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Going On

PHILIP OAKES

Drawing a new party line?

IF YOU'RE trying to guess what style of propaganda campaign Labour will eventually mount in the election to be, take a look at an exhibition which opens on Tuesday at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. It's a collection of original paintings and drawings commissioned for all branches of the media from books to TV commercials and picked as the best work of the year by "European Illustration '78 '79," the glossy annual published next month at £18.50.

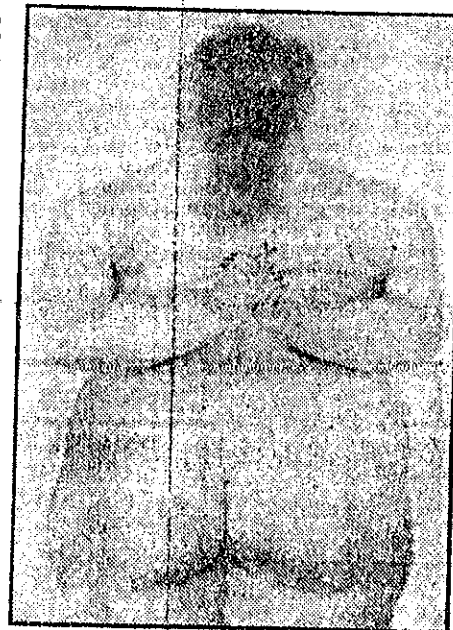
The election flavour is supplied by the book's editor, Edward Booth-Clibborn, who coincidentally heads Labour's squad of propaganda experts. "It is a volunteer force of market analysts, writers and art directors recruited by me," he says. "They all wish to remain anonymous but I won't deny that the art directors include some of the people who selected the work in European Illustration. It gives some idea of what they admire and the images they think are effective. Almost certainly the main thrust of the campaign will be delivered by party political broadcasts on TV. But posters are still potent. I'm convinced myself that an artist can do a much more effective job than a photographer. And if artists are used in Labour's campaign it would seem logical that they'll come from those on show in European Illustration."

It's the basis of an intriguing guessing game. The British artists Booth-Clibborn most admires offer little in the way of comfort for floating voters. There is Ralph Steadman, a superb draughtsman whose apparent disgust for the human condition had resulted in savage cartoons of whores on patrol and excreting dogs (Steadman has an almost pathological hatred of our four-footed friends). There is Russell Mills whose hard-edged drawing seem to lock his men and women in stress and disquiet. Most striking of all there is Sue Coe ("politically

orientated and with a strong social sense," says Booth-Clibborn) whose illustrations include a horrific representation of the murder of Steve Biko entitled "How people commit suicide in South Africa" and a bloody commentary on the Canadian seal cull. The work of all three is powerful, original and uncompromising. If they lend their talents to a political campaign the results could be electric. What effect they would have

on the ballot box is anyone's guess.

Booth-Clibborn sees this year's "European Illustration" as proof positive that commercial art has come of age. "Artists are now proud to work for the media" he says. "We are going through an aesthetic revolution. Attitudes have changed radically from a few years ago. It is a colloquial art that is being practised. Readers and audiences are addressed much more directly. There is a genuine dialogue going on." Like life, in fact, like politics ought to be.



Top: Sue Coe's illustration for a magazine poll on seal hunting.
Above: Booth-Clibborn drawn by Adrian George.
Left: Olivetti diary illustration by Fernando Botero.