

Why Norman And Jason Aren't Talking

By MERLE MILLER



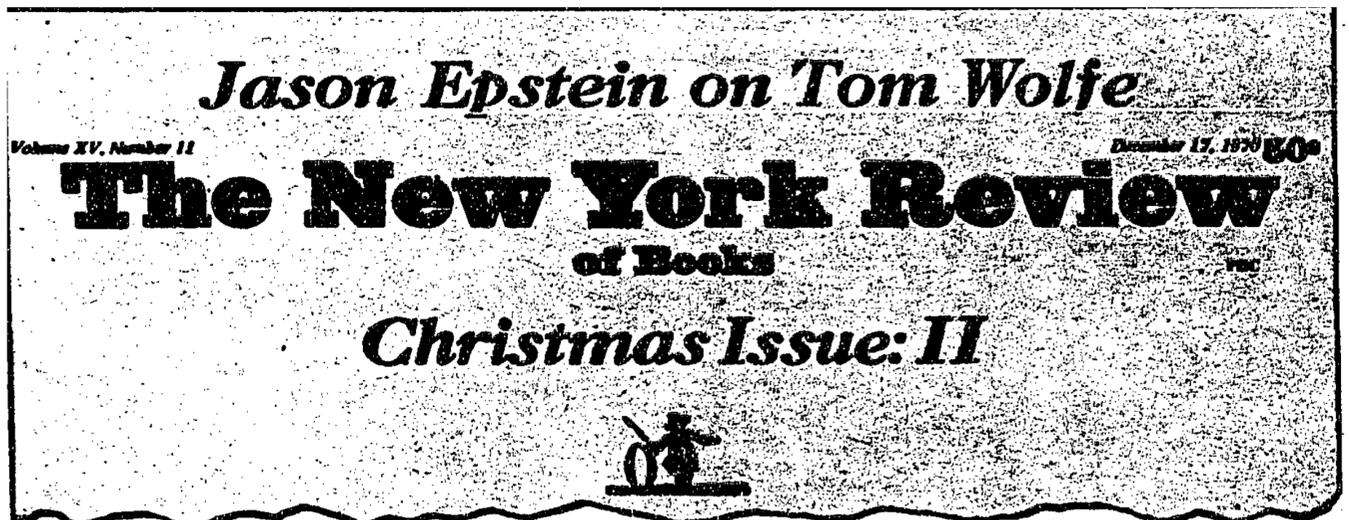
Jason Epstein, one of the principals in a literary feud. His salvos at times appear in *New York Review of Books* (circulation about 100,000), which he helped found — and, Norman says, is bent on “enlarging the heritage of hatred for America.”

JASON EPSTEIN and Norman Podhoretz are both in their early 40's, both Jewish, both graduates of Columbia, both editors and occasional writers, and while they were once close friends, they are now sworn enemies. They once agreed on almost everything, in literature and in politics; now they agree on almost nothing, and the arguments between them, in large part because of them, are repeated on every university campus in the United States, as well as in every city and town where people who are intellectuals or think of themselves as intellectuals—and these days who doesn't?—get together.

Norman Podhoretz is editor of *Commentary*, which has a circulation of 60,000 a month, and, according to a study called “How and Where to Find the Intellectual Elite in the United States,” which was published in *Public Opinion Quarterly* last year, *Commentary* has more influence on the thinking of intellectuals in this country than all but two other publications, one of which is *The New York Review of Books*, which has a circulation of about 100,000. (The other is *The New Yorker*.)

Jason Epstein is one of the founders of *The New York Review*; he writes for it now and again, and while he denies having any direct editorial influence on the magazine, his wife Barbara and his friend Robert B. Silvers are the top editors. And those who know all three find it impossible to believe that they disagree on any major issue concerning the magazine. Jason is also a vice president and a senior editor of Random House, one of the largest and most prestigious publishing houses in the country. Random House is owned by RCA, which also owns Alfred A. Knopf and Pantheon Books. The three companies share the same sleek modern building on East 50th Street in New York and

MERLE MILLER, the novelist, lives in Brewster, N. Y., in splendid isolation from the wars of the New York Literary Mob. His new novel, “What Happened,” will be out this spring.

