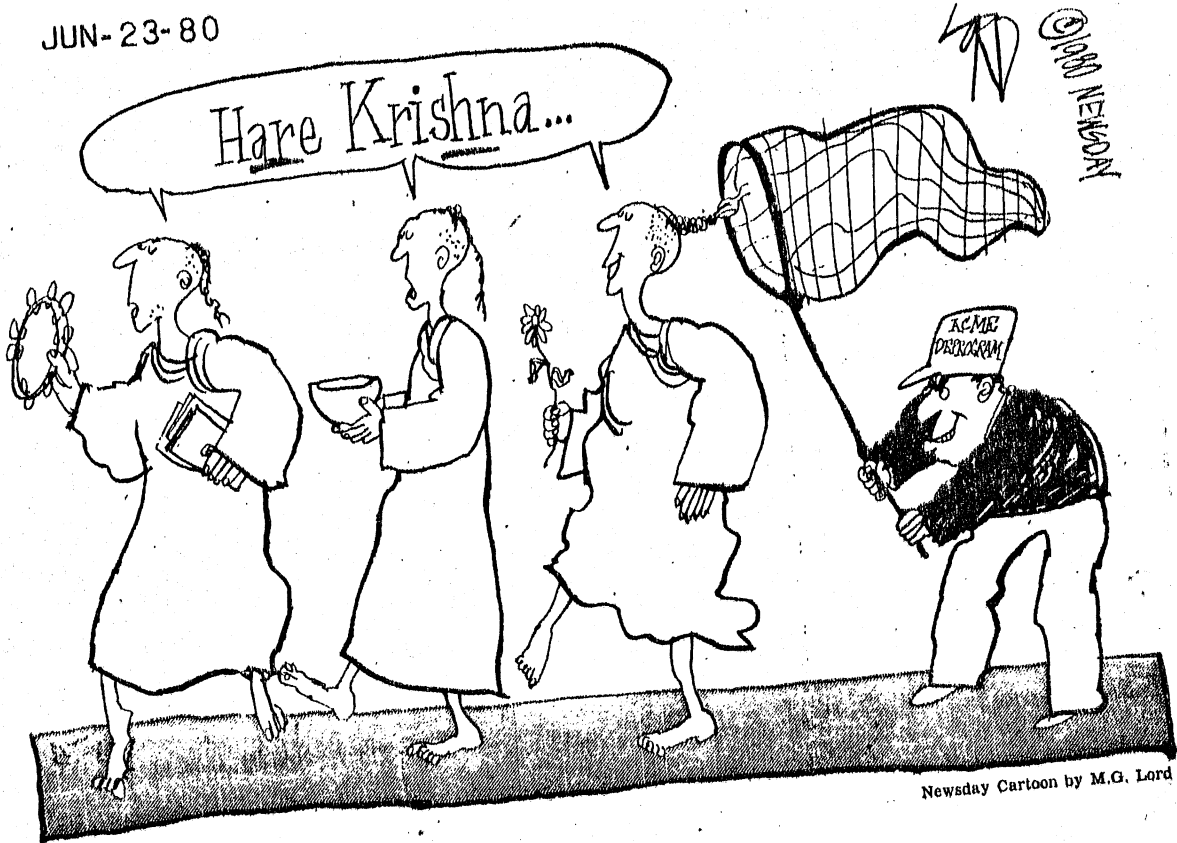


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## Dubious Treatment for Cultists

It is easy to sympathize with the agonizing concern of parents and legislators who support the "cult bill" recently passed in Albany. But making it a law could cause even more suffering.

The legislation is intended to protect people over the age of 15 from deceptive recruiting practices and physical maltreatment by so-called cults. Those are purposes that seem reasonable.

There is more, however. The bill would, under certain conditions, permit an alleged cult victim to be seized by police, locked up at home and subjected to forcible "deprogramming."

That could be as questionable from a therapeutic standpoint as it appears to be on constitutional grounds. And these harsh provisions are not really softened

by the bill's provision allowing the release of the confined person after 45 days of such treatment.

It would be foolish, of course, to say the state should ignore criminal abuses by any organization. Children younger than 15 are protected from such exploitation by existing penal laws. And if legislative investigation identifies a need for stronger laws on the activities of cults, they should be given the fullest study—with equally full regard for the constitutional separation of church and state.

But abridging the liberty of individuals is not the way to prevent abuses by a group. Gov. Hugh Carey's legal advisers are giving careful attention to this misguided bill. We hope the inquiry results in a veto message.