

# POLITICS

BY THE AUTHOR OF MAYOR

WARNER BOOKS \$4.50 U.S.A. 32300-4 (\$5.95 CAN. 32301-2)

A photograph of Edward I. Koch, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, wearing a light blue dress shirt and a red and blue striped tie. He is smiling and has both arms raised in the air. In the background, the white dome of the United States Capitol building is visible against a clear blue sky.

## EDWARD I. KOCH

"Like Mr. Koch, *Politics* is zestfully combative, iconoclastically outspoken, mischievously sharp-witted, wickedly entertaining and, often, just plain fun."

—*New York Times*

# POLITICS

**EDWARD I. KOCH**

WITH  
**WILLIAM RAUCH**



**WARNER BOOKS**

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# POLITICS

"More than any other people in the world, Americans identify with their own government. They see it as their own. They want to make it better. Participation is the fundamental strength of politics in America. There are those, and many times they are the best among us, who want to participate actively in the process of government. They want to give something *back* to America, so they make themselves available to the political process.

"Winning in politics and getting to the top of government is a special trip that few people take. I have been one of the lucky ones."

"This is how it happened..."

—Edward I. Koch

**Please turn this page  
for the critics' response  
to Edward I. Koch's  
first bestseller, *Mayor*.**

# The Press Hails

“Outrageous... engrossing... not merely a chronicle of Koch's achievements. It is, more remarkably, an idiosyncratic collection of Koch's observations on just about everyone.”  
—*People*

“A portrait of a politician who loves his job... it's hard to name another memoir that seems so self-revealing.” —*Fortune*

“Not only revealing but also readable... with a candor that is refreshing for its audacity.”  
—*Russell Baker, New York Times*

“Koch proves he's an original... I love it—the whole frolic of Ed Koch and his mayoral memoirs. I relish the sheer enjoyment of his earthy judgment of foe and friend alike.”  
—*Max Lerner, New York Post*

“The book by the mayor of New York that has flabbergasted just about everybody in publishing... almost makes us believe the romance of La Guardia and the promise of Lindsay have returned at last. He is impish, funny, street smart... which is to say, he represents New York very well.”  
—*San Francisco Chronicle*

**ALSO BY EDWARD I. KOCH**

**Mayor**

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TO DAVID GARTH

A media wizard without whom  
I couldn't have been elected in 1977.  
And, more important, my friend.

TO RON DELLUMS

A brilliant congressman and politician,  
a credit to his constituency,  
and a colleague in the Congress.

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## Introduction

IF YOU HAVE READ MY FIRST BOOK, *Mayor*, I hope you liked my candid writing style—for this book is no different. But this second book is not simply more of the same. It examines different issues and shows the way the art of politics is practiced. Most of all it probes further, at least from my point of view, into interesting and complex people who govern or seek to govern. Many are people you know. They are people who have affected all of our lives through their judgments.

What I've tried to do in these pages is to relate by example and anecdote my philosophy and approach to political problems. *Politics* takes the form of a mélange of political and governmental experiences most of which occurred before I became mayor.

This is the most interesting of professions. Politics



can have intimate, seminal, exhilarating and depressing impacts upon both the politician and the constituent. Politics may be the only vehicle by which you can reach the heights or the depths, all in what seems to be a single moment, while the things that are accomplished, or left undone, last lifetimes.

I have tried in the course of my political career never to tack to the wind. That does not mean, however, that I have not compromised positions in order to achieve goals. Nor does it mean I haven't given up when I thought the fight was too great, or the energy required was too much to deliver at that moment.

I have found, and it is something we in politics have all heard about, that the enemies of yesterday can become the associates of today and the friends of tomorrow.

In truth many of the best people come into politics and government. Few but the best could withstand the scrutiny at the top. They do it because they know there is no other field of endeavor that can provide the same satisfaction—albeit not the same large sums of money that are to be made in the private sector. They come because it is exciting, challenging and fulfilling like no other job.

I hope that this book becomes a primer for those who might be considering an entrance into the fray by running for public office, and even a guide for those who wish to be less directly involved.

A political life requires courage. It requires an ability to roll with the punches. It rewards those who have learned to punch back. It takes a special commitment. Most people are satisfied to enjoy politics vicariously. Some just read about it. Some volunteer their time to

work on campaigns. Others seek a more direct stake in the outcome by making large political contributions.

Political contributors are a lot like horse players. They try to predict the future and pick a winner. They are willing to take a chance and back up their beliefs with their money. As with the bettor who backs a winning horse, a financial contributor to a successful political campaign can also get an enormous sense of satisfaction. But that's where the analogy ends for me. If a campaign contributor is looking for a financial return on his/her money, if they think it will assist them in their business or professional dealings with me, they are making a big mistake. Those people obviously don't yet know me. In this area I have been accused of monumental ingratitude. I'm guilty. I try to judge every issue on the merits. There are no quid pro quos. The vast majority of public officials believe and act the same way. That doesn't mean there aren't substantial rewards for political contributors who back candidates they truly believe in. They may leave a positive mark on the generations to come. They may find that in that sense they get back much more than they give. They may be the one who got it started, made it happen.

I have said time and time again as a son of the City of New York, born in the Bronx, that I believe public service is the noblest of professions if done honestly and done well. I know I do it honestly. I believe that most people think I have done it well. This city and this country have given me so much. They opened their arms to my parents from Poland as immigrants in the early 1900s. They permitted me to rise to one of the highest positions in government in this country. I am motivated by the wish to give something back to this

city and country, to the best of my ability, greater than that given to me. While I can never possibly repay this country for the opportunities I have received, I will continue to try.

