

C. K. BLISS

Author and Inventor of Semantography-Blissymbolics



writes to the

Icograda Congress on Signs and Symbols:

"I PROTEST AND I ACCUSE!"

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I PROTEST AND I ACCUSE

Written for the Congress of Icograda (International Council of Graphic Design Associations) to be held in Bled, Yugoslavia, 11-16th July, '66.

By C.K. Bliss

Graduate of the University of Technology, Vienna
Inventor and Author of Semantography (Blissymbolics)
a complete international pictorial symbol writing

For the main theme of the Congress:

Breaking the Language Barrier through Signs and Symbols.

At the first Icograda Congress, in 1964 a leading Icograda man made a call for work on an "International Symbol Language"

He also made later another call for money, more than half a million dollars to be spent on "research", going to conferences, including all expenses, including grants, salaries etc. He then approached organisations for financial support (see Icograda paper, 1965).

He received an answer from the United Nations Association of Australia which was a bombshell, shattering all his dreams of research, conferences and expenses. He was informed that an Australian scholar, C.K. Bliss, has already solved the problem, has written a book about it, and has received highest praise from eminent scholars. The reaction of that Icograda man to this news is the basis of this paper.

I protest against the treatment I have received from this man who calls himself "Chairman" of a "COMMISSION for international signs and symbols." I accuse him of discourtesy, selfishness and incompetence. In the following paragraphs I shall prove the truth of my accusations.

In his appeal for money he said:

"If because of Icograda's work, the lives of only a few people each year can be saved...if through the creation of an international symbol language...the present language barrier can be broken...all those who have contributed their work and financial support to the solving of this complex problem will have made a major contribution to the better understanding between peoples everywhere,"

These words about symbols for saving lives are justified. Thousands of people are dying on the motor roads of the world because road warnings are mostly in the native languages not in pictorial symbols. But incredible as it may seem he excluded expressively work on road warning symbols which can save lives. Instead he instigated an art students competition for 24 symbols only, most of them are already symbolized for centuries, and others are utterly unnecessary, as the following examples will prove.

Who needs a new design for "a directional arrow?" We can see it everywhere. Who needs new designs for "men's and women's toilets?" We can see them in most hotels, cinemas etc. And who needs a symbol for "an historical monument?" When we stand before a statue of a statesman, or an old castle, do we need a symbol to be told that this is an "historical monument?" But the worst is his condition which he imposed upon helpless art students. He demanded from them to design:

"symbols which must be directly intelligible to persons of all nations, of all degrees of intelligence, and of all ages."

Under this outrageous condition fall all the tots and the toddlers of "all ages", all the halfwits and nitwits of "all degrees of intelligence", of "all nations". This includes the primitive tribes of Upper Chindwin in Burma, and Lower Slobovia in Al Cappland.

Imagine the poor students who racked their brains trying to design symbols for an "exchange bureau", a "museum" and an "historical monument" for "persons of all nations" who have never seen nor heard of such things, and who may not have words in their languages for them.

All these facts, taken directly from his papers, prove this man has no idea about the working of symbols. In the name of the many art students who have wasted their time and talents I protest, and I accuse him of gross incompetence.

He acted also discourteously and selfishly. A man who asks for more than half a million dollars for work on an "international symbol language" must realise that his money-givers want him to search and research far and wide for anyone who has already worked out such a language. It was therefore his duty to write to me for information immediately after hearing of my work. But today, after one long year he has not answered my polite and pleading letters.

At last in November 1965, I took the first step and sent Icograda enough informative papers to prove that I have solved the problem. Later they received my book. Here are two of my last sentences from my first letter to them in which I refer to my old age:

"I wish to state that I don't want to make a single penny from my work. I shall die soon and I shall be glad to see that you are taking up my work."

(Copies of all my letters to Icograda are available to interested persons)

The letters I received then from the president of Icograda were non-committal until in his last letter of May 16th, 1966 he declared my work to be unsuitable but said at the same time;

"None of us still has had time to really study your proposals in great detail."

And this after half a year! Time enough to study my papers and leaflets. I attach herewith my folder "Universal Pictorial Blissymbols for the International Traveller" and ask the reader to find out how long it takes to read through. Perhaps fifteen minutes, or a little longer. But the Icograda men couldn't find the short time to study my leaflets. Why not? Because they left all this studying to their "Chairman of the Commission for International Signs and Symbols". Hence all my protests and accusations are solely directed against that man, and if I speak of the "men" of Icograda I want to say that they bear responsibility for letting that man influence them. They should have stopped him long ago.

That man, has he designed and published any system of symbols for an international language? NO! Have the other Icograda men done it? Again NO! What then does he do, and what then does he want to do? This becomes clear from his papers. He wants to travel to conferences with all expenses paid, and wants to do "research" by "co-ordinating" the creative efforts of others. For this he demands more than half a million dollars. My work puts an end to his dreams. Naturally, he is against it, and he has influenced the others.

What argument does he bring forth against my work? My symbols must be "learned". But he did not take the time to do some "research" to find out how quickly people "learn" my pictorial symbols. Educators and others have found that children grasp my pictorial symbols and write whole sentences within the first lesson. The reader may see from the attached folder how simple my symbols really are.

What right have I to protest and to accuse? I have solved this problem posed 300 years ago by the great mathematician Leibnitz, a Universal Symbolism, a complete symbol language, a simple system of pictorial symbols containing also a symbolic logic and semantics.

Professor E.T. Bell, late of the California Institute of Technology wrote in his biography of Leibnitz:

"The very diffusion of Leibnitz' genius made him capable of the dream which Archimedes, Newton and Gauss missed, the 'Universal Symbolism'. Others may bring it to realisation. Leibnitz did his part in dreaming it to be possible."

And Professor Oliver L. Reiser, of the University of Pittsburgh, stated in his lecture to the American Association of the Advancement of Science:

"Bliss realized the ambition of the great mathematician Leibnitz."

I am an old man at the end of my life. I have given my labours, my time, my earnings and savings for this idea, and I have stated time and again that I don't want to make a penny out of it. I want to give it to all mankind.

I am aware that this paper may have legal consequences. But my quotes from the Icoagrada papers do not infringe any copyright because, according to international legal usage, short quotes for critical evaluation are no infringement of copyright. I am also not afraid of any court action for libel because the truth is not libel.

Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. May God help me!

C. K. Bliss

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