Clipping of Note NUMBER 92

But What Can I Do about It?

or, How to shape public opinion yourself.

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MOST PEOPLE are aware that our Way, the American Way of Life, is being seriously challenged – that if something isn't done, things will get worse instead of better. There may not be agreement on which issue or issues are the most crucial, but among those most frequently mentioned are apathy, conformity, lack of a sense of responsibility, racial conflict, inflation, internationalism, socialism-communism, juvenile delinquency, automobile accidents, government spending, monopoly unionism, foreign competition, and the like.

Yet, we find even those persons most seriously concerned asking this question: "But what can I do about it?" I'd like to have a nickel for every time I have heard this expression from those who earn more than I do. I say it this way to emphasize the fact that so many people, whose capabilities in business fields far exceed mine, plead full ignorance in the all-important business of fulfilling their duty as American citizens.

Salesmen who make hundreds of contacts before they make a sale, advertisers who are happy with a few orders per thousand broadsides mailed, fishermen who will go to any lengths in the mere hope of landing the big one, become very different people when it comes to performing their civic duties. Here, they seem to expect immediate and overwhelming results with a minimum of effort. They underestimate the competition. The grafter, the subversive, and the special interest groups have much to gain by imposing their wills upon legislators and upon the public; and what they gain is immediate. You and I, who want the blessings of liberty secure for ourselves and our posterity, perhaps are less aware of what we gain by defending and advancing Americanism.

Whatever the reason, the fact remains: people seem to like to believe that they can't do anything – so they do nothing. Yet, what each person is capable of doing, and has the ability to do, is most substantial.

Sound Opinions, Well Expressed

First, you must have an opinion, as soundly based and firmly established as possible. Second, you must see that this opinion is expressed in public, for an unknown opinion has no more value than any other form of unknown wealth.

Most of us aren't going to hire a hall, put on our own TV show, or even write a book. But we can, at least in conversations, say we are not convinced (when we aren't), and let those who have made a good point know that we think they have done well. Even those who would remain least involved can do this much. Psychologists have demonstrated that six or seven people, in agreement or disagreement, determine the degree of certainty with which a person holds a conviction. Never underestimate the power of an expressed indication of approval or disapproval.

You are busy, but you do read widely to keep informed. Good! As you read, mark articles, underline cogent phrases, check summarizing paragraphs. Then, send these on to others. If you have time, include a note such as, "This also confirms what you said," or "You may be right, but there does appear to be another side." Formal letters of transmittal are seldom necessary. Just mail these materials where you think they would do the most good.

You may doubt the effectiveness of this technique until you see an editor, to whom you have sent a mailing or two, permanently alter his policies; or a legislator change his vote on an issue. Or, a friend who has been in disagreement with you will come around one day and say: "You know that last item you sent really has something to it. I never thought of it that way." And still people ask: "What can I do about it?"

If most of us did just this

Mr. Kahn, a businessman from Chicago, is perhaps best known for his "Letters to the Editor."

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