I hope this book inspires others to enter politics and government. We all owe so much.

E.I.K.

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## **“On the Merits”**

PATRONAGE IS NOT ILLEGAL, and patronage does not necessarily corrupt. It is simply not the best way to run a government.

Patronage was best described by Meade Esposito when he retired as Brooklyn Democratic county chairman in 1984 and, waxing philosophical, decided to tell the reporters exactly how patronage had worked for him. He gave the following illustration: In 1973 he had supported Abraham Beame for mayor, and immediately after Abe Beame had won the primary Beame called him and said, “Meade, you have six commissionerships.”\* What that in fact means is one of

\*See *The New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1984, p. B3.

two things. It could mean that whatever six people Meade Esposito might have sent to Beame for the six commissionerships that had been given to him, Beame would have appointed those six people without further inquiry. That is one form of patronage. Or, a better form from the point of view of the government, and probably what was intended, would be that these positions "belonged" to Meade Esposito and that they would not be filled until he, Meade Esposito, had sent someone who was qualified to hold the position, insofar as Abe Beame decided what "qualified" meant. It was by these rules that the game was played in the City of New York for many years.

I decided early on, and I have never deviated from this, that patronage was not going to be helpful to providing the best government for the City of New York at least in the difficult times in which I governed. And so I said to the Democratic county leaders at our first meeting at City Hall, "I want everybody to know, and I hope everybody understands it, that my government will not deal in patronage with respect to jobs in government. With respect to jobs in government, I'm happy to receive your recommendations, but I will make the determination as to who gets the positions, basically commissioner and deputy commissioner jobs, and will fill jobs on the basis of who's best irrespective of where they come from. I'm happy to have your resumés for the purposes of interviewing people, and I will interview them. But the ultimate selection will be on the basis of who's most qualified. With respect to

judgeships I don't want your resumés, because judgeships will not be filled through any political procedure whatsoever. It will not be held against candidates if they happen to be involved politically. They have to go through the Mayor's Judiciary Committee, and if you want to recommend them to that committee feel free to do so. But you should know now that there will undoubtedly be mostly self-initiating applications there. Most applicants will be qualified lawyers who will just say that they want to be considered."

There was a silent gasp in the room, because this surely was not what the county leaders expected. And then I said to them, "In order to make up for what I've just said to you now, I also want you to know that I will be doing two things for you. I will support your candidates for public office unless I have reason to believe they're corrupt, but other than that I'm not going to go into the question as to whether or not they are equal to, better than or worse than their opponents. If they're yours, I'm for them. And, secondly, I will come to your fund-raisers, and if my name is helpful in raising money, fine."

I have never deviated from either of these two positions. I also said to the commissioners at about the same time, "You are given the authority by me to pick your subordinates. I want you to look at the whole field of prospective applicants. If I ever find out that you've discriminated based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, et cetera, I'll fire you. But if you don't discriminate on that basis and you take whoever you think is the

best, I'm not going to clear those with you, they're yours. Don't call me when you hire and don't call me when you fire. The reason I'm doing this is I don't want you ever to be in the position that if I find fault with you you will say to me that I prevented you from doing your job because I sent you palookas whom you had to hire. If you have palookas on your staff, they're there because you put them on.

And I will tell you something else. I'm suggesting to you now that you look at all the people who work for you and those who are subject to being removed from the payroll because they are not civil service, or to being demoted because they are civil service but are working at higher levels than those at which they are protected by civil service—that you take the action to remove or demote now, in the first thirty days of your appointment, because after that you're going to come to love these people. You're going to get to know their wives and children and you're not going to fire them or demote them. That's the nature of the world."

I know that every one of my commissioners, with maybe a few exceptions, makes deals with the county chairmen and the district leaders and the members of the City Council, not in any corrupt way but because they believe it is in their interest to maintain good relationships in getting legislation or budgets through or getting the assistance of district or county leaders. I'm not blind to that. Nevertheless, the practice is vastly reduced and I'm not part of it. And it's not as though I want to be like Caesar's wife. It's just that I believe that



handling it this way reduces the incompetence and the corruption, notwithstanding the fact that both will be present in every administration.

Having established the rules, I then had to deal with the appeals for exceptions and so forth. That was inevitable, politicians being what they are, the ego, etc. And some of the appeals were memorable experiences. One I remember now clearly eight years later (there have been several refresher appeals on this one since then) is the case of Gurston Goldin, Jay Goldin's brother.

Jay Goldin had been elected comptroller, the second-highest job in the city government, in 1973. That was the year in which Beame was elected mayor. And sometime after that Abe Beame had appointed Gurston Goldin to the Board of Higher Education. Gurston Goldin is a psychiatrist. He is probably a very good psychiatrist.

Early on this became an issue, and Jay came in. He said to me, "I would like you, as a personal favor, to reappoint my brother to the Board of Higher Education."

I said, "Well, Jay, I'll think about it, but I can't make you a promise on that. I'll determine that after I inquire as to what's in the best interest of the composition of that board and the city."

He then said that to him this was "the most important matter of any matter" that we would ever discuss and that Abe Beame had obliged him in a similar conversation and that being on the Board of Higher Education was the most important agenda item for his brother Gurston.