Chapter IV

CONCERNING LEADERSHIP IN GROUP-ANALYTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

This chapter is based on a paper read in January 1949 to the American Group Psychotherapy Association in New York who had invited me to talk on leadership. What they had in mind was really a paper on the therapist's technique in group analysis. For this the term 'leader' seemed to me unsuitable since the therapist does not act as a leader of a group in the usual sense. In addition the term had a political flavour at the time (Mussolini, Hitler). 'Director' would be misleading since in a technical sense he is 'non-directive'. I had already, in group-analytic usage, introduced the term 'conductor'. This allows one to express more specifically when the group analyst acts as a leader and when he does not.

The term 'leader' is used here in the ordinary sense of one who wishes to lead a group to a certain goal, in some respects the opposite of what a good therapist does who sets out to wean the group from its wish to be led. The group analyst does not often function as a leader in the ordinary sense. In thus refraining from leading he shows up, 'by default' as it were, what the group wants and expects from a 'leader'. I used this type of observation from group-analytic experience to throw some light on the idea of leadership. This is here explained as it was not apparently appreciated by part of the New York audience at the time. The paper, nevertheless, deals explicitly with what the therapist-conductor does or does not do in group analysis.

The group-analytic situation has peculiar features which have developed from its therapeutic intentions. Such a group is composed of members who are particularly disturbed in their relationship to other people. When they meet they have no other object beyond that of dealing with their disturbances. They are not given any aim or object, no set topics or programme for discussion. Instructions are kept to the bare minimum. The discussion is completely loose and undisciplined,

a free association of ideas which can best be described as a 'free-floating discussion'. Ordinary politeness in social intercourse goes by the board and frank disclosure of mutual feeling, reaction and attitude is encouraged.

The therapist, the natural leader of this group, does not assume active leadership. Moreover, he is not primarily concerned with the formation of its members into a good and efficient group. If he were so concerned, he would do the exact opposite of all this: he would give the group a concrete aim, a strong lead, and see to it that the members are well predisposed to social co-operation, and have a high degree of individual and social integration.

This is a peculiar group then to take as a basis when talking of group formation and leadership. Nevertheless, what this group with its very specific features can teach us is valid in other types of group, both from a scientific and a practical point of view. This group throws light on the processes of group formation by emphasizing the disturbances of these processes and on the function of the leader, by default. Let us now say something about aspects which qualify it positively as an instrument of research.

(1) It is a face-to-face group comprising seven or eight patients and the therapist. This proves large enough to observe psychological reactions in their social context. The group is also large enough to be representative of its community. Yet it is intimate enough to trace the ramifications of these reactions in the individual member and to explore their roots inside the individual.

(2) The personalities come to the fore in the light of their mutual interactions. The lid is lifted, as it were, and one gets a full view of that which is usually concealed.

(3) The fact that the group is composed of psychoneurotic and, occasionally, slightly psychotic patients, and that it is concerned with therapy puts emphasis on unconscious aspects and primitive reactions. What is normally latent becomes manifest in this group.

(4) The leader—as will be seen presently—is in a favourable position as a participant observer.

Things are multidimensional in such a group: we can describe them on many different levels or cross-sections. We will select two such levels which form opposite poles of a sliding scale. We will call them the manifest and the latent or primary level.

The manifest level comprises what actually manifestly goes on in this group between the patients themselves and their doctor. It is concerned with adult, contemporary reality. The primary level refers to processes and mechanisms which are predominently unconscious; to primitive, infantile and primordial behaviour. Roughly, these two levels correspond to the secondary and primary processes of the dream.

For the sake of presentation and to introduce some simplifications, we will consider the leader and the group separately, although they are in a state of continuous mutual interaction and conditioning and cannot really be isolated from each other. It might also prove helpful to contrast analytic and integrative processes, although these, in turn, inevitably go hand in hand. Analytic processes have, more immediately, a disruptive and disturbing effect, whereas integrative ones are constructive and supporting.

