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STANLEY M. ISAACS: THE CONSCIENCE OF NEW YORK

by

TERRY S. RUDERMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in History in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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1977

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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To Jerry

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CHAPTER I

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

"I was on my own this weekend and devised the idea of following John H. Finley's stunt hiking around [Manhattan] island....It's a good game. You begin by going right to the river - East or Hudson, it doesn't matter and start to walk around the island....Why travel abroad when you can go through Bohemia, Poland, Italy and most other countries - and see your own city at the same time?"¹

This was 1925. After hiking thirty-four miles, Stanley Isaacs, more excited than tired, wrote enthusiastically of his adventure, never imagining that twelve years later he would be serving Manhattan as its Borough President and later as a City Councilman. In 1925 Isaacs was well known in New York through his efforts in housing reform and the settlement movement. His years as a liberal Republican office holder battling as a minority voice in his own party, and in government, still lay ahead.

The Isaacs' family fascination with Manhattan went

¹Stanley Isaacs to Edith Isaacs, New York, 2 August 1925, Personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

back two generations to Stanley Isaacs' grandfather Samuel Isaacs. Born in Holland in 1804, Samuel Isaacs migrated to England in 1814 after his father, a banker, suffered financially during the Napoleonic wars. Prior to his move to America, Samuel Isaacs pursued rabbinical studies and had been principal of an educational institution, Neve Tsedek, in West Norwood, London. At the age of thirty-five he left his post to become Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Jeshuron in New York City.¹ In 1845, after a split in this body he became the first minister of the Congregation Shaaray Tefilia and remained with them until his death in 1878. This group, composed mainly of English Jews, sought to "worship therein according to the rites and usages of Polish and German Jews" as opposed to the simpler Sefardic (Spanish) customs of the earlier Jewish settlers in New York City.² During this period while reform Judaism steadily made gains among New York City Jews, Samuel Isaacs firmly maintained Orthodox traditions in his temple.

The Isaacs family continued an involvement with the Shaaray Tefilia Synagogue through service on its Board of Trustees for the next hundred years. In 1945 Stanley Isaacs chaired the centennial committee of the congregation.³

¹Simon Cohen, Shaaray Tefilia: A History of its Hundred Years (New York: Greenberg, 1945), p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Notes for Centenary Booklet of West End Synagogue, September 1945, Stanley M. Isaacs Papers, Box 12, New York Public Library, New York. Hereafter referred to as Stanley Isaacs Papers.

Rabbi Isaacs' influence extended beyond his own temple. In 1857 he founded the Jewish Messenger, the first Jewish newspaper written in English in the United States. This publication introduced Rabbi Isaacs and Judaism to the Christian community. Its pages gave news of home and abroad, campaigned against the rising movement of reform Judaism and offered political views. Isaacs' support of the anti-slavery crusade lost many Southern subscribers; whereupon he wrote "we want subscribers for without them we cannot publish a paper and Judaism needs an organ; but we want much more truth and loyalty and for that we are ready if we must to sacrifice all other considerations".¹ Despite the consequences, Rabbi Isaacs insisted on his principles. His grandson, Stanley Isaacs, displayed this same trait many times.

During the Civil War Rabbi Isaacs organized relief for the wounded. In 1865 he represented the Jewish faith at Lincoln's memorial service in New York City. Rabbi Isaacs instilled a sense of service in his children. He and his son Myer played major roles in the formation of the first Jewish charitable organizations in New York. These included the Young Men's Hebrew Association, Mt. Sinai Hospital and the Hebrew Free School Association.²

¹Cohen, Shaaray Tefilia, p. 75.

²Memo as to Jewish Connections of Stanley Isaacs, 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

Samuel Isaacs' children were involved in their father's publication, temple and causes. From these contacts, his son Myer married Maria Solomon, the daughter of Barnet L. Solomon, who was then President of Shaaray Tefilia. Maria, like her husband, was a native New Yorker of English ancestry.¹

Myer Isaacs followed his father in the tradition of civic involvement. In 1891 he organized the Baron de Hirsch Fund, along with such New York Jewish leaders as Jesse Seligman, Jacob H. Schiff and Oscar Strauss. This foundation dedicated itself to the problems of the new immigrants to the United States.² Years after his father's death, Stanley Isaacs became active in this fund and served as its Vice President. Like his grandfather and father, he continued to help his co-religionists through charitable participation in the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, the American Jewish Committee and the United Jewish Appeal.³

By profession Myer Isaacs was an attorney. In 1870, he and his brother Isaac established the firm of M. S. and I. S. Isaacs, specializing in wills and trusts and real estate law. Myer also lectured in these fields at his alma mater,

¹Stanley Isaacs to Pauline Kolsky, 19 June 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

²Deed of Trust, Certificate of Incorporation, By-Laws of Baron de Hirsch Fund, 1924, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 41.

³Memo as to Jewish Connections of Stanley Isaacs, 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

New York University Law School. In 1880 Governor Alonzo B. Cornell appointed Isaacs Judge of the Marine Court of New York City.¹

Like his father, Myer Isaacs reached out to help others. He became active in the settlement movement and in 1899 founded the Educational Alliance, the second settlement house in New York.² Myer Isaacs' civic pursuits also involved him with the immigrants on the Lower East Side. In 1897, Mayor William L. Strong appointed Isaacs, along with Abram Hewitt and Jacob Riis, to a Commission of small parks in New York City. Their recommendations and efforts led to the establishment of Seward and Hamilton Fish Parks.³

Stanley Myer Isaacs was born September 27, 1882, the youngest of Myer and Maria's six children. From the beginning Stanley lived in the city council district that he later represented. Born on Lexington Avenue between Sixty-third and Sixty-fourth Streets, he moved to a brownstone on East Seventy-third Street at the age of five. Two years later his mother died, at which point Minnie, the oldest sister, took charge and helped to raise the five younger children.⁴

¹J. M. Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," The New Yorker, 12 December 1959, p. 62.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, Oral History Project, Columbia University, 1959, p. 9.

³Stanley Isaacs to Jacob Marcus, 31 October 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

⁴Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," p. 67.

Minnie supplemented her duties with charitable activities. Another sister, Alice, became head of the Botany Department at Hunter College, as well as an organizer of the Lenox Hill Neighborhood Association and Memorial Camp. She married William C. Popper, a founder, along with Myer Isaacs, of the Educational Alliance. Estelle, the "least sparkling of the clan" had been a teacher before her marriage to Adam Frank, a lawyer.¹

Judge Isaacs' legal career inspired his children. Encouraged by his example, all three sons, Julian, Lewis and Stanley became lawyers. Unfortunately, Julian's career ended prematurely at the age of thirty-two when he died from tuberculosis. Lewis, the middle son, was the artistic member of the family. Besides his legal vocation, he was a part time composer and one of the founders of the MacDowell Colony in Petersborough, New Hampshire, where writers, artists and musicians worked undisturbed in individual cabins.² His wife Edith published and edited Theatre Arts magazine. Myer Isaacs' brother Isaac and his daughter Isabel, whose mother died in childbirth, also lived at the Seventy-third Street

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With a City (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 8-9.

²Flagler, "The Public Be Served I", p. 62.

townhouse. Isabel was brought up practically as a sibling to Myer Isaacs' children.¹ Stanley, the youngest in his family went on to have the most distinguished career of all.

His formal education began at Normal College, later renamed the Model School of Hunter College. Then he enrolled at Sachs Collegiate Institute² which attracted students primarily from the prominent German Jewish families in New York. Founded by Dr. Julius Sachs, an "Old World schoolmaster whose uniformed boys in smart black suits and starched stand-up collars, were seldom spared the rod, the school emphasized the classics, languages (including German) and Teutonic discipline".³ Stanley felt that the "program gave excellent training for college. There weren't any athletic nor other activities".⁴ Here, young Isaacs mingled with the same group that participated in the various Jewish charities. These contacts Stanley kept for life.

At Columbia, where Isaacs attended college, he was part of an institution in the midst of exciting change. In

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With a City, p. 9.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 3.

³Stephen Birmingham, Our Crowd (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967), p. 160.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 3.

1897, the university moved from its Forty-ninth Street location to the Morningside Heights campus, on a site previously occupied by the Bloomingdale Asylum for the Insane. At the turn of the century this area was remote and inaccessible. A classmate of Isaacs' wrote "the el still rumbled overhead on Columbus Avenue, the first spadeful of dirt for the subway system had not been dug and horse cars rolled on both Amsterdam Avenue and Broadway".¹ For a decade, Seth Low, as President of Columbia, had developed the school in every direction. Low, a wealthy businessman, raised large sums of money, making the school's move possible. He personally contributed one million dollars for the new library.² Low's efforts to create a great university extended beyond the physical plant to the quality of the faculty he recruited. On the way to receiving his B. A. in 1903, Stanley Isaacs studied with such distinguished men as John W. Burgess, Frank Bassett Moore, Edwin R. A. Seligman and Henry Seager. Isaacs received a M. A. in political science in 1904 and felt most influenced by the men of that department.³

John W. Burgess, as illustrated in his major work, Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law, promoted

¹H. R. Steeves, "Memories of Goatville Days", University on the Heights, ed., Wesley Frist (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 138.

²Horace Coon, Columbia: Colossus on the Hudson (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1947), p. 88.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 6.

the scientific principles of German scholarship in historical research.¹ His course on constitutional law for thirty-five years exerted "a lasting influence on thousands of students and established Burgess as dean of American Constitutional historians".²

Frank Bassett Moore was a prominent scholar in international law. He had practical experience as counsel of the Paris Peace Commission after the Spanish American War, as well as a History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to which the United States has been a Party and A Digest of International Law to his credit.³ Even as Borough President Stanley Isaacs often thought of Moore. "You may not remember me," Isaacs wrote to his former professor in 1940, "I attended your lectures at Columbia in 1904 and still remember the clarity with which you presented complicated issues. The political science department at Columbia that year was splendidly staffed and I think I learned more from my M. A. work than I gathered from any other year's study. Even in this local post I find myself dabbling...in international affairs."⁴

¹Richard Hofstadter, "The Department of History", The History of The Faculty of Political Science Columbia University, ed., R. Gordon Hoxie (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 213.

²R. Gordon Hoxie, ed., History of the Faculty of Political Science Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 73.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to John Bassett Moore, 4 December 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

In the economics department Isaacs noted the influence of Henry Seager and Edwin R. A. Seligman.¹ Both men cautiously championed many liberal doctrines. Seligman supported the income tax while staunchly defending the institution of private property.² After graduating, Isaacs met both professors again in politics. These men did not restrict their interest in municipal affairs to academic study. In 1901, Seligman, recognizing the short lived nature of bursts of reform, helped establish the City Club and the Bureau of Municipal Research.³

Author Melville Cane, another Columbia alumnus of this period, referred to this era at school as the "Woodberry Years", after George Woodberry, professor of comparative literature. Describing the scholar as "distinguished alike as poet, biographer and literary essayist, especially noted as an editor of Shelley and a biographer of Poe and Hawthorne", Cane felt that Woodberry would "always be cherished by those who sat in his classes rather as a great teacher, a great spirit". Stanley Isaacs was also inspired by Woodberry. "He gave me a clearer insight into English literature, into

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 6.

²Hoxie, History of the Political Science Faculty, p. 3.

³Ibid., p. 71.

⁴Melville Cane, "The Woodberry Years," University of the Heights, ed. Wesley First, (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1969), p. 96.

poetry, into essays and into abstract literature than I could possibly have gotten from anyone else. He made me appreciate things that I would have passed by and I think I remember them. I happen to have a mind that's interested in concrete things to a great extent," he explained. "My reading goes along the lines of history and biography rather than either philosophy or literature in general. He made me like poetry. At least at the time."¹

Stanley Isaacs made Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year and graduated first in the class of 1903.² Although basically a modest person, Isaacs took great pride in this achievement and for the rest of his life proudly wore his Phi Beta Kappa key at all times.³

During his college years, Stanley started a club for youngsters at the Educational Alliance, the settlement his father founded. After the establishment of the Surprise Lake Camp for the underprivileged in 1902, Stanley became an active participant there and took his boys from the club to the camp. Years later, he became a trustee of the settlement and its President for a while, also a director of Surprise Lake Camp. Stanley felt these early experiences

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 6.

²Ibid., p. 6.

³Elinor Guggenheimer, interview, New York, 17 November 1973.

"gave me a better background concerning the problems of the people of New York City than I could have gotten in any other way."¹ Through work in the settlement, he achieved direct contact with the people he assisted.²

Stanley Isaacs began law school at Columbia but found it "rather unsatisfactory. It was a time of transition. Dean Keener had resigned a year or two before, Dr. Kirchwey whom I admired was very much the Dean but the school was in a state of flux."³ In the winter of 1903 the Trustees Committee on Education concluded that the Law School's course of study needed complete revision. They sought to tailor training more to the needs of a practicing attorney, reduce the number of credits required for a degree, schedule classes so that students could work part time and adopt a qualitative system, giving additional credit for work done well and penalizing work done poorly.⁴ These general complaints, along with his father's death in 1904, caused Stanley to transfer to New York Law School. This switch enabled him to graduate in 1905, a year earlier

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 10.

²Helen Harris, interview, New York, 22 December 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 5.

⁴Julius Goebel, Jr., ed. A History of the School of Law; Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 189-190.

than expected, and begin working.¹ Upon his admittance to the New York State Bar, Stanley, following in his father's footsteps, joined the family firm of M. S. and I. S. Isaacs. In 1907, a partnership was formed between Stanley, his brother Lewis and Henry Mack² in what became primarily a real estate practice.

In the summer of 1900, Eddie Prince, an acquaintance of Stanley's had tried to play matchmaker and brought Stanley to Edith Somborn's house hoping to encourage a romance. The evening passed awkwardly and nothing materialized. Two years later, as a junior at Columbia, Stanley accidentally ran into Edith, who was now a freshman at Barnard College. A phone call followed. Once again Stanley and Eddie came to call on Edith, the beginning of many such visits. Edith was enthusiastic but felt "why bring Eddie? He wasn't especially interesting to me...and I didn't see why we needed a third person. But Stanley did, for the first few years, and Eddie was a most obliging chaperone. After a half hour of talk he would complain of fatigue, yawn audibly and retire to a comfortable chair, where he would promptly fall asleep. This became a signal for Stanley to move hesitantly closer and hold my hand."³

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 5.

²Partnership agreement between Lewis M. Isaacs, Henry Mack and Stanley Isaacs, 1 January 1907, New York, in possession of the author.

³Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 4.

In contrast to the intellectual bent of the Isaacs clan, the Somborn family had emigrated from Germany and were merchants who had invested in real estate. They could not boast of distinguished PhD.'s, college graduates, or spiritual leaders. Edith's father was the American representative for Jules Mumm Champagne. As a good student, Edith was an exception in her family. At school, Stanley, rather than her family, encouraged Edith to study hard. He promised to buy her a Phi Beta Kappa Key if she achieved this honor. This inducement worked. One day Stanley received a phone call from Edith: "have you got five dollars?...for a Phi Beta Kappa Key?" Edith recalled, he was so pleased and answered, "that's the nicest way of spending five dollars".¹

They saw one another regularly for a few years. "Although," Mrs. Isaacs wrote, "he made quite clear what he felt for me, he didn't mention marriage, and I knew he wouldn't until he could support a family." The closest remark resembling a proposal came in 1908 when Stanley suddenly asked, "when we're married, do you want to live in the city or the country?" Edith replied "the city" and he agreed "that's what I want too." After that, Eddie stopped coming along with them and the engagement was on.²

¹Ibid., p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 4.

The couple married in 1910 and set up housekeeping in an apartment on Park Avenue and Eighty-ninth Street. Like many young couples, they had to make certain accommodations to each other. Edith admits to having been spoiled as the youngest child in her family. Her father died when she was ten and her mother never scolded. "I would rush off to school (usually late) leaving things in the greatest disorder, and come home to find them neatly put away."¹ Stanley was a meticulous person. Fortunately, for their relationship, Edith gradually became more organized and stopped leaving things in disarray.²

Attempting to be punctual continually plagued Edith. Coming from a house where "no two clocks were ever the same...it was one of the most difficult adjustments I had to make..." she wrote. "It wasn't easy but I soon realized that if my marriage was to be happy I had to reform. I worked at it and after a year or two did pretty well."³ Still, Edith could not always conform to her husband's precisely planned schedules. This brought out Stanley's temper at home, which he generally concealed in public. Usually, he got over these outbursts quickly.⁴ "His apologies were

¹Ibid., p. 10.

²Edith Isaacs, interview, New York, 28 December 1971.

³Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 10.

⁴Millicent Sturm, interview, New York, 20 October 1973.

always delightful," according to Mrs. Isaacs, "they made up for his scoldings." 'I'm sorry I was so prompt,' he would say contritely, 'I didn't mean to be,' or 'my watch must be fast, I'll set it back two hours and this will never happen again.'¹

Stanley did his share of compromising too. Brought up frugally, with careful attention to how money was spent, he felt his wife should keep accurate records of household and personal expenses. He gave her a book orderly arranged for entries under the categories of food, household supplies, clothing, gifts, contributions and miscellaneous. Edith never mastered bookkeeping. A year passed with miscellaneous by far the largest grouping. For a birthday present Edith requested "no more accounts". Stanley laughed and conceded "they aren't much use the way your keep them anyway, so okay."²

Although Edith's family practiced very little religion, she agreed to follow the Jewish dietary laws. Brought up in a Kosher home, Stanley wanted to continue the customs. After acquiescing for five years, Edith argued her case. "When you go to a restaurant, you eat buttered rolls with your meat and whipped cream desserts. But at home everything has to be kosher." Stanley agreed, "I suppose it actually doesn't [mean so much], or I'd go to a kosher restaurant for lunch...It's a family tradition that

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With a City, p. 10.

²Ibid., p. 11.

I accepted as a matter of course. But now that we're discussing it, I guess it's not very important to me personally. It's part of the Jewish way of life, like observing the holy days in synagogue. But," he consented, "as long as you stick to one or two rules, like having no pork or shellfish at the table, I'm willing to cancel out the rest."¹

As a young adult Edith was more outgoing than Stanley. Dinner time conversation at Myer Isaacs' table had centered on the topics of good government, social problems, science or art.² Stanley continued to be very straight and serious. Edith was more vivacious and sociable.³ Throughout the years Stanley was never prone to casual chatter and certainly never considered a light dinner companion.⁴ A close friend has described Stanley as "just about one of the most humorless men I've ever known".⁵ The extent of Stanley's humor was his skill in making up puns.⁶

¹Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," p. 64.

³Myron Isaacs, interview, New York, 25 October 1973.

⁴Elinor Guggenheimer, interview, 7 November 1973.

⁵Victor Weingarten, interview, New York, 30 October 1973.

⁶Helen Isaacs Herrick, interview, New York, 12 October 1973.

The Isaacs had two children; a son Myron born a year after their marriage and a daughter Helen, eighteen months younger. "Myron," Mrs. Isaacs wrote, "was the good little boy of the story books, obedient, helpful, always an honor student. Helen...who picked up the nickname Casey early in life, was a mischievous, imaginative, delightful little imp."¹

Like his father, Stanley Isaacs valued scholastic achievement. Myron realized very early that "getting good grades was an easy way to please my parents" and for him this was relatively simple. At Dartmouth College, he continued the family tradition of Phi Beta Kappa.² Casey was often discouraged; no matter how good her marks were Myron always did better. Stanley Isaacs believed that women should have the same educational opportunities as men. When Casey dropped out of Smith College after freshman year, her father expressed great disappointment.³

The same high standards Stanley Isaacs inherited and set for himself he attempted to impose upon his children. This led to difficulties with Casey during her teenage years. They disagreed over her social life which her father characterized as "wild behavior." He could never accept the idea of her drinking during prohibition. Stanley Isaacs strictly adhered to all laws and strongly disapproved

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With a City, p. 14.

²Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

³Helen Isaacs Herrick, interview, 12 October 1973.

of anyone who drank during this period. When the family moved their residence during prohibition Stanley Isaacs applied at the license bureau for a permit to transport their three and one half bottles of liquor. No detail was too small for Isaacs when it involved a question of honesty. This precaution later became a family joke. They eventually discovered only water filled those bottles. The original alcohol had been substituted years earlier by household help.¹

To Stanley Isaacs honesty was not merely the best policy, but the only policy. Both Myron and Casey regard their father's total integrity as the strongest legacy that they received from him. Casey remembered a European trip with her parents on which her father fastidiously prepared their list for customs. Even the candy bar she was holding undeclared had to be discarded before they arrived in New York. According to Casey, their extremely detailed list was so unusual that it aroused suspicion at customs causing them all to be thoroughly searched.²

Around his own home, Stanley Isaacs' concern and conversation centered on the family needs rather than on public affairs. At this stage, Isaacs' sense of obligation directed him to his growing family.³ No matter how busy he

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

was, he always set aside some time nightly as the "children's hour."¹ Weekends the family spent together. As soon as the youngsters could walk this often meant all day hikes along the Palisades, the Aqueduct or the hills of Bear Mountain. Stanley always made plans in advance and mapped out excursions. The telephone rang repeatedly on Friday evenings as close personal friends called to be included on these outings. Babette and Walter Langsdorf, Anita and Joseph Depres and the Fred Herz and Albert Heyman families were regular joiners. The group usually marched along to the tunes of Gilbert and Sullivan songs.²

During the winter the Isaacs family spent some weekends at Greenwood Lake, New York, where they enjoyed ice skating, sledding and ice hockey. Summers, they escaped the heat of New York City by vacationing in Maine. Mrs. Isaacs and the children left New York in June and Mr. Isaacs joined them later.³

Stanley Isaacs inherited his Republican affiliation from his father. Myer Isaacs was a member of the Republican party, as well as such reform groups as the City Club, the Civil Service Reform Association and the Citizens Union, which he helped organize.⁴

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 13.

²Ibid., p. 21.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," p. 62.

As Commissioner of Small Parks and Playgrounds in New York, Judge Isaacs was brought into close contact with Theodore Roosevelt who was then Police Commissioner of New York City. Young Stanley Isaacs was very impressed with his father's friend. "I admired Theodore Roosevelt as police commissioner," Stanley wrote, "as alot of other people did, because of the excitement he stirred up and his insistence on honesty in government. I remember when he enforced the Sunday closing law on the theory that a law should either be enforced or repealed. The Brewers organized a protest parade and he proceeded to review the parade. It took courage."¹ Roosevelt became Stanley Isaacs' boyhood hero and idol for life. "I think I can say that aside from my own father, he [Roosevelt] was the person who gave me the greatest inspiration and stimulated in me a genuine desire to be of public service." Stanley felt, "he was much more than a statesman to me and a great President. I do not think that we ever had a sounder spokesman for genuine Americanism."²

Stanley Isaacs first met Roosevelt in 1898. That year, Judge Isaacs ran unsuccessfully for the State Supreme Court while Theodore Roosevelt became governor of New York.

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 7.

²Stanley Isaacs to Irving Ives, 3 June 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 25.

At a meeting where both were speaking, Stanley was introduced to Roosevelt, who said to the sixteen year old boy, "I hope you'll grow up and be a good Republican like your father."¹

Stanley Isaacs began his apprenticeship in politics as a teenager accompanying his older brother Julian on his rounds as district leader. In 1897, at fifteen years old, Stanley took part in his first campaign as an "assistant, assistant, captain" for the fusion mayoral candidate Seth Low.² This was the first of many such campaigns. Despite his strong Republican background, for the next sixty years he called upon Republicans to form fusion tickets in order to create good government. "I always believed in the Fusion Movement in the city of New York. I thought the Republicans should play their full part in trying to take care of the problems of the city, combine with everybody else who had the same ideas." Isaacs maintained, "it didn't make any difference on what candidate they combined, so long as he would make the best qualified candidate for mayor whom they could locate."³

¹Stanley Isaacs, Interview about Theodore Roosevelt, 1 May 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

²Ibid.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 12.

In 1900, Stanley Isaacs worked as an assistant District Captain in the national campaign for William McKinley, and in 1904 succeeded his brother who was ill, as captain of his election district. This area was bounded by Fifth and Lexington Avenues and Seventy-second and Seventy-fifth Streets. At the beginning of the century Isaacs observed, "the Park and Lexington areas were poverty stricken tenement house districts. There were alot of stables there-- not garages - but stables and tenements. Then on Fifth Avenue were some of the wealthiest people in the country."¹ Running along Park Avenue had been the first street railway. Until the railroad was electrified and it was possible to roof over the noisy traffic, Park Avenue was not a desirable location.² Luxurious apartments were not built on this thoroughfare until after 1910.³

As district captain, Stanley Isaacs went from one person to another trying to get their backing. "I had an amazingly interesting group of people in the district," he recalled. "It was my job not to influence them on the president, the mayoralty, nor the governorship but to try to get their support for local candidates. I found that they needed me, because they had no other contact with local people."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 15.

²F. A. Collings, Romance of Park Avenue (New York: Park Avenue Association, 1930), p. 82.

³Ibid., p. 105.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 16.

Isaacs carefully planned his strategy. "When I called on a man who lived on Fifth Avenue I would put on my dinner coat and call around nine o'clock. Otherwise I would be there when he ate dinner." He approached the poorer sector differently. "When I called on a man on Lexington Avenue or Park, I put a rough clothes and called on him at a quarter to six, or he'd be out at the corner saloon. I got to know peoples habits that way." To do his job, Isaacs wrote, "I made a map of my district with every house mapped on it. I put in the name of every resident and if they didn't register I went around to see why. If they sold the house, I found out the name of the new tenant."¹

Isaacs regarded the eight years he was district captain as "the best possible experience. I was the youngest in my family and somewhat bashful and I deliberately went into politics. I wanted to meet as many people as possible and to make as many diversified contacts as fast as possible." In these early days Isaacs had no intention of seeking public office. "I never wanted to run for office, never intended to, never tried to, but I did want to be active. I had to make my living in my law practice."²

¹Ibid., p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 15.

Isaacs based his Republican persuasion on more than just family tradition. As he viewed it, "I worked with the Republican party...on the theory that it was the most progressive and constructive force in the country and that I could count on the Republican party being the liberal party in the country, as against the Democrats, where the Solid South formed the background of the Democratic Party- the South being the most conservative- or even reactionary party of the country." Even worse in Isaacs' opinion was the Democratic urban machines. "I knew that the other support from the Democratic Party came, in the main from corrupt organizations in New York, Jersey City, Chicago and other big cities. They were neither conservative nor liberal. They were just corrupt. I didn't see how any young man could identify himself with the Democratic party in New York. It was a pretty filthy organization."¹

Stanley Isaacs' children grew up surrounded by politics and indoctrinated with the accomplishments of Theodore Roosevelt. From the Progressive party convention in 1916, Isaacs wrote to his family on a postcard featuring the Lincoln Memorial. "Dear Children, On the back of this card is the picture of a statue of one of our great Presidents and Daddy is trying to make another great man President again. Don't you hope Roosevelt will be nominated?"² When Myron

¹Ibid., p. 14.

²Stanley Isaacs to Myron and Helen Isaacs, 7 June 1916, Personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

was about five, Isaacs arranged for his son to meet Roosevelt and have a picture taken with him. Myron was duly impressed. When father and son later passed a billboard advertising the Barnum and Bailey Circus, Myron asked about the rhinoceros "what tricks does he do in the circus?" After explaining to his son that nobody has ever been able to tame a rhinoceros, Myron replied, "nobody, not even Theodore Roosevelt? If he had tried he could have."¹

As the son of an orthodox rabbi, Myer Isaacs had faithfully maintained the rituals of Judaism in his home. He strictly followed the Jewish dietary laws and the weekly Sabbath. The Friday night family ceremony took precedence over all social engagements. On Saturday, the Sabbath itself, no one travelled on streetcars or any other vehicle, in accordance with Jewish law.² While at Columbia, Stanley made special arrangements to avoid Saturday classes. "My father preferred not to have me take any courses on Saturday for religious reasons," Stanley noted. "I was able through Dean Van Amringe to take care of my work without working Saturday, getting full credit for full courses, provided I could pass certain exams."³

"I was brought up in a Jewish household," Stanley wrote, "that kept the holidays and I learned early to be

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 6.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 5.

active in Jewish affairs."¹ Although, he felt a duty to participate in the organizations that his grandfather and father had established, they were only one aspect of Stanley's charitable nature. As he branched out in other areas he explained, "I have always been active not merely in Jewish circles but also in other activities as well because of my feelings that Jews have to play a proper part in community affairs outside of Jewish matters as well as in Jewish matters."²

Unlike his grandfather and father, Stanley Isaacs placed less importance on the formalities of religion. As an adult, he no longer kept the Jewish dietary laws nor attended temple regularly.³ "Being a Jew meant to Isaacs not having to "conform to a rigid pattern or doctrinaire control." He maintained "faith in one God was one essential and I accept the biblical injunction that a Jew should adhere to a moral code... I accept the Old rather than the New Testament."⁴ Stanley Isaacs combined his belief in Judaism with a belief in democracy. "The faith of a Jew, as I interpret it is essentially a democratic faith. I believe there

¹Memo as to Jewish Connections of Stanley Isaacs, 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

²Ibid.

³Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Statement for New Currents, 15 September 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

is a close kinship between our beliefs as Jews and our support of the principals on which this nation was founded. We Jews should recognize we can serve God best by trying to better the lot of our fellow men."¹

Throughout his life, Stanley Isaacs pressed for equal opportunities for all groups not only his own. As a Jew, he felt he should fight for civil liberties for all. "The most important thing for Jews to remember," Isaacs asserted" is that as long as true democracy is preserved here the Jew is safe as no where else in the world. Civil liberties are the cornerstone of democracy and Jews should fight for civil liberties and for freedom on every front at the same time. We must protect the interest of all minorities. The battle of every minority is our battle."² Within the Jewish organizations he always supported positions that integrated Jews with the larger community. In later years, he opposed establishing strictly sectarian community centers. At a meeting of the Committee on Communal Planning of the Federation of Jewish Philantropies, Isaacs argued, "I believe it better for adolescent Jews especially and young marrieds to be brought into contact with other creeds. We should make our contribution to the community whenever possible...local community centers should not be sectarian nor isolationist. We should not freeze out others in the community. We should

¹Stanley Isaacs, Speech at the Jewish Museum, 10 May 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memorandum for Address at the Educational Alliance, 5 March 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

not isolate Jews from them."¹

As a public office holder, Stanley Isaacs believed that he must approach issues without religious consideration. "I feel clearly," he asserted "that if a Jew is active in political life and especially if he holds public office, he must face his problems squarely and meet them directly. He cannot constantly weigh the fact that he is a Jew and wonder what effect his conduct will have on Jewish affairs....Further, to hesitate or to avoid action because one is a Jew in the end tends to develop a sense of inferiority that would prevent really constructive, successful work....I have been told a Jew should avoid putting himself on the spot....This attitude seems to be dictated by excessive timidity. It involves lack of faith in democracy."²

When a Rabbi pressured Isaacs on a proposed local law permitting Jewish Sabbath observers to remain open on Sunday Isaacs retorted "when I voted in the City Council I did not vote as a Jew. I voted as an elected official chosen by my district to represent not only them but the interest of the city as a whole." Isaacs believed "that in doing my best I can disregard completely the fact that I'm a Jew - that in doing just this I can best represent

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memorandum of Meeting on Communal Planning of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, 13 March 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

²Stanley Isaacs to David Deutsch, 30 August 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

my fellow Jews."¹

Stanley Isaacs capably continued his family's tradition of service to the community. This was not anticipated. Julian Isaacs, the oldest of Judge Isaacs' sons was considered the brightest child and the one expected to carry on the family's highly respected name. Stanley looked up to and admired his brother who was eight years older. This turned to "deepest affection, admiration, almost reverence" by the entire family when Julian died in 1906.² Stanley now felt an even greater obligation to excel. He reiterated this desire repeatedly to members of his family. The untimely death of his mother, when Stanley was seven and then his brother, made Stanley extremely conscious of physical fitness. Isaacs felt it necessary to maintain his health so that he too could serve the public as his ancestors had done. To Isaacs, this responsibility meant routines which provided time for physical activity. Until somewhat slowed down by a heart attack at sixty-two, he was an enthusiastic tennis player and avid hiker. Sports were more than just an avocation, they were a duty that he

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Meeting of Men's Club Congregation Emanuel-El, 11 February 1962, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 37.

²Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 23.

imposed on himself. Isaacs' competitive nature also meant that when he played a game, he played hard and to win.¹

Stanley Isaacs used regular walking as an opportunity for mild exercise. Friends claimed it was always difficult to keep up with his brisk pace.² Isaacs also tested his endurance three more times walking around Manhattan island.³ After he bought his summer home, Stanley spent a great deal of time outdoors. He enjoyed puttering around in the woods, chopping down trees and clearing the areas. When friends visited they partook in this activity.⁴

Perhaps Isaacs physical regimen did contribute to his excellent health record. For the seventy-nine years he lived, except for his heart attack in 1944, he had no major illness. He continued to be treated, until he was well into his sixties, by Dr. Murray Bass, a pediatrician, who was an old friend from Columbia.⁵ Throughout his life, Stanley Isaacs resented and was intolerant of illness to an unusual degree in himself, as well as in members of his family. Sickness represented a threatening sign of weakness

¹Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

²Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, New York, 29 October 1973.

³Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 23.

⁴Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 October 1973.

⁵J. M. Flagler, "The Public Be Served II," The New Yorker, December 19, 1959, p. 55.

which he could not tolerate. The night before his daughter was scheduled for an extremely serious operation he went to the hospital. While visiting Casey, the only reference he made to her condition was a nonchalant statement "Mother tells me you haven't been feeling too well."¹

Isaacs' affinity for walking also stemmed from his inherited fiscal conservatism. Although Myer Isaacs' family was financially comfortable, he taught his children to be frugal and expected them to manage on small allowances. During his college years, Stanley used his carfare if he wanted to splurge on something extra.² He learned from youth never to squander money and abhorred waste in his personal life, the same as he did in government. As one economy measure, Isaacs avoided taxicabs whenever possible. He considered them an unnecessary expense and used public transportation to commute to work as well as for social outings.³

The financial greed that traps many politicians never tempted Stanley Isaacs. Basically a man of modest taste, Isaacs ignored status luxuries. He did not own a car until his family absolutely needed one to go to their summer home. Naturally, he desired enough money for his family to be comfortable and secure but he had no ambition to be a rich man.⁴

¹Helen Isaacs Herrick, interview, 12 October 1973.

²Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," p. 64.

³Millicent Sturm, interview, 20 October 1973.

⁴Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

"I have never cared for money or for the luxuries of life," Isaacs wrote to his son in 1922. "I have resolved to live (and this is comfortably enough, of course,) with the distinct intention of saving sufficient to free me, by the time I reach fifty years, from the necessity of working for myself and my family and enabling me to devote myself entirely to public service in such modest way as may offer itself." Isaacs felt "that a man of independent means can render service of the utmost value to his community, far more than the man who is of necessity compelled to earn his own living and who can devote only part of his time to such service. I have never been willing to make money out of politics; I have always thought the man dependent on a political position for his living unable to be really independent and wholly public spirited. I want the freedom that financial independence alone can give me to serve in my own way without considering anything other than the service."¹

Isaacs never amassed great wealth, but enough to establish the independence he sought. When he died in 1962 he left \$90,000 in stocks and bonds, a Manhattan brownstone, a summer home in Croton, New York and \$60,000 in the New York City pension fund.² By the time Stanley Isaacs held public office, at the age of fifty-five, his children were grown

¹Stanley Isaacs to Myron Isaacs, 10 July 1922, Personal files of Myron Isaacs, New York.

²Surrogates Court, New York County, File of Stanley Isaacs, P 2505, 1962.

and his major financial responsibilities behind him. Mr. and Mrs. Isaacs made certain economies and changes in their lives to compensate for the reduced income of government service, as compared to earlier years. They converted the upper floors of their Manhattan townhouse to an income producing apartment. They also rented out their summer home and used a smaller cabin on their property for themselves.¹ To outsiders, such measures were obscured and many people overestimated the extent of Isaacs' wealth.

Although he spent money conservatively, Stanley Isaacs responded generously to appeals from charities and civic organizations. Isaacs rarely said no. His resistance to individuals asking for help was equally low. According to his law secretary, Millicent Sturm, Isaacs always agreed to lend money to people he hardly knew if they seemed in need. Although many of these debtors neglected to repay their obligations, this never seemed to bother Isaacs. He had a book of unpaid loans owed to him, yet he continued this practice his entire life.²

In his early years Stanley Isaacs basically followed the patterns established by his grandfather and father. Beyond the influence on personality traits, Stanley Isaacs adopted his father's profession, political persuasion and

¹Stanley Isaacs to Dr. Alvin Johnson, 14 February 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

²Millicent Sturm, interview, 20 October 1973.

philanthropic activities. Although he inherited many values from his family, Isaacs was at the same time receptive to new ideas and in many respects far seeing and ahead of his times. As he progressed in his career and broadened his civic interests this would become more evident.

CHAPTER II

PROLOGUE TO PUBLIC SERVICE

In the fifty-five years before he held public office, Stanley Isaacs became fully acquainted with many of New York City's problems. As a private citizen practicing law, his life was far from private. From the outset, Isaacs rallied against injustice on many fronts. He participated in the settlement movement, fought for improved housing conditions and battled racial discrimination. These early activities proved a valuable prologue to his later career.

As a man of strong principles, Isaacs unhesitatingly spoke out on controversial issues. Initially, he made personal protests in a quiet manner while always remaining consistent to his basic beliefs. In 1913, as a young attorney, Isaacs refused to belong to the American Bar Association because of their membership policies. "The application asks you to state race, which implies continual discrimination",¹ Isaacs complained. He would not affiliate with such an organization. Another solicitation by the American Bar Association to Isaacs almost twenty years after evoked a similar response. Again he "refused to join because Negroes can

¹Stanley Isaacs to American Bar Association, 9 July 1913, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

easily be barred."¹ In later years Isaacs moved from individual declarations to active leadership in the efforts to end racial discrimination, especially in the housing field.

As a fighter for varied causes Isaacs became a member of many groups. Wherever he went, he became involved. When the Isaacs lived on Park Avenue, he served on the executive committee of the Park Avenue Improvement Association. Like block associations of later eras they sought increased police protection and improved cleanliness, trees and lighting for their areas.²

In the Progressive tradition, Isaacs remained on guard against any denial of representative government. To Isaacs, the entire mechanics of government had to be protected in order to insure democratic results. In 1920, when the New York State Assembly expelled five of its Socialist members, the Young Republicans, with Stanley Isaacs as a leading spokesman, rose to the ousted legislators' defense.³ "The action of the legislature in suspending seems to me criminal folly," Isaacs wrote to Theodore Roosevelt. "Although fundamental Socialist doctrine is abhorrent to me we shouldn't

¹Stanley Isaacs to American Bar Association, 10 August 1931, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²Park Avenue Improvement Association Booklet, 1912, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

³New York Evening Sun, 10 January 1920.

meet socialist propaganda by repression."¹ Rather than be discouraged when his protests failed to bring the desired results, Isaacs still felt valuable publicizing a situation in the hope of inching towards increased civil liberties.²

As soon as World War I broke out in Europe, Isaacs believed the United States would be drawn in and he strongly criticized President Wilson's policies. "Preparedness seemed to me the best insurance against war," Isaacs wrote. "It was in his complete unwillingness to realize the necessity for preparedness that President Wilson in my judgment failed as a national leader in the crisis."³ In professing to view the crisis dispassionately Wilson became "blinded to the real nature of the war, making him fail to see Germany's character and purpose...As a result," Isaacs felt "we drifted into war wholly unprepared due to him and his blindness. We lagged mainly because Wilson did not see the need for a large army abroad."⁴ In Isaacs' opinion, "Theodore Roosevelt, the great statesman of our age saw correctly and Wilson saw falsely."⁵

After the United States entered the War, Isaacs applied for a Captaincy commission in the Ordnance Reserve

¹Stanley Isaacs to Theodore Roosevelt, 8 January 1920, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Personal Impression of 1918-1919, 1919, Personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York, pp. 12-13.

⁴Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁵Ibid., p. 61.

Corps. When offered only a First Lieutenant spot he turned it down.¹ Influenced by Mrs. Isaacs' pleas that men without dependent families should go first, Stanley volunteered his services as Chairman of Local Draft Board 164 in Manhattan. Isaacs' administration of this post foreshadowed his later service as Borough President. As in his personal affairs, Isaacs sought to keep the overhead to a minimum. he worked with a strictly volunteer staff in a brownstone house loaned by the St. Ignatius Church, keeping his costs the lowest of any draft board in New York State.² Whereas other boards operated on budgets of six to twelve thousand dollars, Isaacs maintained expenses to \$668.72 for the year in which he took charge.³ The Isaacs board achieved additional distinction for its local newspaper circulated to draftees from the district.⁴ Here, as he would also later do in the Borough President's office, Isaacs tried to humanize a large bureaucracy.

In reviewing army applications, Isaacs displayed his usual blend of fairness and compassion. "The important job was to make sure that justice was done to the people coming in before me," Isaacs stressed. "They had much tighter rules

¹Stanley Isaacs to Commissioned Personnel Ordinance Department, 31 October 1918, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

²Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 15.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 36.

