

## LIFE IN THE U.S.

## MEDIA

## Mother Jones pushes the outer limits

By David Moberg

**T**HE MAGAZINE FOR THE REST of us? At least the 170,000 people who buy it or the eight million who have received promotional mailings for it know that the magazine is *Mother Jones*.

But who are the rest of us?

"That's part of the mystique," general manager Mark Dowie explained, leaning back in the bright and comfortably cluttered San Francisco offices of the magazine, launched in February 1976. "It's one of the most controversial things we do. But basically it comes from the cultural, political, and national alienation of the '60s. It says something to people who like to read magazines that this won't insult you as much as others."

The slogan and Dowie's explanation touch on some of the distinctive qualities and aspirations of *Mother Jones*, a slick monthly that combines short tidbits on current controversies, advice on health, survival and happiness, exposes of corporate and political skulduggery, short stories, political commentary, reports on alternatives in work, energy, government, and culture, occasional reviews, reflections on the women's movement and a dozen or so other features that might appeal to "the rest of us."

*Mother Jones* wants to reach a broad audience—a quarter of a million within a couple of years. It also wants to feed political ferment and, in co-founder Adam Hochschild's words, "make the basic ideas of some form of socialism as much a part of American consciousness as ecology is today—which was unheard of ten years ago."

#### Confronting commercial necessity.

To succeed politically, the magazine has to prosper commercially and compete on the mass market with publications lacking any scrupulous encumbrance to their goal of money-making. That has led them to confront what co-founder Richard Parker calls the left's "schizophrenia" about business and politics in two ways: first, by paying detailed attention to the business enterprise and promotion and, second, by turning some mass magazine formulas—colorful, clean but fairly conservative layout, personality profiles, come-on articles about fads, entertainments and diversions—to more political ends.

Most of the people putting out *Mother Jones* are in their mid-thirties or younger, experienced with some mainline or alternative journalism, and influenced by at least some activity in the political movements of recent years.

Their readers aren't much different—average age 33, mean income of \$15,000 (considerably higher than *Mother Jones* salaries), avid readers, interested in political muckraking. Sixty-two percent call themselves "environmentalists," 60 percent "liberal," 46 percent "feminist," 33 percent "pacifist," and 25 percent "socialist."

Lots of them probably read *Ramparts*, which was dying as *Mother Jones* was being born—hoping to continue the best of *Ramparts* but with better money management and a slightly different image. Hochschild and Parker, as well as the late Paul Jacobs, another co-founder who left the magazine shortly after its inception, all worked for a brief spell on the old *Ramparts*.

#### An initial 80,000 circulation.

During an 18-month start-up period the projected publication was called *New Dimensions*, a name that had to be dropped abruptly for copyright reasons in favor of



Adam Hochschild (above) and Richard Parker (below), two of the founders of *MOTHER JONES*, believe that their magazine will help make some form of socialism a part of the American consciousness.

the risky, weird monicker taken from one of America's legendary labor organizers. The magazine's founders set up the non-profit Foundation for National Progress to publish the magazine, sponsor research, fund other projects, run a recently started program in teaching worker self-direction (the New School for Democratic Management), and spin off other enterprises. The non-profit foundation status also guarantees its publication, *Mother Jones*, breaks on taxes and postage.

With half a million dollars from roughly 45 donors—mainly individuals and a few small foundations of the McGovernite political stripe—the magazine's initiators started a massive direct mail campaign that netted a starting subscription list of 80,000. They set up an editorial structure that is "halfway between a traditional business and a movement collective," according to Hochschild, with election of some editorial and managerial posts.

On the basis of subscription lists of magazines like *Ms.*, *New Times*, and *Harper's* and analyses of voting patterns, they figured there was a "market universe" of roughly three million people whom they could reasonably try to reach. They picked up lessons from publications ranging from *Ramparts* and the current *Village Voice* to the old socialist magazine, *Masses*.

After initially lukewarm successes with a soft sell, they got pushier. "As long as we're trying to sell things to human be-

ings," Dowie says bluntly, "there's only one way to do it—hype. All of us in this country—left, right and center—are enculturated with slickness. Most leftists, if they go into a drug store, probably buy Crest."

The editorial content changed, too. At first they were very cautious, laid-back, sedate and politically diffuse—with attention to rational consumption, off-beat cures and diversions, and personal confession or advice as well as more hard-hitting political stories. *Mother Jones* now chooses to accent more heavily investigative and critical journalism, along with descriptions of the way things might be in a non-capitalist future.

#### Pursuing the mass audience.

The magazine pursues the mass audience with determination. "At first I had a much more traditional, pristine attitude," Hochschild said. "Every article ought to have the politically correct line and every cover should be restrained. It was pandering to go into profiles."

