

THE POLITICAL PROCESSES AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

(Ken Ellison)

THE POLITICAL PRO.

THE
POLITICAL
PROCESS

In our attempting to organize ourselves ~~in~~ as human beings, any where it shows up, first of all you have a basic kind of order. No society gets along without ordering. The group that you belong to in high school does not get along without some fundamental agreements about ~~themselves~~ how they are going to order themselves-- I mean, there is a leader, there is a common image of how you are going to operate in a situation, I mean etc. etc. etc. Society has a fundamental ~~has~~ a fundamental decision about order. Have you all seen this movie, Clockwork Orange--. Is it out here yet--. In terms of the society at large, ~~order~~ order meant that you don't go around ~~xxxx~~ beating people up and raping women etc. but in terms ~~in~~ of this little group of guys, ~~droods~~, they called them, the way they ordered themselves was to go around doing exactly that. Now they had order. They had a way they went about ~~doing~~ that beating up people, they had an understanding of how they operated, etc. But they ordered themselves. But what I am point at is ~~that~~ not any particular definition, of order, but just the dynamic of a society ordering itself.

Then you have justice. If order is how it is that power gets distributed, justice has to do with the control of power. Whereas in ~~the~~ a society ordering itself, it always has a way of defending itself against others, maintaining a kind of order within itself. But justice has to do with controlling the power that exists in the ordering process. Laws or courts or whatever are ways ~~of~~ of pulling controls or stipulation or setting limits to that.

Then you have the whole dimension of welfare, or how ~~you~~ it is a society defines what is significant, and what rights are, what it is that is life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or three categories like that. Look up on the top of the Welfare. Read them. Secure existence is fundamentally life. How does society define what the rights to life are. Then political freedom is how society decides what people are free, in what manner are they free to participate, what are the channels through which they participate in society. Significant engagement is where society spells out what it means to be significantly engaged, or how you authentically participate in the political process.

THE
POLITICAL
IMBALANCE

What we have seen in our times in terms of what I want to call, the impotence, of the political ~~to~~ deal with the economic--you see a kind of tyrant, impotent dynamic within the political. Or, as our decision-making process has collapsed on us within that whole political framework, what has happened is that order has become the tyrant.

As we increasingly lose our handle on, lose our grasp on how it is you make decisions, or what is the common welfare, as that collapses, the whole dimension of ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ law and order gets expanded. It is like your own body. When disease sets in, your body sends a lot of white corpuscles in there to try to fight that disease. Precisely that same kind of thing has happened in the political. A kind of disease has set into our political process, and what we have done is to expand order, -law and order- -If we only had law and order, everything would be all right.- Concomitantly, justice has become impotent. You just look around for the signs of that. Are you all familiar with the Chicago 7 Trial. You know who those guys are--. Those are the guys who were ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ indicted for the riots at the Democratic Convention a few years ago. They were in court, and what they did was to dramatize how absolutely ridiculous our court system is now, the whole thing. The whole thing was one big spoof. Every day something new would come out in the newspaper about, -Dillinger did such and such, - or -Jerry Rubin did such and such.- He came into court wearing a wig and stuck his tongue out at Judge Hoffman. And Judge Hoffman couldn't do anything about it. He would say, stop that. But what they were doing was just saying, the court system, the system of our judicial process is just so collapsed that it is ridiculous for me to be as . . .

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In the tenth grade I remember discovering that there was such a thing as the South. All of a sudden I become aware that Black people were ~~xxxxxxxx~~ getting beat up. That was the days of civil rights. Police were setting German shepherds loose on whole crowds of people, shooting tear gas, riding into crowds with horses. I just became horribly aware that people were being denied rights. I remember what I did. I decided that ~~xxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ I was going to do ~~xxxxxx~~ something about it, so ~~xxxxxxxx~~ in tenth grade I started a group called CREDO, another buddy in high school and I started it--it was a good word, it was very philosophical, came from Plato. What it meant was Committee for Rights in Educational Opportunities. We collected books for the ~~xxxxxxx~~ Mississippi Freedom Schools. We went around to Churches, schools, neighborhoods, ~~get~~ ~~x~~ and collected books. I remember one day sitting downstairs in our teachers house whose basement we used to keep the books in, ~~the~~ books filled the whole basement--we were trying to sort them out to send down to Mississippi. I was thinking, this is really great, people giving books to send down to Mississippi but then I started looking at the books, and they were the funkiest things ~~xxxxx~~ I had ever seen. No one could have learned anything from them. As I was sorting the books, all of a sudden I picked up a book, and it was Little Black Sambo--have you ever seen that book-- Then it dawned on me that all people were doing was dumping off their old junk books, and furthermore, they are trying to trick me. Here is somebody sending Little Black Sambo to a Southern Black school. ~~xxx~~ And I realized, so I send 3,000 books down there, what is going to happen.--

