

Eric Polisar

June 29, 1923 — July 31, 1968

When Eric Polisar died of cancer on July 31, 1968, there was lost a brilliant, unorthodox, mercurial, and engaging colleague. At the time of his death, he was a member of the faculty of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, a post which he had held since 1961. During those seven years he undertook varied research and was a provocative and successful teacher of undergraduate, graduate, and extension courses. Professor Polisar had previously worked for the Extension Division of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations in 1952-53 as field representative in the School's Albany Office. Before then, for two years, he taught at what was then called the New York State Teachers College at New Paltz. Afterwards, between 1953 and 1961, he served in several important capacities on the staff of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, including that of assistant to the president.

All this was preceded by study at the University of Wisconsin. He earned the B.A. in 1949 and the M.A. in 1950. He completed work on the Ph.D. in history except for a dissertation on the movement and quartering of British troops in the American colonies during prerevolutionary times—a subject which, although not entirely defeating Eric Polisar's unbounded capacity to discover social significance, finally proved too remote for his concern with the more immediately relevant.

Still earlier he had served as an enlisted man in the European theater during World War II.

The foregoing review of Eric Polisar's career does not in itself convey the vigor, verve, and variety of the man. He was a captivating speaker, and he wrote with flair. More importantly, he had a perturbing gift for prophesying problems before they became apparent or acute. A listing of some of his *pre-1965* interests will suffice. These included declining urban economies, race relations, and labor problems in the public service. Concerning them, he wrote, taught, and advised government and union officials as well as academic colleagues. These things he did with wide knowledge, sharp insight, and openhanded generosity.

Eric Polisar brought an uncompromising honesty to his work and concerns. Not all of the victims of his occasional verbal thrusts found his articulate and sometimes acid assaults comfortable to endure. Yet there was tolerance in him, as exemplified by his service as a member of the Board of Cornell United Religious Work, a role at first difficult to reconcile with his *Weltanschauung*. But it was in keeping with his indefatigable willingness to keep laboring at human betterment and with his own zestful mode of life. These traits, revealing an underlying romanticism and

heroism of Cyrano-like proportions, were the more poignant because they were in sharp contradiction to equally strong strands of skepticism and pessimism in his outlook.

Eric Polisar is survived by his wife, Anne Drew Commons Polisar, and three children.

Maurice Neufeld, Ronald Donovan, Kurt Hanslowe