"Now I feel differently. Someone who wants the latest refinement of left thinking or strategy, they'll have to turn to *Monthly Review* or *Socialist Revolution* (now *Socialist Review*) to get it. The people I'd like to reach are open to changing their way of thinking but not necessarily on the left. In a way our doing profiles and getting people interested [in socialism by reading about socialist author Michael Harrington, for example] is analogous to

the French Communist party running ski resorts for its members. You have to give something more than truth or light. Otherwise people get bored."

At times, of course, some critical readers have argued the magazine's quest for entertainment slights serious political arguments and analysis, which is usually deeply embedded in anecdote and description.

Hochschild wants to avoid the American left's history of talking to itself and to "talk across a lot of gaps" by providing literary entertainment; yet he also wants the magazine to do more stories like his favorite exposes of the dangers of the Dalkon shield intrauterine device and of the way Ford Motor Company deliberately built their Pintos as "the deadliest car in America" in order to increase profits.

Those stories revealed "how corporate capitalism works from the inside and shows in a concrete way why capitalism requires these awful things to happen." The Pinto story in the September/October issue last year got lots of publicity and a Sigma Delta Chi award for *Mother Jones*.

#### Sophisticated business operation.

Meanwhile, on the business side, "in order to survive we have to get more sophisticated every day," Dowie said. With a lean staff of 18, they believe they will break even this year while spending around \$144,000 to produce each issue. The staff has computerized everything it can, including a complex model of the magazine's potential growth and cash flow.

There have been difficulties with their eclectic and far-ranging approach. Some readers have accused *Mother Jones* of suffering from "an identity problem" by scattering itself too broadly. A small group of feminists who were angry about a sympathetically critical article on the women's movement nearly touched off an embarrassing boycott. And ecologist Barry Commoner was miffed that his article on solar energy appeared in an issue with a piece that he, but not the editors, thought took "pyramid power" seriously.

*Mother Jones* editors remain convinced that there is a big audience out there for a magazine that runs articles on the assassination of Orlando Letelier and on the joys of masturbation, on Communists in power in Bologna, Italy, and on the rip-off of life insurance, on loneliness and on Gov. Jerry Brown's politics of "nothing for everyone," on "Tex-Mex" music and on dangers of liquified natural gas, on populist politician and country singer Glen Taylor out of America's past and on German filmmaker Werner Herzog from the newest new wave, on migrant Ph.D.'s and on memories of a Chinese youth (an article that won *Mother Jones* the National Magazine Award for *Belles Lettres* in 1976).

"Magazines like this exist on the periphery of the political movement," Parker, author of *The Myth of the Middle Class*, said. "What *Mother Jones* does in a period like this is to put people back in touch with each other in a symbolic sense. They know there are other people out there."

"Beyond that you look for cracks in reporting that feed into the fundamental distrust of government and corporations. Conventional journalism doesn't push toward the other system. You don't report Rumania as the other system but you do push the outer limit."

Pushing the outer limit: that's something the original *Mother Jones* would have liked. ■



## SPORTS

# Look to Philly for next NBA champs

By Mark Naison

**T**HIS HAS NOT BEEN ONE OF the better seasons in NBA history. A spate of fights with thinly disguised racial overtones, one of them ending in tragedy; a visible deterioration in the quality of the refereeing; the wholesale dismissal of losing coaches, and an unprecedented—but justified—string of fines and suspensions coming from the Commissioner's office suggest that the league is heading for trouble if it doesn't clean up its act.

Let's hope the playoffs turn out better than the regular season. Here's how I see the teams lining up:

## Eastern Division:

Philadelphia is the class of the Division. Coach Billy Cunningham has improved the morale of his talented squad by giving everyone playing time, and the '76ers are playing with a lot more enthusiasm and togetherness than they did last year. But the key to the 'Sixers' success is the strength of their bench. The second team of Darryl Dawkins, Joe Bryant, Steve Mix, Lloyd Free and Ted McLain could beat many NBA starting fives. The 'Sixers have been devastating in the second half of the season and have the depth and talent to wear down any opponent.

The only team that threatens to give them a run is the San Antonio Spurs. The Spurs have two great scorers in Larry Kenon and George Gervin, a solid center in Billy Paultz, and a physically unimpressive, but effective group of offensive and defensive specialists. Like the 'Sixers, the Spurs play ten men, and when their shooters are on they can run up the score with amazing rapidity. But they lack the physical strength and overall team talent of the 'Sixers, and could probably not beat them in a four-out-of-seven series.

The other teams in the Division all have glaring weaknesses. The Washington Bullets have good shooters and rebounders, but lack the speed or depth to stay with the 'Sixers. The Knicks, led by Bob McAdoo and Earl Monroe, have excellent scoring power but are complete strangers to such niceties of the game as boxing out,

switching on defense, and running back downcourt to stop the fastbreak.

