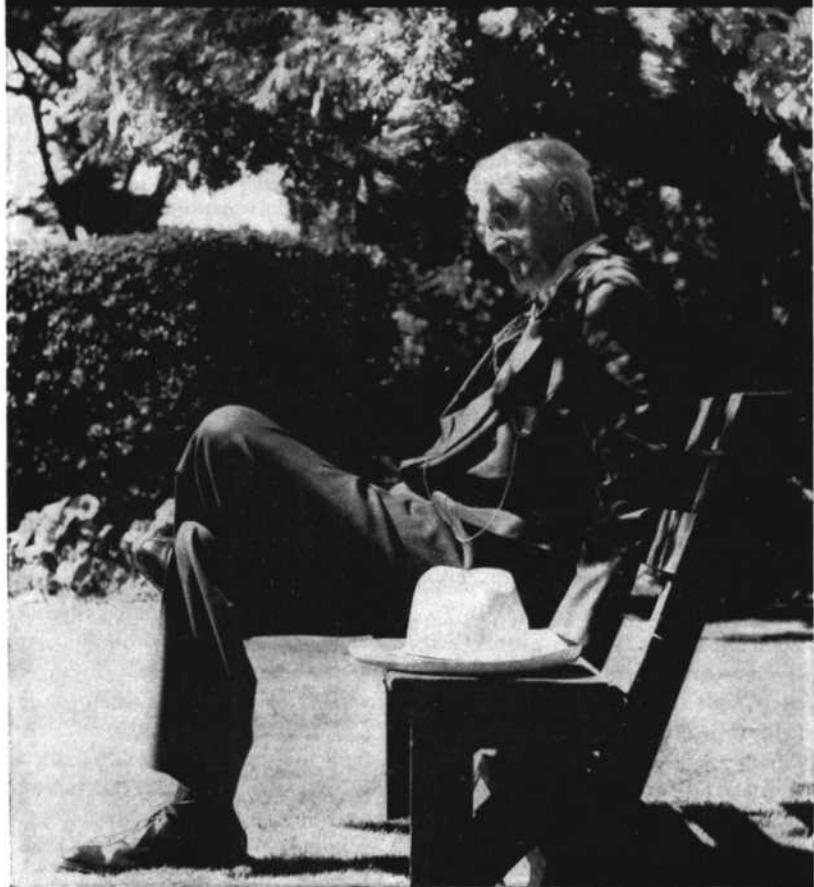


## 18. Leadership in the Federal Government



**A** LEADER is a person who has extraordinary influence on decisions that are made in a given situation. He may exert his influence either by means of his personal qualities or because of the position he holds, or by some combination of the two factors. Bernard Baruch, whose advice was heard and followed by several Presidents even when he held no political office, is an example of personal leadership. The newspaper photographs showing him at his favorite park bench symbolize the fact that his role contained no official character. In contrast stood Calvin Coolidge, whose authority and

power as President came almost exclusively from his government office rather than from the unassuming personality that earned him the nickname "Silent Cal." The influence of most political leaders is a sum of both personal and official qualities.

The political leaders who have been encountered thus far in the text have been using both their personal and their official qualities to influence public policy or achieve public office. In the search for political influence, men typically use their personal qualities to gain some office, and then combine both the personal and the official qualities to reach out for more influence. When, blessed by fortune and the appropriate combination of personal and official qualities, a man acquires great power, he moves into the select company of those who govern America. Whether his power stems from unofficial influence does not matter much in his being counted in that company. The primary fact is that he has arrived, that he has made a place for himself and must be taken into consideration when some important decisions are made.

It has long been a question whether any particular number of men can be said to rule America, whether one group or another does so, and how many people can be said to make decisions for the whole population. Some answers may be given to each of these questions here.

