The Years with Kolatch

Life at America’s Most Significant Obscure Magazine

B E N  Y A G O D A

My first job was as an assistant editor with the biweekly New Leader magazine. Then—1976—as now, The New Leader was not widely known. I was fresh out of college, and when I proudly told a former professor of mine about being hired, his wisecrack was, “Is that a fishing magazine?” (The former professor was David Milch, who went on to fashion better lines as an executive producer of Hill Street Blues and NYPD Blue.) The truth is, I didn’t have much of an idea exactly what it was. My shorthand description, for him and for others who responded to the news with a blank look, was, “Kind of like The New Republic, only not as famous,” which was similar to saying, “Kind of like celery sticks, only not as fattening.”

I had stumbled into The New Leader’s orbit the previous summer. My father, as a young man, had been a labor organizer and then a mediator, and had made the acquaintance of Mitchel “Mike” Levitas, a New York Times reporter on the labor beat. Levitas was now an editor at the Times, and my father asked if he would take a few minutes to talk to me about journalism careers. Given that he was looking across a desk at a more or less clueless young man with little experience and no manifestations of talent, Levitas was understandably noncommittal during our conversation. But toward the end of it, he said he knew of a magazine that assigned book reviews to untried writers. He wrote the name “Mike Kolatch” and a telephone number on a slip of paper.

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Then as now, Myron “Mike” Kolatch was *The New Leader*’s editor. I called on him soon afterward at the magazine’s offices on Fifth Avenue, near Twenty-sixth Street. He was a neat and dapper man in his midforties, with curly graying hair and a pencil-thin mustache. He shook my hand and led me into a room containing waist-high piles of review copies and bound galleys of new books. I emerged with a promising-looking novel and a deadline. I was so delighted when the review was published that it didn’t occur to me to wonder why I wasn’t paid for it. I graduated from college some months later—just, it so happened, as one of the magazine’s two assistant editors decided to leave. I got the job, a cubicle, and a $7,500 salary. In return, I had to promise to stay for two years. “You’ll get a better education than journalism school,” Mike told me.

Never having been to journalism school, I can’t judge the truth of his statement. But I have no doubt that I did learn some things at *The New Leader*. One was how to come up with multiple synonyms for *but* on short notice. Another was that the human will has more powerful capabilities than you might expect.

For reasons I will explain shortly, the nature of the job was such that on alternate Wednesdays, Thursdays, Mondays, and Tuesdays, Mike, the other assistant editor, Stan Luxenberg, and I—who among us made up the editorial staff—worked until midnight, when the building closed down and we left. I say “worked,” but the fact was that frequently, after we returned from our dinner among the cabdrivers at the Belmore Cafeteria on Park Avenue South, Stan and I had nothing to do. We were in pre-Dilbert-era glass-partitioned cubicles. I’m not sure how Stan occupied himself during these long hours, silent except for the periodic tapping of Mike’s pipe against his ashtray as he edited in the adjoining office, but I did a lot of reading. I dipped into the review-copy room (for some reason, I remember a night when I polished off the autobiography of defensive lineman Lyle Alzado), and I spent a lot of time looking at the bound back issues of *The New Leader*. These dated from the 1940s, and the first thing that struck me about them was the collection of notable names on the masthead. Not as editor-in-chief, where turnover was nil. Samuel “Sol” Levitas, Mitchel’s father, had occupied this post from 1936 until his death in 1961; Mike had taken over the following year. It was the roster of subeditors that was striking, especially in its implicit promise of the future that might await me. The Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell had served in the 1940s. In later years, the names included Hilton Kramer, Michael Janeway, Diane Ravitch, Joseph Epstein, James R. Mellow, and Kirkpatrick Sale, all of whom had gone on to notable journalistic or literary careers. (One night Mike told me about a period in the late fifties or early sixties when a Cornell buddy of Sale’s, in New York without a place to stay, slept in the magazine’s offices for a couple of weeks. The buddy was Thomas Pynchon.)
As I looked through the bound volumes and listened to Mike’s occasional reminiscences (he himself had started as an assistant editor in 1953), I learned something about the magazine’s past. It had been founded in 1924 by Norman Thomas and others as a Socialist Party organ. In the mid-thirties, the Socialist Party split, with the militants lunging leftward and the old guard resisting. *The New Leader* aligned itself with the latter group and soon severed its connection with the party. Levitas, a Russian Menshevik who had been smuggled out of Vladivostok to flee the Bolshevik Revolution, assumed the editorship in what Mike described as “the Mensheviks’ only successful revolution.” A large group of like-minded émigrés followed him to *The New Leader*’s offices. The political scholar and writer John P. Roche, when he started writing for the magazine in the late 1930s, was taken aback to find Aleksandr Kerensky, the leader of the pre-Bolshevik Russian provisional government, hanging around the offices. “It was the most incredible collection of people, sitting around talking in German, Polish, Yiddish, and Russian about what should have been done in Russia in 1907,” Roche reminisced to a *New York Times* interviewer. “I remember a couple of them predicting the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939.”

