

Cardinal jeered at housing session

The following was reported Jan. 15, 1966, by the National Catholic Welfare Conference News Service (now known as Catholic News Service):

Baltimore (NCWC) - Lawrence Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore testified on behalf of a proposed fair housing ordinance to the tune of jeers and catcalls from a boisterous minority segment of the audience.

Cardinal Shehan was the first speaker at a meeting of the Baltimore City Council. More than 2,000 persons attended the hearing, held in the War Memorial Building, to consider the provisions of a bill introduced by Thomas J. D'Alesandro, president of the city council.

D'Alesandro's bill is designed to forbid discrimination in the sale or rental of housing in Baltimore.

James Rouse, chairman of the Greater Baltimore Committee and "floor leader" for the bill's proponents, introduced Cardinal Shehan.

About half the audience rose and clapped as the 67-year-old prelate walked to the microphone. Others booed until the chairman silenced them.

Cardinal Shehan said there is an "overwhelming, persuasive moral argument" in support of fair housing legislation. He warned his audience against "the explosive potentialities of the ghetto."

He asked the city council to give leadership to the counties by passing fair housing legislation first. "The legislative remedy," he said, "must be applied in the areas where the social sickness is most apparent."

Cardinal Shehan pledged his personal support and that of the Archdiocese of Baltimore in achieving passage of similar laws elsewhere throughout the state.

The cardinal was escorted from the hall by police as the audience once again divided between jeers and cheers.

Rouse then introduced other clerical proponents of the bill including the Rt. Rev. John Wesley Lord, bishop of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Church, the Rt. Rev. Harry Lee Doll, bishop of the Episcopal Church in Maryland, Rabbi Abraham Shusterman of the Baltimore Board of Rabbis, Frank Kaufman, president of the Baltimore Jewish Council, and the Very Rev. John H. Peabody, president of the Maryland Council of Churches.

A popular speaker among the opponents of the bill was also a cleric. The Rev. Robert T. Woodworth, who described himself as a “humble parish pastor,” spoke out against the participation of his fellow clerics in what he termed “a strictly political matter.”

Rev. Woodworth said the only moral issue involved was that of “individual property.” He suggested the clergymen might occupy themselves more constructively with such problems as the “tyranny of excessive taxation,” “ban-the-Bible in schools,” “filth in the mass media,” and the “protection of communists here at home.”

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