

PSYCHOLOGY

Neighbors Pick Leaders

► REGARDLESS of who is elected to the Presidency on Nov. 2, the real leadership of the country will not be in his hands.

The real leaders of the American democracy are a nameless group, without titles, without salaries, and often without even being aware that they are leaders. They are selected without ballots by the common consent of their neighbors who put faith in their foresight and judgment.

About one man out of 20 in your own community is such a leader. It is he, and not the political speaker, who determines how his neighbors vote, either locally or for President. It is he who swings sentiment toward or away from the new bond issue, or toward building a better school or raising the teacher's pay. This is true in the country. It is also true in the city.

This pattern of leadership characteristic of American democracy was revealed when the U. S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service attempted to inaugurate a program of soil conservation. What the soil conservationists discovered about leadership was done long before the present political campaign. The Government scientists are careful not to apply the results to politics.

Soil conservation is a strictly community undertaking. It does no good for one farmer to plow his acres on the contour, to eliminate gullies, or to plant trees and soil-holding grasses, if his next-door neighbor is going to let all the drainage from his land wash over the boundary and is going to permit overgrazing on his grassland.

And the way to get all the farmers to work together to plan and put into effect an adequate conservation program is not, it was found, for a Government man to go in and tell everybody what they must do.

There are certain molders of opinion in each community. There is the newspaper editor, the preacher or priest, the teacher, the banker or maybe a clubwoman. These are effective. But if you hope to enlist co-operation in an enterprise, you can't leave it to these people to carry it out for you. They influence thinking, but it is not they who produce action.

If you want community action on a program, the thing to do is to hunt up the real leaders and explain your project to them. This is done through an ecological study of the community, Dr. John P. Shea, U. S. D. A. psychologist, has found. The scientist first looks the community over to find out how the people live—their customs, occupations, economic life, religion, recreation, education.

In some places the school has an important role in affairs and much can be done to inform the community through it. But in another locality, the people do not "hold much with book larnin" and would consider it an indignity to be invited to a meeting in the schoolhouse.

It is easy to locate the molders of opinion in the community; you just ask any one of them and he can name for you practically all the others. But to locate the leaders of action, you must ask the followers.

It is the person who has the respect of his neighbors. He is usually a man of few words—he leads mainly through what he does. His neighbors watch him. When he takes his hogs to market, they know it is the most favorable time to sell. If he plants soy beans or wheat, the neighbors would not think of putting all their land into corn.

The natural leader in America is just a little above average in intelligence, but not

too different from his neighbors in this respect. He is always a man of courage, willing to try new things and take the initiative in making changes. He is a man of established soundness of judgment that other men can rely on. He is community-minded; he thinks of the welfare of his neighbors.

It takes a man about one third of a lifetime to establish leadership in a community, but it is then permanent and he usually maintains his position until death.

Without this man's nod of approval for an issue or a candidate, his followers will not budge.

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