From those days on, *The New Leader* cast a cold and comprehensive eye on the Soviet Union, and frequently skirmished with its left-wing counterparts, *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, on the issue of how evil the empire was. In 1956, when the Hungarian uprising had just begun, the magazine sent a cable to Belgrade asking Milovan Dijelas, the former vice president of Yugoslavia, whether he would write an article. Dijelas was jailed within days of the appearance of his *New Leader* essay, which was a predecessor to his book *The New Class*. The magazine was the first in this country to print the work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and it published, in 1964, a smuggled transcript of the poet Joseph Brodsky’s trial on charges of “parasitism.” Generally, *The New Leader* situated itself in the political tradition of social democracy, which has never really taken hold in this country; this partially explains its relative obscurity. But the magazine was host to many international writers sympathetic to that stance, including George Orwell, Willy Brandt, Vladimir Nabokov, Juan Bosch, Bertrand Russell, and Arthur Koestler.

Domestically, though Mike took pride in being aggressively nondoctrinaire and though there was some kinship with the “neoconservatism” then being formulated by people like Norman Podhoretz and Irving Kristol, the magazine’s politics tended to be of the old-liberal, New Deal, pro-civil-rights variety, with strong ties to the labor moment. It had printed some striking authors and articles, including Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” in 1963. (Always on the lookout for reasonably priced copy, Mike had picked the essay up after it had appeared in a small periodical issued by the Society of Friends.) Frequent contributors included the likes of Reinhold Niebuhr, Theodore Draper, Robert Lekachman, and Bayard Rustin. There was some good stuff in the back of the book. Stanley
Edgar Hyman was the literary critic for several years, and James Baldwin was a regular reviewer before he was anointed by fame. The movie reviewer in the early sixties was “Mike” Herr; as Michael, he would soon go to Vietnam to cover the war for *Esquire*, and he eventually published the classic book *Dispatches*. The music writer at roughly the same time was Albert Goldman, later to pen gonzo biographies of John Lennon, Lenny Bruce, and Elvis Presley.

The writers who were appearing in the magazine when I arrived were a solid bunch. Regular columnists included Roche, Walter Goodman of the *Times*, and a fine essayist named Richard Margolis. The theater critic was John Simon, the television critic was Marvin Kitman of *Newsday*, the book critic was the very sharp Pearl K. Bell (Daniel’s wife and Alfred Kazin’s sister), and the film critic was Robert Asahina (soon to become a prominent book editor). An intriguing group of contributors turned out the pointed pieces that made up the feature well: TV reporters like Daniel Schorr, Bob Schieffer, George Herman, and Richard C. Hottelet; foreign newspapermen who had, generally, a shaky command of the English language but who often provided a more nuanced and informed view of happenings in their homelands than what you could find in *Newsweek* or the *Times*; usual suspects from think tanks and academia; and, on occasion, notable personages like Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Elie Wiesel, who for some reason viewed *The New Leader* as a sympathetic platform. Periodically young people would come through the offices for an audience with Mike and emerge, as I had, with a review copy. I recall making the acquaintance of Eric Breindel (who became editorial page editor of the *New York Post*, and died in his early forties), Anna Quindlen, and Cokie Roberts.

I readily understood this group’s motivation—to get published—but I had a harder time figuring out why the notables wrote for *The New Leader*. True, they were reaching a discriminating and loyal audience, but also an extremely tiny audience: the annual statement of circulation listed 30,000 or so paid readers, but Stan Luxenberg and I came to think this number was significantly inflated, and, in any case, a good number of the copies went straight to libraries. The magazine had no scholarly standing, so professors couldn’t amass academic brownie points by appearing in it. Nor, at this point, could contributors expect to create controversy or even conversation. The magazine was once at or at least near the center of a certain politico-journalistic conversation, but to the extent that that conversation still existed, *The New Leader* had no real part in it. We rarely received letters to the editor, and in my wanderings around Manhattan I never heard the magazine talked about and never observed it being read. The only printed reference I saw was when an ad for a foreign film, apparently desperate for a blurb, quoted a line from Asahina’s review. Were it not for that, and for the occasional glimpse of a copy on a particularly well-stocked newsstand, I would have suspected that it existed only in my imagina-
tion—as if I were spending my days in a journalistic *Twilight Zone* episode.

