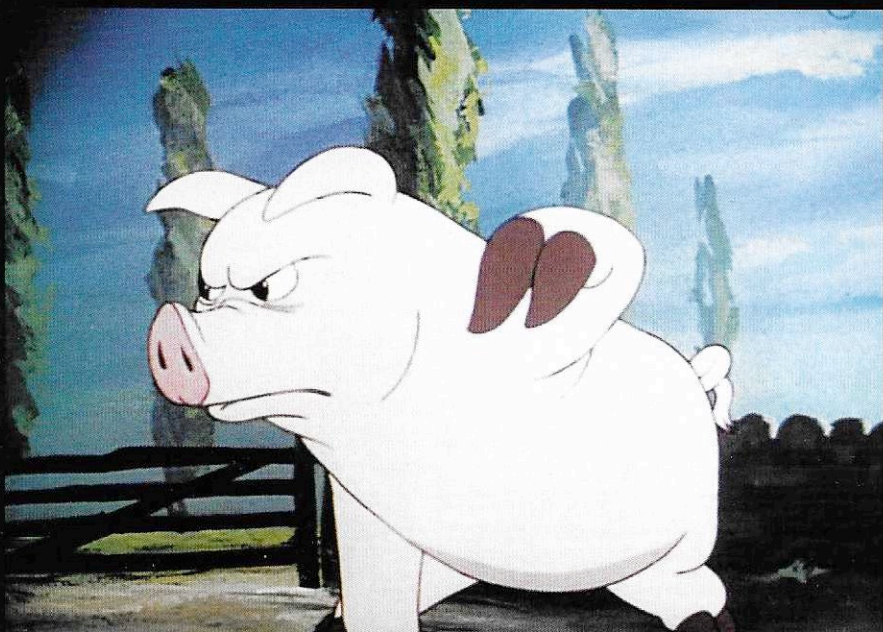


farm subsidy

By John Canemaker



In 1945, in London's *Evening Standard*, Graham Greene reviewed *Animal Farm*, George Orwell's just-published satiric novel, and suggested that the author's self-described "fairy story" might make a good animated cartoon.

"If Mr. Walt Disney is looking for a real subject," Greene wrote, "here it is: it has all the necessary humour, and it has, too, the subdued lyrical quality he can sometimes express so well.

"But," Greene hesitated, "is it perhaps a little too real for him? There is no appeasement here."

Indeed. Orwell's allegory mocks the first 30 years of the Russian Communist revolution in the great anthropomorphic animal tradition of Aesop, Chaucer, La Fontaine,

was wise to question if Orwell's poetical tale—though whimsical and wryly humorous at moments—was right for Disney, in whose films dark elements were always overcome by a happily-ever-after ending.

Eventually, in the early '50s, an animated film was made of *Animal Farm* by Halas & Batchelor, the British animation studio of husband-and-wife team John Halas (1912–1995) and Joy Batchelor (1914–1991). Though the cartoon was Disney-like in overall design, its content was far more serious and adult-oriented than that of any Disney feature.

Nevertheless, George Orwell, who died in 1950 at age 45, would likely have disapproved of the film. For admirable as it is in many ways, it compromised the book's dour ending by grafting on a predictably upbeat one. In the film, the downtrodden animals of the world unite and overthrow the pigs!

The story behind *Animal Farm*'s transformation from book to screen—why and how the film got made and why the ending was changed—is filled with more than a little intrigue: It recently came to light that the animated feature was actually commissioned by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency as Cold War anti-Communist propaganda.

The widespread use of propaganda in animated films during World War II is well known. Disney's studio, for one example, was kept afloat financially by a steady stream of film commissions from U.S. government agencies. Not so well known is the government's continued use of animated propaganda in the postwar period.

"By the late 1940s," writes animation historian Karl Cohen in liner notes for last year's 50th-anniversary DVD release of *Animal Farm* (Home Vision Entertainment), "the C.I.A. was spending tax dollars creating culture as a secret weapon to combat communism around the world." Cohen suggests the C.I.A. bought the film rights to the Orwell novel "assuming that the ending could be changed to better serve their purposes."

Vivien Halas, Halas and Batchelor's daughter, recently noted, "The first rumblings of the C.I.A. business came out in a book by Francis Stoner Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper—The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, in 1999."

We now know that the 1954 animated film of *Animal Farm*, George Orwell's grim anti-Soviet allegory, was funded by the C.I.A. This might explain the British-made feature's cheery ending—the barnyard bad guys (read: Communists) are overthrown.