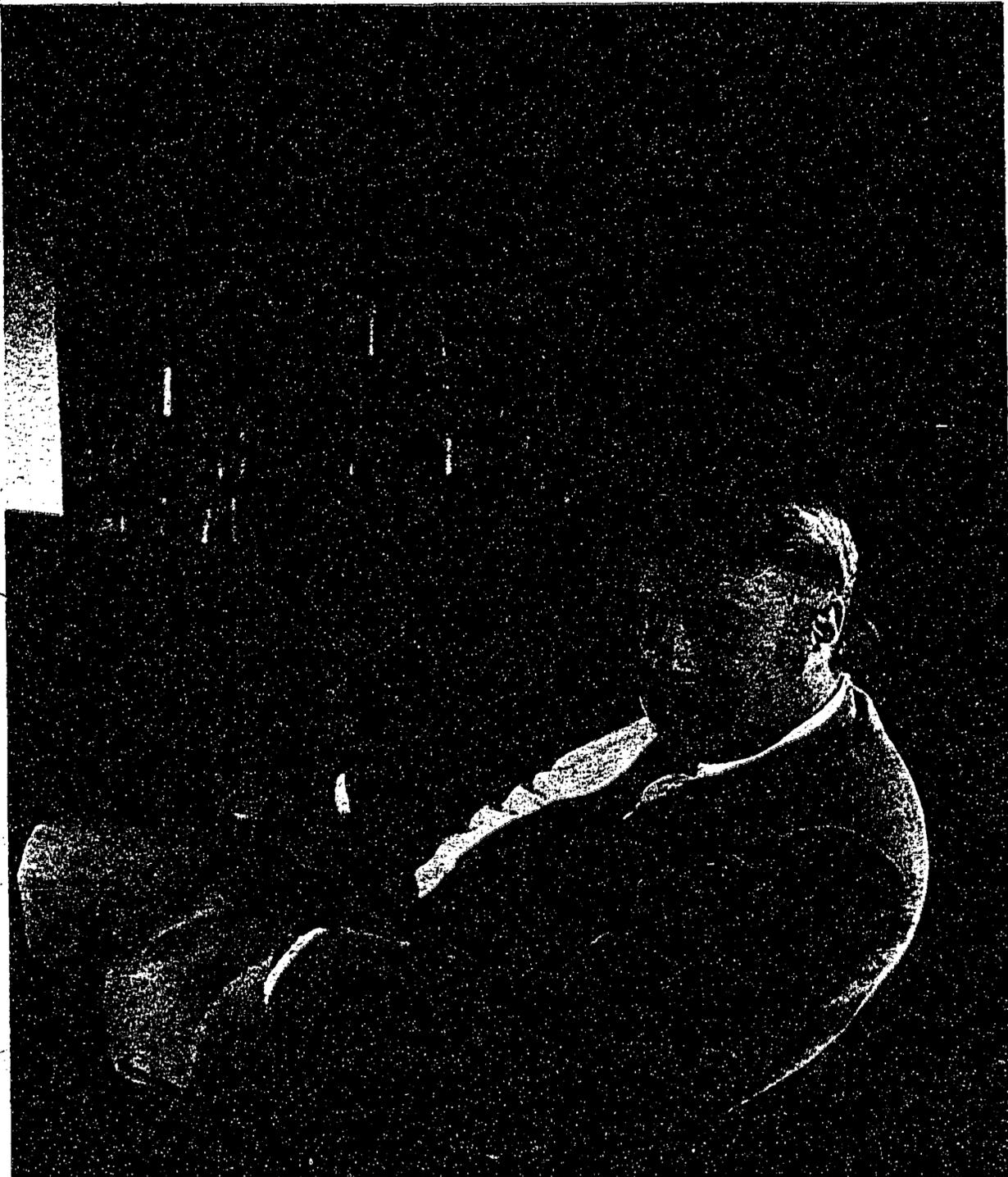


constitute the most powerful book publishing combination in the country today, probably ever.

Some people feel that the disagreement between Jason and Norman is of importance only to a coterie of so-called intellectuals in New York. One observer says: “They don't understand the rest of the country and are deeply fearful of it. They have a sense of the apocalypse. They feel that the Cossacks come from the steppes, and to them the steppes are

Nebraska, Iowa—anything that isn't New York. They don't understand that, apocalypse or no, most people are going to take their prune juice the next morning.”

But there are those who believe that not all the issues in the rift are so apocalyptic, and that friendships in New York literary society wax and wane with less profound events—like the disheartening review given Norman's autobiographical book, “Making It,” in a 1968 issue of



Norman Podhoretz, the other principal. His weapon is *Commentary* (circulation about 60,000). When Norman took over as editor in 1960, his friend Jason advised him the magazine was "played out, through . . . a boring Jewish magazine."

Some say the quarrel between Norman Podhoretz and Jason Epstein matters only to a coterie of so-called intellectuals in New York. Others see it as creating—or is it reflecting?—new political alignments.

carefully examined to avoid possible hair-pulling among the ladies and fisticuffs among the men. Was it the war in Vietnam that did it?

The war was certainly fundamental. It became the central symbol in the argument between Jason and Norman, and between *New York Review* and *Commentary*. In essence the disagreement is over whether the System can or should be salvaged, and to what extent the war is an aberration of the System or characteristic of it. And whatever the personal animosities involved in the break between the two editors, their division is taken seriously as illustrating the division in the country. A writer in the Catholic magazine *Commonweal* has said of their quarrel:

"What once could be taken as another family squabble among Manhattan literati looks more and more like an important indicator of future political alignments."

So let us trace the story of the falling out between these two gatekeepers of the literary establishment, as related by the more than 50 members of the "family" I talked to, stopping first to suggest the broad areas of their disagreement on the war and our society.

THE *New York Review* was attacking American involvement in Southeast Asia as early as 1965, and in the years since its editors have devoted more space to that subject than to any other. The essays, many of them written by Noam Chomsky, professor of linguistics at M.I.T., have been increasingly filled with the rhetoric of revolution. They have argued that the war is characteristic of the System, that America is to be regarded as a primarily imperialist nation and that our policymakers are, with few exceptions, totally corrupt. Whether the arguments are sound or not, there is no question but that *N.Y.R.* has contributed more to the peace movement and to the growing disenchantment with the war in the country at large than any other single publication.

Commentary has from time to time printed
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Commentary

The Creator of *Wojanow*

The *New York Review* and the similar treatment accorded Jason's book, "The Great Conspiracy Trial," in *Commentary* last year. It is true that ever since Edgar Z. Friedenberg's treatment of "Making It" in *N.Y.R.*, except for a few cold hellos at one social gathering or another, Norman and Jason have not spoken to one another.

Norman and his wife, Midge Decter, used to be among the dinner guests at the Epsteins' apartment, where Jason occasionally cooks superb

meals on a restaurant-sized stove for as many as 40 guests. Back in the sixties, you could have the Podhoretzes to dinner and, say, Mary McCarthy and Dwight MacDonal and Hannah Arendt and Lillian Hellman and Hans Morgenthau and Paul Goodman and Delmore Schwartz, all at the same time.

Alas, death and geography and politics and disheartening book reviews have separated them now. Guest lists in the seventies must be

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The New York Times

Published: March 26, 1972

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Why Norman and Jason aren't talking

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a mildly critical essay or editorial on the subject of Vietnam, but it was not until May, 1971, that sociologist Nathan Glazer presented the case for immediate withdrawal. In that same issue Norman wrote: "As one who has never believed anything good would ever come for us or for the world from an unambiguous American defeat I now find myself . . . moving to the side of those who would prefer just such a defeat to a 'Vietnamization' of the war, which calls for the indefinite and unlimited bombardment by American pilots in American planes of every country in that already devastated region."

As early as 1966 the writers and editors of N.Y.R. seem to have been convinced that the war was immoral. In contrast, the last time I saw Norman he said that, yes, he was against the war, "but I still don't think it's evil." He added: "I was against military involvement there from the very beginning; I have been entirely consistent in my view since 1962. I haven't moderated my views at all—unlike some others. I was against the war from the beginning—a position I learned from Hans Morgenthau really—not on moral but on political grounds, that it was an illegitimate and unintelligent expansion of the policy of containment. I am still for the policy of containment. . . . There have been war crimes, but the war itself is not a criminal war. It is a tragic mistake, and this country will pay heavily, internally and in its relations with other countries, because of it."

Given the basic moral disagreement over the war, it's not surprising that the two men find little to agree about in American society either.

Norman believes that we may not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we are coming close to that. It is America the Beautiful and don't rock the boat. The democratic process works. Look around you. Jason is much more an elitist, a position that is reflected by The New York Review. The feeling seems in general to be that those on the top and those on the bot-

tom of our society, maybe in any society, must join together to push the inert middle. Unless people are threatened with the extreme position of the Panthers, say, nothing will be done for the blacks.

