

‘THE DIALECTICS OF THE GROWTH MOVEMENT’

At one of the very early AHP meetings, I became so irritated at the proceedings that I suggested that AHP stood for ‘The Association for Hedonistic Pursuit’. At a more recent meeting, I heard Paul Lowe expound a very ancient and very reactionary philosophy. One of the consequences of it was that if the poor are poor, then somehow, they need to be. Those that exploit somehow need to exploit. That the only change we should aim at is a completely personal one connected with our own consciousness and being. I made the point that this philosophy justified every sort of oppression, from slavery onwards. An older man said ‘We are not interested in what you think’. I think he was right. Nobody else protested. I felt angry, and therefore did not stay to find out quite what sort of meditation was on offer. I felt that I was wrong - maybe AHP stood for Anti-Humanistic Psychology.

On reflection, I realised that this was overdoing things. At the same meeting, I had attended a Co-Counselling session run by John Heron, and found it very good. I felt at the time, and still think, that Co-Counselling has some features that could enable it to be used on a wide scale among the working class. These are: that it is on a peer basis of equality, and that the techniques are relatively easy to understand and transmit. However, even in the case of this particular way of working, there are some contradictions. In spite of the desire of people in the Co-Counselling community to spread their networks amongst the working people, they have not so far been able to do so. The actual *practice* of the growth movement is that it involves almost exclusively middle class, professional people. All growth movements, of any species, are a lower middle class pursuit, at the present time. Why?

I think that we have to look at the internal contradictions of the movement as it has developed, and relate this to the society in which we live.

The action, striving energy and movement of all the therapies, both new and old, derives from a major internal contradiction; from the point of view of someone coming into therapy or a growth session, you could put it like this:

1. I am unfree, distressed, and in the grip of some alienating process or experience. And,
2. I want to become free, I want to escape from distress and alienating processes.

The therapist, group leader, facilitator, or whatever, claims to have the practice and theory to solve this contradiction. He has a method and a rationale, and whether he admits it or not, this is based upon some underlying assumptions.

The early psychoanalytic movement, (from which the 'new therapies' largely derive) had an assumption like 'You have, inside yourself, unconscious contradictions'. The theory and the praxis revolved around this central idea, and even now, although it is not often stated explicitly, this is still an assumption of Gestalt therapy and Co-Counselling, and much of Encounter work.

The T-Group and Sensitivity practice (particularly the NTL species) would be something like 'You haven't resolved your social contradictions between yourself and other people'. Another assumption worked upon by the newer growth practices could be put 'You are contradicted by your lack of loving, expressive, sexual, bodily and emotional expression'. In many ways, a really good, complete group would have something of a synthesis of all these contradictions. However, there are other, equally important contradictions.

The next one I want to bring up is connected with authority. You could put it this way:

1. I am partly distressed by those people who manipulate and control me.
And
2. You (the therapist or leader) manipulate and control me, apparently for my own good.

But even within the Establishment, many psychiatrists are influenced by the 'anti-psychiatry' position of Laing et al, at least, the younger ones.

Another crucial contradiction can be put in the form -

1. You need a well-trained, highly qualified expert, approved by the proper authorities, and costing a lot of money.
And
2. You don't.

Much of the economic problem flows from this contradiction, and it certainly was true that the long and expensive treatment involved in psychoanalysis did restrict it in the early days, and still largely today, to a small group of middle and upper class people who could afford to have someone work exclusively on their damaged psyches. It also accounts for the popularity amongst the establishment of cheap, quick treatments to get the members of the proletariat back to work, derived from drugs and conditioning techniques. However, in a different form, the same problem afflicts the new therapies. Certainly the cost is much lower, and very substantial numbers of lower middle class professionals can afford the costs of the weekends and the like. This problem came home to me clearly when I was involved in running a Co-Counselling workshop for a Marxist workers group. A young worker with a family was unable to come because missing a Saturday's work would deprive him of a day and a half's pay which he needed to pay his rent and food, etc. In this case, it would have been necessary to pay him a subsidy to come, rather than charge him a fee.

