

“We were all more alive ten years ago,” says Richard Dreyfuss,

who this year rounded the 30-year-old bend, turned down an offer of \$1 million plus a percentage of the gross for one movie, and carried home an Oscar for *The Goodbye Girl*, playing the cuddliest toy this side of Edward Bear. “And,” he adds, mustering the energy that has caused some critics to dub him manic and arrogant, “we all knew it. It was a very exciting time. The days were something to look forward to; after ‘69, everything in this country went into the toilet. America went home with a headache. We all took Bufferin.”

Dreyfuss takes a deep breath, lights one of too many cigarettes and continues, his voice a staccato punch in the air. “Nixon scared us,” he states with unequivocal finality. “He knocked our blocks off by ending the draft and killing people at Kent State. And then there were the assassinations. People just went away. But you know,” he adds, echoing the thoughts of many post-radicals, “what’s really scary are the college kids today. Kids in their early teens are saying they’re sorry they missed the 60’s and that’s a good sign. But the middle generation, those kids between 18-25, they’re totally blown away in my opinion. I know I sound like a parent saying ‘what are these kids coming to,’ but our current college generation is a tremendous disappointment to the whole country.”

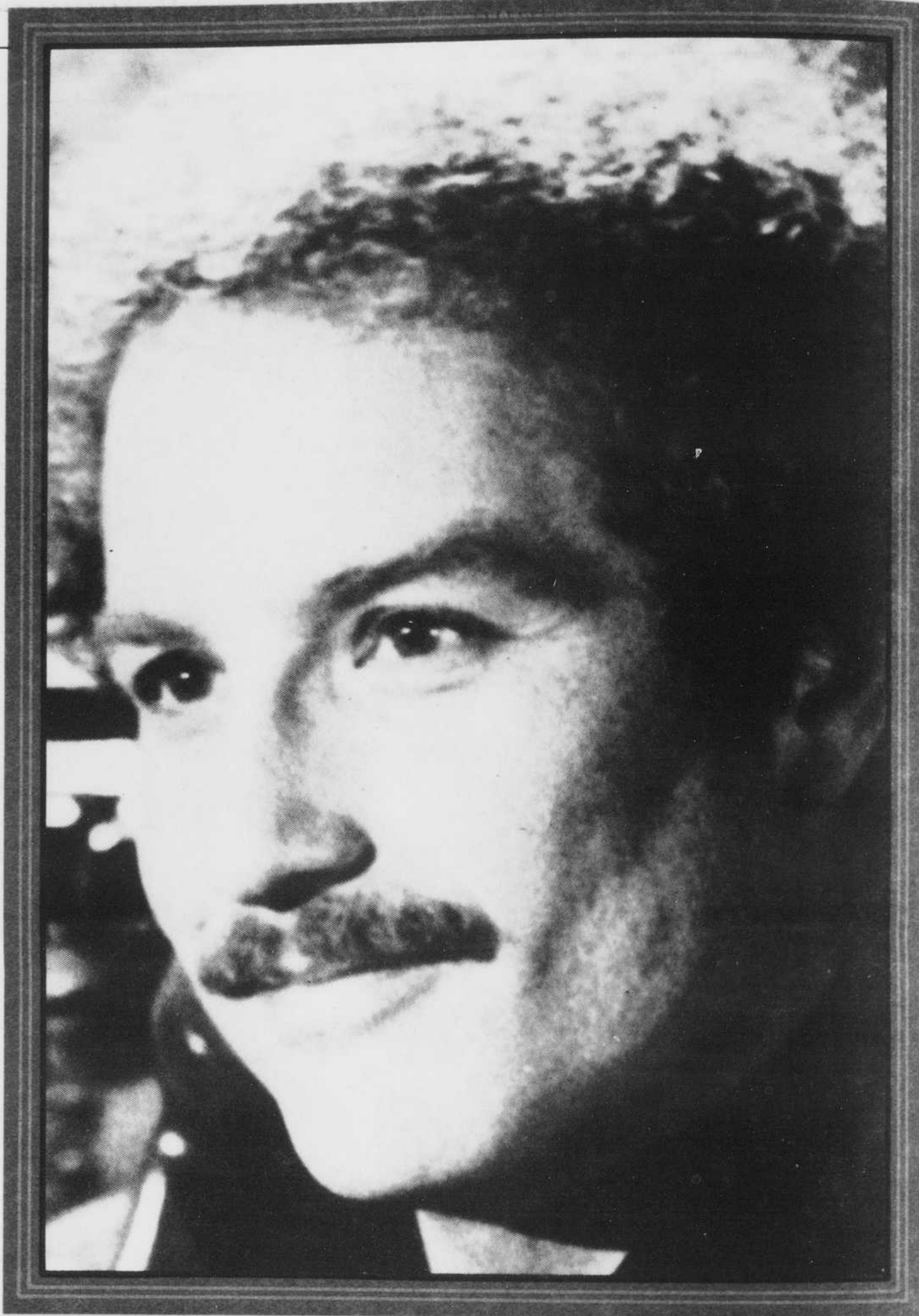
Dreyfuss, who was in Los Angeles putting the final touches on *The Big Fix*, the first movie he’s produced, has given a great deal of thought to the changing times. Like so many who came of age in the 60’s, it’s difficult for him to be reconciled to the 70’s. The schism between ‘68 and ‘78 is too enormous to comprehend. After all, ‘68 was a watershed year: Le Joli Mai in France, the Democratic Convention in Chicago, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Tet Offensive and so on. It produced shock waves around the world and pushed a generation to dedicate itself—for a time at least—to fundamentally changing the world. And Dreyfuss was part of that time.

