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**Leadership and the crisis of power: evaluation and reality**

Hello. I am very glad to witness here in Petersburg such a significant and representative event concerned with the very first group-analytical community, which, in fact, is the first to be represented in our country. I am glad that Saint-Petersburg and Russian group-analytical space is coming in touch with such a representative professional assembly. My report addresses the subject of going through crisis situations and the role of leadership or power in this process. I found it worthwhile comparing the tendencies in society with the main processes in our groups, since historically group analysis has been developing in close relationship with the theories of social development, such as Norbert Elias views.

The crisis situations both in society and in different groups are always in the focus of many issues and problems which fill our life. Meanwhile, from the dialectical point of view, undergoing a crisis is an inevitable and important constituent of qualitative changes and therefore, it should be considered as one of the stages of development. This brings us to that essential significance of successful undergoing of crisis stages for the development of the social structure. However, this does not mean that crisis situations do not carry threat of destruction for a structure that will not be able to adjust to new requirements.

All of the above suggests that undergoing a number of crises in development is an essential part of life of any social entity, with the contradiction between the current power structure and leadership on one side and the ongoing group and social processes on the other occupying a central position. As the discrepancy between the structure and its actual needs plays the leading role in crisis development, it is accompanied by the growth of tension and affect. Such tension requires some psychological defense, which produces processes of psychological regress (from the psychoanalytical view) in this social entity and its members. As is known, Freud mentioned that psychic processes in groups and human masses are based on forming projections, parental above all, upon the leader, which are caused by the frustration by the group situation and by the regressive processes of the participants caused by him / her. Meanwhile, when describing processes in group-analytical groups, S. Foulkes remarked that the conductor in the group is under the projection of the super-ego, which he should not accept and give back to the group. This facilitates group development and formation of the group matrix, which enables effective development of group-analytical process. There are quite a number of works on group analysis and group psychotherapy in general, addressing crises of development in groups. All of them define the role of a conductor in a group and analyse the projections of the participants upon him / her as an important step in building a psychotherapeutic group.

Presumably, undergoing crisis stages is significant for the social space, as it conditions the structure of society, its matrix which enables social institutions to function better and to overcome contradictions. As is known, social crises involve a considerable affective tension in society. It can also generate destructive social processes.

Like in groups, the processes in society can also be considered as regressive, which appear now and again and are of a certain depth, with the leader being the object for parental figures projection. And one can assume that the character of these projections depends upon the depth of the regress. For instance, the leader can be projected with the super-ego of the members of the group or society that may be rather mature. In this case everybody expects the leader to control, to punish the bad and to encourage the good, as well as to defend. In deeper regressive processes the leader can perform the role of an early almighty parental figure, of a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ object whom the solution or deepening of any problems that the group or society is facing, depend upon. That is why in crisis situations and social conflicts with power these projections create an image of a leader as of a person who is unfair, or is incapable of correct and fair actions. So, one can assume that the second evaluation of power figures is more deeply regressive and gives rise to a desire to destroy this power.

You can observe this in history. In 1913 Vladimir Lenin, the main ideologist of our October revolution of 1917, formulated the necessary conditions which he called “a revolutionary situation”. According to him, one of its constituents was the situation when it is impossible for the authority “to take over and manage as it used to”. In my opinion, it just reflects such projections which are viewed as inability of the current authority to lead under the conditions. Its second constituent – when it is “impossible for the people to keep to the old life style” – refers to a deep frustration of people which conditions this deep regress. Afterwards, he elaborated this last thesis with an idea that a revolution requires active involvement of people. I would not say that such large scale changes, like revolution, are conditioned only by unconscious projections, as Lenin singled out other factors in a revolutionary situation, which he called subjective, that facilitate its success. However, when captivating people, these projective processes can be an essential component of this revolutionary situation.

At the same time, under a less deep regression which generates projections of a more mature superego and, if there is a crisis, gives rise to ideas about unfair activities of the authority, confrontation is also possible but it aims not as much at destroying power figures, as at the attempt to change them. Usually, such protests suggest demands, petitions, protests against the current actions addressing the government, or other appeals to the authorities. But they do not reach radical forms of protest.