## THE RULE OF LAW

A strong argument can be made to deny that America has any set of rulers. One can say: no one rules America; it is ruled by laws, not by men. The laws tell leaders what they must and what they must not do, what they may and what they may not do. The Constitution, the court decisions, and all of the laws governing rights, interest groups, political parties, and government officials, are in effect *impersonal* leaders.

That is so. People not living under constitutionalism, and people who are living under it but do not realize it, fall very easily into the false position that men are without limits, save as the "law" of the political jungle sets such bounds. In fact, the laws "lead the leaders" in two general ways:

1. They stand as constant reminders to the leaders regarding how they should behave. For instance, the statement in the Constitution that no man shall be convicted of a crime without due process of law is not only an instruction to the courts; it is an ethical principle that guides a great many men and their leaders to respect the rights of others, even in the hurly-burly of politics.

2. The laws also limit the behavior of leaders in specific senses. For instance, the Attorney General, who is chief of the Department of Justice and who therefore is the overall head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, cannot use these federal police to suppress free speech nor to censor the press of his opponents without risking impeachment or indictment, trial, and conviction on several counts. To take another example, men who wish

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**Bernard Baruch, Seated at a Bench in New York's Central Park, Where He Often Has Chatted Informally with Political Leaders.**

to achieve certain kinds of power over their fellow citizens must go through the process of being nominated, elected, and sworn into public office; the laws of the land are aimed at giving the most important political powers only to men who have thus qualified themselves.

The body of laws is the work of many generations of leaders. The Constitution, for instance, owes much to the seven thousand years of western civilization that preceded it, to the leaders who drafted it, and to the generations of leaders who have carried it forward. Today it is part of the mental and moral heritage of American political leaders; and, through the institutions that it sets up, it limits the ability of one leader or a set of leaders to avoid its injunctions and intent. Therefore the leaders of today rule America only to the extent allowed by the laws and by their training in obeying the laws.

### THE NUMBER OF LEADERS TODAY

The laws govern leaders; but they also have an especial effect upon the number of leaders. They permit every person to become politically active to the full measure of his desires and ability. Under American law, practically every adult could be active in politics twenty-four hours of the day. Furthermore, the laws of the United States are hostile to the concentration of power in a very few hands. The details of this division of powers have been treated in earlier pages. The federal system of government, which divides power between State and nation; the decentralized and chaotic party structure that makes personal power hard to acquire and to retain in large amounts; and the division of the federal government (and the States too) into legislative, executive, and judicial branches with strong legal defenses against invasions from one another—all these laws guarantee that the number of men of great importance in government will exceed the tens, dozens, or few hundreds that have ruled many other governments, past and present.

Before settling more closely, however, upon the estimated number of determining voices in national affairs, it is well to remember how few Americans have demonstrated some amount of political activity. It will be recalled from the chapter on public opinion that only a small fraction of the population engages in a modest degree of political activity in the midst of a political campaign. Figure 22 showed precisely the results of the latest of several studies of the political activity of Americans. Its central point was clear: although the laws may permit and foster universal political activity, only about one out of every thirty-five American adults engages in even that minimum of political activity from which leadership must spring. Whatever kind of leadership one is talking about will have to come from a group of Americans numbering fewer than three millions, for a completely inactive and non-participating leader is an impossibility akin to an "illiterate reader."

Some people may be shocked, and others consoled, by these figures; in either event, politics can be understood only in their terms. Whether other lands have experienced a condition of greater activity can only be a matter

for speculation. However, it is doubtful that other peoples have been much more active than the Americans of today. The short-lived Athenian democracy had its multitude of slaves, aliens, and inactive citizens. The laws of the Roman Republic permitted a very small ruling group during most of its history. No information is available on the great modern democracies, save that until a generation ago they could not have supported even under the law as large a proportion of active citizens as is found in the United States. James Bryce once declared that the politically active Englishmen of the late nineteenth century numbered no more than 3,500. Indeed, it is probably fair to say, disconcerting as the situation may appear to some, that America has one of the most active citizen bodies in history. If the proportion of Soviet citizens exceeds it, and such is probably the case, the reason lies in the intense agitation within the Soviet Union to make people active in civic affairs, always provided that the activity is controlled rigidly in the interests of the Communist Party. Obviously, in the Soviet case, one is then talking about an administrative machine, not the free and general political activity that is in question here.

