

RUSSELL STETLER & TRACY THOMPSON  
424 NORTH STREET, OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94609

January 21, 1976

Dear Sylvia,

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the Belin controversy, in case Random House did not inform you of its decision. We learned yesterday that Random House had decided to delete your question ("Did Belin thus passively and by omission become a party to collusion, perjury, and the suborning of false testimony?") by printing a black bar over the type. Although we objected in principle to the deletion, we believed that visible censorship -- in the form of a black bar -- was preferable to an invisible alteration, indistinguishable from routine editorial decisions or changes to which we had reluctantly agreed.

Today we were informed that the black-bar decision was not final. Jason Epstein in particular was represented as favoring white space instead of the black bar. When we telephoned Jason, to our surprise he defended his preference of the cosmetic white space as a courtesy to you! His argument was that the black bar, drawing attention to the deletion, would invite Belin to publicize the fact that your publisher, Random House, agrees with him that your question was libelous. Our reply was that this is merely the sad truth of the situation, which could hardly be covered up by making the deletion less obvious. Random House apparently hoped to appease Belin and have the whole matter forgotten. We declined Jason Epstein's invitation to insert a statement of our views into the preface, since this would only justify further delay. However, we were assured at the end of the conversation that they will use the black bar to delete the sentence. If anything changes, we will of course let you know.

We would be grateful if you would treat this information as confidential for the present. Please let us know if it is we who misunderstand your attitude toward the Belin matter; it appeared that Jason's desire to shield you from further attacks from Belin did not result from direct consultation with you.

With very best wishes,

Yours,

*Russ*

Russell Stetler