Civil rights was youth's entry, just the awareness of the incredible plight of the Black man in our country-- was the youth's entry into this kind of social engagement. that we experience now. You think that Black people started the Civil rights movement-- No, it was youth that started it. Black people--there was awareness there,-- but it was 1,000s and 1,000 of youth getting on buses up at Pennsylvania, and Harvard and Cornell, and New York University, and University of Chicago, and ~~riding~~ riding down South, and putting their bodies on the line, in front of the horses and the German shepherds, and the cattle prods, and the hoses, and saying, look, look, look, there is something wrong in our society. That is what brought our whole society to an awareness that something was wrong, not a bunch of black sharecroppers down there. That didn't bother any of us including us virtuous northerners, a single bit. It was when their own children were ~~down~~ down there being aware ~~that~~ of it that something happened.

I remember after CREDO ~~collapsed~~ collapsed and then ~~next~~ next thing I did, it was in eleventh grade, that what I decided was that that summer I was really going to involve myself. I went out to Washington, I joined up with SNCCC, Student, Non-violent Coordinating Committee, you wore blue-jean top, and wore a quality button, on your lapel, and went out to march on Washington. That is where Martin Luther delivered his speech, -I have a dream.- There were 1,000s, I don't know how many showed up, 350,000 or something like that. It was incredible, this huge gathering. We are going to tell Washington, We are going to tell the head, what is going on so finally something will happen. It was a great event. I was way in the back of the crowd and I wanted to get up close to see Martin Luther King, and I met up with this guy who was in the Red E Cross, he was a big black man, ~~about~~ about six feet eight, with a big red cross on the back of his shirt, and he said -I sure wish I could get up there.- Meantime, I couldn't see a thing, people all around. So he said, -Look like you are going to faint.- And I said O.K. and looked like I was going to faint, and we went right up to the front, he said, -Red Cross coming through.- When we got up there, right in front of the speakers podium, we started listening to the speeches, Martin Luther King came up, another man, young civil rights workers, and this went on for four or five hours, and I was enthralled until suddenly it dawned on me that there weren't any Senators coming up there to talk. There weren't any Congressmen out there. There weren't even any officials of the city out there, except policeman. All of a sudden it dawned on me that it was myself talking to myself and that nothing was going to come of it, in all that kind of desperation, there was nobody there who that was listening.

Twelfth grade came along and I decided that if we couldn't get the civil rights thing moving, about then the Vietnam War was beginning to start, before people were aware of it in the society as a whole. So I told myself that I was going to keep my own integrity, and I became a conscientious Objector, and I began to demonstrate

The New Individual and the New Society
Youth Section
Page 4, Political

that something was wrong in the society. I tropped off to the University and discovered in my own college, nothing seemed to move. There were deep problems there in terms of the rights of people to participate, so I became a college activist, and spent my freshman year an activist for the college, and that finally didn't ~~work~~ work. We had student government; and had it structured like the United States government. We had dorm senators, residential congressmen, etc. And we all went into this big room once every week, with a fantastic layout, speakers, sargeant-at-arms and everything. What did we do-- spent three hours discussing what needed to happen in the college, and at the end of the meeting someone would say, well, who is going to take this to the proper channels--. All of a sudden, everyone was aware that the fact was that all that discussion was for naught. The proper channels wer not going to ~~get~~ get anything done. We had this great thing, that was like playing house, for three hours, all of ~~us~~ senators and congressmen committed to getting that college changed, and we knew nothing was going to happen. I got tired of that and finally decided to join SDS, ~~xxxxxx~~

And that is the journey of every youth, I want to suggest. You finally get to the point where you decide, -Is it really worth it-- I think I'll just burn the whole thing down. I spent about a year in SDS, that was when Weathermen was being developed. I went down to the Democratic Convention, in Chicago, do you all remember that-- standing in the middle of Balboa and Michigan Avenue, downtown Chicago, here was this whole crowd of youth saying, -The whole world is watching, the whole world is watching.- We had already come across the railroad yards; they had tired to keep us on the other side, and then we were in downtown Chicago. And I can remember the television cameras all the way around, and we were finally going to get something said to the society, and I'm up there saying, -The whole world is watching,- -The whole world is watching,- and I looked through the heads and saw about ~~22~~ 20 deep blue helmets marching this way, and 20 deep blue helmets, and the other side, 20 deep blue helmets, and on the other side was a park with 40 deep blue helmets all the way around it. And we were right in the middle of ~~it~~ that. And I thought to myself, What is going to happen, and all of a sudden, it happened. It just went ~~away~~, like that. All I remembered in that scene was trying desperately to try to get out of there, desperately. The problem was that every one else was, and the other problem was that the police were clear that that is what everyone was trying to do. And consequently they were 20 deep there, 20 deep there, 20 deep there, and 40 deep there. One hope, there was a little sanitation building, one of those things on the corner, and ~~there~~ then there was the park where you could get the railroad tracks. You couldn't go that way, the guys who had gone that way were already falling through the plate glass ~~in~~ windows of the Hilton Hotel. You could literally hear skulls being cracked behind you. And the whole crowd saw that hole, a couple hundred people, there were police there and police there, but no police there.