As a rule, in crisis periods, there are different political movements that reflect both the first and the second projections and therefore differ in the degree of radicalism. At the beginning of the 20th century the main revolutionary party in Russia – the Russian social-democratic labour party – could be divided in two groups – Bolsheviks and Menshiviks. The existing power was unable to spiral out of these projections of a “bad object” and this resulted in the Revolution of 1917.

One can assume that processes in groups develop in the same way. During crisis periods in a group regressive processes intensify, with a group conductor becoming the object for different projections and blames for not being fair. For instance, he / she can be blamed for letting some group members say something about the others, which the latter consider unacceptable or unfair. He / she can also be blamed for giving more attention to some group members at the expense of others, and, finally, for not being active enough in some cases. Such remarks can be put forward to be discussed in a group in an attempt to change the situation and the conductor’s actions. Meanwhile, despite confrontation with the conductor, there is still a possibility for a dialogue.

Under a deeper regress, the conductor is evaluated as unwilling or incapable of creating a safe situation in a group, which can lead to devaluating the group and willing to leave it, which is an act of symbolic murder. Such projections of a “bad object” on a group seem to correspond to what M. Nitsun defined as the phenomenon of anti-group – destructive processes in a group aiming at its destruction. It should be mentioned, that, obviously, these anti-group tendencies activate during periods of crisis. You can remember detailed descriptions of power crises given by W. Bennis and H. Shepard in their famous work. It tells about how some group participants, identified as “conflict” ones, produce a destructive impact upon the group, as they get discontented and frustrated by the group situation which contradicts their usual pattern of behavior. These descriptions could well illustrate the anti-group.

In his 2008 Foulkes lecture on power in a group and rebellion against it, M. Nitsun also said that in group processes it is possible to single out not only an anti-group but also an anti-conductor, who “reflects group hostility against the conductor”. The reason for this is that the conductor is perceived as weak or ineffective. If you try to transfer this phenomenon to what we have already said about an anti-group, a deep split of the conductor image, when “a bad object” is projected on it, may be behind it. There is also an unconscious fantasy about a possible almighty “good object” who is sure to take over if you destroy this bad object. In this cases anti-conductor protests do not aim at a possible dialogue and discussion of negative feelings towards the conductor. A favourable solution of the situation is possible only by recovering the integrity of the object-conductor for the group.

Meanwhile, among the most important things is the fact that according to the mechanism of projective identifications these processes make the conductor have the same countertransference feelings towards the group as to a bad object. The unconscious desire to destroy it manifests itself in a conductor as apathy, difficulties in concentrating on the group activity, or disappointment about working in it, being tired of it, willing to finish and close the group. Such tendencies are often the case with beginner group analysts and are important to be dealt with so that group analysts do not become “anti-conductors” that the group is projecting on them. It is therefore necessary to analyse the feelings as soon as possible, in particular with the help of supervision and personal therapy in order to help the group analyse its own feelings. To do that, it is necessary to return the group these feelings in the form which it can accept.

When describing crisis stages, W. Bennis and H. Shepard pointed out an important role of the participants who are not involved in them, the so-called “independent” ones. It is they, as stated in the work, who could make an effective dialogue, and the conductor’s task is to draw them to this. However, there are situations when there are very few or no participants who are not involved in crisis phenomena. In these cases, the conductor must be active indeed, at least at a crucial period so that when the intensity of projections decreases, there are participants who are capable of assuming such role.