In this area Norman is fond of quoting George Orwell, who once said that the greatest danger to democracy would come from "an army of unemployed led by millionaires preaching the Sermon on the Mount."

Norman has this to say about the middle class: "Jason and all those other counterculture people go through life hating the bourgeois, hating bourgeois life. . . . But American politics is really trying to make everybody middle class. . . . American society is a society devoted to success, and everybody is in the act for all practical purposes."

Jason has written: "America has nothing but its middle class, and if you happen not to belong to it, you are nowhere. . . . Kids growing up sense, as some of their elders do, that the American middle class . . . is not really worth the trouble that it takes to get into it and stay in it . . . if all you have at the end is life on the installment plan."

Since both men thrive on consistency, their class attitudes creep into their lifestyles. Jason smokes Monte Cristo cigars from Cuba, when he can get them, which is not very often these days; they cost \$1.25 each. In addition, he has from time to time been seen lighting up something with a distinctly counterculture scent, inhaling with pleasure.

Norman, who was a four-pack-a-day cigarette smoker and who remembers having 13 martinis at one sitting in an airport with Willie Morris, then editor of Harper's, has in the last two years given up smoking and drinking. Although he thinks that marijuana should be legalized, he recently wrote a somewhat melodramatic editorial denouncing it as a "seducer of the innocent" and "the lethal enemy of life itself."

NORMAN and Jason first became aware of each other in the late nineteen-forties

when they were students at Columbia. Jason, who grew up in Maine and Boston, was a member of the class of 1949, Norman of the class of '50. Jason got an M.A. in English in 1950.

Although there were only about 2,000 students in Columbia College in those days, Jason and Norman were not close. A professor who knew them both says, "When they thought about it, if they did at all, and in any case I'm sure it wasn't very often, they must have hated the mere idea of each other."

They were alike in so many ways and different in so many others. Both were a little chubby; neither was particularly athletic. Both were bookish, although Norman by his own confession had read almost nothing except "popular novels and a few of the standard poets. I had never heard of most of the books we were given to read in Humanities and Contemporary Civilization." Jason gave the impression that he had read everything, everything worth reading anyway.

Norman in those days was a theoretical socialist, although it is doubtful that he had much time to think about politics, let alone do anything about it. Those who remember Jason doubt that he had any politics at all; he would have considered politics beneath him, somehow vulgar. The group he spent most of his time with were snobbish boys; Jason was the only Jew among them. For some reason most of the others were all either becoming Catholics or becoming un-Catholic. It is said that they thought of themselves as being the last gasp of the Bloomsbury group. The professor who remembers them said, "They gave the impression that if you hadn't read Proust in French you might as well go home."

A \$60-a-week milkman's son on a Pulitzer scholarship, Norman spent more than two hours a day traveling by subway between his home in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn and Morningside Heights. "Most of Norman's friends were the sons of New Jersey dentists; at least they looked like the sons of dentists. They had crew cuts, and they talked about 'breaking Keats' and were all terribly aggressive and got very good grades. . . . I believe Norman wore two-toned shoes, brown and white, and he brought his lunch in a spattered brown paper bag."

Jason at Columbia was not rich, but, as he has since remarked, he "had money." He wore three-button Brooks

Brothers suits, always black, "which gave him the air of someone in perpetual mourning," and would go downtown with his friends for concerts, plays and a meal at one of the fancier midtown restaurants. His manner of speaking was then more or less what it is now, his voice rather high-pitched with a slightly nasal Boston twang. As for Norman, he writes that when he started at Columbia his speech had "largely lost the characteristic neighborhood accent and was on the way to becoming as neutrally American as I gather it is now." True, most of the time there is very little Brownsville in Norman's accent, but I am told that when he gets excited or angry, it all comes back.

BOTH were possessed of monumental ambition, but Jason's attitude was that he was above ambition. A man who has known him for 25 years and observed his rise to eminence without surprise says, "Jason is professionally lazy. He isn't really lazy; he just builds up the idea that he is, and he would rather die than appear eager or enthusiastic. . . . He is a professionally depressed person; he comes on more depressed than anybody."

Jason's favorite word is "boring"; at least it seems to be the word he uses more than any other. An acquaintance claims that he once clocked Jason and that he said "boring" 32 times in less than half an hour.

Jason denies that he was ever rude to Willie Morris, who in 1967 became the youngest editor in the history of Harper's and, more recently, became the one with shortest tenure. But in "North Toward Home," Willie's account of his journey from Yazoo City, Miss., to Manhattan, he describes with considerable acerbity a job-hunting interview with an unnamed editor who reminds a lot of people of Jason.

In the book, Willie says he told the editor that he would very much like a job on his new publication. If Willie's account is to be believed, the editor replied: "Not a chance, I'm afraid. We barely have enough money for the next number. . . . What other jobs do you have in mind?"

"I mentioned two institutions, one a magazine, the other a large daily newspaper [Harper's and The New York Times]. Both had indicated they were interested in me.

"Those are two of the most boring publications I know of," he said.

"I mentioned two executives from other publishing firms that I might see."

"They're not very intelligent people," he said.

"At this point I was beginning to get mad. A slow Mississippi boil was rising north from my guts. . . . I would not have wished to begin my new life in the city by throwing this little man out of a second-story window into a courtyard. . . ."

NORMAN at Columbia came on bright-eyed (he has blue eyes) and bushy-tailed, eager, perhaps too eager, anxious to please. He's still a lot like that. His friend Richard Schickel, the book and movie critic, says, "Norman is like a Hollywood musician, anxious to be liked, very cheerful, very upbeat. He has an appealing kidlike quality."

Over lunch recently Norman said: "There are two kinds of people in the world, those who want to be loved and those who want to be feared. I want to be loved, but I sometimes seem to go out of my way to make that difficult, if not impossible."

In "Making it," Norman wrote about his college days (he keeps going back to that time, both in the book and in conversation): ". . . Is it any wonder that I aroused so much hostility among certain Columbia types: the prep school boys, those B students who rarely said anything in class but who underwent such evident agonies over the unseemly displays of pushiness they had to endure from the likes of me; the homosexuals with their supercilious disdain of my lower-class style of dress and my brash and impudent manner; and the prissily bred middle-class Jews who thought me insufferably rude. All of them were lumped indiscriminately together in my mind as 'snobs.'"