The Cavaliers and the Hawks, though they are well coached squads, lack the overall talent and depth to beat the top teams.

I see the 'Sixers running through the Division with no difficulty if they don't get overconfident.

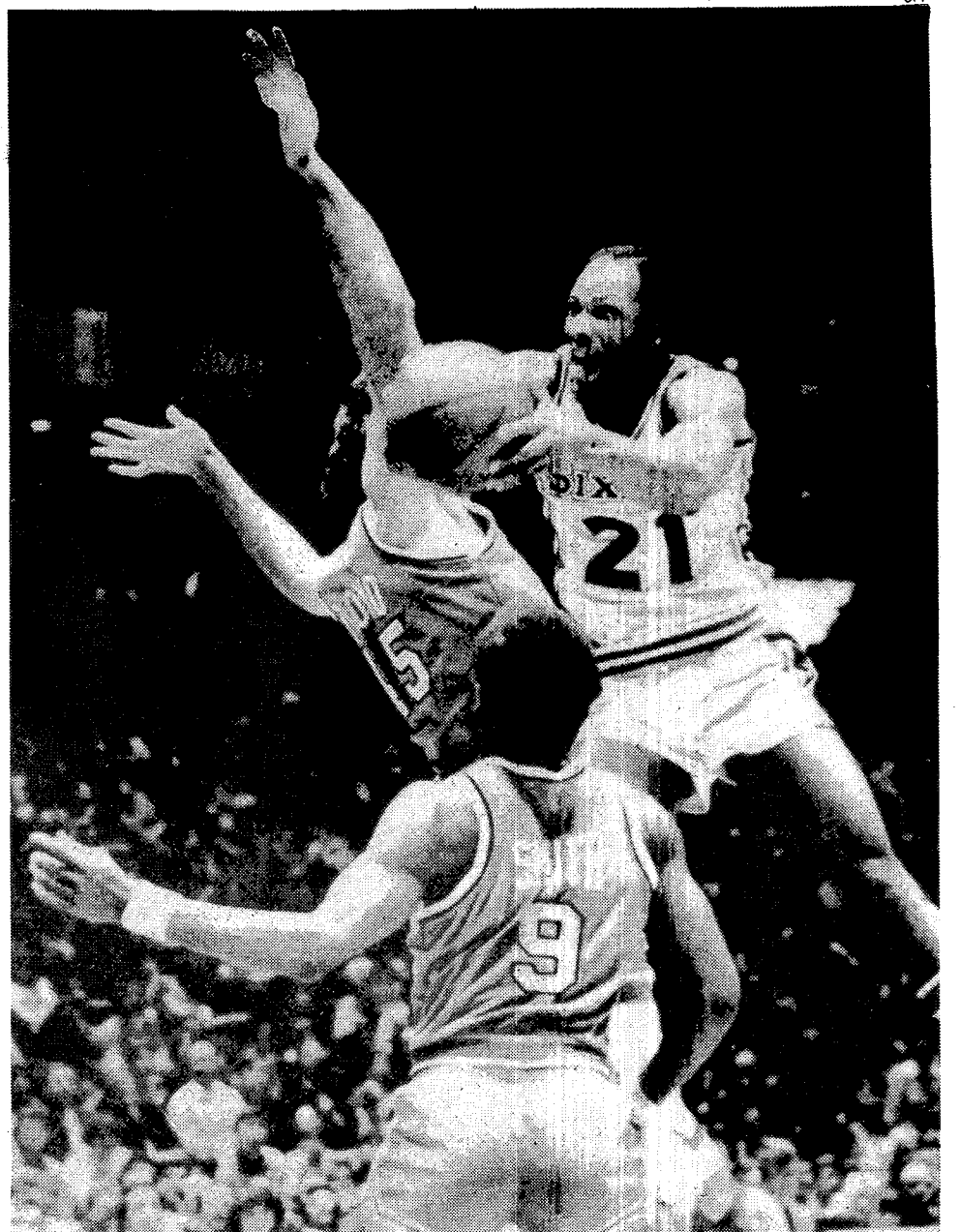
## Western Division:

The West is harder to call. Portland would be the obvious favorite if they were healthy, but with injuries to Bill Walton, Lloyd Neal, Larry Steele and Bob Gross (possibly for the season), they are a shadow of the team that won the championship last year. If Walton and Neal (who has been one of the best forwards in the league this year) return in good shape, the Blazers can win the Division, but if not, almost every other team in the Western playoffs has a good chance at beating them.