### *Size of the national leadership*

The still considerable number of citizens who may be termed "active" is, however, reduced considerably by the demand that they exhibit some real influence before they may be admitted into the ranks of those leaders who make the vast majority of top decisions of the federal government. Previous chapters have given leads to how many of these three millions are leaders of consequence.

1. A few of them are elected federal officials and judges, about 900 in all.
2. Some are appointed federal officials of high authority and responsibility, such as Cabinet members and their principal aides, numbering about 800.
3. Some are leaders of opinion, including publishers, editors, writers, professors, actors, and the like, totalling perhaps 800.
4. Many are leaders of national interest groups such as the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Federation of Labor, the American Legion, and the Farm Bureau Federation, numbering perhaps 400.
5. Many, about 800, are party leaders and defeated or aspiring candidates for office.
6. Some are drawn from particularly interested State and local officials, both elective and appointive; others are the counterparts of categories (3), (4), and (5) above, on the State and local level, making perhaps 1,500 in all. In connection with this category, it is well to remark again on the effect that the laws and character of the country have upon federal leadership. State Governors and mayors often have a good deal to say about national questions. A county political leader, for example, although he may have little interest in or knowledge of national affairs, may hand-pick a congressman or control a high federal appointive officer. The many thousands of people in this category are for the most part unconcerned with national affairs. However, they are potentially powerful; on occasions and in matters

that involve their immediate interests (as in a party struggle, an election campaign, or a legislative debate), they will rise to the defense of their views. As officeholders or party workers of considerable skill, they can command attention and respect. They are not to be relegated to the ranks of unconnected, uninformed outsiders, or uninformed and powerless people at large.

7. Others, perhaps 500 in all, are private individuals of important financial and industrial connections.

8. A number are "political personalities without portfolio." These are the trusted advisers, assistants, and confidantes of congressmen and other leaders, Washington hosts and hostesses, and even a handful of foreign diplomats, totalling altogether approximately 1,000.

Summing up, the number of highly placed and influential leaders in national affairs does not appear to be large. The rough calculations above yield about 7,000 persons. It is unlikely that the whole range of federal government occupies the direct initiative, ideas, interests, and actions of more than 10,000 persons of first-ranking importance. To be on the safe side, one may keep in mind the figure 10,000. Beyond them stand perhaps ten or twenty times as many persons who are quite active but who have a hand in making important policies only occasionally. Behind these, in turn, come probably another million or thereabouts who contribute modest leadership in building up pressures, carrying out decisions, modifying details, and operating the vast machinery of the governmental process. The remainder of the three millions of at least minimum activity accomplish that minimum and little more; yet in view of their small number in comparison with the total population, their contribution to the political process cannot be viewed as negligible. One might add, too, that about another six million people work for the government or in relation to the government, but in non-political jobs.

### ***Relations among the top leaders***

The 10,000 that constitute the national top leadership are not organized. They form no clique. The American government is not run by "Wall Street," as communists invariably argue. It is not ruled by "labor," by "Jews," by the "city machines," by the "farmers," by a "brain trust," by "business interests," or by "communists," for that matter. Such simple assertions contain at best the grain of truth that a hundred similar assertions would have when made about a hundred different groups; "even a stopped clock is right twice a day." They arise, of course, out of a profound ignorance of how the government functions and out of a hostility to some one element of the population. It would be more nearly correct, although still scarcely worthy of consideration, and probably a good deal healthier for national unity, if one accepted as fact that 100 million American adults have equal voices in the making of public policy.

