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POLITICS

IS

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

Several weeks ago, when I was preparing to speak to you today, one of my colleagues in New York--on discovering the topic on which I was to address you--was astounded that I would attempt to speak about politics. "Why politics? We don't want to involve ourselves in politics. We exist. And that's the most important thing. Politics is none of our business."

Are we really so naive as to believe that we can exist, and continue to exist, unless we involve ourselves in politics? Politics is far from being none of our business, because politics is everybody's business. Everybody, and particularly for those who would fulfill their duties and responsibilities not merely as citizens, but as human beings, with fellow human beings for whose conduct and welfare they are in a measure responsible. The great English poet, John Donne, said: "No man is an Island, . . . intire of it selfe. . . if a clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse as well as if a Promontorie were, . . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind."

It is this involvement in mankind that I am talking about because politics is the sphere of human activity through which our involvement with our fellow man is principally determined, and it is therefore to politics that we must turn our attention

if we are in any measure to achieve for ourselves and all of our fellows those rights and liberties which ought to be ours, which ought to be everyone's. We cannot afford to ask for rights for ourselves without asking for rights for all others.

But to exist, as my colleague suggested we ought, to exist as a homophile organization, to exist as a movement, to exist as a group seeking rights, is far from being enough. To give an example: The Negro rights movement in this country has been in existence formally for over seventy years--in existence, that's all. Till about ten years ago, when the leaders of the Negro rights movement and the rank and file of the Negro rights movement began to involve themselves in political activity. Since they started involving themselves in political activity, since they started involving themselves in the practical workings of everyday politics, we have seen vividly and dramatically what can be done by a movement seeking fulfillment of rights. Now this is not to imply that the Negro's battle for social rights and civil liberties is won. It is to state that until the leaders and the rank and file of the various Negro organizations got themselves into politics their battle had never really begun. What I am asking you to do is to start our movement on the road to winning our social rights and civil liberties. I am asking you to involve yourselves in politics--in practical everyday politics. I am asking you not to wait seventy years before beginning effective action. In short, to paraphrase President Johnson's words in regard to the Negro civil rights battle: Too long have we waited already. Let us begin now.

Now I realize that any time there is a call for political action there is immediately sounded the response that politics is dirty, that politics is crooked, that all politicians are liars, thieves, grafters, and men, in short, of no honor. Politics itself is considered a dirty word by many, and few people respect politicians. Too often, these feelings are based on fact, but only because we permit it to be so. The New York Herald Tribune recently stated, in declaring itself for one of the major Presidential candidates, that it found the choice difficult but that it could not avoid the responsibility of making a choice unless it wanted no action at all, unless it wanted anarchy.

We are all of us making a decision for bad politics when we refuse to involve ourselves. As long as we refuse to examine issues, as long as we refuse to investigate the qualification of candidates, as long as we refuse to protest when bad men are in office, as long as we supinely accede to the inclusion on the ballot of party hacks and men of no qualification, we deserve the sort of politics we have, and we deserve the sort of treatment we receive.

Now there are good men in government, men who have the honesty

and the guts to stand up for what they believe is right instead of for what is expedient, men who will, if necessary, stand alone against a hostile House or a hostile Senate and champion truth and justice and honor. But these men can exist only because an informed and active constituency puts them in government and keeps them there.

The history of this movement in politics is a sad one. There have been several times in recent history when the members of the homophile movement have either actively attempted to involve themselves in political activity or have inadvertently found themselves involved.

In 1959, the former Mattachine Society, at its annual convention in Denver, passed a resolution commending the incumbent mayor of San Francisco, George Christopher, for his enlightened treatment of the homosexual situation in that community. Christopher's opponent for the mayoralty in the fall of 1959, Russell L. Waldon had the endorsement of the San Francisco newspapers and was considered a shoo-in candidate. Several weeks before the election Waldon accused Christopher of being "soft on homosexuals" and used the Mattachine Society citation as the basis of his charge. He used all the cliches and untruths that are the customary weapons in this sort of a campaign. Typical of his charges was this from the San Francisco Progress: "This is a matter of grave concern for every parent. It exposes teenagers to possible contact and contamination in a city admittedly overrun by deviates. For a city administration to permit this situation to exist is nothing less than scandalous."

The day following Waldon's charge, it was discovered that the whole campaign to brand Christopher as being "soft on homosexuals" was being engineered by a minor San Francisco politician with a long history of involvement in smear campaigns, blackmail cases, and the like. In reaction, all the San Francisco papers changed their backing to Christopher and public reaction to the tactics used by Waldon was so strong that the "shoo-in" candidate for the mayoralty of San Francisco was defeated by a substantial majority.