Jason, of course, was one of the snobs, and his enemies—and there are more than a few of them around town—contend that he still is. They begin by mentioning an article that he once wrote for The New York Review about the cost of living in the city ("... that outrageous, snotty article, and he claims to be this big radical"). The piece stated:

"Fifty thousand a year, quite apart from capital, will keep a family, if not in luxury, at least in reasonable comfort and safety. It is possible to manage on less, perhaps as little as half as much, by living on the West Side, doing without this or that and thinking more or less always about getting by. But to fall below

this level is to become not a citizen but a victim of New York, incarcerated with thousands or millions of others in those miles of flats in Queens or Brooklyn."

AS a result of their different attitudes toward scholarship, among other things, Jason's grades at Columbia were gentlemanly but not memorable, while Norman walked off with the most coveted prize of all, the Kellett Fellowship, as well as a Fulbright, which together gave him three years at Cambridge.

So he went off to England ("... nothing will ever seem so beautiful to me again as the sight of New Court in the brilliant September sun that was presciently shining over Cambridge on the day that I arrived"). Jason became part of a training program that had just been started at Doubleday and, before long, came up with a revolutionary idea in publishing: He proposed to publish in soft cover good books, like Gide's "Lafcadio's Adventures," Stendhal's "Charterhouse of Parma" and Edmund Wilson's "To a Finland Station." He planned to publish them in attractive formats, selling for \$1 a book, perhaps \$1.25. Up to then, soft-cover books had been ephemeral; Anchor Books were meant to last.

Another employe in the Doubleday offices at the time was Barbara Zimmerman, who was also from Boston and had graduated from Radcliffe in 1949. She was just as bright and ambitious as Jason, but as things in most businesses were then, and to a large degree still are, she was a secretary. She did, however, do some editorial reading, and, although everybody at Doubleday was against it, she wanted to publish a book called "The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank.

Barbara was finally told that if she could get Mrs. Roosevelt to write an introduction for the book, Doubleday would publish it. She got the manuscript to Mrs. Roosevelt, who liked it, and Barbara wrote an introduction which was signed by Mrs. Roosevelt. The book was published and became a big best seller, as well, of course, as a play and a movie.

On Dec. 30, 1953, after Anchor Books had been successfully, not to say spectacularly launched, Barbara and Jason were married, and, although Doubleday officially frowned on marriages of two employes, they were so valued that they were given the Doubleday

apartment in Paris for a lengthy honeymoon.

While Jason was becoming the most talked about young man in publishing, Norman was in the Army, from mid-December, 1953, to mid-December, 1955. Most of those two years were spent at an outpost near Kassel, Germany, as a lecturer on the differences between Communism and democracy. Three days after Norman was discharged he went to work as an assistant editor of Commentary, and it was during the months that followed that he and Jason became close friends. William Phillips, one of the founders of Partisan Review and still its editor, remembers them both from that period: "Norman in those days was bubbling over with enthusiasm, with energy; he wanted to know everything; he was so—I think *avid* is the word. Jason was very much the same, youthful, energetic, eager to know. I think perhaps he was more impatient than Norman, more changeable, more temperamental. But there was such rapport between them. They were very chummy. . . . Politically they did not seem very far apart in those days."

At the time Norman at least was a very hard-line anti-Communist. He had to be to survive at Commentary. He has written, "All articles were carefully inspected for a trace of softness on Communism. It was a crime of the mind and character which might even give itself away by a single word. . . . It [Commentary] could always be trusted to tell its readers what was right with American society more than what was wrong."

Commentary had been founded in 1945 by the American Jewish Committee, an organization made up largely of well-to-do Jews whose ancestors had emigrated from Germany before the 20th century. It was edited by Elliot E. Cohen, a strange and difficult man who toward the end of his life felt that he was in constant danger of a physical attack from unnamed Communists. In 1959 he committed suicide.

But by that time Norman was no longer with the magazine. He had resigned the year before after enduring two years of in-fighting among the editors. He had decided to try to make his living as a freelance writer, a hazardous undertaking for anyone, but he had a wife and three children to support. In 1956 he had married Midge (two of the children came from her previous marriage and they now have a total of four), who, like Barbara

Zimmerman at Doubleday, had started out at Commentary as a secretary; she had gone on to become an editor and after a stint at Harper's is now managing editor of Norman Cousins' nascent magazine, World Review.

UPON leaving Commentary, Norman was rescued from the perils of freelancing

joined Random House, where he has been for 12 years.

Norman had only been at Doubleday three weeks when Jason left, and he was offered Jason's job at far more money than Jason had been getting. He refused it, and left Doubleday. In his own account of the matter, Norman says he didn't want the job. Others dis-



Barbara. Jason's wife, she is one of two top editors at New York Review. They met when both were publishing prodigies at Doubleday.

—by Jason, who offered him a part-time job at Anchor Books. ". . . \$500 more than my full-time job at Commentary," recalls Norman, "and I would still have four days a week to write."

Unfortunately, although Jason was editor of Anchor Books and heir-apparent to the top editorial job at Doubleday, things were still not going the way he had in mind. No one is willing to talk about what happened, although Jason, as the *enfant terrible* of all publishing, clearly had differences with the Doubleday "system." Whatever the reasons, he left the company and, after a brief, abortive effort to buy Penguin Books in London with Barney Rosset, the maverick who founded Grove Press and Evergreen Review, Jason

agree. "Norman feels that he performed the ultimate act of friendship by refusing Jason's job," said publisher Harold Steinberg of Chelsea Press. "A few years later, when he'd finished his book, he felt that Jason should reciprocate by giving his wholehearted endorsement to the book. Jason didn't, and Norman felt that he had been betrayed."

But in those earlier days who would have guessed that Norman and Jason would ever be less than friends. They were young, and so was the world, and as Jason once wrote, ". . . one's conquest of New York seemed inevitable: less a challenge than a natural right, and one never expected to grow old."

For a time Norman and Jason worked together at

Random House on a project called Looking Glass Library, which proposed to publish for children the same kind of good books that Anchor had brought out for their parents, but although they published several titles, the project never really got off the ground. Eventually, Norman resigned and returned to Commentary, against the advice of everyone he knew ("Jason Epstein said that Commentary was played out, through, and wondered how I could even consider getting involved with a boring Jewish magazine"), this time as editor.

"My ideological strategy for the 'new Commentary' . . . was to say good-by . . . to the hard-line anti-Communism and to celebrations, however quiet, of American virtue."

Just 30 and the editor of a prestigious journal, Norman looked ahead and saw a sharp leftward lurch among writers and intellectuals. "It won't be socialism and it won't be A. D. A. liberalism," he said at the time." This left movement will be a moral criticism of all existing social institutions. There's going to be a greater readiness to blame our society for the fact that it is difficult to adjust to — rather than blaming people for not adjusting."