We shall first consider what happens on each of these two levels, the manifest and the latent or primary one, apart and later take into consideration what bearing they have on each other. Suppose we listen on the radio on two different wavelengths not to two different concerts but to one and the same. Let us assume that we are interested in analysing the symphony—the parts the strings and wind instruments play. We would have arranged our reception in such a way that on one wavelength we hear the string instruments, whereas the wind instruments are only faintly indicated, and on the other wavelength it would be the other way round. We would then first listen in on the one wavelength, then on the other, and, finally on both of them together. This is an analogy of the way in which I propose to proceed.

As far as the group is concerned the two levels we are about to consider also correspond to two basic problems. Basic problem number one, on the manifest level, concerns the relationship to other people in adult life and contemporary reality. Basic problem number two concerns the relationship to parental authority, as represented in the primordial image of the leader, and corresponds to past, infantile and primordial reality.

We have said that, on the manifest level, the therapist does not lead. This is, however, a negative definition. One cannot simply 'not lead'. One must do something. The quality of 'not leading' follows rather by implication from what the therapist

does, from the interpretation he gives to his role. What he does and does not do is more in the nature of directing or conducting. In order to differentiate this from a leader role, we shall refer to him on this manifest level as a 'conductor'.

In this way we can say that, while the therapist does not assume active leadership of the group, he conducts it continuously. We shall not enlarge upon the ways in which he does this because this would comprise in detail the whole technique of the group analyst. We can only mention here a few points which are particularly relevant for our present purpose. The conductor keeps in the background as to his person. He follows the lead of the group and makes himself an instrument of the group. Whereas the group is leader-centred, he puts, from the very beginning, the group as a whole into the centre and submits his own function completely to the interests of the group. He sees to it that his function can, in time, be understood to be in the service of the group. He is a member of the group, making his particular contribution. Whenever possible he lets the group speak, brings out agreements and disagreements, repressed tendencies and reactions against them. He thus activates and mobilizes what is latent and helps in the analysis and interpretation of content and interpersonal relationships. He encourages the active participation of the group and uses the contributions of its members by preference to his own. On the analytic side, the conductor's function can thus be compared with that of a catalytic agent.

He treats the group as adults on an equal level to his own and exerts an important influence by his own example. He sets a pattern of desirable behaviour rather than having to preach to the group. He puts emphasis on the 'here and now' and promotes tolerance and appreciation of individual differences. The conductor represents and promotes reality, reason, tolerance, understanding, insight, catharsis, independence, frankness, and an open mind for new experiences. This happens by way of a living, corrective emotional experience.

It can be seen that the conductor thus activates both analytic and integrative processes. Disturbance and bewilderment caused by the uncovering of alarming, new, hitherto unconscious material is counterbalanced by the increased strength of the group as a result of its growing integration. In fact, the energies set free through the analytic process are being used in the service of this integration. We must, therefore, modify

our previous statement that the group analyst is not concerned with the formation and integration of the group. While it is true that he is not primarily concerned with it, it is nevertheless of the greatest importance that the group can balance the impact of ever new sources of disturbances through an increased level of tolerance, based on its own growing strength. This is quite apart from the importance of a better integration in its own rights. It is for this reason that the conductor addresses the group, on this manifest level, as if they were mature adults and as if they were, or were to become, an integrated whole.

Besides, in the absence of an aim at integration, the dynamic, group-disruptive, socially disturbing aspects of symptoms could not be brought out. One could say that the conductor aims at a 'tolerable imbalance' between constructive and disruptive tendencies, or upsetting and supporting influences, and that he has continuously to assess their proportion. In other words, he must judge how much new ground can be broken, and on what level, in view of the tolerance attained. This refers both to the individual members as well as to the group as a whole.

It can be seen that this interpretation of the conductor's role puts him into a particularly favourable position as an 'observer' of the group, including himself. He is aware that he could not, in any case, observe a living process without entering into it and exerting influence and change. By being inside the group as well as outside of it at the same time, he can, however, particularly well observe the dynamics of the group including those concerning his own influence.

