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STYLE OF LEADERSHIP & WAY OF LIFE:
Politicians and the Theory of
Development

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The thesis of this paper is a simple one: just as the message of the mass-media has been said to be the media themselves (the medium is the message), the message of the politicians can to a large extent be said to be the politicians themselves. In other words, what people will pick up from politicians in power, and also from those aspiring to power will not so much be the verbal message in writing, in speeches and so on as their style of leadership and their way of life in general. Consciously or unconsciously it will be assumed that these two together give more valid clues to the type of society the politician wants to see in practice than the type of society he portrays with his words, in ideology. More precisely, the style of leadership will reveal the basic map of the social structure he (because it is usually a he!) wants to see enacted, and his way of life will tell something about the way of life he would like to see in society. This is a basic reason why magazines, popular books and also newspapers and other media dedicate so much space to the doing and living of politicians, whereas their speeches are often taken cum grano salis, except to demonstrate inconsistencies.

Having said this it should immediately be pointed out that there is no simple way of spelling out this thesis. Imagine a politician is living in a grandiose manner, a big mansion, marble and crystal, valets, lavish parties bestowed upon fellow politicians and other key figures, all the trappings of security and servility. The hidden message is very simple: the society he wants is not a society with equality where standard of living is concerned regardless of what he says, regardless of how communist, socialist, social-democrat, populist or what not he might be. There is a simple reason for this: everybody has some idea about how much is available in society in terms of resources, how many people there are as citizens of this society and can figure out more or less what the average level of living can be within at least a short-term future.

The conclusion will be that the way of life available to that particular politician is only intended for a very few, in other words that the distribution of what people have will continue to be heavily skewed. The gossip columns become political clues!

But the reaction to that will not necessarily be negative. If the politician stands for equality as a key value to be realized here and now he may be seen as a hypocrite, but then that may also be seen as a part of what it is to be a politician. Thus, the message is not only one of continued inequality, but also one of continued hypocrisy. The population will take note of both, some may protest, most are likely to think "OK, so be it". If the politician actually also stands for inequality and says this quite clearly he may score a point or two as an honest person. There will be a consistency in the message that may stimulate efforts to overthrow him by those who stand for equality and also practise it, but the overall reaction may not necessarily be negative.

This has to do with the reaction to a politician who both preaches and practises equality, one who lives modestly, in a 3-room apartment, with an inexpensive little car, no lavish display of anything material, however much the person may be exercising power. The fourth combination is actually also an empirical possibility: the materially highly modest leader who stands for an inegalitarian society - like Salazar in Portugal during more than a generation, as opposed to Franco in neighbour Spain - certainly both preaching and practising inequality (but not misery).

One reason for the mixed reactions to those who practise equality by living at a level of austerity or frugality more or less corresponding to the social average would be that they do not project for the population a model of anything material to aspire to. What they communicate is actually that "this is enough, if I don't need more you certainly don't need more either, and if you are above my level in material living

you should feel badly about it! Shed what is unnecessary and go down to a more reasonable level!" Thus, the message is moralistic.

Here there are many factors at work at the same time. First, it should be noted that relative to a politician who lives with maximum ostentation, far out of reach of anybody else in the society most others actually become equal, not with the politician, but relative to each other. But relative to a politician immersed in the middle of the social scale of material wellbeing others become highly unequal: there are those above and those below, there are those who feel that they ought to climb down and those who feel that they should get up. The latter politician will instill highly different practices in the population to the extent that he serves as an example, whereas the political leader way out on top of everybody instills the same practice, adulation and admiration mixed or unmixed with hatred, or social climbing in the direction of the top, or both.

Second, a way of life is certainly a way of exercising leadership. Let us assume by definition that the politician has power: normative (idea) power, remunerative (carrot) power, punitive (stick) power.⁽¹⁾ If his material living is above everybody else's then there is some kind of reassuring correspondence or concordance in this: he who has more power also has more of other things, and vice versa. There is something threatening in the discordance brought about by somebody who lives just like one of us, but nevertheless has power over all of us. If the power is control of resources, of goods and bads, in other words is essentially of the carrot and/or the stick kind, then it even looks as if there is an element of insincerity at work. If he has all these things why doesn't it also show up in his way of living? Of course, that politician may argue that these resources are not his, he can only make use of them on behalf of the government, the State, the people, the country. But suspicions about a secret life, a life of a totally different kind when he is closer to where the resources are located, hidden from the people, will abound. Gossip fills in the gap between power and privilege and makes for an image of crank/concordance between the two.

