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The Politics of Group Participation and the New Social Revolution Part III

The New Leader Helps the Discussion Rather Than Dictates the Orders

First, people feel threatened. A 'leader', boss, patron, chief or father, feels that his job is under attack when people talk of 'group participation.' The problem is that *this is true*. The usual leader conceives of his role as 'giving the orders'. The group participation process is dramatically opposed to this. *Everyone* contributes to the group decision, and the function of the leader is to 'moderate the discussion' and 'facilitate the group process.' Thus a leader is needed, at least until the group can itself assume and share out on a rota basis the leadership functions.

But because the group participation process does not function with the leader who 'rules over his subordinates' or 'runs the organization', an authoritarian leader will *feel* menaced by 'group process' advocates and actually *will be* menaced. So here we have the first and often the most insurmountable obstacle to the expansion of self-regulation processes.

And it is just at this juncture of *opposed vested interests* - the hierarchy-diminishing group on the one hand, the hierarchy-supporting leader on the other - that an escalation of conflict can begin. This escalation will usually terminate in a new and equally (if not *more*) rigid hierarchy, *no matter which side wins*. It is at this juncture of open conflict that the Marxian analysis of 'class war' will appeal to the group subordinated and lead them toward aggressive language and then aggressive action as they try to 'merely claim their rights.' And finally, the authoritarian power *profits* from the belligerence of those without power, because the threat to the established order justifies a 'hardening' of the authoritarian control and even 'taking new precautions.'

Negotiation and Compromise

I am aware that the current 'radical' point of view is to see this confrontation and opposition as inevitable. My proposal will sound 'reformist' to most 'revolutionary' ears, but the name 'reformist' doesn't trouble me. The Marxian and current radical position see 'negotiation', 'compromise', and all 'partial solutions' as 'submission to the power structure.' But the 'self-regulation' position recognizes the need for evolutionary changes of an educational nature, and that people need time and experience in practising 'the group process' for this to finally function. Therefore any dramatic win/lose confrontation is against the spirit of slow and comprehensive evolution.

More to the point, the art of 'negotiation' is essential within the *final* structure of a self-regulating group in order that every individual can retain his freedom of expression. Therefore, since 'to successfully negotiate' is a part of the final structure, then that same 'art of negotiation' must come into full play at the onset of the 'full participation' movement.

For example, the authoritarian leader avoids discussion with his subordinates because it is more *expedient* to just hand down the orders. In parallel form, a movement toward 'full participation' might see it as *expedient* to try to override and eliminate the current authoritarian leadership. But such expediency is generally best avoided, for it is most useful (and also more ethically consistent) to employ the art of negotiation as the means of all interactions rather than 'hold it in reserve' for a Utopian endpoint.

The importance of negotiation (as well as its obstacles) will be discussed subsequently. But it can be said here that the 'spirit of group self-regulation' is founded on the idea of co-operation of all participants. An authoritarian leader, although functioning outside of the ideology and spirit of the 'group participation' process, is still functioning with the group *at present*. And it is *from the present* that the next step must always be taken for evolutionary change. Needless to say, too, many leaders in an authoritarian cast system recognize they are as imprisoned by their role as are their subordinates, and many more leaders will recognize this if the possibilities of 'total participation' are clarified in a non-accusatory and non-threatening fashion.

I see that this principle - 'negotiate with your leader' - lacks a certain emotional appeal, especially when a group has been deeply victimized by the power hierarchy, and perhaps *needs* a retaliative slogan like, 'Let's get the leader,' for moral sustenance and emotional cohesiveness. But if we also employ the principle of 'Let the ends be the means' - not only for its ethical consistency, but also for its *educative* (modelling) value - then to negotiate with the leader for 'group participation' can become a group's first 'problem situation' for which the final ends it cherishes, including negotiation, are called upon. Thus, the earliest phase of group self-realisation employs the means which are also envisioned to be its goal.

Facing the Reluctant Boss

What happens *after* the first step toward group 'self-regulation', especially if the leader takes the hard line and remains impervious to this proposal, or even as we know can be the case, when the leader punishes those who make such a proposal? Do we still negotiate with the inflexible leader?