As far as the group is concerned, each individual member is actively brought up against what I have called for our purposes the first basic problem of social life: his relationship to other people and to the group as a whole. He has to solve this actively. The clash between his own egotistic needs and impulses and the restrictions imposed by the group, as expressed in the formula 'the individual and the group', is replaced by the co-operative formula 'the individual in the group'. More explicitly, the individual learns that he needs the group's authority for his own security and for his protection against the encroachment of the other fellow's impulses. He has, therefore, to create and maintain this group's authority himself accepting willingly necessary modification of his own instinctual impulses. He learns also that, in return for this sacrifice in unbounded activity, he receives the support of the group for his

own particular individuality. He is a participant in a double process, dwelling in both camps of this conflict: he must tolerate the wishes and desires of others if his own claims are to be tolerated and he must restrict in himself what he feels he cannot tolerate in others.

This attitude is acquired inevitably, as a result of emotional and psychological processes in interaction, but it can be raised also to the level of an intellectual conviction. This necessary adaptation to reality and the rules of social intercourse is the more acceptable as the analytic process at the same time frees the patient from the anachronistic fear of, and dependence upon, primordial authoritarian images.

That this happens on a manifest level is only possible because the conductor does not play the part of a leader.

In summing up what happens on this manifest level in artificial isolation, we may say: analytic and integrative processes in their interplay bring about a growing-up (maturation) on the part of the group. The conductor makes the group active participants; acting preferably through the group, he mainly contributes as a catalyst and observer; activating analytic and integrative processes, he makes the group stronger. While there is a decrescendo of his own active participation, there is a crescendo move towards integration and self-reliance on the part of the group.

We will now switch over on our wavelength and listen in to the other level.

This is, of course, under usual circumstances, unconscious. It can be made conscious to a degree in group analysis but this will usually happen only in a group who go through rather prolonged and extensive treatment. The correct handling on this level is of greater importance than the degree to which the group can be made conscious of it. The interpretation rests on what is known from psycho-analytic investigations and, in particular, from Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.

In the unconscious phantasy of the group, the therapist is put in the position of a primordial leader image; he is omniscient and omnipotent and the group expects magical help from him. He can actually be said to be a father figure and it is all too easy to interpret his position really as that of a father or mother and see the group as representing a family. This is not my impression. Whereas family transference reactions between the

members of the group and the leader can occasionally be seen, the configuration as a whole does not, by any means, necessarily shape according to the family pattern. It is true that the family is a group but not that the group is a family. Group psychology must develop its own concepts in its own rights and not borrow them from individual psychology. The group is older than the individual.

On re-reading recently Freud's book I found, to my surprise and satisfaction, Freud himself as an ally in this. I will quote: 'We must conclude that the psychology of the group is the oldest human psychology; what we have isolated as individual psychology, by neglecting all traces of the group, has only since come into prominence out of the old group psychology by a gradual process which may still, perhaps, be described as incomplete'.

Later on, when Freud talks of the relationship of a single member of the primal horde to the primal father he mentions 'his archaic inheritance which has also made him compliant towards his parents and which had experienced an individual reanimation in his relation to his father'. We can see from this that the group can reanimate this archaic inheritance directly.

However this may be, the group on this level shows a need and craving for a leader in the image of an omnipotent, godlike father figure. We can add now an important feature to our picture of the group-analytic situation: the therapist is placed by the group into the position of an absolute leader—a position which he cannot lose, although one may say he can spoil it. We shall, later on, see that this condition is essential for the meaning and weight of his actions on the manifest level, as a conductor.

The group needs the leader's authority on this immature level. Apart from the fact that individual members can, in this way, approach their individual conflicts with authoritative figures, the group as a whole can thus effect its 'second basic experience', namely the adjustment of the relationship between the leader and the group.

