

POWER ACTORS, POWER STRUCTURES, AND COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

By concentrating this discussion on power actors and power structures, we may leave the impression that they are the only people who "count" in community decision making and action. What we have tried to do is to describe the qualities of the people who are most intimately involved in most community decisions. This does not imply that others cannot or should not become involved.

It is important to realize that under a democratic system, we must strive toward two objectives in community decision making:

First — those who have social power should represent **all** major sectors of the community, rather than specific sectors. Implicit in this is that social power should not be concentrated in the hands of a few. We must, therefore, constantly strive to broaden leadership and see to it that new people gain skills in acquiring and using social power.

Second — we should encourage those who lack social power and/or do not hold leadership positions to become involved in decision making, both in making

contributions to the decision-making process and in reacting to the decisions that have been made. This is the essence of citizen participation — individuals exercising their freedom of choice to decide when, where, and why they might become involved in community decision making. When people no longer have this choice, we will no longer have a democratic society.

For decision making to work in the long-range interest of all the community, representation of all segments of the community and adequate citizen participation are essential.

Summary

The promise of a democratic society requires that the power structure of a community represent the interests of all sectors of that society and that those who cannot lead must be encouraged to contribute to and react to the decisions that are made on their behalf.