

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS, as given by Mattachine Midwest, president, Robert Sloane, at the first Open Meeting at the Midland Hotel in July, 1965.

A lack of rights is often taken for granted. People are used to being put upon by government authority. It sometimes takes centuries of dreamers, philosophers, and finally revolutionaries to shake people out of their lethargy, to open their eyes to the fact that they don't have to accept the oppression that has been taken for granted by the oppressed and the oppressors through the ages.

In 1776 our forefathers not only posted notice of their independence from colonial bondage, but proclaimed man's inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to support these newly formulated principles. More and more people rallied around their ideas, giving support that would have been unimaginable a generation or so before. Of course, there were those who said, "What's the use? You can't win," or that old chestnut, "You can't change human nature," as though there were no hope of civilizing people. But as you know, the rebels led by Washington did win their independence.

In the nineteenth century there were those who believed that the institution of slavery would always be with us. After all, it had existed since biblical days, and "you can't change human nature." Yet when the time was ripe, out went slavery. The abolitionists had many well-wishers who agreed that they were right, but never lifted a hand because they were defeatists, without faith.

Until a couple of generations ago the standards of our society kept women from the so-called universal suffrage. Women were kept in an inferior position in the home and on the job, and deprived of the to vote. But in spite of public lethargy women finally won their rights. The fight still goes on for implementing these rights through equal pay, broader job and professional opportunities and wider political participation.

Each generation has the responsibility to guard those rights already achieved and to advance the cause of freedom for all people. As Lincoln said at Gettysburg, "It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced..that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom."

Who could have imagined, a generation ago, the 1954 Supreme Court ruling barring segregated schooling, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the law soon to be enacted on voting rights? The NAACP took cases to the Supreme Court. The Civil Rights movement got a quarter of a million people to march on Washington, organized the Mississippi Summer Project and the marches on Selma, Montgomery and Bogalusa. Under the banner of non-violence, tremendous progress is being made in spite of those who take the old way for granted.

In our time, homosexuals have been the victims of abuses winked at by the law authorities. They have been arrested without due process of law, victimized by odious police methods such as entrapment, manhandled by the police and deprived of legal redress when physically assaulted by gangs. They have been treated as second-class citizens by civil service, the armed forces and employers. This attitude has made some of them vulnerable to blackmail.

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De Tocqueville noted that Americans are great joiners, that every cause has its devotees ready to organize. This is true for the homophile. During the past fifteen years homophile organizations have sprung up all over the country. Each has developed its own program of activity, quite similar in proclaiming the rights to be different and still claim the full protection of the law and protection in one's career. These groups have organized to rededicate themselves to the right of all people including homosexuals, the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They do not ask for special privileges; they demand equal rights.

There are still pessimists who say, "You can't change human nature." Yet the State of Illinois did pass the Model Penal Code, making private relationships between consenting adults legal. The Mattachine Society of Washington, with the cooperation of the National Capital Area Civil Liberties Union, defeated the U.S. Civil Service Commission in appealing the Scott case. Great progress is being made in New York, Philadelphia, and other East Coast cities and in San Francisco, Los Angeles and other West Coast areas. In San Francisco, when the Society for Individual Rights holds a public meeting more than 250 people turn out.

The existing organizations have hoped for a long time that Chicago would catch up, and set up its own organization. With their encouragement this has finally been accomplished. All of us here today are participants in that historical development.

On May 11, less than three months ago, an Ad Hoc Committee of 17 persons gathered to structure a Chicago-based homophile organization. After a series of meetings we broke up into committees to further the launching of a soundly structured group. At our meeting of June 22nd, we adopted a constitution and bylaws, voted ourselves a name, Mattachine Midwest, and elected officers and a board of directors to serve in the interim period until the first elections in November 1965. We have a hard-working board of directors, each with committee responsibilities, and envisage a hard-working membership, with each individual participating in some form of committee activity.

Our work will help many people who will never support or understand our purpose for existence. Nevertheless, those of us who are here tonight have the responsibility to give of ourselves--our money, our time, our minds, our enthusiasm--to strengthen and advance Mattachine Midwest. It is our vehicle in this generation for advancing the rights of the homosexual.

As we discuss the various activities and committees, think what you can do to strengthen this effort. We have an appointment with destiny in our generation, just as the patriots of 1776 had in theirs. Our success will make available to our country all the potential that lies dormant in inhibited and suppressed individuals, perhaps more than fifteen million of them. Let us use all the instruments we have at hand to continue the good fight, to win full equality of treatment for the homosexual.

Just as the civil rights movement draws support from decent white people, so does the fight for the rights of homosexuals draw to it decent heterosexual people. Let us continue to broaden the base of our membership and our support. Let us invite and encourage membership and help from all, regardless of sex or sexual orientation. We may not become a mass movement, but we can hope for tremendous achievements in our time--with your help.