What does the leader in group analysis do on this level? Briefly, he accepts his position in order to use it in the best interests of the group and, eventually, to wean the group from this need for authoritative guidance. What does this imply? First of all, that he must recognize the situation for what it is.

Again, in his position as observer, he is very well placed to study the dynamic deployment of this relationship.

Secondly, he must be free from the tempation to play this godlike role, to exploit it for his own needs, or to take it in any sense personally. This presupposes that he himself does not unconsciously share in this phantasy and need. If he did he would be afraid of accepting it, a not infrequent reason why therapists are afraid of taking on groups. They are really afraid of having to live up to their own unconscious phantasy of a leader which, of course, they could not do. If a leader is fixed by his own character to any part or aspect of this primitive role, he may be quite a good leader in relationship to any group who are in need of just the 'leader type' that he personifies. The situation then becomes fixed in that relationship and cannot move out of it. We then get the different types of relationship which have been so well described by Fritz Redl. In the group-analytic situation we see these types of group-leader relationships as passing episodes in a continuous flow.

The group analyst accepts whatever position the group chooses to confer on him. This means that he does not ever actively assume such a position, or act upon it, nor on the other hand, deny it by word or deed. He behaves in this respect very much in the same way as the psycho-analyst does in the transference situation. He does so mainly for two reasons. Firstly, he must be in a position to give the group the security and immunity emanating from his authority as a leader as long as the group is in need of them. Secondly, he must accept this position as a leader in order to be able to liquidate it later on. He could not wean the group from something which had not been previously established. The conductor, however, is prepared for and, in fact, invites a decrescendo move from his authoritarian pedestal. Here again he behaves passively, he lets it happen. He does not step down but lets the group, in steps and stages, bring him down to earth. The change which takes place is that from a leader of the group to a leader in the group. The group, in its turn, replaces the leader's authority by that of the group.

In summing up as to what happens on this primary level one can say that there is an important move on the part of the group in the sense of its being weaned from the infantile need for authoritative guidance. This is the result of an all-important decrescendo move as regards authority on the part of the leader.

We shall now briefly consider how these two levels interact upon each other.

How does the manifest level influence the primary one? The first point to consider is that most of what happens on the primary level does so by implication from the manifest level. There are two moves through which the manifest level acts upon the primary one, one on the part of the leader, the other on the part of the group.

As to the leader, we see now the full implication of his refraining from active leadership on the manifest level. Only this enables him to preserve his neutrality, as it were, on the primary level. If he were to take an active leading part as a conductor, the group would be bound to interpret the position he takes up as that of a primary leader and confuse him in these two roles. On the part of the group, as we have seen before, there is a growing maturation on the manifest level as a result of analytic and integrative processes. The conductor, by inaugurating and consistently supporting these processes, digs his own grave as a leader, as it were. This growth in maturity and strength on the manifest level brings about the all-important decrescendo move as regards dependence upon, and authority of, the primary leader.

It is more difficult to state how the primary level influences the manifest one. The primary level is entirely latent but, without it as a background, much of what happens manifestly would lose all its weight and meaning. Without having this basic authority at the back of him, the conductor might simply lose all prestige by behaving as he does. The group might be bewildered and anxious, succumb to a hopeless feeling of frustration and interpret the conductor's reluctance simply as weakness and incompetence. In its despair it would look for another leader; not necessarily for another therapist, but worse still would elevate somebody sufficiently vociferous out of its own ranks into the position of leader. He, particularly if neurotic, could be expected to abuse this position and certainly not to use it in the ways here described for the benefit of the group.

The group, to begin with, without the sanction of the leader would not have the courage to inaugurate the analytic process, to break new ground, to test values and accepted codes of behaviour. The conductor's own contribution, explanations, interpretations, questioning of standards, judgments and values

would not have the necessary weight; nor would his own example have the necessary significance to modify behaviour. In the clash of personalities under high emotional tension, the members of the group need the immanent presence and protection of a father figure in whose impartiality and justice they have confidence. Nor could the frank disclosures of these interpersonal relationships, often of a highly aggressive kind, come about without the validity of his sanction.