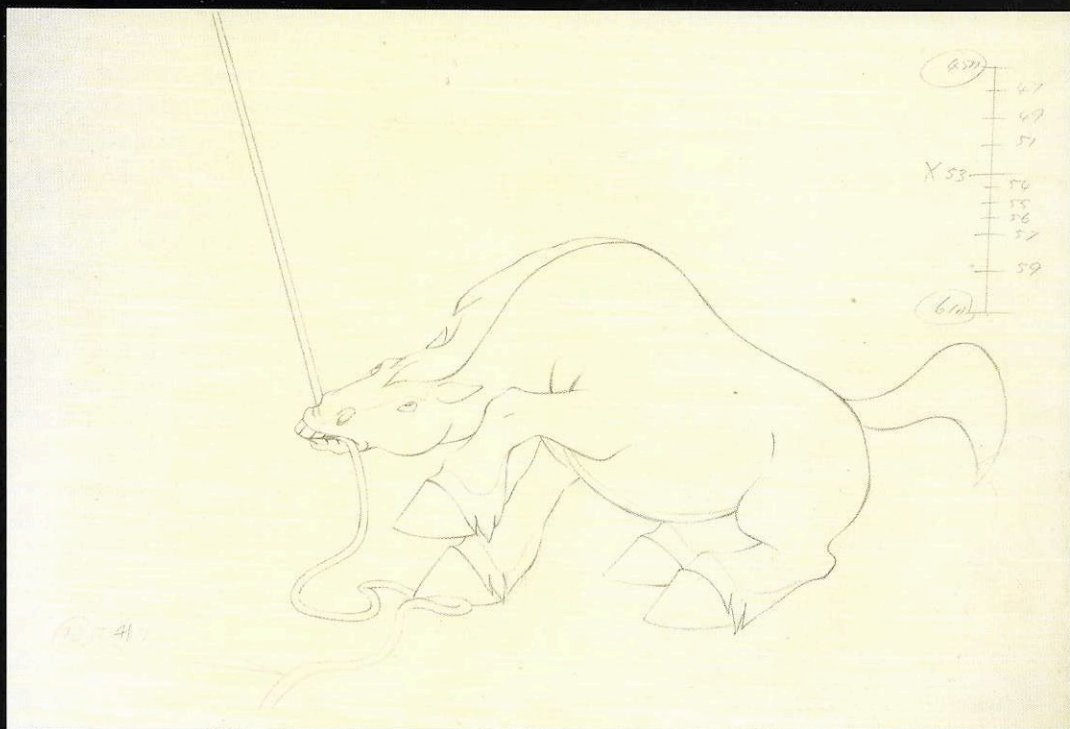
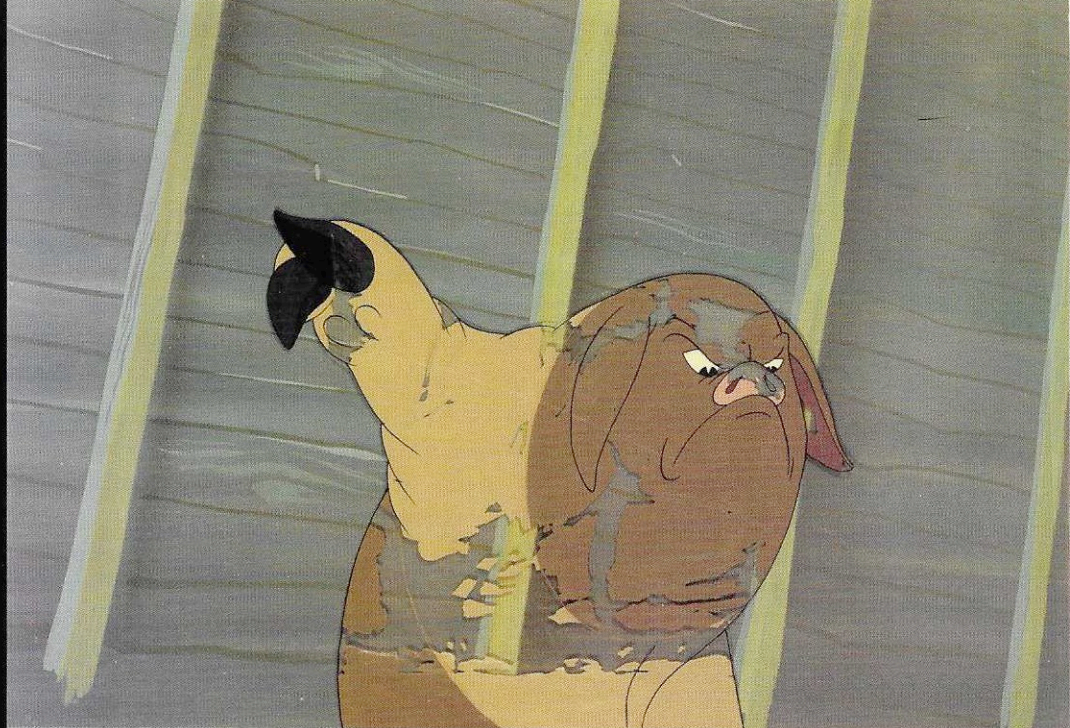
Kipling, and Beatrix Potter. His farm animals are stand-ins for Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky (all depicted as pigs) and the Proletariat (a self-sacrificing horse, a loyal mule, productive chickens, and so on).

