

POLITICS AND BRICKBATS

By SEN. THOMAS J. DODD (D., CONN.)
(A Holmes Alexander Guest Column)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Any one who wants to play an active role in politics has to be prepared for brickbats — and I believe that I have in my time received more than my share of them. About this I do not complain, because I embarked upon my political career with my eyes wide open to the hazards.



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Prolonged exposure to brickbats inevitably toughens one's hide, and a certain amount of adversity makes a man a better politician — and a sadder one.

IF YOU ARE profoundly convinced of the rightness of the policies you are advocating, then it does not matter too much what your opponents say about you. Neither does it matter too much if you appear for a time to be isolated, nor if your views and actions are twisted and misrepresented.

Like most politicians, I have had my ups and downs, my brickbats and my accolades. If I have had on occasion to endure vilification and slander, I have also had the very great satisfaction of seeing certain of my political views converted into law and policies I have advocated in the field of foreign affairs ultimately adopted by our government.

By and large I have relished the give and take and even the inevitable campaign roughhouse with political opponents. Sometimes in the course of a heated campaign I might be angered by what I consider to be a foul blow by my opponent. But I have always found that campaign wounds heal quickly and that, once the campaign is over, even the bitterest political rivals can again become firm friends.

ORDINARY political brickbats are one thing. It is an altogether different thing when you are made the target of a sustained attack of character assassination by a nationally syndicated columnist.

In inviting me to write this guest column, Holmes Alexander has asked me how it feels to be attacked in column after column, day after day, accused of villainy after villainy — and in a sense left helpless to reply because my opponents can direct their attack against me through the columns of several hundred newspapers, while I, myself must patiently wait for the final verdict of the Senate Ethics Committee and of the courts.

I shall answer frankly by saying that this is a terrible ordeal for any public figure to endure.

No matter how certain you may be of your own innocence, no matter how confident of the ultimate verdict, you can't help wondering how many of the lies and distortions are actually believed by your supporters, and you can't help being concerned over the anguish such a campaign inflicts on your wife and children.

I MUST SAY that all the members of my family, from my wife, Grace, to my youngest son, Nicky, have borne themselves like so many Spartans. If they have suffered, they have not permitted me to see it. Grace has summed up her own attitude in these words: "If you were guilty and no one said a word about it, I would hide my head in shame. But because I know you're innocent, I can hold my head high no matter what may be said about you by your enemies."

The attitude of my family has been a tremendous source of comfort and encouragement to me in my present ordeal. I have also been heartened by the hundreds of letters I have received from old friends, assuring me of their continued friendship and support. If a single one of these old friends had turned against me, it would have hurt me far more than I would care to admit. But so far they have been loyal to a man — and this is something for which I shall always be profoundly grateful.

No words can express how much the dedication and loyalty of my staff members have

meant to me. Contrary to the impression which the few staff members who betrayed me have sought to create, the overwhelming majority of the present and previous members of my staff have remained personally loyal to me, and they have sought to show their loyalty in many different ways.

NATIONWIDE the mail count to date has been roughly 10-to-1 in my favor, while from the State of Connecticut it has been running approximately 20-to-1.

Some of my friends wonder at my ability to bear up under sustained attack. And I can only answer them by saying that I bear up because of my own clear conscience and because of the encouragement of my family, my friends, my staff and my many thousands of supporters in Connecticut and across the nation.

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