Now, while it would be pleasant to associate the commendation of Christopher by the Mattachine Society and his ultimate victory, we can claim no credit whatsoever. For it seems that the commendation was proposed by this same minor San Francisco politician, who had "infiltrated" the Mattachine Society several weeks before the annual convention and had submitted the commendation to the San Francisco chapter asking them to back it. Thinking that the man was sincere, they agreed to support it. Unfortunately, instead of making political hay in the sunshine of Christopher's victory, the San Francisco Mattachine adopted a petulant attitude toward Waldon and filed suit against him for daring to intimate that the Mattachine Society consisted of homosexuals.

In 1962 an effort was made to determine the extent of the voting power of the homosexual minority in California by the League for Civil Education. The League selected as its guinea pig the Prohibition Party's candidate for state treasurer, Leslie Rice. Mr. Rice was selected because his party had averaged only 2,110 votes per candidate in the previous election. The League assumed that if they supported Mr. Rice, that if the homosexuals supported Mr. Rice, that any appreciable increase over the 2,110 vote figure would indicate the strength of the homosexual "vote." "After a strenuous campaign. . .," says the League's newspaper, a campaign consisting of tongue-in-cheek ads such as "Stamp out demon rum" and "Vote for the Prohibition Party's candidate," the election results came in, with an increase of approximately one-tenth of one percent in the Prohibition Party's polling.

In 1963 the League for Civil Education again tried to muster a voting bloc, this time by backing an entire slate of candidates. The League estimated that it had 70,000 potential votes in the San Francisco homosexual community, and maintained that in 1959 these votes had been cast for Christopher rather than Waldon because of Waldon's stand against homosexuals.

This time the League's principal candidate was not chosen facetiously as Rice was, but was a genuine candidate, the former Public Defender of San Francisco, Edward T. Mancuso, whom the editor of the LCE News reported had promised the homosexual community of San Francisco nothing except to ensure fair treatment of everyone and to be mayor to all of the people of San Francisco. The other two candidates in this campaign were rejected by the League for Civil Education because of their attitudes toward the sexual deviates. One of them had been acting mayor of San Francisco and had a reputation for harassing all minority groups, and the other had answered a question regarding sexual deviancy with the comment: "There must be some law to control them." So therefore the selection of Mancuso for a candidate was a good choice. However, Mancuso was definitely the underdog in the campaign. He lacked campaign funds, and, with the exception of the League's newspaper, he lacked support of the San Francisco press. The League believed that it could muster enough of the homosexual vote to overcome these handicaps and assure Mancuso's victory. The League's newspaper gave extensive coverage to the issues at stake and circulated word through San Francisco's gay bars that Mancuso was the wisest choice that these voters could make. In addition, the League sponsored a telephone campaign on the day before the election.

Mancuso was swamped, polling only 17,501 votes to the other two candidates' 120,000 and 72,000. Despite the League's contention that Mr. Mancuso was strongly ahead of the other candidates in the gay areas of San Francisco, the paper admitted that it was impossible to state what percentage of the vote came from their campaign.

Out of three cases cited we may dismiss the San Francisco Mattachine's inadvertent involvement in the mayoralty campaign in 1959 as being of no consequence. There was obviously no intention on the part of the San Francisco Mattachine to involve itself seriously in political action. The other two cases, however, represent sincere, though ineffectual, attempts to become involved in genuine political activity. Why then do I contend that they should not be discouraging examples? Because, while the intent was genuine, the realities of political life were totally and completely ignored.

First of all, political campaigns are not waged upon caprice or whim if they are to succeed. While politics is everybody's business, it is a serious business, a serious business indeed. If one is to succeed at political activity, one must learn the business and learn it thoroughly. Politics is no place for half-hearted amateurs. To be sure, most workers in politics are amateurs but this is not the idle undisciplined sort of amateur activity which may be associated with a social club, or, unfortunately, with the past actions of the homophile movement.

The 1962 support of the Prohibition Party candidate was doomed to failure from the start. First of all, the man represented a lunatic fringe element, with no universality of appeal and nothing to command him save his inclusion on a laughable slate. While some irresponsible homosexuals would vote for such a candidate as a lark, no serious responsible homosexual could be expected to throw away his vote on such a candidate any more than any responsible heterosexual would be expected to do. The Rice candidacy offered the homosexual nothing except laughs.