THE NEW INDIVIDUAL AND THE NEW SOCIETY.
YOUTH SECTION
Page 5, Political

And you could hear it behind you, crack, crack, crack, and I started running for that and tripped over someone who had tripped in front of me, and it was like there was a little wake that was left in the middle of that street and the whole crowd tried to get through that funnel, and the police were just squeezing it off like this. And here were about 15 or 20 of us right in the middle of the street and cops everywhere, all around you, and I remember getting up and couldn't see, my glasses had fallen off at that point. And seeing that crowd trying to get through that funnel and running with everything I had, and I can just remember, you know when you are swimming and you look like that, seeing this guy come behind me with a club, ready to take my head off, and I ran, and I hit the crowd, it was like hitting a wall, pow, and it didn't move, and I turned around, and there was a policeman, with this club, and about the time he raised it to hit me, ~~it~~ a guy stepped out of the crowd and takes the club ~~from~~ and the policeman's hat and hits him over the head, and about that time, every policeman who had seen that, jumped on that guy, and I don't know if he is ~~murdered~~ eaten alive today from the kind of beating they gave him.

Well, I got out of there without getting my head cracked, and I remember crossing the street, and there was a telephone booth there, and the first thing I did was to rip the telephone thing out, and just threw it at the crowd, and I finally got across the railroad track, and the last thing I remember before things just went foggy, and I spent the rest of the night walking around, ~~it~~ was that I was sitting on the corner just crying, and looking around, and it seemed like hundreds of others, just sitting on the other side of that park, crying, because you knew you had failed. You knew nothing was going to come at that point. It wasn't the police that was there, you just knew that standing there yelling, -The whole world is watching,- and creating havoc was equally as ineffective as trying to reestablish just good old law and order and pretend like nothing was going on. I knew that the policeman who had tried to bash my head in was in exactly the same boat that I was. His response to get me was the exact same response as mine to get rid of him. Exactly the same.

Well, the only thing that you start thinking about doing in that kind of situation is just retreating into your own thing. Soon after that I went to India, and when I came back from India, the political climate had heated up, the Vietnam War was a much larger issue, but I came back and just went into meditation. I took yoga and sitar in India and I was pretty good at both, and I spent all my days up in my room, meditating and playing the sitar, because I mean, I didn't want to get my hands dirty. I had seen Balboa and Michigan. It's like the whole youth culture is at that kind of point right now. Everybody is clear that nobody has the answer. Everybody is clear that just radical ineffectiveness of attempting to destroy. All those youth down there on Balboa and Michigan were like white corpuscles, or like, if you will, a sign of the disease, and the police

were the white corpuscles.---However you want to look at it. But that was just a demonstration of a kind of immediacy in which nobody finally knows where to go. And the crisis is where you turn in the political to see how ineffective it is. Mr. Nixon could have a heart attack of gold. If he wanted to handle the urban crisis in this country, all alone, he probably couldn't do it. At

Time magazine published an article on the bureaucracy in the government, and the bureaucracy is so incredible that the President has a hard time getting something done, because it just gets lost, ground up. The whole thing is like just wheels within wheels within wheels. And it is not like youth are the only ones who are lucid about what is going on. Your parents downstairs, everybody you meet, is aware of the problem, but nobody knows what to do about it. And it is like the whole youth culture, being on the edge of that kind of lucidity, of the collapse of the ability to deal with the problems that we have on our hands, is like there are two choices that you see

people operating out of. One is, that I am going to be a man rebel. You go out to a commune and just get out of this society. -I'm not going to even dirty myself with it.- Or I'm just going to be a terror, with my parents, my school, my friends, anybody I come in contact with I am just going to demonstrate ~~them~~ to them that this is a horseshit situation. The other one is, I call it, -When in doubt, sack out.- You just see the kind of thing--I just am going to go to sleep. You ask someone to ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ get involved, and they say they have something better to do, and pretty sure what that is is that they are sure they get a nap every day.

We all have encountered just a refusal to want to face the future, because of what we know it demands, just the overwhelming demand to participate in building the kind of future that is needed. Whether you decide to be the disestablishment or the establishment, whether it is you decide to walk around making it clear that there is trouble, in our society, or whether you want to walk around and be the guy that ~~x~~ says everything is all right, neither of those postures are going to create or build the kind of future that is necessary.

