



UNITED NATIONS SEEKS A GLYPH  
TO INSPIRE UNITY

An article which appeared in the New York Times on Sunday March 29, 1964 by Kathleen Teltsch.

The search for international understanding has led the United Nations to the glyph.

Glyphs are little symbols, such as the plus and minus signs used in mathematics. Since they are "independent of language and culture", glyphs have been stressed as a means of breaking down the language barrier.

With this in mind, the 113 United Nations member states are being asked to promote glyph development, invent new glyphs and standardise old ones, use more glyphs as road signs and widen the use of glyphs generally.

Since 1965 has been designated as International Co-operation Year, it is being suggested that developing the glyph is one of the useful tasks that could be encouraged.

The idea of promoting glyphs was first mentioned in United Nations circles by Dr. Margaret Mead, the anthropologist.

Suggestions from individuals are not customarily received or acted on. The idea was not pursued until the Canadian delegation saw its merits and sponsored it in the 12-nation committee planning the 1965 observance, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

The committee has given the glyph the go-ahead. It has said it regards the idea of promoting glyphs as in complete harmony with the International Co-operation Year but is leaving it to the member of governments to discover their own ways of using the symbols.

One obvious field, the committee suggests, would be in foreign travel, where identical road signs with universal acceptance would be a safety measure. The whole communication field stands to gain from the glyph - le glyph to the French, glifko to the Spanish and znak to the Russians.

The official glyph (the origin of the term is a Greek word meaning "carving") for the 1965 international year is almost certain to be the insignia for the United Nations celebration. Artists at work on preliminary sketches have selected as their theme hands clasped in brotherhood. If the committee approves, the design will go on postage stamps and posters, as the first United Nations glyph.

End of article

Note by Bliss: When I read about the new term "Glyph" I oringed in rage. I had learned that it was Mighty Margaret Mead who invented the term to make people believe that she has done some creative work on symbols. She hasn't. Glyphein means to carve in Greek. Graphein means to write. Hence we don't say teleglyph but telegraph, not monoglyph but monograph and so on. And least of all does glyph mean a symbol which has the same meaning in all languages. The word is taken from the Greek hieroglyph which means sacred carvings. But what people (including Mighty Margaret) don't know is that the Egyptian hieroglyphs are not a pictorial symbol writing, but a fully fledged alphabetical writing in which every picture stands for a letter of the alphabet. For more details see S.S. 269 and S.S. 270.

I dashed off the following draft for a printed leaflet on that "glyph" for the United Nations "the clasped hands." I tried to show that the Not-so-United Nations which are composed of many countries in Africa and Asia to whom the clasped hands don't mean what they mean in Western countries. Here is the text:

DO CLASPED HANDS MEAN INTERNATIONAL  
CO-OPERATION ? THEY DON'T !

They don't. They mean FRIENDSHIP only. But even this is hypocritical. People shake hands who are not friends. A friendly tribe may never shake hands. They rub noses. Told that clasped hands mean CO-OPERATION, they might say: "How can you co-operate when holding hands tight?"

But suppose the U.N. gives it a new twist of meaning: CO-OPERATION THROUGH FRIENDSHIP. It still won't work. Many people are friends, who wouldn't dream of co-operating with each other. They may have their different opinions about almost everything.

How to overcome this semantic dilemma? Only by agreeing internationally about the meaning of phonetic and pictorial symbols. But some people refuse to agree.

Seventeen million people, four times the population of many a country, each with a seat in the U.N., try to convince people to co-operate in the use of Esperanto.

Eighty years ago, a doctor in Warsaw signed his book Dr. Esperanto, meaning "hope" in his new international language. In 1916 Dr. Zamenhof died heartbroken. He had not been able to enlist the co-operation of the only people who can make Esperanto a reality. Who are they?

The language teachers and professors could introduce Esperanto in the schools of the world TOMORROW. But they refuse to co-operate and DO it. Why? One school of thought says that language teachers are sadists at heart. They rule their irregular rules of grammar often with a ruler or a bamboo cane.

Others say that if languages would be made regular and simple to learn, and if all mankind would know Esperanto, millions of teachers would be out of a job. That's why they refuse to co-operate internationally.

#### ARE PICTORIAL SYMBOLS SELF-EXPLANATORY?

Do they explain "themselves"? They don't. Anyone who thinks they do, suffers under a self-induced delusion.

Take the international direction sign of the arrow. To a tribe hunting with bow and arrow, it must be explained to them as we explain to children the meaning of TO THE TOILETS →.

Suppose that tribe speaks perfect English. They would know then what TOILETTES mean. But following it, they may end up in the department for ladies gowns in some store in some countries.

Suppose they see TO THE TADPOLES. They would be stumped, unless they are told that they are in the lobby of an aquarium. What's that? Literally translated it means a waterarium. What's that again?

What is the meaning of this literary excursion? It means: EVERY SYMBOL, WHETHER DRAWN AS A PICTURE, OR AS GEOMETRICAL SOUND SYMBOLS A B C etc. HAS TO BE LEARNED THE HARD WAY, FIRST IN SCHOOL, THEN IN YEARS OF USE.

How many sound symbols, that are words, do you know? Peasants in Europe and elsewhere know about 3000 sound symbols, that are words. Workers and tradesmen know about 8000 sound symbols, that are words. Intellectuals about 15,000 to 30,000. Scholars about 50,000 to 100,000.

And the large dictionaries list over 500,000 sound symbols. But each listed word may have 10 or more different meanings, all nicely numbered under 1 2 3 4 5 and a b c d etc. making it over 5 million different symbols.

This is the answer to the learned idiots who laugh at Bliss. "Imagine Bliss, the crackpot, he must have invented tens of thousands of pictorial symbols. Compare with this the simplicity of our 26 Latin Letters!"

The End.