On the other hand, the 1963 attempt had all the elements of a really sincere effort save for two critical factors--political acumen and political activity. The choice of candidate was valid, and the approach to this campaign was essentially serious. Yet apparently no real effort was made to function on Mancuso's behalf at the effective grass roots level. Circulating suggestions through gay bars, making a few last-ditch telephone calls, and championing the candidacy in the pages of a sincere but ineffectual publication of limited circulation are inadequate means to choose when you are trying to achieve political success.

Political action demands grueling day-to-day work at every level on behalf of a candidate. It means pushing doorbells, making telephone calls, compiling voter lists, researching the issues, knowing all there is to know or finding out all there is to know about your opposition.

It takes money, it takes time, it takes the efforts of many, many willing hands. In short, political activity, to be successful, demands successful political organization. Successful political

organizations do not grow on trees. Successful political organizations are not founded half-heartedly. I say, therefore, that the reason for the failure of the homophile movement in this regard in the past has been the failure to recognize political facts in this country--the failure to recognize that successful political activity can be achieved only through work with an established political organization.

And herein lies the rub. To most of us, the very thought of attempting to persuade one of our major political parties to support our own unpopular view is folly. I am sure that most of you sitting here today are convinced that there is nothing whatsoever that you can personally do to influence the politics in your precinct, in your ward, in your city, in your state. You could not be more in error.

Let us learn a lesson from the Negro civil rights movement. How have these organizations gained the political strength that they now display? How has the Negro movement for rights achieved the support of both major parties at the national level? How have they gotten themselves in such a position that the obtaining of rights for them is one of the most important issues in the Presidential campaign? They have gained this strength politically because they have involved themselves in politics at the grass roots level. They have gone to work for the political clubs in their own communities. They have joined the political organizations in their own precincts, and they have been welcomed. Now it doesn't take a lot of votes at the local level to make your influence felt there. It doesn't take 100,000 votes to carry a precinct. It doesn't take 100,000 votes to carry a congressional district. And in some cases it doesn't take 100,000 votes to carry a governorship. It takes only one vote, really. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Representative John Dowdy, of Athens, Texas, beat his opponent, Benton Musselwhite, in the 1962 Congressional election by a vote of 43,598 to 36,150. He won by a difference of approximately 7400 votes. Accepting the Kinsey projection of one man in ten, we assume that approximately ten percent of Dowdy's Congressional District is homosexual. And assuming, as is logical, that their vote was evenly divided between Congressman Dowdy and his opponent, a shift to the opposition of Dowdy's half of the homosexual vote would have been the deciding factor in electing Musselwhite instead of John Dowdy. Now we realize the issues are not that simple. Musselwhite might have been a Republican in a Democratic district. He might even have been an exponent of urban renewal, and obviously Dowdy's constituents are opposed to urban renewal or they wouldn't have elected him. There are lots of things that could have been the factor. But the single fact remains that this congressman could have been defeated in his bid for election had the homosexuals in his district--in the secrecy of the voting booth--voted for his opposition.

Now, I am not saying that we should react on a negative basis. We should positively champion our rights. But had the homosexuals in Dowdy's district been made aware of the issues and had there been an effective campaign, he could have been defeated.

What I am asking you to do very simply is this: I am asking you to do what some of us in New York are doing. In Greenwich Village, the voters have recently put the control of the major political organization in the hands of a reform group led by Edward I. Koch. He has been chosen the leader of the Village Democratic Organization, and consequently is the effective political leader of the community.

Last Wednesday, the New York Times reported that the Police Commissioner, Michael Murphy, at the request of Edward T. Koch, was starting a fresh campaign to "clean up homosexual activity in Greenwich Village." I am sure that if Mr. Koch recognized the fact that a great deal of his support in the village came from these homosexuals he was going to "clean up," he would have a much more enlightened attitude toward the situation. And so those of us who live in Greenwich Village are joining the Village Democratic Organization and are going to work hard and effectively to see to it that the homosexual element in our community has its rights protected. We can do so because this organization, like every political organization, needs constant, everyday help if they are to succeed in any form of political activity themselves.

I am going to close by saying that I suggest to all of you, Democrat or Republican, that you go back to your community, that you go back to your own precinct, that you go back to the established political club of your choice and join it. That you work at the grass roots level and that you work for effective political action.

I return to John Donne: "Any man's death diminishes me, for I am involved in Mankind." And if we do not involve ourselves in politics on our own behalf, I go back to this: "Send not to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."