S. Foulkes pointed out it was necessary for a conductor to give power to the group itself. And it is this way which will decrease projections upon the conductor and help in recovering his / her object integrity. However, this could be quite a task because in case of projection of a “bad object” upon the conductor the group may take such actions for an attack or neglect. Therefore, it is important to discuss feelings and attitudes of group members towards the conductor. This will enable them to turn to a dialogue, to move from reacting to the projections to their analysis. The conductor should help the participants express these projections, in particular by his / her own interventions, for instance, by saying and asking about possible feelings of the group towards him / her, showing understanding and being open for their discussion. The transition to discussion recovers the perception of the conductor as of an integrated object and creates background for giving the superego function to the group.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the conductor has certain power functions, in particular to maintain the group boundaries and to administrate it. During crisis periods carrying out these functions is of particular importance. But while confronting with the actions of the participants which are destroying the group, the conductor should avoid confronting with their feelings which are conditioned by these projections. Acknowledging, maybe even active acknowledging the right of the participants to feel disappointment or discontent in such situations creates conditions for discussion and dialogue. This sets up preconditions for revealing other qualities and characteristics in the conductor and for a graduate recovery of his integrity as that of an object. It is necessary, so to say, to let the participants “kill” the “anti-conductor” in themselves and at the same time to maintain the contact with them, as well as to give them an opportunity to see that this “anti-conductor” is not you, but something else. When joining the group feelings, the conductor becomes its ally in removing that object which is being projected upon him / her and facilitates creating a favourable situation in a group. For instance, if some participants talk about their desire to leave the group because they do not see how they can receive in it what they need, it is not worthwhile arguing with their desires. One can confirm their right to this and suggest discussing during the time left what they lack in the group and why they conclude that they cannot receive here what they need. Such discussion allows the conductor to spiral out of the bad object projection and join the side of the participants. The discussion enables them to change their perception of the situation in the group and their attitude to the conductor and to keep on participating in the group. It should be noted that the analytical position of the conductor in the group based on the principle of minimum interference contributes to it, with the conductor becoming a model of an independent (according to W. Bennis an H. Shepard) group member who is not directly involved in conflicts.

Here we can draw some parallels with situations in society where solution of social crises is possible through building a political dialogue of the authority with those social layers which turn out to be involved in the crisis social conflict. And this is the important task of the authority, which in the end shapes a mature civil society reflecting its shaped healthy social matrix. Maybe, the capability for this constitutes the maturity of the authority structures. Though there are some parallels between society and a psychotherapeutic group, there are still essential differences in terms of quantity and character of affecting factors. In particular, this concerns the position of a leader in society who, unlike the group conductor, has much less opportunities to take an independent analytical position and be quite little involved in current processes. However, if you trace the historic development of society, you can notice that as social relations undergo democratization, the involvement of authority structures decreases, with leading figures becoming more neutral and not trying to assume the role of “the father of the nation”, which was so typical not a long time ago. This common historical movement facilitates the development of the civil society, which is capable of perceiving the social reality in a more realistic way without overshadowing it with its projections as it used to be hundreds of years ago. Therefore, even serious social-political transformations in developed societies take place with much less serious social turbulence, more often through political dialogues (though tough ones) instead of civil wars.

So the fact that the way to solving social crises lies through the development of a political dialogue is beyond any doubt. Like in a group, an important role in building this dialogue may belong to those social layers and political forces which are not directly taken by these projections. When touching upon processes in big groups, which are mostly similar to those in society, P. de Mare attached an important role to developing a dialogue in a group. He contrasted developing the dialogue to filling the group with this or that ideology that aims at “limiting the interaction to binary relations when something is given as right or wrong” and thus maintain the existing projections. As he said, the dialogue is “multilateral, is a discourse of a multitude of participants” which allows to form a wider and more realistic view upon the events. Unfortunately, the more social frustration allowed by the government there is, the less powers not involved in ideological confrontation there are. If society does not come to the dialogue, it is possible that processes which are equivalent to anti-group ones and are connected with the “bad object” projection upon the leaders may start to escalate, which can be socially detrimental.

So, pre-edipal regressive processes arising in crisis situations both in groups and in society may generate intensive destructive processes. They deepen the crisis as the regress of the people involved in the crisis is increasing and the primitive projections upon the leader are being formed. A certain indicator of this is when the leader becomes to be treated as incapable for effective actions in a situation. The way out of this situation in group-analytical groups lies in building a dialogue and in further recovery of the integrity of the conductor object for the group-analytical group. One can achieve this by focusing the discussion upon the reasons for the group frustration.