Once we recognize how group self-regulation works, in its entirety and great complexity, we will see that such a question need not be answered at an early point. Other points of initiative are taken to develop a self-regulating group, and a success at these other points would resolve how to approach an intransigent leader. Most significantly, an understanding of how a self-regulating group actually functions must be communicated within a group membership often even before the group meets in a

formal manner to realize this end. This task is faced simultaneous to (or before) the approach to the organizational leader. Its success will bring other participants to an awareness of how 'participation by all in making decisions related to work and working conditions' is actually better for *everyone concerned*. Those participants who have a good rapport with the leaders (or director) can make a new approach. Furthermore, new participants brought into the 'sharing responsibility' movement can suggest alternative and more feasible directions toward influencing the director to accept and employ 'participation by all' methods of discussion and decision-making.

The Fear of Direct Opposition to Authority

But in this knotty and octopus-like question of 'how to influence the leader', we have overlooked the fact that there is another source of intense resistance to 'self-regulation' principles, namely, *the group participants themselves*, politically labelled 'the people'. The security with an authority outside of themselves, the doubt in themselves, the doubt in their peers, the distrust in 'people who want to change things'; and the deeprooted fear in the possibility that they could *lose something* if they tried to change the situation, all make a high wall of ignorance which 'the people' want to protect. The price for change is the security of the *status quo*. (1) And when we remember that people have suffered again and again from economic depression, widespread job loss, violence on the strike lines, lack of security when ill or widowed, and threat of retribution from management and police for radical activities, as well as nonsupport and derision from their own peers and family when one member of a group has wanted to take a strong activist position, then we can understand the historical and social reasons for people's fear and reluctance when it comes to social change.

The group participation movement must *reassure* people that the changes sought are evolutionary and educational in nature, and that there is no desire to prematurely attack the power structure. Again a clearly 'reformist' notion, a labelling which no-one should be fearful to carry. The reason? To change people's *capacities* to create and conduct self-regulating groups will ultimately transform the social structure and modify our hierarchical systems more profoundly and durably than any sudden, 'revolutionary' shift in power structure.

Workers Must Do More Than Marx Claimed

The evidence? All those 'revolutionary changes' initiated under the banner of Marxism during the last 100 years. Marx propounded a shift in power to the proletariat - that is, 'the dictatorship of the people.' He did not give a clear outline of how 'the people' can actually participate actively in the power structure by means of 'everyone participates' group process. The aftermath of Marx is that 'the people's leader', in conjunction with 'the people's representatives' (the members of the Party), take care of policy-making, decision-making, evaluation, and so on. 'The people' are expected to be content to trust their welfare to these new 'delegates of their well-being'. Unfortunately, enough have been content to perpetuate this system.

It must be understood that Marx's political approach was inspired by an injustice in the distribution of wealth, and *not* with a vital concern over *how* political decisions are made. His intention was for 'the workers' to wrest their power from the capitalist entrepreneurs, in order that the discrepancies of great profit for the factory owners and low wages for the workers would be abolished. However, this does not alter the basic 'managerial system'. So we see in the USSR and other socialist countries a new managerial class arises to control the production plan, technology, expansion, 'personal problems', and so on, while the worker continues to do his prescribed duty with passivity, patience and obedience. The worker is not asked to contribute to the inustrial planning. If there is a 'Workers' Council' it is usually a smoke-screen and powerless. What is essential is that the worker has not developed 'self-regulating groups' that could supervise and ameliorate *his family and social life*, assist with housing conditions, care for children of nursery school age, influence child and adult education toward the principles of autonomy and group cohesion, preserve the ecology from pollution and the natural environment from industrial obliteration, and so much more. These personal, cultural, educational and political needs are *not* advanced by workers' organizations of Unions and syndicates because their original goal was, in following the Marxian orientation, to redistribute the profits, but *not* change the centralized (and expedient) decision-making process toward 'discussion and decisions-by-all' methods.

To return to our original line of reasoning: Proponents of 'group participation' do not propose to 'immediately 'attack the social structure', but rather, those who opt for educational change of 'the people' toward 'group participation' skills that could make effective autonomuus, self-regulating groups, have no fear to be called 'reformists. The policy of education and evolution allows for step-wise and partial change to occur, especially when this alters people's fundamental capacities for relating to one another, and, unlike the 'revolutionary spirit', there is no disdain for gains that are minimal and made in compromise with the authorities who hold the power.

The citation of 'neighbourhood organizer' Saul Alinsky was, 'Demand 100%, take 30%, and call it a victory.'