Another thread that runs throughout the movement, past and present, is that of individual change. By this I mean that whatever variations there are in methods and practice, each person comes out the other side more free or 'actualised'. He or she might be a reactionary or a revolutionary, a business man manufacturing bombs, or a social worker helping the needy, or indeed, live or do anything. However, there has developed, particularly recently, a more total ideology, where the person, it is claimed will reach new heights of ecstasy and self-actualisation; this can be extended to what is virtually a religion whereby not only *you* will be self-actualised, but you will revolutionise and change the whole world. There is a modest, but not over explicit element of this in the Co-Counselling practice and ideology, and certainly a number of Encounter enthusiasts would argue that they are engaged upon a whole new way of life that could change the world. In extremis, you reach the religion of the guru. Of course, from my point of view, this kind of position is extending an internal contradiction, and thinking that it can solve the massive external contradictions in the world - a world where the working class is exploited in a mad matrix of capitalism, where two-thirds of the world starve, and millions have died in the last fifty years. The roots of this kind of philosophy are very old. It is often based on an idea like 'revolutionise yourself first, and the world afterwards'. Generally, it has appealed to groups who are in a fairly privileged position, like the Athenians developing their great cultural ideas on democracy on the backs of slaves. Taken by itself, it can never hope to change a large social structure since it is based only on individual action, and does not include collective action. I haven't here got time to go into the historical details, but many of the readers of this article will be familiar with taking part in unstructured, large, face-to-face groups. This situation demonstrates very clearly how it is impossible to change the totality of the power and emotionality structure by individual action. It is just as impossible to stop the American Air Force from dropping napalm by individual efforts at self-actualisation by the Viet Cong. I should say that I'm not against individual self-actualisation, in fact I think it is a foremost goal for any person who wants to be fully human, but that it is necessary to recognise the contradictions involved, and *also* take part in collective action. And this collective action can mean fighting. If you are inside Buchenwald, then it is necessary to use violence against an even greater violence.

The need to fight, the contradictions out in the wider world, seem to be quite outside the growth movement's theory and practice. If you look at the Quaesitor leaflet, or the advertising material from a growth centre, you will find every conceivable kind of activity. But you don't find anything on how to fight large-scale oppression.

You may say that this is a bit hard, since we are specialists, then we are concerned with particular problems of how to live a better life, or how to improve our psyches, or whatever. I would say two things about this. One is that the whole of the modern, bourgeois ideology has a very mystifying and invidious way of neutralising and taming its intellectuals, scientists and others. The educational system and its ideology encourages us all to specialise in one corner, and to see it as totally unconnected with the rest. Thus it is that a physicist can claim that he is a neutral scientist working on the problems of, say, nuclear physics, and not responsible for Hiroshima; or the psychologist working on IQ tests which have the result of excluding bright working class kids from higher education. Now, most people I know in the growth movement are fully aware of this when it relates to people outside the movement; but the system

has a way of trapping people like us if we see only the immediate psychological matters. The sort of total ideologies in the growth movement that I talked about actually (although unintentionally) help to maintain the ruling class. It is very similar to the way that the system encourages people to be only interested in their immediate satisfactions, in their family and the like. The system permits sexism and pornography. It can tolerate all kinds of freedoms *provided* that they do not challenge the ownership structure of society. Marcuse calls this 'repressive tolerance'. (I should add that this is not true in a directly repressive system; for example, I know that in Spain, police spies are sent to T-Group sessions. And that in South Africa, there has been some suppression of the Encounter movement).

Another problem with the specialist's position is connected with employment. The early therapies are largely integrated into the job system of capitalism, and indeed, nothing is more respectable than the psychiatrist or the psychoanalyst going about his daily life. The T-Group development has largely been integrated into the management structure of capitalism. It is a useful tool for sending senior personnel who have been so conditioned by the authoritarian and conformist system that when they get to the top, they are unable to work co-operatively in groups, as required by modern, complex technology. (Of course, you don't need T-Groups for the shop floor). Furthermore this technology has been developed considerably in different directions in the field of Organisation and Development, where all kinds of behavioural techniques are used to improve teams, job satisfaction, change organisations and the like. The armies, the Ministry of Defence, the large corporations, the armaments factories, the Civil Service, the Police, all make use of this technology. The growth movement, as it's now developed, is largely unrespectable and on the fringe. It is defused in two ways, one of which is that in order to make a decent living, growth centres have to operate on a commercial basis, and hence become part of the commodity system; in some cases, it becomes almost indistinguishable from the entertainments business. However, like the old therapies, it seems clear that as time is going by, the new therapies themselves are becoming respectable. Slowly and surely - at the moment largely in social work organisations and psychiatric institutions, the techniques are becoming more and more respectable, and increasingly used. Even groups of business men now receive Encounter training. I know a major oil company in which many of the senior executives have T-Group and Encounter sessions. They're a likeable bunch of people - they are sensitive to each other, open and frank. This company manufactures napalm.

I have talked about the growth movement as though it were concerned entirely with encounter, the AHP and the like. Of course, the movement is much bigger, and includes many people in social work and mental health, who are more likely to read Case Con, Red Rat, or Humpty Dumpty than Self and Society. Many of these people would have views rather like mine. Their actions in the world are likely to be to do with Trade Unions, mental patient collectives, the debunking of bourgeois psychology and the like. Most of these people are not attracted to the AHP.

I think the reason is that the end result of these major and minor contradictions brings about the situation that I alluded to at the start. That is, a group of middle class people doing interesting and creative things, genuinely concerned with creating good relations, and fighting personal oppression, but ignoring social oppression. I don't think that the Journal is entitled to the word 'Society'. Self, yes. Society, no.