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Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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Remarks by Senator Edmund S. Muskie at the Maine State Democratic Convention

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REMARKS BY SENATOR EDWARD S. MUSKIE
AT THE
MAINE STATE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION
PORTLAND, MAINE
MAY 16, 1970

IN THIS TIME OF NATIONAL STRESS, WE MUST REDEFINE THE
NATURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A POLITICAL PARTY.

FIRST, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT IN A STATE-WIDE OR NATION-
WIDE PARTY THERE NEVER WILL BE UNIFORM THOUGHT OR COMMITMENT ON
EVERY PHASE OF EVERY ISSUE.

SECOND, IN A FREE SOCIETY AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTY IS
NOT BUILT ON A MONOLITHIC IDEOLOGY, BUT ON A BROAD COMMUNITY OF
SHARED INSTINCTS AND INTERESTS ON A VARIETY OF ISSUES.

AND THIRD, A POLITICAL PARTY SHOULD PROVIDE A MECHANISM FOR
RATIONALIZING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION SO THAT DIFFERENT KINDS OF CITIZENS
CAN FIND WAYS TO WORK TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE COMMON OBJECTIVES.

THE ISSUES CONFRONTING AMERICA TODAY ARE AS COMPLEX AS ANY I CAN RECALL, AND IT IS NAIVE TO SUGGEST THAT LARGE NUMBERS OF AMERICANS WILL OR SHOULD REACT TO THEM IN AN IDENTICAL WAY.

ON THE OTHER HAND, ALL OF US PRAY FOR CERTAIN SHARED OBJECTIVES: PEACE AT HOME AND ABROAD, JOB OPPORTUNITIES AND ECONOMIC STABILITY, RACIAL HARMONY, A WHOLE SOME ENVIRONMENT, AND A SENSE OF NATIONAL DECENCY, PURPOSE AND PRIDE.

THESE SHARED OBJECTIVES CAN BE THE BASIS FOR EFFECTIVE POLITICAL ACTION.

THIS YEAR, THE NATION FINDS ITSELF IN A BLEAK SITUATION, NOT UNLIKE WHAT THE DEMOCRATS FOUND IN MAINE IN 1954.

NOW AS THEN, THERE ARE SERIOUS PROBLEMS. NOW AS THEN,
THERE IS A LACK OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP. IN MAINE AND ACROSS THE
COUNTRY, OUR JOB IS TO EARN THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE THAT
LEADERSHIP.

TO DO SO, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE NEARER ANARCHY
THAN AT ANY POINT OF MY LIFETIME.

THE T.V. IMAGES LAST WEEK OF WORKERS ATTACKING STUDENT
PEACE DEMONSTRATORS ON WALL STREET--OF AMERICANS SPILLING THE
BLOOD OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF AMERICANS UNDER A WAVING AMERICAN
FLAG--WERE SHOCKING. THEY SHOULD ALERT EACH OF US TO THE DEPTHS OF
MISUNDERSTANDING AND HATRED THAT DIVIDE US.

THEY SHOULD BE AN URGENT AND CLEAR SUMMONS FOR RESPONSIBLE
POLITICAL REACTION BY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. WE MUST BE HONEST
WITH OURSELVES AND REALISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE AND OUR CAPACITY TO
AFFECT IT.

(a)

IN THE WALL STREET BRAWL AND IN OTHER
INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE ACROSS THE COUNTRY,
STUDENTS, WORKERS, NATIONAL GUARDSMEN,
POLICE AND OTHERS ALL MUST BEAR A PORTION OF
BLAME AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR BLOODSHED.

IN THE WALL STREET CLASH, FOR INSTANCE,
THE WORKERS CANNOT BE CONDONED FOR TAKING
THE LAW INTO THEIR HANDS AND FOR RESORTING
TO PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN THEIR RAGE AND
FRUSTRATION. THEIR ACTIONS FLY IN THE FACE
OF EVERY AMERICAN TRADITION.

(B)

ON THE OTHER HAND, PROTESTERS WHO
CHALLENGE THE SYSTEM, NO MATTER HOW
VALID THEIR COMPLAINT, HAVE SHOWN AN
INSENSITIVITY TO THE ASPIRATIONS AND FEARS
OF THE OLD, THE UNDER- EDUCATED AND THE
WORKING MAN. TO THESE AMERICANS, DEMON-
STRATORS ARE A DIRECT AND PERSONAL THREAT.
THEY RESENT ATTACKS ON A SYSTEM TO WHICH
THEY ARE LOYAL. THEY RESENT ATTACKS ON A
SYSTEM BY THE PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES OF THAT
SYSTEM

(C)

I RAISE THE ISSUE NOT TO FIND FAULT,
BUT TO DEMONSTRATE OUR NEED TO BE SENSITIVE
TO THE ATTITUDES OF OTHERS WITH WHOM WE
DO NOT NECESSARILY AGREE. WE MUST LISTEN
TO ONE ANOTHER. WE MUST RESPECT ONE
ANOTHER WHATEVER THE DIFFERENCES OF OUR
VIEWS.