I would add, 'you are not compromising yourself when you compromise. You are negotiating the situation, and in the compromise, you have taken another step.'

The Gains of Compromise Within a Group and Between Groups.

It will be seen subsequently how 'compromise', 'negotiation', 'partial steps', 'trial periods', 'progress in bits', and other such concepts, are a highly valued and intergral part of all 'group process experienced', and never demeaned. When all participants of a group add their individual and free voices to the central pooling ideas, the final plan derived from collection of opinion will demand a certain degree of compromise from each individual in order for the group to reach a cohesive consensus. Here the most fundamental principle of 'group participation' takes root: It is *worth it* for each individual to compromise for the group cause *in a freely chosen group*, because *the*

process of collaboration and cooperation among free and creative individuals will always take those individuals to a point significantly further than they could ever achieve alone. With this basis, the mediation of conflicts and opposing positions within a group are scheduled by mediation, negotiation, and compromise, and the compromise is accepted in good faith, as a trust in the totality of the group co-operative process. A person who feels a particular group runs counter to his spirit and nature could seek out another group, were the situation such that alternative groups were available and that the individual could make a free choice among them. (Of course, the lack of 'alternative groups' dominates our present situation. Therefore, the benefit of 'free choice of group' is not yet ours. But the philosophy of the 'group participation' movement at least indicates the directions to be evolved.)

Aside from mediation of conflicts within a group, 'group participation' means to mediate conflicts between a group and outside forces. Although the spirit of compromise demands a tolerance for frustration, in that set goals are only partially realized, the group structure permits multiple projects where the limitation of gains in one domain are compensated for by advances in other areas. For example, if a patron or manager refuses to grant a rectification of salaries and equilibration of responsibilities to a petitioning group of workers, the workers can use their energies for 'mutual aid' projects, social affairs, educational groups, or 'political-personal expression meetings' in order to buttress their cohesiveness and augment their personal capacities. No time is lost. With the next approach to the management, the workers' group is both stronger and more intelligent, and their method of petition can be altered to maximize success. When the 'natural leaders' of a petitioning group, whether individuals of true talent or merely aggressive personalities, are forced to repeatedly lead the group effort, the natural group force is lost. 'Full group participation' must be the method and goal from the very start, if the group's potential energy is to be harnessed to the principle of self-regulation.

In conclusion, the objection against 'full group participation' mainly comes from fear, whether by the managerial (executive) group or 'the working people.' The fear is based on past realities and must be respected. This justifies the 'educational' point of view - to change people's capacities - over and against the 'attack-the-power-system' style of social change. The power system will itself transform in an evolutionary organic way when the 'participation capacities' of the working people have changed. This is *not* a 'horse-before-the-cart' argument, which claims, 'if you want to change the system, you have to change the people within it.' Such an argument usually emphasizes the change of people's 'consciousness', whether through meditation, 'spontaneous' spiritual awakening, recognizing the Word of God, the meaning of love, and so on. But the 'participation' position accentuates 'the growth of capacities for effective interaction in a group context.' People learn the A,B,C's of effective and satisfying group interaction, and *outgrow* the authoritarian hierarchy by using this democratic, egalitarian and human-potential-realising mode of interaction.

Figure 1

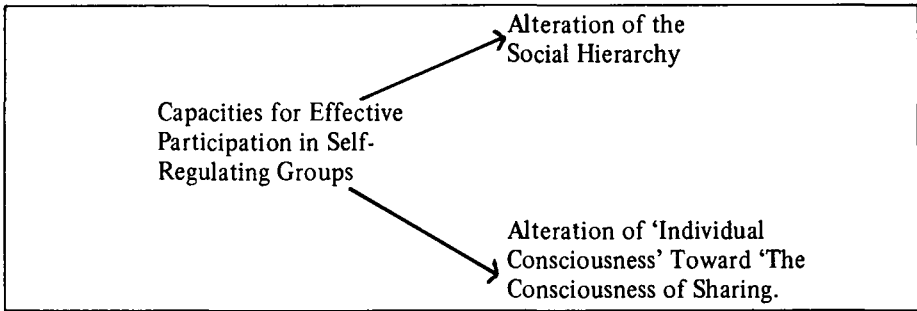


Figure 1 shows how social and individual transformation can proceed naturally from the 'effective participation' mode of group process. But the reason this is *not* the 'horse-before-the-cart' is that 'group participation *is* the horse *and* the cart. For our civilization to permit multiple *transformations* of the society as a whole and for the individual members, a method of 'continual evolution' is needed. The 'small, self-regulating group' is the most mature and comprehensive base for *all* political destinies. The self-regulating group is the milieu where a face-to-face confrontation and collaboration takes place between the individual and his closest peers. This breaks down the public-private dichotomy, and every individual can realize his potential to influence his personal destiny. The more effective the total group and its individual participants, the more effective in realizing this final political goal.