In listening on our two wavelengths together we find that the two levels have a dynamic, reciprocal relationship toward each other: a crescendo move in the maturity of the group and a decrescendo move in the authority of the leader. The crescendo move of the group on the manifest level inaugurates and maintains the decrescendo move of the leader on the latent, primary level. Dependence upon authority is replaced by reliance on the strength of the group itself. The leader furthers the analytic process throughout. This analysis of intrapersonal and interpersonal difficulties liberates energies and promotes integration.

As to integration, the position is rather different. The group borrows, at first, strength from the leader's authority and tends to integrate through him. This preliminary integration rests on immature, infantile grounds and, to a certain extent, counteracts the integration on a mature level, a group-centred integration. In his role as conductor, the therapist supports this group-centred integration directly. Gradually as the group becomes stronger and can integrate better on its own, it is less and less in need of borrowing strength. Once the decrescendo move in the authority of the leader has set in, the weaning from the leader's authority lends indirect support to the positive integration of the group. The conductor while observing this process on both levels, has to direct it in the sense here described, watching the appropriate balance between upsetting factors and the tolerance of the group to cope with them. He thus exerts an activating influence on both analytic and supportive processes.

The group itself provides two significant experiences that correspond to the two levels outlined and which, in turn, interact and mutually support each other. One is adjustment to fellow beings (social adjustment) and to present-day reality, occurring predominantly on the manifest level. The other is the correction of dependence upon authority—in particular

anachronistic authority—which is predominantly on the infantile, primary plane.

The group-analytic situation is a valuable tool for psychotherapy and for the scientific study of human beings in a social setting.

It seems of particular importance that the observer avoid the fallacy of transferring the concepts gained from the psychology of the isolated individual, in particular psycho-analytic concepts, too readily to this new field of observation. If he thinks, for instance, in terms of transference of the family group containing father, mother and siblings, of projection, identification, repression, resistance, reaction formation, fixation, and so on, merely in the way they appear in the individual situation, he will find all these, to be sure, in operation; but he will not learn much that is new. If he thinks, however, of the group situation which he has in front of him, he will find a wealth of new observations as regards the dynamics of the group and, indeed, new light will be thrown upon the mechanisms operating in individual psycho-analysis.

The paramount need here is to create a scientific view of group psychodynamics and such concepts that will enable us to understand and exchange each other's experiences and problems by expressing them in a language that is commonly understood. In this way the problems and observations of the group therapist and group analyst become available as immediate contributions to the study of the group elsewhere and *vice versa*. With this orientation in the mind of the conductor, the group-analytic situation becomes the natural meeting ground of the biologist, anthropologist, sociologist and psycho-analyst. In fact it displays the living process as what it really is—a co-ordinated and concerted whole.

The second impression I hope to have conveyed is this: that the spirit in which these groups are conducted and the qualities required on the part of the conductor have an essential affinity to education according to the concepts of a democratic way of life and for good world citizenship.

We have mentioned what are the essential preconditions in the therapist and shown that his qualifications correspond to a desirable type of leader in a democratic community. He must be reasonably secure and reality-prone in his own person. He must have outgrown and be immune against the temptation, however strong, to play God and to use his group for his own

satisfaction—that is, he must have solved his own Oedipus conflict satisfactorily. He loves and respects the group and his aim is to make its members self-responsible individuals. He wants to replace submission by co-operation on equal terms between equals. In spite of his emotional sensitivity, he has self-confidence, which comes from modesty, and the courage to lead, which springs from his social responsibility.

When all is said, there will remain a nucleus, not at present further reducible by science, more nearly expressed perhaps by art and religion, bound up with his own personality, a primary rapport (charisma Max Weber called it) based on love, respect and faith. Without these, he cannot awaken nor bind the spell of what the poet called 'the old enchantment'.