

PSYCHOLOGY

Politician's Personality

Seekers of public office usually desire deference which they rationalize in terms of the public good. Personalities may tend toward reformer or administrator type.

► IT TAKES a special kind of personality to lead a man to seek nomination in the turmoil of clashing wills that marks a political convention such as that held in Philadelphia. And it takes a special kind of personality to be able to "sell" himself to the voters and be elected to the office of President.

This "Homo politicus" is described by Prof. Harold Lasswell, specialist on the psychology of politics at Yale University, in a new book, "*Power and Personality*" (Norton).

The "political man," says Prof. Lasswell, is a man with an intense and ungratified desire for deference. This he rationalizes in terms of public service or the public good.

A disproportionately large number of those holding public office come from professional families of the middle class. The parents in these families are likely to be always holding up and glorifying the ideal of public service rather than personal and purely private advantage, thus encouraging the boy to see his own desire for power and reward in terms of the public welfare instead of his own.

The politician's desire for power is sometimes born of alternate deprivation and indulgence when he is a child. This is characteristic, Prof. Lasswell points out, of the middle class family that holds children up to high ideals and niceties of conduct and is likely to discipline

them severely when they fail to reach these ideals. Sometimes, Prof. Lasswell says, the code is baffling.

"On the one hand he is supposed to 'be a nice boy' and not fight or engage in perversity, but on the other he is supposed to 'stand up for himself' in altercations with other boys."

Political and other ambition for power is fostered also, Prof. Lasswell says, by a home in which one member of the family, usually the mother, feels that she has married "beneath" her social class.

Political leaders are also likely to come from the country or small town. His abnormal desire to succeed and gain universal respect and deference is a way of compensating for the stigma of being a "hayseed."

Among the men battling for election to a single public office, you find a variety of personalities, Prof. Lasswell notes. One man may be an agitator or reformer; another basically an administrator. One may have a compulsive need for order and meticulousness in all his dealings; another tolerates diversity and is expansive.

Even the office of President may be changed by a new incumbent to fit his own personality.

"If he is an agitational type, he tends to respond to agitational opportunities," writes Prof. Lasswell. "If, on the con-

trary, he is an administrative type, he goes in the other direction. In either case the office changes, and the perspectives entertained about it are modified. Both Roosevelts developed the agitational possibilities of the presidential office, while Herbert Hoover underlined its administrative potentialities. A given trend may be reversed, as when William Howard Taft de-emphasized the impetus given to presidential leadership by Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson, in his turn, rejected the comparative inactivity of his predecessor and resumed the march toward expanding the office."

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