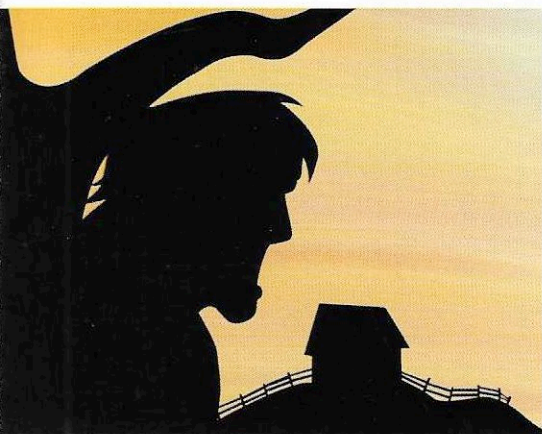
After rebelling against a human farmer (Mr. Jones, a symbol for Czar Nicholas II) and routing him from the farm (the 1917 Russian Revolution), the animals take over. But little by little, they begin to suffer under the dictatorship of the tyrannical pigs. By the book's tragic ending, the animals' hopes for the revolution are dashed, and—to their horror—they realize just how corruptible a force power can be. As it turns out, the human nature within the animals made the pig leaders no different from their human oppressors, even (finally) in appearance.

Graham Greene admired Disney; but he

Facing page: Two stills from the feature-length *Animal Farm*, made by animation studio Halas & Batchelor. The defeated human farmers, represented by barnyard tools, are contrasted with one of the triumphant pigs who take over the farm and install a dictatorship.

All stills and photos courtesy of The Halas and Batchelor Collection Ltd.





Above, left: Silhouette of Farmer Jones; **center:** Joy Batchelor is amused by animation director John Reed's performance of one of the film's characters; **right:** Producer Louis De Rochemont (light suit), John Halas, and Joy Batchelor confer on the project's script. **Facing page, top:** Surviving original art from *Animal Farm* includes a damaged cel with a painted background showing the domineering pig Napoleon; **middle:** An animation "clean-up" drawing (made from a less-detailed rough drawing) of the horse Boxer building a windmill; **bottom:** Two frames of the same scenes.

Saunders revealed that screen rights to *Animal Farm* had been obtained by the C.I.A.'s Office of Policy Coordination—specifically, by two members of the Psychological Warfare Workshop, headed by Howard Hunt, who later achieved notoriety as part of the Watergate burglary team.

Hunt's Hollywood C.I.A. operatives were Carlton Alsop, who, according to Cohen, "was working undercover at Paramount," and writer Finis Farr. The two flew to England to meet with Orwell's widow, Sonia, who agreed to terms "after they arranged for her to meet her hero, Clark Gable."

Hunt next chose the film's producer: Paramount's Louis De Rochemont, who had worked with Hunt on the newsreel documentary series *The March of Time* from 1935 to

De Rochemont was "a Navy buddy and good friend" of screenwriters/producers Philip Stapp and Lothar Wolff, who had worked with the producer in the Navy's film unit. Joy Batchelor collaborated with Stapp in 1949 on a Marshall Plan film (*The Shoemaker and the Hatter*) produced by Halas & Batchelor, and eventually both Stapp and Wolff became scriptwriters on *Animal Farm*. "I suspect," Cohen concludes, "Halas and Batchelor's reputation, personal friendships, and budgetary restraints were important factors in the decision to award them the contract."

The reputation of John Halas and Joy Batchelor was very high indeed in international animation circles; their studio was credited with putting Britain firmly on the map as an animation production center. "We



1951. De Rochemont in turn selected Halas and Batchelor as the film's co-directors.

Lower film production costs in Europe were a factor in the selection of the London-based H&B animation studio; but Tony Shaw, in his book *British Cinema and the Cold War* (2001), suggests another reason: De Rochemont questioned the "loyalty" of American animators. Cartoon studios, such as United Productions of America, home to Mr. Magoo and Gerald McBoing Boing, were being purged as left-leaning in the wake of hearings by the House Un-American Activities Committee. The prevalent Red-baiting of the period resulted in many animators losing their livelihood. [See "Lost Rainbow," *PRINT*, March/April 1993.]

Vivien Halas, on the other hand, told Cohen that her parents got the contract because

were the golden studio," John Halas said in a 1979 interview.

Halas, a Hungarian animator/producer, had immigrated to London in 1936, where he met Joy Batchelor, a British animator/scriptwriter. The couple formed Halas & Batchelor in 1940 and were married a year later. Starting modestly by making theatrical advertisements, the studio lasted 45 years, producing some 2000 shorts and seven full-length animated features.