I like that movie Little Big Man. Has everybody in here seen that--. It's roughly the story of this guy named Jack Crabb. It starts out that he is an old man, and he is talking into the tape recorder for the anthropologist. He says, -My name is Jack Crabb,- in this high old voice, -and I was an Indian scout for General Custer, and I knew the Indians for what they was, and I knew the white men for what they was,- and the whole rest of the movie, this Jack Crabb guy, who is Dustin Hoffman in the movie, goes between the whitemen, who are the Cavalry, and the Indians, who were the Indians. He was always going back and forth. It was like the Indians, to me sort of represent the disestablishment, fundamentally what they want to do is say, -This culture is no good for us. What we are going to do is just sit up here and smoke peace pipes, etc. etc.- Then there is General Custer. And Jack Crabb is always going between these two

THE NEW INDIVIDUAL AND THE NEW SOCIETY.
YOUTH SECTION
Page 7, Political

guys, and what he discovers is that the Indians over here don't have any answers. They have turned themselves over. They act stupidly before the establishment. They decide to just commit a kind of suicide in the sense of never making a decision about the future. They want to hold on. The same thing with the establishment. The cavalry is just out for their own, to make things the way they want them. Well, Crabb is always going between these two. He is an Indian for a while, he fights with the Indians. Then he gets in some wierd mess and ends up showing up being a muleskinner for a white cavalry. The thing that struck me about the movie,--the spoof that struck me about the movie--the first spoof that happened to me when I watched the movie was that I always ~~thinks~~ thought that the Indians were the good guys. It is bloody. You just see them ~~as~~ massacred everywhere. And they really seemed to have a good time of it. They build their teepees, they smoke their peace-pipes--I wonder what.s ~~thats~~ in it, and just sort of laze around. And I get sort of spoofed--the Indians are the good guys and the cavalry are the bad guys. As I began to reflect on that I began to see that ~~neither~~ neither of these groups had any way, were making any kinds of decisions about the future. that involved the whole society. The Indians wanted it their way and the white men wanted it their way. Neither your decision to say, -It is all terrible - as the disestablishment, or your decision to say, -It.s all O.K.- is going to create the future.

What.s needed to me, is something like the -trans-establishment,- the kind of demand for every man these f days is to stand in between that and to see where the deep underlying problems in society are, and to move on that, and at the same time to decide not to throw everything out, to burn it down. For that won.t accomplish anything either. I read an article about a hippie in London, Engla England. He was being interviewed by K Cronkite or somebody like that. The interviewer asked him what he was out to do, and he said, -What we are going to do, me and my buddies, is that we are going to just tear everything down until the year 2,000. That is what we are going to do. We are just going to rap this society apart, and then we are going to start building it, all over again.- The problem with that, the stupidity of that is that we don.t have the luxury of being able to wait until theyear 2,000 to decide to move.

I read an article--I don.t know what your favorite ecologist says--but the one I read said that in 30 years, the whole globe was going to have to make a decision about whether it was going to go ~~back~~ on living, or just lie ~~an~~ down and let the grass grow over ~~it~~ us, or let the garbage grow over us. This whole globe was going to have to make that kind of decision. And that is just in terms of environment.

You think about the ~~minimal~~ other arenas, population, poverty,--you just think about those. The whole world is going to have to decide. We don't have a lot of years to have the luxury of just critiquing, just criticizing what is going on. Nor do we have the luxury of sitting back and saying, -It's all O.K. I guess I'll just be bourgeois like the rest.- and I'll get mine.- For that is all right in terms of the immediacy, but in terms of the future, it is exactly what we were talking about in that economic workshop this morning. There is nowhere to hide in terms of deciding to invent the whole new future for society.

Maybe that is where all of youth is today. And maybe you have to go around and proclaim it that it is time to build, it is time to envision a new future for society, and not accept the old just because it is the old, just because it is so hard to change, nor give up, but to envision a new future.

I don't know if any of you have read this book, Giants of the Earth. But it is a book about the settling of the Western frontier. It is about this Swedish family that goes out to North Dakota to settle down, the wild and wooly West. The book is 22 chapters long. The first two chapters is about this family getting out to North Dakota and deciding where they are going to homestead. You know how they decide that-- They are going ~~about~~ one day, and there is a water hole, and there is prairie for as far as they eye can see, miles and miles and miles. Have you all seen the great plain, do you know what that looks like-- It is just far. And the father says, -Here,- and they pull up the horses, and they get out, and the next twenty chapters of that book is the family just living, and building their life in that place.

That is something like where we are in terms of the building of society. We have all made the decision, fundamentally, that has to go on, that the civilizing process, the human enterprise, needs to be in history. We have all got pretty clear what the problems are. We all see that desert that is there, miles and miles and miles of problem that we are going to have to combat. But now, it is like the decision is, you set down your stake, and you build where you are, you build.