IT IS OUR JOB AS DEMOCRATS TO BRIDGE
THE GAPS OF MISUNDERSTANDING AND TO WORK
TO PROVIDE THE SAFETY VALVE FOR DISAGREEMENT

(D)

WITHIN OUR PARTY AND AMONG ALL KINDS OF
AMERICANS.

WE WOULD BE WISE TO REMEMBER THAT
FROM THE BEGINNING, OUR SYSTEM HAS TOLERATED
AND PROTECTED DIFFERENCES AMONG AMERICANS,
BUT WE HAVE REJECTED AS NATIONAL POLICY IN-
EQUALITY IN TERMS OF OPPORTUNITY, JUSTICE
OR HUMAN POTENTIAL.

WE HAVE DONE SO BECAUSE OF CERTAIN
VALUES WHICH HAVE PROMOTED FAIR PLAY AND
TRUST.

(E)

WE HAVE REJECTED ARROGANCE, BY THE
PRIVILEGED AND POWERFUL AS WELL AS BY THOSE
WHO HAVE LITTLE TO RISK IN PURSUIT OF THEIR
OBJECTIVES.

WE HAVE REJECTED SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS,
BY THOSE WHO RESIST CHANGE AS WELL AS BY
THOSE WHO PREACH REVOLUTION.

WE HAVE REJECTED INTOLERANCE, BY
THOSE WHO ENLENDABED BY THEIR PREJUDICES
AS WELL AS BY THOSE WHO ARE DEAF TO IDEAS
OTHER THAN THEIR OWN.

(P)

WE HAVE REJECTED SELF-INDULGENCE,
BY THOSE WHO WOULD SOIL THE ENVIRONMENT
FOR PROFIT AS WELL AS BY THOSE WHOSE APPETITES
FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE TRANSCEND THE LAW.

AND WE MUST REJECT VIOLENCE, BY CON-
STRUCTION WORKERS AS WELL AS BY STUDENTS
WHO BURN LIBRARIES AND LABORATORIES.

INSTEAD, WE HONOR HUMILITY, TOLERANCE,
SELF-RESTRAINT, THE ROLE OF LAW, AND PEACE.

I DO NOT SUGGEST THAT WE SHRINK FROM
A CONFRONTATION OF IDEAS. I DO SUGGEST

(G)

THAT WE ADVANCE OUR PERSONAL OBJECTIVES
IN A CONSTRUCTIVE AND RATIONAL WAY,
MINDFUL OF THE ULTIMATE NEED TO REACH AGREE-
MENT ON POLICY AND MINDFUL, TOO OF HUMAN
FAILINGS -- IN OURSELVES AS WELL AS OTHERS.

A FREE SOCIETY CANNOT LONG SURVIVE --
EITHER FREE OR SECURE -- IF FREEDOM IS CONSTRUED
AS A LICENSE FOR SELF-INDULGENCE -- EITHER BY
THOSE WHO HOLD AUTHORITY OR BY THOSE WHO
SEEK IT.

THE LESSON OF OUR NATIONAL EXPERIENCE
IN A FREE SOCIETY IS:

-- THAT COMPROMISE AND CONCILIATION
MAKE PROGRESS POSSIBLE;

-- THAT INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND SELF-
DISCIPLINE ARE INSEPARABLE ALLIES;

-- THAT GOVERNMENT MUST SHOW SELF-
CONTROL IF IT IS TO ASK THE SAME OF THE
GOVERNED;

-- THAT WE MUST NOT ONLY TOLERATE
DISSENT BUT DEFEND IT;

-- THAT THOSE WHO HAVE THE AUTHORITY
HAVE A SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO USE IT WITH
RESTRAINT; AND,

-- THAT THOSE WHO LEAD MUST LISTEN
TO THOSE WHO DISAGREE, AND LISTEN WITH
UNDERSTANDING, TOLERANCE, AND PATIENCE.

THESE PRINCIPLES ARE BASIC TO THE
AMERICAN SYSTEM AND TO THE DEMOCRATIC
PARTY.