⁴Ibid., p. 41.

than under the Second World War. Much more rigid requirements. For example, if a man was once ordered into service, you couldn't relieve him for any cause except for serious illness. When a young man, an only son whose father had just died appeared for induction, I just didn't have the heart to send him into service on the day of his father's funeral but the law was perfectly clear that I had to. I called up Martin Conboy, the head of the New York City draft and said 'Martin, I'm going to let the man off and send someone in his place...I can't take a man away from his mother the day after his father dies.' Conboy said, 'you're absolutely right, now forget about it.' That was all."¹

Another man, granted exemption due to his wife's pregnancy reported for duty after the baby was born dead. Isaacs sent him back home for another sixty days. Acknowledging a break in the rules, Isaacs reasoned "I was helping a man whom I had a right to help in a crisis in his affairs. He would have been perfectly willing to go."²

"On the other hand," Isaacs maintained, "I think that practically no man who didn't want to go got away with anything with my board. For example, my friends acted, without knowing it, as sort of spies." After hearing about a man exempted as being underweight because he ate nothing but

¹Ibid., p. 37.

²Ibid., p. 39.

salts, Isaacs called the suspect in unexpectedly for a physical. Taken by surprise the young man registered a normal weight and was drafted.¹

After a year on the board Isaacs resigned to serve in the Office of the Secretary of War. Stanley became part of a commission sent to Cleveland to arbitrate a strike in the clothing industry. Here, through his negotiations with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Isaacs first met Sidney Hillman. Twenty years later, Hillman as a leader of the American Labor Party, took part in his party's decision to support Isaacs for the Borough Presidency of Manhattan.²

In 1919, Isaacs left law practice to become a partner in real estate with his cousin Isabel's husband Edgar A. Levy.³ In a letter to his eleven year old son Myron, Isaacs explained his actions. "I started out to practice law, as you know, and engaged in such profession for fifteen years. I like the profession in its broader aspects. I disliked the more subtle and legalistic side. I am sure that I could never have any special ambition to hold judicial office - work on the bench was neither active enough to suit me, nor did it have sufficiently broad contact with human nature...I was able to earn a very comfortable living from my profession, on the other hand, I could never look forward to relief from professional work." Then

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 44, 82.

³Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 16.

came Stanley's wartime experience. "After the war was over, and I had had a taste of freedom from law practice and opportunity on long broader lines than I had had before, my law work interested me somewhat less. It was at this time your Uncle Edgar asked me to join him." Isaacs gave his son three reasons for his acceptance. "In the first place I had always specialized in real estate law, the change from representing others to representing myself did not involve any very fundamental difference. In the second place, I was promised the same freedom to engage in outside work of a public nature and to render social service that I was always eager to give. Finally, I had the definite prospect in the course of ten or a dozen years, of having laid by sufficient on which to live - and of being free to devote myself wholly to social and civic service without the necessity of worrying about the support of my family. The last was decisive."¹ To Isaacs financial independence meant complete freedom to serve the community. He hoped to achieve this status through his new venture.

Edgar Levy, Jr., another member of the real estate firm, recalled, "my father and Stanley Isaacs owned residential apartment buildings in Manhattan. These included 7 and 27 West Ninety-seventh Street, 336 and 315 Central Park West, and 171 and 151 West Fifty-seventh Street. My Dad decided

¹Stanley Isaacs to Myron Isaacs, 10 July 1922, Personal files of Myron Isaacs, New York.

he wanted to take life easier and asked Stanley to come in as a partner. He helped in the buying and selling of property, as well as in the supervision of running the buildings....The business prospered in the 1920's. In the 1930's we did our best to keep our heads above water. Our firm was one of the few individually owned ones which didn't go into bankruptcy."¹

Although Isaacs engaged in real estate during the boom times of the nineteen twenties, by leaving Levy in 1937, in the midst of the depression, to hold public office, he did not maximize his profits. A few years later, while adjusting his financial differences with Levy, Isaacs wrote to his brother Lewis, "after I severed relations with Edgar my interest continued. Numerous properties were dropped and capital losses fixed leading to a larger debt against me. There were a number of properties producing income. We agreed if Levy cancels all obligations, I'll surrender all interests."²

To Isaacs, the nineteen twenties meant both a building period in his career and a time of important personal decisions. Between 1923 and 1930 Stanley bought both his winter and summer homes, establishing his life patterns for the next thirty years. In 1923, Isaacs had the opportunity to purchase land for himself on Ninety-six street between

¹Edgar I. Levy, Jr., interview, New York, 30 September 1974.

²Stanley Isaacs to Lewis Isaacs, 25 May 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

Fifth and Madison Avenues in Manhattan, next door to an apartment house owned by his firm. One day Stanley arrived home and announced to his wife, "we can have land at a most reasonable price if we agree to build a house not more than sixty feet deep. We have to protect the light of the apartment next door." They never hesitated. Thrilled at the prospect, Mrs. Isaacs wrote, "we watched the house go up brick by brick, climbing up ladders before the stairs were built, getting in the way of the workmen. It is something of a landmark, four stories high, built of dark irregular bricks, with limestone trim, leaded glass windows, random width oak floors and well-proportioned rooms."¹ They moved in June 1924. It became Stanley's home for the rest of his life and campaign headquarters for his City Council races in years to come. After Myron and Casey married the Isaacs rented the top two floors to supplement their income.

They made few changes on the lower floors, which remain with the original furnishings, mostly heavy oak pieces. Though worn with age, even the brocade dining room draperies still hang, as they have for the past fifty years. Portraits of Stanley's heroes, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, George Washington and James Marshall adorn the walls. Books are everywhere. Isaacs read vociferously, pushing his collection beyond the bounds of the ample sized

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, p. 57.

library. Stanley enjoyed browsing through bookstores and had little sales resistance for a new volume that seemed interesting. The works of the classic historians, George Bancroft, J. B. McMaster and James Ford Rhodes and biographies of leading Americans fill the shelves. In fiction, he favored Charles Dickens, John Galsworthy and Robert Lewis Stevenson. Regardless of the hour, Isaacs read for at least thirty minutes before retiring each evening.¹ A fast reader, with tremendous recall, he amazed his secretary Millicent Sturm who said, "years later he could easily recall specific details from any book he had finished."²

A house in Manhattan did not fulfill Isaacs' craving for outdoor living. A conservationist in the Progressive mold, Isaacs looked longingly at country homes. "But I accepted that as a matter of course and never really took it seriously," Mrs. Isaacs wrote, "until one day in January 1930 he told me without warning that he had made a down payment on a house and fifty acres of land in Croton-on-Hudson. It's a very small down payment" he said apologetically, "and you'll fall in love with it the minute you see it. It's a wonderful piece of land with a marvelous view...This is exactly the place I've been looking for for years," Stanley exclaimed to Edith, as she saw the property for the first time. "Across there is the Hudson and Bear Mountain...down

¹Edith Isaacs, interview, 28 December 1971.

²Millicent Sturm, interview, 20 October 1973.

there on the left is where we'll have a tennis court, those trees on the right are fruit trees...and down below are the most wonderful woods where we'll clear trails and we can all hike." Although initially less enthusiastic than her husband, Edith soon grew to enjoy Croton as a "haven to which we went happily over the years."¹

With the house and tennis court built, Croton became a comfortable refuge for family and friends. Guests learned to navigate the perilous path leading to the cottage. "Stanley had a great passion for nature," Mrs. Isaacs wrote, "no trees were cut down but the smaller ones that interfered with their more important neighbors, no rocks moved if they could be circumnavigated. The path from the road to the cabin was truly a menace. Rocks of all sizes and shapes made a trip for the unwary a hazardous adventure. But they were handsome rocks, some of them covered with mosses or lichens and Stanley loved them."² Isaacs relaxed through his physical activity at Croton. "His heart attack put a stop to playing tennis but not to clearing woods and trails of fallen timber, sawing and bringing in logs for the fireplace, carrying up pails of water from the spring (he claimed it tasted so much better than water from a faucet) pruning trees and helping our neighbors with any job that required his help."³

¹Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, pp. 58-59.

²Edith Isaacs, "Hi Jinks with Joli," personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

³Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, pp. 60-61.

Until the Isaacs bought the land in Croton they did not own a car. Once they made weekly excursions to Northern Westchester Mrs. Isaacs learned to drive and they purchased an automobile. Despite their convenience and often times necessity, Stanley viewed cars with disdain. Busy roads spoiled wilderness settings and careless accidents took people's lives. At some point Stanley might have found it useful to drive, but his strong competitive nature stood in the way, according to one son. Once Mrs. Isaacs became an accomplished driver, Stanley "would never stand for being her pupil or doing something less competently than she did."¹

Recognizing the permanence of cars, Isaacs sought at the least, improved compensation procedures for accident victims. As early as 1934, he began promoting a plan similar to the no-fault insurance program adopted in New York in 1974. In 1935 Isaacs wrote in favor of "a system modelled along the lines of the workmen's compensation act with recovery irrespective of fault. This carries with it the requirement that every New York motorist carry insurance to carry his share of compensation needed."² Isaacs rejected "the plea for lawyers out of business" as "the usual pleas of vested interests. There is no right to continue outmoded costly processes. Society must take care of its victims."³

¹Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs to New York Evening Post, 16 December 1935, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

³New York Times, 6 June 1938.

When Isaacs believed in a cause, he persisted in advocating it regardless of public acceptance. Writing to Jacob Javits, attorney general of New York State in 1955, Isaacs renewed his argument. "I'm strong for the development of an automobile accident compensation plan along the lines of workmen's compensation. The tremendous congestion in all the courts is due to the overwhelming number of lawsuits involving auto accidents."¹ "The court procedure leads to delays, proof shouldn't be required." Isaacs argued "the victim is really a victim of the pace at which society insists on traveling."²

Although Isaacs certainly recognized the need for improved roads as traffic volume increased, he remained a champion of the pedestrian and a protector of recreation areas. In later years, Isaacs voiced opposition to roads which threatened to destroy existing parklands. When the engineers designed the Major Deegan Expressway, Isaacs criticized plans to cut through Van Cortlandt Park. "Of course I realize a highway like this is essential to remove inter county traffic from the local street system," Isaacs conceded, "but there is "no excuse for depriving children of valuable recreation area."³ "I cannot see a magnificent

¹Stanley Isaacs to Jacob Javits, 17 October 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 25.

²New York Times, 4 October 1955.

³Stanley Isaacs to John Murray, 30 June 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

park destroyed as ruthlessly as this and the interest of children derided as callously as this, without being unhappy and disturbed."¹

Similarly aroused when authorities built the Palisades Parkway to Bear Mountain, Isaacs complained "I welcome the highway to the Park but I believe traffic should be diverted when it reaches the park and not invade it. The whole easterly section of the Park would be divided into three units by the proposed highway and destroy the beauty and quiet. It would be inconsistent with the original intent to preserve a section of the Ramapos."² Although not part of New York City, Isaacs regarded "Bear Mountain, because of its proximity to the city of equal importance to the greater state preserves. We should be just as strenuous in preserving this as the Adirondacks."³

Stanley Isaacs could also be counted on as an advocate of women's rights. Beyond being a supporter of the Twentieth Amendment granting women's suffrage,⁴ Isaacs remained sensitive to subtler forms of sex discrimination. He noted the danger of limiting a particular job in the housing administration to a female. "I believe this unsound from every

¹Stanley Isaacs to Newbold Morris, 25 July 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs to Leonard Smidth, 25 September 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

³Stanley Isaacs to Leonard Smidth, 14 September 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to James W. Wadsworth, Jr., 20 January 1920, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

point of view. Men as well as women are useful in social service activities," Isaacs argued. "Moreover, the moment you state that only a female can be appointed director of social activities you make it easier for a female to be excluded from other positions and I think this decidedly unfortunate from the women's point of view."¹

Within the Phi Beta Kappa association, Isaacs pushed for a merger of the women's and men's divisions. With his wife a member of the honorary society, Isaacs had personal reason to feel that there should be no separation of the sexes! "I can see no reason in not opening our doors to female members of Phi Beta Kappa."²

Among his acquaintances, Isaacs encouraged the women he knew to be involved outside their homes. When one friend moved to Venezuela, Stanley wrote to her "you say nothing of your activities but I do hope that you have continued to take an active interest in the people around you and in affairs generally and are not just content with domesticity, no matter how pleasant and restful it may be."³

Isaacs' participation in the Educational Alliance led to his involvement with the United Neighborhood Houses. Established in 1919 as a coordinating agency for all the

¹Stanley Isaacs to Langdom Post, 31 August 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Stanley Isaacs to Jerome Alexander, 14 December 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

³Stanley Isaacs to May Lumsden, 28 May 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

settlements, it sought greater unity among them to carry out their social programs. According to Isaacs, "the man who influenced me most in United Neighborhood Houses was Dr. John Elliot who was President when I first became active in it. He inspired me to work in the housing field especially...I was chairman of that committee [housing]. I worked with him and with Clarence Stein, an architect and planner."¹ By 1934, Isaacs became President of the organization, a post he held for the next twenty-six years. As Helen Harris, former executive director of United Neighborhood Houses said "Stanley Isaacs was the United Neighborhood houses. Whenever one of the settlement houses had a problem, Stanley was there. He knew exactly what was happening in the thirty-five neighborhoods we covered."²

Through his real estate ventures and his position as Chairman of the United Neighborhood Houses Housing Committee, Isaacs became a leader in the housing reform movement in the nineteen twenties. Isaacs felt it "is absolutely essential to work toward the improvement of social conditions in this country and that activities in this direction are sound and even essential from the most conservative viewpoint." He believed bad housing "to be at the root of many of our social evils."³

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 11.

²Helen Harris, interview, 22 December 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs to Evans Clark, 7 February 1936, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

Tempered by his own experience as a real estate manager and landlord, Isaacs never lost sight of the practical side of the problem. As Myron Isaacs said of his father, "he believed in reform, but most of all in bringing about change that could actually be brought about. He knew for reforms to succeed they had to be properly based economically."¹ Isaacs always kept that in mind.

In real estate concerns Stanley Isaacs could evaluate both sides. While both a member of the Executive Committee of the Committee of Apartment House Owners and Builders² and on the Board of Governors of the Real Estate Board of New York³, Isaacs felt compassion for the poor unable to find decent housing. As early as 1923 Isaacs wrote, "the difficulty of the really poor paying for decent housing is still a problem. Society demands reasonable light, air and fire protection and the cost cannot be paid by the poor. It can not be met through ordinary economic processes. State action of some sort is necessary. The legislature unfortunately has centered on efforts to keep down rents rather than constructing homes."⁴ Isaacs argued "economic pressure cannot in the long run be expected to operate so as to produce houses for

¹Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

²Stationery of Committee of Apartment House Owners and Builders, 1920, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 2.

³Charles G. Edward to Stanley Isaacs, 22 July 1921, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 2.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, "Consideration Concerning the Housing Problem," Real Estate Record and Guide, 13 November 1923.

those who cannot afford an economic rent...I believe savings banks should be induced to lend their funds to limited dividend corporations engaged in constructing workingmen's homes."¹

Isaacs also suggested that New York City grant tax exemptions to model tenements. "The city should aid efforts to improve housing," he argued. "The justification is that the community as a whole suffers from bad housing conditions... Those that agree to go into production of decent homes, not for profit but to perform a public service, agreeing to limit their own returns, should have this cooperation from the city. The burden of others in the community (fire, police, sanitation) make up for the small amount of tax lost in old buildings."²

Few men in the real estate field shared Isaacs' views. The Real Estate Board opposed the Walker Bill granting tax exemption for twenty years on multiple family buildings erected by limited dividend corporations under the state housing law.³

Isaacs welcomed progress in clearing slums. However, when the New York State Legislature began debating a new multiple dwelling act to replace the 1901 law, Isaacs as chairman of the United Neighborhood Houses Housing Committee

¹Stanley Isaacs to the New Republic, 2 April 1924, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 2.

²Stanley Isaacs, Letter to the Editor, Real Estate Record and Guide, 25 December 1926.

³New York Times, 27 May 1927.

originally opposed the bill for not going far enough.¹

"The new law was important from the point of view of builders and real estate owners. As for light and air, it provided in taller structures an increase in courts and yards," Isaacs wrote, "but as far as housing those of moderate means it didn't do much."² Isaacs complained, "the new bill ignores existing dwellings, the old law pre 1901 tenements."³

Even before the bill passed the United Neighborhood Houses criticized the measure as not enough protection for tenement dwellers. The agency proposed several amendments to the new law which they considered vital to the act's effectiveness. To reduce fire hazards they desired "fire retarding the halls in old law tenements and replacing antiquated and dangerous vertical fire escapes." Concerned with health and sanitary conditions they pushed for "ending occupancy for dwelling purposes of all cellars...prohibiting within a reasonable number of years the occupancy for dwelling purposes of rooms without a window opening to the outer air...and insisted there be at least one toilet for the individual use of each family."⁴

United Neighborhood Houses' power lay in its ability to generate interest in the housing problem and attract

¹New York Times, 17 February 1928.

²Stanley Isaacs, Riverside Republican Club Bulletin, May 1930, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 4.

³Stanley Isaacs, Letter to the Editor, New Republic, 9 January 1929.

⁴United Neighborhood Houses Press Release, Proposed Amendments to Multiple Dwelling Law, 21 October 1929, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

other social agencies as their allies in lobbying the appropriate politicians. In its early days, according to Ira Robbins, a former New York City Housing Commissioner, "they were important in starting movements, then when the bandwagon started to become political they were taken over."¹ After initiating their crusade for better housing, fifty other organizations interested in the problem formed a new housing section of the Welfare Council of New York City.² Support soon came from such organizations as the East Side Community Council, Kips Bay Tenants Association, Federation of Jewish Philanthropies Women's Organization and the Welfare Committee of the Republican County Committee.³ Favorable newspaper editorials appeared in the New York Times, Sun, World and Post.⁴ Through these efforts State Senator Samuel Hofstader and Assemblyman Abbot L. Moffat introduced five bills in the legislature in relation to old law tenements.⁵ By the following year, two of the five amendments passed. One ending cellar occupancy and one prohibiting use of vertical fire escapes after 1934 became

¹Ira Robbins, interview, New York, 26 October 1973.

²New York Sun, 6 December 1929.

³Stanley Isaacs to Abbot L. Moffat, 8 March 1930, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Report Housing Committee United Neighborhood Houses, 12 May 1930, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

⁵United Neighborhood Houses Press Release, 23 January 1930, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

law. The other measures to be introduced at the next legislative session.¹

Despite continuous appeals by the social agencies, housing conditions stagnated. The early victories proved hollow ones. "Under successive laws, enforcement of most provisions requiring changes have been postponed," Isaacs lamented. "The prohibition against cellar occupancy is not enforced by the tenement commission. The prohibition against certain windowless rooms does not go into effect until January 1936....The moratorium should not be continued....Social considerations and enforcement of law would stimulate work, destroy false values in decrepit houses and fill vacancies in improved houses."² In 1935 one bill passed providing toilet facilities for every tenement family and another one requiring fire retardation of the halls of all old law tenements.³ The new laws appeared on the books but in reality nothing changed. As Isaacs wrote to Assemblyman Herbert Brownell, "I'm disturbed at the threatened moratorium against the enforcement of the Dwelling Law. Delay simply perpetuates indecent conditions in buildings. Enforcing the laws would lead to jobs for many, improvement of neighborhoods and improvements of real estate conditions

¹United Neighborhood Houses Press Release, 28 April 1930, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo as to Multiple Dwelling Law Provisions Affecting Old Law Tenements, 11 January 1934, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

³Stanley Isaacs to New York Times, 3 December 1935, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

besides curing a very serious social menace."¹

Throughout these setbacks, Isaacs remained optimistic. From his lobbying efforts with United Neighborhood Houses, Isaacs gleaned a lesson that became a strong part of his personal creed. "The United Neighborhood Houses really had no power except the ability to assemble public opinion..."² Yet within seven years of the passage of the Multiple Dwelling Act they had the amendments they desired."³ To Isaacs, this clearly showed "that people properly organized, even without the support of big money and big business and without the strength of powerful organizations nevertheless could get there."⁴ For the rest of his life, Isaacs operated on the premise that persistence and publicity would eventually bring success.

With New York City's debt limit almost extended to its limit in 1935, Isaacs turned to Washington for help. "The solution seems to lie in the development of a long term housing program stimulated and financed by the federal government" he wrote. "Let us hope the next session of Congress passes one of the housing bills now pending establishing a long term Federal housing program to meet these needs."⁵

¹Stanley Isaacs to Herbert Brownell, 6 February 1936, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 56.

³Ibid., p. 59.

⁴Ibid., p. 60.

⁵Stanley Isaacs, Letter to Editor, New York Times, 6 December 1935.

Pleased with the prospect of the Wagner Housing Act, Isaacs made his support known. "I believe the Wagner Housing Bill well drawn and well planned to meet what seems to me the most pressing problem the country faces. Bonds which the housing authority would issue would be self supporting. The Bill provides for annual subsidy....Considering the size of the problem, one subsidy is not so great. It would hardly mean substantial new taxation."¹ "It does not carry with it anything like the appropriation that I think should have been included," Isaacs commented, "but I think it proper to give it full support as the beginning of a sound program...I like particularly the feature which very rigidly limits the plan for the construction of houses to families of low income and the effort to decentralize administration."² United Neighborhood Houses demonstrated their support for the bill by sending delegations to Washington to testify at hearings. They worked most effectively as lobbyists.³

Never losing his businessman's outlook, Isaacs combined his request for decent housing conditions for the poor with an appeal to the investor's self-interest. "The economic basis for improvements lie in the fact the slums are getting worse." Isaacs stated "that real estate in slum

¹Stanley Isaacs to Henry Morgenthau, Jr., 2 March 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²Stanley Isaacs to Edward Devine, 9 April 1936, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

³Helen Harris, interview, 22 December 1973.

areas is declining and will continue. I believe far sighted real estate men will be more and more convinced that pressure for those interested in improving conditions from a social viewpoint is sound even from a business and investment standpoint."¹ Isaacs blamed slum conditions for fostering a trend to the suburbs. "Enforce the dwelling laws," he argued "and artificial land values would end forcing minimum standards of safety and decency and would cause vacation of the worst tenements."² "It is the nature of the buildings of the Lower East Side that has caused migration and not the attraction of more open spaces, better transit and the development of the automobile," according to Isaacs. "Land values on the Lower East Side wouldn't be as high today and would permit reconstruction if it were not for the speculative possibilities to which the owner's cling. Enforce the dwelling law and artificial land values would collapse forcing a minimum standard of decency."³

Although never enacted, Isaacs proposed an interesting plan to use the reserves set up under the Federal Social Security Act to finance nationwide housing. Under Isaacs' scheme thirty billion dollars would be available over a period of years to provide decent modern homes for low income families. Rather than investing the social security

¹Stanley Isaacs, draft of letter for Herald Tribune, 6 March 1934, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²New York Times, 11 March 1934.

³Stanley Isaacs, draft of "Another Phase of Slum Problem", 20 February 1934, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

money in ordinary United States bonds, it would be put into bonds of federal, state and municipal housing authorities.¹

"Here were funds offering a ready source of investment and the wage earner continues to furnish the three percent needed to maintain social security payments on an even keel."²

Isaacs held, as he felt his hero "Theodore Roosevelt did, that those who believe in the Constitution and our form of government and our economic system are bound all the more to correct its faults and injustices and therefore should support measures for social security such as unemployment insurance, old age pensions etc., as well as a carefully studied housing program to meet the needs of those who are condemned to live in the slums because private capital has never been provided for them."³

With real estate business slowed down in the nineteen thirties, Isaacs devoted increasing amounts of time to his various crusades. This, he found very stimulating as he explained in a letter to a close friend. "Life is quite hectic here, but all the more exciting for that reason. Real estate is still far below par with few signs of recovery and all that I can do in business is not particularly constructive or progressive, but largely salvage work which

¹Stanley Isaacs, "Financing Nationwide Housing With Social Security Reserves," New York Social Work Review, 5 April 1937.

²Stanley Isaacs, Press Release, 11 March 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs to William Allen White, 3 February 1936, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

is very important and also very aggravating. Outside activities," Isaacs emphasized, "fill a good deal of my time and I can promise you are much more interesting and much more satisfactory to me. Possibly," he explained, "because my ambitions are not very high and I am willing to make progress from hand to mouth, a little at a time, I am satisfied with the results of the activities of that group that I work with. We have become very well recognized and definitely effective in minor ways in proding city and other officials in curing minor defects in administrative procedure, in getting something started and in encouraging others, that should prove of social advantage."¹

In 1937, the opportunity for public office gave Isaacs a chance to combine his vocation with his desire to accomplish certain social goals. With a new arena available Isaacs could now branch out in more directions.

¹Stanley Isaacs to Edward Davison, 14 May 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

CHAPTER III

EARLY POLITICS

"I always embraced a desire to be of aid to others and to play a part in civic affairs," Stanley Isaacs wrote. "Through the example set by my father, whom I revered and to Theodore Roosevelt, my father's friend, I became active in politics." Accepting the thesis that "participation in politics was not only a privilege but a duty,"¹ Isaacs falls into a long political tradition of genteel reform.

In the post Civil War period, industrialization and urbanization led to profound changes in the American way of life. The new business forms and the wealth created by nationwide industries challenged the predominance of established local elites. The nouveaux riche rather than the old gentry became the community decision makers. Traditional living patterns disintegrated as the cities expanded and became more impersonal. The wave of new immigrants destroyed the existing homogeneity and created the urban boss as a competing political power base to the old

¹Notes for "This I Believe," May 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

stock leaders.¹

The genteel reformers of the late nineteenth century sought to impose a sense of order on their changing society, placing themselves at the helm. Politically, the voiced their discontent by criticizing the ruling Republican party. Originally founded on an anti-slavery platform, the G.O.P. attracted an idealistic following. Post-war scandals and the predominance of business influence in the party disillusioned many partisans. Losing faith in both President Ulysses S. Grant and their party, vocal Republican dissidents appeared.

Old stock patricians of Yankee-American backgrounds found their place in society threatened by the nouveaux riche, politicians and new corporate chiefs. Dissatisfied with these developments, genteel reformers coalesced. As men of upper-middle class backgrounds, they had been well educated in Ivy League schools. Mostly lawyers and other professionals they were men of means who had worked for their money rather than inherit it. They came from families with established roots in their localities and as gentlemen felt a hereditary right to rule and a moral duty to protect the social order.²

¹Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Random House, 1955), pp.136-141.

²Marlene Stein Wortman, "The Mugwump Movement in New York 1865-1884: A Study of the Culture and Institutions of Reform (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1966), p. 2.

These self-proclaimed aristocratic guardians of the community possessed the same spirit implanted in Isaacs by his family. They considered themselves the best men to govern. While scorning the idle rich, they equated the best men with wealthy men. Reformers believed economically secure individuals would place national and community interest above personal gain. Isaacs too adhered to the idea that those who represented wealth had a greater stake in the community and a more legitimate claim to rule. In later years, he continued to defend increased representation on the New York City Board of Estimate for Manhattan and Brooklyn, the two boroughs containing the highest percentage of taxable real estate. He argued that those with the largest financial interest deserved greater influence.¹

Patrician reformers considered it their moral responsibility to maintain the virtues of honesty, self-denial, hardwork, generosity to the underprivileged, deference to authority and self-help. Politically they translated reliance on self-help into criticism of spoilsmen and protective tariffs. They believed that economic forces regulated by natural laws, if left alone, resulted in inevitable progress. These men viewed both the spoils system and high tariffs as an unwarranted interference on the economic order.²

¹Stanley Isaacs to Clinton Blume, 22 January 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

²Wortman, "Mugwumps in New York," pp. 3-4.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century the genteel began organizing their own professions. During these years, they founded the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association in an attempt to institute uniform standards and bring a sense of order to the medical and legal fields. In the process, they created a feeling of solidarity among themselves which aided reform's organization.¹

Possessed with the conviction that they were indeed the best men to manage affairs, genteel reformers became active in politics. They viewed current politicians as materialistic and vulgar and offered themselves as an alternative. Responding to the scandals in President Ulysses S. Grant's administration, disenchanted reformers looked for another alternative. Still suffering from its wartime image, the Democratic organization had little appeal. In 1872, a group of gentlemen reformers broke away from the G.O.P. and launched the Liberal Republican party. They included professionals, leading journalists, influential academicians and some politicians and businessmen.² Above all, these men sought to reestablish order in

¹Robert Wiebe, The Search for Order (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), pp. 114-117.

²John G. Sproat, "The Best Men": Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 47.

a society ravaged by war and reconstruction. Viewing patronage as the root of bribery and corruption they turned to civil service reform as a panacea for the nation's problems. The merit system offered a means to raise standards and impose order. The political boss who thrived through dispensing jobs blocked these visions. Stanley Isaacs also saw the civil service as a means of purifying government and discouraging political appointments.

The nineteenth century reformer admired the independent man in politics who rose above partisan battles. The genteel associated government service with patriotic duty and referred contemptuously to professional politicians who placed party loyalty first. Isaacs shared this outlook as he wrote, "I believe complete independence and ability to resist pressure from political leaders and selfish interests is literally essential for a man to do a sound job."¹ Like the earlier reformers, Isaacs valued independence and prized public spirit over party spirit. Through the years, he wrestled with the problems of maintaining his freedom of action while operating within the party framework. In all

¹ Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Women's City Club Meeting, 15 November 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 35.

of his activities, Isaacs jealously guarded his independence, as his spiritual heirs had done, even at the risk of jeopardizing his career.

In New York City, the experience of William Marcy Tweed's political machine of the early 1870's engendered distrust of the urban boss. In the mid-nineteenth century New York became an urban industrial center. Tammany Hall, a patriotic society and Democratic stronghold, in its quest for power attempted to humanize conditions for new immigrants. As Tammany leader, Tweed offered the lure of food, jobs and coal to garner support. In return, he personally profited at the expense of the public treasury. Revelations of his dishonesty enforced the image of the evil boss supported by Irish-Catholic immigrants. Observing Tweed's methods, reformers linked excessive expenditures to public works. Rather than examine the institutions and conditions which contributed to the growth of corruption, the reformers concentrated on punishing guilt. In their eyes, bad government resulted from the practices of bad men who violated the absolute laws of right and wrong.¹ Stanley Isaacs adhered to the picture of Tammany Hall as a corrupt, political machine, a factor that kept him forever loyal to the Republican party.

¹Jerome Mushkat, Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971), pp. 1-3; Alexander Callow Jr., The Tweed Ring (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 3, 15, 266; Seymour Mandelbaum, Boss Tweed's New York (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), p. 75.

In 1884, a group of patrician reformers, who became known as the Mugwumps, bolted the Republican party. Defiantly, they supported the Democratic Presidential candidate Grover Cleveland, who more closely represented their views than the Republican nominee, James G. Blaine. In a later election, Isaacs too would leave the Republicans to back Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive party choice in the 1912 election.

The average Mugwump had been a long time urban dweller from the Northeastern United States, especially New York and Boston. He was a young college educated professional or businessman who often attended Harvard or Columbia University. These rebels comprised a socially prominent, wealthy group but were definitely not the idle rich. Mostly novices in politics, they had little to lose from their actions.¹

The ideology of their upbringing instilled Mugwumps with the notion that they, as educated men, had an obligation to be active leaders in their community and nation. This was the same philosophy that Isaacs' family preached. Although the Mugwumps hoped to see their pet programs, civil service reform and tariff reduction, promoted by Cleveland's election, the Mugwumps' perception of themselves as guardians of civic morality prompted the bolt. In their

¹Geoffrey Blodgett, The Gentle Reformers: Massachusetts Democrats in the Cleveland Era (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), p. 19-21; Gerald McFarland, Mugwumps, Morals and Politics, 1884-1920 (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), pp. 18-34.

minds, Blaine's nomination presented a clear moral issue of opposing a dishonest man.

Mugwumps looked to aristocratic journalist Edwin Lawrence Godkin, editor of the Nation, to articulate their outlook. To alleviate the excessive materialism of the age, he advocated the creation of a class of educated men as protectors of civilization. Godkin remained devoted to orthodox liberalism which stressed man's freedom from coercion by government and other individuals. He believed nature had created a perfectly balanced economic order, which if left alone would result in progress and provide the greatest good for all.¹ The nineteenth century reformers interpreted both protective tariffs and trade unions as disruptions of the economic equilibrium. Isaacs, in a later era, accepted labor unions as a means to rectify inequities.

The Mugwumps stressed efficiency in government rather than increased public services and showed little interest in the problems of the poor. These nineteenth century patricians feared the underprivileged masses as a threat to social order, and dismissed agrarian and labor reformers as members of the dangerous classes.

Displaying a continuing aversion to party politics, genteel reformers hoped to attract the best men in civic affairs by founding enduring independent organizations.

¹Richard Gerber, "Edwin L. Godkin Discovers America," The Rocky Mountain Social Science Journal V (October, 1968): 14-20.

As a means to establish leadership outside the political machine they participated in non-partisan groups. In New York City, the City Reform Club formed in 1882 and the People's Municipal League begun in 1890 provided an early training ground for urban reformers. In the Mugwump tradition, they advocated civil service reform, municipal elections apart from national campaigns and businesslike government.¹

Founded in 1892, as a response to the continued municipal corruption, the City Club became the most successful of these groups. Like the earlier City Reform Club, it maintained a plush meeting house for its select members but it also attempted to amplify its activities with precinct level workingmen's campaign clubs. The City Club established and financially sponsored five subsidiaries known as Good Government Clubs A, B, C, D, and E in each election district in the city. Eventually twenty more such organizations appeared. Although membership continued to be primarily professionals and businessmen, including Myer Isaacs, the City Club contributed to the growth of reform's organized strength and the 1894 election of Mayor William Strong.²

Resigning his post as federal Civil Service Commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt returned to New York to become Police Commissioner in the new reform administration. In Washington, Roosevelt's conscientious execution of the laws

¹McFarland, Mugwumps, p. 101.

²Sproat, "The Best Men", pp. 59-60.

contributed to the institutionalization of the civil service and reinforced his own position with genteel reformers. Committed to New York, he welcomed an opportunity to aid reform in his native city. Attempting to create an honest police force and eliminate bribery in the department, Roosevelt enforced the Sunday saloon closing law. Despite the unpopularity of this move, especially among German-Americans, Roosevelt persisted in his drive.¹ Stanley Isaacs first met Roosevelt as the reform Police Commissioner. Impressed with this type of courage, Isaacs forever admired the independence Roosevelt displayed in this position.

In 1897, in time for the next mayoralty race and the first election of the Greater New York City, Myer Isaacs joined with other patrician reformers in organizing the Citizens Union. Aiming at municipal reform they emphasized the inadequacies of existing parties founded upon national and state issues to deal with city government. Unlike the earlier groups, the Citizens Union operated as a municipal party. It still exists but no longer puts forth its own candidates. As an independent Republican, Isaacs worked successfully with non-partisan organizations, like the Citizens Union, which continued in this reform tradition promoting good government without considering party advantage.

In 1901, joint Citizens Union and Republican en-

¹William H. Harbaugh, The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 79-91.

dorsement elected Mayor Seth Low. This race introduced Stanley Isaacs to fusion politics. Low's administration demonstrated the continuation of patrician reform and the emphasis on structural change. He stressed businesslike efficiency and reduced the budget through cutting jobs and salaries. Typical of the limited nature of conservative reform, Low continued to ignore the social and economic conditions of the urban poor and failed to be reelected in 1903.¹

By 1904, after an initial boost from family members, Stanley Isaacs was on his own and on his way to becoming an active Republican in New York County. Already Vice President of the Roosevelt and Fairbank First Voters Club of the Twenty-ninth Assembly District² and Republican Captain of his election district,³ he actively participated in several local campaigns, including Lincoln Bates, Jr.'s race for the assembly in 1910.⁴

Even stronger than family and local influences,

¹Melvin Holli, "Social and Structural Reform" ed., Alexander B. Callow Jr., The City Boss in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 217-219.

²Letterhead, Roosevelt and Fairbanks First Voters Club, 1904, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 15.

⁴Letterhead, Lincoln Bates, Jr. for Assembly, 5 November, 1910, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

Theodore Roosevelt's personality drew Isaacs into the Republican party. "The main thing," Isaacs later stated, was that "Theodore Roosevelt's soul inspired me...I still regard him as the greatest preacher of his time. People said he used clichés and platitudes, still he gave it emphasis and direction. He lived it himself with complete sincerity in everything he said and did. It was exciting just to have known him."¹

Throughout the spring primaries of 1912, Isaacs remained a regular Republican. Soon it became obvious to him that Roosevelt would be denied the Presidential nomination, despite popular support. Francis Bird, who served as New York County Progressive Party Chairman, "was most influential in persuading me," Isaacs wrote, "to resign from the Presidency of the Republican Club in my District. Lincoln Bates, Jr., was also a great influence. At their request I became the Progressive leader of the Twenty-ninth Assembly District."²

As Isaacs was weighing his decision to switch parties he received a convincing letter from Bird. "It seemed to me my duty to support [The Progressive Party]....I believe it

¹Stanley Isaacs, interview about Theodore Roosevelt, 1 May 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

²Stanley Isaacs to Mrs. Ripley Hitchcock, 1 March 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

will eventually be successful," Bird argued. "It is certain to be so if the men who really believe in it lend a hand. I spent Sunday with Colonel Roosevelt and told him I decided to resign and support the movement. He was very nice about it and told me the fight was a crusader's fight and the cautious course for me was to hold my job. I should consider very carefully. I thought this very nice of him and unlike what the Sun and Times would have you believe he would have said."¹

Although Lewis Isaacs tried to discourage his brother Stanley from taking this major step, Stanley could not be held back. He explained his decision to Lewis. "If a new party is built along permanent lines, not merely one man, I think I must do what I can to keep it along and not just stand back ready to join if it works out and scoff at it if it fails. A man never helps anything merely watching it grow." Isaacs refused to consider his own personal interests. "Nor am I willing to let the fact that I can doubtless do much better for myself by staying in the Republican ranks influence my conduct. I never went into politics with anything personal in view and if this cause is worth helping and I can do it most good by joining now

¹Francis Bird to Stanley Isaacs, 24 July n.d., Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

rather than later, I want to lend a hand." As to the Republicans, Isaacs felt "it has become hopeless to fight within the party in view of the number who've left it for the new....The fact that I'm giving up family tradition does not weigh heavily with me cause thousands of Republicans are leaving the party and those forming the new party are mainly Republicans of high standards."¹

Isaacs formally resigned from his Republican club in September of 1912, declaring "the events of the past four months made it unpleasantly clear to me that disinterested and public spirited efforts will no longer be effective in the Republican Party dominated as it is both in State and Nation by selfish leadership....I feel that the struggle for clear politics within the party has become hopeless and can be fought only under new banners with real prospects of success."²

Isaacs advised Roosevelt that he would "spend time between now [August] and election day in practical work of assisting the movement and bringing others into the ranks."³ Keeping his word, Stanley became Vice Chairman of the

¹Stanley Isaacs to Lewis Isaacs, 6 August 1912, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

²Stanley Isaacs to Republican Club of the Twenty-ninth Assembly District, 3 September 1912, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

³Stanley Isaacs to Theodore Roosevelt, 8 August 1912, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

Progressive County Committee in Manhattan and chairman of the National Progressive Organization in the Twenty-ninth Assembly District. He worked through the newly established Yorkville Progressive Club, operating from a storefront on Park Avenue and Eighty-fifth Street.¹ Isaacs had not met closely with Roosevelt since his 1898 campaign for New York State Governor. After Stanley organized the Yorkville Progressive Club he went to Roosevelt's office with seven or eight other people. "He picked me out by name that time," Isaacs wrote astonished. "That seemed to me pretty remarkable....He had a fabulous memory."²

For the campaign, "I got a bunch of youngsters as captains", Isaacs noted. "We worked very hard - we had no money at all. I told everybody who worked for the Progressive Party that it was a crusade."³ Under Isaacs' leadership in the Twenty-ninth Assembly District the Bull Moose party carried the district pushing the Republicans to third place in the voting tallies.⁴

For four years, Isaacs kept the district club going and aimed toward Progressive Party goals. During the 1913 New York City Mayoral campaign, Progressives threw their

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 20-21.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 22.

support behind John Purroy Mitchell, the victorious fusion candidate.¹ Once again Isaacs reaffirmed his faith in fusion politics as a means toward good government. In 1914, Isaacs campaigned for Frederick Davenport, the Progressive's unsuccessful candidate for United States Senator.²

The following year the Progressives tasted victory in their opposition to the new State Constitution. As Chairman of the New York State Constitutional Convention Committee Isaacs led his party in their fight "to defeat the product of the Constitutional Convention which was controlled by the most conservative people in the Republican party allied with the most conservative in the Democratic party....We were determined to beat the Constitution and prepared a report on it. When it came to the vote in 1915, we did succeed in beating it. I think it was a very healthy thing for city and state."³ "The constitution provided inadequate provisions for home rule for New York City," Isaacs argued, "home rule needed for New York must be complete. We believe that city government is not merely a branch of the state government, but that besides it's a corporate entity...and advocate giving each city and village powers to regulate matters about its own

¹Stanley Isaacs to John P. Mitchell, 1 August 1913, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 28.