One of Norman's first editorial coups was the discovery of a manuscript which he says had been turned down by 19 publishers but was exactly what he had in mind for the "new Commentary." He published large excerpts of Paul Goodman's "Growing Up Absurd" in the first three issues under his editorship.

Norman also called Jason about the manuscript ("Goodman? . . . that has-been?"). Jason read it, liked it, and under his editorship Random House published it. It has been a long-time best seller, and Goodman, who is now thought of as a kind of literary Norman Thomas, is still one of Jason's writers, one of the lucky few who still manage to contribute to both Commentary and New York Review.

"Growing Up Absurd" now seems mild indeed as a criticism of American society, but, still, it seems unlikely that Norman would publish the Goodman pieces today. A good deal of Commentary these days, a little more than 10 years after Norman took over, is devoted to hardly quiet celebrations of American life; the enemies are not

un-Americans as they were a decade ago, they are anti-Americans, and chief among them are, in Norman's words, the "WASP patriciate" backers and the "radical intellectuals of Jewish origin who run The New York Review and whose radicalism, such as it is, consists entirely of preserving and enlarging the heritage of hatred for America."

And more recently he wrote: "... whatever the case may have been yesterday, and whatever the case may be tomorrow, the case today is that the most active enemies of the Jews are located not in the precincts of the ideological Right but in the ideological precincts of the radical Left. . . . Jews should recognize the ideology of the radical Left for what it is: an enemy of liberal values and a threat to the Jewish position."

BUT Norman took over at Commentary during happier, less quarrelsome times, 1960. What a golden year it seems in retrospect. Just to begin with, there was Jason's cruiser. He had bought it the year before, and there are still those who will never forgive him for that: "A sailboat might be all right for somebody in publishing, but to have a cruiser with a heated cabin. Oh, no."

Jason himself was perhaps too self-conscious about owning it. He made a point of never speaking in nautical terms about it. He spoke of "parking it on 79th Street" or of "going uptown in it," and it was always "upstairs" instead of "topside."

Nevertheless, on a summer evening what could have been more pleasant than a cooling cruise with a cold supper in the larder, a few drinks before dinner, perhaps some wine with dinner, and the good conversation of four old friends — Norman and Midge, Barbara and Jason?

Those were also the days when the guests at the Epsteins' dinner parties were still nodding in agreement and Jason was performing with virtuoso skill in the role of chef. (One reason that Jason eats so much at home is that, among the many things he finds wrong with Manhattan, there is in his opinion not a decent restaurant anywhere.) At just such a dinner party, during the newspaper strike in the winter of 1962-63, on a night when Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Hardwick, who is Mrs. Lowell, were having dinner at the Epsteins, the idea for The New York Review

was born. Or so Jason tells the story.

Such spontaneity would have surely been unique in the annals of publishing, and the more prosaic truth was that Jason had been talking about a new book review for years. As indeed who hadn't? It was impossible to get more than half a dozen literary types together for cocktails without somebody bringing up the idea.

So it was not surprising that among those with whom Jason had at times discussed the possibility of starting "a serious newsprint paper like The Times Literary Supplement of London" was Norman. Norman, in fact, was in the small group that laid plans for the Review, and claims he could have been the editor had he chosen to volunteer himself. ("I had been involved with Jason on two previous enterprises and I had no reason to believe this one would be more successful," he now explains.)

The first issue of The New York Review was laid out on the Lowells' dining room table, with the help of Silvers, a very private man who was then an editor of Harper's and had before that been on George Plimpton's Paris Review. About 80,000 copies of that first issue were printed; it was crammed with publishing advertising, all that money that publishers had been unable to spend during the strike, and it seemed that everybody who mattered literature-wise in this country and in England was in it, either by, or about, or both. And the response was overwhelmingly favorable. So in the summer of 1963 a second issue was published.

Since then N.Y.R. has been appearing twice monthly, backed by an assortment of friends and relatives of the editors and publisher and, reportedly, by several rich "WASP patricians," all of whom are said to be zealous about noninterference in editorial matters. In this time, the Review has become, according to its critics, a powerful political journal, dedicated to the support of the New Left, often leading the way. One observer said that these days, far from being a book review—the American equivalent of The Times Literary Supplement—N.Y.R. is much more like The New Statesman and Nation of the nineteen-thirties, when Kingsley Martin edited it, following every shift in the Stalinist line:

"Of course, there is no longer a Stalinist line; today

it's the kids. Kids of 25 or more. N.Y.R. reports every move they make, adoringly. Worshipfully, you might say."

POLITICALLY, the Review was born in a simpler, brighter time. The drab years of the Eisenhower regency were over. The Kennedys, as Midge Decter wrote, had "swamped the national consciousness. Their arrival in the White House in January, 1961, very quickly came to be seen not as a changeover, but a breakthrough of some kind."

"In the early sixties," said Ted Solotaroff, editor of New American Review, "intellectuals were being rewarded; attention was being paid to them. There was the idea that society rewarded those who were bright and enterprising. . . . Louis Kronenberger once said of that time, 'People used to sell out at 40. Now they sign on at 25.'"

Early in the decade Jason and the poet John Thompson were flown to Nigeria, ostensibly to find out whether the Nigerians could and should set up a textbook publishing house of their own. The Nigerians had been buying their textbooks from England.

Something called the Fairfield Foundation supposedly picked up the tab but everybody, almost everybody anyway, knew it was really the C.I.A. Who in those days except a few soreheads and malcontents objected to the C.I.A.?

A little later Jason and Barbara and Norman and Midge, once again at the ostensible expense of the generous Fairfield Foundation, were flown to Mexico City to shore up the Mexican cultural scene for our side. But after getting there, Barbara decided she didn't like the look of the thing and returned to New York. Jason and Norman and Midge flew to Acapulco at the taxpayer's expense, indulging in various anti-Communist cultural activities on the beach. Jason went around introducing himself to everyone as an American spy.

But by April, 1967, a great many people, including Jason, had changed their minds about those cushy trips. Jason wrote in New York Review, "The fault of the C.I.A. was not that it corrupted the innocents but that it tried, in collusion with a group of insiders, to corner a free market. . . . One sighed to discover still another well-heeled racket emerging from the thickets of American public and corporation life, this time, alas, landing on one's own doorstep."

"It was, to use a term favored by the intellectuals of the fifties, the allrightniks who did the most expensive traveling. . . . On two occasions I did some myself."

