



Now local elections are over for 1975 and Town Meeting is next on the political scene, we can look back on the recent Selectman's race and indulge in some "reflections".

There are times I question the Democratic system, even though in general I'm culturally and intellectually devoted to the ideal it represents.

March, 1975, is one of the times it's in question.

Other than the fact I believe Marty Hoxie was an honest Selectman and the fact he had a delightful sense of humor, I've no special brief for the fellow. Frankly, I didn't know him that well; I do know well other people who did, however, and I regret his defeat.

As for Mrs. Montagna who won at the polls, I know her no better. I know nothing bad about her, and many people I know and like, and whose opinion I respect, seem to have supported her candidacy.

The people have spoken and she won the Selectman's seat. Good for Mary; I believe she'll do the job to the best of her ability.

Nevertheless, I'm worried. I'm worried because I believe she won for several reasons: some good ones and some not-so-good ones. A lot of people voted for Mary instead of Marty because they were angry about something Town Hall has done in the past few years, or about something Town Hall hasn't done -- for them, as individuals.

Some who had supported Marty in earlier elections expected him to look more favorably upon their appeals for tax abatements after property was revalued. When all those requesting abatements received the same consideration, those people who felt Marty owed them a favor didn't like it.

Some who wanted special favors from Town Hall because of a previous association with Selectmen incumbents - and didn't get them - saw a vote against Marty as an opportunity to show their disappointment and displeasure.

Then there were those who voted for Mary because she's a woman, and they believe women should have equal opportunity, not only an equal voice in government, but equal opportunity to govern.

And there were others who admired the gal's tenacity, her determination to be elected to the Selectmen's Board, and who wanted to give her a chance to show what she could do.

Finally, there was a well-organized group who supported Mrs. Montagna because their license fees were raised and their cost-of-doing-business in the Town of Barnstable increased. Some hold alcoholic pouring or package store licenses, and exert a considerable influence among those who spend time at the local pubs.

Probably there were others who really believe the person they voted for can do a better job than any other candidate in the race.

If 250 people had felt differently, for whatever reason, Marty -- not Mary -- would have been elected.

Will you seriously consider the effect this could have upon the Town of Barnstable? Supposing, as some are now saying, Mrs. Montagna is deeply indebted to the interests of those who operate liquor-serving establishments, and is unable, as Selectman, to withstand the pressures those people will bring to bear upon her.

Supposing, as some say, the big-city tactics begin to infiltrate the Barnstable Town Hall. Pay-off, pressure tactics, politics with a capital P. How long can the Selectmen remain honest? One year? Two?

If there is now a majority of Selectmen who take the position they will do no special favors for anyone, and everyone gets equal treatment under the law, how long can they hope to hold their elected positions?

If you were a Selectman, and had done your best to do an honest job, and found yourself in a majority position on the three-man board, and were up for election next year -- and had just seen a twice-elected Selectman with whom you'd worked for two years, and who you knew to be a fair and honest man who had done fine work for the Town, beaten at the polls by a person allegedly backed by some pretty unsavory characters -- how would you feel about your job security?

How would you feel about sticking to your principles of "doing what's best for the town as a whole, doing what's fair and right for the greatest number of people"?

Would you, perhaps, be tempted to slip toward the side of safety for yourself? Would you wonder if it's worth it to be an honest politician? Wouldn't you perhaps be apt to protect yourself a little bit, go along

with some of the deals, stretch a point of honor just a little way?

That's what it's all about, right now. There's a guy over there in Town Hall who's up for election in March, '76, and he's going to have some strong competition unless he knuckles under to some of the pressures.

Will people keep him honest? Well, how much attention do people pay to how Town Hall's being run on a day-to-day basis? How many voters really know what the Selectmen do, what the limitations are, and where the soft spots are in the Selectman-Town Meeting form of government?

How many people show up at the open meetings the Selectmen have been holding in the villages? What do they learn at those meetings? Are they favorably impressed by what they learn? Do they discuss with their friends and neighbors the good things our Selectmen do for us? Or do they just grouse about things they don't like and don't understand?

How many registered voters didn't bother to vote on March 1st? Or didn't support Marty because he hadn't done them "a personal favor"? Or didn't vote at all because Marty may have seemed a "shoe-in"?

How many voted for Mary because she seemed to represent the "underdog", without giving any thought to what would be good "for all the people in the Town of Barnstable"?

How many of you who didn't vote now wish you'd taken the time to do so?

I'm deeply concerned about the future. And that's not because I think Mrs. Montagna is a poor selection. I'm concerned because I fear she may find it difficult to make the decisions necessary for "the best good for the most people".

If one of her compatriots should also find it difficult, for whatever reason, there will be a hole in the dike of good government. Through that hole will seep the diseases of graft, pay-off and political patronage so common to the cities and, so far, never witnessed in our town.

For this reason, I ask each of you to watch Town Hall more carefully than at any time in the past. Please inform yourselves. Please keep your nose in what's assuredly more your business than anyone else's.

Don't leave it for "George" to do. YOU do it. Show concern. Dig for details. Ask questions. Get answers. And talk about injustices if you find them developing.

All three of your elected Selectmen are badly in need of your help this coming year. Together they can stand firm and do a fine job. If they become divided, the town faces serious trouble.

The people have spoken. The elected officials will go about the business of running the Town. Whether they do a good job depends - to a much greater degree than many appreciate - upon each and every one of you as individuals.

We need good and honest Selectmen, And believe me, please, they need a good and honest constituency - not one that's looking for personal favors for certain people within it.

I believe it's wrong to seek personal favors from elected officials. I feel it's wrong to expect something for yourself that your neighbor can't get - because you supported a good candidate. Not everyone agrees with me.

The comments expressed by Miss Leonard in her "Village View" are those of her own and do not represent the opinion of the publisher. On the contrary, we feel that Mrs. Montagna was duly elected through our democratic process and feel confident that she can and will perform her duties in the best interest of the Town of Barnstable.