More nearly true is the assertion that the top leaders of the nation, like the politically active citizens who were described earlier, are drawn in the majority from the better-educated, more skilled occupational groups. Fur-

thermore, their parents, on the whole, are more prosperous and give them more opportunities than are afforded the average American. Probably the most conclusive proof for this statement is to be found in an examination of the occupations of the parents of the top 10,000. Regrettably, complete information on this subject is not available; but Table 14 shows the situation found among large parts of the top leadership. Note the special representation of segments of the population by labor and business leaders.

**TABLE 14. OCCUPATION OF FATHERS OF AMERICAN TOP LEADERS<sup>1</sup>**  
(in percentages)

| Occupation of Father                       | Pres.,<br>V. Pres.,<br>Cab.<br>Memb.,<br>1789-<br>1934 | High<br>Civil<br>Serv.,<br>1940 | U.S.<br>Sen.,<br>1949-<br>1951 | U.S.<br>Hse.<br>Rep.,<br>1941-<br>1943 | CIO,<br>AFL<br>Ldrs.,<br>1940's | Bus.<br>Ldrs.,<br>1930's | Occupations<br>of<br>Labor<br>Force,<br>1890 |
|--|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Professional<br>Proprietors<br>& officials | 38   | 28                              | 22                             | 31                                     | 1                               | 14                       | 5  |
| Farmers                                    | 20   | 30                              | 33                             | 31                                     | 16                              | 58                       | 6  |
| Low-salaried<br>workers                    | 38   | 29                              | 40                             | 29                                     | 15                              | 12                       | 26   |
| Wage earners                               | 0  | 3                               | 1                              | 0                                      | 8                               | 5                        | 5  |
| Servants                                   | 4  | 10                              | 3                              | 9                                      | 60                              | 11                       | 36   |
| Farm laborers                              | 0  | 0                               | 0                              | 0                                      | 0                               | 0                        | 7  |
| Unknown,<br>unclassified                   | 0  | 0                               | 0                              | 0                                      | 0                               | 0                        | 15   |
| Total                                      | 0  | 0                               | 1                              | 0                                      | 0                               | 0                        | 0  |
| Number                                     | 100  | 100                             | 100                            | 100                                    | 100                             | 100                      | 100  |
|  | 311  | 180                             | 109                            | 186                                    | 356                             | 8,396                    |  |

<sup>1</sup> Data of first four and last columns from Matthews, D. R., *The Social Background of Political Decision-Makers* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1954), p. 23. Data on labor leaders derived from Mills, C. Wright, *The New Men of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948), pp. 88-90, and on business leaders from Taussig, F. W., and C. S. Joslyn, *American Business Leaders* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 78.

Figures on education support the conclusion: for example, 88% of the House of Representatives during 1941-1943 had college educations; 87% of the Senate of 1949-1951; 77% of the State Governors during 1930-1940; and 79% of all Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Cabinet members during 1877-1934. But only about 10% of the entire population more than twenty-five years of age has received a college education. Today more than ever, the chances that a boy or girl may achieve great political success are bettered if he or she comes from a family that is well-to-do and if he or she receives a college education.

Certain among the States, too, seem favored so far as producing leaders is concerned. Between the year 1900 and the middle of 1955, thirty-two different men were named to the federal Supreme Court and 152 different persons to Cabinet posts. Four States—New York, Massachusetts, Ohio,

and Tennessee—supplied sixteen, or half, of the new justices; yet the combined population of these States according to the 1950 census was only about 30 millions, or 20% of the national total. The twenty-nine States that have furnished no justices during this period have a total population of 60 millions, or twice as great as these four States. Seven States—New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, and Ohio—have provided eighty-nine, or 59%, of the Cabinet members chosen since 1900. Yet these States together have only 35% of the entire population of the country. The reasons for this concentration are numerous; perhaps most important are the facts that at least some of these States are pivotal in national elections, and also that Presidents have been indebted to the ruling circles of these States.