In a lengthy attack on The New York Review that appeared in Commentary in November, 1970, the sociologist Dennis H. Wrong cited Jason's article on the C.I.A. as "a turning point in the relation of the N.Y.R. to the New York intellectual milieu out of which it grew. . . . His indictment of America was

be explained, at least in part, by the reviews of "Making It," a memoir of his progress in New York's literary society.

When I talked to Norman, it was almost as if the whole thing had happened yesterday afternoon. None of the sores had scabbed over. I wondered if they ever would.

"... the hatred in all those reviews. I am not given to paranoia, but it was a paranoid's delight. . . . In the world in which I live I would guess that 99 per cent of the people

66Today Norman will not say anything about Jason for publication, and Jason will not discuss Norman, although a friend swears Epstein recently remarked: 'Norman can be very engaging, very charming. After all, there was a reason for my being his friend.' 99



marked by the antibourgeois, esthetic overtones characteristic of a certain literary tradition, as is his stress on the ugliness and pollution of the environment, the inadequacies of education, and the crassness of 'familiar Philistine expansionism' as the 'middle class grunted its way upward.'"

Some readers of Commentary felt that Norman wrote a good deal of the article signed by Wrong; they even say that they can point out paragraphs that have the unmistakable Podhoretz style, but since Norman is an assiduous, line-by-line editor of everything that goes into the magazine, as meticulous in his way as the late Harold Ross of The New Yorker, it would not be surprising if he spent a little extra time on something as important to him as "The Case of The New York Review."

Norman has said: "... these counterculture people seem to feel that this country's problems cannot be dealt with. They give out a feeling of despair rather than trying to deal with the problems. . . . Edmund Wilson wrote about the Scottsboro boys that the Communists didn't want them freed; they wanted them convicted, and it's the same now with the counterculturists."

AS has been observed, some feel that Norman's increasing rigidity and his lashing out at a good many people who were once his friends could

hated it. I kept remembering that old Jewish saying, 'What did that man do to me that he didn't say hello to me this morning?'"

"Making It" was to have been published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, which paid Norman a \$25,000 advance for it. But Roger Straus hated the completed manuscript. ("It was as if I had handed him something obscene"). Eventually, it was published by Random House, although Jason disliked it, and said so, but not at Random House.

As Norman says, the reviews were not kind: in fact, it is doubtful that any non-fiction book of the last 10 years has received so many vitriolic reviews. Edgar Z. Friedenberg, whom Norman feels he discovered and who is now one of Jason's writers at Random House and a kind of house reviewer at N.Y.R., was really not as unkind as most, but he did end his notice by saying, "... we may surely hope that successive volumes will permit us to follow the career of this remarkable still young man. And they may be more mellow; sometimes, as we age, memory softens our perceptions of reality. In 'Podhoretz Returns' and 'Son of Podhoretz' the monster may turn out to have a heart of gold."

But that was mild compared to what Wilfred Sheed, for instance, wrote in Atlantic: "... he has written a book of no literary distinction whatever, pockmarked by cli-

chés and little mock modesties and a woefully pedestrian tone. . . . The book could simply be titled 'America, 1967,' slickness, shallowness, and the flight from pain and death and art—all in one package."

The only comment of Jason's that I could track down, I believe unpublished, was, "Balzac should have written it, about somebody else."

UNDER the circumstances it is not surprising that when Jason's book, "The Great Conspiracy Trial," was published in 1970, Norman was, shall we say, waiting for it.

In the fall and winter of 1969-70, Jason spent almost five months commuting to Chicago to cover the trial of Abbie Hoffman, then one of Epstein's writers, and his fellow defendants. Refusing to betray the slightest hint of radical bias, he appeared at the trial in Savile-Row suits, with his hair at a length that was only a bit left of center. He did attempt to shock the local bourgeoisie, however, by lunching during the trial at one of Chicago's posher Jewish men's clubs with hairy defendants Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, among others, in tow.

Jason wrote a series of articles on the odd events in Judge Julius Hoffman's courtroom for The New York Review; his book is a greatly rewritten and lengthier version of those articles.

When Leon Friedman, who had reviewed the Jessica Mitford book on the conspiracy trial of Dr. Spock for Commentary, asked if he could review Jason's book for the magazine, Neal Kozodov, the executive editor, said, "Oh, no. We have something special in mind for that book."

And, indeed, the treatment accorded "The Great Conspiracy Trial" was special. Most book reviews in Commentary are less than a page or a little more in length. "Judging the Chicago Trial" was the lead article in the January, 1971, issue, occupying nine and a half pages. While Tom Hayden's book, "Trial," and J. Anthony Lukas's, "The Barnyard Epithet and Other Obscenities—Notes on the Chicago Conspiracy Trial," were also considered, the main emphasis was on Jason's book. The article-review was written by Alexander M. Bickel, Chancellor Kent Professor of Law and Legal History at Yale, a frequent contributor to Commentary.

Hayden's book got the worst of it, but the attack on "The Great Conspiracy Trial" was almost as scathing. Dr. Bickel accused Jason of the sin of pretension, of being less than candid and of being a sloppy scholar. "The savant's encyclopedic knowledge comes — though often not quite straight—out of an encyclopedia, and the impartial observer is given to argument by insinuation and sleight of pen. . . . Epstein . . . does not call people pigs. . . . Some of his expressions of contempt for the white middle class seem to amount to no more than social snobbery—cruel and coarse, to be sure, as only a self-righteous humanitarian, secure in the knowledge that he loves his fellow man, would permit himself to be."

THERE were other less cosmic events than wars and revolutions that served to widen the breach between Jason and Norman. One was the matter of Tom Wolfe's account of the gathering at the Park Avenue apartment of Leonard and Felicia Bernstein to raise money for the bail of Black Panthers then under indictment for alleged plots to bomb various buildings around New York. Wolfe did not invent the term "radical chic," but in using it to describe the gathering, he made it part of the vocabulary, except possibly among radicals.

Jason himself reviewed Wolfe's book in New York Review. He hated it and appeared not to think too highly of Wolfe personally: "Unself-conscious as always, Wolfe missed what must be the heart of the matter. What he calls radical chic is, in fact, only the unhappy residue of the broken promises and defeated politics of the Kennedys. . . ."

Another Epstein, Joseph, wrote up the book for Commentary: "The Bernsteins' evening with the Black Panthers is a subject Tom Wolfe might almost be said to have been born to write about."

