

better and more beautiful article than the department stores have to offer: the renewed love of the personal practice of music or painting or drama; the awakened interest (love succeeded by curiosity and curiosity by science) in the free delights of birds, flowers and all the creatures of the fields and the forests—all these will have a place in the adult education which has this objective of a personalized society and socialized personalities.

Let us, however, face the essential difficulty. All that we speak of as desirable, all that seems so clearly the *only* desirable new social pattern, is nevertheless by no means in the natural, that is to say the unconscious, tendency of the times. Although the war has given us new institutions, like farmers' production committees, community war-service councils, labor-management cooperative committees which are in the desired direction, it would nevertheless be naive folly to suppose that the current is assuredly set this way. All these war-created forms of personalized, functional "get-togethers" are still few in number and hard to keep alive. The forces of depersonalization in the mass-industries of the city, in the stultifying toil of the farms and in the canned entertainment of radio, film and juke-box, seem everywhere overwhelmingly dominant. Every-

where there are monstrous forces creating a sub-personal uniformity of thought and of taste which, on analysis, originate with the monopolizing tendency inherent in modern finance-industry.

For that reason, it seems not only inevitable but profoundly right that the adult education which has such a humanist and personalist vision of society must ally itself with those groups and social forces which are in protest against their bondage to these anti-democratic and irresponsible economic institutions in our own society. Not, be it noted, to identify itself completely with any political or "cooperative" movement, but to act as guide, counsellor and friend to such groups, friendly enough to uphold most scrupulously amongst them the highest standards of knowledge, science and truth.

But the day of adult education as an affair of individual self-advantage or as a learned process conducted in an academic vacuum, is ended. Adult education is, as we all are personally, involved in the crisis of our times and, with democracy itself, it has to choose and to act. It becomes more and more a matter, not just of the mind, but of the mind and the heart and the will. Like war, it becomes "total." And, as we have said, total can mean either totalitarian or wholly personalist.

How Good is the Canadian Gallup Poll?

By WILFRID SANDERS

FOR nearly 18 months, newspapers across Canada have been regularly publishing bi-weekly articles purporting to set forth what the division of Canadian opinion is on a wide variety of subjects, from air raids to war aims, from by-elections to Vitamins.

Who is it who claims to speak with such neat, tabular authority, on such a daedal subject as mass opinion? What is their

authority, and how accurate are they? Finally, what is their function—good, bad, or indifferent?

Let's look at some facts.

The Gallup Poll, or, to give it its full title, the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, is one of a chain of affiliated Institutes operating in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Sweden, and Canada. The American Institute is now in its eighth year, the British in its seventh, and the Canadian, Australian

and Swedish in their second years. These five Institutes exchange their findings with the result that, (if you assume for a minute the accuracy and validity of their findings), a pool of information regarding democratic thought is being built up. More important still, because of the fact that in all these countries the Institute is supported by an independent press, this information is given wide circulation. In Canada, potential readership represented by the 26 member newspapers is around four million.

The Canadian Institute is a co-operative, non-profit organization, participated in by 26 leading Canadian dailies. These newspapers are published in all parts of Canada, from Halifax to Victoria, inclusive. They represent all shades of political opinion, and include two of the leading French language newspapers. Membership includes small dailies as well as large ones. This geographical, political, racial, and economic diversification is, in itself, one of the best guarantees of objectivity and impartiality in the operations of the Institute.

Here, then, is the answer to the first question posed above. The organization responsible for these reports on public opinion is a non-partisan venture on the part of Canadian newspapers, who believe that what people think is just as much news as what they do. It is also part of an international organization with similar aims and objectives, and similar techniques.

But on what authority does it purport to find and report public opinion? Is it accurate?

Here again, it is not necessary to depart from fact. In gauging public opinion, the poll uses the familiar sampling method, in which care is taken to see that all significant component parts of the population are represented, in their right proportion to the whole, in a cross-section of the population. The scientific construction of this cross-section is the crux, the determinant, of the poll's accuracy. It is the factor that makes a modern opinion poll as different from the old-fashioned straw vote, as a modern dive

bomber is different from the machine flown so precariously by the Wright brothers at the turn of the century. The mathematical principle on which it is based—the law of probabilities—is as generally accepted and as indisputable, as the multiplication table.

Elections and referenda constitute the only pragmatic opportunity for checking the accuracy of the polls, and the soundness or otherwise of applying the sampling technique to public opinion. While public interest in the polls is probably highest just before an election, most pollsters feel that the prediction of an election's results a few days before voting starts is not, in itself, a particularly valuable contribution to the democratic process. From their point of view, the chief value in election forecasts lies in the fact that it provides a check on the accuracy of the cross-section, and at the same time demonstrates to the public that sample polling actually does work.

In the seven years of its existence, the American Institute of Public Opinion has made 114 state, local, and national election predictions, both on candidates and on issues involved. In 1936, when the Institute was formed, the average error was six per cent. From 1937 to the presidential election of 1940, this average error was reduced to four per cent. From 1940 to 1942, including the 1942 congressional elections, the average margin of error in the Institute's forecasts had been cut to 2.5 per cent of the actual vote.

Because of the fact that opinion surveys are based on principles of sampling, and the law of probabilities, they may fall short of expectations on occasion, but the overall record of seven years is one of constant improvement, and a narrowing of the margin of error.