A program for the way society will finally develop, or a program for its individuals, will restrain our vision. But we can begin to describe and manifest the 'eternal methodology' of face-to-face confrontation which can *open* our world to the creative evolutions we need and would have.

References

Page 65 (1) The recent expose by Pliouchtch is only 'another' weighty evidence of the U.S.S.R.'s unceasing threat and punishment against dissidents. This time the mental hospital and the psychiatric establishment provide the milieu and means of the repression.

(2) See Liss, Jerome, *Free to Feel*, Wildwood House, London 1974, p.221.

Page 68 (1) When Richard Nixon and his colleagues spoke of 'law and order', what did this mean? - 'the right of public and private assembly?' Or 'to protect certain children from kidnappers?' or 'Hippies in southern towns from the 'Easy Rider' threat; or is 'law and order' to protect the southerners who liquidate the Hippies they didn't like to see? Or to protect the 'lawmen' (police) from the investigative eye of citizens' committees who have heard claims of prisoners physically beaten, sometimes murdered?

Page 69 (1) from Lloyd De Mause, 'The Evolution of Childhood,' in *History of Childhood Quarterly*, *The Journal of Psychohistory*, Vol. No. 4, p.503. (Available from the psychohistory Press, 2315 Broadway, N.Y.10024.

Page 71 (1) The 'knots' of resolving conflicts in intimate relationships - lovers, couples, parents and children - are described in a paper, 'The Need for Good Holding and The Obstacles in Getting it', published in *Energy and Character*, the Journal of Bioenergy, (Editor David Boadella), Abbotshbury Dorset, Winter 1976-77.

Page 74 (1) See Stanley Milgram's *The Submission to Authority*.

Page 116 (1) Actually, the 'techniques of their application' are not so simple. This forms the subject-matter of another paper.

Page 118 (1) An interesting and important exception to this 'lack of personal contact' is found in the functioning of the Philadelphia Macrocollective, which does ecological studies and initiates political action for 'saving the natural environment'. Meeting time offers a balance between project discussion and personal sharing.

Page 119 (1) Avrich, Paul, *The Russian Anarchists*, New Jersey, Princetown University Press, 1967, p.158.

Page 120 (2) Ibid, P. 162-3

Page 120 (3) Ibid, p. 166-7

Page 147 (1) It is unfortunate that highly valuable books on the question of worker self-regulation - such as Ernie Robert's *Workers' Control* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1973), and Charles Levinson's *Industry's Democratic Revolution*, (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1974), do not raise the important question of workers' fear. Workers' fear (as well as their apathy) have realistic underpinnings, and these psychological forces effectively block large masses of working people from taking part in their own movement for self-regulation.

In addition, the 'workers' control' literature, today just as in the era of Marx, fails to differentiate a *false* workers' movement where *all* initiatives and power are taken by a few individuals, from a *true* workers movement where *all* participants contribute in an active and responsible fashion toward the final goal.

GESTALT IN SCOTLAND

For some years in Edinburgh, Sempervivum Encounter have been offering in their programmes Gestalt-orientated groups led both by Sempervivum co-leaders and by visiting Gestaltists, in particular Ischa Bloomberg. Following an experiential demonstration by Ischa in November 1976 there was a discussion about the possibility of starting a Gestalt training course based in Edinburgh. This has just started. A year's programme includes a 4 day group with Ischa, 6 two day groups with other leaders, a residential week and twice monthly peer group meetings. Supervision by tape or letter is also possible.

As well as 14 trainees they have a number of people who are interested in purely experiential work and these will share equal time on the 4 day group, participate in groups led by the trainees and also take part in training groups if one of the trainees cannot make it. This is a basic skeleton programme lasting (depending on the person) 3 years.