Joseph Epstein—and from here on it will be necessary to keep our Epsteins straight—is a frequent contributor to Commentary. While it is unthinkable to suggest that Norman and Midge would even hint to Epstein, Joseph, how he should handle the book, it would be foolish to think that Epstein, Joseph, wouldn't know that Norman and Midge thought highly of it. But then the reason people in these concentric circles are friends is that they agree on things.

In any case, Epstein, Joseph, loved Tom Wolfe's book calling it, in whole and in part, "a minor comic masterpiece."

Now Jason and Barbara Epstein were not at the Bernstein party, although Robert B. Silvers, the other top editor of the New York Review, was. Since neither Silvers nor Mrs. Epstein would talk to me I cannot record what, if anything, was said around the office about the Wolfe book or about the Bernstein caper. I only know what Jason wrote: "Wolfe's sin is a lack of compassion and his intellectual weakness a tendency to panic when he finds himself beyond his depth, frailties that commonly accompany moments of great personal or public stress. . . ."

Needless to say, Jason and Joseph did not agree about the Black Panthers either. Jason wrote, "...the Panthers had by this time [when they were charged with the bomb plot] gained a certain interest, not to say glamour, as the authentic voice of black misery and rage. One tended to hear in their violent language and the shallow Marxism that accompanied it not the sound of revolution but the cry of pain."

Commentary's position on the Panthers had been made clear time and again, for example in an essay called "A Perspective on the Panthers," written by Tom Millstein, a junior fellow at Columbia: "What is the black Panther party? It is a totalitarian organization of black nationalists which identifies with branches of world Communism. . . . It is anti-Semitic, sometimes openly, sometimes by implication and innuendo. . . . It is a racket, but also much more than a racket."

No one seems to have emerged as a clear victor in The Battle of the Epsteins, although the Panthers some months later were acquitted. I would guess that had very little to do with the Wolfe book, the Epstein reviews or, for that matter, the Bernstein gala.

FOR Norman, New York Review's coziness with the Panthers was no doubt further proof of its soft-mindedness on Jewish matters. Norman, as one of the legions of anonymous observers I talked to said, "regards the effect of any given action on the Jews as a touchstone of how the democratic process is functioning." He himself has written: "I think that Jews must

once again begin to look at proposals and policies from the point of view of Jewish interest, and must once again begin to ask what the consequences, if any, of any proposal or policy are likely to be as far as the Jewish issue is concerned."

There are perhaps no better examples of the differences between Jason and Norman than the views expressed in their respective journals on the two events of the last 10 years that Norman says have influenced him more than any others: the six-day war between Arabs and Israelis, and the New York teachers' strike in the fall of 1968.

Norman and Jason, and *The New York Review and Commentary*, were totally divided on the meaning of the teachers' strike. To Norman the issue of community control of the schools in Bedford-Stuyvesant seems to have been less important than the fact that the issue "brought black anti-Semitism into widespread public view . . . and . . . it exposed in certain elements of what the blacks themselves like to call the white power-structure an apparent readiness to purchase civil peace in the United States—I do not say social justice—at the direct expense of the Jews." The anti-Semitism which surfaced during the strike was, in Norman's view, more often "understood," and more often blamed on the Jews themselves, than it was ever condemned. And this "caused some of us to worry. Were we being paranoid?"

Jason was all for community control of the schools, and as for the anti-Semitism, he wrote: "Undoubtedly there have been expressions of anti-Semitism on the part of the various black demagogues, and as the largely Jewish U.F.T. [United Federation of Teachers] insists on pitting its strength against the black community, there will be more. Yet it seems to have become the policy of the union, whenever such slanders have been committed by the blacks, to amplify them in a way that suggests that the Nuremberg rallies are about to be resumed in the Abyssinian Baptist Church. It is, to say the least, irresponsible for the U.F.T. to fill the mails with unsubstantiated anti-Semitic statements of black militants while obscuring the fact that in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experimental district nearly 75 per cent of the teachers are white and more than half of these are Jewish."

Of the six-day war Norman wrote: "What the victory did . . . for some of us . . . and perhaps for most American Jews, was to reinforce a thousand-fold a new determination we had already tasted as a saving sweetener to the bitter sensations of isolation and vulnerability . . . It can, I believe, be understood to have represented the recovery, after a long and uncertain convalescence, of the Jewish remnant from the grievous and nearly fatal psychic and spiritual wounds . . . suffered at the hands of the Nazis . . . The Jews who had so often violated the commandment to choose life now obeyed that commandment. . . . It was a thing to celebrate."

The *New York Review* has, so far as I can make out, dealt with the six-day war only once. In August, 1967, I. F. Stone, an early and enthusiastic supporter of the Jewish state and a frequent visitor there as a correspondent, wrote a long piece on the "holy war." At the end Stone said: "If in this account I have given more space to the Arab than the Israeli side it is because as a Jew, closely bound emotionally with the birth of Israel, I feel honor bound to report the Arab side, especially since the U.S. press is so overwhelmingly pro-Zionist. For me the Arab-Jewish struggle is a tragedy. The essence of tragedy is a struggle of right against right. . . ."

Stone did, however, quote Ben-Gurion as saying: "Israel is the country of the Jews and only of the Jews. Every Arab who lives here has the same rights as any minority citizen in any country in the world, but he must admit the fact that he lives in a Jewish country." And Stone added, "The implication must chill Jews in the outside world."

As I say, so far as I know that is N.Y.R.'s only real comment on the war, and there are those who say that the absence of comment is in itself a comment. One thing is certain, as one of the anonymous said, with some acerbity, "The *New York Review* cannot be said to have underscored the Jewish issue."

NORMAN'S decision to take on the New Left in all of its to him hideous aspects came in the summer of 1970 when he took three months off from *Commentary* and holed up in the country to work on his book about the sixties, a decade he finds alarmingly similar to the nineteen-thirties, especially politically. A staff member of

the magazine says, "When Norman came back, he was loaded for bear and, not at all incidentally, for Jason Epstein and *New York Review*. He reminded some of us of Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai, but his commandments were not limited to 10. . . ."

One thing is certain. If Norman had made a slight shift to the left when he took over the editorship of *Commentary* in 1960, by the time he returned to the magazine in 1970 he had made a shift to the right. To some, even those

write a monthly essay, "Issues," sometimes only a page, sometimes more.