The Canadian Institute has had only one chance to check the accuracy of its cross-section, and that opportunity arose only a few months after it had started operations in this country. From many angles, the plebiscite of April, 1942, on the question of methods to be used in raising men for military service, presented an unusually tough nut to pollsters. In

the first place, there was no precedent on which to rely, inasmuch as this was only the second national plebiscite in Canadian history, the first one being the prohibition plebiscite of 1898. Moreover, the issue involved was not clear cut. As it appeared on the ballot, the question was whether or not the government should have a free hand in deciding the methods to be used in raising men for military service, and the public was told by the Prime Minister that Conscription for overseas service was NOT, per se, the issue. But no advance information was given the public as to what course the government would follow if it were given a free hand. Opinion polls, prior to the polling date, indicated, however, that a majority of Canadians interpreted the vote as being directly for or against conscription for overseas service,—in other words, that a "Yes" majority would result in the introduction of overseas conscription, and vice versa. Other voters saw the plebiscite as a vote of confidence or non-confidence in the present government. This confusion of issues did not make the poll's job any easier.

Unlike an election, there were no local candidates to stimulate interest, and no precedent to go on in estimating the all-important factor of turnout. A "free-the-government's-hands" vote was advocated by all political parties.

The forecasts of the Institute and the actual vote results are now a matter of record. The national vote was correctly forecast within five per cent. The vote in each province was correctly "called", average margin of error by provinces being 5.2 per cent. In Quebec where religious, racial and political issues were thoroughly confused, the Institute's prediction was correct within 2½ per cent.

This plebiscite provided a test of more than the accuracy of the Canadian organization's methods. Prior to this forecast it had been charged by some critics of the polls that while their fitness for forecasting the voters attitude on a specific candidate had been admittedly demonstrated, the poll's ability to test opinion on less tangible issues had not yet been proven.

It would be difficult to find a less tangible, more complex issue than that provided by the Canadian plebiscite. Canadian editorialists are still arguing as to what the vote meant. The British and Australian Institutes have also had their opportunities, by way of elections, to test their methods, and have thus served to confirm the validity of the sampling technique, when applied to public opinion.

As to the third question raised at the outset of this article—that of the function of the polls—it is impossible not to introduce matters of opinion. However, facts need not be abandoned altogether.

Montaigne, the French political philosopher, described public opinion as being "a powerful, bold, and unmeasurable party." That it was unmeasurable was taken for granted in Montaigne's day. Even James Bryce, English observer of "The American Commonwealth", and penetrating student of democracy, wrote that the "obvious weakness of government by public opinion is the difficulty of ascertaining it." Bryce recognized that elections, newspapers, associations, political parties and other agencies for the expression of public opinion provided a rough gauge, but accepted none of them as sufficiently direct for his critical taste. To him, such agencies were too often advocates, rather than barometers, or weather cocks. Moreover, the risk of confusing the pleas of a small, highly vocalized pressure group with public opinion was too apparent. In looking forward to what he believed would be the next stage of democracy, "in which the will of the majority of citizens could be known at all times", Bryce appears to have come fairly close to forecasting the modern opinion poll, since the method he hoped for had two main characteristics, i.e. that it go directly to the people themselves, and that it be based on some unit or segment of the population smaller than the entire electorate.

It is rather intriguing to see how criticism and support of the polls divides along roughly the same lines as one of the oldest rifts in democratic thought—the rift represented by Thomas Jefferson's direct

democracy, and Alexander Hamilton's representative democracy. If one accepts the view that the great masses of the people are, by educational and intellectual standards, unfitted to determine what is in their best interests, then the results of the polls become virtually meaningless—"a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But if one shares the Jeffersonian view—that in the long run, the people are less likely to misgovern themselves than any small exclusive group, then the continuous scientific, and impartial study of public opinion becomes an important supplement to the work of the people's representatives, whose main job, is, after all, to represent.

It has been said that newspapermen and politicians are much like doctors: they spend their days listening to people with a pain, or people in trouble. The man who misuses his ration coupon gets his name in the paper, but the housewife who uncomplainingly trims her household shopping list to comply with the spirit of the law, remains unknown. The man who stands up and says he is not going to fight England's wars, and will ignore his draft notice, gets national attention, whereas the lad who just goes and volunteers is unpublicized. Under our mechanics of news, it is the person with a pain, or the person in trouble, who IS news. So it is with pressure groups, and highly organized minorities, who often lay claim to much greater public support than they actually enjoy. The vast majority of the public remain virtually inarticulate, except at election time. By taking issues of the

day to the public, directly and at frequent intervals, pollsters feel they are helping to make the so-called average citizen articulate—to make his views known.

It is difficult to study the results of scientifically conducted public opinion polls without becoming convinced of the innate good sense of this average citizen. It would take more space than is available to catalogue the instances in which polls have found him to be actually in advance of his elected representatives, especially in connection with issues bearing on the prosecution of the war. Months before the 1942 budget increased the income tax in the lower brackets to unprecedented heights, the Canadian Institute found the public willing to bear more taxes. After the budget had put the increases into effect, the poll could find only one or two per cent of Canadians who felt that taxes were too high, or that they couldn't adjust themselves to the new levies. Again, months before the principles of compulsory savings were adopted, the poll published the results of a survey showing that the majority of Canadians favoured such a scheme. Long before the first ration card was ever issued, the public was found to be anxious for rationing of tea, coffee, gasoline, and sugar. For at least a year the public has wanted some form of health insurance. The record could go on and on.

Granting that the public is not infallible, the poll nevertheless appears to have proven the soundness of government by public opinion in war, as well as in peace.