

PSYCHOLOGY-POLITICS

Science Studies the Politician

Political Personalities Divide Into Three Main Types: Administrator, Agitator, Theorist

By MARJORIE VAN DE WATER

WHAT MAKES the politician what he is? From the President himself down to the soap-box orator on the street corner, ardent wet and zealous dry, anarchist and bureaucrat, Senator and ward boss—what was the obscure turning point which brought them to their present paths?

It occurred to Prof. Harold D. Lasswell, who teaches political science at the University of Chicago, that the answer might be found in a thorough study of the previous lives of these men—a study as searching as that made by the psychiatrist. If the physician by delving into the obscurities of the youth of his patient can find out what brought him to the insane hospital, why shouldn't a similar search into the history of the normal man reveal what brought him into Congress or the White House?

Accordingly Prof. Lasswell undertook to make such studies following the methods of Freud. In this he had the assistance of many prominent psychiatrists who approved his methods, although some conventional psychologists may disagree with them.

A few such detailed histories were ready-made at hand, because some politicians had at one time or another been patients in mental hospitals. In other cases, the politicians volunteered to make their private histories available for the purpose because they realized that our knowledge of human nature in politics would be advanced if normal persons were studied with the same care as that bestowed on the abnormal.

Only living persons were included—individuals who were studied personally by specialists under conditions of unusual intimacy. There was no hauling out of anecdotes of the youth of historic personages. No attempt to make interpretations from second-hand documents regarding remote persons with whom there could be no personal touch.

Nor was it Prof. Lasswell's purpose to prove that politicians are insane or to catalog the symptoms of such prominent men.

"We have not finished when we know that modern Alexanders, Caesars, and Blüchers are alcoholic; that a modern Bismarck is hysterical; that a modern Lincoln shows depressive pathology; or that a modern Marat suffers from arthritis, diabetes, and eczema," Prof. Lasswell says in his report which has been published by the University of Chicago in a book entitled "Psychopathology and Politics."

Rather his purpose was to examine the whole of the private lives of these individuals and discover what experiences were significant in developing the traits and interests of the politician—what were the psychological turning points of his life.

Hoover Called Administrator

Politicians, he found, may be divided on the basis of personality into three main types—the administrator, the agitator, and the theorist. President Hoover, he cites as an example of the first type, the administrator pure and simple. The Old Testament prophets were good examples of the agitator. And the theorist is best typified in Karl Marx.

There are, of course, many composites of two or more of these types. Lenin, the hero of Soviet Russia, for example, is described by Prof. Lasswell as a combination of all three types, administrator, agitator, and theorist.

From his study of these three types and the various composites, Prof. Lasswell has even worked out a very definite and mathematical-looking formula to express the personality of the politician. Here it is:

$$p \left\{ \begin{array}{l} d \\ r \end{array} \right\} = p$$

where p , he says, represents private motives; d represents displacement onto a public object; r represents rationalization in terms of public interest; p represents the political man; and $\left\{ \right\}$ represents "transformed into."

Suppose we translate all this into more understandable language by fitting the formula to a special case.

Johnny Jones as a small boy owned and was very fond of a pet dog. The dog died as a result of the cruelty of

some neighborhood urchins who pegged stones at the luckless puppy. Johnny developed a profound love for dogs and also perhaps a parallel hatred for gangs. This love and this hate comprised his "private motives."

As he grows up, if he were to be an ordinary citizen, he might start a farm to raise dogs.

But Johnny is to be a politician of the agitator type. So instead of surrounding himself with real live dogs, his interest is displaced onto dogs in general. He founds a society for the prevention of cruelty to dogs. He interests himself in legislation forbidding the keeping of dogs in the city or forbidding the dissection of dogs even for scientific purposes, and so on.

The next step is to rationalize his attitude in terms of public interest. He builds up arguments showing that dogs are essential to the public welfare. He writes pamphlets describing the good that dogs do in protecting human life, in leading the blind, in returning affection for kindness.

The big difference between Johnny and his non-political brother is then that the object of Johnny's emotional interest has been entirely changed. It is no longer the bark and nuzzling nose and the pathetic wag of a stubby tail that appeal to him; it is the idea of dog in the abstract that he is crusading for.

Agitators Were "Spoiled" Children

Among the agitators studied by Prof. Lasswell, one trait seemed to be so very common as to be characteristic. This is what psychologists term narcissism, an excellently descriptive word derived from the name of the Greek youth Narcissus, who gazed into a placid pool one day and fell in love with the beautiful image of himself he saw there reflected. Agitators, Prof. Lasswell tells us, have their affections equally centered on themselves. And this is often because as children they were "spoiled" by their parents or made the center of an admiring family group.