Considering the vast size of the nation, its heterogeneity, the manner in which the 10,000 are chosen, and the utterly divergent and multitudinous people to whom they owe their positions, it must be concluded that they are a very mixed group. Indeed, many of them are bitter political opponents. The 10,000, however, do have an important trait that merits comment: it is probable that any one of them will know scores or hundreds of the others. It is likely that any one of them could come to know any other member of the 10,000 by asking for an introduction through a mutual friend in the group. Very few people among the remaining 100,000,000 American adults could do the same. Hence it would be permissible to view the national leadership as a very loose network of people who are informed about many of the same things, who tend to know people of the same type, who perhaps share some attitudes and habits in greater numbers than do the rest of the population. However, they cannot be regarded as a clique, a social class, or an organized group.

### ***Divisions of the influentials by scope***

One can decide that, although the 10,000 may be lumped together from the fact that they all have considerably more power in national affairs than the rest of the people, their influence is in almost all cases restricted in scope. One restriction of scope is *functional*. For example, a congressman cannot judge a court case, even if he should care to do so. No doubt many times, as when the Supreme Court struck down New Deal measures of the 1930's or when the Court in 1954 ruled that segregation by race in public schools is unconstitutional, a President or some congressmen would have liked to reverse the Court; however, no President or congressman has ever attained such power, although Presidents Jackson, Lincoln, and F. D. Roosevelt nearly performed the feat.

The President and Congress are allowed more leeway in invading each other's powers; still, the record, as a subsequent chapter will show, contains more drawn decisions than victories for one or the other. These are but two examples of the way in which the 10,000 are split up into groups that are charged with proposing policies, urging their adoption, propagandizing about them, legislating, administering the laws, judging them, and policing the judgments. Each of the clusters of leaders in these functional categories

meets severe restrictions both from the law and from the other leadership clusters when it moves out of its customary range of power.

Overlapping these functional clusters and running parallel to them are geographic clusters of leaders. For instance, a Virginia party leader has little influence in North Carolina and less in New York; the head of the California Federation of Labor has little to do with the legislative policies of the Illinois Federation of Labor; and the Senate as a whole can do little about the party machinery in a State that sends an unpopular colleague into their midst. Other clusters of leaders are divided according to the *topical* subjects their chiefs are entitled to, or directed to, treat with. The Court of Customs and Patent Appeals has no purview over a violation of the federal law against kidnapping, which falls in the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice for prosecution and the regular federal district court for trial. The Secretary of Commerce has little influence over the Federal Reserve Board. The President cannot, even after several years of power, influence strongly the policies of the Interstate Commerce Commission. Most defense policies are made without the consent of the Secretary of Labor. The National Association of Manufacturers reaches its policies on international trade without consulting the Department of State.

### ***The hierarchy within the clusters***

Besides being divided up according to the scope of their powers, the 10,000 are arranged differently within their clusters. For example, the cluster of the executive branch is arranged internally so that the President has potentially at least the power of making personally most important decisions that the Department heads or the White House staff can make. On the other hand, the power cluster of the Senate comprises ninety-six men of relatively equal power, at least by contrast with the presidency; its collective decision, represented by the majority vote on an issue before it, of course has great weight in telling the executive branch what to do. It has such great weight, in fact, that the individual Senators derive much personal power in and out of Washington from the part they take in that collective decision.

A wealthy, active interest group of many members may resemble either the presidency in the way its influence is focused in one man (e.g., John L. Lewis of the United Miners Union), or the Senate in the way its influence is divided among several men (e.g., the National Association of Manufacturers). The most important newspaper publishers of the country ordinarily act without consultation and apply their strong individual pressures without the collective force of a senatorial vote. Such a cluster is, within its own scope, an anarchy, a condition without any central authority.