“You know,” he says with resignation, “we lost. We came real close to changing the realities of politics in the 60’s—changing attitudes and perspectives and then we lost. But what happened to the next generation? They listened to the Establishment—I hate that word, but I can’t think of a better one—say ‘come on kids, your older brothers and sisters fucked up. Don’t believe them.’ And you know what? That next generation listened to the Establishment, and said we won’t even try.”

Dreyfuss, part of the post-World War II baby boom that has with its numbers made itself the consistent dominant force in American society, tried. Born in Los Angeles, raised in the highly competitive atmosphere of Beverly Hills (he attended Beverly Hills High, one of the richest and most academically outstanding schools in the country), Dreyfuss is a former politico who picketed, marched and protested with the best of them. He was part of the generation to whom President Kennedy in his Inaugural address passed the torch, part of the generation that said to the military-industrial complex, “Hell no, we won’t go,” part of the radicals who tried to make revolution come true in this land of compromise and debate. And then, like too many of his contemporaries, Dreyfuss gave up.

“I realized the other day,” he said with an ironic smile on his face, “that I hadn’t listened to the news in almost ten years. I turned my back on politics and concentrated on my career. But now I think you can combine them both. I think you *have* to combine the personal with the political. What gets to me,” he says, pacing his small office in a converted warehouse in Venice, California, part of *The Big Fix* co-producer Carl Borack’s commercial house facilities, “is that we’ve totally abandoned all the impulses of the 60’s and gone back to a way of life that’s like the 50’s. Nixon, Carter and Ford are like the 60’s never happened. It’s as if Robert Kennedy’s life and the lives of all those people never were. What was so wonderful about the 60’s was the possibility of change. Everything was possible.” Richard did not add “in the best of all possible worlds.”

It’s easy to understand why Dreyfuss is so obsessed with a remembrance of decades past. For one thing, ‘68 has been a major topic of discussion in the media of late; for another, Dreyfuss had just finished reading Arthur Schlesinger’s potent and provocative biography



on Robert Kennedy. And finally *The Big Fix*, based on the detective novel by Roger Simon, has as its hero a former politico. The novel published by the now defunct Straight Arrow Press (a money-losing off-shoot of *Rolling Stone*) was a thin attempt to push a Raymond Chandler-type sensibility into the current jargon, but Dreyfuss says the screenplay (re-written over a two year period) has altered much of the book, including a fundamental change in the *modus operandi*, from a presidential primary to a gubernatorial race. (How fortuitous that the movie will be released one month before Californians go to the polls to choose between Jerry Brown and Evelle Younger.) Richard insists what attracted him to *The Big Fix* was not the detective story, but the fact that it dealt with a former 60’s radical, Moses Wine, trying to relate to the world gone square.

But the juxtaposition of one sensibility against another reality is a tricky concept, and Simon himself was unsuccessful juggling that notion in the novel. Although Simon’s said in print he’s a Marxist, you’d have the devil’s own time proving that with his book. The closest Wine gets to being a Marxist is driving a broken-down car, living in a Chicano ghetto and having ties with what might be called “The Movement” (old lefties, an Abbie Hoffman-type runaway, a Cesar Chavez-type hero). Simon may say he’s Marxist, but his novel isn’t gong to rival *Man’s Fate*, and it’s doubtful the movie version of his tome will replace *Battle of Algiers*, but it is impossible to comment directly on *The Big Fix*; the powers-that-be could not be induced to arrange a preview screening. (Not a good sign.)

Dreyfuss, however, is certain his movie will make a political statement. “The film has a victory,” he says, “and that’s what makes it political. For me right now, I’m only in the mood to make people happy. During the middle 60’s, liberal artists—of which I am one—realized we were in this torpor, and began making very down films which were warning us about the world, like *Dr. Strangelove*. That’s what we needed then and that’s what we responded to.

“But now people respond to something else. They want to smile,” he says, echoing the