A few months later the sociologist Nathan Glazer, who along with Daniel P. Moynihan, is a close mentor to Norman, announced that having been a "mild radical," he had now become a "mild conservative." Like Norman's, Glazer's shift was minimal. Back in the fifties at the height of Senator Joseph McCarthy's power, Glazer was telling the readers of *Commentary* that McCarthy wasn't



Midge. Norman's wife, Midge Decter; she was with *Commentary* and then *Harper's*, and is now managing editor of Norman Cousins' new magazine, *World Review*.

who admire him most, the shift seems not to have been as great as Norman himself feels that it was. "It was not a drastic change," says a friend. "It just seems large in Norman's eyes."

Even Norman admits that his infatuation with the New Left was transitory. "Except for about five minutes," he says, "I was unhappy even then [in the early sixties] about the New Left."

Perhaps the difference is that Norman began speaking for himself in the magazine. In June, 1970, he began to

much of a danger to the country's civil liberties. All the Senator could do, said Glazer, was to "haul people to Washington for a grilling. . . ." And what was so frightening about that?

In any case, Norman went along with Glazer's "mild" switch. He wrote that by 1970 "some of us who came a decade earlier to radicalism via the route of ideas rather than the route of personal grievances are convinced that it has become more important to insist once again on the freedom of large areas of hu-

man experience from the power of politics, whether benevolent or malign, than to acquiesce in the surly tyranny of the activist temperament in its presently dominant forms. It is in this sense that we consider ourselves deradicalized, and not out of any sudden lapse into indifference over the remediable ills which afflict the world. . . ."

The barrage of attack has continued without interruption every month since, and Norman's angers and energies seem in no way to have diminished. He has said, "I always felt I was holding the line. Now I'm on the offensive, and I'm positive I'm going to win."

It may be true that the country as a whole is moving to the right, but among intellectuals, at least among the intellectuals I have discussed the matter with during the last nine months, Norman's position is a lonely one. People on the left have even begun to accuse him of being "fascist." When he speaks with vehemence, as he always seems to these days, I am reminded of listening in 1968 to the vehement Joseph Alsop defending his equally desolate position on Vietnam.

Perhaps nothing at all has changed, as Jason himself seems to suggest. The first time he refused to see me he said on the phone, "The whole idea of writing something about Norman and me . . . is really too boring even to consider. . . . Others have tried it. Some galoot from New York magazine tried it, and he didn't come up with anything. We went through the same thing in the fifties, and the same people were on the same side then as they are now. . . . It is boring and tedious, and I will have no part of it."

BUT, then, perhaps Jason's denials reflect something that is happening at New York Review. Perhaps, as some people believe, The Review is discovering that the audience for radical rhetoric is growing smaller.

After all, the radical kids have quieted down considerably, and even those who dislike The New York Review most feel that it has, too. It certainly seems unlikely that its editors would these days put a diagram showing how to make a Molotov cocktail on the front page.

That happened in 1967, the year Andrew Kopkind wrote a piece criticizing Martin Luther King as an ineffectual

do-gooder, adding, memorably, "Morality, like politics, starts at the barrel of a gun."

Kopkind, a onetime writer for Time and The New Republic, has since repaired to a commune in Washington, D.C., and Jason when questioned about what happened to him is inclined to give the impression that the name is only vaguely familiar. Andrew who? "Oh," he has been heard to say, "Andrew Kopkind. He turned out to be a pain in the ass."

Kopkind, Hayden and Stokeley Carmichael have long since disappeared from the pages of New York Review. Not only that, but in the Jan. 7 issue last year—a month or so after the Wrong article—Murray Kempton had some unkind words to say about Hayden and his book, "Trial," economist Wassily Leontief wrote about the shortcomings of Cuban economic planning and Elizabeth Hardwick, in tough reviews of the films "Trash," "The Groupies" and "Gimme Shelter," declared that "Something pitiless and pathological has seeped into youth's love of itself, its body, its politics."

The Review, once accused of being a neo-Castroite publication, also printed recently an impassioned letter by the Cuban novelist Jose Yglesias, attacking Castro for imprisoning the Cuban poet Heberto Padilla. Norman, however questioned the motives behind such leftist criticism of Padilla's treatment. Referring to a similar protest signed by Jean-Paul Sartre and some 60 other European intellectuals, he wrote:

". . . if the imprisonment of Hubert Matos and so many thousands of other political prisoners could not rouse the libertarian ire of the radical intelligentsia . . . why should the arrest of Heberto Padilla have done so? It would be pleasant to think that the answer lies in a new concern for liberty among the radical intellectuals of the West. Yet if this were the case, the signers of the protest would not be likely to say, as they still do, that the Castro regime has in the past been exemplary in its respect for the human being. My own guess is that the Padilla affair has served these intellectuals as a convenient pretext for jettisoning Castro and the Cuban Revolution, not for the crime of Stalinism (although the regime is certainly guilty of that) but for the crime of failure: the failure of Che's effort to foment revolution in other Latin American countries and the

concomitant failure to fulfill the revolution at home."

TODAY, Norman will not say anything about Jason for publication, presumably except for publication in Commentary, and Jason will not discuss Norman, although a friend of Epstein's swears that Jason not too long ago remarked, "Norman can be very engaging, very charming. After all, there was a reason for my being his friend."

Richard Kostelanetz, a youngish man who describes himself as "a poet, critic and cultural historian," has in the last few years spent a good deal of time studying what he calls "The New York Literary Mob." In a book he is writing, "The End of Intelligent Writing," Kostelanetz predicts that one day soon Norman and Jason will become friends again: "... behind their squabbles of the moment . . . is . . . an implicit sense, like that held by disputing families within a single Mafia, that each knows he will once again be doing business with the other. . . . The name of their game is not war—not even literary war—but monopoly."

Well, maybe, but I doubt it. The quarrel is real, and it is basic. And if the scars left by the remarkably similar battles of the nineteen-fifties are any indication, and I think they are, it is unlikely that Norman or Jason will forgive the other for what he considers the outrageous, not to say dangerous, not to say near-traitorous conduct of the moment.

Meantime, the debate continues everywhere across the country. My own travels during the last year, largely on college campuses, seem to confirm that New York Review is ahead. It recently acquired the list of subscribers to L. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly, 68,000 in number, and Stone has become an N.Y.R. contributing editor. If all of those continue to subscribe to N.Y.R., that would bring The Review's circulation up to 153,000, but so far nobody seems to know whether that will happen. It hasn't yet.

It is impossible to tell whether Podhoretz and Epstein help to create the divisions within the country or merely reflect them. But I doubt that it matters much. Since neither Norman nor Jason takes a modest view of his place in the cosmic scheme of things, both will very likely continue to lead their armies, however small, into battles, however peripheral. ■