### ***Interlocking clusters***

Some of the clusters are so closely related to one another that they contribute to the making of the same decisions and policies. Others are isolated. There is, however, no master network that has scope over everything and in which power is concentrated in a few hands. Perhaps the closest ap-

proach to such a master network is the presidency. The President and his subordinates can sometimes effectively dominate the executive branch of the government. They can sometimes rule a majority of both houses of Congress on a sizable proportion of all matters coming before Congress. They can sometimes influence strongly a part of the press, a number of key interest groups, and several of the independent administrative agencies of the government such as the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Yet this uncommon and vast network of control is the closest the United States has ever come to an oligarchy or a totalitarian government, and it is too far from these conditions to be called by either of those names. One notes, moreover, that, in such a rare event, strong and hostile minorities are still to be found everywhere save in the executive branch. Nor does the unusual condition embrace the courts, the many State and local party organizations and governments, or the numerous autonomous facets of society—churches, schools, and the like—that escape the network's influence entirely.

### *Comparison with foreign networks*

Compared with the top leadership of other large countries the American structure is very large, loose-knit, and lightly powered. The Soviet government, for example, concentrates most of its vast authority in the hands of a very few men of the Presidium (or Executive Board) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (a cabinet of the parliament), and the Presidium of the Council of Ministers (a cabinet of the chiefs of administrative departments). The very highest leaders occupy posts in more than one of these three groups. Probably a hundred men, or even fewer, make the vast majority of decisions in all spheres of social and political life. No independent leadership cluster exists outside this group. All opposition to the leadership, save where directly solicited by it and permitted by it, is extremely hazardous. Members of the innermost circles strike up independent tones at their peril. Vast numbers of Soviet citizens are politically active, but they are bridled, saddled, and ridden, by the top leadership.

The English leadership is also a much smaller group than the American, even in relation to the smaller population of the country. Probably no more than one thousand Englishmen can be said to possess significant ability to influence their government's policies in the regular course of governing. Unlike American congressmen, a sizable proportion of members of the House of Commons would not qualify as members of the top leadership. They are so tightly controlled by their party chiefs that they cannot contribute independently to public policy. The contrast of the English situation with the Russian is nonetheless striking, for two reasons: English constitutionalism severely restricts the behavior of English top leadership; and, as a salient facet of such constitutionalism, a potential elite in the form of the opposition political party is always ready to take over the government. Even when out of power, the party's leadership must be counted as directly influential upon the government's decisions. Perhaps nowhere in the

world is an opposition as carefully organized, given such license to criticize, and as accurately focused, as in England.

The French, German, and Italian republics possess a more diffuse top leadership structure than the English. In each of them there is a type of localism—provincialism in France and in Italy, provincialism and federalism in West Germany—that decreases the freedom of action of the group that controls the central government. Also, each country has a multi-party system whose leaders must be counted among the persons with strong influence upon public policy. Probably for both reasons, the number of individuals involved in the top leadership goes well beyond the number in England without, however, approaching the total number of American national leaders of first rank.

A survey of American national leadership and a comparison of it with foreign examples indicates that the American government is conducted in an immediate and direct sense by a few thousands of individuals who combine official and unofficial roles in varying degrees. They are limited by the laws; their scope of action is restricted; they are not well coordinated; they do not share uniform views; most owe their power to different sources of public esteem in the various sections of the country, in private enterprises, in appointments by public or private bodies, in long party service, or in intellectual and scientific skills. The forces blocking a unification of these separate clusters are very strong. When, as will be seen in the next chapters, an institution such as the presidency has expanded its leadership function relative to the rest of the 10,000, it has been not so much at the expense of the other leadership clusters as it has been the outgrowth of performing new or augmented functions.

## QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS

1. Distinguish between official and personal leaders. Give an example of each from your student community.
2. What are some educational and other traits found among the top leadership in different proportions than in the national population as a whole?
3. What are the institutional limits to the full power of the top leadership of the nation?
4. To what extent are the national leaders independent of one another, rather than being a single clique?
5. Is the American national leadership a tighter network than the leadership of England or of the Soviet Union? Explain your answer.