There is, however, a much deeper reason for the threat emanating from that type of political leader. It is this: that he is honest, that he has precisely what it looks as if he has, that he is not going to use his position to accumulate riches now or later, for himself or for friends and members of the family. In that case his power becomes more the power of the person than the power of the position, in other words charismatic. His immediate power basis will be normative, the commands emanating from the person through words and deeds and ways of life, and less based on his access to the triggers of the levers releasing carrots and/or sticks. In other words, the person becomes more like a saint, like a guru, to use the Western and Eastern expressions for what is essentially the same thing.⁽²⁾

But in that case there is something basic to learn from the theory of sainthood and guruhood. Saints and gurus do not lead ordinary, average lives. They are not inserted in the middle of human society. Rather, they are precisely like the ostentatious political leader but in reverse: where the former has everything material possible, the saints and the gurus have next to nothing. As a part of society they are still placed at the extreme. The society remains pyramidal, only that the pyramid is upside down. Or, more correctly: precisely because the material pyramid is upside down the non-material pyramid becomes stronger, more secure. The saints and the gurus pay for their ascendancy over others in terms of normative power by frugally sacrificing certain goods and inflicting certain bads. It is by passing this test successfully that they attain the power position they have. Material possessions may certainly be converted into power and not only into carrot and stick power. Material dispossession may, however, sometimes be even more effectively converted into power, but then mainly into normative power.

What has been said so far adds up to one thing: how difficult it is to be a political leader if he wants to practise what he preaches and if what he preaches is equality! There is

some truth in the adage that people want somebody to look up to, although this is certainly a saying overexploited by those only concerned with being up, and being looked up to, not with working for people at all. And people probably have a sense of concordance or consistency: if it is natural/normal that he who is high up materially has resource power at his disposal then it is equally natural and normal that he who is very low down but nevertheless has power must have it as normative power. Two ways of establishing leadership: through conspicuous consumption and through conspicuous sacrifice! This does not mean that it is not possible for somebody to be inserted in the middle of society and have a title as president or prime minister - the question to be raised is merely whether that person really is a politician, playing neither Bigman, nor Saint?

This question should be discussed seriously. The Swiss example, as well as Scandinavian examples, may indicate that such leaders are in fact highly substitutable however much they may be written up during their period of holding office. In the Swiss case this is extremely much so, to the point that one can almost see the president as a functionary, or as some kind of trustee very much like the president of a voluntary association. He has qualities others do not have, otherwise he would not be in that position, but he is primus inter pares for one year only, and very much one of them. In fact, there may be great uncertainties surrounding his identity, even his name, whereas the leader materially very much at the top or materially very much at the bottom will tend to be known to almost everybody.

Let us now try to go more deeply into this, by looking more at the structure of leadership. One convenient, conventional distinction is between the authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire leaders⁽³⁾ the leader who dictates, the leader who enters into dialogue and is responsive to demands and wishes and reactions, the leader who essentially lets things happen and is leader in the name only. In the first case there is a one-way process of power, in the second case a two-way process, in the

third case the leader is not a power center at all. How does this relate to what has been said about ways of life of the political leader?

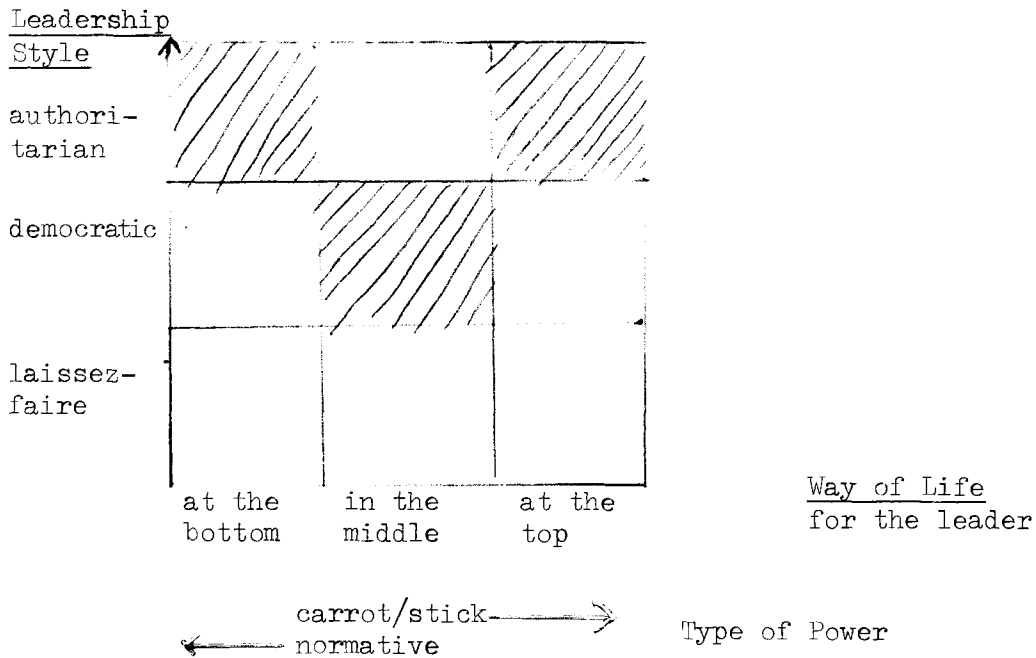
There is a complete compatibility between an authoritarian leadership style and being located at the top of the pyramid or the bottom of the reverse pyramid; authoritarian and charismatic regimes are known for exactly this. That type of leader can of course engage in democratic practices, but will probably not be believed. There will always be the implicit question: democracy up to what point? Is he/she really willing to relinquish material possessions or saintlihood/guruhood? Is he not merely a catalyst for democratic practices among others - at most? He may be in it, but not really of it, being so different from the rest of us!

