

NOTES ON THE LEADERSHIP CRISIS

"Leadership" may be the most sorely missed quality in American life today- and it may be the least understood.

The absence of leadership *cannot* be equated with the accidental absence of individuals with personal leadership qualities. The human society always has roughly the same mix of innate qualities.

It is then a truism to say that *circumstances*, at any given time, inhibits those personal leadership qualities, or the emergence into public life of people with such qualities. And it is tautological to say that leadership is at a low level because social standards in general are at such a low level; that is exactly why we are seeking leadership. The search for the kinds of circumstances which inhibit leadership has to be more specific and deeper than that.

Furthermore, we have to be clear that it is not just "leadership" that any given group of us is seeking, but a leadership which is congruent with basic values. It is not likely that America will go long without leaders. Leaders will emerge, without question, but they may not be the leadership many of us want. We are not just looking for leaders, or strong leaders, or able leaders, we are looking for "good" leaders, according to our varying values.

Almost none of us is a piece of unshapen clay whom a strong leader can mold any way he wants just by providing "strong leadership." We have values and aspirations to which he must relate. In modern industrial society, there is no such thing as a strong man on a white horse who can ignore the values and aspirations of a substantial part of the population, even if he has to manipulate and distort those

values. In other words, a distinction must be made between a "dominator" or "tyrant" who siezes and maintains power by force, and a "leader."

Since leadership is related to a set of values, there obviously can be different leaders for different groups. When we talk about a "leader," we're talking about *someone who can integrate a substantial number of people around a set of common values*. In a society as large and heterogeneous as ours, leadership must take on some special attributes. One is the ability to hold together a large number of people on the basis of a common set of values which are important to those people- even though they may disagree on other matters or values. Further than that, a leader must be able to integrate those people around some negotiated compromise on their differences---or else he will never be able to integrate a large enough group in the population.

There are two major circumstantial impediments to such leadership these days; one is the murkiness of value commitments as they generally exist; and the second is the breakdown of those political institutions which have lent themselves to the exercise of leadership.

The first point is simple enough. If a leader is one who integrates people around a common set of important values - that set of values must exist. Of course, one of the attributes of leadership is the ability to identify values broadly but subliminally held, and make them come to life again. But by the same token, when there is a rampant state of value-confusion, that leadership becomes more difficult.

We are in a general state of value-uncertainty, which is dificult enough, Value-

uncertainty has to do with the general loosening of traditional ties and loyalties which has been much described. But value-confusion is something more than value-uncertainty.

The fact is that large numbers of people are not *that* uncertain about their political values in America. At least, there is a substantial majority of Americans who could be rallied around the general values related to political freedom and social compassion. The question today is: what actions serve those values? For example: in what ways do quotas serve the cause of political freedom and social compassion? In what ways do nuclear power plants serve those values? In what ways does reduced American military preparedness serve those values? In what ways do various levels of government expenditure serve those values? And so forth.

We are in an age where everything is done in the name of *virtae*; and where--because of growing populations, growing expectations and dwindling resources -- there are real conflicts between virtuous values.

Again, this state of value-confusion makes leadership more difficult--but at the same time makes it more essential, and not impossible. It is exactly the job of leadership to integrate us by helping us to deal with this value confusion.

To remind us again that we are talking about a *kind* leadership: there is no question that eventually leaders will come along to deal with this value confusion. But the manner in which they will want to deal with it may be unacceptable to many of us. They may want to deal with it by turning their backs on some of the

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values we hold important. Then, of course, they will not be *our* leaders---they probably will not be able to act as leaders for a very substantial part of the population. But because the rest of us remain in a state of confusion and leaderless, they may become *dominant* leaders.

The job of enlightened and sophisticated leadership is made more difficult by value-confusion---but is made especially difficult by another phenomenon: the breakdown of certain critical political institutions.

American political institutions -as flawed as they have been in practice -have been peculiarly designed for the exercise of negotiation-politics, coalition-politics. They have been coalition-party, representative-government politics, rather than factional-party, direct-democracy politics. In other words, in a large heterogenous society, our political institutions have been *vehicles* for integrating negotiated sets of common values. Our institutions have made it easy and necessary for people to get together and hammer our sets of common values, and programs to fit.

As we know, leadership will not automatically emerge from such an institutional environment--it is often too easy to pretend an amalgamation of values--but it is the environment from which leadership is most likely to emerge--because common to both is the element of integrating a large number of disparate people around a common set of important values.

To cite a couple of homey examples: a Truman or a Humphrey emerging from a coalition process are more likely to perform as American leaders of quality than a McGovern emerging from a faction-controlled convention, or a Carter emerging from a series of direct primaries. In the latter cases, the negotiating process, the coalition process has been absent.

By the same token, how does leadership emerge on a San Francisco Board of Supervisors constituted by small-district factional elections? How does leadership develop in a state where factional referenda are so easily ordered up through signature-collecting companies?

These structural developments towards direct-and-instant democracy, nurtured by our communications revolution, are the major impediments to the emergence of political leadership in our society. And indeed how difficult is it for a leader to establish himself politically by attacking these developments which, in our value-confusion, so many of us see as aids to democracy rather than deterrents to democracy?

Well, they say that we get the leaders we deserve.