³Ibid., p. 29.

property, affairs and government and exercise full power of local self-government."¹

Isaacs remained faithful to many Progressive ideals his whole life. Twenty-five years later, during Franklin Roosevelt's Supreme Court crisis, Isaacs suggested an earlier solution. "As far as the Supreme Court is concerned, Theodore Roosevelt's former idea of a recall of judicial decisions still seems to me the logical method in our country to counteract the influence of a majority of the court which may be too much imbued with a dead social philosophy to permit the progress demanded in this land."²

Isaacs championed the Progressive faith in proportional representation for New York City. "Political partisanship has no place in the selection of city government. The election of Low in 1901 and Mitchell in 1913 was possible because the Republican party was aided by an independent group."³ After the abolition of proportional representation for the City Council, Isaacs lamented "as long as the method existed those who believe in good government could act together without reference to party leaders and party machines. Now candidates for the City Council will be subject to party mechanics similar to others."⁴

¹Stanley Isaacs to Herald Tribune, 28 January 1915, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

²Stanley Isaacs to Dorothy Thompson, 10 February 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs to Learned Hand, 28 October 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Genevieve B. Earle, 19 July 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

Following the progressive emphasis on absolute morality, Isaacs adhered to Roosevelt's dictum "if I must choose between righteousness and peace I choose righteousness."¹ Isaacs never followed the politically expedient solution on major issues no matter what the cost. In making decisions Isaacs maintained you "can reason more clearly if you do not try to analyze all the petty phases of a proposition but settle it on the basis of the main issue if it involves a moral issue. Then you don't have to worry anymore....It's perfectly right to compromise on issues that aren't moral issues."²

In the progressive tradition Isaacs guarded against corruption in government. Fearing abuses by public officials he supported measures that limited individual discretion especially in fiscal matters.³ As Borough President and City Councilman, Isaacs carefully avoided the slightest suggestion of personal wrongdoing. Never wanting to be in a position of owing a favor, Stanley Isaacs refused to accept anything from anyone. He sought to maintain complete independence at all times. His strict code meant never even allowing a good friend to treat him to a meal. Lunch checks with Stanley

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes Concerning Theodore Roosevelt, 25 March 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

²Stanley Isaacs, Interview about Theodore Roosevelt, 1 May 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

³Jacob Lutsky, interview, New York, 26 November 1973.

were always divided according to what each person ate with the tax and tip appropriately prorated. In a large luncheon group Stanley always made these calculations. As one friend of Isaacs commented, "we all trusted him to do it accurately".¹

Equally rigid about the numerous unsolicited gifts that arrived at his office or home, Isaacs tried, if possible, to return such items. With perishables, such as fruit or flowers, he donated them to one of his favorite charities. He then conveyed his actions and feelings to the sender. "I found at my house, on my return yesterday a very handsome basket of fruit from you," Isaacs wrote to one aspiring job seeker, "but I just can't accept any gift, large or small, from anyone whom I am trying to help in the city administration. I could not return it to Florida, I finally decided to give it to the Lenox Hill Settlement. I know you meant well, but I want you to know that I am completely rigid about acceptance of any kind of favor or gift from anyone with whom I have official contact."²

Isaacs answered critics who questioned the progressives' motives. Of George Perkins, the J. P. Morgan partner who became so close to Theodore Roosevelt, Isaacs maintained, "I don't agree with Harold Ickes that he killed the Progressive party....I'm confident he was an honest and sincere

¹Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 October 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs to J. Edward Blount, 6 January 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 34.

progressive provided you take into consideration his conservative background and financial connections. He was one of those conservative men far sighted enough to know the United States couldn't tolerate a relapse into the days of McKinley and Hanna. Of course," Isaacs conceded, "his past business association was harmful to the party because he was called a hypocrite on the basis of these." But Isaacs contended, "I worked with Perkins, especially during the campaign to defeat the new constitution which the Republican controlled Constitutional Convention proposed for the State of New York....Perkins was the spearhead of the opposition. I don't see how he could have fought some of the more reactionary provisions of the proposed constitution if he hadn't been wholly sincere."¹

"I have to question your appraisal of the whole situation in 1912," Isaacs wrote to Elting E. Morison. "You imply Theodore Roosevelt's motive - lust for power is underlying all. I believe this emphasis quite unfair....I was involved in the campaign, and in the end ultimately joined the Progressive party because I felt there were proud reasons for his entry into the race. I'm certain those reasons motivated most of us and Theodore Roosevelt was persuaded by them....To me the difference between the Progressive and Republican platforms is great. The Progressive platform as

¹Stanley Isaacs to Judah Rubenstein, 21 March 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

drafted was almost revolutionary." Isaacs believed "Theodore Roosevelt was persuaded by the development of this program in which he was deeply interested and by the pressures from his followers to support our desires for an independent party. I don't believe he created this demand but I believe he yielded to it, possibly without reluctance. I do feel," Isaacs suggested to Morison "that you'd want to weigh the point of view of those who joined the National Progressive party and who still regard our program as most constructive with marked influence on the years that followed."¹

In 1916 Isaacs went to Chicago as a delegate to the National Progressive Party Convention. When the party broke up he joined the Hughes Alliance in New York State and campaigned for Charles Evans Hughes for President.² After the national election, Herbert Parsons, the Republican leader in Isaacs' district, asked Stanley to rejoin the club. "I told him," Isaacs noted "I have no apologies to make for being a Progressive." Parsons replied, "you don't have to do any apologizing at all. We need you. We need liberal progressive people in the Republican party."³ Confident that the party was now more open-minded, Isaacs returned to his former club. Within one year, he was elected its President, which

¹Stanley Isaacs to Elting E. Morison, 29 November 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 35.

proved to Isaacs that he could maintain his independence and still be successful in politics.¹ This confidence influenced his entire political career.

Although he never again left his party, within the Republican organization Isaacs remained a maverick. As a proponent of measures that weakened boss control he was often at odds with the leadership. As a former Progressive, Isaacs continued to press for those mechanical means which appeared to insure greater democratization of the political process. "I decided," wrote Isaacs, "it was more useful to work within the party frame than as an independent outside the party. Influence on nominations is as important as influence on elections. I believe the party is a tool to achieve something not an end in itself. It's goal is to help our progress toward a higher standard of living."²

In 1919 Isaacs was a spokesman for the minority of New York County Republicans who wanted the direct primary used to nominate candidates. The majority, favoring the convention system, argued that this procedure produced Theodore Roosevelt. To this Isaacs retorted, but "it also took it away from him."³ Isaacs continued to protest the role of

¹Ibid., p. 36.

²Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Annual Invocation Meeting of Orange County Federation of Young Republican Clubs, 23 February 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

³New York Times, 20 February 1919.

district leaders in designating party nominees. He routinely complained, "I resent bypassing the rank and file."¹

In 1920, Isaacs joined a small group of Republicans backing Herbert Hoover for President. When Stanley offered his support he participated whole heartedly in a highly visible manner. Beyond lending his name to the Hoover campaign organization, Isaacs spoke at rallies for the prospective candidate.²

The following year Isaacs belonged to the Citywide Coalition Committee, promoting the Fusion Movement against Tammany Mayor John Hylan.³ After Hylan's overwhelming victory Isaacs analyzed the results of the election as a blueprint for future races. Isaacs looked at history to "learn from the past and not to worry about what might have been."⁴ "I have always felt the proverb 'History repeats itself' is true," Isaacs wrote to Walter Lippmann, "mainly because having ignored our history or having become carefree about it, we repeat mistakes that could have been avoided."⁵

The 1921 campaign, in Isaacs' opinion, illustrated

¹Stanley Isaacs to Frederick Coudert, 9 May 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

²Postcard announcing Hoover Rally, 2 June 1920, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 2.

³New York Times, 17 June 1921.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Simon Gerson, 1 October 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to Walter Lippmann, 22 July 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

fundamental errors which Republicans could correct in other elections. To defeat Tammany forces, Isaacs asserted that a true coalition must be formed including all anti-Tammany Democrats, Independents and Republicans. The campaign must be waged for all the candidates nominated. "Absence of anything like intelligent discussion on fundamental issues" marked the 1921 race, Isaacs asserted. "I believe victory against Tammany Hall requires attack by exposure of misgovernment and corruption....The idea that a straight Republican ticket can win in New York City must be disregarded for this generation."¹

Through the 1920's Isaacs remained a regular Republican satisfied that at least Coolidge restored honesty², and pleased with Hoover's success in 1928.³ Isaacs avoided conflict on national issues. In local disputes, Isaacs sometimes sided with the organization. Isaacs backed Frank J. Coleman, when he was challenged by former State Senator Schyler M. Meyer for leadership of the Fifteenth, formerly the Twentyninth, Assembly District. Meyer's actions were understood as an attack on Samuel S. Koenig, Republican County Chairman since 1911 and Congressman Ogden L. Mills, both men Isaacs supported at that time.⁴ Coleman won the fight along with

¹Stanley Isaacs, The New York Municipal Campaign of 1921, n.d., Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 49.

³Ibid., p. 63.

⁴New York Times, 25 January 1924.

Mrs. John T. Pratt as his associate leader.¹ A few years later Isaacs became campaign manager for Mrs. Pratt's congressional race. In 1926 to meet renewed opposition to Koenig's leadership Isaacs joined in the reorganization of the New York Young Republican Club. Originally founded in 1911, they revived the club to offset the newly formed New York County Republican Club of anti-Koenig men.²

When Stanley Isaacs preached equality and minority rights, he included women. There is "no reason why a woman shouldn't be elected mayor or hold any office provided she's qualified," Isaacs asserted, "there may be a handicap in accepting a woman candidate because of the effects of prejudice. However, I don't share that prejudice."³

Isaacs' actions revealed his openmindedness. In 1928, he successfully managed Ruth Pratt's campaign for Congress. Mrs. Pratt's victory made her the first woman representative from New York City. She began with a primary against Assemblyman Phelps Phelps. Each claimed to be the organization candidate. Phelps boasted endorsements by four out of the five district organizations. Although Ruth Pratt received the backing of only one, the Fifteenth Assembly District, it

¹New York Times, 2 April 1924.

²New York Times, 23 May 1926.

³Stanley Isaacs to Dorothy Diamond, 31 May 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 35.

contained forty-five percent of the Republican vote.¹ "We had an advantage," Isaacs felt. "Mrs. Pratt had been on the Board of Aldermen and had shown herself to be a conspicuously able and fine woman. Phelps had been in the Assembly for about five years and a very inconspicuous member."² After the primary she went on to beat Philip Berolzheimer in the general election.³

Two years later, Isaacs managed Ruth Pratt's victorious re-election bid. Isaacs admired the congresswoman for her show "of independence...on prohibition and protection she supported the President. She ran on a platform favoring repeal of the eighteenth amendment and she had the courage and independence to vote against the tariff."⁴

Sandwiched between Mrs. Pratt's two campaigns, Isaacs stood behind Fiorello LaGuardia in his first attempt to become mayor of New York City. With Keyes Winter, leader of the Fifteenth as LaGuardia's campaign manager and Joseph Clark Baldwin III, alderman from the same district, as treasurer, Isaacs' associates were heavily involved in the campaign.⁵

¹New York Herald Tribune, 7 September 1928.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 66.

³New York Times, 7 November 1928.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to New York Times, 22 October 1930, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 1.

⁵Arthur Mann, LaGuardia: A Fighter Against His Times, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 271.

Isaacs sought no material rewards for these endeavors. "I made no effort to get an appointment," Isaacs claimed, "because I wasn't interested at the time. In those days I couldn't afford to be independent. I had family responsibility and others which were still there. My son was still at college and law school and I wanted to see him through. I wasn't going to do anything to make me dependent on a political job for a living. In 1931, I visited Ogden Mills in Washington when he was in the Treasury Department. As I was leaving he said 'what do you want? Can't I do something for you. I'd like to do something for you.' I said 'I'm not interested', which was really true and he took it at face value."¹

Earlier revolts against Samuel Koenig, Republican chairman of New York County, had been squashed by his supporters. By the end of 1932, years of discontent erupted in a final blow to Koenig's rule. Isaacs, like many other Republicans became disenchanted with Koenig's uncomfortably close relationship with Tammany Hall.² The Fifteenth Assembly District Republican Club denounced Koenig, claiming that he along with Republican State chairman W. Kingland Macy, "traded with Tammany".³ At a meeting of the Fifteenth Assembly Dis-

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 80.

²Henry Van Veen, interview, New York, 13 November 1970.

³New York Herald Tribune, 31 December 1932.

strict Club calling for Koenig's resignation, Isaacs charged "not since the Mitchell administration had the Republican party under Koenig's leadership won a victory in the city." Isaacs vigorously attacked the dealist favors under the Macy-Koenig system.¹ Koenig ignored all resignation calls. For the next few months, Republicans weighed forcibly ousting Koenig in mid term versus waiting for the fall primary. Isaacs was one of the leaders of the anti-Koenig forces. The Republican County Advisory Committee resolved to let the voters decide in the primary elections. The challenge began as Stanley Isaacs and other Young Republicans, Archie O. Dawson, J. Edward Lombard, Jr., and Walter Mack, Jr., rallied for action.² Through their efforts Chase Mellen became the next county chairman. Unfortunately, he proved inept in his post and only served a two year term. Underneath the change at the top, the old crowd stayed the same. Two years later, Kenneth Simpson, leader of the Fifteenth Assembly District, became County Chairman through the support of the former Koenig group.³

As the 1933 mayoral campaign approached, Republicans such as Isaacs, thinking in terms of fusion, created a group to formulate the ticket.⁴ Drawing its members primarily from

¹New York World Telegram, 27 March 1933.

²New York Herald Tribune, 28 March 1933.

³Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1970.

⁴New York Times, 20 January 1933.

conservative Republicans, the business community and the Good Government organizations, the Fusion Conference Committee initially reacted negatively to LaGuardia.¹ By summer, when Judge Seabury, well known for his muckraking investigation of the New York City judicial system, came out for LaGuardia, the fusion base broadened. Republican opposition to LaGuardia focused around former Governor Charles S. Whitman. Stanley Isaacs pushed hard for LaGuardia, as the Whitman forces attempted to recommend the nomination of General John F. O'Ryan. Judge Seabury decisively intervened for LaGuardia.²

In the campaign Isaacs organized a real estate committee for LaGuardia and spent half of every day at headquarters.³ His support helped attract leaders of the social settlements.⁴ Isaacs admired LaGuardia's treasurer David Heyman for his refusal to run a deficit. Deploring waste of any kind, Stanley felt entirely too much money was usually squandered in politics.⁵

As the depression and New Deal reforms changed the national government, Isaacs looked discouragingly at the

¹Arthur Mann, LaGuardia Comes to Power (New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1965), p. 67.

²Ibid., p. 86.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 73.

⁴Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1973.

⁵Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 74.

outlook for Republicans in 1936. "The justified antagonism to Roosevelt," Isaacs wrote, "is driving us, I am afraid, into an untenable position. We seem to be drifting more and more toward the conservative side." Noting his hero Theodore Roosevelt, Isaacs emphasized, "I am sure Theodore Roosevelt believed in a strong federal government, apparently we're turning against such and emphasizing states rights. I think this development unfortunate. I feel Theodore Roosevelt coupled his belief in a strong federal government and broad federal powers with a sincere faith in local administration. It is Franklin D. Roosevelt's insistence on direct Federal control and administration in every locality and direct Federal control and administration of every government agency, that I think is so disastrous, rather than his desire to see the Federal power broaden so as to cope with nationwide problems. I do not believe this distinction is being pointed out to all Republican voters and the net result is that we are turning into a reactionary states rights party - just the antithesis of what we stood for from 1901-1908."¹

Isaacs' mistrust of Franklin D. Roosevelt goes back to the 1920's when Roosevelt was President of the American Construction Council. Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. claims Roosevelt accepted this position to serve the industry and

¹ Stanley Isaacs to James R. Garfield, 28 October 1935, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

quit because he received no assistance.¹ According to Isaacs, his personal experience contradicted this interpretation and created a lasting tarnished view of Roosevelt. As a real estate builder and investor, Isaacs feared the "promotion of certified mortgages by unscrupulous operators. Reckless mortgage issues were encouraged based upon swollen appraisals that brought in high fees to promoters and disaster to investors. It was clear...that unless there was some measure of restraint and control within the industry it would lead to a collapse." Isaacs went to Roosevelt with concrete examples of "properties mortgaged for fifty percent or more in excess of their cost and true value, the mortgages being then sold as 'Conservative investments' by companies." Roosevelt listened to the evidence of fraud and pleas for regulations and agreed to appoint a committee to correct these abuses. "Thereupon he appointed to the committee three men...all the most flagrant offenders in the industry. In other words, Roosevelt doublecrossed us and those whom we were trying to protect in a most flagrant manner. I never trusted him after this experience."²

After the 1933 fusion sweep, the Manhattan Borough Presidency spot remained in the Tammany Hall camp. The

¹Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt, Vol. 1: The Crises of the Old Order (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), p. 375.

²Stanley Isaacs to Keyes Winter, 3 September 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

LaGuardia team sought complete victory in 1937. They needed a strong candidate, liberal enough to insure the endorsement of the American Labor Party. Founded by Franklin Roosevelt admirers in 1936, to gain the support of the large Jewish labor groups hostile to Tammany Hall, this party became a significant factor in the 1937 citywide campaign. As a Jew involved in the settlement and housing movements, Stanley Isaacs fulfilled these requirements.¹

The nomination came as a surprise to Isaacs; he had not solicited it.² As the negotiating process for the slate began, Isaacs received a call from Kenneth Simpson, New York County Republican Chairman, requesting Isaacs to meet with Adolf Berle, Sidney Hillman and Alex Rose. "You can talk their language," Simpson suggested, "and I can't. I need you." At a meeting at Berle's house Isaacs wrote they reached an understanding that if "we gave them men whom they could cheerfully support because they were liberal in their instincts, attitudes and record, they would give them support and not merely become an adjunct of the Democratic party." After we left the meeting Simpson said "I've got a question to ask of you, but I don't expect you to answer it. Will you

¹Paul Kern, interview, New York, 24 October 1973.

²Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

run for Borough President? Isaacs succinctly replied 'I'm not interested.'"¹

The conversation ended and Isaacs went home never even mentioning the offer to his wife, thinking the matter unimportant. But that Sunday, the newspapers carried a release indicating Isaacs as Simpson's choice for Manhattan Borough President. Thinking he must be a stalkinghorse for someone else, Isaacs paid little attention to the article. The next day Paul Kern, who was active in the American Labor Party told Isaacs "You have to run for Borough President. The Labor Party is ready to support you....The Mayor wants you and Mr. Berle wants you. You're going to hear from them." Only then Isaacs wrote, "I took it seriously. I talked it over with Mrs. Isaacs and came to the conclusion if the nomination came to me in that way I'd be very glad to accept it."² "I don't think he ever really hesitated," Stanley's son Myron recalled, "he liked the idea of public service."³

The following day Isaacs received phone calls from Berle and LaGuardia. Berle, as spokesman for the Mayor, asked Isaacs to run for the Borough Presidency and insured

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 82-83.

²Ibid., pp. 84-85.

³Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

him . . . Labor Party endorsement. Isaacs agreed to make the race. A call from LaGuardia followed expressing delight. "He said he didn't have to see me cause I know where he stood and he knew where I stood. That was the whole preliminary for the Borough Presidency."¹ The campaign was on.

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 85.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOROUGH PRESIDENCY

"A political campaign is one form of insanity, or at least it seems to me as I go through with it," Isaacs wrote in the midst of his run for the Borough Presidency. "It is exciting to face so many audiences of different kinds and see how patient they are, it has been a fine experience. I am delighted with the company I am in and the fact that we really stand for something worth while and that it is not the usual political bunk but more of a crusade for decency and sound city planning and win or lose I won't be at all sorry to have run."¹

Filled with enthusiasm, Isaacs campaigned vigorously. LaGuardia's fusion team shared headquarters at the Roosevelt Hotel. The Fusion Committee picked up most of the expense, leaving Stanley on his own only for circulars and mailings.² To finance this portion Isaacs wrote, "I made up my mind to ask for no contributions at all and to supplement such contributions as were sent me voluntarily by my friends out of my own funds, if this prove necessary,

¹Stanley Isaacs to Natalie Davison, 27 October, 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 87-88.

in connection with the very limited expenditures that I propose to make in my individual campaign."¹ Isaacs supporters delivered, "I inquire why I had not been solicited for a contribution," one follower wrote "and was informed that no solicitation for contributions had been made but that contributions freely offered would be accepted. I enclose a small check."² These amounts accumulated, adding up to \$5364.25 of the \$6499.16 spent in the campaign. Isaacs personally covered the \$1134.91 difference.³

Isaacs felt comfortable with his running mates. In defense of LaGuardia at the top of the ticket, Stanley wrote, "I honestly do not want the support of anyone who is not willing to give me his aid knowing that I am just one hundred percent for the mayor and going to campaign for him with all the energy that I possess. I know of course, that many people will vote for me who are not for LaGuardia, but I would not want them to do so if they did not understand my complete loyalty to him."⁴ Isaacs found the fusion candidates, Joseph D. McGoldrick for comptroller and Newbold Morris for President

¹Stanley Isaacs to Andrew Armstrong, 5 October 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Charles Garside to Stanley Isaacs, November 1973, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Statement of the Treasurer of the Non Partisan Citizens Committee to elect Stanley Isaacs Borough President, 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Max Morgenthau 24 September, 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

of the City Council, both easy to work with.¹ Although initially delighted with Thomas Dewey on the ticket running for Manhattan District Attorney, Isaacs' ardor for him soon cooled. At first Isaacs wrote to Dewey, "I am sure you must know how desirous I am that you gave way to the pressure upon you to run for District Attorney. You will strengthen the ticket immeasurably and almost insure LaGuardia's re-election. I have selfish reasons naturally for wanting you to run, because it will be the greatest possible pleasure to campaign side by side with you in this borough. But I hope you will believe me when I say that is not the reason which animates my urging you to accept the nominations."² By election day Isaacs had changed his views of Dewey. "I never campaigned with a more selfish individual," Stanley wrote. "He insisted in his headquarters (he established separate headquarters throughout the city) that there be no picture of any other candidate. I thought it should be a joint campaign."³ This growing friction surfaced again in later years.

Isaacs campaigned as a "crusader for a humane city government,"⁴ with the conviction that "government and

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 89.

²Stanley Isaacs to Thomas Dewey, 9 August 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 89.

⁴Stanley Isaacs Campaign Flyer, 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

private individuals can work side by side" to improve New York. He believed "business and real estate must develop a social consciousness in the process."¹ The Citizens Union hailed Isaacs as a man who had "given years of unselfish service to progressive political and civic movements. He is a recognized authority in such fields as city planning and housing and is thereby particularly qualified. His character, ability and experience give promise of distinguished public service."² Equally as enthusiastic, the New York Times wrote "he is that rare rare hope. A practical dreamer, of his executive ability there can be no reasonable doubt. Of his political and personal independence there can be no doubt either....Mr. Isaacs has the endorsement of the Republican, City Fusion, Progressive and American Labor Parties, which is evidence that he commands the confidence of voters of several different philosophies. His record indicates that he deserves that confidence."³ The public agreed, carrying Isaacs with his fellow fusion candidates to victory in the 1937 election.

Falling short of LaGuardia and Dewey's one hundred

¹Stanley Isaacs, Speech Real Estate Board Luncheon, 7 December 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Citizens Union Endorsement, 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 6.

³New York Times, 13 October 1937.

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³New York Times, 13 October 1937.

thousand vote plurality, Isaacs defeated Timothy Sullivan 285,451 to 244,860. Isaacs drew his greatest pluralities from the 7th, 9th, 10th, and 15th election districts; the nicer residential neighborhoods surrounding Central Park on the South, West and East and in the 23rd district in Northern Manhattan's Washington Heights area.¹ At this time, Democrats outnumbered Republicans four to one in registration.²

The newly adopted 1937 city charter left the Borough Presidents with sharply diminished powers from their predecessors and a salary reduced from twenty to fifteen thousand dollars. Under the new framework the borough head continued as a member of the Board of Estimate but not as a member of the Council, as he had been. In his borough, he could appoint an advisory planning board and had general supervision over the construction and repair of public roads, the sewage and drainage systems and the public baths. As a borough spokesman he could use his position as a platform to advocate his pet causes.³

Work began as Isaacs assembled his staff. At this early point he initiated a controversy which haunted him for

¹New York Times, 3 November 1937.

²New York City Board of Elections, Annual Report, 1937, pp. 56-57.

³Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Queens College Speech. 10 April 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

the rest of his career. Although a dedicated Republican, Isaacs respected the coalition which elected him and sought to fill his office with people of varied political persuasions. He realized the important role of the American Labor Party in the fusion victory and agreed to reward them accordingly, as long as competent people filled the positions. For his confidential examiner Isaacs chose Simon Gerson, an avowed Communist. This appointment created an uproar. Known as a smart young man, very knowledgeable in city government, Gerson seemed to Isaacs a good choice for this job.¹ Gerson, the City Hall Reporter for the Communist paper, The Daily Worker, also spent summers in Croton, New York and had met Isaacs socially. "There is no question but that Stanley knew my political bent," Gerson recalled. "He knew I wrote for The Daily Worker, a Communist paper and that I had supported the American Labor Party."²

Before publicly announcing his plans, Isaacs sought LaGuardia's approval. Paul Kern, then a mayoral assistant, remembered the meeting between the two. As Isaacs suggested Gerson, LaGuardia replied, "they did a lot for us in the campaign. They deserve something for what they did. I would not be embarrassed by it."³

¹Paul Kern, interview, New York, 24 October 1973.

²Simon Gerson, interview, New York, 17 October 1973.

³Paul Kern, interview, 24 October 1973.

Naive about the implications of Gerson's communism, Isaacs expected the outcry in the press to end quickly. According to his son Myron, Isaacs felt he "shouldn't limit his appointments to Republicans and just didn't distinguish between communists and socialists."¹ The press saw differently and reacted strongly. The headlines blared, "Isaacs picks Gerson Communist as aide."² "Stanley Isaacs says not interested in Communist affiliations of Gerson. The public will not share his amazing indifference....Gerson will take charge of press relations of the Borough President's office. This means communist control of all information and propaganda coming out of that office."³ The Tribune agreed, "however sacred, may be the principal of free conscience and free speech, it is absurd to insist that a democracy on the strength of this principle should tolerate in its government the servants of alien power."⁴

Angry citizens took action and the press gave it wide coverage. "War Vets bitterly protest Isaacs Red Appointment."⁵ "Meeting state leaders in Veterans, religious and patriotic

¹Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

²New York Times, 23 December 1937.

³The New York Journal and American, 23 December 1937.

⁴The New York Herald Tribune, 25 February 1938.

⁵The New York Journal and American, 23 December 1937.

organizations plan campaign ouster Gerson and failing that ouster Stanley Isaacs."¹ The Telegram strongly suggested "Stanley Isaacs should promptly rescind appointment. Failure to do so raises grave questions of Stanley Isaacs' own fitness."²

Even as the newspaper attack continued and pickets marched in front of his Ninety-sixth Street home, Isaacs stood firm.³ "I was determined to appoint fit men for the job," he explained. "I mentioned it to Ken Simpson, (New York County Republican Leader) and LaGuardia and nobody raised any objection....I made up my mind that if a man could be elected to public office and there was no prohibition against the election of Communists, as was proven later by the election of several to the City Council, there was no reason why a man should not be appointed. I felt that, until membership in the Communist party was proved actually subversive and while it was recognized as a legal party, membership in that party has no right to bar a man."⁴ To Isaacs the whole affair raised a civil liberties issue, similar to one he had fought once before. "Exactly the

¹New York Telegram, 7 February 1938.

²New York Telegram, 28 February 1938.

³Edith Isaacs, interview, 28 December 1971.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 90-95.

same stand was taken when the Socialists were expelled from the Assembly," he wrote. "The same situation exists in this case and the same type of person has been lined up against the appointment. This is the sort of thing I have fought all my life and I can promise you that I will never give way under such circumstance."¹ Isaacs tried to explain himself. "I believe devoutly in the civil liberties guaranteed by this Constitution - not merely in freedom of thought, in expression as well. I have stood by the Gerson appointment because I thought the attack upon it was an attack upon fundamental American liberties and because I did not believe and do not believe that membership in the Communist party involves a desire to overthrow this government by force or violence, any one advocating that, of course, has no place in civil government." Isaacs felt "we have to fight 'communism', as an unsound and destructive economic and social doctrine, and on the other hand join with communists in protecting our essential democracy. Of course I may be misled in thinking that they can be sincere allies in this fight, but I do believe they can be."²

As the protest mounted, Isaacs conferred with LaGuardia, A. A. Berle of the American Labor Party, Mark MacClay, a leading Republican and George Seabury, head of the Fusion Movement.

¹Stanley Isaacs to John R. Davies, 7 September 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²Stanley Isaacs to George Adler, 12 December 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

Although Isaacs never personally wavered in his convictions, he did not want to do anything to embarrass the administration. The group supported Isaacs in his decision to stand by the appointment.¹

The public furor continued. The Telegram refused to accept the parallel between the ouster of the Socialist members of the legislature and Gerson's appointment. "Elective offices are different than appointed ones and you can't compare Communists and Socialists....We can't imagine why Gerson is so important. Mr. Isaacs has we fear lost his sense of proportion."² Isaacs answered with a letter to the newspaper trying again to explain his actions. "I regarded it my duty to fill the various exempt positions in this office with the best material I could locate. I was glad to surround myself in this office with those who differed among themselves in their fundamental ideas, believing that I could learn from both the right and the left and that I would be more useful to the community which I serve if I understood the point of view of as many as possible of the varied constituency which had elected me....I assure you I have nothing whatsoever in common with the Communist doctrine or Communist Party." Isaacs maintained "a member of the Communist party is eligible under civil service rule. I do not see why he is ineligible for appointive office."³

¹Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1973.

²New York Telegram, 19 February 1938.

³New York Telegram, 28 February 1938.

Amidst the critical uproar, favorable support came to Isaacs from the National Lawyers Guild. They adopted a resolution asserting that the "maintenance of democracy depends upon the fundamental principal that no person should be discriminated against, persecuted or disqualified by reason of his political beliefs or affiliation."¹ Other prominent liberals including Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, author Lewis Mumford and Citizens Union President William J. Schieffelin, openly backed Isaacs in the dispute.²

The American Legion petitioned New York State Governor Herbert Lehman to remove Isaacs from office. They charged "he violated both the letter and spirit of his oath of office and betrayed public trust by appointing Gerson."³ Lehman dismissed the ouster plea, claiming he had no power to remove an elected official who had acted within his legal rights.⁴

The New York State Legislature reacted to the Gerson issue by passing the McNoboe Bill forbidding communists in public employment.⁵ The press stirred once again, but on this issue, even the newspapers critical of Isaacs, opposed the act. The Post wrote, "we think the McNoboe Bill bad and unconstitutional. We hope the Governor will veto it. The

¹New York Times, 17 February 1938.

²New York Post, 3 March 1938.

³New York Times, 8 March 1938.

⁴New York Sun, 10 March 1938.

⁵New York Times, 15 March 1938.

Gerson appointment was a political error. The passage of this bill shows how grave an error."¹ Labeled "a dangerous bill" by the Times² they joined the Telegram³ and Tribune⁴ in calls for the governor's veto. The Daily News, which had given Isaacs earlier support wrote, "the anti-red bill goes too far. We hope Stanley Isaacs holds out against organized pressure and refuses to fire Gerson solely because he is a red."⁵ The Journal continuing their attack on Isaacs came out for the bill's approval.⁶ Governor Lehman vetoed the act "as a peril to liberty...opening gates to oppressive laws."⁷ Despite this setback, Isaacs' opponents did not abandon their attack.

As the mood of the nation turned against the Soviet Union following Stalin's pact with Hitler in 1939, pressure against Gerson increased. Indignation rose following the Dies' Committee inquiry into widespread un-American activities by Communist party members.⁸ In 1940 Gerson foes received a new law. The enactment of the

¹New York Post, 21 March 1938.

²New York Times, 22 March 1938.

³New York Telegram, 21 March 1938.

⁴New York Herald Tribune, 24 March 1938.

⁵New York Daily News, 22 March 1938.

⁶New York Journal and American, 23 March 1938.

⁷New York Times, 31 March 1938.

⁸New York Journal and American, 10 October 1939.

Devany bill extended the ban against employment of persons advocating violent overthrow of the government to the unclassified civil service. A year later a similar measure passed covering teachers and regular civil service positions.¹ The American Legion now moved to force Gerson's ouster through a lawsuit based on violation of the Devany amendment.² With the Corporation Counsel's refusal to defend Gerson, he had to retain his own attorney and consequently quit his post as the trial began.³ "I hereby resign," Gerson wrote to the Borough President. "The unwillingness of the Corporation Counsel to defend my case on obvious civil liberties involved places the entire burden of protracted litigation upon me. My meager finances makes this impossible. Moreover, I am reluctant to continue further a situation in which my employment is being maliciously used to detract from your splendid work."⁴ In accepting this resignation Isaacs lamented, "I should have preferred that the question of the principles of your political party be adjudicated by the courts. Your resignation apparently renders the matter academic."⁵

¹New York Post, 18 April 1940.

²New York Times, 10 September 1940.

³New York Telegram, 27 September 1940.

⁴Simon Gerson to Stanley Isaacs, 27 September 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to Simon Gerson, 27 September 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

Earlier Isaacs had refused Gerson's offers to resign, believing that they should fight it through. Gerson explained, "Isaacs calculated even if I got out, opposition would be hardened and feel encouraged to hang it around his neck anyway." The 1940 lawsuit presented a new set of facts. Doubtful about getting a fair trial from a Tammany judge and disgusted by the prospect of a long bitter proceeding, "we decided in that prevailing atmosphere, I'd resign."¹

In later years Isaacs, looking back at the whole affair, conceded that he might have acted differently in his appointment. Yet, beyond that, he would have done exactly the same thing as far as not firing Gerson.² Although, the history of the case affected Isaacs every time he ran for office, he felt "it taught me I could stand up against what I regarded as hysterics without wavering or wincing. I could face the other things I had to face hereafter."³ The Gerson dispute forever limited Isaacs in the choice of public office he could seek. Myron Isaacs, in keeping with his father's optimism, stressed "on the other hand, it made him known to a lot of people who otherwise would not have known him. It also illuminated his integrity by illustrating what

¹Simon Gerson, interview, 17 October 1973.

²Mrs. Jonathan Bingham to Stanley Isaacs, 15 January 1959; Stanley Isaacs to Mrs. Jonathan Bingham, 21 January 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 95.

he thought important."¹ However, the damage to Isaacs' career clearly outweighed any gain.

Isaacs' approach to his other appointments also disturbed the political leaders accustomed to unquestioned patronage. Ken Simpson, New York County Republican Chairman gave Isaacs a breakdown of the voting and enrollment figures of the Republican and American Labor parties. From these he calculated the Republican allotment of jobs as two thirds of those available.² "But I was determined to appoint men fit for the job," Isaacs wrote. "I believed the top jobs should be engineers. They never were according to Simpson, but he acquiesced....I was able to fill the positions with first class men."³

In recommending corporation inspectors, men who checked on the utility company's street digging, Isaacs accepted political suggestions. Paid for by the utilities, "I felt willing," Isaacs wrote, "to take political recommendations because all they had to be was honest and conscientious. No other qualifications required." But Isaacs then imposed his own specification. "I only took married men because \$1800 was good pay. I thought I could do social work. I gave Simpson and Rose a list of people I'd appoint...divided

¹Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

²Kenneth Simpson to Stanley Isaacs, 20 December 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 91.

according to the vote of each for Borough President."¹ Disgusted when he tried to contact several current inspectors by mail and "had fourteen letters returned by the Post Office, not found,"² Isaacs shook up the system. Noting the minimal duties of the job, the Borough President assigned certain inspectors to help undermanned departments in his and other offices.³ Formerly, the inspectors used their spare time carrying out contracts for the local district leaders. While he did not dare abolish the patronage completely, Isaacs insisted that the men did some work besides checking holes in the pavement. Isaacs also ended the practice of providing a chauffeur for each inspector. As he went through the Borough President's office slashing useless jobs, it antagonized the politicians used to handing out no-show positions. Isaacs personally investigated all the jobs under his jurisdiction. An evening check on the twelve night watchmen for the Borough's steamrollers revealed only two men actually on duty. Isaacs would not tolerate political appointees collecting undeserved checks. The missing men soon found themselves unemployed.⁴

Aiming at efficiency, as Isaacs took office, he imme-

¹Ibid., pp. 98-99.

²Stanley Isaacs to William B. Herlands, January 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³Gilbert E. Goodkind to Henry H. Curran, 17 October 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

⁴Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1973.

diately proclaimed high standards for his employees. In return for all workers putting in a full nine to five day, he eliminated Saturday morning service for all but a skeleton force. He reinstated time sheets and warned punctuality would be given serious consideration in evaluation of services.¹ Accustomed to a leisurely existence, enforcement of these provisions came as a shock to many employees. The ample sized correspondence department usually required two months to answer constituent's mail. Isaacs cut the division in half and insisted return letters be sent within twenty-four hours. Some laborers, frightened by the new Borough President's zeal, resigned. Within the first eighteen months, one hundred and forty-three people left the Borough President's offices, mostly through resignation or retirements. Only fifty-three new people had to be hired to fill the vacant spots.²

Isaacs tempered his demands by improving general working conditions. Besides initiating a five day week, the office adopted a code setting forth the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively.³ Isaacs, a friend to labor, proclaimed, "I strongly favor the organization of

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo to all Employees in Office of Borough President, 3 January 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 7.

²Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," p. 77.

³New York Times, 11 November 1939.

employees, whether it be in private industry, in social service or in government employment. Speaking to employees in my own department I recently stated I would encourage them."¹ From the beginning, Isaacs demonstrated his support for labor by requiring the union label on all printing coming from the Borough President's Office.² Isaacs always respected a picket line, even when it meant missing a dinner given by Republican State Senator Frederick Coudert.³ Typically, Isaacs followed his larger principles rather than solidifying his political ties. In strikes, Isaacs proclaimed, "my steady policy has been never to pass through a picket line or by any other action injure the cause of organized labor. I firmly believe that all good Americans are bound to respect the legitimate aspirations of labor."⁴

With Isaacs' encouragement all competitive employees in his department elected members of a personnel board who judged workers for civil service credit. Appointments and promotions followed strict numerical positions on these ratings.⁵

¹Stanley Isaacs, Speech at Luncheon, New York College Teachers Association, 12 March 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²New York Post, 13 January 1938.

³William Mesevich to Stanley Isaacs, 6 April 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to William O. Sims, 30 June 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

⁵Borough President's Report on Manhattan 1938-1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

By applying the economic and efficient habits of his personal life to the Borough President's office, Issacs saved the city almost four hundred thousand dollars his first year.¹ For the second year, he reduced the budget by half a million dollars. The surplus resulted from filling only twenty-five of the one hundred and ten vacancies that occurred and by recognizing only merit for advancement. Discovering the agency overmanned, Isaacs transferred some employees to other departments, the rest retired or resigned.² Isaacs eliminated wasteful jobs rather than indiscriminately cut salaries, a practice he felt to be a false economy that merely weakened employee morale. Paying close attention to the public work projects and their costs, Isaacs steered his department towards more economical measures, such as selecting asphalt rather than granite paving on the roadways.³

When the City's financial crisis worsened, Isaacs responded to the Mayor's request for voluntary salary cuts. "I agree, the highest paid should be asked to accept a reduction," Isaacs wrote to LaGuardia. "Elected officers like myself whose salary fixed by charter should voluntarily do so. I will follow your lead, as I do so often and waive ten percent of my salary. I am completely in sympathy with

¹Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 12 January 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²New York Times, 6 January 1939.

³Stanley Isaacs, Speech at Dinner of Citizens Budget Commission, 22 January 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

you in your insistence that the total expenditures of the City shall be kept within the total estimated income.¹

In building the East River Drive, Isaacs demonstrated his ability to get things done efficiently while incorporating money saving devices. Under his predecessor, arrangements had been made for a parkway with traffic lights along the East River. Soon after election day, Isaacs wrote to Mayor LaGuardia, "I believe further study should be made before plans adopted. It would be better, if possible to have the Drive follow the river front, provided there is room between the shore line and bulkhead line and provided the interest of property owners can be safeguarded. I do not believe that sufficient study has been made as yet of the possibilities of this route and therefore urge the matter be postponed until such studies can be made."² "I believe we should have in mind the example of the West Side Highway," Isaacs told the Board of Estimate, "a distinct contrast to older Riverside Drive, which the work done so far resembles."³ Within months, designs for the East River Drive changed completely. The new proposal

¹Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 3 April 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 29 November 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs, Statement for Board of Estimate, 14 January 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

called for building a roadway without lights along the waterfront while developing additional parklands enroute. To Isaacs, the drive represented more than just an arterial highway. He viewed it as "a whole social conception designed to relieve traffic on the east side of the city, reclaim the entire riverfront for the people, obliterate civic eyesore, create new park and recreational facilities and last but not least, improve real estate values...the source of our revenues."¹

For engineering details Isaacs relied on his Commissioner of Borough Works, Walter D. Binger. Isaacs himself deserves credit for the method of land acquisition, which saved the City a considerable amount.² Believing it "reckless to condemn property, where it was possible to avoid it",³ he proposed separate agreements with the various waterfront owners for their lands and riparian rights. New York City usually condemned all the land easements and rights they needed. Stressing the economic advantages of his method, Isaacs argued "it lowered the cost of land to the city and avoided the uncertainty of court awards and possibility in some cases of paying heavy consequential damages. In many cases it was an advantage to the owner. Land which he returned

¹Stanley Isaacs to New York Post Real Estate Editor, 4 June 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

²Walter Binger, interview, New York, 3 December 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 111.

increased in value because the design of the thoroughfare had been adapted to the problem of the adjourning owner. The enhanced value was then subject to taxation by the city."¹ As an example, the Brearly School's playground had been located on an East River pier. They agreed to give up their riparian rights, worth about forty thousand dollars. In return, the city built a deck for eighteen thousand dollars over the drive to be used as a playground.² The reconstruction cost the city less than the worth of Brearly's claims and the value of the playground to the school excelled any sum that they could have been awarded. The Borough President's office made settlements of this nature along the length of the drive, saving the city an estimated one million dollars, while accommodating, wherever possible, the needs of the original landowners.³

Isaacs "always thought it wrong to think of the drive in terms of the auto and ignore people. I planned the whole structure with the double purpose to accommodate the drive to the neighborhood."⁴ Isaacs, a businessman, never lost sight of business needs in his plans. The stretch from Thirtieth to Forty-ninth Streets bypassed the slaughter

¹Stanley Isaacs, "Land Acquisition Procedures and Landowners," The American City (September 1939), Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 112.

³Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 11 September 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 122.

houses, Con Edison and the New York Steam plants all needing access to the dock. Isaacs arranged for the construction of underpasses.¹

As a side benefit of the drive, the city gained almost twelve acres of parkland along the road.² In this project Isaacs and Robert Moses, then New York City's Parks Commissioner, cooperated in planning the new facilities.³ Except for Isaacs' opposition to a park in the business district around Thirtieth Street, the two peacefully worked out the parks' locations leaving their jurisdiction to Moses' department.⁴

On many other issues Isaacs and Moses became bitter foes. Each had his own vision for New York. As Moses, the practical doer embarked on various projects, Isaacs the cautious reformer protested. Moses the master builder championed automobiles and the necessary roads for them. Even when construction destroyed homes, he forged callously ahead. Except for the East River Drive, Moses is responsible for all of the major highways around New York City. Operating through Public Authorities, he built the Major Deegan, Van Wyck, Sheridan, Bruckner, Gowanus, Prospect, Clearview, Whitestone, Staten Island, Cross Bronx, Brooklyn-Queens, Nassau and Long

¹New York Post, 8 March 1940.

²Lester Hammond to Stanley Isaacs, 16 October 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 105-106.

⁴Ibid., p. 114.

Island Expressways, as well as the Harlem River Drive and the West Side Highway. To link the five boroughs, he built the Triborough, Verrazano, Throgs Neck, Marine, Henry Hudson, Cross Bay and Bronx Whitestone bridges.¹

In contrast to this record, Stanley Isaacs distrusted automobiles and never even learned to drive. Fearing an invasion of motorists would disrupt traditional living patterns, Isaacs remained the defender of pedestrians and subway riders. As Borough President and later as a minority member of the City Council, Isaacs' criticisms could not compete with the power Moses wielded in New York. Despite continually complaining as Moses promoted cars over people, Isaacs most complete victory over Moses did not come until 1956. Finally, in the Battle of Central Park, Isaacs prevented Moses from using additional parkland for a parking lot.

While exchanging words in public and letters in private, Isaacs avoided the name calling dear to Moses. A typical Moses letter ended, "I am not much of a fellow at compromising, but I think I know what can be done and what can't be done, what the difference is between irresponsible academic planning and actual results." Isaacs in turn sent

¹Robert Caro, The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 6.

²Robert Moses to Stanley Isaacs, 1 June 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

a memo to Borough Works Commissioner Binger, "enclosed letter from Moses, please read and return. I think there should be no answer."¹ Another time Isaacs wrote to Moses, "incidentally, why the dickens do you have to write such unpleasant letters? I like to work with you. I even enjoy an occasional battle but I don't see why you have to descend to personalities every time."² Isaacs did not retreat from public positions in which he believed. He just saved his energies for the issues, not the people involved.³

Isaacs and Moses disagreed on a wide range of topics. When Isaacs proposed one free admission for school children attending the World's Fair, Moses argued it would be an opening wedge for others and the fair would go bankrupt.⁴ Moses also opposed Isaacs' suggestion for an East River hydroplane landing, claiming it would benefit only a handful of millionaires.⁵ Isaacs felt "we should be awake to modern methods of transportation. True that at the moment the only people that can afford this are those of substantial means, but I don't intend to be prejudiced against a proposal because those who can use it are wealthy or are in the social register....We

¹Stanley Isaacs to Walter Binger, 2 June 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²Stanley Isaacs to Robert Moses, 28 April 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

⁴New York Herald Tribune, 17 June 1938.

⁵Robert Moses to Stanley Isaacs, 26 April 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

have got to realize we must constantly develop the efficiency of our city as a going community concern and can't afford to think only of parks and recreation."¹

When Moses promoted removal of the Old Clinton Castle Aquarium from Battery Park to Bronx Park, Isaacs pleaded for it to remain at its historic site.² Moses lashed out at Isaacs calling him "an old Standpatter"³ for his desire to preserve the existing building. Although Isaacs succeeded in delaying the move through a Board of Estimate hearing,⁴ eventually they appropriated funds for a move.⁵

In Isaacs first two years of office, he and Moses became immeshed in one dispute which drew widespread public attention, concerning the battery crossing between Manhattan and Brooklyn. Initially, Isaacs opposed a Brooklyn Battery tunnel because of the inadequate traffic provisions for downtown Manhattan. Also in conflict with Mayor LaGuardia, who considered the tunnel a most important capital project,⁶

¹Stanley Isaacs to Robert Moses, 28 April 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²New York Times, 26 February 1941.

³New York Post, 26 February 1941.

⁴New York Herald Tribune, 29 August 1941.

⁵New York Herald Tribune, 12 September 1941.

⁶New York Times, 19 September 1938.

Isaacs stated his position to Alfred B. Jones, head of the New York City Tunnel Authority. "I will resist any effort to authorize the construction of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and its entry into Manhattan unless this traffic problem is provided for." Isaacs insisted, "you can't go east, through the financial district. This necessitates a continuation of the East River Drive. Before the tunnel is agreed to, adequate finances must be agreed to which will enable this borough to handle the traffic."¹ Moses dismissed Isaacs' objections as minor claiming the important question was whether the City could get funds from Washington.² When these did not materialize, Moses supported a bridge crossing which would be cheaper to construct. To Isaacs, a bridge raised even more objections than a tunnel. Writing to LaGuardia, Isaacs argued "the bridge approach will injure a large number of important office buildings and blight the neighborhood....I feel the administration should not back the project."³ At a heated meeting of the City Planning Commission, Isaacs, leading the opposition to the bridge, criticized the proposal for its

¹Stanley Isaacs to Alfred B. Jones, 16 September 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²New York Times, 20 September 1938.

³Stanley Isaacs to Fiorella LaGuardia, 22 March 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

lack of traffic arrangements and its esthetic qualities.¹ The bridge, he felt, would vandalize battery park and be a blot on the New York City skyline.² With an eye towards real estate, Isaacs maintained that the bridge ramps would "depreciate real estate by thirty percent whereas the tunnel plan would increase values by one hundred percent." He stressed the need for careful studies to consider the alternate proposals.³ "Please forget the idea that I may be an obstructionist," Isaacs answered Moses' hostile gibe, "that really is a complete misnomer. I am thoroughly sincere in feeling that neither bridge nor tunnel should be authorized unless the conditions which it creates, so far as traffic is concerned are met in advance and by the Triborough Bridge Authority itself."⁴ Just as Isaacs seemed to be losing the battle in New York and all the necessary steps had been taken towards approval, Washington stepped in. The army engineers, having jurisdiction over harbor and river improvements, gave their final opinion. The War Department rejected the plan as a peril in war time. If destroyed, the bridge could block access to the Navy Yard. As Isaacs hailed the decision Moses accused the Roosevelt Administration of sabo -

¹New York Herald Tribune, 16 February 1939.

²Stanley Isaacs, Speech for Paramount News, 29 March 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³New York Times, 21 March 1939.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Robert Moses, 20 February 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

taging the project.¹

Cognizant of the need for a crossing between the two boroughs, Isaacs immediately wrote to Rexford Tugwell, Chairman of the City Planning Commission. "The War Department has disposed of the problem. Now is the time to re-study for a tunnel, constructed without damage to battery park and adjacent property, but it needs adequate traffic provisions. I believe no new traffic artery should be authorized unless the traffic problems it creates have been taken care of. I believe traffic that doesn't have to enter Manhattan should by-pass it."² Many years later, a completed tunnel with connections to the East and West Side highways spanned the battery crossing.

Despite the provincial character of the Borough Presidency, Isaacs demonstrated his concern for worldwide problems. Believing that "we can not be blind to reality and close our eyes, we must let Hitler know we're opposed to fascist expression," Isaacs spoke out. "The United States with England, France, Russia and Czechoslovakia should have taken firm opposition against fascist aggression some time ago...only in unity of the world's democratic forces can we place confidence and base our hopes for peace....Those loyal to democracy must stand together in defense."³ Using the

¹New York Times, 18 July 1939.

²Stanley Isaacs to Rexford Tugwell, 18 July 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³Stanley Isaacs, Speech at City College of New York, Faculty Student Meeting, 29 September 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

restricted resources of his office as an influence on foreign policy, Isaacs issued a department ban on all German products. "I do not want any German made goods purchased by our office," he instructed his bureau chiefs. "An occasional order has been inadvertently made by us and filled by the Department of Purchase then had to be returned with an explanation. To simplify the matter it would be advisable that in requisitioning care taken that no German made goods be ordered."¹

When plans called for the demolition of the Sixth Avenue elevated subway, Isaacs resolved that the scrap iron must not be sold directly or indirectly to an aggressor nation.² The resulting agreement with the Harris Company, contracted to raze the el, stipulated that the metal could not go to any country "now engaged in war."³

When powerless to take any specific action on foreign relations, Isaacs wrote protest letters, worked with activist groups and spoke at rallies. He followed his convictions, never weighing the political consequences. Isaacs' views on foreign affairs, as in domestic, reflected his admiration for Theodore Roosevelt. Both stressed military

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo to all Bureau and Division Heads, 10 January 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²New York Post, 16 September 1938.

³New York Telegram, 19 December 1938.

preparedness and a strong Anglo-American alliance.

A defender of the loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War, Isaacs urged lifting the Spanish embargo. "I do feel," Isaacs wrote "that the conflict is a fundamental one between democracy and Fascism and it is for that reason that I felt it proper to speak on behalf of the loyalist cause."¹ At a Madison Square Garden rally Isaacs said, "the fight of the Spanish loyalist to preserve their democratic government, is one of the great epics of history. To our shame, our unsound neutrality program helped undermine democracy in Spain. The government refuses to lift the Spanish embargo. Our neutrality lends support to the bitter enemies of democracy. We must expose red-baiting tactics."²

When the Civil War ended, Isaacs turned to the Spanish refugee problem. "I feel that Franco's success is a reversion to fascism in Spain." "I believe we should do everything possible to rescue those who fought for democracy in Europe, those who are refugees from the fascist government whom they opposed."³ Isaacs proposed a scheme for the Spanish refugees, as well as those fleeing Nazi domination. Believing that "we have so far failed those who have suffered"

¹Stanley Isaacs to Rev. Allison Smith, 27 June 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Madison Square Garden Rally, 19 June 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs to Cordell Hull, 27 January 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

and recognizing the "problem if we let down all bars to immigrants, unemployment would follow," Isaacs suggested another way out. He called for "planning on a very large scale, of carefully selected areas in the United States set aside for refugees, without regard to race or creed with proper financial assistance. The areas should be developed into self supporting communities which grow their own food, save clothes, etc. We have enough land....It should be possible to bring in large numbers of people on condition they go to one of the colonies....The relief we're sending abroad could provide here for them, at far less cost and with far greater efficiency. "In the process, Isaacs stressed, we would be helping the Allies, "relieving them of the burden of supporting a dependent population. The refugees could return to their native country when the invaders were driven from the land." As an alternative, Isaacs suggested "plans for bringing those who came to reside here permanently within their respective quotas or other methods leading to their absorption into this country, without competition with our own workers could be developed by a specialized government agency, a refugee authority could plan and supervise. We would be developing an American program following the lines justified by our past history and we would be aiding those nations which are fighting a war in the outcome of which our own vital interests

are concerned."¹

Isaacs' interest in preserving civil liberties extended to aliens living in the United States. "Aliens should be welcomed into this country as prospective citizens," he argued. "It is indecent to treat them as probable enemies. In these days we should be more loyal than ever to our traditional attitude to political refugees seeking a haven from oppression."²

As World War II began in Europe, Isaacs became a member of the Committee to Defend America by aiding the Allies. "It is in the interest of our country to give every possible aid to the Allies short of war," he wrote. "I realize fully that support to this extent definitely involves the risk of war, no matter how carefully we try to avoid it. We can't afford to be just neutral....Germany will destroy all vestige of democratic government. There may well be other reasons for giving unqualified support to the Allies but our own selfish interests compel it."³

Isaacs never doubted the necessity of supporting the English. "I believe that we are more likely to keep out of war if we extend every possible aid to England, and that her

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo, 19 June 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

²Stanley Isaacs, Statement for New York City Conference on Foreign Born, 30 September 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

³Stanley Isaacs to Clark Eichelberger, 6 June 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

failure would bring us inevitably into conflict with Germany and as long as there is hope of England's success we should give her all assistance short of war. Further," Isaacs added, "I believe we should extend ourselves to the limit to prepare against possible contingencies and inevitable conflict if England loses out. I support the old fashioned Theodore Roosevelt idea that if we are really ready for war, we can best avoid it, we will be more likely to be left alone."¹ Following these lines, Isaacs favored compulsory training for possible military service. I believe," he said "that those who love democracy should be prepared to defend it."² "I can think of nothing more democratic than measures to secure universal military training as rapidly as possible and on as broad lines as possible in order to defend democracy."³

When the Soviet Union became Germany's enemy, Isaacs had no problem supporting them as allies. "I believe that we should do everything we can to cooperate with Russia in its effort to defeat Hitler," Isaacs wrote. "Hitler is my enemy and any nation which joins fighting him is our ally and I will not be frightened from helping a worthy cause because people with whom I am in complete disagreement on

¹Stanley Isaacs to Walter S. Neff, 29 July 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

²New York Herald Tribune, 30 July 1940.

³Stanley Isaacs to Rosalie Manning, 6 August 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

substantially every matter happen to join with me in favor-
ing that cause."¹ "In the United States," Isaacs argued
"we should unite everybody really opposed to Fascism even
if some of those who join may be insincere or motivated
by their interest in some other problem."² He held this
same attitude towards domestic crusades and always welcomed
anyone promoting a similar goal regardless of their other
views. On the homefront, Isaacs sponsored both Russian³
and Chinese war relief efforts.⁴

As Borough President, Isaacs continued his lifelong
interest in housing. When he campaigned for office, Isaacs
noted, the "Borough President, as a member of the Board of
Estimate has no jurisdiction over rent problems. I expect,
however, to exercise whatever influence I may have to try to
improve housing conditions."⁵ Concerned primarily with Man-
hattan, Isaacs felt his borough "the heart of the city had
been allowed to decay. East Harlem, the Lower East Side
and parts of the West Side need improvements and offer oppor-

¹Stanley Isaacs to Luigi Crisculol, 14 October 1941,
Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

²Stanley Isaacs to Bruce Bliven, 26 September 1941,
Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 6.

³New York Times, 10 October 1941.

⁴Daily Worker, 15 July 1940.

⁵Stanley Isaacs, Memorandum concerning inquiry of
Tenants Organization as Rent Legislation, October 1937,
Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

tunities for housing projects with public and private funds. It is time the development of the city reversed its trend and turned inward."¹ Isaacs looked both to new housing and regulatory legislation to improve conditions in Manhattan. "Efforts should be made to persuade landlords to comply with the dwelling law rather than close them up," he wrote. Always maintaining a sense of realism, Isaacs acknowledged, "some increase of rental must be anticipated even without the development of shortage. An effort should be made to create impartial tribunals for mediation and conciliation. A central tribunal could be established with branches in each municipal court district. It could exercise influence to prevent profiteering in rents, prevent unnecessary dispossessing of tenants and in general bring about more harmonious relations."² Isaacs never lost sight of the fact that both the tenants and the landlords had grievances.

Believing the "best way to clear slums is to replace bad housing with good in the same area," Isaacs criticized existing policies. "We have been too mobile developing one section at the expense of the other. The shifting of population through developing new residences has tended to expedite creation of new slum areas. I hope the tendency to greater permanence of location will be applied in increased measure both to business and homes. The city would

¹New York Times, 4 January 1938.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memorandum on Housing, 9 November 1937, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

gain if both its residents and its business populations both settled down."¹

In 1938, Isaacs favored the proposed New York State Constitutional Amendment authorizing the state to borrow and make loans for housing purposes. The State Housing Board had been created twelve years earlier, but without money of its own, had to work through Limited Dividend Companies financed by private capital. Under the new measure the state could now authorize bonds for building funds.² Dismissing the notion that government financing of lower income housing would have a detrimental effect on private industry, Isaacs wrote "I believe properly safeguarded and under proper circumstances government building would not affect adversely building by private investors and groups. We need adequate supervision over rentals and tenants. Government housing should be designed only for groups which need it....If we throw down the worst slums it is not a threat to those who might build but rather an invitation."³

Not content with merely building new housing, Isaacs concerned himself with the type of structure erected and

¹Stanley Isaacs to Editor New York Times, 18 November 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Stanley Isaacs, Radio Address, 25 October 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

³Stanley Isaacs, Address at American Bankers Association Meeting, Stanley Isaacs Papers, 1938, Box 2.

how it would hold up in time. In a "personal and unofficial" letter to Mayor LaGuardia, Isaacs warned, "we are building the slums of tomorrow. We must revise zoning and dwelling laws...mainly lack of light and air...we will be ashamed of these houses. By cutting requirements for coverage and height to fifty percent of present we would give adequate light and air for all times and would spread values instead of concentrating values in some areas and ruining others. We should force private builders at least to approximate the standards we are applying to public housing."¹ Throughout the years, Isaacs opposed building on the outskirts of the city when so much had to be done in the already built up areas. "We must recognize the importance of cleaning up existing slum districts and the high costs of cheap land where the city has to provide for new sewers, streets and schools."² These pleas drew no support.

In many respects Isaacs can be seen as a man ahead of his time. Several of his proposals, which went unnoticed or ignored, have since been adopted by later administrations. A proponent of increased community control, Isaacs' ideas for the revitalization of the local school boards, foreshadowed the actions taken in the 1970's. "These little known and

¹Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 6 January 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memorandum for Housing Discussion at Annual Meeting Welfare Council, 24 May 1940, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 4.

little appreciated community agencies should be utilized," Isaacs maintained. "I would like to see the local school boards as live functioning instruments acting as a stimulus to program improvements in the school system. The local boards should in my opinion function as little town halls in community education matters."¹

On another educational issue Isaacs had one of his rare public disagreements with LaGuardia. In 1941, claiming budgetary reasons, the Mayor advocated closing Manhattan's Townsend Harris High School for the intellectually gifted. Isaacs opposed this move and sided with the minority to maintain the school.² "Townsend Harris has a fine reputation" he wrote, "and I believe a high school of this type is a sound public institution. I know there's a difference of opinion but I feel strongly that the opportunity for the unusually bright is equally important as special classes for the mentally retarded."³ Isaacs' defiance angered LaGuardia. Victor Weingarten, a city hall reporter at the time, recalled seeing Isaacs emerge shaken from the Mayor's office after a last minute workover during the Board of Estimate vote. "The Mayor

¹New York Sun, 7 January 1938.

²New York Herald Tribune, 26 April 1941.

³Stanley Isaacs to Pearl Bernstein, 2 December 1941, Personal Files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

just said if I vote against him, I won't get renominated," Isaacs told Weingarten, "but I'm going to vote against it anyway."¹

Unmoved by the Mayor's threats, Isaacs maintained his position. Although other factors entered into LaGuardia's abandonment of Isaacs, this incident illustrated Isaacs independence and the tensions it created between the two men. "I refused to act as a rubber stamp as some of the other city officials did," Isaacs wrote. "He LaGuardia wanted a different kind of person around him, rather than someone who was completely independent."²

Some of Isaacs' controversies had lighter overtones. In 1939, he and Bronx Borough President James C. Lyons engaged in a territorial dispute over the Marble Hill Section of Manhattan. A 1903 War Department action eliminating the Spuyten Duyvil Creek and opening a new waterway south of Marble Hill, left about fifty-two acres of Manhattan on the Bronx side of the water. Lyons claimed this area should be added to his borough following the natural rather than artificial boundary. Originally taking a conciliatory stance Isaacs agreed, "If the people show in a plebiscite that they want to join the Bronx that's all right with me."³ As

¹Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 October 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 134.

³New York Telegram, 9 March 1939.

Lyons grew more threatening Isaacs became firmer and assured Marble Hill residents that "no appeasement shall take a foot of Manhattan soil. We would resist to the death the proposed Anschluss with the Bronx....All Manhattan will rise as one man to defend Marble Hill, which we regard as dearly as we do Times Square itself."¹ After the Board of Estimate decision for a "plebiscite, rather than a putsch," Lyons dropped his efforts to annex the area.² When Isaacs included a description of the incident in his yearly borough report, Mayor LaGuardia responded with a critical, confidential letter. "Naturally your report is yours. However, I have the responsibility of printing....The attempted humor and article itself entitled 'Marble Hill' is neither humorous nor necessary as I see it, except to get you into another controversy! You have had enough and now that you are nursing a bad leg, I think you have been kicked around enough, at least not to have to nurse a sore toche. Signed Fiorello"³

In an innovative vein, Isaacs proposed a plan for renumbering addresses in Manhattan to establish uniformity within the Borough. Attempting to replace the current system with its different scheme for each road, Isaacs suggested that all even addresses be on the east side of the avenue with the

¹New York Times, 11 March 1939.

²New York Post, 7 December 1939.

³Fiorello LaGuardia to Stanley Isaacs, 18 September 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

first two digits indicating the nearest street to the south.¹ The plan drew the support of the post office, police departments and even Bronx Borough President Lyons.² Their endorsements could not outweigh the power of the high tax paying Fifth Avenue Merchants who feared harm to trademarks based on their addresses.³ Isaacs continued to push for this change throughout his city council years, but to no avail.

Isaacs' relationship with the regular Republican organization treaded on uneasy grounds. He had little in common with men like J. R. Davies, head of the National Republican Club in Manhattan, who urged the Republicans to break away from the Fusion team.⁴ Davies preferred a coalition with anti-New Deal democrats.⁵ The club soon passed a resolution denouncing the American Labor Party.⁶ These sentiments prompted a letter from Isaacs to Davies. "I intended resigning from the club when dues were payable but knowing the financial stress you're facing, I'm going to continue for another six months but I will not do any more. The point of view of the club is diametrically opposed to what I believe to be the best interests of the Republican

¹New York Herald Tribune, 2 July 1939.

²New York Times, 1 January 1940.

³New York Times, 9 May 1940.

⁴New York Times, 20 April 1938.

⁵New York Herald Tribune, 12 July 1938.

⁶New York Telegram, 12 July 1938.

party. I do believe that I should not be a member of a club which adopts views that differ so widely from my own."¹ Upon reconsideration, Isaacs remained in the club, reflecting his general philosophy of maneuvering for change within an organization. "At one time I thought of resigning from the club," Isaacs wrote "but felt that this would be unwise, partly because of my deep rooted loyalty to the party and also because I thought it wiser to stay in and continue to fight for the development of a progressive viewpoint in the club, rather than just step out."²

Isaacs further strained his Republican ties when he endorsed Bronx City Councilman Mike Quill who had been dropped by the American Labor Party for refusal to support that party's anti-Communist stand. Denouncing Isaacs, Republican City Council candidate Joseph Baldwin said "when we elect a Borough President who endorses a Communist in the same letter he endorses me, I don't want his endorsement. It's time Republicans endorsed Republicans."³ In answer to Queen's County Republican Leader Warren Ashmead's criticism of this move, Isaacs wrote, "I agree with you, it is not proper for me to discuss all qualifications of candidates. However, this being a non-partisan administration, it seemed to me

¹Stanley Isaacs to John Davies, 30 August 1938, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 2.

²Stanley Isaacs to Charles D. Hilles, 13 October 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³New York Post, 4 November 1939.

I was justified in expressing an opinion as to those present City Councilmen who have been of assistance to us, no matter what county they come from, or what party they belong to."¹ Recognizing the Republicans' limitations in New York City, Isaacs felt "in New York City we can do nothing except by combining all other groups and individuals entirely irrespective of party lines, we want the kind of government this administration is giving. This year's figures confirm the fact that we Republicans just cannot go it alone in this city."²

Undaunted by criticism of his actions, Isaacs wrote to Quill after the election. "I am disappointed you're not elected and I was proud I was able to put in a good word for you despite resulting attacks from people who should have known better....My Republican friends have condemned me for this."³

As maneuvering for the 1941 nominations began, the Gerson issue loomed in the minds of the political power brokers. As the summer of 1941 progressed, Isaacs found himself without clear cut support from LaGuardia, the Fusionists or the Republicans. Each group seemed to be

¹Stanley Isaacs to Warren Ashmead, 9 November 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

²Stanley Isaacs to Warren Ashmead, 13 November 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³Stanley Isaacs to Mike Quill, 14 November 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

waiting for the other to move, none wanting to take on the responsibility of supporting Isaacs for fear he would be a serious liability.

As the newspapers announced that LaGuardia planned to withhold support of Isaacs, leaving the decision of the Borough Presidency to others,¹ Isaacs tried to discern the Mayor's position. "The article in today's World Telegram makes it very necessary that I discuss my own renomination with you," Isaacs wrote to LaGuardia. "Naturally, I have taken for granted that I would have your support and in view of rumors an announcement to this effect should be made as soon as possible."² With no answer forthcoming, Charles C. Burlingham, the dean of New York City's fusion movements since the turn of the century, went to LaGuardia on Isaacs' behalf. "I saw the Mayor this afternoon and tried to sound him out" Burlingham reported to Isaacs. "He is certainly not against you, but seems to think it's up to the Republicans to nominate you."³ Without LaGuardia's guiding support, Isaacs had little chance for the renomination. Fearing the loss of Catholic voters, LaGuardia backed away from the Borough President. To Isaacs' boosters like

¹New York Telegram, 3 July 1941.

²Stanley Isaacs to LaGuardia, 3 July 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 6.

³C. C. Burlingham to Stanley Isaacs, 21 July 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 6.

Paul Kern, LaGuardia's actions spelled betrayal. The Mayor had sanctioned the Gerson appointment and Isaacs' subsequent actions, but now fearing voter repercussions chose to desert his former running mate.¹ Sporting national ambitions, LaGuardia believed that Isaacs would be an albatross outside New York City.²

Not convinced by this excuse, Isaacs wrote, "LaGuardia said he wouldn't support me because I'd lose him votes, especially in Brooklyn and Queens, I felt that this was not his real reason in opposing me. It was because I was too independent...also I think an element of rivalry. I was a possible future contender."³ Paul Kern, who worked in the Mayor's office, before heading the Civil Service Commission, sensed this competition. "LaGuardia resented being called 'The Little Wop", Kern recalled. "He wanted the admiration of the intellectuals that Isaacs had. He cut down Stanley deliberately. He always envied Stanley Isaacs for the community he reached."⁴

Within the Republican organization, Isaacs had little support. His original mentor, Kenneth Simpson lost his post as Manhattan Republican County Chairman to Thomas Curran, a strong Thomas Dewey supporter. Looking beyond the city,

¹Paul Kern, interview, 24 October 1973.

²Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 133-134.

⁴Paul Kern, interview, 24 October 1973.

Dewey, like LaGuardia, felt reluctant to be closely associated with Isaacs.¹ As C. C. Burlingham observed, "to tag Stanley with communism is ridiculous, but what a ridiculous thing politics is. A lot will depend on Dewey. If Dewey should speak against Stanley, he will not get the Republican nomination!"²

Dewey advisor, Herbert Brownell, suspected a personality conflict between Dewey and Isaacs. "Dewey was abrasive at that point in his career," Brownell recalled, "and was anxious to organize the Republican party to favor him. Stanley Isaacs was always independent. They had two different approaches to politics."³

Holding LaGuardia responsible for the city ticket, Dewey himself maintained that he would have supported Isaacs.⁴ However, by not asserting an affirmative voice for the Borough President, Dewey acknowledged tacit disapproval of his former running mate. Up until two days before Isaacs' official rejection by the Republicans he wrote to C. C. Burlingham. "I am still confident I will receive the Republican nomination. It depends largely on the Mayor. The District leaders have said they are for me

¹New York Daily Mirror, 30 July 1941.

²C. C. Burlingham to Walter Binger, 12 July 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 6.

³Herbert Brownell, interview, New York, 11 December 1974.

⁴Paul Kern, interview, 24 October 1974.

but are reluctant to act if the Mayor doesn't want me"¹....

The Mayor never pushed for Isaacs and in the final count only four of the thirty-two Republicans on the Manhattan Republican Executive Committee stood affirmatively behind him. While "praising the Borough President's ability and expressing personal affection for him" they said "that by the Gerson incident and his support of left wing candidates he had demonstrated a persistent attitude on a matter of fundamental importance which we believe makes him ineligible for renomination."²

"I had the feeling Dewey cooperated with him (LaGuardia) in preventing my nomination," Isaacs wrote. "Early in 1941, I talked with Ken Simpson, then County Chairman and he agreed to support me. Then there was a fight over leadership of the party. Dewey backed Tom Curran for county chairman. Ken Simpson was displaced and died shortly after." Mending fences, Isaacs went to Curran and told him, "although I supported Simpson to the finish, as long as he was county chairman I would recognize his position in the party and be glad to work with him. He was cordial, told me I'd done wonderful things for the party, and wonderful things in my office, he was on my side. A number of district leaders came to me when it was time to reconsider my renomination and told me they were for me." Then, according to

¹Stanley Isaacs to C. C. Burlingham, 28 July 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 6.

²New York Times, 30 July 1941.

Isaacs, "all of a sudden, things changed overnight....Tom Curran wouldn't see me and I gathered he'd been turned against me and I felt by Dewey not the Mayor."¹

Isaacs again suggested he might be a threat as possible competition. "It would sound very conceited if I said I thought that either LaGuardia or Tom Dewey thought I was doing too good a job and wanted to get rid of me because I might be a competitor of theirs for office some day. That might be the reason. I can't say so. I have no evidence of that and I'm not conceited enough to think so. I do believe that I made a very good record in office. I'm not modest enough to say otherwise. I'm confident that I did.... Whatever motives Dewey and LaGuardia had I can only guess but I never believed the reasons given for my displacement sound."²

Isaacs later proved to be a tremendous vote getter in his own right. The politicians in 1941 did not foresee this. To LaGuardia and Dewey, backing Isaacs seemed a liability, especially beyond New York City. Despite pleas from Isaacs supporters the Mayor could not be convinced otherwise.³

Isaacs had his problems within the Labor Party also, which itself had split into two groups. The "right wingers joined with David Dubinsky in pinning a medallion on Stanley Isaacs as one of the best Borough Presidents Manhattan ever had and refusing his endorsement on the ground that he had

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 135-138.

²Ibid.

³Helen Harris, interview, 22 November 1973.

been a stooge and front for the Communists."¹ They criticized not only the Gerson appointment but the Mike Quill endorsement as well.² "As to the left problem," Isaacs wrote "they won't give me any formal endorsement because of my giving complete support to the Mayor and President in international affairs....The left wing group wanted me to throw out the adherents of the right wing...of course, I said no....I have refused to do this because I won't dismiss any man who does a decent job because those who recommend him no longer like him."³

Even if Isaacs had received labor support he could not have run without the Republican designation. As C. C. Burlingham advised, "I have told you ad nauseam a labor endorsement without the Republican would have made you inevitably a Leftist candidate and Tammany could have tagged it on LaGuardia and the whole ticket."⁴

With more supporters among the City Fusion Party, Isaacs hoped for their backing. Despite pressure from Isaacs' friends, leader George Seabury refused to bind his group to any resolution until after the Republicans and LaGuardia had indicated their intentions.⁵

¹New York Herald Tribune, 21 May 1941.

²Reinhold Niebuhr to Stanley Isaacs, 25 June 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

³Stanley Isaacs to Grace Gosselin, 19 June 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 6.

⁴C. C. Burlingham to Stanley Isaacs, 20 August 1941, Richard W. G. Welling Papers, Box 11, New York Public Library.

⁵New York Times, 23 July 1941.

Left without organization support, Isaacs announced his intention to run as an independent and began circulating the necessary petitions.¹ This alarmed Republican, Fusionist and American Labor Party leaders alike who feared a split would result in a Democratic victory. Influential in persuading Isaacs to abandon the race, both C. C. Burlingham and Mark MaClay argued against getting involved in a nasty campaign. With just twenty-four hours before the filing deadline, Isaacs held a meeting at his house. Gil Goodkind, who had been an assistant in the Borough President's office, Mark MaClay, Congressman Vito Marcantonio and Henry Van Veen, Secretary to the Commissioner of Borough Works, attended and put the final negative stamp on Isaacs' Borough Presidency run.²

Enjoying his public forum, Isaacs wanted to continue in politics. For a man without a party the New York City Council, which elected its members by proportional representation, seemed a viable alternative. "I decided to run for the city council," Isaacs wrote, I did not intend to be driven out of politics for anybody and for any reason."³ A whole new campaign began.

¹New York Times, 7 August 1941.

²Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 136.

CHAPTER V

THE INDEPENDENT CITY COUNCILMAN

Abandoned by his party, Isaacs turned to his friends and built a personal organization for the City Council campaign.¹ "I have gone through quite a siege" he recounted. "If I had stayed in the picture I would have been labeled, wholly unjustly of course, as having been strictly selfish in my attitude and the cause of a three cornered fight which would have turned this office back to Tammany Hall....I could not have carried the Republican primaries without spending alot of money which I do not have and which I would not let my friends contribute." Not one to run away, Isaacs decided, "I certainly did not want to surrender to some of the vicious enemies of decent government who unfortunately were able to prevent my nomination, so I am running for the Council, where I am confident my friends will support me and my enemies can not stop me. This will give me a forum for the next two years from which I can continue to work for decent government and for civil liberties."²

In contrast to the Republicans' negative response,

¹Henry Van Veen, interview, 13 November 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs to Natalie and Ted Davison, 19 August 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

Isaacs received endorsements from the City Fusion Party,¹ the Citizens Non-Partisan Committee² and the Citizens Union.³ The New York Times,⁴ New York Daily News,⁵ New York Herald Tribune⁶ and New York Post⁷ all recommended his election. The Committee for the Election of Stanley Isaacs drew its members from all parties and attracted many from the social service fields.⁸

"I was rather pleased with the fact that the Republican Party didn't include me as one of their Council candidates," Isaacs wrote. "It gave me the opportunity of proving that I was stronger than my own party and could run on my merits and that any idea that I was a weak candidate was unsound and untrue."⁹ To compensate for the lack of organization backing, "because I was entirely on my own I took advantage of every opportunity to speak where I could and I received very satisfactory support."¹⁰

¹New York Daily Mirror, 22 September 1941.

²Daily Worker, 22 August 1941.

³New York Times, 30 October 1941.

⁴New York Times, 4 November 1941.

⁵New York Daily News, 3 November 1941.

⁶New York Herald Tribune, 3 November 1941.

⁷New York Post, 3 November 1941.

⁸Letterhead, Committee for the Election of Stanley Isaacs, Stanley Isaacs Papers, 1941, Box 6.

⁹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 139.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 141.

Under the Proportional Representation scheme, Manhattan elected six of the city's twenty-one Councilmen. From the nominees, voters ranked their choices for Councilmen. The first count eliminated candidates with fewer than two thousand votes and awarded those ballots to a voter's second selection. Thereafter, the candidate with the lowest total of first and subsequent choices were dropped until the borough reached its appropriate number of City Councilmen.¹ After the tally, of the twenty candidates in Manhattan, Isaacs finished fourth; behind Democrats William Carroll, John Nugent and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., but ahead of all the endorsed Republicans.²

This victory greatly enhanced Isaacs' sense of independence. Encouraged by his success in defying the party regulars, he could never feel beholden to them. "I was really pleased both with the character and the extensiveness of the backing that I received and with the vote itself. Although, I had no party label of any kind I received almost forty thousand number one votes, way beyond my Republican competitors and all other independents." Isaacs claimed, "I accomplished just what I wanted, to prove my own strength in this borough beyond question and to provide myself with a forum for the first of the year so that I can continue to be active in politics in my own way....Despite the turndown

¹New York Times, 13 November 1941.

²New York Herald Tribune, 13 November 1941.

of the nomination, I had plenty of strength among those whom I respect most. I was particularly pleased too, that I received letters from the most conservative peoples in the community, Nicholas Murray Butler, the Vice President of the New York Central Railroad, the Engineers of the Consolidated Edison Company, Citizens Budget Commission, etc., also from left wing individuals and the poorest paid people in the city service."¹

To Isaacs, the election results demonstrated that the Republicans had misjudged his strength. "I carried twenty-two of the thirty-two districts as against the three other Republicans who received the official endorsement. Except for the tenth, I carried every Republican district by very substantial majorities. I am sure these figures...certainly should prove the stupidity of those who argued that I would be a weak candidate for any office on the Republican ticket."²

Unfortunately, the ebullience of victory could not be transferred to the job itself. Initially, Isaacs found his new position and returning to his law practice a let down. Writing to his son, Stanley lamented, "I must admit that I enjoyed life better heretofore than I do now. The Council involves a tremendous waste of time and energy and I am not enthusiastic about it, although it gives me some opportunity

¹Stanley Isaacs to Natalie Davison, 8 December 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

²Stanley Isaacs to William McHose, 17 December 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

of course. I have not as yet been overwhelmed with clients, but am very busy with a mass of volunteer work that is wished on anyone who succumbs. I still have to do quite a little speaking and attend luncheons and dinners and free evenings are still scarce."¹ Expressing a similar view in another letter to a personal friend, Isaacs wrote, "I do not enjoy my present office nearly as much as I did that of Borough President. I am kept very busy in various fields of activity. I opened a law office the first of the year but it is naturally quite a struggle to revive a law practice after I have been out of it for so long."²

Isaacs began searching for other alternatives. "Some friends of mine have suggested that I would be qualified in many ways for the National Labor Relations post from which Mrs. Herrick has just resigned," he wrote to an acquaintance in the labor field asking for help securing the vacancy. "I am interested because I do not enjoy my work on the City Council and want a job where I can be far more useful than I feel today."³ Isaacs' request came too late. The position had already been filled.⁴

¹Stanley Isaacs to Myron Isaacs, 21 January 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

²Stanley Isaacs to Winifred Bates, 1 December 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

³Stanley Isaacs to J. L. Murphy, 1 September 1942, Personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

⁴J. L. Murphy to Stanley Isaacs, 14 September 1942, Personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

As World War II widened, Isaacs attempted to serve in the burgeoning defense effort. "I am not at all satisfied with my work today," Isaacs wrote to an army officer he knew. "The City Council is a bore. I am a minority member of a powerless body with only one or two people to work with whom I have real respect. The law practice which I resumed does not interest me....Naturally what I really want is the opportunity of being of direct service in this war. There is plenty to do here but I am stymied, LaGuardia being what he is. I want to know if there is any real opportunity for me under the war department either as a commissioned officer or otherwise."¹ Since Isaacs exceeded the sixty year old age limit for service, the army rejected his offer.²

Isaacs remained highly critical of the Council. "City Councilmen draft their own bills unless some good natured committee or organization supplies them....I doubt if many of the City Councilmen use the municipal reference library...few of them really read! The sessions never begin on time....The occasional brawls that take place are interesting - more so than the serious moments. Of course, there are a number of very sincere, hard working members," Isaacs conceded, "but

¹Stanley Isaacs to Colonel Edward Greenbaum, 14 September 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

²Colonel Edward Greenbaum to Stanley Isaacs, 25 September 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

the body has little power and does not fully understand its limitations or how to use the power it has to the best public advantage."¹

Despite these early appraisals, Isaacs remained in the Council for twenty years. He soon learned to value his status as an independent City Councilman. It became obvious, especially as the years passed, that any higher ambition Isaacs might have would be blocked by unforgiving Republicans. As other political doors closed, Isaacs began to appreciate his post for whatever limited power it offered. He used his position both as a forum and a means to reach those in higher spots, in order to influence city policy.

True to his philosophy, Isaacs became a public servant only after he had reached a financially independent stage of life. "I believe," he wrote, "a man should take public office only when he is independent, for you can only be of use in politics after you are free of all alliances."² Financially, the Isaacs lived conservatively. With their children self supporting, Stanley had none of the demands of a growing family and absolutely no need to compromise principles for economic reasons.³

In all legislative decision making, Isaacs exerted

¹Stanley Isaacs to John A. Fitch, 6 January 1943, Personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

²New York Telegram, 27 September 1957.

³Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

his independence. He rejected the notion that "I am supposed to carry out the wishes of my constituents....I never know what these wishes are," he explained. "I hear from the noisy groups and those mostly opposed. I believe in the old fashioned doctrine that a man is not chosen to keep his ear to the ground but to use his own best judgment....There is a complete remedy in a democracy. The ability to replace him." Isaacs also felt, although he represented a single area, he should "act with due account to the rest of the city." As evidenced by the Gerson incident, Isaacs rarely changed his stand if he believed in a particular issue. He felt, "leadership often means accepting unpopularity, where it's necessary, in the hope of ultimately converting critics. You can only make progress through that kind of leadership."¹

In making decisions, Isaacs tried to "test problems as they developed, when possible by broad principles. If you ask whether it's sound, decent or moral it saves time. If you try to analyze each problem as it develops from all angles it becomes confused. If you try to test it by predetermined ideas and principles it's far more easily solved. Of course", Isaacs acknowledged, "you can't be wholly independent. You must work with others and it does require a measure of compromise. But it should be in minor details,

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Meeting of New York Chapter of American Institute of Planners, 17 April 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 35.

not involving any major principles."¹

Isaacs' heart attack in 1944 also heightened his independence and drive to get things done. When sent home from the hospital with orders to rest, after a few days the Councilman told his daughter, "I won't live like an invalid, even if it means only five years. I have things to do."² Having no patience with illness, Isaacs could not be slowed down. As Myron Isaacs observed his father, "after the heart attack, he never knew when the end might come and lived doing the best he could from day to day."³

The New York City Council has always had limited power. Isaacs operated at a further disadvantage as a minority member. Getting any legislation passed always meant enlisting the support of the Democratic Councilmen. When Isaacs first joined the Council, the minority included representatives from the Republicans, Communist and American Labor Parties. Genevieve Earle, a Brooklyn Republican, served as Minority Leader for the group until 1949. "The minority was close in the beginning, we used to meet before Council," Earle noted. However, "after the 1943 and 1945 election, we were completely diverted and didn't even try to have a coherent program. We had Republicans that wouldn't talk to Communists."⁴ Referring

¹Stanley Isaacs, Speech Women's City Club Meeting, 15 November 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 35.

²Helen Isaacs Herrick, interview, 12 October 1973.

³Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

⁴Genevieve Earle, Reminiscences, Oral History Project, Columbia University, 1950, pp. 123-124.

to Isaacs in her Reminiscences, Earle remarked, "I think the most outstanding member under any administration at any time is Stanley Isaacs....He's way ahead of anybody in ability and devotion, a fine public servant."¹ "Stanley Isaacs is the kind of person who'll be cooperative with Democrats when they have good legislation, very constructive and helpful. He's good in committees when they introduce bills which are badly drawn he won't support, he'll make suggestions as to changes, which in order to avoid harsh public criticism on the floor from him they'll make."²

Isaacs' accomplishments as a Councilman can not be measured by bills which bear his name. The Democratic majority easily adopted any popular ideas as their own. Councilman Isaacs publicized his views and then worked behind the scenes at the Council to implement them.³ Answering a request to introduce a particular bill, Isaacs explained his problem. "I have the same feeling as you. I will study the proposed amendment but you can take it for granted that I'm perfectly willing to introduce it. There is one catch; namely the majority of the Council run the show and they do not like passing something that a minority member introduces. It would be better for you to have it submitted by some member of the majority."⁴ For his years of voicing constructive opposition

¹Ibid., p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 125.

³Jacob Lutsky, interview, New York, 26 November 1973.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Herman Shumlin, 17 May 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

Isaacs won respect as the "Conscience of our city government."¹

As a Councilman, Isaacs continued his protest against racial discrimination. "I am definitely convinced," Isaacs wrote, "if the average Negro had the economic opportunities for cultural development that we demand for others, you would find little or no difference except that caused by other people's prejudice and conduct."² Isaacs worked towards improving these conditions and battled injustice in many areas.

During his first City Council campaign, Isaacs planned a luncheon for his supporters at the Roosevelt Hotel, site of his election operations. When the head waiter heard blacks would be in the group, he offered them a separate room. Refusing, Isaacs insisted "I don't want a private room, I want to be seated in the main dining room." When the waiter replied "that's out of the question, we never seat Negroes in the main dining room," Isaacs threatened to move his headquarters. The manager acquiesced and served the meal as requested.³

Noting higher food prices in Harlem, than elsewhere in the city, Isaacs urged the construction of an enclosed

¹New York Times, 13 July 1962.

²Stanley Isaacs to Mrs. Norman Goetz, 20 October 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

³Edith Isaacs, Love Affair With A City, pp. 142-143.

public market in the area.¹ "Those in Harlem pay six percent more in food costs," Isaacs complained to LaGuardia. "Even if a building cannot be established on a permanent basis now, how about a temporary structure?"² The Mayor dismissed the idea, blaming a shortage of materials.³

Isaacs eagerly joined a Citizens Committee protesting the "anti-Negro attitude of big league baseball."⁴ He felt strongly about "every barrier which prevents Negroes from having equal opportunity."⁵ Isaacs' efforts did result in "forcing the Hospital Commissioner to revise the practice of staffing hospitals along racial lines and to open the nursing service and internship in all city hospitals."⁶ Previously, despite a shortage of trained nurses, only Harlem and Lincoln hospitals accepted black students and employed them. Isaacs and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. introduced a City Council resolution instructing the Commissioner of Hospitals to assess the practices of all city hospitals and training

¹New York Times, 31 August 1942.

²Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 27 August 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

³Fiorello LaGuardia to Stanley Isaacs, 31 August 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Leon Strauss, 8 August 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to Larry McPhail, 10 September 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

⁶Stanley Isaacs to William S. Gailmore, 24 October 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

schools so no individual be excluded from service because of race, creed or color.¹

Leaders from the black community acknowledged Isaacs' aid. "Thank you very much indeed for signing the excellent appeal to Congress to pass the anti-lynching bill," Walter White, secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, wrote to Isaacs.² From Robert J. Elzy, of the National Urban League, came a message of "appreciation of the splendid radio speech in connection with our seventh Vocational Opportunity Campaign. I feel certain that it represented a definite contribution to the betterment of interracial understanding among the people of New York City."³ Expressing another thank-you, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., wrote, "you are just about the most cooperative individual I know. It makes me feel eternally grateful to you for all the favors you have done for me."⁴

Focusing on housing discrimination, which merged his two special interests, better living conditions for all and racial equality, Isaacs made the greatest strides for blacks. When the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company announced plans for the Stuyvesant Town Housing Project, Isaacs objected

¹Stanley Isaacs and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., City Council Resolution, 29 May 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

²Walter White to Stanley Isaacs, 13 July 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

³Robert J. Elzy to Stanley Isaacs, 23 March 1939, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 3.

⁴Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. to Stanley Isaacs, 21 May 1941, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 5.

to the company's intended rental policies. He based his attack on New York City's agreement to grant the company special tax exemptions. Isaacs and Powell introduced a City Council resolution forbidding tax exemptions for housing and redevelopment projects which discriminated on the basis of race, creed or color.¹ The Council turned it down. Undaunted, the following year, 1944, Isaacs and Benjamin Davis, Jr. presented a new bill requiring termination of tax exemptions where discrimination had been found by the State Supreme Court.² As in most instances, where the Council accepted an Isaacs' proposal, they altered and then adopted it as their own. After holding hearings, the City Council Finance Committee agreed to introduce another bill directed towards future projects. Pleased to see any progress, Isaacs wrote to George Hallet, Jr., of the Citizens Union. "The Finance Committee of the City Council decided to introduce a bill of its own dealing with redevelopment corporations. It adopts the general form of the Davis-Isaacs bill except it makes plans only to the future. I don't mind because I don't believe we could have passed a retroactive measure applying to Stuyvesant Town which could have been sustained in court."³ A practical reformer, Isaacs appreciated the

¹Stanley Isaacs and Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., City Council Resolution, 21 May 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

²New York Times, 16 February 1944.

³Stanley Isaacs to George Hallett, Jr., 24 April 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

boundaries within which change could take place and welcomed each small step towards a final goal. Asking Hallett's support for the new bill, Isaacs argued, "I understand the Citizens Union intends to oppose the Finance Committee compromise bill. You know how difficult it was to get any action and I hope you won't mind my urging you to reconsider this."¹ The City Council passed a bill barring bias towards tenants in any future housing project built by private capital with tax exemption under the urban redevelopment act. It became law in 1944.² The discriminatory renting practices of Stuyvesant Town itself had to wait until the 1950's to be corrected by additional local legislation. In the interim, the United States Supreme Court ruled restrictive covenants against public policy and New York State passed the Wickes-Austin law prohibiting discrimination in any project in any way aided by the government. With these tools, Isaacs had more support for his housing battles in the years ahead.³

Thinking of the entire city, not only his own borough, Isaacs projected his visions for a postwar New York. Stressing sound city planning, Isaacs hoped to see a progressive city, "one in which living conditions are at the heart of

¹Stanley Isaacs to George Hallett, Jr., 18 May 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

²New York Times, 15 May 1944.

³Stanley Isaacs, Memorandum about Stuyvesant Town Bill, 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

planning, not only homes, but the amenities of living...a city which thinks frankly in main in terms of its children for a better world tomorrow. A city which recognizes equal opportunity for all...a city in which people share in the responsibility for planning their own future." Isaacs emphasized the "important function of neighborhood activities and neighborhood social consciousness."¹

Suggesting practical economies, Isaacs advocated the concentration of municipal services. "Why not have joint fire and police stations?" he questioned"...and a union of branch libraries in high schools? Keep the playgrounds and athletic facilities open afternoons and evening and make the local high school the center of community activities instead of separate neighborhood houses or settlements....New York is planning a separate health center and welfare center. Why not house it together?"² Presenting his case to Mayor LaGuardia, Isaacs stated the "asphalt plant is consistent with what I am advocating for better neighborhood planning, concentrated public utilities in the same spot. The entrance to the plant on the Ninety-second street block is also used for trucks and a sanitation dump and since Moses joined in providing a playground to the north, no property in the

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Annual Meeting YWHA, 23 March 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

²Stanley Isaacs to The American City, October 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Scrapbook 22.

neighborhood suffers....I believe neighborhood planning along these lines and concentration of municipal services, not at all impractical and that the program for post-war construction as planned is defective because it scatters local services."¹

Continuing his argument with New York's next Mayor William O'Dwyer, Isaacs urged the "necessity of planning first to bring basic districts into alignment...ask various departments to replan their district lines. Instead of the present chaotic distribution of local agencies, a program of local civic centers could be developed leading to convenience and improved neighborhoods. Structures could house two or city departments. This," Isaacs contended, "would result in economy in construction and operation and easier interdependence, cooperation and efficiency."² Almost thirty years later, the New York State Charter Revision Commission similarly recommended dividing the city into forty or fifty service districts, each with its own police, sanitation, health and other service facilities.³ Isaacs would have applauded this idea. He maintained that sound city planning depended on citizens having access to the central administration. The remedy, as he saw it, lay "in local civic centers made

¹Stanley Isaacs to Fiorello LaGuardia, 24 May 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

²Stanley Isaacs to William O'Dwyer, 19 April 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

³New York Times, 4 February 1975.

possible by administrative districts which followed the natural boundaries and established neighborhoods."¹

After World War II ended, Isaacs expressed concern for the numerous infringements on civil liberties occurring in America. Again, he contributed to the voices of protest. Isaacs believed, "we're suffering from hysteria in the United States, based on fear of Communist aggression; and plans are being made which are the product of such fear and hysteria rather than far sighted wisdom...although you may disagree you should be free to hear all points of view."² Isaacs reacted bitterly to President Truman's directive permitting the Attorney General to designate subversive organizations. "No one can quarrel with these aims laid down by Truman." Isaacs agreed, "that anyone attempting to overthrow the government has no place in government employ. But, I don't believe new legislation is necessary to put this obvious rule in effect. It would leave wide open to interpretation what is disloyalty. To permit an executive officer of the United States to list subversive organizations and then eliminate anyone belonging or sympathizing, would obviously violate fundamental principles of civil liberties. There is nothing more important in our democracy than preservation of the rights of individual citizens," Isaacs

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Citizens Committee on City Planning, 8 April 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs to Abraham Schargel, 22 March 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

argued. "The recent proposals menace these rights. We dare not allow bitter hostility to Communist activities be made an excuse for proper protection. We cannot allow those who would like to restrict the liberties and hamper the freedom of individual citizens to take advantage of the anti-Communist sentiment to gain their ends."¹

"I'm strongly opposed to permitting any government official, without the requirement of thorough investigation, public hearings, an opportunity to answer charges and an opportunity for court review, to label any association or organization which he disapproves as subversive or disloyal." Isaacs felt President Truman's new regulation gave "the Attorney General power to disrupt or ruin any organization, the objectives of which he may disapprove, simply by labeling it as one which seeks to alter the form of government of the United States."² Isaacs complained to the Attorney General for compiling a list of subversive organizations "without the opportunity for the agencies involved to be heard in their own defense, to justify their existence and to prove their loyalty. Organizations should be deemed innocent of charges of subversion until proved guilty. This is condemnation without trial."³

¹Stanley Isaacs to Edward Reese, 5 June 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs to Eleanor Roosevelt, 26 March 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

³Stanley Isaacs to Thomas Clark, 6 June 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

Making his views known to the general public, Isaacs spoke at a forum on subversive activities at the New School for Social Research. "The Truman doctrine and pronouncement of the Attorney General violated civil rights, libels and condemns organizations without hearing and condemns individuals....The fact is we're not honestly trying to limit attack on subversive activities. We have ample laws to cover such persons and of course they should be punished and jailed. The State Department is deliberately weeding out liberals. I believe," Isaacs asserted, "democracy can stand the test against Communism, Fascism and prove its advantages. We're playing into Fascist hands by lowering our standards."¹

Firmly believing in academic freedom, Isaacs took a visible stand on issues related to organizations on college campuses. When the New York City Board of Education proposed a ban on student groups deemed subversive, Isaacs became Chairman of a newly formed Citizens Committee on Academic Freedom.² After Queens College sought to bar the American Youth for Democracy, Isaacs joined in a statement asserting his faith in academic freedom and the right of students to "be permitted to organize college life. The revocation of the charter of the American Youth for Democracy at Queens College

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo for dinner forum on "Subversive Activities" at New School for Social Research, 27 January 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

²New York Times, 23 June 1947.

took place without a hearing and under severe outside pressure."¹ Isaacs stated, "I happen to believe protection of civil liberties the most important single internal job that has to be done today. I assure you I will continue to be active in that field whenever there is a sound opportunity."² Understandably, Isaacs approved when the Board of Higher Education later rejected the proposal barring those groups organized with programs to subvert the United States Government.³

In his own activities, Isaacs would not be intimidated by the participation of Communists. "I believe," he wrote, "that it is unsound to condemn an organization because Communists as well as non-Communists are active in it, if its objective is sound. I have been willing to work with such organizations because in some areas there is no other organization doing the work that I think should be supported."⁴ Isaacs maintained, "because of my faith in democracy, I'm against the reckless un-American proposal that Communists be outlawed. Freedom and democracy guarantee the right of any

¹Stanley Isaacs, Osmond K. Fraenkel, Lyman Bradley, Statement, 8 April 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

²Stanley Isaacs to Rose Stamler, 15 July 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

³Stanley Isaacs to Dr. Ordway Tead, 24 November 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Eleanor Roosevelt, 26 March 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

group to organize. Don't let us abandon the ideas of freedom, no matter how much we may abhor Communism or detest Communists. To outlaw Communism is to start on the road toward Fascism....Permit the destruction of one minority and every minority is threatened....No matter how much we fear Communism we literally dare not adopt totalitarian methods to destroy it."¹

Always on guard for any infringement of civil liberties, Isaacs protested the planned composition of the Commission for the Temporary Care of Children. The proposed bill provided for equal representation of Protestants, Catholics and Jews on the twelve member board. This Isaacs felt, "contrary to American theory...it deliberately excluded men and women who do not formally adhere to creeds." Isaacs suggested the commission leave three spots open before allotting equal membership to the designated denominations.²

During the years on the Council, Isaacs continued his distrustful attitude towards the automobile. His warnings in 1948, then a lone voice, are more typical of statements made in the 1970's. Disapproving of a suggestion to build a bridge between Staten Island and Brooklyn, Isaacs wrote, "consider the long term effect on Staten Island. It seems tragic if we end Staten Island as it is. It is unique with

¹Stanley Isaacs, Statement for Columbia Broadcasting System, 24 March 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs, Press Release, 15 October 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

the amenities of suburbia within the city. We have room within the city today for ten times the population. There is no need opening Staten Island to rapid transit, buses, tenements and row houses. Must the auto and the need for short cuts and for speed overwhelm us?" Isaacs asked. "The autoist is being given the right of way no matter what damage his privileges may cause to those who are displaced or to those who would like to be left alone. Is this progress? Isn't it far better to think in terms of a varied city?"¹

When the city planned an auto use tax, Isaacs stood behind it, despite negative reaction from his constituents. As he explained to William J. Gottlieb, President of the Automobile Club of New York, "I think the five to ten dollar tax on passenger cars would be justifiable considering the enormous amounts spent on special highways for the benefit of the automobilist. The city needs funds badly. This contribution would be substantial. It is certainly warranted, if we provide an increase in fare that the Mayor proposed for the straphanger, for the automobilist to contribute toward the cost of his highway."²

In defense of the little guy in New York City, Isaacs favored maintaining the five cent subway fare. "The city

¹Stanley Isaacs to the Editor New York Times, 21 July 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs to William Gottlieb, 15 January 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

policy of subsidizing transit was established thirty years ago," Isaacs argued. "It shouldn't be changed."¹ An increased fare "is taken from the neediest, similar to a sales tax. We subsidize motorists on the highways, why not subways? The subway extensions were pushed by real estate interests who wanted to develop their own property. They shouldn't try now to force passengers to foot the entire bill."² Isaacs viewed the subways as "underground highways similar to vehicular arteries" and complained that the "straphanger is the only individual traveling on our highways who is asked to pay the full cost of the underground railroad he uses."³ "All such highways benefits the entire city," Isaacs argued. "Let the straphanger's fare cover the cost of maintainance and operation of his vehicle the subway."⁴ When the subways began to show a deficit in operating costs Isaacs agreed a higher fare might be necessary, but only enough to cover the increased expenses, nothing more.⁵ Disturbed when the fare went to ten cents, Isaacs

¹Stanley Isaacs, Discussion on Increased Fare in New York Transit System before the City Club, 17 February 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo in Opposition to Proposed Increased Fare, 19 January 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

³New York Herald Tribune, 24 February 1947.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Editor New York Evening Sun, 4 March 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to William Reid, 16 October 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

complained, "I can see no excuse for the fare being raised to ten cents, eight cents would cover every current need."¹

"On the merits I can justify an increase to cover operating losses only."²

Looking for a way to raise revenues without burdening New Yorkers, Isaacs favored a municipal income tax on non-residents. "I see every reason why non-residents, working in New York and obtaining income from business and profession in New York, should make their contributions to our city."³

Isaacs proposed "a local income tax on non-residents at a rate of one percent a year on all salaries and profits of unincorporated businesses and professions. It would answer the cry of many that outsiders enjoy our subway facilities. Of course there would be opposition but it seems a justifiable proposal."⁴ This plan never materialized in the 1940's. The commuter income tax would await a later era.

Isaacs objected to any revenue measures which drew money from the poorer segments of society. When the City

¹Stanley Isaacs to George Hallett, Jr., 26 April 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo as to Five Cents Fare, 30 April 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

³Stanley Isaacs to Dr. Paul Studenski, 28 June 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Joseph Lazarus, 10 January 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

Council proposed holding lotteries Isaacs disapproved.

"I regret the City Council has seen fit to request the state legislature to introduce an amendment to the state constitution to permit holding of lotteries to raise funds for our hospitals and medical research. It is shocking for New York to meet tax problems in this way. To give legal sanction to encouragement of gambling means raising money from those least able to contribute and by appealing to their worst interest...gullible people would lose not gain from official competition."¹

While Isaacs believed in economy in government, he also felt money must be spent on the essential social services or else society would suffer. Drawing attention to these needs, Isaacs warned, "blind economy threatens disaster for the city school system. The arbitrary slashing of personnel in the Bureau of Attendance of the Board of Education and the deliberate scraping of trained social workers in the Juvenile Aid Bureau and the hamstringing of the probation service of the children's court are inexcusable. The rise in juvenile delinquency demonstrated the fallacy of a program of penny wise economy."² Aiming directly at the problem, Isaacs introduced a bill, supported by the Citizens Union, calling for the "restoration of special investigators in the Juvenile Aid Bureau of the Police Department and appointing

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo for WOR, 30 January 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

²New York Post, 23 December 1942.

additional probation officers in the children's courts in order to curb the special wartime menace of juvenile delinquency."¹ The Council settled for a proposed study on delinquency rather than action.²

Feeling it valuable to make his views known, even if he doubted success, Isaacs presented many council resolutions he never expected to be passed. Isaacs enjoyed the respect of many civic groups who worked with him publicizing their causes.³ Struggling for greater use of the public schools, Isaacs wrote, "I want to make one more effort to increase playground facilities over the summer. I drafted a resolution to introduce. I realize that this may have no effect but at least it seems to me worthwhile going on record again for this important issue."⁴ Isaacs sought publicity for his ideas, not himself. Democrats like Jacob Lutsky agreed, "Isaacs never seemed to care if something made Stanley Isaacs look good. He was motivated by a sincere interest in good government."⁵

Always looking beyond the city to the critical issues of the nation, Isaacs became concerned and involved in foreign

¹Citizens Union, Press Release, 21 November 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 7.

²New York Times, 3 February 1943.

³George Hallett, Jr., interview, New York, 19 November 1973.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Francis Brannan, 29 June 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

⁵Jacob Lutsky, interview, 26 November 1973.

policy matters. Recognizing the connection between domestic conditions and international relationships, Isaacs spoke out on many subjects beyond the range of the City Council's jurisdiction. "The future of humanity," Isaacs argued, "depends on the establishment of sound friendly relations between the British Commonwealth, Russia and the United States....I regard myself a conservative who believes that the preservation of our institutions requires elimination of avoidable social injustice."¹ Discussing the essentials of permanent world peace, Isaacs stressed the need for a world organization, in addition to action on the home front. "We must fight fascism here in the United States. We must fight for liberty and justice for all and equal opportunity for jobs, housing, health and education."²

During World War II, Isaacs sponsored the Russian War Relief effort, hoping to foster friendship between the two countries.³ "It is as important to lay the foundation for peace as it is to win the war," Isaacs argued. "Britain, Russia, China and America must organize and plan together. As far as Russia is concerned it has been harder to develop the same feelings as Britain. The future of humanity depends upon the elimination of these prejudices."⁴

¹Stanley Isaacs to Henry Luce, 26 October 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

²Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Seward Park High School Commencement, 30 January 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

³New York Times, 25 February 1943.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Meeting of Jewish Council for Russian War Relief, 9 January 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

Observing the increased tension between the United States and Russia after World War II, Isaacs highlighted what he believed to be the "fundamental error of our present international and national program. We've not realized the best way to oppose Communist activities here is to live up to our domestic ideals, remedy conditions which run counter to them and improve living standards. Similarly, in our sound effort to prevent the expansion of the Russian system we should recognize the needs of submerged peoples of other nations and insist on improving their living conditions."¹ Isaacs maintained, "I certainly do not want to see Russian power grow, but I do not believe that we can counteract the infiltration of Communism through military aid, nor should we do so by supporting illiberal and corrupt governments through fear of Communism. I think that there are ways of working with the peoples who believe in a decent measure of democracy in various countries and ways of helping them to gain power, far more effectively than we are doing, either in Greece for example or in China." Looking ahead, Isaacs wrote, "I am fearful of what can happen in fifteen to twenty years from now when no matter what we do, Russia will be powerful. I do not want her to be a menace to the peoples of the world at

¹Stanley Isaacs to Chester Bowles, 20 April 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

that time and I am not convinced that what we're doing today is sound from that point of view."¹

"Make no mistake," Isaacs wrote, "I think Russia has been at fault time and time again and difficult to deal with. On the other hand, we fail to realize this conduct is due in the main to fear of us and our intentions. I do not think this is just a pose. My feeling is that neither country is for war."²

Encouraged by Truman's plan for economic aid to Western Europe, Isaacs wrote to a friend. "I'm working hard with the little influence that I have to help put the so called Marshall Plan across, because I think in the end it will build up all of Western Europe and in turn this will promote trade with Eastern Europe. In the end, it will make for better relations everywhere."³ In support of the program, Isaacs joined the Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery and advocated their shared views to civic organizations.⁴ Speaking before the Government Club of New York University, Isaacs warned "if the European Recovery Plan is

¹Stanley Isaacs to T. O. Thackrey, 30 April 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

²Stanley Isaacs to M. H. Stieglitz, 5 March 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

³Stanley Isaacs to Winifred Bates, 12 January 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

⁴Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery, Press Release, 9 January 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

not accepted, it will lead to continued poverty and spread Communism. The plan combats Communism in the sense that it presents a constructive program to remove poverty and despair. The plan if successful will restore Western Europe to a reasonable level of prosperity....The United States can not enjoy prosperity if the rest of the world struggles."¹

As plans for the postwar world took shape Isaacs criticized his coreligionists who clamoured for an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine. "I feel that the desire of many of my fellow Jews to settle there [Palestine] can and should be worked out; but on a sound interracial basis," Isaacs wrote to Wendell Willkie. "I have never believed it proper to insist upon a Jewish nation which would attempt to exclude the Arab population from full participation in economic and government activities."² In Isaacs' opinion, when the British relinquished their mandate in Palestine, "internal affairs must be worked out so that Jews and Arabs participate with full equality in the handling of its affairs. I do not believe in a Jewish national state which would reduce anyone else because of their race or creed to the status of a minority without full rights, anymore than I am ready to accept for Jews or Negroes anywhere a status which gives them less."³

Unable to effect a compromise between Arabs and Jews,

¹Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery, Press Release, 4 March 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs to Wendell Willkie, 9 April 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

³Stanley Isaacs to Freda Kirchway, 4 October 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

the British withdrew from Palestine in 1948. Following the Jewish proclamation of the State of Israel the Arab countries went to war against the new nation.¹ These events, coupled with the feeling that the United States had not amply aided Jewish refugees, led Isaacs to give Israel limited support. While he continued to assert, "I was never a Zionist and I do not like the idea of a country based on race or religion," Isaacs acknowledged "the enormous value of that country as a refuge for displaced persons" and contributed to Jewish charities aiding Israel.²

As an elected public official, many groups invited Isaacs to address their meetings. He welcomed these opportunities. Isaacs also joined many varied foreign policy committees which shared his outlook. Expressing continued opposition to the Franco regime in Spain, Isaacs chaired a conference to aid Spanish Republicans in Exile, held under the auspices of the Spanish Refugee Appeal of the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee.³ Regarding Spain, Isaacs wrote, "I always believed in the Loyalist cause in Spain. The loyalists were fighting not merely Franco, but Hitler and Mussolini as well. In a sense theirs was the first major war against Fascism. I believe we're obligated to do all we can do to restore the well being to those who suffered for freedom and democracy."⁴ Isaacs opposed including Spain in

¹New York Times, 15 May 1948.

²Stanley Isaacs to Ben Winitree, 7 April 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

³Program, Conference to Aid Spanish Republicans in Exile, 16 February 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to William D'wyer, 9 November 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

the European Recovery Program. Writing to Senator Irving Ives, Isaacs maintained, "I just don't feel we can fight Communism successfully by allying ourselves with a Fascist dictator whose regime in Spain is brutal and intolerant."¹

Disapproving of American foreign policy in China, Isaacs wrote to the State Department Bureau Chief. "I associate myself with representatives of the National Conference on American Policy in China and the Far East. We are in sharp protest against the present policy of our government in giving support to the Nanking government of Chiang Kai-Shek. I believe our China policy violates our basic political traditions by interference with internal affairs of China."² Explaining his feelings, Isaacs wrote to Jacob Javits, "We must center our aid on improvement of Chinese conditions and avoid direct aid militarily or financially to the Chiang government."³ "This money being sent to Greece and Turkey is not relief," Isaacs complained, "it involves military assistance and promotes not peace but ill will, we're dividing the world into two hostile camps. The Soviet Union's acts and ours should be guided as to remove fears....Russia is the second most powerful nation.

¹Stanley Isaacs to Irving Ives, 4 August 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

²Stanley Isaacs to W. W. Butterworth, 18 February 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

³Stanley Isaacs to Jacob Javits, 30 March 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

We must learn to work with her."¹ Isaacs felt "it is essential to maintain friendship between the USSR and the USA. There is no excuse for the Anglo-American bloc to organize to oppose every act and attitude of Soviet Russia."²

Realistically, a New York City Councilman can not make foreign policy. However, as an elected official Isaacs lent his weight to the organizations in which he participated and contributed more than the average citizen to the sway of public opinion. Whether in local or national affairs, Isaacs reached his positions independent of his constituents and fellow Republicans. Manhattanites displayed their approval by returning Isaacs to the City Council in 1943, 1945, and 1947, under proportional representation. The Republicans, despite their reservations and divergent views, reluctantly offered their endorsement in 1943 and all subsequent elections. To maintain his independent streak and Republican allegiance Isaacs needed broad public support. How Isaacs operated as a politician helps explain his success as a City Councilman as well as his failure to achieve higher office.

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Talk at American Slavic Congress Conference, 27 April 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Birobidjan Dinner, 23 September 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

CHAPTER VI

THE INDEPENDENT POLITICIAN

"I decided early, it was more useful to work within the party frame than be independent outside the party....I chose the Republican party as a matter of faith believing the party a tool to achieve something, not an end in itself....I feel a part of a great crusade in the city, always at the center of the fight against Tammany Hall and the corrupt machine."¹ Except for his brief interlude as a Progressive, Isaacs remained a Republican as his grandfather and father had been. For fifty years he tried to balance his "two basic theories" concerning politics. "It is best to work inside the party," he upheld, yet one must "nevertheless retain a basic independence of thought and speak freely."² The Republicans differed with Isaacs on many issues. The degree of independence he sought inevitably limited his influence within the party. He accepted this consequence. Whether slashing patronage jobs from the Borough

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Annual Invocation Meeting of the Orange County Federation of Young Republican Clubs, 23 December 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Columbia University Class, 12 March 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

President's office, or refusing to fire Simon Gerson as a matter of principle, Isaacs never behaved as an ordinary politician. Beyond conceding the one restriction of not being able to "jump in and out of the party,"¹ Isaacs compromised little else.

Despite his unorthodox political style, Isaacs held public office for twenty-four years, winning eight successive campaigns, never losing an election. Although his liberal tendencies often inflamed party regulars, except in 1941, Isaacs received Republican endorsement.

A true independent, Isaacs also maintained, "I don't think a man who holds office has the right to go against his own convictions even if he thinks his constituents would like it." Isaacs refused to heed to public opinion as well as party policy. "If constituents don't like it," he believed they have the remedy "to throw you out."² Isaacs' career illustrates how a man can be truly independent and yet succeed in politics. Several factors contributed to this difficult feat.

Isaacs entered the political arena at age fifty-five, already a well known New Yorker. He brought with him a receptive constituency familiar with his activities in the settlement and housing fields. In running his campaigns, Isaacs could count on the assistance of members of the various charities and civic groups to which he belonged. He assembled

¹Stanley Isaacs, Speech Political Institute Barnard College, 18 November 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

²Stanley Isaacs, Interview about Theodore Roosevelt, 1 May 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

his own organization in 1941 and all subsequent campaigns. Volunteer workers and financial contributions came easily to Isaacs' headquarters.¹

His ability as an individual vote getter forced the Republicans to take note. Having failed in an initial attempt to eliminate Isaacs from city government, the party pragmatically accepted the Republican office holder for whatever use he could be.² After 1945, Isaacs also ran with the Liberal party's endorsements. In the 1949 campaign, this additional line on the ballot provided the extra margin needed to win, bolstering Isaacs' independent stance towards the Republican organization. "The Republican vote was off so in 1949 I needed the Liberal line," Isaacs wrote. "It made me feel particularly independent because they [the Republicans] couldn't claim that I was their successful candidate."³

Beginning his political career at fifty-five years old influenced Isaacs' aspirations. Although, he certainly wanted to become Borough President again and he enjoyed being mentioned as a mayoral possibility, for a politician Isaacs set his sights low. He operated within the confines of city government, realizing the limitations of advancing age.⁴

¹Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 November 1973.

²Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 232.

⁴Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

He first became Council Minority Leader in 1949 at sixty-seven. Combining political obstacles with his age restricted Isaacs' options for higher office. An older man who recognizes he can not move up substantially can stand to be more courageous than a young man concerned with his future career.

A financially sound base contributed to Isaacs' independence. With ample funds, he could afford to take some unusual stands. Disapproving of the City Council's vote to increase their own salaries in 1949, Isaacs wrote, "I'm doing everything possible to block the unwarranted salary increase. Unfortunately, the minority of the City Council has little power except to protest, which we've done clearly and emphatically."¹ Not satisfied with words alone, Isaacs chose to donate his two thousand dollar raise to various charities. Writing to the American Civil Liberties Union he explained, "I regarded the salary increase unnecessary. I determined to share the increase voted to me with local social service and civic organizations in addition to the contributions I regularly made."² When the City Council passed another increase

¹Stanley Isaacs to E. E. Cook, 13 December 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

²Stanley Isaacs to Patrick M. Malin, 30 November 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

in 1955, Isaacs again complained. "I refuse to accept the increase for myself. I have supported increases for rank and file civil service employees but I don't believe on the top level that the City has to compete on a salary basis with private industry. There are more attractive rewards for public service than an increased pay check. I intend to ask the board to continue my line at its present rate."¹ Isaacs felt a responsibility to serve the public which went beyond monetary compensation. Unrealistically, he thought everyone else should feel that way too.²

Finding this form of protest ineffective, Isaacs decided to accept his full salary after the 1957 election left him again as the only Republican in the City Council. "As I will be alone in the City Council," Isaacs wrote to the Director of the Budget, "a voting member of every committee and intend to be diligent in attendance at all meetings I've come to the conclusion it's foolish to accept compensation less than the Chairman of several committees receive and almost the same as every other City Councilman."³

Still viewing the Republicans as the party of Theodore Roosevelt, Isaacs retained his loyalty and a working

¹Stanley Isaacs, Press Release, 27 December 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 26.

²Betty Bernstein, interview, New York, 27 November 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs to Abraham Beame, 11 December 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 29.

relationship with the organization. Myron Isaacs, explained his father's philosophy: "he believed he could make decisions and work quietly for anything he felt was in the best interests of the city but that he shouldn't get into public fights with party officials; keep on civil terms with party leadership and be emphatic privately."¹ Joan Hamlin Ellis, who worked for both Stanley Isaacs, as Minority Leader, as well as his predecessor Genevieve Earle, noted the difference between the two. "Both Mrs. Earle and Stanley Isaacs had been Republicans and ran without them. Mrs. Earle bolted the organization. Stanley Isaacs gave the organization an opportunity for suggestions and if he didn't think it adequate, he'd then reject it. He permitted the organization to submit names for positions and reviewed them."²

Within the New York County Republican Committee Isaacs had little power. Although, he won respect as a dedicated and sincere public servant, many Republicans opposed his liberal philosophy.³ "I have no influence with Tom Curran,"⁴ Isaacs wrote referring to New York County's Republican Chairman from 1940-1958. At one County Committee meeting Curran

¹Myron Isaacs' interview, 25 October 1973.

²Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

³Vincent Albano, Jr., interview, 25 September 1972; Bernard Newman, interview, New York, 16 October 1973.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to William Hoppin, 21 March 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

slighted Isaacs by leaving him off the dais and referred to Councilman Meyer Goldberg as the only New York County Republican member of the Council.¹ As Bernard Newman, who succeeded Curran as County Leader recalled, "in Isaacs' firm, not pushy manner, he walked up to the platform in the middle of a discussion and announced, 'I'm about the only Republican office holder not on the platform and I feel I should be heard on the subject.' He received a round of deafening applause and carried the day for the issue. I thought he was right," Newman said, "Isaacs had been rebuffed and in a gentlemanly way overturned it."²

Isaacs tempered his independence with a degree of cooperation with the party. Vincent Albano, Jr., who became Republican County Chairman in 1962, remembered Isaacs as "basically an organization man, although a liberal Republican, who might have been more comfortable as a Democrat."³ Isaacs could be counted on to speak at rallies and participate in campaigns of fellow Republicans with whom he shared similar views. In cases where Isaacs disapproved of the Republican ticket he remained neutral.

In 1945, Isaacs criticized his party for selecting Democratic Judge, Jonah Goldstein, as their mayoral candidate. "I'm distressed at the willingness of the Republicans and

¹New York Herald Tribune, 7 July 1943.

²Bernard Newman, interview, New York, 16 October 1973.

³Vincent Albano, Jr., interview, 25 September 1972.

Liberal parties to accept a candidate who is fundamentally a Tammany man," Isaacs wrote. "I'm equally distressed that the five county chairmen of the Republican party made their decision without consultation with district leaders or rank and file. I think there should have been some element of democracy behind the choice of candidate."¹ Goldstein expected the Tammany Hall nomination too, "Isaacs recalled in his Reminiscences. "I was told that it was only due to the dispute over the division of patronage that the plan fell through, saddling the Republicans with Goldstein. I thought the deal filthy, I couldn't support him."² Corresponding with Victor Weingarten, a campaign advisor, now in the navy, Isaacs wrote, "I feel as you do, Jonah Goldstein is no good and apt to conduct a very hypocritical campaign. I'm starting to campaign for the City Council and I have the Republican nomination without strings but I regard it as making it impossible for me to publicly attack Goldstein although I like O'Dwyer better. I made it perfectly clear to Curran I am against Goldstein and I have been angered by the nomination."³

Isaacs took the same approach during Dewey's campaigns for President. "I was asked to speak for Tom Dewey when he ran for President in 1944," Isaacs wrote. "I refused to do

¹Stanley Isaacs to David Fields, 12 June 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

²Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 172.

³Stanley Isaacs to Victor Weingarten, 26 July 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

it and I didn't support him in 1948. I didn't make any public statement of how I voted or what I was going to do. I purposely refrained from that because I was a part of the Republican machine and also a Republican office holder."¹

Doubting that he would receive the Republican nomination for City Councilman in 1943, Isaacs considered ending his political career at that point. Looking to his friends in his home Fifteenth Assembly District, Isaacs wrote to State Senator Frederic Coudert, "I should like to know Curran's intention. I take for granted you'll press for my nomination at the executive meeting next week. Obviously, I'm not impartial but how can the County Committee justify my rejection after the strength demonstrated in 1941?"² Pessimistic about the outcome, Isaacs wrote to his son. "As for the City Council, I'm openminded pending final word from the Republican County Committee. Coudert and others are trying to secure the Republican nomination for me, but I'm certain they will fail. I doubt that I will run without it. It means raising a substantial campaign fund and getting alot of people to work hard for me and I just don't feel like asking them at this time. It seems hardly worth the effort."³ Planning for his rejection, Isaacs prepared a statement acknowledging the Republican's

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, pp. 214-215.

²Stanley Isaacs to Frederic Coudert, Jr., 7 May 1943. Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

³Stanley Isaacs to Mike Isaacs, 29 May 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

failure to renominate him. "I'm not surprised by the refusal of Curran's Executive Committee to renominate me. Obviously, I do not belong to their school of Republicanism. I believe that a man elected to office serves his party best if he gives the upmost for sound social measures and a liberal and progressive program."¹

Isaacs never used this message. "Somewhat to my surprise, I must admit," Isaacs recounted to C. C. Burlingham, "the Republican party adopted me as one of its candidates for City Council and I decided to run again. The City Fusion Party and the Non-Partisan Committee have both endorsed me. While I can not say that the Council has substantial power, at least it gives me a forum, which as you know, I am glad to use to stimulate the departments of the city administration which are concerned with social progress. And even though I don't pretend to have much influence on your friend, the Mayor, I do believe that all this has some effect."²

Not quite sure why he received Republican backing, Isaacs acknowledged to fellow Republican William M. Chadbourne, "I never should have received the endorsement I know, without the fine support that Fritz Coudert, you and others in the Fifteenth gave me."³ Explaining the situation to

¹Stanley Isaacs, Statement by Stanley Isaacs on Republican's Failure to Nominate Him, August 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

²Stanley Isaacs to Charles C. Burlingham, 16 September 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

³Stanley Isaacs to William M. Chadbourne, 16 August 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

Wendell Wilkie, Isaacs speculated, "considerably to my surprise the Republican County Committee endorsed me. I was confident that this would not happen and I had pretty well determined not to run. It then tipped the scales, however, and accordingly I am going to run again. Frankly, I do not know the background of the decision or entirely how it happened. Possibly the party is beginning to realize your strength and they have become more careful about antagonizing those who hold progressive and broad views as to the future of the party."¹

Isaacs, in 1943, again proved to be a big winner at the polls, a factor no political party can ignore. Adding supportive editorials from the Tribune,² Post³ and Times to the Citizens Union and Citizens Non-Partisan Committee's⁴ endorsements, put Isaacs in a strong position. "Stanley Isaacs was elected by a vote exceeding 75,000. He far outdistanced the field."⁵

Feeling confident, Isaacs unhesitantly bucked the Republican organization the following year in the 1944 Presidential campaign. With New York State's Governor Dewey

¹Stanley Isaacs to Wendell Wilkie, 18 August 1943, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 9.