Correspondingly, the leader with an egalitarian lifestyle is in principle in a situation compatible with the exercise of democratic power. There is no extreme difference in material living standard setting him off, be that above or below, from the people clustering around the average in which he has inserted himself - hence, a two-way flow of communication should be eminently possible. But is it equally possible to lead others: he does not stand out as an exception? For that reason he is likely to be seen not as a general centre of power for all kinds of functions but more as a functionary, possibly as a central point of communication, not even needed as a catalytic agent, but as some kind of traffic cop in the complex two-way traffic of power in a truly democratic, egalitarian society. Needless to say, from this the step to the laissez-faire style is but a short one: he becomes a political leader in name only, leaving no traces behind. A good cloak for the non-entity!⁽⁴⁾

Thus, we are back to the old thesis that there may have to be some mystique surrounding the exercise of power. The two extremes mentioned have that mystique in highly different ways, although they may administer it well or badly. The one in the middle is demystified - why should he then have power over others? There are

two obvious ways out: through conspicuous consumption or conspicuous sacrifice with some talent he might even combine them. But by staying in the middle the situation becomes an almost meaningless one, or only meaningful in a very participatory society.⁽⁵⁾

In order to try to explore this let us first summarize what has been said so far in a chart that will permit us some further speculations:



In this chart the 3 ways of life for the leader are placed along the horizontal axis and the 3 styles of leadership along the vertical axis, yielding a total of 9 combinations. However, as laissez-faire is not exactly political leadership and as it is considered unlikely both that authoritarian leadership can be exercised from the middle of society and egalitarian, democratic leadership from the very top or the very bottom (materially speaking) three combinations are singled out for particular attention. The two types of authoritarian power differ however: as indicated in the figure the way of life also puts some constraints on the type of power exercised; a theme that has been developed above. Of course, all the other six combinations are logically possible, but the assumption is that the three indicated will be the empirically most likely. It should also be noted that the authoritarian at the top may be the benevolent carrot type, doing out favors; or the malevolent stick type, the tyrant. He may also be both, carrots to the cronies, sticks to others.⁽⁶⁾

Also, the egalitarian- democratic combination can easily develop into an egalitarian laissez-faire combination. At this point political leadership stricto sensu vanishes and what is left is a vacuum where leadership is concerned, but not necessarily a social system that does not function.

And this is the point where the whole notion of leadership should be discussed critically. Are leaders strictly speaking necessary? Are leaders there in order to lead or could it be that there are leaders for some other reasons, that leadership is secondary, something else is primary? In that case, what could these primary factors be that give rise to "leaders"?

At least three answers suggest themselves.

First, we are used to seeing prestige and privilege as something given to those with power in order for them to exercise power more easily. Maybe it would be better to see it the other way round: that power is in fact some kind of bonus given to those who have prestige and privilege for some other reasons, to the outstanding, to those who are above others? Some people are extraordinary for reasons inherent in themselves or in more external circumstances; people submit to them and ask to be led! In that case the roots of power would not be "functional" in some objective need for "steering" of a social system. They would be in the general shape of verticality in that culture; in that which puts some persons above other persons. In general terms that could be the division of labour, whether it comes about through internal social differentiation, externally imposed differentiation or is more tied to personal properties of those seen as extraordinary. The latter would be the case for the saints and the gurus. If the culture is horizontal, then trouble for leaders! ⁽⁷⁾

Second, political leadership and power may be a response to expansion and size just as well as increasing size, expansion may be a consequence of political leadership. The leadership can be of anyone of the three types. But there seem to be reasons to say that once the social system has exceeded a

certain size then laissez-faire and a minimum of cohesiveness are no longer compatible. And after that there is a new threshold where democratic leadership also becomes impossible - and only the authoritarian is left⁽⁸⁾.

