

Firefighters: Their Lives in Their Own Words. Dennis Smith. *Double-day*, \$18.95. When I was a teenager, I wanted to be a fireman. This desire came not from hearing sirens and watching firetrucks, but from reading Smith's bestseller *Report From Engine Company 82*. I was convinced that no job could be as pure and good as fighting fires and saving lives, and this adolescent belief has been largely reaffirmed by Smith's latest book.

Kierkegaard said, "Purity of heart is to will one thing." If this is true, then firefighters have the purest of hearts. The one thing they will is to put out fires. According to Smith, "You go out on a job, you eat some smoke, you take a little heat, and you get the great satisfaction of confronting the flames and defeating them." Purity of heart is to will one thing: death to the flames.

This book of interviews with paid and volunteer firefighters reveals that these civil servants do not worry about ambiguity. Firefighters are "all fundamentally good guys who care about other people," says one; "I joined the fire department because I believe in the individual in American society, individuals helping each other," says another. Who can argue with this?

Of course, firefighters are not saints. Smith describes the language around a firehouse as scatological: he once heard a firefighter use the "F word" 63 times in a commentary on the staleness of a bagel. (And the word wasn't fire.) There is prejudice in fire departments, directed against minorities. And firefighting can strain a family, since it requires so much time away from home. "But the fire department is my first love and always will be my first love," says one fireman. "When duty calls, I have to go."

From this kind of zeal comes courage, and courage is needed if a person is going to walk into flames and thick smoke and rescue people. You can't be lukewarm about a job that requires battling fires in ships, grain elevators, highrises, warehouses, and slums, constantly risking burns, smoke inhalation, and building collapses. But no firefighter is alone. Camaraderie grows from the things that firefighters see: "the shared grief, the loss of another fireman, the loss

of a child at a fire, the unspeakable things."

Strangely enough, there is one simple innovation that would reduce the danger, a change that all firefighters would welcome: mandatory sprinkler laws. Sprinkler systems are extremely effective in stopping fire; in fact, there have never been multiple deaths in a building with an operational sprinkler system. But, according to Smith, politicians are in the pockets of the real estate and construction moguls who know that sprinkler installation cuts profits, so there are very few residential sprinkler laws in the United States. Voters should know, and will one thing: laws requiring sprinklers in all buildings. The passage of such laws would make us all firefighters, and would save 8,000 lives a year.

—Henry G. Brinton

City for Sale: Ed Koch and the Betrayal of New York. Jack Newfield, Wayne Barrett. *Harper & Row*, \$22.50. "Today's reformer is tomorrow's hack," Brooklyn boss Meade Esposito used to say. Esposito had a special knack for making this motto a self-fulfilling prophesy. Surely one of his greatest triumphs was the sell-out he and other New York City machine bosses orchestrated around

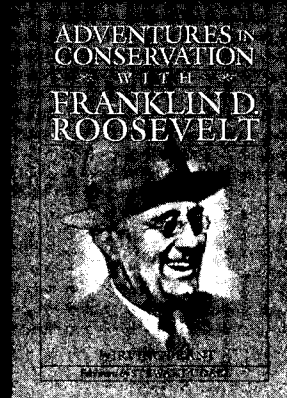
Ed Koch. When he was elected mayor in 1977 Koch's reputation rested on his antimachine credentials. But by 1982, he was kicking off an ill-fated gubernatorial campaign with a press conference flanked by Democratic party bosses—Bronx boss Stanley Friedman (convicted in 1987 for bribery and racketeering), Queens boss Donald Manes (who committed suicide in 1986 while under investigation), and Esposito (convicted in 1988 for bribing Rep. Mario Biaggi). The reformer had come full circle.

That is the central story of *City for Sale*, written by *Village Voice* reporters Jack Newfield—who moved to the New York *Daily News* in mid-1988—and Wayne Barrett. The book's timing is particularly apt, as it was released during the Bess Myerson trial (which had featured testimony from the mayor himself). And in January yet another city hall patronage scandal began breaking, with revelations that the bosses exposed in this book used a Koch-initiated affirmative action program to place their hacks in key city agencies. With the mayoral primary coming in September, investigative journalists and opportunistic opponents are going to have a field day examining the paper trail of corruption. *City for Sale* may be the first book to document the corruption in Koch's ad-

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ministration, but it probably won't be the last.

Municipal corruption in New York has a lustrous history. Koch knew exactly how to play this legacy to voters. A liberal congressman from an ultraliberal Manhattan district, Koch had a history of reform that was almost as deep-seated as his ambition. To be elected mayor of the entire city in 1977, however, required several measures designed to distance himself from the image of the goo-goo from Greenwich Village. One way was to parade about with Myerson, the politically connected former Miss America, to thwart rumors that Koch was a homosexual. The second strategy was to publicly support the death penalty, a popular issue with

which Koch could needle two of his strongest primary opponents, Bella Abzug and Mario Cuomo.

But the final and most devastating deception was cutting deals with the party machines. Koch's platform was staunchly antimachine. His campaign slogan—"After eight years of charisma and four years of the clubhouse, why not try competence?"—was aimed at incumbent Abraham Beame, a crony of Esposito's who had put the city in financial ruin. Privately, however, Koch knew he could not win without machine support. In a tight New York campaign there is simply no substitute for the logistical aid—petitioning, clubhouse endorsements, palm cards, phone banking—that the machines

dispense. This became clearest after the September 1977 primary, in which he and Cuomo finished with the most votes, requiring a runoff election. Koch badly needed the Brooklyn and Bronx votes that only the machine could deliver, but he couldn't afford the negative publicity of being endorsed by a party hack, especially one with reputed mob ties like Esposito's.

So at a Sunday morning breakfast at Esposito's mother's home, Esposito agreed to give Koch secret logistical support in return for access to his administration. Newfield quotes Esposito as later bragging: "I get whatever I fucking want from [Koch]. I told him not to dump our captains, and he said no problem. He promised me access and that he would be a good mayor. . . . [Koch media adviser David] Garth didn't want to use my name. . . . But everyone knew I was calling the shots." Koch cut a similar deal with Bronx boss Stanley Friedman.

Once Koch took office, funny things began to happen. Machine captains were not fired; in fact many were promoted to high positions in contract-rich agencies. Koch appointed Anthony Ameruso, an Esposito crony, as commissioner of transportation, even though a screening panel Koch personally established found Ameruso unqualified. The Parking Violations Bureau was run on a complex system involving hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes, which went to PVB chief Lester Shafran and to Manes. Friedman held 167,000 shares in a dummy company called Citisource, which received a \$22 million contract from the bureau to build hand-held computers for parking meters, even though Citisource had no assets, no employees, and no computer. (A systems analyst who pointed out these facts was told he'd be fired if he didn't recommend Citisource.) When evidence of corrupt activity made it to city hall, it was ignored or suppressed.

Why did Koch, whom not even his most severe critics consider personally corrupt, tolerate the mess around him? Newfield and Barrett argue that he continued to need the machines. Jay Turoff, Koch's head of the Taxi and Limousine Commission, for example, personally supervised the use

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