²New York Tribune, 22 October 1943.

³New York Post, 30 October 1943.

⁴New York Times, 2 November 1943.

⁵New York Herald Tribune, 11 November 1943.

striving for the Republican Presidential nomination, the New York City contingent lined up solidly behind him. Isaacs felt otherwise; he favored Wendell Willkie's outlook, especially in foreign affairs. As a Willkie advocate, Isaacs approached Curran. "Tom, I want to go to the national convention as a delegate this year. I know there are very few from New York but I feel I have a right to go because of party service, because of my standing in the party and my standing in public life. I want to go. You may not want to have me, because I'm for Wendell Willkie. That of course, is your privilege. But I want you to know that I've talked it over with Willkie, I told him I could carry the Seventeenth Congressional District, for two delegates, if there's a fight." Isaacs warned, "if you decide you don't want to send me, than they'll be a fight because I'm going to organize that district and will try to carry it for Willkie delegates, and I think we can....I'm authorized by Mr. Willkie to say that if you send me as a delegate he'll be satisfied with one delegate from New York rather than have the fight and an opportunity of possibly electing or properly electing two." Curran acquiesced to this request. "I'd be a delegate," Isaacs wrote. "It pleased me very much. In the first place, it showed that he recognized the fact I probably could win, he never would have sent me otherwise."¹ This incident, once again reinforced Isaacs' faith in his independent

¹Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 177.

attitude. He claimed, "it showed you could be independent in politics and be successful. No matter how crushing or how well organized the machine was if you have a cause or a candidate, and if you have popular support you can win."¹

This victory proved meaningless. Willkie formally withdrew before the official nomination and Isaacs'

heart attack in June 1944 prevented his attendance at the convention. Still, Isaacs issued a statement criticizing Dewey's straddling on issues and insisted "he would not be for any candidate for President who was not ready to go declare himself for international relationships which go far beyond mutual cooperation."² After the Republicans designated Dewey for President and Tom Curran for United States Senator, Isaacs reverted to a low profile position. "I have given no support whatsoever to either Dewey or Curran," Isaacs wrote to a fellow City Councilman. "I have gone on no committees and have made no speeches. I have made up my mind, however, that while this shows my own party friends just how I stand, I would not publicly come out against them and announce support of either Roosevelt or Wagner. It has seemed to me more important to maintain my position within the party so that after election I could be useful along decent progressive lines, rather than sacrifice that usefulness by stepping out in this election....I can assure you," Isaacs

¹Ibid., p. 180.

²New York Times, 23 June 1944.

insisted, "that in weighing future usefulness I am not thinking along selfish lines because I have burned my bridges long ago. Dewey and his friends know exactly where I stand and I expect to make this even clearer after election, but I would weaken myself and help my enemies within the party if they could say that I was a deserter and an outsider."¹

Fully realizing the consequences of not backing Dewey, Isaacs wrote after the election, "the popular vote was so close, that Dewey and friends are quite cocky and those of us who think it's time for a change, within the Party, have no satisfactory national leadership as yet.... Newbold Morris finally came out for him to preserve his support for next year. Knowing how vindictive Dewey is, I am sure that my failure to do this means that I will have little chance for recognition next year, unless it is forced from the outside and that seems unlikely."²

As the 1945 campaign approached, the newspapers speculated on the possibility of Stanley Isaacs running on the city wide ticket.³ Isaacs himself remained doubtful, though clearly interested. While waiting for LaGuardia's

¹Stanley Isaacs to Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., 6 November 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

²Stanley Isaacs to Simon Gerson, 10 November 1944, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 10.

³New York Telegram, 1 February 1945; New York Herald Tribune, 2 February 1945; New York Times, 12 May 1945.

future to be determined Isaacs did little. "The problem of LaGuardia's nomination must be settled first," he wrote.

"Should LaGuardia be eliminated I might well be in the running because I don't know of any other Republican around whom all progressive forces could unite. But I may be wrong. Dewey may feel that my failure to support him last year makes it necessary for him to oppose me....I'm watching with great interest but at the moment doing nothing because there is nothing I can do."¹ Writing to Simon Gerson, Isaacs commented, "I've been mentioned as a possibility for Mayor rather vaguely and it would seem a bad time to do anything on my own until the impossibility of nominating and electing LaGuardia is made perfectly clear. Then I hope to be in the running, although the odds are about ten to one against me."² When Algernon D. Black, leader of the Society for Ethical Culture offered his help, Isaacs replied, "frankly I would be immensely interested and pleased if it should turn out that those who believe in sound and decent government in the city should turn to me for leadership. Whether this could be brought about or not I just don't know and frankly, as you well know, I won't pay the usual political price under any circumstances. I believe that the Mayor has lost his usefulness and just must be replaced. Whether I am the right man is for you and many others to

¹Stanley Isaacs to Victor Weingarten, 7 March 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

²Stanley Isaacs to Simon Gerson, 7 March 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

determine and of course I appreciate your interest and all that you say."¹ A few months later, trying to enlighten a friend in the service on the situation, Isaacs wrote, "the campaign is so confused, it's hard to analyze. There seems to be no leadership anywhere....What the Liberals will do, no one seems to know and the Republicans who've been trying to work out a deal with the Democrats, are more likely to be stranded by inept handling. Many people are urging me to run but," Isaacs noted, "they do not have the inside tract in the nominating area and despite my real sense of satisfaction because of the very high calibre of those who are backing me, I do not believe there is even a remote chance of my nomination. However, I can always run for the Council again, and I am sure successfully, and there is some advantage in free lancing with good backing and with no obligations to people whose motives are somewhat different from mine."²

The mayoral nomination became immersed in talks among the county leaders of coalition between Republicans and Democrats. Although aiming at "killing the Labor Party, defeating LaGuardia and dividing the spoils, the result was Jonah Goldstein, a good Tammany man is now the Republican and Labor Party candidate and Bill O'Dwyer, the Tammany candidate...complicated by Newbold Morris, who is running at

¹Stanley Isaacs to Algernon Black, 7 February 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 11.

²Stanley Isaacs to Norman J. Lourie, 18 May 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

the Mayor's request on a third party ticket."¹

With this deal set, Isaacs asked LaGuardia for a position on the City Planning Commission, rather than run for reelection. The Mayor promised to decide in time for Isaacs to circulate petitions for the Council, if necessary. Newbold Morris, who planned to run for Mayor as a third party candidate, finally presented Isaacs with the message from LaGuardia. "Newbold called me up to say that he had talked to the Mayor," Isaacs wrote, "and that I ought to run for President of the Borough of Manhattan and that I could be elected but if not I would receive the appointment to the Planning Commission so I couldn't lose." Annoyed, Isaacs answered "I would not run anyway, I would not take the responsibility of defeating [Edgar] Nathan and electing [Hugo] Rogers...which would probably result from my running and that I would not be persuaded by the guarantee of an appointment. That this was an independent matter and if the Mayor is sincere in his desire to protect the city after his administration ended, he should be glad to make that appointment. I tried again to see the Mayor when he returned to New York but failed. I made no further efforts. About July 18, Tom Curran asked to see me, and said I was his first choice for Council. I said I'd be glad to run. He made no conditions of any kind."²

¹Stanley Isaacs to Lillian Robbins, 12 September 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo on Political Happenings June-August 1945, 2 August 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

Confident of a victory and guided by Isaacs' conservative spending, the Committee for Isaacs' reelection sent out a letter stating "this year we're planning a more economical campaign. While we are asking his friends to renew their contribution, we are suggesting they reduce it by 25 per cent."¹ A few days before the election, Isaacs wrote to his son, "things look reasonably comfortable for Tuesday. I am the number one choice of the Times, Tribune, PM and the Post and having their support I think that the other papers don't count."² The Tribune praised Isaacs as a "diligent public servant of the highest type."³ PM proclaimed, "Stanley Isaacs is by far the most intelligent Council member. An effective liberal endorsed by the Citizens Union, the CIO and the AFL."⁴ As expected, Isaacs won easily, the only Republican City Councilman elected in Manhattan.⁵

By the 1949 election, New York City had ended its experiment with proportional representation in the City Council.

¹Form Letter about Financial contributions, October 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

²Stanley Isaacs to Mike Isaacs, 2 November 1945, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 12.

³New York Tribune, 30 October 1945.

⁴PM, 2 November 1945.

⁵New York Times, 18 November 1945.

After the 1947 campaign both organizational Democrats and Republicans united in an effort to eliminate this voting method. The system, in allowing greater minority representation again resulted in the 1947 election of two Communists to the Council. This fact dominated the movement against PR. The Democrats eager to take advantage of their majority strength seized this issue to discredit this voting procedure. Although Republicans seemingly benefited from PR, the organization could not prevent the nomination of independent Republicans and in addition, in 1947 they could not permit the Democrats to rally alone against Communism.¹

After World War II anti-communist sentiment became extremely strong. The supporters of repeal played on this bias and persuaded the New York City voters to endorse their view. The Press took their stands. The New York Times, News, Mirror, Journal American and World Telegram and Sun, lined up for repeal, while the Herald Tribune, Post, PM and Daily Worker urged retention of PR. Organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action, Citizens Union, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the United Neighborhood Houses favored PR. Opposing them, the American Legion, Catholic War Veterans, New York Board of Trade and the Disabled American War Veterans campaigned for PR's demise.²

After New York City abolished Proportional Representation, Isaacs' Republican voice became even more isolated.

¹Belle Zeller and Hugh Bone, "The Repeal of Proportional Representation in New York City," American Political Science Review, December 1948, p. 1133.

²Ibid., p. 1130-1131.

With elections to be held every four years by state senatorial districts, Isaacs emerged the lone Republican on the Council in the 1949 election. Although, originally eager to return to the Borough Presidency, the 1949 campaign results gave Isaacs a new unique, position which he grew to enjoy.

"I am hoping to run for Borough President," Isaacs wrote to his son in 1949, "but am certain it can't be put across. I've been too independent to suit those in charge of the nomination, though I honestly feel I am growing stronger all the time with the electorate and could prove to any reasonable person that I have the best chance to put Rogers out of office, and that's worth doing...at any rate, I don't expect any organization opposition to my going back to the City Council. It may be a contested primary because Ed Rager will insist on running and there are some other ambitious Young Republicans in the field, but I had and expect the endorsement of the leaders and that should make the primary pretty safe. In my senatorial district the election would be safe for almost anybody and I know that I will have enough outside support once nominated to make it pretty safe."¹

Writing to Frederic Coudert, Jr., Isaacs remarked, "I had a talk with Tom Curran last week. He assured me I was being considered for Borough President, though he did not

¹Stanley Isaacs to Mike Isaacs, 9 June 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

commit himself or indicate his own views as to this. More important, "Isaacs stressed, "he gave me complete assurance that as far as he was concerned, I was his candidate for City Council if I were not nominated for higher office. Since, you had already indicated your support subject to conference with the other leaders and since Dorothy Bell Lawrence had assured me that she felt the same way, I believe this means that the entire organization is behind me."¹

Ed Rager, elected in 1946 in a special election to fill a vacancy on the Council² lacked the broad support Isaacs had. Officially, Curran explained Isaacs designation as the Republican nominee in the district due to his seniority in the Council.³ As Isaacs viewed the situation, "I went to see Curran and told him I wanted to be considered as either candidate for Mayor or Borough President. If not...would he give me full support as City Councilman in my district. He said he would. I was the senior man there and I knew he disliked Ed Rager intensely and distrusted him. The very fact that he was my rival gave me prestige and was really an asset of mine in obtaining Tom Curran's support."⁴

¹Stanley Isaacs to Frederic Coudert, Jr., 28 June 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

²New York Times, 27 December 1946.

³New York Herald Tribune, 22 July 1949.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Reminiscences, p. 221.

East Side Republicans like Newbold Morris, former President of the City Council and the 1949 Fusion Candidate for Mayor, wrote to Rager, "as between Stanley Isaacs and you, Stanley was a friend of my father's when I became active in Republican politics in 1928. He is widely respected by conservatives in our party as well as liberals. In my opinion his experience, knowledge and reputation in the community make him so highly qualified we're lucky he's running. If you'd gone over your decision with me I would have done my best to dissuade you from going into the primary."¹

Stooping to a low level, Rager introduced a resolution in the City Council "calling on the Committee on Rules, Privileges and Elections to investigate the fitness of Stanley Isaacs to be a candidate of the Republican Party for the City Council from the Twentieth Senatorial District."² The majority, as well as the minority came to Isaacs' defense. "In face of a scurrilous and dishonest attack on Mr. Isaacs, expressed in a recent resolution," Genevieve Earle wrote, "the majority and minority voted down his assailant without dissent. In a well deserved tribute the Majority Leader called Stanley Isaacs a tower of strength in the City Council."³

¹Newbold Morris to Ed Rager, 23 July 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

²City Council Resolution, 4 October 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

³Genevieve Earle to Editor New York Herald Tribune, 24 October 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

Failing to get on the ballot, Rager organized a write-in vote. Posing a minor threat, at that point, Isaacs won 3,150 to 209 while only spending \$148.13.¹ In the fall election Isaacs defeated his Democratic opponent Donald Menagh 56,606 to 45,458. Under the new system, of election by districts, Isaacs emerged as the only Republican elected to the City Council.² He now became Minority Leader of a minority of one.

Isaacs' city council district included the First, Eighth and Ninth Assembly Districts in Manhattan. Roughly, the First AD included the blocks from Houston to Fifty-fourth Streets between Lexington and Eighth Avenues. Registration figures reveal a definite Democratic majority there ranging from a low of 4,000 in 1953 to 12,000 in 1961. In 1949 and 1957 Isaacs failed to carry this area. The Eighth Assembly District ran east of Third Avenue to the East River, from Forty-first to Eighty-fourth Streets, where Democrats outnumbered Republicans 22,440 to 11,281 in 1949. After the demolition of the Third and Second Avenue elevated subways in the nineteen fifties, more Republicans moved into the luxury apartments constructed. By 1961, Republicans trailed by only 3,000 registrants, 21,768 to 18,894. Isaacs greatest strength always came from his home district the Ninth AD, covering the area east of Central Park to Third Avenue, from

¹Stanley Isaacs to Edith Isaacs, Memo, 22 September 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

²New York City Board of Elections, Annual Report, 1949, p. 78.

Fifty-fourth Street north to Ninety-sixth Street, then narrowing to Madison Avenue on the east boundary until One-hundreth Street. These neighborhoods, among New York's most expensive, registered a Republican plurality of an average of two thousand votes. Isaacs built up sizable majorities here in each of his elections. In 1953, he beat his opponent Rose Rothenberg 24,695 to 8,659 and in 1961 smashed Richard Zeif 26,612 to 7,867 in this one district.¹

Being Minority Leader entitled Isaacs to an increased salary as well as a staff. He reappointed two of his predecessor's aides, Michigan Brown as messenger and Joan Hamlin as stenographer typist.² To the current legislative clerk, Isaacs advised, "after consultation with the County Chairman, I have to tell you I can not reappoint you. I'm naming someone from Manhattan. It is impossible for me to ignore my own borough."³ While Isaacs would never bow to directions concerning appointments, he did permit the organization to submit names for the available posts and he did try to find mutually acceptable choices. Gabriel Kaplan, a Manhattan Republican became the Minority Leader's first legislative

¹New York City Board of Elections, Annual Report, 1949, pp. 33, 78; Annual Report, 1953, pp. 32, 93; Annual Report, 1957, pp. 35, 91; Annual Report, 1961, pp. 37, 108.

²Stanley Isaacs to Joseph Sharkey, 4 January 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

³Stanley Isaacs to Theodore L. Weigand, 28 December 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

clerk.¹ When Kaplan resigned two years later, Isaacs looked for another acceptable Republican. "After considering a number of candidates," Isaacs wrote, "I consulted with Tom Curran, who really gave me a free hand....I decided to appoint David Palley, who has been active in Republican politics for quite awhile."²

In 1949, Isaacs promised the Liberal Party leaders that when Michigan Brown retired a member of their party would become messenger. By 1952, when Brown left, Isaacs realized the uselessness of this job and refused to waste additional city funds with a new appointment. Fully aware of the political repercussions, Isaacs still could not be convinced to go against his personal principles.³ He notified the Liberals. "I have been giving thought to the messenger vacancy....It has troubled me. The more I think it over, the more certain I should not fill the post. I have no use for a messenger. I've tried to convince myself I could use someone appointed under that title; part time as an investigator or for research, but I honestly have not been able to do so." Knowing his decision would not be appreciated by the politicians, Isaacs wrote, "you may

¹Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 3 October 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

³Stanley Isaacs to Amos S. Basel, 4 December 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

think me a strange person, but I can't help it. I just cannot waste the city's money nor spend it in a way I think extravagant. When I was Borough President, I eliminated several exempt jobs. After a few months I found I appointed a really useless, quite incompetent man and in due course removed him, even though he was the husband of a good Republican District Leader who never forgave me....The administration is headed for the rocks financially and one of the reasons is unnecessary jobs. I can't attack it for waste and at the same time fill a post which I honestly don't need to fill. I know I have nothing to gain personally by leaving the job vacant and will receive no credit. On the contrary you in the Liberal Party will, I'm afraid think I'm doing an injustice. Most of my political friends will think me quixotic. Nevertheless, I cannot reconcile myself to any other course."¹ Again, despite this display of independence, Isaacs did not suffer. He continued to run with Liberal Party support in his subsequent campaigns.²

Within the Republican Party, Isaacs maintained a constant watch on the burgeoning conservative movement. "It is a disheartening tendency to see the National Republican Committee think in terms of William McKinley and

¹Stanley Isaacs to Murray Baron, 4 December 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

²Ben Davidson, interview, New York, 28 January 1976.

Mark Hanna,"¹ Isaacs lamented. "I want to see the days of Theodore Roosevelt come back again. He was my boyhood hero and I deeply regretted that the Party has long since departed from his standards and progressive ideas."²

Appalled by the tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy, Isaacs wrote, as early as 1952, "my feeling is that he is the victim of his own evil character and unscrupulousness and that he is really one of the most reckless and dangerous people in this country today."³

Hoping to strike a balance in his own Republican club, Isaacs appealed to Senator Irving Ives, "I write to ask you to speak at the December meeting of the Republican club in my district, the Ninth Assembly District. Our club, from my point of view became too conservative minded of late, to put it mildly. Senator Brewster of Maine is to speak...representing the over-conservative, isolationist, pro-Taft for President group in the Republican party. I am anxious to have this address balanced by a man I believe progressive like yourself."⁴

¹Stanley Isaacs, Journal Message to Young Republicans, 30 December 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

²Stanley Isaacs to Clarence Buddington Kelland, 16 November 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 15.

³Stanley Isaacs to Cornelius W. Wickersham, Jr., 29 February 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Irving Ives, 29 October 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

On the national level, Isaacs became an early supporter of Eisenhower, believing that "Ike's nomination and election would lead to a clean-up of the Republican party, similar to Theodore Roosevelt in 1901. I've always hoped," Isaacs wrote, "for that kind of movement to rejuvenate the Republican party and change it into a really powerful and constructive force for better government and firm international leadership."¹

Within the organization, Isaacs always supported the more liberal candidates. In 1946, Joseph Baldwin opposed Frederick Coudert, Jr., in a primary for Manhattan's upper east side Congressional seat. "I'm backing Joe Baldwin, over Coudert," Isaacs wrote, "but without hope he'll win. I should like nothing better than to be proved wrong."² Isaacs blamed Republican defeats in New York City on the "failure of Republican leaders to understand that New York was a progressive liberal city and demanded candidates of that sort." Calling for more young people, Isaacs advised "he would try to make Republicans realize they could not win unless they worked out an honest and sincere fusion of all those interested in good government."³ In his own area,

¹Stanley Isaacs to Irving Ives, 11 January 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

²Stanley Isaacs to Henry Van Veen, 20 August 1946, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

³New York Times, 10 November 1957.

Isaacs repeatedly complained. "We have to wake up in our district to the present picture and take drastic steps to develop a more powerful organization in the interest of everybody." Critical of his party, Isaacs condemned those who seemed "ready to take refuge in a scapegoat, lack of patronage for example, to explain what I think was the consequences of our own faults or our lack of an energetic plan."¹

By 1953, running an Isaacs' campaign became a "fairly routine, simple task," according to Victor Weingarten, the public relations man in charge. In 1941, Weingarten joined the Isaacs team. "Stanley asked me to help in his campaign at one hundred dollars a week," Weingarten recounted. "After the campaign, he wanted me to continue working. But the councilmatic salary was five thousand dollars, and I would be getting fifty-two hundred. I decided I wouldn't work for less, so for the next twenty years I worked for him for nothing. Stanley's campaigns were never much of a problem," Weingarten noted. "He was a liberal Republican and he picked up much Democratic support. Both he and his wife Edith had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. The campaigns were very inexpensive. The only things paid for were printings and mailings. Everyone worked for nothing. The campaigns were very repetitious. Stanley had great access to the press. It was a very easy job for me, very routine."²

¹Stanley Isaacs to Wilma Silverstein, 12 June 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

²Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 October 1973.

The Isaacs' home served as campaign headquarters. With little assistance from the Republican organization, Isaacs relied on his own group of volunteers drawn by personal loyalty.¹

Isaacs became entrenched in his normally Republican district and in 1953 trounced his Democratic opponent Rose Rothenberg by a margin of two to one. This time he solidly beat his challenger even on the basis of the Republican count.² Isaacs also drew many votes from Democrats and independents, influenced by glowing endorsements from liberal groups as the Americans for Democratic Action.³ The Citizens Union also affirmed, "Stanley Isaacs is an outstanding public servant. His voting record the best in the City Council."⁴

On the Republican line alone, Isaacs, in his district, trailed his party's mayoral candidate, Harold Riegelman. With Isaacs' additional votes from the Liberal column he ran almost eight thousand votes ahead of Riegelman in the area.⁵ Following election day, the New York Times editorial proclaimed, "one result of yesterday's election will be realized with

¹Edith Isaacs, interview, 28 December 1971.

²Stanley Isaacs, Election Results, 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

³Dorothy Kenyon to Stanley Isaacs, 7 October 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

⁴Citizens Union, Press Release, 15 October 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

⁵Stanley Isaacs, Election Results, 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

general satisfaction, we believe regardless of party affiliation. Stanley Isaacs has been reelected to the City Council. As City Council Minority Leader and lone Republican (with Liberal party endorsement) he has been a tower of strength, sanity and integrity."¹

With minimal campaign expenses, in 1953, Isaacs found himself left with a surplus of \$674.88. Upon reflection, he wrote to his campaign treasurer. "The more I think of it, I should not give it to the Citizens Union or any one organization but refund it to those who subscribed. It will mean nothing to most of them but nevertheless it is the right thing to do. Please distribute seventeen percent back to each contributor."² A form letter explaining Isaacs' feeling went out to all those who had donated to the Isaacs election fund. "We received contributions of \$3,888. As the campaign progressed, it became evident the outlook was for success. There was no need to spend the sums required in previous years. The outlays were limited to printing, postage and modest contributions to local Republican and Liberal Party committees. The balance of \$660 we are determined to distribute 17% back to each contributor. Enclosed is a check for your share of the refund."³

Isaacs despised waste and refused to spend unnecessary

¹New York Times, 4 November 1953.

²Stanley Isaacs to Helen L. Bittenweiser, 2 November 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

³Helen Bittenweiser to those who contributed to this Committee, 20 November 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

money in a campaign, even when funds were available. "I see no sense in spending more than was sound and reasonable," Isaacs wrote, "and of course the result justifies what proved to be wise economy."¹ Striving for fairness, in everything he did; to Isaacs returning the excess seemed the proper thing to do.

Discouraged by the Democrats' overwhelming victories in the 1953 citywide elections, Isaacs stressed "the 1953 campaign proved what's been shown time and time again since 1897. The Republican party cannot go it alone. If it insists on drawing candidates only from its own ranks and fails to unite all irrespective of party, we'll doom ourselves to failure in every city election and worse condemn the city to strongly entrenched Tammany control. My training, experience and interests lie in the progressive element that I hope to see dominate the Republican party."² Isaacs lamented to his former assistant, Gabriel Kaplan, "locally our district organization is about as feeble as an organization can be and still be active and the whole county organization is not too strong. Mayor Wagner is doing well on the whole. He's very weak but he has good people around him and keeps his door wide open to those interested in better things. In fact the door of the Mayor's office is really wide open to me and that's most helpful. Dan Reisner and Tom Curran resent the

¹Stanley Isaacs to Percival Jackson, 23 November 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

²Stanley Isaacs to John G. Linsner, 4 December 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

fact that I don't play their kind of politics, joining in sometimes well-founded but always politically motivated attacks on the administration. But I think my job is to get results and not just to get newspaper headlines and I'm sure that program works."¹ Democratic Mayoral Assistant Jacob Lutsky concurred, "Isaacs' approach to government was not political. He was motivated by his interest in good government."²

With his progressive Republican philosophy, liberal organizations, as the Americans for Democratic Action welcomed Isaacs. Allegedly a non-partisan group, most ADA members, if not independents, belonged to the Democratic or Liberal parties. Isaacs believed that there should be "in existence an organization, independent of both major political parties which will advocate liberal principles, support liberal policies and encourage liberal forces." Acknowledging the difficulty of being a Republican in such a crowd Isaacs wrote, "it must be admitted here in New York the independent Republican within ADA has many obstacles with which to contend. Liberals and Democrats tend to work together, endeavoring to drag the ADA wagon behind the Democrats. All the more important

¹Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 2 September 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

²Jacob Lutsky, interview, 26 November 1973.

there be Republican adherents within ADA."¹ Although active in the organization, serving as a delegate to ADA's National Convention² and on the New York City Advisory Board,³ Isaacs still questioned his place in an organization which he felt aligned itself too closely with the Democrats. "I was disturbed at yesterday's State Board meeting," Isaacs wrote in 1950, "if ADA swallows the entire Democratic ticket and ignores the Republicans....I don't see how they can be regarded really as sufficiently independent to permit my being a member of their board."⁴ A few years later, Isaacs again reiterated these thoughts. "I have doubt as to the usefulness of a Republican these days within the framework of ADA. The few of us are so heavily outnumbered that we honestly are not able to be really effective. The alliance between the Democratic and Liberal parties of course, is in part responsible for this picture. However, I have faith in ADA, great respect for its leadership and want its partisanship to be tempered. Further, and frankly I like ADA for the enemies it has made."⁵

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo to ADA, 11 January 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 25.

²Stanley Isaacs to Evelyn Dubrow, 3 March 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

³Lester Rosner to Stanley Isaacs, 7 August 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Eva Levy, 18 September 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to Dorothy Kenyon, 26 August 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

Explaining his position to the New York Young Republican Club, Isaacs stated, "I joined it [ADA] because I think its views generally sound and I thought it very healthy that there should be among its members, good Republicans, sympathetic to their ideas who could convince them from time to time that our candidates represent far better people to support than those pressed by Liberals and Democrats. We haven't been too successful, I must admit, but nevertheless my activities along these lines have been definitely fruitful."¹

Finally, in 1956, Isaacs resigned from ADA after the State Convention endorsed Democrat Robert Wagner, Jr., over Republican Jacob Javits, for United States Senator. In the past, Javits ran with ADA support. Isaacs argued the case for neutrality in the upcoming election.² Losing this battle, Isaacs sensed the impossibility of working within this group. "This will confirm my resignation from ADA, from the State Boards and any other posts I occupy," Isaacs advised the state leadership. "The action of yesterday's convention in refusing to support Jacob Javits, as qualified for United States Senator, after the repeated support he's been given by ADA, and after the statement by Joseph Rauh eulogizing the candidacies of both Wagner and Javits as a great credit to New York State, shocked me. From the line of discussion, it is evident no Republican could have been endorsed for that office....I had

¹Stanley Isaacs to John G. Linsner, 31 March 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

²New York Times, 24 September 1956.

hoped within ADA, despite the preponderance of Democrats and Liberals, there would be recognition of ability. From yesterday's action it is clear loyalty to one's own party governed the vote in ADA. It is clear there is no room for a Republican in ADA."¹

Even after his resignation, Isaacs received offers to participate in ADA activities. In a letter from Joseph Rauh, National Chairman, inviting Isaacs to attend the Tenth Anniversary ADA Conference, Rauh included a handwritten message. "We miss you. Please come."² Isaacs turned down the offer.³ These events did not influence ADA's support of Stanley Isaacs in his City Council fights. He continued to win the group's approval.⁴

In Isaacs' 1957 reelection bid, he received the same strong endorsements which by now had become repetitious. The Times editorial advocated that the 'City Council should be abolished, its membership is stricken with mediocrity, almost unrelieved. One outstanding exception is Stanley M. Isaacs,

¹Stanley Isaacs to George Kaye, 24 September 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

²Joseph Rauh to Stanley Isaacs, 30 January 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 28.

³Stanley Isaacs to Joseph Rauh, 1 February 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 28.

⁴Allen Taylor to Stanley Isaacs, 4 November 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 29.

minority leader, vigorous and alert as ever at the age of 75....He has both the Republican and Liberal party endorsements, as well as commendations from the ranks of labor and an expression of preference from the affiliated Young Democrats. He is a voice of liberal conscience in the council, and stands alone as an example of change, independence and principle in that body. We heartily support his reelection."¹

Isaacs faced Margot Gayle, a Democrat and John Cort, nominated by the United Taxpayers Party. Although, Isaacs felt the minor party candidate could be thrown off the ballot, he and his advisors felt it better to let it ride without publicity. They reasoned "those who voted for Cort would probably vote for the opponent anyway."²

Isaacs received minimal aid from the Republican organization. "I discussed with Fritz Coudert, the possibility of a mailing to the Ninth Assembly District," Isaacs wrote. "He told me of the difficulty of raising money. I still feel there should be a mailing. I'm the sole local candidate. I told Fritz I'd contribute \$500 and he did agree the district would match that sum at least and send out a letter and leaflet to all voters who could be covered at the cost of \$1,000."³

¹New York Times, 29 October 1957.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo, 24 September 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 29.

³Stanley Isaacs to Charles Gold, 23 October 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 29.

Isaacs anticipated little difficulty in being re-elected, despite the weak Republican city ticket headed by Robert K. Christenberry. Writing to thank Victor Weingarten for his help in the campaign, Isaacs acknowledged, "of course I'm really as certain as anyone can be that I'll be reelected. This is only to mention the really distant possibility that Christenberry's campaign, which has been a miserable one might conceivably pull me down too."¹ This did not happen. Isaacs ran ahead of Christenberry on the Republican line and beat Gayle and Cort without the additional Liberal party votes. In his district, Isaacs received more votes on the Liberal line than did the Democratic-Liberal mayoral candidate Robert Wagner.²

Despite Isaacs' independent nature, on several occasions he did choose the more diplomatic course when personalities, rather than issues were involved. Isaacs never deliberately antagonized the party leadership unless it touched upon his own principles.³ The 1958 Pete Goodwin-John Lindsay Congressional primary demonstrated this facet of Isaacs' behavior. With Frederick Coudert's announced resignation from

¹Stanley Isaacs to Victor Weingarten, 4 November 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 29.

²Stanley Isaacs, Election Results, November 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 29.

³Morton Lawrence, interview, New York, 6 November 1973.

his Congressional seat, Pete Goodwin, President of the Ninth Assembly District Republican Club became the organization favorite; John Lindsay the challenger. Although Isaacs considered Lindsay "a bright young man, who would go places in the party,"¹ Goodwin had supported Isaacs in the past and Isaacs decided not to take an active role in the primary.² In addition, as Isaacs explained to his assistant Joan Hamlin, "I talked to Gertrude Hess and she told me Tom Curran regarded John's candidacy as involving an effort to undermine his leadership. I don't believe this is so, although Albano's support has some thing of this atmosphere. I have made up my mind at this time that under no circumstances will I support Goodwin but I will not come out for John yet."³ Avoiding controversy, Isaacs never publicly came out for Lindsay, despite their mutual outlook in many areas.⁴ After the primary, Isaacs applauded the results. "You must realize how delighted I am with that incredibly satisfactory victory," Isaacs wrote to Lindsay. "I want to be helpful in connection with the campaign. Above all I want to wipe out any bitterness that remained in the 9th A.D. club and try to enlist the full support of all

¹Edith Isaacs, interview, 28 December 1971.

²Theodore Kupferman, interview, New York, 17 October 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs to Joan Hamlin, 28 May 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

⁴Theodore Kupferman, interview, 17 October 1973.

those active there."¹ To this Lindsay answered, "your generous help and quiet support was one of the things which made the whole venture worthwhile. Indeed I'm not sure that my interest in public service would have been as sharp had it not been for my admiration and friendship with you. So you're partly to blame you see."²

After a divisive primary, Lindsay looked to Isaacs to help mend wounds in the local Republican club. "I accept your offer to square things away in the 9th AD. There is no easy solution....I am sure with time and your help...it will work out."³

Isaacs considered Lindsay's philosophy and record a promising direction for the Republican party. "The words liberal, progressive and forward looking apply to you,"⁴ Isaacs wrote to Lindsay.

Isaacs campaigned for Lindsay in the Congressman's bid for reelection in 1960. "Of course, use my name as a member of your committee; in any capacity that appeals to you,"⁵ Isaacs offered. "Of course, I'm delighted to be

¹Stanley Isaacs to John Lindsay, 13 August 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

²John Lindsay to Stanley Isaacs, 20 August 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

³Ibid.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to John Lindsay, 5 August 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to John Lindsay, 23 May 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers Box 33.

included as one of the Chairman of the Lawyer's Committee,"¹ he informed a campaign worker.

Isaacs wrote letters urging support of Lindsay² and hosted a party for him.³ "I'm not too excited about the 1960 campaign," Isaacs wrote to a friend "and was quite inactive except for the local area where I worked hard for Congressman John V. Lindsay, who has made a fine record and whom I regard as one of our future greats. I don't think I overestimate his qualities. He's a man of unusual character and ability and very deserving of continued public service."⁴ In a handwritten note Mary Lindsay acknowledged Isaacs' aid. "Thank you for all you've done for John but you know how much your advice and friendship has been appreciated."⁵

In 1958 Tom Curran died leaving New York County Republicans with an election for County Leader for the first time in eighteen years. Isaacs had little say in this decision.⁶ With the prospect of a sharp battle for the post

¹Stanley Isaacs to Charles Moerdler, 19 August 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

²Stanley Isaacs to New York Post, 26 October 1960; Stanley Isaacs to Manhattan East, 28 October 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

³Mary Lindsay to Stanley Isaacs, 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Mrs. Murray Snyder, 21 November 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

⁵Mary Lindsay to Stanley Isaacs, 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

⁶Vincent Albano, Jr., interview, 25 September 1972.

Isaacs felt the selection of a new chairman should be postponed until after the fall elections. "No matter who wins out it will be a nasty fight," Isaacs argued, "and it should be avoided at least until after election day. The important thing is not to handle organization problems but rather to run a successful campaign....Wouldn't it be possible to persuade some outstanding Republican to accept the chairmanship of the County Committee for a period until after elections in order to supervise the campaign and manage it in all local details."¹ Other Republicans did not adhere to this view.

Isaacs initially backed John Lamula, an old friend and reform leader in lower Manhattan.² He lost out to Bernard Newman, who served as County Chairman from 1958-1962. While Newman praised Isaacs as the "best public servant I've known; a man of great character and integrity" Newman acknowledged Isaacs' limited influence. "Although widely respected for his insistence on maintaining his principles," Newman explained, "many people within the Republican organization criticized Isaacs for being too leftist."³

As the 1960 Presidential election approached, Isaacs again faced the dilemma of disliking the Republican nominee,

¹Stanley Isaacs to Frederic Coudert, 5 August 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

²Stanley Isaacs to John Lamula, 12 August 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

³Bernard Newman, interview, 16 October 1973.

Richard Nixon. "I don't respect or trust Nixon," Isaacs wrote. "As a member of a party holding office, I can't oppose him but I won't give him active support."¹ Isaacs' lack of enthusiasm for John F. Kennedy made this particular predicament somewhat easier. Feeling Kennedy "a shallow guy",² Isaacs wrote, "John F. Kennedy has been built up as a result of heavy expenditure and Madison Avenue tactics."³ "I have no real interest in this Presidential campaign," Isaacs informed his son-in-law Snowdon Herrick. "I don't feel that either candidate is really well qualified. I'm voting for Nixon because I think he's the better of the two and I would in any event unless there was a marked difference, for party reasons. However, I refuse to make speeches for him because I can't extol him and I won't put on a false front."⁴

In 1961, Isaacs faced his most serious threat to re-election from the right wing of the Republican party. Ed Nash, a young conservative, Manhattan chairman of the Young Americans for Freedom, placed a want ad in the National Review calling for a candidate to oppose Stanley Isaacs. Finding no takers, Nash ran himself. Nash, a twenty-nine year old advertising

¹Stanley Isaacs to Louise T. Stockly, 3 February 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

²Millicent Sturm, interview, 20 October 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs to Jill Stern, 27 April 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Snowdon Herrick, 6 October 1960, personal files of Edith Isaacs, New York.

executive, drew the battle sharply along conservative versus liberal lines. He ran a well organized and well financed campaign. According to Theodore Kupferman, then the Minority Leader's legislative assistant, Isaacs' boosters "attempted to eliminate Nash through the courts on the basis of his alleged Bronx residency. Isaacs himself felt uncomfortable with the concept of knocking Nash off the ballot. Isaacs felt everyone should have a chance to run. Finally, he agreed to this tactic, but the courts affirmed Nash's contentions anyway."¹ In this contest, Isaacs had the solid backing of the Republican organization. "Stanley Isaacs is opposed by a brash young man from the Bronx, "George Frankenthaler, a leading Republican wrote to the New York Times. "Stanley Isaacs has the support of every Republican club and Republican leader in the area, including Nelson Rockefeller, Jacob Javits, John Lindsay and Bernard Newman."²

Originally Governor Rockefeller hesitated about getting involved in a party primary. "While I have the highest regard for Stanley Isaacs," Rockefeller wrote to Kupferman, "as governor of the state and leader of the Republican party, it is my policy not to take a position in the primary."³ Isaacs requested that the governor make an exception noting, "it is

¹Theodore Kupferman, interview, 17 October 1973.

²New York Times, 4 September 1961.

³Nelson Rockefeller to Theodore Kupferman, 10 August 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 36.

not merely my position but a victory for the conservative forces and would encourage further attacks."¹ Isaacs received the following encouragement from Rockefeller. "As a long time friend and neighbor in your City Council district I cannot resist writing this note to reconfirm to you personally what I said to all the Republican candidates at our meeting last week. I admire you for your tireless and selfless dedication to the people of New York, often as the one Republican on the City Council, for your fights against Tammany and your constant vigilance as a watchdog for good government."² As the New York Times assessed the situation in their editorial, "The GOP has a primary too. Stanley Isaacs has been a distinguished conscience of the City Council and deserves renomination and reelection. The Republicans should rebuff the extreme right wing of their party. A defeat for Stanley Isaacs would be a defeat for the liberals of the GOP."³

Isaacs won the primary 6,138 to 4,323.⁴ "Considering his years in office," Kupferman conceded, "this was not too good a turnout. If it had not been for the Republican organi-

¹Stanley Isaacs to Nelson Rockefeller, 15 August 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 36.

²Nelson Rockefeller to Stanley Isaacs, 30 August 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 35.

³New York Times, 6 September 1961.

⁴New York Times, 8 September 1961.

zation we would have lost."¹ In the general campaign Isaacs had no difficulty beating his Democratic challenger Richard Zeif.²

At seventy-nine years old, Isaacs had run his last campaign. He died in office a year later. Throughout his career as a public official, Isaacs refused to compromise personal principles for political considerations. After overcoming the Gerson incident, Isaacs felt ready for any challenge. Each successful independent stand further strengthened Isaacs' faith in himself and this approach.

¹Theodore Kupferman, interview, 17 October 1973.

²New York Times, 8 November 1961.

