



Acme

## ALFRED E. SMITH AND NEIGHBORS

One of the last public appearances of Al Smith bore testimony to his life-long concern for the welfare of people and to the esteem this had won him in human hearts. The above picture taken three months before the onset of his final illness shows the ex-governor of New York State visiting Vladeck Houses, a public housing project on New York City's lower east side only a few blocks from his own birthplace. On the same day, he and members of the Citizens Housing Council visited the site of the proposed Al Smith Houses, a state financed project to be built on the spot where he once went to school. Throughout the tour, the former governor was greeted from all sides by men, women, and children who showed their delight at seeing him. One old woman grabbed his hand, kissed it, and said: "Governor, if

you're down here something good will happen to the neighborhood."

Al Smith's buoyant personality endeared him to millions, and the record of his eight years of governorship proved that the human warmth that radiated from him was sincere. In those years, he led his state in a trail-blazing toward social advance that was soon to be carried forward by the nation. The problems he faced at his inauguration for his first term shortly after the close of World War I are already beginning to reappear on the horizon. Because at that time he demanded and subsequently obtained "more stringent and universal laws for the protection of the health, comfort, welfare and efficiency of the people," his state will be better prepared to meet these problems as they again approach.

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## Social Workers and Politicians

A justice of the City Court in New York, who is also a graduate of the New York School of Social Work, maintains that social workers and politicians have much in common.

MURRAY HEARN

WE know that social workers and politicians are "allergic" to each other. But do they have to be? This ought to be as good a time as any for social workers and politicians to admit that both are members of the human species, and recognize a fact which should have been perfectly obvious all along—that they have much in common.

Both are expected to have the same goal—community betterment. To reach that goal they must work together, for whether social workers and politicians realize it or not, they are interdependent. In our society, they are both here to stay.

### Misconceptions

What is called for is understanding: understanding of the politician on the part of the social worker, and understanding of the social worker on the part of the politician. Before this mutual understanding can be brought about, two misconceptions will have to be erased. The social worker will have to discard his cartoon-inspired idea of the politician as the derby-hatted, cigar-smoking idler, who lives off the taxes of honest citizens. The politician will have to drop the notion of the social worker as an intellectual snob, who never bothers to explain himself to plain spoken folk in public life, or who does so in mystifying technical language, and who snoops and interferes in people's lives for his own satisfaction.

Any effort to break down these imaginary barriers calls for a working definition of the word "politician," which too often is used as a term of opprobrium. Actually it is a general term for anyone actively engaged in affairs of public policy or community significance and connected with political parties. Whatever may have been true in the past, today the success of a politician does not depend on dishonesty. On the contrary, survival in the hard game of politics is surprisingly often accompanied by an invulnerable reputation for ethical and decent behavior.

I do not seek to defend those who have abused their privileges as mobilizers of votes and community leaders. The existence of dishonest and also unqualified politicians cannot be denied. They are not, however, typical. By the same token, there are individual social workers who may exploit their clients or agencies for their own emotional needs. Yet no one would maintain that they are in the majority.

The American attitude towards the man in public life—an attitude all too often fostered by social workers—has done little to raise standards of politics. In England, where a political career stands high among professions (on a plane with medicine and law), the work of the politician is interpreted as a community or national service. Yet in our country, the man in public life is often

regarded as nothing more than a self-seeker. Such an attitude does not encourage the emergence of a high type of politician, nor discourage the existence of the less desirable. On the contrary, self-righteous aloofness from the politician and his work actually impedes the development of higher standards of politics.

Men like Elihu Root, who have sought to apply basic democratic principles, have maintained that no one should be permitted to hold public office for any length of time without close observation by alert and informed private citizens. Good public officials invite scrutiny for two reasons. If their work is well done, they need intelligent support for it and help in interpreting it to the general public. If their work is badly done, they need criticism calculated to improve it. But how much constructive observation of public officials has been performed by social workers, who might reasonably have been expected to share in the task?

### A Civic Responsibility

With occasional exceptions, there is interested participation in elections only when a president, a governor, or congressman is selected. But where do these candidates originate? There is no royal family of statesmen. The statesman of tomorrow is the local politician of today. Those who now sit in high places were once local office holders—councilmen, sheriffs, district attorneys, state legislators,