"""""current comments"

Of Presidents, Politics, and Chicken-Pluckers

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The Pennsylvania county in which I live imposes on its residents an "occupation" tax. I was shocked to learn recently that my occupation is neither information scientist, publisher, chemist, nor librarian. My occupation is president. This classification, especially for purposes of tax assessment, irritates my already much irritated sense of justice. It seems to me fundamentally inequitable that all presidents should be lumped together and taxed alike, regardless of income, and no matter how "presidential" their different presidencies may be.

The county tax experts apparently see little difference between presidents of the United States, of the Institute for Scientific Information, or of the smallest local chickenplucking organization. This is equality with a vengeance! Now, I am as democratic as the next fellow. Although I have never mingled socially with Presidents and Premiers, I would not object to doing so. It is well known that I do mingle socially with chicken-pluckers, and some of them are undoubtedly also presidents, and possibly even members of the Young Presidents Organization, which I once considered joining. I'm sure the members of YPO would find it repugnant to pay such a tax. If neither income nor degree of presidentiality matters in this business of the occupation tax, multiplicity may. What, indeed, is going to happen if my county tax authorities discover that I am a president twice-over, not only of ISI , but also of the Information Industry Association. O hard condition!1

Being a president, I suppose in no matter what degree, presents some awesome problems and much ambivalence of sentiment. Few scientists and scholars "like" administration and management. And yet it is frequently the willingness to devote oneself wholly to the details and routines of administration that reflects the deepest motivation to achieve an objective. Having recently read Clark's biography of Einstein, I find it relevant to recall what ruthless and constant discipline was required of that gentle genius to prevent the exigent intrusions of family life, politics, society, and so on.

upon the achievement of his goals. We less gifted people must accept the requirements of "administration".

I have never felt comfortable with the traditional techniques of politics-whether of nations, corporations, professional societies, universities, social clubs, what have you. So much valuable energy seems always wasted in their monumentalization of trivia--the endless perusal and finicky adjustment of platforms, bylaws, procedures, regulations, etc.--which leaves me almost as exasperated as the attitudes one must assume and the compromises one must accept for even the smallest accomplishment. The fact of life, however, is that being president of a corporation or of an association does involve politics, in the sense that people must be brought together, agreements defined, compromises made, decisions reached, and so on. I am conscious of this fact especially in my role as President of the IIA, where I must attempt to remain neutral in regard to the viewpoints of more than 50 different firms, and yet strongly partisan in regard to their needs as a group. As ISI grows, I also feel more like a politician than a scientist; at least, it seems to be demanded of me.

Perhaps the tax assessors are right in classifying all presidents as one and the same, in considering only their function rather than the varying scope of its activity. I may, thus, be forced to recognize that such a classification as "president" can be justified in an occupational handbook. Perhaps the many college and university presidents who read Current Contents will appreciate my reaction to this kind of dubious equality. Nevertheless, I shall continue to protest that all presidents should, because of it, be taxed alike.

- The tax assessor may have Shakespeare on his side. The reader may wish to be reminded of the soliloquy in Henry V in which the young king muses on the "hard condition" of leadership and its specious privileges.
- Clark, R. Einstein: The Definitive Biography. (New York: World Publ., 1971).