Group Interdependence

By Ian Gordon-Brown

In February 1974, when the address on which this article is based was given in London, the United Kingdom was working a three-day week. This was brought on by the world oil crisis, a mine workers' strike shutting all pits, and a severe dispute on the railways. They were among the events leading to a general election and the fall of the Conservative administration.

We are at the dawn of the Aquarian age. Aquarius, as we know, is a sign connected with group consciousness. Insofar as we shall have problems in Aquarius, our problems will have to do with groups, group relations, group adjustments and group living. My own guess is that the most difficult issues will have to do with inter-group adjustments. The crisis through which we are passing is a good example, a foretaste, of the kind of problems we shall have to solve.

Few of us realise quite how intimately we are all connected up in this modern world until we hit such a crisis. We then discover that one group literally holds the power of life and death for other groups and for a nation. I am told that there are some twenty men who can bring the whole of our railway system to a halt. They are those who switch electric power, and balance its flow, from the national grid into the railway network.

We talk rather facilely today of interdependence implying that this is the nature and the basis of our interrelation. But interdependence implies a two-way balance and a reciprocal flow. I do not think we have remotely grasped the Aquarian concept of interdependence, which is a network idea. Rather are our present-day interrelations characterised by dependence, and there is spiritually and psychologically a profound difference.

Today great groups of people, and nations, are dependent on one another to a high degree. One centrally placed group can dictate to others, or to a nation, and those others are really powerless to do anything about it. We have to ask ourselves whether this is what Aquarius and Aquarian group interdependence is all about, or whether we have somehow got things wrong.

Freedom and the Self

Let us think for a moment of the emergence of the great human instinct of self-assertion, or the assertion of the self, and the principle of freedom. One of the triumphs of the Piscean age is that it has brought man to the point where he insists on being himself. The value and dignity of being fully human comes near the top of our scale of priorities. Many factors have made this possible, but particularly education, mass communication, rising living standards and the revolution in expectations. Indeed in many countries high wages are no longer sufficient to bribe people to do great numbers of dull, routine, monotonous, dehumanising jobs. They prefer lower paid but more interesting work.

The growth of the sense of freedom and individual independence is a great human achievement. It is also the force that brings the problem of excessive dependence in inter-group relations into such sharp focus. It brings to light the subtle, powerful yet hidden compulsions that are being woven into the fabric of our social relationships.

Justice for Minorities

How, for example, does a minority get fair treatment from the majority? How do the miners get the country and its government to listen, to really listen to what they are saying? The answer of classical economics is that the free play of supply and demand would solve the problem. Miners could leave the pits; other sources of power would be developed, and when this process became too expensive, miners' wages would rise to the point where labour would be attracted back to the pits. And indeed this has to some extent been happening.
But we also know that economic life today is not quite that simple. There are many constraints to such idealised flexibility, constraints such as no other jobs in the neighbourhood, income policies, non-economic values and pressures such as families in long established homes not wanting to move, children happily settled in school, not to mention the immense difficulty in making sudden changes in modern capital-intensive industries and economies.

So the wage earner is often stuck; he cannot move. And again we must ask: how does this minority which feels itself unjustly treated by society get that society to listen to it? How do women get equal pay? How do old age pensioners avoid always being at the end of the queue? What about such essential but economically weak groups as dustmen and postal workers? The list is endless. The unpalatable fact is that the weak cannot make a loud enough noise, they cannot 'hurt' the community. So more often than not the community ignores their just and reasonable demands and goes its own selfish way.

However, when a group that can hurt the larger whole actually starts to do so, there are screams of protest. Such a group is almost invariably charged with irresponsibility and urged from all quarters to consider the needs and welfare of the wider community. What is such a minority group to do, especially if it is convinced that the wider community has for too long taken no notice of their fully justified demands?

Whatever may be right in particular circumstances, it is no solution in the long run for the majority to ignore and override minority feelings. Or indeed for the minority to do nothing and let others trample all over them.

World Power Play

How to adjust the rights and demands of different groups within the body politic is, therefore, a crucial human dilemma. The international oil crisis provides another striking and symbolic illustration of the problem. A small group of immensely powerful states, in terms of their economic importance, 'hold the world to ransom'. It is of course no more in the interests of the oil sheiks to ruin the economies of the developed nations than it is of the miners to wreck the British economy. But they have got in a few weeks of threats and power play what would have taken years of polite bargaining to accomplish.

Who will now follow them? For twenty-five years, ever since the end of world war two, the idealists among us have been trying to persuade the rich nations to give far more aid to the underdeveloped nations of the third world. You will remember the goal of the Development Decade, that wealthy states should allocate one percent of their Gross National Product for this purpose. While large sums were poured into armaments, this one percent goal was only reached by one or two countries in one or two years. Pleas of humanity and morality fell on deaf ears.

So we may expect that as and when 'poor nations' find themselves in positions of strategic economic power, they, too, will 'turn the screws', and force the Western world to pay up. And who can blame them? They too have a right to live.

The immediate coal and rail disputes will sooner or later be settled. Although we can help with our thoughts, the forces in the situation have long since gathered their own momentum and one can do little but let them play themselves out.

Agents of the Will

But at this full moon of Aquarius we can and should take note of deeper issues. Some of you may recall the statement of Djwhal Khul that the Shamballa force is operating in humanity in two ways. One is through leaders, particularly the political leaders and dictators; the other is through public opinion, the political will and the public or mass will.