To get back to our contributors’ motivation—it certainly wasn’t financial. Book reviewers, including such eminences as Harold Bloom, Hans J. Morgenthau, Adam Ulam, and Richard Pipes, were compensated, as I had been, with a review copy and a letter of thanks, and other writers’ fees were in what Calvin Trillin (himself an occasional contributor) described as “the high two figures.” The payment policy, I should point out, was a matter of necessity rather than cheapness: the magazine’s revenue stream was barely a trickle. We accepted advertising but, except for an occasional one-column spot from a university press, never got any. Every two weeks, when an issue was being put to bed, one of my jobs was to pick out a public service ad from our rotating collection (stamp out forest fires, buy savings bonds, be aware of breast cancer) to slap on the back cover. Circulation did not add much, and other than a vague sense of incoming grants of some kind, I couldn’t say where the money came from to pay for rent, production costs, postage, and four salaries (the fourth went to Barbara Shapiro, who was and still is office manager, comptroller, circulation manager, secretary, and receptionist), not to mention author fees. The one source of funding I did know about was the Strand Bookstore. Every few months a representative from that establishment would come in and clear out the review-copy room, paying 25 percent of the cover price per volume. The one fringe benefit Stan and I enjoyed (we had no health insurance or benefits of any kind, somewhat ironic given the magazine’s association with labor) was getting first dibs on the books, provided we could match the Strand’s price.

Job titles are fanciful at many magazines, but for Stan and me (and later Dean Valentine, who came on after Stan’s two years were up—funny how it never struck us as odd that the assistant editors were always young men, never young women), the job title was absolutely descriptive. We were assistants, and we edited. Some of our duties were not much different, I imagine, from what our contemporaries at *Commonweal* and *The Nation* were doing. It was the very end of the hot type era, and every day during closing week, we’d be delivered long sheets of coarse paper covered with type: the galleys. One copy was for proofreading. We’d get to work on the other with a pair of scissors and a glue pot, laying out the issue on big pieces of cardboard with the dimensions of the magazine indicated in light blue print. There was no art director per se, but years before, Herb Lubalin, a noted designer, had contributed a template that was elegant, durable, and flexible enough so that we three editors could plug in the contents of a given issue and be confident that it would look pretty good. On alternate Wednesdays, we would spend the day at the printing plant in Bayonne, New Jersey, checking page proofs as they came off the press. (Midway through my time at *The New Leader*, Mike bowed to the inevitable and switched to cold type, and a word processor—person and machine—came onto the premises.)
The distinctive part of *New Leader* editing was the stage that came before proofreading and layout: the treatment of the author’s copy. What was placed in front of us was often along the lines of a first draft, understandable given the level of the contributors’ compensation. Applying the usual adjustments of grammar, spelling, capitalization, and so on was only the beginning of our task. After that the real job began. Using any means at our disposal (deleting, adding, or substituting words or phrases; transposing paragraphs; wholesale rewriting), we were to massage the piece until it conformed to Mike’s very strict and somewhat idiosyncratic standards of euphony, logical consistency, and “flow.” Each part of this trinity had corollaries. He was a stickler, not to say an obsessive, about word repetition, which led to odd elegant variations, such as calling Israel “the Jewish State” and Mao Tse-tung “the Great Helmsman.” For some reason, he was especially vigilant about the excessive use of *but*, which he defined as more than once every six or seven paragraphs. I quickly developed a mental list of substitutes, which I can still run through at a dinner party when the conversation is lagging: *yet*, *though*, *however*, *nevertheless* (or *nonetheless*—you couldn’t use both in the same piece), *still*, and (getting more baroque) *at the same time, by the same token, and be that as it may.* Mike is an orthodox Jew, and though he never talked about religion, I couldn’t help wondering whether he had been a serious student of the Talmud—such was his attention to what seemed to me minor or nonexistent internal contradictions. He would, in any case, seize on a statement in paragraph three that in his mind didn’t gibe with one in paragraph fourteen, and call for some acknowledgment or explanation to be made in the latter passage. As for flow, his watchword was that pieces should move “like water”—which, in his New York cadence, came out sounding the same as Linda Richman’s “like butter.” One result was an abundance of transitional phrases, sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. *New Leader* pieces were studded, like a fruitcake, with the likes of *meanwhile, to be sure, in any event, similarly, interestingly, that is, of course, indeed, as a result, moreover, for example, needless to say,* and, needless to say, all the *but*-substitutes.