CHAPTER VII

THE MINORITY LEADER FOR MANY MINORITIES

By a unanimous vote, one to nothing, Stanley Isaacs became Minority Leader of the City Council in 1949. Surrounded by Democrats, after New York City abolished proportional representation, Isaacs led a minority of one. Although superficially discouraging, he actually found himself in a stronger position than before. Speculating on his new post, Isaacs wrote to a friend, "in the new City Council, I expect to attend a lot more meetings. What I'll be able to do remains to be seen, but I'm not at all hopeless about having a measure of influence, because I know how to work satisfactorily with the Majority Leader and he is going to need my help from time to time. When a majority becomes as big as his, it also becomes more or less unruly."¹

In his correspondence, he expressed satisfaction with his new role. "I've enjoyed my work on the City Council. Being the sole member of the opposition has given me, interestingly enough, considerably greater influence and a measure of power."² In another letter, Isaacs remarked, "as a matter

¹Stanley Isaacs to Nancy Despres, 17 January 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

²Stanley Isaacs to May Lumsden, 23 May 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

of fact - and this may sound conceited, I'm really pleased with my post in the City Council. Even though I'm the minority, I have substantial influence on all its legislation."¹ To his former assistant, Gabriel Kaplan, he wrote, "things are going quite well in the City Council. This sounds conceited but I believe my influence growing as time goes on. Even though I get licked most of the time at least those who vote against some of the things I oppose are quite apologetic about it and admit compulsion."²

"As Minority Leader," Isaacs explained, "I'm not merely an ex-officio but a full member of every committee. I feel obliged to attend every meeting of the committees and hearings, as well as the City Council. Just because I am only one you'll find I miss only occasionally in summer. I must become officially the Minority Leader or otherwise won't have the right to vote. This necessitates the somewhat Gilbertian procedure of naming and voting for myself."³ As he saw it, "my job as the sole Republican is to be critical and make constructive suggestions....The Republican party must be constructively useful...social justice must be the goal."⁴ If

¹Stanley Isaacs to Elinor Abelson, 18 April 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

²Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 13 May 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

³Stanley Isaacs to Lee Wood, 14 January 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Brooklyn College Talk, 29 May 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

Isaacs opposed an issue he could "file a report and force a hearing. Certainly I can use the press." Isaacs claimed, "I succeed to a limited extent, because I don't seek personal publicity, but I will work within committees and with the majority leader."¹

Being the lone Republican on the Council gave the freedom and independence he prized. He accounted to no one for his opinions and activities. Majority members did not enjoy this luxury. Earl Brown, a Democratic City Councilman who joined Isaacs sponsoring anti-discrimination bills, discussed this problem. "No doubt you were surprised when I changed my vote last Friday," Brown wrote to Isaacs. "Frankly, I hated to. I changed it for one reason: Charlie Keegan had worked with me to put over our Brown-Isaacs bill when he became acting Majority Leader. He asked for my help. I did it out of gratitude....Government by backscratching is dangerous and unsound. I guess I did wrong by voting for the resolution. I suppose one should be willing to do in public what one would do in private."² Although Isaacs disagreed with Brown's final vote, he understood his fellow Councilman's predicament. "Frankly, I was troubled by your change because I thought it really important....I realize I'm in an easier position than anyone else because I can be completely independent. I realize

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Meeting of City Affairs Committee of A. D. A., 14 February 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 18.

²Earl Brown to Stanley Isaacs, 6 March 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

members of the majority have to make concessions from time to time to retain influence with fellow Democrats."¹

Isaacs appreciated his unique position. Joan Hamlin Ellis, the Minority Leader's secretary recalled, "I'd be so mad if I knew a City Councilman acted differently than he believed and Stanley Isaacs would try to educate me about the problems that an individual had because he was a Democrat."²

Jacob Lutsky, Mayor Wagner's assistant on City Council affairs, worked closely with the Minority Leader. Lutsky sought Isaacs' assistance on bills which drew objections from other City Councilmen. "If a bill was really good, I'd speak to Stanley Isaacs about it," Lutsky noted, "and he would speak up in a committee meeting. Out of respect for him they'd listen, more so than just if it came from the Mayor....Although, his name doesn't appear on legislation (if the idea was good the Democrats took it) his word was of great value in almost every case....Stanley Isaacs had so much respect in the City Council. If there were twenty-six votes in the Council, he was equal to twelve of them." Most of the real work at the Council occurs in committee. "Isaacs was present at every meeting....He knew his subjects and was prepared for meetings. I could sit back and let him work. I'd keep still, he was persuasive. I wouldn't ask him for anything improper or I would lose his respect."³

¹Stanley Isaacs to Earl Brown, 7 March 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

²Joan Hamlin Ellis, interview, 29 October 1973.

³Jacob Lutsky, interview, 26 November 1973.

Eric Treulich, former City Council Majority Leader said in 1961, "Stanley's most important role is his influence on ninety-five percent of the legislation he agrees with us. He has prevented us from looking silly on occasion. If he were ever to leave the City Council he would be mourned more by us Democrats than Republican higher ups."¹ Isaacs often helped Democrats in the writing and structuring of bills in Committee.²

Despite the many criticisms made of the City Council and the tendency of its members not to exert independence, Isaacs believed New York needed some "sort of grass-roots structure of city government."³ Acknowledging the limitations of the Council, Isaacs still felt it "important to have direct, personal contact with some city official." The City Council itself is responsible for the ill esteem in which it's held," Isaacs claimed. "Its members are well paid, but not sufficiently attentive to their duties....If City Councilmen were of higher caliber and the Council more jealous of its own powers, it would assert itself more often."⁴

Isaacs guarded against any restrictions in the electoral process which stymied popular expression. Within the party structure, he called for direct election of district

¹Manhattan East, 2 March 1961.

²Jacob Lutsky, interview, 26 November 1973.

³Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Dinner for W. Bernard Richland, 30 January 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Dorothy Bromley radio program, 27 January 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

leaders,¹ a measure later adopted. Isaacs strongly denounced the Wilson-Pakula Law which provided "no one can be designated as a candidate by enrolled voters of a party in a primary or a convention, who is not an enrolled member of the party." He argued, "this bill would ruin fusion in New York City, while it would permit bipartisan deals to be negotiated by political leaders. It will make it impossible for enrolled voters of the party, in defiance of those who control the organization, to nominate an independent or someone nominated by another party."² "The law," Isaacs complained, "hampers those who want to work together, irrespective of their own parties, for efficient and honest municipal government. The law permits deals between leaders."³ The bill became law, over Isaacs' objections and continues in effect today.

Despite Isaacs' extreme concern for the people's proper representation in government, he still considered the other factors which he felt contributed to a viable New York. As a former real estate man, Isaacs stressed the importance of these investments to New York City's development. In discussing representation on the Board of Estimate

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for WCBS New York Forum, 26 May 1962, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 37.

²Stanley Isaacs to C. C. Burlingham, 10 March 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 14.

³Stanley Isaacs to Editor New York Times, 1 November 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

Isaacs' conservatism became apparent. In sharp contrast to his many liberal stands Isaacs rejected repeated efforts by Queens politicians to switch voting on the Board of Estimate from a weighted system, favoring Manhattan and Brooklyn, to an equalized count. "I notice there's pressure behind legislation to change voting on the Board of Estimate so as to deprive Manhattan and Brooklyn of the advantage they enjoy because the Borough Presidents of these boroughs have two votes. They argue that an increase of population, especially in Queens, justifies the change. I've always supported the present voting system because population is not the only factor to be considered." Isaacs asserted, "forty-eight percent of the assessed value of real estate in the city is within Manhattan and about twenty-five percent in Brooklyn. Many issues that come before the Board of Estimate involve city wide assessments and since the greater burden of payment lies on those two boroughs, it seems proper to get additional voting power."¹ Here, as in most fiscal issues, Isaacs maintained a conservative outlook. Abandoning his usual liberal positions regarding government representation, Isaacs held this highly undemocratic stand. Always fearing too loose a rein on city funds he felt that those who had a vested interest had the right to determine policy. In the revised 1961 city charter this view lost out. On the Board of Estimate each Borough President now had one vote.

¹Stanley Isaacs to Clinton Blume, 22 January 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

Isaacs favored measures that democratized government but not if they clogged the machinery. Bothered by the unnecessary delays from extensive public hearings, he wrote to Roger Starr of the Citizens Housing and Planning Commission. "I'm growing increasingly disturbed at the waste of time involved in public hearings due to the desire to give everybody a chance to be heard. It involves a sound democratic principle. Nevertheless, I see no reason why there shouldn't be some time limit....I believe as you do in the democratic process, but I also believe that our important officials should not have their patience abused. There should be some time limit."¹

As Minority Leader, Isaacs enjoyed greater press coverage than before. With increased visibility his views received wide publicity. Even when the Council voted against him, twenty-five to one, as they so often did, Isaacs' opinions had exposure.²

Pursuing many of the same causes he had followed for the preceeding fifty years, Isaacs continued to fight racial bias in every form. Presidential initiative, United States Supreme Court decisions and New York State laws attacking discrimination helped pave the way on the local level. With Harry Truman's ascendancy to the White House in 1945, the federal government assumed a more positive role in the civil

¹Stanley Isaacs to Roger Starr, 16 June 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 34.

²Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 October 1973.

rights battle. Soon after taking office, Truman proclaimed, "the extension of civil rights today means not protection of the people against the government, but protection of the people by the government. We must make the federal government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and inequalities of all Americans. And again I mean all Americans."¹ No President had ever sounded so strong in his defense of civil rights. To support his word, Truman created a Civil Rights Committee to study conditions and suggest a remedial program. Based on this committee's report, Truman called on Congress to "make lynching a federal offense, to outlaw the poll tax, to end segregation on all interstate transportation, to set up a permanent FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Committee] to prevent discriminatory hiring practices, to enforce fair elections and to create a permanent civil rights commission." In 1948, side stepping the legislative branch, he issued executive orders forbidding discrimination in federal employment and ending all segregation in the armed forces.²

Also in 1948, the Supreme Court ruled that restrictive land covenants could no longer be enforced by the courts. Previously, to insure segregation, real property owners created private legally binding agreements to exclude blacks from ownership or occupancy in designated areas. In the landmark case, Shelley v. Kramer, the Supreme Court decided that judicial

¹Richard Kluger, Simple Justice (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 250-251.

²Ibid., p. 255.

enforcement of these restrictive agreements denied equal protection of the laws as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Federal Constitution.¹ This ruling eased the way for passage of legislation attacking discrimination in the housing field.

The need for labor during World War II and the extended economic boom afterwards contributed to a "growth of tolerance in post-war America: there was work for all."² In 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive proclamation forbidding discrimination in hiring practices and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee to insure compliance with the order.³ Towards the end of the war, New York State passed the Ives-Quinn bill outlawing "discrimination in employment because of race, creed, color or national origin, either by employees, labor organizations, employment agencies or other persons." This bill created the State Commission Against Discrimination as a watchdog agency.⁴

Observing prejudice by contractors working on the

¹Joseph Tussman, ed., The Supreme Court on Racial Discrimination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 287.

²Kluger, Simple Justice, p. 749.

³Ibid., p. 219.

⁴New York Times, 6 March 1945.

Brooklyn Battery Tunnel in New York City, Isaacs alerted the Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority to this situation. Even though Isaacs doubted success, he spoke up.¹ "I don't want to hold the Unions blameless by any means," Isaacs wrote, "but the contractors seem to be dodging the issue. The State Commission Against Discrimination is following its usual procedure. Discrimination exists and it is flagrant and the Authority has the duty of enforcing those provisions in the city contracts which forbid discrimination in employment. There is no difference between these provisions and other provisions which specify the kind of materials to be used and give detailed specifications as to the job. Certainly, you would not feel yourself without power to take action if these contractual obligations were violated. I think you have the power to force adjustment."²

Individuals came to Isaacs with personal problems. Jane Bolin, a Black Domestic Relations Court Judge, approached Isaacs when the army assigned her nephew to a segregated unit. Discussing the incident with Congressman Jacob Javits, Isaacs wrote, "his case is one of many that emphasizes the stupidity and unsoundness of segregationist policy in the army....I hope

¹Stanley Isaacs to Marian Wynn Perry, 14 March 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

²Stanley Isaacs to George Spargo, 14 March 1949, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 17.

you will do what you can to remedy this particular case and do what you can to destroy that un-American and stupid policy of the military authorities."¹ Isaacs' friends knew they could count on him with any problems. "I am indebted to you for so many diverse kindnesses," Judge Bolin wrote thankfully.²

Segregation in the schools infuriated Isaacs. When the Board of Education planned a new building for P.S. 6, within his city council district, he fought an unsuccessful battle against the proposed boundary lines for the school. Condemning the "costly replacement," Isaacs added, "the site was obviously selected so the school could be confined to a very exclusive student body. The concept violates what I believe to be sound principle that wherever possible all public schools should endeavor to include in the student population children of varied races and creeds and from families of varied income levels. The present school area which feeds P.S. 6 is outrageously gerrymandered so there are no Negroes....The present district is laid out to stimulate segregation....There is no need for segregated schools at the very point where Harlem and Yorkville coincide."³

¹Stanley Isaacs to Jacob Javits, 6 April 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

²Jane Bolin to Stanley Isaacs, 4 May 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

³Stanley Isaacs to William B. Nichols, 12 March 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

Despite the popularity of the new school in his district, Isaacs had the courage to campaign against it. Reluctant to give up a cause, a few years later Isaacs called for a rezoning of P.S. 6, notwithstanding parental objections.¹

Yet, Isaacs resented filling any particular job on the basis of race alone. When Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., called for more appointments of Blacks to city jobs because of their voting strength, Isaacs branded this an "immoral principle."² He deplored the concept of balanced political tickets." This is not integration," he argued, "but just the opposite. It emphasizes race and creed and national origin."³ When Hulan Jack, Manhattan's Borough President resigned in 1961, Powell and others advocated that Jack be replaced by another Black man. Isaacs felt it "disgraceful to choose an inferior candidate solely on the basis of being Negro," adding he "would be delighted with a Negro of ability and integrity."⁴ "I dislike the idea that we have to find a man for Borough President of Manhattan who is Negro," Isaacs commented. "I don't think any office in the city should be allotted to a Negro, Jew or Catholic because that's discrimination. I wouldn't mind running Sam Pierce for Comptroller and

¹New York Post, 26 April 1960.

²New York Times, 28 March 1960.

³New York Times, 12 February 1962.

⁴New York World Telegram and the Sun, 19 January 1960.

then we wouldn't label the office of Borough President as Negro. These things bother me."¹

Seeking to end bias in child care agencies, Stanley Isaacs and Earl Brown introduced a bill which would "bar public funds to private agencies that discriminated because of race or color." This bill would "compel institutions; supported in part by City funds to make their facilities available to more Negro children requiring foster care."² Family tragedies resulting from the death, illness, desertion and neglect of parents left at least ten children homeless each day in New York. They then waited for extended foster care placement in the city's one public and thirteen private shelters.³ In 1952, an influential study conducted by the Community Service Society, at the request of the Commission for the Foster Care of Children, reported the inadequacies of this program and condemned the existence of racial discrimination in certain child care agencies.⁴ Abuses existed despite a New York City budget provision denying money to private institutions not accepting a "reasonable proportion of any racial group."⁵

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes WCBS T.V. Forum, 4 June 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 35.

²New York Times, 4 April 1952.

³New York Times, 18 February 1952.

⁴New York Times, 6 February 1952.

⁵New York Times, 25 June 1952.

The Citizens Committee on Children additionally reported "ten of the fourteen Protestant and nonsectarian institutions that take both Negro and white children have appeared to adhere to definite color quotas. A two-week survey of temporary shelter institutions showed that while 80 percent of white infants under six months of age needing care were placed there were no Negro placements. In the 6-month-to-1-year age group all white youngsters were placed but only 40 percent of the Negro children received care. For children 1 to 1 1/2 years old the figures were 70 percent of the whites and 50 percent of the Negroes, while in the 1 1/2-to-2 years group facilities were found for all white children but only for 57 percent of the Negroes."¹ Isaacs and Brown hoped to correct these inequities.

To prepare for the act's passage, Isaacs considered the problem with many charity leaders. "I've redrafted our bill in light of a series of discussions with various people," Isaacs informed Brown.² Carefully enlisting allies, Isaacs acknowledged approval from the American Jewish Congress. "I appreciate your support of the bill insuring that city funds will not be given to foster care institutions which discriminate in their administrative policy because of race, color or

¹Ibid.

²Stanley Isaacs to Earl Brown, 27 February 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

religion."¹ Working closely with the Citizens Committee on Children, Isaacs obtained the necessary endorsements from City Commissioners, as well as private groups.²

Speaking for the bill at the public hearing held by the City Council General Welfare Committee, New York Welfare Commissioner Henry L. McCarthy argued this measure "gives us the enforcement powers we need to carry on our fight against discrimination." Representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Urban League, United Neighborhood Houses, Citizens Committee on Children, and the Urban League of Greater New York, also spoke on the bill's behalf. With the weight of the city administration, civil rights groups and leaders in the child welfare field, the Brown-Isaacs bill forbidding discrimination in child care institutions became law in 1952.³

In Isaacs' struggles for racial equality he rejected any measure which separated Black and White. He opposed gerrymandering election districts, even when it aimed at improving minority representation in the legislature. "I believe the proposal to carve a special senatorial district, covering Harlem and East Harlem unsound." Isaacs argued, "gerrymandering is improper even in a good cause. The Harlem

¹Stanley Isaacs to William Maslow, 31 March 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

²Betty Bernstein, interview, 27 November 1973.

³New York Times, 4 April 1952.

ghetto should be broken down, not embalmed in a senatorial district. Negro representation in the Senate, Assembly and Congress should be brought about through the normal electoral process not by creating Jim Crow districts."¹

In later years, Isaacs modified his views concerning the type of attack necessary to counteract segregation. "We've reached a serious impasse," Isaacs felt, "growing worse in most of the ghetto areas. Maybe we have to think in terms of balanced communities and not just the negative policy of no discrimination."² In an attempt to be non-discriminatory the New York City Housing Authority originally accepted tenants without considering their racial backgrounds. Instead of creating an integrated situation, as they had hoped, the low income buildings attracted increasing numbers of minority tenants. As Isaacs watched New York City's housing projects move from mixed to non-white communities he urged "replacement of the no discrimination policy by a constructive policy of endeavoring to create in the housing field integrated and at the same time balanced communities. I can see that those with the desire to benefit minority groups may well have to think in terms of the abhorrent term quota to achieve our goals. I would like to see the law changed so that the City Housing Authority would be authorized to adopt a tenant selection policy

¹Stanley Isaacs to Constance Curtis, 5 March 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

²Stanley Isaacs to Patrick Murphy Malin, 18 December 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

that would produce balanced communities."¹ In the late 1950's the Housing Authority switched to this approach. Determined to take affirmative action, the Authority began "withholding apartments from one or another racial group to reduce ethnic over-concentration in any one project." To achieve integration they deliberately held apartments vacant hoping to fill them with white tenants.² Isaacs viewed the policy change enthusiastically. "The adoption by the Housing Authority of a color-blind policy of tenant selection was initially a pace maker for integration in our city and nation. In recent years it had led to the opposite effect. As the new policy is increasingly successful, we can look forward to increased integration throughout the neighborhoods of our city."³

Despite Housing Authority efforts to foster integration the trend towards a disproportionate percentage of minority tenants could not be abated. Economic barriers as well as social discrimination created this situation. As Ira Robbins, a housing specialist and President of the City Club reported, "more than 60 percent of nonwhite families,...cannot afford to live anywhere but in subsidized public housing. Of the remainder less than 5 percent have the economic means to

¹Stanley Isaacs to Reverend James A. Pike, 30 November 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 27.

²New York Times, 7 January 1961.

³Stanley Isaacs to Robert Wagner, 10 October 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 39.

afford apartments built without government assistance of some sort." Without an increase in the incomes of Negroes and Puerto Ricans, he lamented, "there is no possible solution to their housing needs except subsidized public housing."¹

After Isaacs' death, a state inquiry in 1963 found that the Housing Authority's quota system violated the state law against discrimination and resulted in the reduction in the housing available for low-income Black families.² The Authority had to discontinue this practice.

By the time Isaacs became Minority Leader in 1949, conditions outside of New York City had created a more favorable atmosphere for combatting housing discrimination. Nationally, the Supreme Court, in 1948, ruled restrictive covenants no longer enforceable by the courts. The justices reasoned that court intervention by the state gave individuals the coercive power of government to deny others of their property rights.³ With the groundwork laid to attack discrimination related to state activity, in 1950, the New York State legislature passed the Wicks-Austin bill. This measure prohibited discrimination in future projects in any way aided by the government. State law already barred discrimination in wholly public housing. The new legislation extended coverage to "all housing built with public assistance, either through tax exemption or use of condemnation powers to assemble sites."

¹New York Times, 22 October 1961.

²New York Times, 27 January 1964.

³Kluger, Simple Justice, p. 254.

The prospect of increased housing as a result of the Federal Housing Law of 1949, also prompted action at this time.¹

Based on these developments, Stanley Isaacs and Earl Brown introduced a new housing bill in 1950. The resolution, suggested by the New York State Committee On Discrimination in Housing and drafted in conjunction with them, relied on the city's use of its police powers.² This act outlawed discrimination and segregation in any structure, "exempt in any part in taxes, on property sold below cost, assembled by the city or any agency through power of condemnation, built by any agency supplied funds or financial assistance." Every violation carried a five hundred dollar fine and persons discriminated against could bring action in the courts.³ Only the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, who enjoyed a twenty-five year tax abatement from New York City for their Stuyvesant Town development, lobbied strongly against the bill.⁴

With its passage, Edward Lewis, Executive Director of the Urban League exclaimed, "City Councilmen Earl Brown

¹New York Times, 1 April 1950.

²Stanley Isaacs, Memo about Stuyvesant Town Bill, 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

³Stanley Isaacs and Earl Brown, Local Law to Amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York in relation to Discrimination and Segregation in City Assisted Housing, 28 September 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

⁴New York Times, 2 March 1951.

and Stanley Isaacs did a remarkable job in piloting through the City Council legislation to prohibit discrimination in projects similar to Stuyvesant Town. This measure will remove a blot on the name of our city."¹

From this point, Isaacs and the State Committee on Discrimination in Housing moved steadily towards outlawing discrimination in all multiple dwellings. With Mayor Wagner's support, City Council Majority Leader Joseph Sharkey joined with Brown and Isaacs in the 1954 Sharkey - Brown - Isaacs law, forbidding discrimination in Federal Housing Administration insured housing.²

Since its inception, in the depression, the Federal Housing Administration has been a mortgage guarantee program, assuring lenders of repayment even if a borrower defaults. Traditionally, the FHA had avoided the central cities and even supported bias by encouraging a policy of neighborhood stability which called for properties to continue to be "occupied by the same social and racial classes."³ The FHA concentrated on the suburbs, leaving the lending institutions and the government agency to blame one another for neglecting the cities. The FHA argued they could not insure mortgages

¹Edward Lewis, Statement, 27 February 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

²New York Post, 12 May 1954.

³Kluger, Simple Justice, p. 246.

if institutions would not lend. The lenders replied how could they be expected to make loans if the FHA would not support them.¹

In 1954, the FHA began providing protection for the rehabilitation of rental housing and the construction of new apartments located in urban renewal programs. By May 1954, the Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education, gave new impetus to ending discrimination on every front. Dealing with the question of segregation in the schools, the court concluded, "that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," and are a denial of "equal protection laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment."² The implications of this ruling extended far beyond education. As Richard Kluger concludes in his history of the case: "The law of the land no longer recognized a separate equality. No Americans were more equal than any other Americans." All race classification laws came under attack. Walter White, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People reacted to the decision by announcing that "wiping out housing and job discrimination was next on the agenda."³

¹National Commission on Urban Problems, Building the American City (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), pp. 95-101.

²Tussman, ed., The Supreme Court and Racial Discrimination, p. 42.

³Kluger, Simple Justice, p. 714.

Just weeks later, New York City, as usual in the forefront of liberal movements, passed its local law "to bar discrimination in any apartment house henceforth constructed with Federal Mortgage Insurance."¹ "In sharp contrast to the battle over the original Brown-Isaacs law," the State Committee on Discrimination in Housing reported, "no opposition, overtly or behind the scenes by the city's real estate and lending interests."²

Public policy dictated that builders given government assistance could no longer discriminate. From Washington, Albert M. Cole, chief of the United States Housing and Home Finance Agency "declared intensified federal warfare on racial discrimination in housing," and announced "that the government would refuse federal aid to cities that default on their obligations to minority citizens."³

Following the logical progression of these housing laws, New York City again took the lead. The existing measures only applied to 164,172 units, including 90,000 in public housing. This left almost 1,800,000 apartments untouched by any law.⁴ The State Committee on Discrimination

¹New York Times, 25 June 1954.

²State Committee on Discrimination in Housing, Press release, 9 July 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

³New York Times, 30 October 1954.

⁴New York Times, 19 June 1957.

in Housing, which had led the crusade against bias, recommended a concerted attack to its constituent organizations.¹ Responding to pressure for reform, Mayor Wagner announced his intention to make New York City the first in the nation to outlaw racial discrimination in housing.² Underestimating public resistance, in May 1957, with Mayor Wagner's endorsement, Sharkey, Brown and Isaacs introduced a bill to ban bias in private housing.³

Immediately, the real estate boards in all five boroughs joined in an all out campaign against the proposed law. They maintained the bill would encroach on the freedom of an individual to use his own property as he chooses. Attacking the bill as "vicious and hypocritical" they drew a distinction between housing built or supported with public funds and those financed as private investments.⁴ Insisting the issue centered on economics, they argued passage of the bill would result in a slowing down or cessation of mortgage loans by savings banks and insurance companies.⁵ Urging their tenants to write to

¹Citizens Union, Press release, 1956, New York City Housing Discrimination Vertical File, Municipal Reference Library, New York, New York.

²Robert Wagner, Housing Policy of the City of New York, August 1956, Robert Wagner Papers, Box 1494, New York Municipal Archives, New York.

³New York Times, 26 May 1957.

⁴New York Times, 27 May 1957.

⁵New York Times, 16 June 1957.

the Mayor, the landlords distributed over one hundred thousand flyers in Manhattan alone.¹ Heavy mail poured in to the Mayor's office running three to one against the bill. City Councilmen reported opposition of four to one from their constituents.² The New York Times wrote in their editorial, "we oppose the bill as being the wrong way to the right end. We don't think the people of New York prepared for passage and fear that consequences would be the stopping of large scale construction and drastic reduction of property values."³ To this Isaacs replied, "I believe that the law would spread minority groups and thus enhance property. Judging from the past, legislation has been the soundest and most effective approach toward community education."⁴

Sensitive to public opinion in an election year, the General Welfare Committee of the City Council voted to shelve the issue temporarily in June, 1957.⁵ Undaunted by adverse mail, Isaacs persisted in his support. "I can assure you from a political view I gain nothing," he wrote. "In my City Council district there is a small percent of minority residents. Further, most of the real estate men who live in the city are opposed and live in my district. In addition, there

¹New York Times, 15 June 1957.

²New York Times, 19 June 1957.

³New York Times, 15 June 1957.

⁴New York Times, 18 June 1957.

⁵New York Times, 19 June 1957.

are many cooperatives within the district. I can't let those facts however govern my action where a matter of vital importance is involved from my point of view."¹

A public hearing of the General Welfare Committee, held in July, drew over two hundred New Yorkers. Algernon D. Black, Chairman of the New York State Committee on Discrimination in Housing, spoke for the thirty-eight civic and social welfare organizations in favor of the bill. James Andrews, representing the Real Estate Board, "dubbed the legislation a force bill with vengeance."² Various proposed amendments postponed action on the bill.

Disgusted by the slow progress on the bill Isaacs accused the Mayor of deliberate stalling.³ "The details in connection with the bill have been disgraceful," Isaacs wrote to Mickey Levine of the Americans Veterans Committee. "The Mayor came out wholeheartedly for it, then retired into a shell and hasn't lifted a finger. We've had promises of meetings of the General Welfare Committee before the end of August and further promises without fail on September 12th but no notices of this later meeting have gone out, so it will not be held. However, the State Committee on Discrimination in Housing has been riding hard on the Mayor and

¹Stanley Isaacs to Henry Demling, 2 July 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

²New York Times, 31 July 1957.

³New York Times, 2 October 1957.

Joe Sharkey to spur action. I'm really hopeful that a meeting of the General Welfare Committee will be held in the near future, and a sound bill enacted."¹ Stanley Lowell explained, "Wagner was never going to back away. It was our judgment that it was better politically to wait until after the election....The Mayor organized a Committee, I was chairman, concerning the bill. We tried to organize counter pressure. We went to groups supporting the bill and said write. The bill was deliberately introduced by two Democrats and a Republican for widespread support."² Acknowledging Isaacs' long term interest and activity in housing discrimination, the Democrats included his name on the landmark legislation.³

With election day safely behind the anti-bias bill finally passed in December 1957, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, creed or national origin in private multiple dwellings housing three or more families. The measure exempted one and two family homes, except those in developments of ten units or more.⁴

Isaacs had long championed this cause, now many others

¹Stanley Isaacs to Mickey Levine, 11 September 1957, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

²Stanley Lowell, interview, New York, 14 December 1973.

³Jacob Lutsky, interview, 26 November 1973.

⁴New York Times, 6 December 1957.

had joined him. Although Isaacs needed the Democrats to pass the act, former Mayor Wagner conceded, "Stanley Isaacs deserved great credit for it....His support was good in getting people who suspected politicians."¹ Obviously, a statute of this nature can not be achieved through the efforts of one man alone. Isaacs is entitled to recognition for being part of the movement from the start, publicizing the need for legislation and stirring groups to action, even before the concepts enjoyed widespread approval. Isaacs showed courage in backing a cause which originally had limited popularity, especially among his own constituents. By 1961, an amendment easily passed widening the housing bias ban to include the "prohibition of discrimination on the rental, leasing or sale of all private housing, except for rental, of an apartment in an owner occupied two family house, or room within an owner occupied family house or apartment."²

As a watchdog of housing conditions, Isaacs voiced concern over many developments. In the 1950's he focused on the related issues of overcrowding and tenant relocation resulting from passage of the 1949 United States Housing Act, establishing the federal policy of urban renewal. Title I of this legislation provided for federal funds to be used "to assist communities in eliminating their slums and

¹Robert Wagner, interview, New York, 2 November 1973.

²New York Times, 17 June 1961.

blighted areas through the assembly, clearance, preparation and sale of land for redevelopment at fair value, for uses specified in local plans."¹ Rather than provide additional housing for the poor, this legislation often led to increased housing problems in the city. "Instead of helping the ill housed, urban renewal was used to enhance political reputations, provide profitable investment opportunities for lending institutions and builders and indirectly help the cities' economic foundation."² In their planning the cities ignored the requirements to relocate those displaced by the new construction. Even when the renewal projects involved new housing the former residents of the area could not afford apartments built in place of the razed slums.

Under Title I of the Housing Act the federal government planned to assist private developers in rejuvenating the deteriorating neighborhoods of the inner cities. Faced with high costs of slum land and demolition of existing structures, builders had looked to less expensive, less built up, outlying areas. Designed to counter this trend, the Title I program provided federal subsidies for the cost of site improvements, (walks, curbs) and of supporting facilities (schools, playgrounds) in the rebuilt area. Through

¹New York Times, 23 April 1950.

²Mark Gelfand, A Nation of Cities: The Federal Government and Urban American 1933-1965, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 207.

the right of eminent domain the government agencies assembled quantities of land and then resold it at lower prices to developers. The federal government bore two-thirds of the cost and the local municipality one third.¹

Robert Moses, as head of the Mayor's Committee on Slum Clearance, guided New York City's use of Title I funds. By 1957, \$267,000,000 had been spent in New York, whereas only \$133,000,000 had been spent in the rest of the country.² By this appointment Mayor William O'Dwyer granted Moses immense power. Whereas the power of eminent domain had been restricted in the past to government built projects, under Title I the government could condemn land and then transfer it to private individuals. Entire areas of cities could be condemned, displacing thousands.³

In the name of slum clearance money went to build projects in Manhattan, such as the New York Coliseum at Columbus Circle and the Lincoln Center Complex for the Performing Arts in the west sixties. Even in cases planned exclusively for better housing slum conditions magnified as a result. Demolishing inadequate housing still left many homeless. Surrounding the Manhattantown urban renewal site

¹National Commission on Urban Problems, Building the American City, pp. 155-156.

²Caro, The Power Broker, p. 12.

³Ibid., p. 777.

between Central Park West and Amsterdam Avenue and between Ninety-seventh and One hundred streets radiated "a slum, a teeming, seething hive of humanity - a place of squalid, run-down, dilapidated tenements so overcrowded that children had to sleep in shifts, of doorways filled with drunks and narcotic addicts and gutters filled with garbage...the area had been inundated with a flood of new residents....A project designed at immense cost to clear up a localized, six block square slum infection was instead causing that infection to spread over many more than six other blocks."¹

Disturbed by this procedure, Isaacs wrote, "there is a revolution in the concept of the word blight. We no longer see the abandonment of an area by tenants looking for better homes. We see the reverse, the overpowering of areas by families invading territory that formerly was occupied by single family homes and large apartments....Landlords deliberately neglect their properties because they can maintain full occupancy no matter how little they spend for repairs."² "Gross overcrowding," he argued, "can't be blamed, as it is by so many uninformed people, just on Puerto Rican influx. It is due, to a large part, to the destruction of existing housing and the inability of those displaced to find decent homes without overcrowding existing buildings. We should build on vacant lands or marginal land, occupied

¹Ibid., pp. 964-965.

²Stanley Isaacs to Ira Robbins, 24 November 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

by a few. We need a responsible agency to care for relocation." Isaacs asserted that "the previous city administration had no conception of the creation of new slum areas which was the inevitable result of the failure to plan properly for those dislocated. All those urging creation of a central re-locating agency are strongly behind public housing projects and slum clearance and want to make sure it's handled with decency and humanity."¹

Recognizing Isaacs' activities, Mayor Wagner contacted the Minority Leader. "I'm writing to you, because of your interest in civic affairs of New York City as evidenced over a long period of time. No problem is more vexing then housing. I am in the process of appointing a committee consisting of a number of prominent members, A Mayor's Committee for Better Housing. I hope you'll join with me."² Isaacs immediately replied, "I will gladly serve."³

Reporting as head of the Subcommittee on Tenant Relocation, Isaacs made several recommendations. "Families displaced by government action," he stressed, "should get first preference into new housing....The City Planning Commission should be instructed not to approve any project involving dislocation of tenants unless it receives from initiating agencies

¹Stanley Isaacs to Editor New York Times, 2 February 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

²Robert Wagner to Stanley Isaacs, 11 October 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

³Stanley Isaacs to Robert Wagner, 11 October 1954, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 24.

adequate assurance that relocation of such tenants in suitable housing is feasible....The Bureau of Real Estate should be abolished and its functions etc. transferred to a new Department of Real Estate Management, headed by a Commissioner appointed by the Mayor to coordinate all activities about tenant relocation."¹

Always trying to maintain a balanced perspective, Isaacs acknowledged the landlords' right to a fair return. Referring to rent control, Isaacs wrote to Gabriel Kaplan, "I'm supporting the increase of fifteen percent for those who have paid no increase since 1943, despite the fact that this is quite unpopular. I think it merely just and it does not show too much favoritism to the landlords."² The City Council voted nineteen to one against higher rents. Believing the raise justified, Isaacs retained this unpopular opinion.³ "I regret you feel I'm wrong," he explained to a disgruntled constituent, "but I can assure you I didn't take the stand because I favored real estate interests in any way...but it seems to me tenants who have not paid any increase since 1943, while their neighbors have voluntarily paid increases in large

¹Stanley Isaacs, Report of the Subcommittee on Tenant Relocation of Mayor's Committee for Better Housing, June 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 25.

²Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 12 March 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

³New York Times, 11 March 1953.

numbers to the extent of fifteen percent could well be asked to pay that additional rent. Costs are up,...I might add I favor a bill in Albany prohibiting increases where violations are pending on the building."¹

In Yorkville, the area east of his city council district, Isaacs denounced the replacement of older housing with high rise expensive buildings. The new construction lay far beyond the reach of those originally displaced. "The picture in Yorkville disturbed me." he wrote. "I have been in touch with the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House. I have succeeded in persuading the Rent Control Commission to require those building luxury housing to give at least six months notice before the present tenants can be evicted and to pay their moving expenses. Before this, tenants could be evicted on three months notice and without a penny to cover moving costs."²

Isaacs continued to criticize the city's policy on slum clearance and especially those projects financed through Title I of the 1949 National Housing Act. His attacks on the program, which Robert Moses directed, further contributed to the rift between the two men.³ By 1953 many New York liberals began questioning Moses' activities, fearing his policies might be

¹Stanley Isaacs to Ida Collins, 13 March 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

²Stanley Isaacs to Mrs. Thomas Lee, 30 August 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 26.

³Flagler, "The Public Be Served I," p. 30.

creating new slums. The displaced poor had no choice but to flee to already overcrowded slums, live in cellars and basements, and kitchenless apartments. Numbering in the tens of thousands, evictees moved into existing slums and the areas adjacent to them. Feeling the public must be educated, Laurence Orton, a City Planning Commissioner led a unit to investigate Moses' activities. For the first time someone compiled an estimate of the number evicted from their homes for public works. Figuring conservatively, they concluded 170,000 persons had been made homeless since the end of World War II. Negroes and Puerto Ricans, while only twelve percent of the city's population in 1950, comprised nearly thirty-seven percent of the displaced. The Orton survey also disclosed that the average income of those driven out by all of Moses' public works, including expressways, fell far below the city average. These people, handicapped by poverty and discrimination were the ones who would have the greatest difficulty locating new homes.¹

"Displacement is a mess and overcrowding is worse than fifty years ago," Isaacs asserted in a speech to a Republican club in 1959. "The Title I Agency is heavily responsible for what's going on. It's merely a commission, not an agency of the city government, appointed by the Mayor and responsible to no one but him. There's no full time executive in charge...Moses is too busy to handle the operation properly,"

¹Caro, The Power Broker, pp. 965-968.

Isaacs claimed, "and besides he's a dictator type....There must be a reorganization of Title I."¹ Isaacs denounced the handling of the Title I program as "outrageous and dishonest....In several cases," he claimed, "purchasers have been thoroughly irresponsible, milked the property, robbed the tenants and then thrown up their hands after years of delay without constructing a single building....The committee has been slow to respond to criticism about relocation. You can not excuse displacement of large families and the high percent of one bedroom apartments in new buildings."² By the late 1950's Isaacs had a lot of company in his criticisms. As Moses recalled, "the press attacks mounted in 1958. By 1959, The New York Times had become hostile."³ The Slum Clearance Committee ceased operation in 1960 and the newly created Housing and Redevelopment Board took over their work.⁴

Isaacs' differences with Moses touched on many other aspects of city life in addition to housing. From the inception of Isaacs' career the two men aired their disagreements publicly. Isaacs reacted negatively to Moses' plan to build

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo for 8th Assembly District South Republican Club Meeting, 23 September 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

²Stanley Isaacs to Roger Starr, 6 November 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

³Robert Moses, Public Works: A Dangerous Trade, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1970), pp. 459-460.

⁴Ibid., p. 464.

several indoor play centers. The Councilman believed recreation facilities should serve varied functions and not be planned exclusively for children.¹ "As you know," Isaacs wrote to Moses, "I've felt compelled to oppose the erection of indoor recreation centers where schools could be used, at least in my humble opinion, to serve a similar purpose."²

Isaacs opposed Moses' proposal to charge admission for the Shakespearean productions in Central Park.³ Writing to producer Joseph Papp, Isaacs stated, "I'm sure you're right with the problem with Moses. It's wonderful to have these free performances in Central Park. I hope you'll win out in that contest."⁴ Expressing his approval at Papp's eventual victory, Isaacs wrote, after attending a play, "I thought the performance exciting. Its success fortifies that wonderful battle to preserve free Shakespeare in Central Park." Isaacs underscored his support with a twenty-five dollar contribution.⁵

¹Stanley Isaacs to G. Howland Shaw, 20 May 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

²Stanley Isaacs to Robert Moses, 7 December 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

³New York Times, 27 April 1959.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Joseph Papp, 16 April 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to Joseph Papp, 4 April 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

In coping with juvenile delinquency problems Moses and Isaacs again differed. In 1952, the Council considered a bill which would have made parents liable for vandalism committed by their children. Isaacs scorned this approach. He argued, "that kind of law would never be prepared by pediatricians, educators, social workers, and judges who really understand the problem."¹ Isaacs blamed "substandard housing" as the underlying cause of juvenile delinquency.² "The vandals are rarely caught, the measure avoids the issue; the victims are from broken homes and the parents share with the community the responsibility for delinquency."³ Meanwhile, Moses rallied the bill's supporters.⁴ Initially, Isaacs appeared successful in this dispute. Explaining the maneuvering to Gabriel Kaplan, the Minority Leader wrote, "to my surprise, I was able to defeat a perfectly stupid vandalism bill, fining parents of children guilty of vandalism up to twenty-five dollars in spite of Bob Moses' pressure to get it across."⁵ To Isaacs' dismay, five years later the Council voted to impose a fine for parents of youthful vandals. Isaacs

¹Stanley Isaacs to John Warren Hill, 23 October 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

²New York Times, 20 May 1955.

³New York Herald Tribune, 4 May 1954.

⁴Moses, Public Works: A Dangerous Trade, pp. 28-29.

⁵Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 20 November 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

still remained against the concept.¹

Sensitive to any issue that affected children, Isaacs led the fight against Moses' attempt to expand the Tavern-on-the-Green parking lot at the expense of a playground in Central Park. An inflamed Isaacs, concerned with youth, as well as the conservation of the park, finally stymied a Moses plan. After years of losing disputes, both big and small, Isaacs finally swung the press and public to his position and Robert Moses had to back down.

With Moses' approval, the Tavern-on-the-Green Restaurant planned renovations which included extending their parking lot while ruining a playground. Tampering with Central Park invited disaster. New Yorkers viewed the park "as something special," invested with "beauty and historical significance as the first and most influential of America's landscaped parks." In the heart of Manhattan, it served as "practically the backyard for an astoundingly high proportion of the city's wealthiest and most influential individuals....It had become the symbol of beauty, open space, peace, fun, of everything parks meant to a city."² When Moses' actions threatened to destroy parkland, Isaacs stepped in.