The magnetic nucleus of every group is will, the central point of purpose, the jewel in the lotus. Group work and effective groups become, in a sense and at a certain level, agents of the will. This is an important point.

The British Prime Minister [at the time of writing, Edward Heath] is clearly a man of will, a channel for the first ray force. The miners likewise have mobilised their will for the struggle and test of strength. The government is a symbol and channel and expression of the first ray. Symbolically and factually the miners work in densest substance, in and with the mineral kingdom, which as a king-
Freedom is governed by the first and seventh rays.

Remember too that London, the centre where the issue must be worked out, is a major planetary centre and channel for first ray energy, for Shamballa force, though happily in its building aspect. Thus we have the political will and the public (miner's) will doing battle in a major first ray centre.

1975 will see a renewed and more powerful inflow of Shamballa force into humanity. Who knows how long the effects will take to percolate through. One hundred years ago it was some ten years before there was an outcropping of organisations resulting from that end-of-century hierarchical push. This time one expects a far quicker response. And I suggest we can expect many difficulties unless we can get a deeper and better understanding both of group work and how to adjust the relations of minority and majority groups within the larger community. The will and the group are too closely linked to make for comfort if we get things wrong.

Networks

Let us, therefore, examine some aspects of group work. The Hierarchy works through small groups of disciples, whose link with the centre is strong and tested. In larger groups there is dilution. Too powerful a flow of will through the centre of a larger group disturbs and aggravates those who are not fully identified with group purpose.

The larger the group, whether it be an organisation, a union, a business concern or a government department, the harder it is to 'manage'. Rules, regulations, orders and constraints of various kinds are imposed to hold it together and keep it true to its purpose. Aquarian values of freedom, spontaneity, flexibility and etheric, as distinct from dense physical, organisation are very difficult to maintain as soon as a group gets beyond a certain size.

We are told that in the new age groups will form and be disbanded with greater ease and less pain and with far less 'organisation structure' than in the Piscean era. This has been nicely illustrated by the way in which the younger generation of activists in America organise pressure movements. Donald Schon in his Reith Lectures said that all you needed was a telephone switchboard, an operator, a bit of cash, and a directory of the network of activists across the continent. You rang them up, and passed the message, and they, in an autonomous way, got to work.

Dependence, Independence, Interdependence

This is the concept of the network, linking small groups, focal points of light and goodwill. No committees, no constitutions, no organisational structure; beautiful in its simplicity and for certain purposes immensely effective.

Which brings me back to dependence, independence and interdependence. We can probably agree that independence, in the sense of being unrelated to the human race or condition, is neither desirable nor possible. No man is or can be an island.

I have tried to point out that dependent relations can also never be right relations, except in the case of the young or handicapped and even with them the goal is always to transcend dependency at the earliest possible opportunity.

Dependency in group relations, especially where majority and minority groups are locked into a situation where they are forced to fight if they cannot agree, is socially dangerous and destructive. Modern society, with its huge conurbations, large organisations, intricate technologies, top-heavy legal and bureaucratic structures, excessive centralisation, has created an immense number of dependent relations between groups whose members increasingly demand a say in controlling events that affect them.

Freedom is closely related to the will. Mindless monolithic social structures are fit only for zombies. Modern freedom loving and free thinking Aquarians cannot tolerate this kind of prison house. The freedom and order which can be one of the glories of the Aquarian age will not easily develop through our present oversized and under-brained human organisations.

The immediate danger comes from the increasing potency of the Shamballa force and the growing responsiveness of men everywhere, and especially groups of all kinds, to that force. The combination can be explosive in conditions of excessive dependence.
Aquarian Group Work

Let me quickly summarise some of the steps we can take and the principles we should observe in group work and social organisation if we are to build a world society in which Aquarian interdependence is the rule. These also are some of the keys to the right reception and channelling of the Shamballa force.

First: Work with and in small groups. Where these grow into a larger movement keep the operating units small and as autonomous as the work allows. Let common goals and work be the binding link, not a common administration.

Second: Strengthen the concept of network, for links between individuals, within and between groups, and as a sound basis for the social organisation of communities, nations and world society. One of the significances of the Triangles network is as an ‘ideal model’ for social organisation.

Third: Delegate and decentralise both responsibility and decision-making powers. The strength of a society is in its people, their capacity to carry responsibility, and their freedom to make decisions. This can only be learned by doing. One of the fundamental errors of modern social organisation is excessive centralisation of decision making, which is an inevitable corollary of emphasising organisation.

Fourth: Be flexible. Create a vehicle when needed, and let it disappear when its task is done. People and their capacities are the primary resource, not organisations. Let us therefore ‘grow people’.

Fifth: Work for interdependence in society. Neither independence nor dependence are adequate for Aquarius. Self-sustaining communities of medium size is the right model, and the Chinese commune principle could point the way. Big is not always bad, but it is rarely best.

Sixth: Technology must become subservient to people. Avoid adopting any design, machine, plan or development which will obstruct and inhibit human growth.

You will ask about love. Love is, of course, the first principle. The prescriptions I have listed are prescriptions for a heart network. They are an expression of love and therefore can provide a channel for that energy. In the last analysis the Shamballa force requires a heart network. It is one of the tragedies of modern living that we have built instead an organisation of forms.