It is not unusual for a magazine to have its own idiosyncratic style: *Time* and *The New Yorker* did for decades. But they had large staffs of editors to process the prose. At *The New Leader*, there were only the three of us. After Stan or I had finished with a piece, we passed it on to Mike, who would often, without rancor, rip apart all our changes and start in anew. This was the reason for the late nights on the week the magazine was closing. (We were excused early on Fridays, when Mike had to be home before sunset.) His editing style was methodical in the extreme; he once told me (without much exaggeration, I think) that after he had finished working on a piece, he could recite it from memory. As the hour struck seven, then eight and nine, we waited, both because it would be unseemly to go home while he still labored and because, chances were, we would eventually be summoned
into his office to be asked some question or merely to observe him as he worked. When I want to conjure up a mental picture of concentration, I still think of Mike working on a piece of copy, patiently staring at a sentence until finally deciding how it should read. Before writing in the chosen words, he would flip his mechanical pencil upside down and erase the somehow deficient solution I had devised. Then he would gather the eraser shards together into a little pink ball, press down on it with his index finger, pick it up like a magnet, and deposit the remnants of my words in his green glass ashtray.

I left the magazine precisely two years after I started. The intense and isolated working conditions had begun to get to me. Our art critic, a sardonic Englishwoman named Vivian Raynor, came up one day and remarked—with some degree of shock, I think—that the mise-en-scène was “Dickensian.” Vivian’s appearance was rare; our contributors seldom came into the office. (John Simon did show up now and then. Once he dropped off his review of the all-black production of *Guys and Dolls* and suggested, in his distinctive middle European accent, a headline for the review—“Dudes and Chicks,” the slang outdated even then.)

I spent a fair amount of time mulling over the “Which is better, *New Leader* or journalism school?” question and, as I say, came up with no definitive answer. My time there did teach me to take apart a sentence, a paragraph, a piece, in the manner of a Marine with his rifle, which is probably a useful skill to have. For some years after leaving, I tended to write with an overdeveloped sense of structure and flow. In short, I used phrases like *in short* too much. Eventually, I think, I managed to extract the useful elements of the Kolatchian code—most notably, an awareness of what every sentence is doing, and how an imaginary reader may be responding—from the dullness, overliteralness, and impersonality it sometimes led to.

Of one thing there was no doubt: the *New Leader* pipeline to the major leagues of journalism and publishing, if it ever existed, was by then officially shut down. The place to have been in the late 1970s (it’s clear in hindsight) was Charles Peters’s *Washington Monthly*, which had recently sent or was about to send the likes of Jonathan Alter, Taylor Branch, Gregg Easterbrook, James Fallows, Michael Kinsley, Nicholas Lemann, Joseph Nocera, and Walter Shapiro off to impressive careers. *The New Leader*, at that point, was so far out of the loop it wasn’t funny. I sent out a couple of dozen résumés to notables who had written or worked for the magazine and got some nice letters in return, but no offers. (It wasn’t just me. I believe that the only *New Leader* assistant editor from the seventies and after to gain any kind of fame is my contemporary Dean Valentine, who after a couple of magazine jobs switched from journalism to television. He was until recently head of the UPN network.) I decided to hang out my shingle as a freelance writer. Implicit in that occupation is a need to make money from one’s free-
lance writing. So I did not approach Mike Kolatch with any ideas for pieces. He didn’t approach me, either.