The agitator, he says, may also have been hindered by some obstacle from developing a normal love affair. All the affection that the ordinary man showers on the one and only girl is dammed up in the agitator and finally finds expression in his emotional excitement over a cause. And the ordinary person's desire to impress and be loved

by a definite individual becomes in the agitator a more generalized desire to impress and arouse the crowd, the community, great masses of people.

In the family history of agitators "there is often a record of a 'model boy' during the early years, or of a shy and sensitive child who swallowed his resentments," Prof. Lasswell found. Resentments, too, as well as affections pop up in later life in much more generalized form.

Many administrators — those with drive, imagination, and the fire of enthusiasm greatly resemble the agitators in personality and developmental history, Prof. Lasswell found. The chief difference that sets them apart from the agitators is that their emotions are centered on less remote and abstract objects. In fact they are quite likely to become emotionally preoccupied in early youth with specific individuals in the family circle or immediate acquaintance so that their whole future conduct is dependent upon these early relations.

Conduct Depends On Early Relations

One of the administrators described by Prof. Lasswell, but disguised under the substitute for a name, "Mr. H.," (which is not, however, his initial) developed in childhood an intense hatred of a stern and domineering father. This hatred had throughout his life been hidden and he had gotten along in the home through deceit, posing as a model child except for a few incidents when his transgressions came out. He was caught in a childhood misbehavior with a little girl of the neighborhood and thereafter had many fights with the girl's brother. Many years later when he was opposed to this boy in a debate he was so emotionally disturbed that he actually fainted. In business, his suppressed guilty feelings and hatred showed up plainly in his dealings with both superiors and his men. His engaging manners won him favor with those above him, but his feeling of insecurity led to an unreasonableness and an arrogant pose which antagonized every man who worked for him.

Not all administrators are of this type, however. Some may exemplify the happy medium between the person with his head in the cloud of abstractions and that other who is so tied down to definite situations and individuals that his sense of values is completely disturbed.

"We may suggest that another group of administrators is recruited from among those who have passed smoothly through their developmental crises. They

have not over-repressed powerful hostilities, but either sublimated these drives, or expressed them boldly in the intimate circles," Prof. Lasswell says.

"They display an impersonal interest in the task of organization itself, and assert themselves with firmness, though not with overemphasis, in professional and in intimate life. Their lack of interest in abstractions is due to the fact that they have never needed them as a means of dealing with their emotional problems. They can take or leave general ideas without using them to arouse widespread affective responses from the public. Tied neither to abstractions nor to particular people, they are able to deal with both in a context of human relations, impersonally conceived."

Well-Adjusted Type Is Rare

You may judge for yourself how rare is this well-adjusted type of executive in business as well as in politics.

You might think that the political theorist, the developer of political creeds, like Marx, would not be of interest from the point of view of Prof. Lasswell's study. But he has found that the individual's history counts here, too.

"Political prejudices, preferences, and creeds are often formulated in highly rational form, but they are grown in highly irrational ways," he says.

"When they are seen against the developmental history of the person, they

take on meanings which are quite different from the phrases in which they are put."

Thus "Mr. P." because of emotional disturbances in his youth and other reasons failed to get along with his studies and seemed likely to prove a great disappointment to his ambitious father. The war came along just in time to save face for the boy. He joined the army and made a fine record for personal courage. Once the war was over, his troubles began again and all his old worries returned. In the light of this record, the fact that "P." is strongly militaristic in his views becomes very understandable.

"G.," however, is a socialist and pacifist. And a look into his early history shows that from a very early age, he has had what is known as a "blood phobia." His morbid fear of the sight of blood later extended to many other objects; he was afraid of dogs and cats and horses because they might scratch or bite him, and carefully avoided fights with the other boys. Later on, when he heard that western capitalism meant war and bloodshed, he experienced a profound revulsion against "capitalism," "imperialism," and everything that in his mind went with them.

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ASTRONOMY

Thousands of Meteors Seen During Recent Shower

MORE THAN 28,000 meteoric flashes in the night sky were seen from more than 150 localities by several hundred observers who watched for the Perseid meteors early this month (August 10 to 12), it is indicated by reports received by Prof. C. P. Olivier of the Flower Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania up to August 17. Prof. Olivier is president of the American Meteor Society.

More persons saw more meteors this year than at any previous return of the shower of the famous Perseid "shooting stars," said Prof. Olivier, praising the newspaper cooperation that inspired many laymen to make meteor counts and

report them. Prof. Olivier expects that later reports from the western coast and foreign countries will increase the record.

Meteors falling at the rate of 208 an hour was the record observation of a group of Columbia College students at Dubuque, Iowa, who watched the recent shower. Even on August 7, which was six days before the peak of the shower, a group of six saw 140 meteors an hour while an individual observer recorded 80 an hour. The highest rate of 208 an hour was a group observation at 1 a. m. on August 12, when the rate seen by one person was 116 per hour.

The observations were organized by Prof. John Theobald.

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