people alike, as a faceless mass.

*Right:* For the Soviets, "we" comes before "I." The individual separated from the community is an uprooted plant; individualism, they fear, is anar-

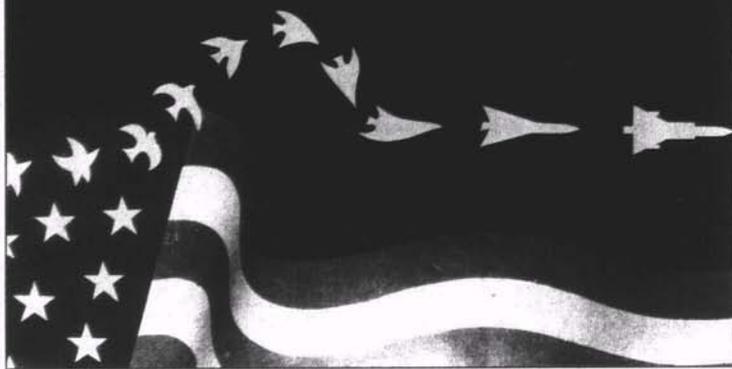
chy. This cartoon contrasts the wealthy capitalist to the socialist people. The caption reads: *Banker*—"I am the state." *People*—"We are the state."



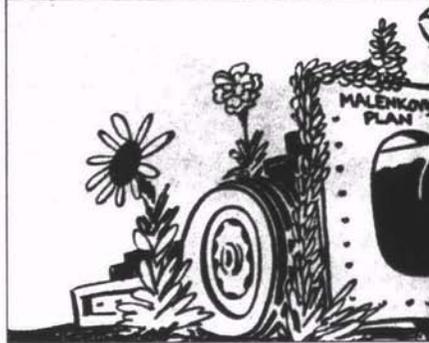
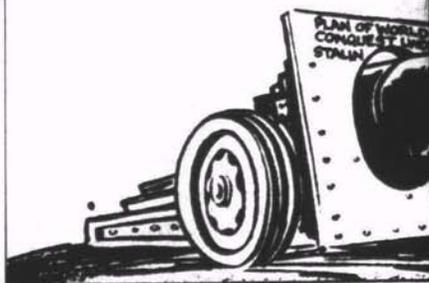
Both Americans and Soviets view each other's peace proposals with jaundiced eyes. *Right:* We suspect they use disarmament proposals and times of

detente as a breathing spell to strengthen the means to achieve world domination. *Left:* They share the same suspicion about us.

## «МИРНАЯ» ПОЛИТИКА США В ДЕЙСТВИИ



## BUT HOW ABOUT THE



*Left:* In spite of our mighty military power, we continue to feel threatened by the "overwhelming superiority" of Soviet arms. Compare the size of NATO to the Russian Bear, and you get some measure of our unconscious fear of the Soviets.

*Right:* The most common fear expressed by Soviet citizens is that Americans, because we have not known the horror of war on our own soil since our Civil War, will initiate a nuclear war.



## BASIC DESIGN!



In American-Soviet relationships, periods of enmity and friendship have always alternated. When our hopes for cooperation for a more peaceful world are aroused, we remember the most recent period of detente when the Odd Couple walked together (*left*).

The Soviets frequently bring to mind the years when we were allies, here symbolized by the famous moment when our armies met on the Elbe River on the eve of the end of World War II (*above*).

Over the years the images and metaphors we have used to understand each other haven't changed much. Our differences are deep, systemic, abiding. In times of high tension, the twisted stereotypes emerge from our minds and contaminate our perceptions with suspicion and hatred. In times of calm, we edge toward each other, wary giants trying to take the first steps toward friendship. We perceive and construct reality in opposite ways; therefore, we are and will be bound together. Let us hope that our wrestling together may remain a form of loving combat. □

**Sam Keen** is a lecturer, an editor of *Psychology Today*, and the author of such books as *The Passionate Life* and *Faces of the Enemy*. He can be reached at 16321 Norrbom Rd., Sonoma, CA 95476.

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