Throughout its history, H&B used numerous styles of animation that varied depending on the project. The studio employed many bright young talents, some of whom received their professional start there, and pioneered new technologies, such as 3D films and computer graphics. H&B opened new markets for the British film industry in gen-

eral and for animation in particular.

Halas & Batchelor's *Animal Farm* was, in fact, the first animated entertainment feature ever produced in England. The adult subject matter anticipates the sophistication of *Yellow Submarine* (1968) and Ralph Bakshi's dark animated features of the 1970s.

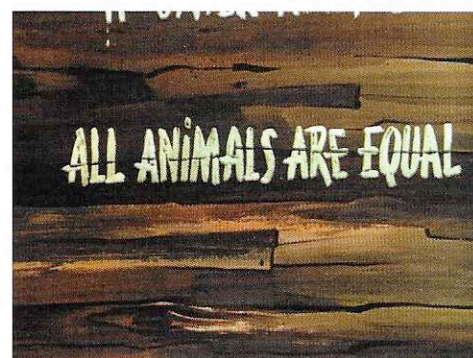
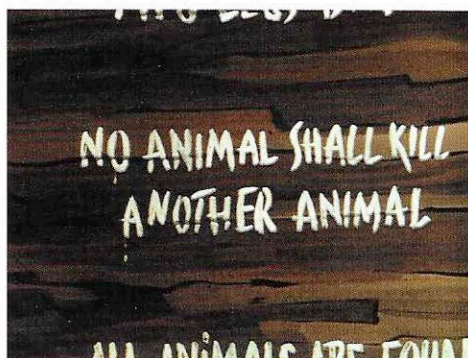
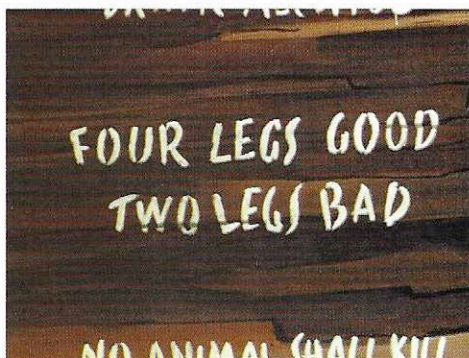
At the time it was made, Disney dominated the feature-length cartoon market with family fare on the order of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), and *Lady and the Tramp* (1955). Few studios dared plow the same field, and certainly not with a grim allegory about Russian communism. But Halas and Batchelor took up the challenge.

"Had it not been for ten years' continuous work representing over a hundred short subjects, many of them highly specialized in content and technique," writes Roger Man-

ney touches" to the characterizations, such as a little duckling who can't keep up with the others, similar to the littlest mushroom in *Fantasia*'s "Nutcracker Suite" segment.

For the most part, though, the animals are animated with minimal anthropomorphism, except for the pigs who, as highly caricatured humans, are at the end called upon to walk in jackboots on their hind legs. The film does not flinch in scenes depicting violent confrontations (animals against humans, pigs against other barnyard animals). Death usually occurs off-screen, but the buildup of tension in chase scenes leaves no doubt as to the sad fate of the animals who dare challenge the vicious and cunning pigs.

Regarding the notorious altered ending, Vivien Halas recently said, "Personally, I don't think that either Joy or John real-



ville in *The Animated Film* (1954), "the Halas-Batchelor Unit could never have reached the position where it was possible to undertake the production of *Animal Farm*."

The contract was awarded in November 1951, and the 75-minute film was completed nearly three years later. A crew of 70 (including five lead animators and three background painters) toiled in both a London studio on Soho Square and a second location 120 miles west in the town of Stroud.

Directorial duties were shared by Halas and Batchelor and John F. Reed, a former "special animation effects" animator on Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). Reed used his considerable expertise in rendering shadows, flames, rain, and other natural phenomena to establish the film's somber visual and emotional palette. Reed was also credited with (or blamed for) inserting specific "Dis-

ized that the so-called backers were from the C.I.A." The changes came about, she noted, "as the film evolved. There were at least nine versions of the script and heated discussions about the end. My mother especially felt it was wrong to change the ending." Her father, however, in a 1980 television interview, said the new ending "offers a glimmer of hope for the future," which no doubt echoed the sentiments of producer De Rochemont and his silent backers.

Ironically, reality in the form of world events finally caught up with the film's finale. In the 1990s, some 40 years after *Animal Farm* reached the screen, people all over Eastern Europe rose up against Soviet domination. The destruction of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. itself make the optimism of the cartoon film seem downright prescient. **P**

Above: Three stills from *Animal Farm* of homilies and rules devised by the farm animals before the pigs take over.
Facing page: 14 frames from various scenes in the film.