Time passed and had its way with me and everything else in the world, but not The New Leader. I still never heard anybody talk about it, and not even the information revolution could lift it from obscurity. (I just now typed “New Leader magazine” into Google.com and was presented with an almost inconceivably tiny list of twenty-six Web pages, one of which listed “new articles” in Leader Magazine, the official periodical of Canadian scouting. Most of the rest, for some reason, contained thumbnail biographies of erstwhile television critic Marvin Kitman.) But the magazine continued. I would pick up a newsstand copy every year or so, and find that it was exactly the same. The same design and typeface. The same mix of articles and reviews, with a public service ad on the back cover. The same house ads (“It makes dollars and sense to become a regular subscriber”). And the same writers: Walter Goodman, John Simon, Ray Alan, Andrew J. Glass, Phoebe Pettingell, Eliahu Salpeter, Donald Kirk, Darryl D’Monte, David M. Oshinsky, Hope Hale Davis, Gus Tyler, and on and on. Most of these names may hold no meaning for you, reader, but for me they are a madeleine-level nostalgia cocktail.

One or two things did change. Under Mike’s name on the masthead, a new assistant editor used to appear roughly every two years. A decade or so ago, there started to be only a single name in this slot, as opposed to the traditional two, suggesting that the magazine had become even more of a one-man operation. There also appeared to be a higher level of candor in the annual Statement of Circulation. The one in the final issue of 2001 listed a paid circulation of 10,650.

One day in the spring of 2001, almost precisely twenty-five years after I first reported for work, I walked into The New Leader’s offices. I was there because, contrary to conventional wisdom, youth doesn’t really want to know—it’s actually middle age that’s curious. As an archetypal first job, my New Leader experience fits smoothly into the account of my professional life I tell myself and others, but over the years I found myself musing on the one big question: How, without profits, prominence, or even modest circulation, has Mike Kolatch managed to keep the magazine alive all these years? And so I phoned him and asked if I could come in for a chat.

Beforehand, I did some research. In the years since I’d left the magazine, a number of books about “the New York intellectuals” had appeared. The New Leader tended to be mentioned glancingly, if at all, and its existence after, say, 1960 was almost never acknowledged. The perception of the magazine generally depended on the politics of the author. Coming from the left, Alan Wald, in The New York Intellectuals, wrote disdainfully that The New Leader “was generally regarded as a halfway house for right-wing social-democratic anticommunists from which virtually no one returned.” On the other hand, Mary McAuliffe, in Crisis On the Left: Cold War Politics and
American Liberals, 1947–1954, commended The New Leader for recognizing “that the international and domestic Communist menace was real.”

The most provocative material I found was in Frances Stonor Saunders’s The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters, published in 1999. Saunders writes that in the early 1950s, Sol Levitas approached Tom Braden of the CIA’s International Organizations Division and said that without an infusion of money, The New Leader would go under and a valuable anti-Communist voice would be lost; Braden recalled coming up with cash donations of about $30,000. In addition, according to the book, between 1953 and the early 1960s, Time Inc. paid The New Leader $5,000 a year in exchange for what the contract between the two organizations termed “information on world-wide Communist tactics and personalities, with particular reference to Communist activities within the Labor movement.”

Saunders did not address the issue of The New Leader’s funding in the sixties and beyond. Nor did she or anyone else have anything to say about why, in the absence of payment or prestige, the magazine was able to attract writers, year after year. I actually had a hunch on that point. A couple of years ago, Mike called me and asked me to write a book review. I have a lot of obligations, I have a mortgage, nobody I know reads The New Leader, I was not especially interested in the subject of the book, and I regard writing as work, not fun. Why, then, did I say yes? I suppose because for an odd mix of reasons—flattery, loyalty, some inchoate sense of obligation, the Judeo-Christian work ethic, and the realization that it might be impossible to refuse without sounding rude—it was easier to say yes than no.

I phoned Reuven Frank, one of the pioneers of television news and a former president of NBC News, who has been The New Leader’s television critic for nearly a decade, and got the sense that it was somewhat the same with him. He told me that he had always been aware of The New Leader because his father, M. Z. Frank, a Russian émigré journalist, was a devotee of the magazine. “I retired in ’88,” Frank said, “and in 1992 Mike called and said he was working up the back of the book—would I be interested in writing about the Democratic convention? Nobody had suggested anything like that to me before.”

Every once in a while Frank gets overtures from other magazines. He said he is not tempted: “I owe Mike Kolatch—he asked me to do it.” Besides, he said, he finds the magazine a congenial environment. “Its original purpose no longer exists, but it keeps going, mainly because Mike keeps it going. It’s not The New Republic, it’s not The Nation. You get a sense that those magazines are part of a permanent campaign. The New Leader is not. It’s cozier. You find things in it you don’t expect—all of a sudden, there will be a piece about Quebec politics.”

