

STATEMENT TO THE SKOKIE HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION BY

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The other day, I heard my children and several of their friends arguing. The child whose turn it was to be picked on that day, George, was insisting that little Johnny (who wasn't there) was two years old. The remaining three children insisted that Johnny was three years old. Evidently the point was crucial to picking on George. "He's two," "No, he's three," rang back and forth, until my seven year old daughter said, "All right! How many people here say Johnny is three? How many say he's two? Ha, ha, George, it's three against one. Majority wins!" I heard George half-heartedly suggest that they ask Johnny's mother how old he is, but the others were not at all impressed.

I went out and asked the children, "If one person says that one and one are two, and three people say that one and one are four, how much are one and one? "Two," they said. Even a child knows that one and one are two, no matter how many people say they are four.

Why then, did the children vote on Johnny's age? There may be a number of possibilities, but there is one in particular which seems relevant to tonight's meeting.

The children wanted to reassure themselves that they were entitled to continue treating George the way they had been treating him.

The vote gave them that assurance, but it didn't give them the truth. They were not interested in the truth. That's why they were willing to let the question of Johnny's age be decided by a show of power. It is easy to see that Johnny's age is not a question which is determined by a vote. It is not always easy to see that human rights, like Johnny's age, are not determined by a vote.

When we vote on fair housing, we are not deciding whether or not some people have the right to live where they want - they may not have the power to live where they want - but they have the right, regardless of how we vote. Our vote only determines that we, who are already engaged in exerting power over other people, agree that we are entitled to that power.

If we are to ask the question, "Should there be fair housing in Skokie?", the question of power is the real subject. A community cannot take a vote on a person's right to decide for himself where he will live. It can only take a vote on whether or not to use its power to deny him the exercise of that right. Because the Human Relations Commission has not clearly defined the purpose of this meeting, it may have helped to create the impression that the community can determine whether or not there should be fair housing.

If the Commission had invited all interested people to come here tonight to offer suggestions about how to write legislation which would most effectively stop broker discrimination, it would have posed for the community a legitimate problem. As it stands now, people might be encouraged to believe that by expressing their views, they can, in effect, cast an informal vote for or against fair housing. The meeting becomes a referendum.

When the Skokie Commission proposes, and the Board of Trustees passes meaningful fair housing legislation, they will be affirming the inalienable right of every man to choose whether or not he wants to live here.