Los Angeles, on paper, looks to be the strongest of the other teams. With Kareem Jabbar at center, Adrian Dantley at forward, and a backcourt strengthened by the addition of Lou Hudson, Charlie Scott and rookie Norm Nixon, the Lakers have looked like a powerhouse during the latter half of the season.

But in the first round of the playoffs LA has to get by a surprising Seattle team in a two-out-of-three series without a home court advantage and they could easily get knocked out there. Seattle matches up well with L.A. because it has an excellent defensive center in Marvin Webster, a powerful rebounding forward in Jack Sikma, and three superquick high-scoring guards led by Gus Williams and Fred Brown. I don't think they can win the Division, but they could be a spoiler.

Phoenix and Denver, who will probably meet in the second round, each has a shot at winning the Division if Portland is not at full strength. Phoenix is a small, quick team, which features fine shooting, passing and aggressive team defense (they lead the league in steals). They have a good bench and the league's best rookie in Walter Davis. But they lack rebounding strength and an intimidating defensive center and this could cost them in a four-out-of-seven series.



The Philadelphia '76ers' second team, which includes players like Lloyd Free (above), could beat many NBA first teams.

Denver, a similar team in many respects, is a showcase for the talents of David Thompson, possibly the very best player in the NBA this year. Thompson has the quickness, moves and leaping ability of Dr. J, but adds to this the best stop-on-a-dime jump shot since Jerry West. Despite Denver's other weaknesses (a mediocre backcourt, and a center who can score but is weak defensively), the Nuggets are a threat to win any game because of Thompson's unique abilities. They are the only team to beat Portland at home this year when the Trailblazer squad was at full strength, and their bench is much stronger than it was last season.

Where does all this lead? I pick Portland to win the Division if they are healthy. If key Portland players are injured, I pick L.A. to win it, provided they get by their tough first round match with Seattle. If not, I pick Denver! How's that

for clarity?

## The Finals:

This is the 'Sixers' year. I know I said this last season (and ended up poorer for it), but I feel confident, almost smug about my prediction. The 'Sixers are a much stronger, more balanced team than they were last season and their opposition is weaker. Portland is the only team who has given them much trouble and the Trailblazers will have a difficult time getting out of their Division unless there are some miraculous recoveries on their injury-riddled squad. Even if they win the West, they will have to meet the 'Sixers without Bob Gross, who was one of the keys to the Portland victory last year. The Blazers are a great ball club, but they need everyone at full strength to meet a revitalized Philadelphia team, and Dr. J and Co. should win the first of what may be a long string of NBA championships. ■

# Winter baseball

Continued from page 24.

ishment. He will take a bath this season.)

While Vida Blue was an unwilling victim of pure baseball, some players revel in it, particularly in the winter, when they are allowed to be unrestrainedly egotistical, not bound at all to a team concept. A form of social Darwinism prevails. With no real games in the winter the elements of the cold hustle are more evident. Individualism is held in check only by the ability of a player's agent.

Winter baseball follows a clear progression of events, which begin a month after the World Series. The end of the regular season starts the interior season of baseball with rituals and a rhythm of its own. In November the free agent draft takes place. In December the owners meeting heralds a flurry of trades. And until the commencement of spring training at the end of February the Florida and Caribbean leagues go through mock seasons concluding with the Caribbean World Series.

In these leagues the players know that only their own performances, not that of their teams, are what matter. But, even then, sterling play in the Caribbean often has little value. The most valuable player this year in the Venezuelan league, for example, was Bo Diaz, also of the Boston Red Sox. But stardom in the Venezuelan

league wasn't enough to keep Diaz from being traded as part of a four-player package through which the Red Sox received Cleveland Indian pitching ace Dennis Eckersley. (The Red Sox feel that the Eckersley trade is the trade for the Penant.)

Baseball is the top sport of Caribbean countries. The season there occurs only in the winter. Baseball in the Latin countries is not all one-sided. It may be the only industry in Latin American in which Americans constitute the bulk of the employees. But many Latin players also

prominently appear in these leagues. Scouts for big league teams watch these games closely. They are exploratory engineers seeking the wealth that will benefit the home company. The Caribbean is baseball's new frontier.

(The importance of Latin baseball to Latinos might be indicated by the fact that the only election held while Rafael Trujillo was dictator of the Dominican Republic reportedly hinged on the outcome of a baseball game. Trujillo's opponent fielded the best Dominican team available, prompting El Presidente to pay astronomical sums to stars of the Negro Major

Leagues to play on his side. He won.)

The big sleep of baseball in the winter is over. But baseball remains more than business. And in the end, Reggie Jackson is more than a candy bar promoter. Without his three home runs off three pitches in the final game of the 1977 World Series the Reggie! bar wouldn't have as much cachet. Winter baseball depends on the summer game. Business can't detract from the grace of what happens on the diamond. It can only profit by it. ■

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