I was too polite to ask my next question, but Frank, with his journalistic background, sensed it. “I know what you’re getting at—why do I do it for so little money? Part of it is that I’m a retired guy, and something to do is very desirable.”
Shaking Mike Kolatch’s hand, I had the sense that a not very accomplished makeup man had been asked to apply a quarter-century to my old boss. The curly hair and the mustache were white, he was wearing bifocals, he was maybe five pounds heavier, his face had a few wrinkles . . . otherwise, it was the same guy. After we settled in his office (not the same: the magazine moved west to Seventh Avenue more than a decade ago), I asked him about the CIA connection. He said he had no direct knowledge: Sol Levitas had always kept all money matters close to the vest—he even kept the review copies locked up in his office—and by the time Mike came on as editor, the flow of cash had long since dried up.

Mike told me that he did not grow up in a Menshevik or even a political household (he said his father was an accountant, shedding some light on Mike’s editing style), and that, like me, he had never heard of _The New Leader_ until late in his college years. Also like me, he was introduced to the magazine by Mike Levitas. “I was editor of the NYU student newspaper, and all the college papers in the city used to be printed at a shop on Avenue A and Fourth Street. Some friends of mine worked on the Brooklyn College Vanguard, and they introduced me to the editor, who was Mike.”

He was drafted after graduation—the Korean War was on—and served as editor of the Fort Dix _Post_. When he was discharged, in 1953, Mike Levitas mentioned that a job was available at his father’s magazine. Mike Kolatch had always thought he would go into newspaper reporting, but this seemed like an interesting opportunity. Eight years later, he hadn’t budged. Then Sol Levitas, who had been synonymous with the magazine for a quarter of a century, died. Mike told me, “There was a serious question as to whether the magazine would continue. The board was ambivalent. I suggested that if _The New Leader_ folded, it would hardly be a fitting memorial to Levitas. They figured, ‘What do we have to lose?’”

Following the example of Max Ascoli’s _The Reporter_, Mike took the magazine from a weekly to a biweekly. Editorially, he attempted to beef up _The New Leader_’s traditional strong suit, coverage of foreign affairs. “I had developed a high regard for the past of the magazine, in the late forties and the fifties—it focused on the Soviet Union when no one else did. If you were George Kennan and wanted to write about the Soviets, you had to do it in _The New Leader_.”

The finances were the tricky part. Mike learned that Levitas was a master at soliciting and juggling a variety of revenue streams. “He was a master _schnorrer_,” he said, using a Yiddish word loosely translatable as “sponger.” “He’d stop people on the street and ask for a cigarette, and leave with the whole pack.” Mike had no such skills, and even though the magazine had rent-free offices at the former Rand School on East Fifteenth Street, it was always on the verge of bankruptcy.

We adjourned to lunch at a small Italian restaurant on Eighth Avenue. The staff greeted Mike like a long-lost friend. He explained that he had often
eaten dinner there during late nights at the office, but that the late nights were no longer. Bowing, somewhat, to finances and age, he had taken the magazine bimonthly a year before. All the editing could be done in business hours!

But rent and salaries and so on still had to be paid. I asked him how he did it. He explained that one of the magazine’s longtime supporters had been the Tamiment Institute, which also operated a significant library of labor and political history and some property in the Pocono Mountains. This property had originally been a rustic retreat where interested parties could discuss the intricacies of social democracy and anarcho-syndicalism. But by the sixties it had become the Tamiment Lodge, a very successful resort known for its Robert Trent Jones–designed golf course and its Playhouse, where Danny Kaye, Mel Brooks, and Woody Allen had trod the boards. Realizing that the Lodge was no longer serving its original purpose, the Institute put it on the market. And it gave a good portion of the proceeds—a little less than two million—to *The New Leader*.

“So it’s like an endowment?” I asked.

“No,” Mike said. “An endowment spends only the interest. We spent the principal and the interest.”

“That means the money will eventually run out.”

“Right.”

“So when does it run out?”

“Funny you should ask. It ran out this year.”

But that does not, Mike explained, mean the end of *The New Leader*. He has some funds socked away that will take it at least through the next few issues. And after that? “If you run across anyone with a lot of money to spend, send him my way.”

Lunch was over. I made motions to pick up the check. Mike would have none of it. “I’ll get my money’s worth out of this,” he said.

Back at the office, I saw what he meant. He showed me three books that he had picked out of the review-copy room and asked if I would review one of them for the magazine.

Sure, I said.