Third, political leadership and power may be a response to exploitation or expansion in depth just as much as the latter may be the consequences of powerful political leadership. Again, all types of power seem possible, there may be exploitation of the authoritarian kind or exploitation with a human face.⁽⁹⁾

These last two possibilities actually suggest that expansion and exploitation processes require or lead to a certain structuring of societies. For the expansion process there has to be a centre, for the exploitation process there has to be a top to which the fruits of exploitation can accrue. Usually, centre and top go together, and in that case it is almost inconceivable that there would not somewhere in society be those who had a way of life far out of reach of everybody else: the centre, at the top. To those who have this kind of privilege power might just as well accrue over and beyond what they already have; in fact, it is built into their position.⁽¹⁰⁾ Political "leadership" is needed if expansion/exploitation is the goal. If the goal is a society consisting of small, locally self-reliant, self-steering groups political leadership would be vested with the people themselves, and one could talk about "leadership", but not of "leader." But the assumption is a society restraining its horizontal expansion and vertical exploitation, remaining small and egalitarian - in other words what we have elsewhere referred to as a beta-structure.⁽¹¹⁾ The moment a society tends towards an alpha-structure, sprawling out sideways and adding layers of verticality, there is no doubt where the leader is located: in the centre, at the top. It should only be added to this that smallness is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for horizontality: there is also what has been referred to as a gamma-structure, the small social unit with a pattern of authoritarian leadership.⁽¹²⁾

If now the question is asked, "what is the future of political leadership"⁽¹³⁾ one has immediately to add another question, "in what developmental context? Do you mean a society that moves

more in the alpha direction or a society that moves more in the beta direction?". If what is meant is the latter, a society consisting of smaller units, then one might say that the future of political leadership lies in its atomization, not in the sense that leadership disappears but in the sense that leaders diminish in significance, in power. Just to take one example familiar to many intellectuals: the difference between the university professor ruling his "chair" like a medieval fief and the elected, rotating head of department who functions for a year or two. However, if one conceives of development as fortification of alpha-structures then the most likely pattern would be more authoritarian leadership of the kind defined by local cosmology.

One would have to know, under what conditions are some persons seen as more extraordinary than others? Is it because they have ascribed characteristics, from birth on: the right class/ caste, the right family background, the right sex, the right birth order? Or is it more in terms of achieved characteristics, education, meritocracy, ability to fight successfully in the political arena? Or a combination of the two? The latter is generally the safer answer, adding that in Northern Europe and North America leaders will probably tend to be well educated, meritocratic achievers, and not necessarily of good family, whereas in Latin Europe the opposite may be the case.⁽¹⁴⁾ In Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union⁽¹⁵⁾ the combination of ascription/achievement will be based on party membership and some education on the one hand and frequently expressed loyalty and solidarity on the other. In India the caste element will probably continue to play a considerable role.⁽¹⁶⁾ In Africa⁽¹⁷⁾ and South America,⁽¹⁸⁾ with the old caste structures much more contested than in India, the populist figure who rises from rags and no power to riches and power may be seen as an embodiment of what an underprivileged country as a whole could be able to do, and as a symbol being vested with considerable power, at least for a period.] Expressed differently: differences between

leaders and led legitimize exploitation: why should I not do unto others what he does to me? If it is correct for him to treat me like that why could I not treat my children, my wife, my workers etc. in the same way? It belongs only to the picture that this statement should just as well be turned around: if I treat my children, my wife that way why should there not also be somebody who does the same to me? - thereby paving the way for authoritarian leadership through the whole structural arrangement, by extrapolation from the micro level to the macro level.⁽¹⁹⁾

As a conclusion let us only point out how little this has to do with official rhetoric, with such things as liberalism and socialism or other ideologies. What is at work here are deep social structures and deep assumptions about social structures. There are choices to be made or choices that have been made generations ago. Is the society to expand further? Is the society to deepen its exploitation? If the implicit answers are yes, then the social structure is more or less defined and leaders will appear, generally speaking, compatible with the underlying cosmology.⁽²⁰⁾ If the answer is in terms of a more modest society, however, then the cosmology will still be at work and demand rewards for an extraordinary person, for a Big Man. That way the village or clan or tribe tyrant may still come into being, just as much as a pater familias; lofty, arrogant, authoritarian.

In short, it is naive to believe that political leadership is something we can select. It is probably more correct to believe that we have the political leadership we deserve, given the social assumptions within which we operate. Given more general considerations of what human beings deserve, from a more humanistic point of view, one might decide that those assumptions could be revised - and that is the ultimate conclusion of this paper. The roots of expansion, exploitation and their concomitant, authoritarian leadership, are in our social logic, not in those particular persons or in the particular arrangements given to them. It is up to us to try to make that social logic more explicit, comprehend it critically, and possibly change it. In the meantime we might say: tell me your style of leadership, and I shall tell you the hidden code of the society - - ⁽²¹⁾.