Verbal and written protest failed. When a bulldozer arrived on the scene, Isaacs led his troops in the battle of Central Park. Mrs. Isaacs recapped the story for her daughter,

¹New York Times, 14 October 1959.

²Caro, The Power Broker, pp. 988-989.

then living in Switzerland. "Here's the bare story. Last Monday, Daddy was in the shower and Eleanor Sanger phoned in great excitement....She had to talk to Daddy at once.... Eleanor said a bulldozer had arrived and was tearing play-space for parking space. She could see it from her window. What to be done? Daddy knew about the opposition to Moses' plan and told Eleanor to get in touch with the leader of a group of parents and corral a bunch of mothers and children and have them stage a protest physically to prevent the bulldozer from operation. Daddy went over himself and helped stage the demonstration, but he thought it better to feature the baby carriages. He finally succeeded in getting the bulldozer to go away. The upshot is there's to be a hearing."¹

A bitter exchange of letters followed. An angry Isaacs wrote to Mayor Wagner, "I wish to protest the wanton destruction of park property. Park property shouldn't be used for this purpose. Central Park is the sacred heritage of our generation. No one, not even the Lord High Park Commissioner shall be permitted to destroy its beauties for such an unworthy purpose. I'm told those who protested asked a hearing and his answer was a bulldozer on the job. I ask you who has the power to stop it."² Moses voiced his sentiments to City Council Majority Leader Joseph Sharkey. "Let me add Stanley's wild statements, as to the unusual character of the Tavern improve-

¹Edith Isaacs to Helen Isaacs, n.d., Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

²Stanley Isaacs to Robert Wagner, 17 April 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 28.

ments, is of a piece with other similar charges he's made over the years. Stanley turns up at every ball ground well in advance of the game, equipped with broken bottles, stink bombs and Bronx kazoos. He waves the bloody shirt and practices yelling foul before the game has started and everyone else is eating peanuts. Stanley has bitterly opposed practically everything I've worked on," Moses wrote. "In the rare instances in which he's been on my side I've always been vaguely uncomfortable and have restudied the subject on the assumption that Stanley's usefulness lies in guiding successful enterprise in the opposite direction."¹

According to Moses' biographer, Robert Caro, "a new element had been added," to this dispute, which made this battle the "watershed of Moses' career. Following Isaacs' instruction, Eleanor Sanger had telephoned more than a score of newspapers, radio stations and television stations to ask them to send men to the scene. And they did." Unlike previous protests against Moses, this new contest would be raged with widespread publicity. The story had everything, names, trees, Central Park, bulldozers and motherhood. "This was MOTHERHOOD! The press saw this and made the most of it.... The tactics Robert Moses was using were the tactics he had been using for thirty years - but now the press was reporting them, and a whole city was watching them. The things Stanley Isaacs was saying now were the same things he had been saying for thirty years. The only difference was now people were

¹Robert Moses to Joseph Sharkey, 27 April 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 28.

listening to them."¹

The Mothers won a court injunction, halting the bulldozer, pending a hearing. As the battle continued, Isaacs discovered the financial arrangement made between Moses and Tavern-on-the-Green owner, Arnold Schleiffer. Their deal, although perfectly legal, cast further shadows on Moses' reputation. According to Schleiffer's contract he could deduct the cost of any repair and renovation improvements of the restaurant from his rent payments. The city profited little. Although Moses personally did not gain, he favored this deal as a means to circumvent the city's budgetary procedure for capital improvements.²

Criticism of Moses' tactics spread from the isolated Tavern incident to the legend as a whole. Isaacs scored a victory. Moses "did what he had never done - at least publicly - before. He backed down." Dropping the lawsuit, Moses announced plans to build a playground rather than a parking lot. Moses had been identified with the bulldozer. "The aura of invincibility destroyed....The aura of infallibility was gone also."³

Stanley Isaacs had the "capacity of fighting hard on

¹Caro, The Power Broker, pp. 990-992.

²Ibid., pp. 997-998.

³Ibid., pp. 1000-1003.

issues, without getting into personalities," his son noted. "My father admired Moses' power, although he disagreed with his use of it."¹ "Bob Moses is a dynamic and energetic public servant and New York City and State owe much to his efforts," Stanley Isaacs later wrote. "But he can also be a destructive force in his impatience to secure results. It's the duty of the rest of us who are equally interested in these public matters to applaud Moses when he is right but to resist his headstrong proposals when he is mistaken."²

Behind their public arguments, Moses and Isaacs maintained a cordial personal relationship. In Isaacs' home library, an autographed copy of Robert Moses' book LaGuardia A Salute and Memoir, contained the inscription, "To my old friend, regardless of occasional difference-Stanley Isaacs from R. Moses."³ Acknowledging Moses seventieth birthday in 1958, Isaacs conveyed good wishes and the thought "even though I fully realize from time to time we'll continue to disagree in some matters, as we have in the past, hopefully, we will remain good friends. Give my love to Mary."⁴ Moses replied,

¹Myron Isaacs, interview, 25 October 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs to J. M. Kaplan, 22 July 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 25.

³Robert Moses, inscription in book at Isaacs home, New York.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Robert Moses, 17 December 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

"I appreciate your sentiments and repudiate any suggestion of future disagreements and surely those in the past were trivial, minor and in any event quite forgotten. Mary has always been one of your fans. She sends her love. Our love to Edith."¹

Looking out for the underprivileged, Isaacs condemned proposals for a tax on off-track betting as unsound. Despite laws to the contrary, many New Yorkers placed bets on horse races through bookies operating illegally away from the tracks. If a legal network could be substituted for the current system it would open up a new source of taxation. Isaacs rejected this approach. This type of tax, he believed, would draw "funds from those least able to pay by appealing to their worst instinct. The true source of widespread betting would be the poorest in the community. The ignorant and poverty stricken would be appealed to most, just the wrong group to pay taxes."² Commenting on gambling in general in New York, Isaacs stated, "betting is not immoral per se - but its consequences. Ignorant persons and those with the least means go for it. It is important to refrain from enticing those who cannot afford to lose."³

¹Robert Moses to Stanley Isaacs, 26 December 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

²Stanley Isaacs, Speech for Eye on New York, 26 September 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

³Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Meeting at Bentley School, 27 February 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

As City Council Minority Leader Isaacs often tried to protect those who could not afford to lose. While an elected representative of the Republican minority, Isaacs served a far greater constituency. In his eagerness to promote equitable government he became a leader for many minorities in need of a spokesman.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CITY COUNCIL MINORITY LEADER

As Minority Leader of a one man minority Stanley Isaacs often found himself without a following in the Council. Undaunted, he saw his job as "picking flaws," even when it meant standing alone in criticism of the administration.¹ Each year, he made a lone attack on the city budget. Despite his many liberal concerns, in fiscal affairs Isaacs acted conservatively. Raised in a house that valued thriftiness and praised the Republican tradition of economy in government, Isaacs always deplored waste in municipal expenditures.

Isaacs studied the Mayors' yearly budgets for possible economies and then prepared a City Council Minority Report with his recommendations. "The need for strict economy is not realized," Isaacs claimed in 1951. "The city faces at least \$150,000,000 increase in the cost of operations during the next budget year and the proper way to meet these costs is through house cleaning and eliminating political

¹New York World Telegram and the Sun, 30 April 1956.

favorites."¹ Isaacs stressed that the "capital budget must weigh not only the burden of the capital cost of projects involved and increased debt service which they occasion, but also the cost of operation. The proposed budget also violates the city charter, it included lump sums appropriated."²

In the late 1950's New York City's expenses began to exceed its revenues. To compensate for this discrepancy Mayor Wagner resorted to measures which Isaacs deplored. The city operates with two budgets. The expense budget normally covers the daily operations financed by current tax revenues. The capital budget includes long term improvements paid for through borrowed funds. To meet burgeoning costs, Mayor Wagner shifted items from the city's expense to capital budget. Isaacs warned against the dangers of this policy. "To permit funding of these obligations through serial bonds instead of mortgaging them directly out of taxes or tax notes is sheer waste. They are taken out of the regular tax levy and become part of the debt service, thus creating an extra charge on real estate. I don't believe that normal items paid every year should be funded in this way." Isaacs wrote in 1955.³ His efforts to call attention to a number of entries in the capital budget which he felt should be in the

¹Stanley Isaacs, Press release, 20 December 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

²Stanley Isaacs, 1952 Minority Report on Capital Budget, 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

³Stanley Isaacs to Charles C. Platt, 28 June 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 26.

expense budget, became a yearly refrain.¹ "The administration," Isaacs argued, "has transferred many items that belong in the expense budget to the capital budget, which means financed by borrowed money. Items become part of the debt service and increase the tax rate accordingly."² "The city time and again has been borrowing for current expenditures," Isaacs cautioned in 1961. This means all of these current expenses are saddled on future administrations. It is time to stop this."³ Few listened to these pleas.

Critical of the city's wastefulness, Isaacs remarked in 1953 that "the budget makes severe cuts in services but fails to develop sound economies. The Mayor complains of the cost of pensions as not under his control but fails to mention that his administration voted to share the cost of pensions of policemen and firemen to the extent of seventy-five instead of fifty percent."⁴ As a means to raise money, Isaacs suggested restoring the auto tax and establishing an overnight parking charge. In addition, he advocated a payroll tax, which provided

¹Stanley Isaacs, 1957 Minority Report on Capital Budget, 21 December 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 28.

²Stanley Isaacs to Editor New York Times, 28 June 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

³Stanley Isaacs to MacNeil Mitchell, 1 March 1961, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 36.

⁴Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Citizens Union Searchlight Program, 13 November 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

for deductions on the first three to four thousand dollars in salary.¹

Isaacs had an even handed approach to the labor problems of city employees. As he supported measures improving working conditions, he expected a high standard of responsibility from those affected. Isaacs had the courage to take an unpopular stand against city laborers if he felt their requests unjustified. When the City Council voted to raise the city's share of policemen and firemen's pensions, Isaacs stood alone casting a negative vote.² Fearing the possibility that other civil service workers would make similar demands, Isaacs argued the "city cannot afford this change."³ While defending this view, Isaacs even faced a physical attack by police and firemen, on the floor of the Council.⁴

Trying to protect victims of misfortune, Isaacs introduced a bill to aid widows of firemen and policemen killed in the line of duty. Understandably, these groups welcomed this idea. Fire Commissioner "Monaghan telephoned,"

¹Stanley Isaacs, 1953 Minority Report on Expense Budget, 1953, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 23.

²New York Times, 15 August 1951.

³Stanley Isaacs, Report in Opposition to Proposed Amendment on Police and Firemen's Pensions, 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

⁴New York Times, 10 October 1950.

Isaacs wrote to Gabriel Kaplan. "He likes my bill thoroughly. The whole department is behind it. I'm glad I thought of the idea."¹ A few months later, Isaacs wrote again, "I'm getting further results at the Board of Estimate today. Two bills I introduced to help widows of policemen and firemen killed in the line of duty to get half of the salary of a full fledged patrolman and fireman for life as a pension, will go through. It would have gone through a long time ago except the Board didn't want to give me credit and the bills bore my name. I took my time, undermined the opposition, and got the policemen and firemen busy and now the bills are going through. It takes a long time to make progress and I've learned patience."²

Isaacs also sought to close the loophole whereby policemen under investigation by a grand jury could suddenly retire, preventing them from testifying. Isaacs introduced a bill which would "require thirty days notice of retirement by all policemen."³ The New York Times commended his activity. "We shall not fail to note that City Councilman Stanley Isaacs is the one man who has played a major part in persuading the Council to do its duty in this matter,"⁴ Writing to his

¹Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 19 June 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

²Stanley Isaacs to Gabriel Kaplan, 20 November 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

³New York Herald Tribune, 27 January 1951.

⁴New York Times, 8 February 1951.

daughter, Isaacs proudly reported, "now I succeeded to put the amendment to the pension provisions so that the police will not be able to walk out and avoid testifying and then receive pensions for life. At the last meeting sufficient pressure was brought to bear so that three City Councilmen changed their vote and the bill that I wanted to pass went through without the emasculating amendment. Then I expect to put in a similar bill affecting firemen, at Hogan's request. It's really funny that the pressure for passage of these amendments falls on me."¹ Isaacs' willingness to support unpopular bills gave the Minority Leader a unique role. "Hogan turned to me," Isaacs wrote to his son-in-law, "because apparently no one in the majority was particularly anxious to lend his name to the bills."²

Isaacs believed "all city employees have the right to organize in their own interests. Of course where safety of the city is involved, for example, policemen and firemen, the right to strike is out."³ Referring to the state law forbidding all government employees strikes, Isaacs commented, "you can argue properly that neither firemen nor policemen

¹Stanley Isaacs to Helen Isaacs Herrick, 13 February 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

²Stanley Isaacs to Snowdon Herrick, 27 February 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

³Stanley Isaacs to Charles Mayer, 16 January 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

have the right to strike and possibly transit workers because of the nature of their jobs. I could defend that, but I can't defend the Conden-Wadlin Act with its sweeping provisions. Of course, the penalties that it provides makes it literally impossible for enforcement because they are so excessive."¹

Isaacs demanded fiscal accountability from everyone. For many years he attempted, unsuccessfully to pass a bill requiring "organizations of city employees to file annual reports covering expenditures in detail." The bills, drafted with the cooperation of the Citizens Union, aimed at scandalous disbursements made by some of the organizations in return for political favors. "It seems absurd," he noted, that "city employees are prohibited by the charter from making political contributions but the central organization should have made donations."² Trying again a few years later, Isaacs introduced another bill requiring "organizations of city employees to keep regular accounts, properly audited and submit annual statements of their financial operations to members."³ Looking for additional support, Isaacs wrote to New York State Republican Chairman L. Judson Morhouse. "I have a proposal to include in the labor plank. A phrase

¹Stanley Isaacs to Dr. Sterling Spero, 3 February 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 31.

²Stanley Isaacs to The Association of the Bar of the City of New York, 30 April 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

³New York Herald Tribune, 13 May 1957.

urging that organizations of state and city employees keep accounts through CPAs and render annual accountings to their members."¹ Even when prospects for passage of a specific proposal looked dim, at the very least Isaacs tried to give his causes wide publicity.

In his later years Isaacs worked towards a \$1.50 hourly minimum wage in New York. In 1961, he offered a bill to this effect, only to see it die in the Council.² Isaacs again in the forefront of a liberal movement had to wait for others to join him. On the national level, in May 1961, President John F. Kennedy signed a bill establishing a national \$1.25 minimum wage by 1963.³ New York City, always a liberal pioneer prepared to move ahead.

During the 1961 mayoralty campaign Robert Wagner pledged a \$1.50 minimum wage for concerns doing business with the city. At a hearing for the bill promoting this goal, the Central Labor Council represented organized labor. They argued "a \$1.50 wage floor would bring needed benefits to low paid workers and aid the city's economy." Speaking against the measure the Building Trades Association, the General Contractors Association, the New York Building Congress, the Real Estate Board and representatives of the laundry industry

¹Stanley Isaacs to L. Judson Morhouse, 18 August 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

²New York Times, 10 January 1962.

³New York Times, 6 May 1961.

contended that those doing business with the city would be placed at a competitive disadvantage. In reality, most firms with city contracts already paid \$1.50 an hour in accordance with union contracts. Over objections from employer groups, Wagner signed the bill making New York "the first city in the nation to require concerns doing business with the city government to pay their workers at least \$1.50 an hour."¹

After the 1961 election brought four new Reform Democrats and another Republican to the Council, Isaacs had the necessary company to promote new action on raising the minimum wage for all workers in New York City.² The group introduced a bill providing an immediate minimum wage of \$1.25, scheduled to rise to \$1.50 a year later.³ "I believe we must eliminate sweatshop labor in the city which has been growing in recent years," Isaacs wrote. "It's the Negroes and Puerto Ricans that are being exploited. This is the object of my bill."⁴ In April, the City Council established a Citizens Commission on the Economy of New York City, whose investigation of the effect of a \$1.50 minimum wage was expected to

¹New York Times, 30 December 1961.

²New York Times, 10 January 1962.

³Stanley Isaacs et al., Local Law to Provide Minimum Wage \$1.25 and then \$1.50, 9 January 1962, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to Robert Raister, 15 January 1962, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

lead to a new law.¹ Isaacs died in July 1962 a few months before the bill finally passed.

From his leadership post, Isaacs pursued his lifelong struggle to mitigate the encroachment of the automobile. Postwar traffic congestion mounted in New York City as new highways brought commuters to work. With the opening of projects like the Van Wyck Expressway and the Brooklyn - Battery Tunnel, more traffic poured into the city. An investigation by the Regional Plan Association revealed that while the actual number of commuters coming into New York daily only increased 17 percent from 1930 to 1950, those coming in by automobile increased by 321 percent. Whereas 38,050 people traveled to work in cars in 1930, 118,400 entered by automobile in 1950. The New York Times reported the two and one half mile trip across Manhattan took motorists forty minutes.²

Faced with New York's traffic problems, in contrast to Robert Moses' road building policies, Isaacs embraced solutions which decreased the number of cars entering the city daily. He favored "parking facilities provided on the outskirts of the Borough of Manhattan so that as far as possible their occupants are diverted to local transit facilities."³

¹New York Times, 18 April 1962.

²Caro, The Power Broker, pp. 913-917.

³Stanley Isaacs to Isaac Heller, 26 January 1956, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 28.

In 1950, soon after Isaacs became Minority Leader he attacked plans for a city built garage between Fifty-ninth and Sixtieth Street on Third Avenue. Besides the traffic implications, using this site meant taking an entire, highly assessed block off the tax rolls.¹ Samuel Smoleff, President of the Citizens Union, recognized Isaacs' effectiveness on this matter. Commending Isaacs, Smoleff wrote to the Minority Leader, "Enclosed is a copy of a letter I received from the Parking Authority on the subject of the Third Avenue garage. I'm assuming it represents a change of position on the part of Moses among others. It seems to show that surprising things can happen. I congratulate you on the apparently successful outcome of your lone campaign."²

An outspoken critic of the city's plans in 1960 to build a series of parking garages in midtown Manhattan, Isaacs argued "we've been stupid in dealing with traffic problems, now there's a proposal before the City Planning Commission for fourteen additional midtown garages, not designed to relieve the streets of parked cars but on the contrary to attract 30,000 to 40,000 more autos in the heart of the city."³

¹Stanley Isaacs to Frederick Zurmuhlen, 6 April 1950, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 19.

²Samuel Smoleff to Stanley Isaacs, 8 March 1951, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 20.

³Stanley Isaacs to John Fitch, 16 September 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

This plan, supported by Mayor Wagner, focused attention on the basic question of whether private automobiles should be encouraged or discouraged in the central business district. Both viewpoints voiced their positions before the City Planning Commission, whose decision under the zoning law determined the outcome of the proposal. Proponents of the garages argued that Fifth Avenue has lost shoppers to suburban centers because people prefer to travel by car. To regain this business the pro-auto group stressed that the city should provide convenient, inexpensive parking. Critics of the plan replied, the private car takes up too much room for the small numbers it transports.¹ In line with this view, Isaacs speaking before the Commission said, "efforts should be made to keep autos out....We need parking on our fringes, then people should use mass transit."²

Drawing support from architects and planners the anti-auto spokesmen also contended downtown should be reserved for pedestrians and suggested malls in some areas serviced only by taxis and buses. The Metropolitan Garage Board of Trade also in objection claimed that they would lose trade from their facilities which did not function at capacity levels yet.³

¹New York Times, 18 September 1960.

²Stanley Isaacs, Statement before City Planning Commission, 7 September 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 34.

³New York Times, 18 September 1960.

Persuaded by the prospect of increased traffic congestion, the City Planning Commission rejected the garage plan. "Automobile transportation, the commission wrote, has played a negligible role in the development of midtown Manhattan....A massive program of garage construction would prohibit the necessary circulation of persons and goods by foot, road and rail."¹

Assessing New York's traffic congestion, Isaacs wrote, "I'm convinced traffic problems should be handled as a function of city planning...what we're suffering from is the facility with which people are persuaded to come into this city by auto as against other means of transportation and choke our streets. Yet, we're doing everything possible to persuade people to come by car and make it difficult for railroads to prosper and people to commute by rail."²

Isaacs always considered people before cars. Objecting to proposals to convert Manhattan's major avenues to one-way streets, Isaacs wrote, "the people in residential areas will suffer inconveniences. It seems foolish to upset the whole area just for through traffic."³ For eight years,

¹New York Times, 16 March 1961.

²Stanley Isaacs to Edward Chase, 2 June 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 34.

³Stanley Isaacs to Lee Thompson Smith, 10 April 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 22.

Isaacs fought a losing cause as Manhattan's thoroughfares became one way. "The area which people live in should be given protection against speeding cars. One way avenues may be speedier but that is utterly unimportant to the people who live in the city."¹ Citing hardships on youngsters, older persons and retail stores, Isaacs argued unsuccessfully against the change.² "I believe the people of this city come first," Isaacs wrote, "and not those who drive around in cars, mainly from the outskirts and the suburbs."³

Throughout his City Council years, Isaacs remained an active member of many organizations, particularly the Citizens Committee on Children and the United Neighborhood Houses. Through these associations he witnessed first hand many of the problems underprivileged New Yorkers suffered. Isaacs always personally investigated matters, whether checking bus schedules, the sequence of traffic lights or slum conditions.⁴ Helen Harris, who served as Director of the United Neighborhood Houses during the years of Isaacs' presidency, recalled his dedication. "I spoke to Stanley

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Board of Estimate Hearing on One Way Avenues, 21 May 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

²New York Herald Tribune, 22 May 1959.

³Stanley Isaacs to William Gottlieb, 23 September 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 36.

⁴Victor Weingarten, interview, 30 October 1973.

daily. United Neighborhood Houses was based in thirty-five neighborhoods. He knew exactly what was going on in all of them. It added great strength for us when Stanley Isaacs pushed for legislation."¹ Noting Isaacs' eagerness for personal contact, Harris wrote, "I'll never forget one cold sub-zero afternoon a couple of years ago. He, Madeline Low and I tramped with numbing feet through a rooming house in Chelsea without heat, with frozen plumbing, fallen plaster, broken stairs and naked electric wires. There were people still living there and we froze bundled up. He always went to see for himself, gathering ammunition for his continued battle against human misery....It is a source of wonder to all of us, how he unhesitatingly made himself available to the least important people."² United Neighborhood Houses pushed for community centers in housing projects, expansion of day care programs and adequate relief formulas.³

After federal and state budget cuts threatened the existence of day care centers, Isaacs encouraged a new group to save those in New York City. Elinor Guggenheimer, then Chairman of the Day Care Council, credits Isaacs with this

¹Helen Harris, interview, 22 December 1973.

²Helen Harris, Talk for 63rd Annual Meeting of United Neighborhood Houses, 15 May 1963, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 38.

³United Neighborhood Houses, Press Report of Annual Meeting, May 1955, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 26.

Workers Committee for Nuclear Disarmament, Isaacs stressed, we "know how much money is needed in every field, yet we're witnessing vast sums spent on armaments. Unless we find alternatives we will spend more and more until the world blows up. We must make sure necessary funds are not diverted by Washington....We must outlaw nuclear weapons...bring about universal disarmament. The one tool available is to strengthen the United Nations, increase its powers. The U. N. must represent every major country," he emphasized, including China. "We need peaceful coexistence, no matter how different our internal structure."¹

Isaacs spoke up on national issues, but in reality a New York City Councilman can exert little influence in policy decisions. Even in local matters, as a one man minority in the City Council, Isaacs could not evoke sweeping change. Instead, he had to rely on a slow hammering away for the causes in which he believed. Enlisting Democratic allies he could then sometimes effect the course of legislation. He needed patience and time to see progress. The first, he learned in office. The second, the public gave him through repeated re-election. For the independent man, leading a minority of one presented a unique opportunity to work for a better New York without being encumbered by the realities of everyday politics.

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Walk for Peace, 27 January 1962, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 37.

organization's success. "United Neighborhood Houses helped us get started," Guggenheimer claimed, "but then Stanley insisted we be independent. Without their mimeograph and space we wouldn't have been able to get our organization off the ground. I went to him with every problem. Stanley was most clear headed."¹

Located in a cosmopolitan center, New Yorkers have always looked beyond their own boundaries to national and international affairs. In the 1950's the liberal community became particularly active in criticizing the growing armaments race between the United States and the Soviet Union. Isaacs, then as before, voiced his foreign policy opinions publicly. Concerned with the ramifications of nuclear weapons, Isaacs joined the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and participated in their conferences and rallies.² Hoping for total disarmament, Isaacs initially urged a ban on all bomb tests which would culminate in the eventual prohibition of all atom and hydrogen bombs. Recognizing the need for an inspection system, Isaacs looked to a strengthened United Nations to do the job.³

Speaking at a peace rally, sponsored by the Social

¹Elinor Guggenheimer, interview, 7 November 1973.

²Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Conference New York Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy, 4 October 1958, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 30.

³Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Rally Carnegie Hall, 25 October 1959, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 32.

CHAPTER IX

FROM GENTEEL REFORMER TO THE CONSCIENCE
OF NEW YORK

The ideals of equality of opportunity, individual freedom and representative government have been part of the American liturgy since the founding of the country. In reality, conditions have fallen short of these high standards. Professing lofty goals, social critics have participated in numberless movements striving towards these ends. Although influenced by our historic aspirations, reformers' motivations can also be examined as part of a continuing tension between liberals and conservatives.

Liberal reformers, adhering to an optimistic faith in progress, believe in the possibility of perfecting society. They advocate change based on a spirit of genuine humanitarianism and idealism. Conservative reformers, while not necessarily strict adherents of the status quo, are influenced by fear of social disorder. They accept small advances to minimize the strength of grievances and prevent greater threats to accepted patterns. In Stanley Isaacs, a delicate balance existed between these two positions. Although concerned with maintaining social order, he tempered this idea with a sense of guilt or perhaps, noblesse oblige towards the less

fortunate. While this mellowed his conservative impulses, his genuine humanitarianism which developed and his acceptance of government assistance remained forever limited by a stern moral code. As Isaacs criticized society he continued to assume the validity of established moral values. At the same time he possessed a feeling of social responsibility flexible enough to accept solutions offered by urban liberal reformers.

On economic issues, Isaacs' internal balance swayed towards his conservative side. A staunch defender of private property, he passionately supported fiscal responsibility and economy in government and business. On social issues, Isaacs appeared to uphold a more advanced outlook. His concern with civil liberties and minority rights aligned him with liberals in various battles. In the pursuit of safeguarding rights the interests of the conservative and the liberal frequently overlap. As heirs to the American constitutional tradition of freedom under the law, conservatives also stress the protection of the individual.

As a child of the nineteenth century, Isaacs followed in the conservative tradition of genteel reform. Deriving a predisposition to reform from his patrician heritage, Isaacs joined the ranks of a group who offered their own leadership as a remedy for society's ills.

A second generation, upper-middle class American, Stanley Isaacs belonged to a family who achieved its

status through accomplishments not wealth alone. His grandfather, an educated Rabbi, founded the first Jewish English language newspaper in the United States. Stanley's father, Myer Isaacs, became a judge and an active participant in civic affairs and reform movements in the late nineteenth century. From childhood, Stanley Isaacs witnessed these familial examples and became imbued with the notion of helping the less fortunate and serving the needs of the greater community. He grew up instilled with a sense of obligation towards the public. Money became only a means to this end. Early in life Isaacs aimed at earning enough to become free to plunge into charitable and civic activities. Even though he remained politically stymied as a City Councilman for twenty years, Isaacs felt fulfilled and worthwhile serving his community, his New York.

To Isaacs and his nineteenth century counterparts, society revolved around the urban areas, particularly New York. Genteel reformers possessed both a social and economic stake in preserving the city's structure and guiding its future. Like the earlier reformers, Isaacs believed political reform meant maintaining moral principles by the proper forms of government, beginning at the local level. Although his ideas moved beyond this notion, Isaacs never lost sight of this basic concept.

In addition to this heritage of genteel reform, the tradition of Jewish philanthropy influenced Stanley Isaacs' activities. Isaacs' grandfather arrived in New York from England in 1839, placing him among the older established Jewish New Yorkers. He and his sons joined with prominent German Jewish families assisting new East European coreligionists who arrived later in the nineteenth century. These newcomers, who clustered on Manhattan's Lower East Side, appeared uncouth to the older settlers. Although the German Jews expanded their existing charities and created new ones, they exhibited a condescending attitude to their poorer brethren. Only the tradition of Jewish communal responsibility and a sense of religious obligation outweighed the developing resentment between uptown and downtown Jews. Worried about the image the new immigrants presented, the old timers concentrated their efforts on Americanization programs, especially through the settlement houses.¹

The Educational Alliance, the settlement Myer Isaacs founded on the Lower East Side, exemplifies this approach. The Alliance provided a community center with a library and gym. To teach adults the duties of American

¹Moses Rischin, The Promised City: New York Jews 1870-1914 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 98-108.

citizenship the institution offered classes in English, American history and civics, as well as vocational courses. Instructors used English, rather than Yiddish, the immigrant's native tongue. The Alliance sponsored Shakespearean productions in English, art exhibits and a variety of clubs. The Baron de Hirsch Fund, another charity which included Myer Isaacs among its founders, upheld similar goals. After abandoning plans to relocate immigrants in rural areas away from New York, the fund supported educational facilities like the Hebrew Technical Institute for Boys.¹

These efforts represented the nineteenth century conservative attitude regarding change. Many of these reformers, particularly the organizing philanthropists, displayed an elitist outlook and acted out of embarrassment and guilt. However, the settlement house workers themselves, genuinely moved by slum conditions, became an idealistic group.

As a teenager, Stanley Isaacs began leading clubs at the Educational Alliance. In a humanitarian spirit he devoted himself to improving the quality of life for the immigrants. As the Jews moved on, he transferred his energies to other minority groups. By background a patrician reformer, Isaacs when faced with the realities of

¹Ibid.

slum conditions, developed genuine concern for the underprivileged and became a leader in the settlement field. Yet, the tension existing within Isaacs between these feelings and his genteel upbringing constricted his humanitarianism.

While he abandoned the nineteenth century moralistic ethos which preached self-help to the poor, Isaacs still felt obligated to act as a defender of civic morality. Although he never implied indigent people remained poor because of inherent immorality, he did suggest the conditions of poverty influenced values. He repeatedly opposed lotteries and off-track betting because he feared the lower classes would gamble against their own best interests.¹

Twentieth century political reform added new ingredients but still continued this heightened sense of morality and spiritual uplift. Emphasis now shifted from the individual to society's responsibility for change and improvement. Earlier patrician reformers denied government had any duty to aid the less fortunate. Municipal reform in the twentieth century became part of the national progressive impulse toward criticism and change. Abandoning the aristocratic tone of the Mugwumps, progressives spoke of democratizing

¹Stanley Isaacs, Notes for Meeting Bentley School, 27 February 1952, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 21.

government and surrendering laissez-faire to the needs of state intervention.¹

Following his idol, Theodore Roosevelt, Isaacs made this transition and joined the Progressive party ranks. He welcomed the Progressive's goal of honest and efficient government and their assault on the political machines. Isaacs agreed with their emphasis on government participation in eliminating social injustice. Throughout his struggle for better housing, Isaacs advocated such assistance. Combining the genteel reformer's belief in the educated man's responsibility for civic well being with the humanitarian's concern for the underprivileged, Isaacs moved easily into the Progressive fold.

Continuing in the Mugwump tradition, progressives relied on experts to solve problems while stressing business-like government without interference from political bosses. Isaacs accepted these tenets. As Borough President, he cut unnecessary jobs and insisted workers produce for their salaries. He looked to professionals rather than politicians as he filled department vacancies.

The Progressives also attracted a number of social reformers who crusaded for better living conditions. Groups like the settlement workers supported the movement as they

¹Hofstadter, Age of Reform, pp. 167-168.

realized transforming neighborhoods required political involvement.¹

Like other progressives, Isaacs relied on changing the environment to attack social problems. "Housing," Isaacs believed to be at the "root of many social evils."² He devoted much of his life to eradicating injustice through this path. "Poverty causes the poor to live in slums, it does not create them," he argued.³ In the progressive mold, he called for improved planning by experts to build structures which would produce improved living conditions. Unlike the nineteenth century reformer Isaacs looked to the government for help. "I believe," he wrote, "that this problem cannot be solved by private enterprise alone and that public subsidies and cooperation of the city, state and nation are necessary if the problem is to be solved."⁴

New York City's second reform wave in the twentieth century carried John Purroy Mitchel into the Mayor's office in 1913. Mitchel, a lifelong Democrat, but outspoken opponent

¹Allen Davis, Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements in the Progressive Movement 1890-1914 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 180.

²Stanley Isaacs to Evans Clar, 7 February 1936, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 1.

³Stanley Isaacs to Maxwell Stewart, 21 December 1942, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 8.

⁴Stanley Isaacs to John Blair, 7 January 1947, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 13.

of Tammany leader. Charles Francis Murphy, accepted the nomination of the Fusion party. Woodrow Wilson, disturbed by Murphy's support of the President's challenger at the 1912 Democratic nominating convention, encouraged a coalition of Republicans, reformers, anti-Tammany Democrats and other anti-Tammany dissidents.¹ Disappointing the social reformers, Mitchel, like his patrician reform predecessor, embraced the efficiency ideas of a modern business corporation and did little to generate enthusiasm among the masses. Dedicated to budgetary cutbacks, he failed to counterbalance wage reductions with social programs.²

The election of Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia in 1933 signaled a new direction in the character of reform in New York City. Unlike previous fusion candidates with North European backgrounds, who belonged to New York's social and business elite, LaGuardia was an Italian American and a professional politician.³ This break with the long tradition of genteel reform can be attributed to nationwide conditions created by the Depression. In the past, change in New York usually resulted from heightened civic indignation aroused by evidence of corruption in city government. To combat the normally Democratic administration, fusion movements of

¹Wallace S. Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, Governing New York City: Politics in the Metropolis (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1965), p. 186.

²Holli, "Social and Structural Reform", pp. 219-220.

³Mann, LaGuardia Comes to Power, p. 38.

Republicans, anti-Tammany Democrats and independents coalesced to drive out the dishonest men. In the 1930's, depressed economic conditions and widespread unemployment added a new element. In addition to exposure by the Samuel Seabury Commission of corruption in Mayor James Walker's administration, a feeling prevailed that New York City needed more than mere tinkering with the mechanics of government. Reflecting the mood of the nation, fusionists realized reform now meant concern with social welfare and they accepted Fiorello LaGuardia.

Stanley Isaacs, able to look beyond the Mugwump mold came out as an early supporter of LaGuardia in 1933. Influenced by his own involvement in housing problems, Isaacs softened his nineteenth century stress on individualism and accepted twentieth century solutions. Still the tension between the two poles of liberal and conservative reform persisted within Isaacs. He often showed great concern that public officials not only be experts but that they have limited personal discretion in their decisions and act according to a clear plan.

In 1937, LaGuardia ran for reelection as a Republican with American Labor party endorsement. This coalition, including New Deal Democrats and New York Socialists, moved further in the direction of social change. Stanley Isaacs became part of this team. Although by temperament a patrician reformer, he also embraced the new measures called for in the 1930's.

Except for his brief interlude as a Progressive, Stanley Isaacs remained within the Republican party his entire life. He joined because of family ties at a time when the G.O.P. stressed Yankee Puritan virtues and aimed at protecting culture from the new immigrants. To Isaacs, the party always represented a counterforce to the Democratic big city machine.

In a Republican context, Isaacs can be labeled an urban Eastern liberal. During his officeholding years two wings of the national party evolved. A conservative, isolationist, Midwestern branch routinely opposed a more liberal internationally minded, urban group. Eastern industrial Republicans, particularly, had to adjust to new issues to combat the New Deal coalition of labor and minorities in the big cities. Unlike Midwesterners in the farm belt, Easterners could not win by preaching strict economy in government spending and repudiation of all the New Deal social programs. Congressional Republicans tended to remain conservative, as those with seniority generally represented safe rural districts. Conservatives also continued to dominate state legislatures, due to malapportionment which discriminated against urban areas.¹ In

¹George Mayer, "The Republican Party, 1932-1952," ed., Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., History of the United States Political Parties, vol III: 1910-1945 From Square Deal to New Deal (New York: Chelsea House, 1973), pp. 2260-2269.

reality, Stanley Isaacs functioned so completely on the municipal level that national trends in the party had only a modest significance to his career.

New York State has produced other liberal Republicans, especially from New York City where candidates must attract Democratic votes to be elected. The successful Republicans have emerged from the more progressive wing of the party. Manhattan has given the public both Jacob Javits and John Lindsay. Like these two, Stanley Isaacs built his following beyond the Republican base.

Isaacs' success as a liberal Republican can be attributed to the nature of his constituency. Although his area did not register a Republican majority his electorate had much in common with their candidate. As City Councilman of Manhattan's "silk stocking district," Isaacs represented mostly upper-middle class, highly educated, white New Yorkers. Many of these same people served as members of good government organizations, such as the Citizens Union, Citizens Committee for Children and the Citizens Budget Commission, all of which supported Isaacs. Running on the Republican and Liberal party tickets Isaacs attracted many Democratic votes, primarily on the basis of his independent posture and his stands on civil liberties and civil rights. This same area elected John Lindsay to Congress before he became New York's next Republican Mayor in 1965.

Although Isaacs follows in a long line of conservative reformers he must be considered as an advanced genteel reformer. While he illustrated the same basic attitude towards change as his nineteenth century predecessors he modified his views with positive action for social welfare. Out of the tension that existed within Isaacs between preserving the old order and his humanitarian impulses, emerged an independent politician and a fighter for social justice.

Using his political positions as a forum, Stanley Isaacs became a spokesman for many minorities. Sensitized to the problems of minorities by his own status as a Jew, Isaacs spent his entire life promoting civil rights for all groups. "Jews have a duty not only to care for Jews but to deal with community problems," he wrote. "Jews who suffered so from discrimination should be leaders in the effort to eliminate it."¹ Isaacs felt "civil rights are the cornerstone of democracy,"² and by safeguarding rights for others, Jews were in turn insuring protection of their own.

Stanley Isaacs fought for civil liberties for all minorities even when the predominant sentiment in America supported racial segregation. As early as 1913, at a time when most Americans believed blacks naturally subordinate to

¹Stanley Isaacs, Memo for Address at Educational Alliance, 5 March 1948, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 16.

²Stanley Isaacs, Notes for American Jewish Committee Conference, 22 April 1960, Stanley Isaacs Papers, Box 33.

whites, he refused to join the American Bar Association because of its discriminatory membership policy. Through the years he pursued an active role promoting racial equality, especially in the housing field. Beginning his attack on discrimination in government aided housing, his efforts culminated in the 1957 Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs bill prohibiting discrimination in all private dwellings in New York City. By 1957 Supreme Court decisions and state legislation had paved the way for municipal progress. Stanley Isaacs deserves credit for promoting these concepts long before they became fashionable.

Unfortunately, Isaacs spoke from a relatively weak platform. Power in New York City resides with the Mayor and Board of Estimate (consisting of the Mayor, the President of the Council, the Comptroller and the five Borough Presidents) rather than with the City Council. The Board of Estimate has jurisdiction over public utilities, city finances, city personnel, city property, city planning and zoning. The New York City Charter governs many of the municipal agencies, thereby placing their operations beyond the reach of the Council. Many of the Council's local laws deal with naming streets, parks and playgrounds, specific details of the building code and transferring property from the

jurisdiction of one city department to another. Interspersed among these are a few important acts concerning rent control, fire safety, traffic and parking regulations and discrimination in private housing.¹

As a minority member of the Council, Isaacs stood little chance of having significant legislation bear his name. Yet, as a minority member Isaacs could successfully use the Council as an effective stage to speak out on social issues, particularly housing and racial discrimination. By publicizing conditions and constantly pushing for improvement, Isaacs aided these causes.

Determined to be active, as long as he remained healthy, Isaacs worked until the last day of his life. Another heart attack at age seventy-nine ended his long career in 1962. At his death, the newspapers amply praised his accomplishments and inspiration. The New York Post applauded Isaacs for his "lonely commitment to the impolitic cause of justice. Stanley Isaacs was one of that creative small company, so essential to democracy, who do not hesitate to take unpopular positions and who value conscience over convenience. The city cannot easily replace Stanley Isaacs."²

¹Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, Governing New York City: Politics in the Metropolis (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1965), pp. 609-612.

²New York Post, 13 July 1962.

"As the voice of "constructive opposition," the Herald Tribune noted, Isaacs participated in almost every "do good activity....For years he introduced bills that died in committee only to be revived and passed under other auspices."¹

The New York Times called him a "Warrior for the people....The conscience of our city government...in the tradition of creative conservatism." Comparing him to Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, they wrote, "Isaacs understands what must be conserved in a society is that which has proved its utility in meeting man's needs, while appreciating that institutions and practices which have failed to meet this test must be changed."² With this insight, Isaacs the independent politician served his city. While other politicians looked to votes, Isaacs looked to his moral principles; making his conscience a conscience for all New Yorkers.

¹New York Herald Tribune, 13 July 1962.

²New York Post, 13 July 1962.

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