



## Psycho-Political Action

By ABRAHAM LEVITSKY

*I'm a gestalt therapist in practice in Berkeley and on the faculty of the San Francisco Gestalt Institute. Strong current interests are the integration of gestalt therapy with psychoanalysis and with hypnotherapy. In my efforts to humanize any aspects of my therapeutic work, I find my wife, Linda, and my son, Todd, to be ever-so-welcome sources of fun and inspiration.—1115 Milvia, Berkeley, California 94707.*

I am writing this note at a far earlier date than is comfortable for me. But Vin Rosenthal's request to speak to the issue of "the place of psychotherapy in society" comes at an interesting time. For the past several years I have had a recurrent fantasy which insisted on being represented by the initials SPPA (pronounced Spa). This stood for Society for Psycho-Political Action.

The idea behind this ambitious slogan was as follows:

Traditionally there have been two main approaches to the thorny problem of human betterment. (1) The psychological emphasis: Society can't become more

sane until its individual members are educated to greater sanity. (2) The political emphasis: individuals can't be expected to have a sane outlook as long as the social structure is crazy. Therefore we must concentrate on the social structure. My thought was: there is an obvious third alternative. If any social or political reformist movement is to be truly effective, *both* emphases are simultaneously necessary. Hence the term psycho-political action.

I wish I were a lot more clear as to how such an organization or movement might function, but the simple fact is that at present the idea is in embryonic form. Like other embryos its future may be short-lived. Together with several colleagues at the San Francisco Gestalt Institute I have been co-leading a seminar entitled "Explorations in Psycho-Political Action." In our brochure we set forth our goal as follows: "How can the principles of humanistic psychology—relating openly, communicating directly, being *real*—be joined to the ideas of radical politics?"

So far we have had just three meetings and have had our ration of enthusiasm and discouragement, confusion and occasional creativity. It is far too easy to settle into the usual political or economic analyses of the ills of our time. When we remain at this level for some time, the life goes out of things and energy drops. When we start to talk to each other about the "political" implications of our daily acts, the atmosphere is vitalized and people feel something worthwhile is going on. Sharing fantasies of how we would live differently if the social changes we favored had already come about was obviously fun. A brain-storming session in which we described "political" projects we would like to conduct got our interest in high gear.

Obviously a therapist trained in group dynamics and communications skills has an enormous amount to contribute. He also may have some built-in hazards to unlearn. But of course the greatest contribution which he—or anyone—can make is his involvement and concern. I am making the assumption that the individual who really feels full within himself has a natural desire to share and to participate with others. It is my guess that the field of psychotherapy and the entire human potential movement will acknowledge more and more that active community and political participation is another vital dimension of self-growth. □

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