Reading Number 14
from *Who Governs?* and from *A Preface to Democratic Theory*

by Robert Dahl

**p. 88, ¶ 2**– In a political system where nearly every adult may vote but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?

**p. 88, ¶ 4**– “The question is peculiarly relevant to the United States and to Americans. In the first place, Americans expose democratic beliefs with a fervency and unanimity that have been a regular source of astonishment to foreign observers...[such as] Tocqueville and Bryce...”

**p. 89, ¶ 2**– “In the political system of the patrician oligarchy, political resources were marked by a cumulative inequality: when one individual was much better off than another in one resource, such as wealth, he was usually better off in almost every other resource—social standing, legitimacy, control over religious and educational institutions, knowledge, office. In the political system of today, inequalities in political resources remain, but they tend to be *noncumulative*.”

**p. 89, ¶ 6, line 1**– “First, among all the persons who influence a decision, some do so more directly than others in the sense that they are closer to the stage where concrete alternatives are initiated or vetoed in an explicit and immediate way.”

**p. 90, ¶ 1**– Second, the relationship between leaders and citizens in a pluralistic democracy is frequently reciprocal: leaders influence the decisions of constituents, but the decisions of leaders are also determined in part by what they think are, will be, or have been the preferences of their constituents.”

**p. 93, ¶ 2**– In American politics, as in all other societies, control over decisions is unevenly distributed; neither individuals nor groups are political equals.”

- **Summary**: The polity is divided into two groups: those who are politically active and those who are not.
- There is hope because the inactive can always become active.