IF OUR NATION IS TO BE FREE AND WHOLE,
OUR PARTY MUST BE ITS CONSCIENCE.

WHEN COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE CALLED
"BUMS" BECAUSE THEY PROTEST ADMINISTRATION
POLICY, WE MUST DEFEND THEM.

(J)

WHEN BLACKS ARE TURNED ASIDE BENIGNLY
AND TOLD, "LATER BOY," WE MUST CONTINUE
TO MAKE THEIR CAUSE THE CAUSE OF THIS PARTY.

WHEN REASONABLE OBJECTIONS TO OUR
SOUTHEAST ASIAN POLICIES ARE CALLED "SEDITIONARY
DRIVEL," WE MUST RALLY TO THE DEFENSE OF
SANITY IN THE MAKING OF FOREIGN POLICY.

WHEN CONFIDENCE IN THE SUPREME COURT
IS UNDERMINED BY MEDIOCRE NOMINATIONS,
WE MUST CHALLENGE THE CARSWELL AND HAYNS-
WORTHS.

(K)

WHEN THE NEWS MEDIA ARE INTIMIDATED,
WE MUST DEFEND AND ENCOURAGE THEM.

AND WHEN A PRESIDENT INVADES A NEUTRAL
COUNTRY WITHOUT WARNING AND WITHOUT
CONSULTING THE SENATE OR PREPARING THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE FOR SUCH A PRECIPITOUS
ESCALATION, WE MUST EXPOSE THE TRAGIC
DIMENSIONS OF SUCH ACTION.

(CONTINUED)

1-A

THESE ADMINISTRATION BLUNDERS ARE A LITANY
OF LEADERSHIP MINDLESS OF THE LAST 16 YEARS OF HISTORY
ABROAD, AND DEAF TO THE SOUL OF AMERICANS TODAY AT
HOME.

THIS LITANY OF REPRESSION AND DIVISION HAS
TRIGGERED DESTRUCTIVE FORCES WHICH THREATEN OUR
CIVILIZATION.

THE INDOCHINA WAR POLICIES, RACIAL INJUSTICE
AND POLLUTION ARE RIGHTFUL CAUSES OF UNREST AND
PROTEST.

TO IGNORE LEGITIMATE NEEDS IS AN ACT OF VIOLENCE
AS DETRIMENTAL TO THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM AS BLOODY
CONFRONTATIONS IN THE STREETS.

IN THE FACE OF SUCH NEEDS, SILENCE IS NOT AN
ACT OF PATRIOTISM; STILLNESS IS NOT AN ACT OF LOYALTY.

EACH OF US SHOULD REMEMBER, HOWEVER, THAT
THE STREETS NEED NOT BE THE ONLY TESTING GROUNDS
FOR IDEAS OR THE ONLY SITE OF PROTEST; INDEED,
THERE NEED NOT BE CONFRONTATION OR VIOLENCE TO
DRAMATIZE DISSENT.

OUR FIRST PRIORITY MUST BE A COMMITMENT
TO PRESERVE THE REPUBLIC AND ITS CONSTITUTIONAL
PRIVILEGES OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP. NO LESS A
COMMITMENT IS APPROPRIATE OR JUSTIFIED.

FOR US HERE, ESPECIALLY, THERE IS THE ADDED
CHALLENGE OF REMAINING MINDFUL OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES
OF CITIZENSHIP IN A FREE SOCIETY.

IN MY JUDGMENT, A RATIONAL, SELF-DISCIPLINED
APPROACH TO THE CRITICAL ISSUE OFFERS THE GREATEST
PROMISE FOR NATIONAL SURVIVAL AND PROGRESS--NO
MATTER HOW URGENT THE NEED OR SWIFT OUR RESPONSE.

(3Aa)

FREEDOM IS BEST PRESERVED WHEN DISSENT
IS EXERCISED CONSTRUCTIVELY AND WITH SELF-
CONTROL.

THE IMPACT OF FREE SPEECH IS ENHANCED
WHEN IT TAKES THE FORM OF RESPONSIBLE
RHETORIC, RATIONAL ARGUMENTS, AND AN
INTELLIGENT APPEAL TO OUR NOBLER INSTINCTS.

IN THIS WAY WE ADVANCE OUR OWN CREDIBILITY
AND THE OBJECTIVES OF OUR CAUSE.

IN THIS WAY WE ENHANCE THE PERSUASIVENESS
AND OUR CHANCES FOR ACHIEVING OUR OBJECTIVES,
IN MAINE AND ACROSS THE NATION.