Follow the Leader ? *

*Container-Contained Processes and the
Exercise of Leadership and Followership in Groups and Institutions*

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Come follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!
Whither shall I follow, follow, follow,
Whither shall I follow, follow thee?
To the greenwood, to the greenwood,
To the greenwood, greenwood tree!

John Hilton, 1652

Introduction

In this well-known old song, a canon composed by an Englishman, John Hilton, in 1652, we are encouraged to follow an invisible leader. But before we decide to do so, we ask him "whither shall I follow? Whither shall I follow thee?" The answer sounds tempting: "to the greenwood tree…" So,… off we go! ...Or perhaps not?

What this ancient song text has to do with my subject will become plain to you at the end of my talk. But first, I would like to concentrate on the dynamics of "leadership" and "followership" and on what I am calling their corrupt derivatives "seduction" and " persecution". The reason I have placed these two words "seduction" and "persecution" in opposition to leadership and followership has its linguistic foundations in the German language. So, let me give you a brief but necessary lesson in German before we go on. The German word for "leader", as you will recognise from your familiarity with Hitler, is "*Fuehrer*". Leadership then is "*Fuehrung*"; to lead = *fuehren*. The verb "to follow" is *folgen*; and followership *Folgschaft*. But by simply adding the little prefix "***ver***", *fuehren* becomes ***ver****fuehren* and *folgen* turns into ***ver****folgen*. Now the thing about that is, that *verfuehren* means "to seduce" and *verfolgen* "to pursue". Thus the title in German reads:

> <u>Follow the Leader?</u> *(Ver)fuehren und (Ver)folgen als Faktoren des Container-Contained Prozesses in Gruppen und Institutionen, or*
> <u>Leadership/Seduction and Followership/Persecution as Factors in the Container-Contained Process in Groups and Institutions</u>

In order to explore this dynamic, I shall call to mind the most important elements of Bion's Container-Contained model, as well as relevant aspects of his theories on group dynamics, especially those dealing with leadership and followership, and shall illustrate this with two examples from current politics in the USA and in Austria. Working hypothesis

My working hypothesis is rather straightforward, perhaps even self-evident, and consists of two parts: First: the better integrated the personality of a leader is, the more mature, flexible and considerate a person he or she is, the more he or she is able to offer followers containment of anxiety through reverie and alpha-function, i.e. through emotional thinking and reflecting on his or her own experience. This being the case, the freer one is to follow his or her lead by virtue of one's own convictions and one's own decision-making process. On the other hand, the more insecure, immature, unintegrated and rigid a leader's personality, the more he/she needs to *seduce* rather than lead, and to *threaten with persecution* rather than allowing potential followers to make up their own minds to follow him or her, or not. And second: that it is the *group* who chooses the kind of leader, the kind of leadership it wants and needs, not the other way around. The groups seeks out and "elects for" one or the other form of basic assumption leadership or work group leadership, depending upon its unconscious needs and desires, its level of anxiety, its mythical substructure and the degree of containment available.

Bion's Theory of Thinking – "Container-Contained"

The theory or the "model" at the base of my reflections is Bion's model "container-contained", also called his "theory of thinking". The relationship between container and contained is central to Bion's thinking. Bion sees this connection as basic, a ubiquitous pattern of relationships which is biologically pre-programmed. In other words, it is one of nature's key patterns. It is at one and the same time: the model of *conception* (penis-in-vagina), *gestation* (embryo-in-uterus), *alimentation* (nipple-in-mouth) and *elimination* (faeces-in-colon). This fundamental pattern – 'one thing inside another', as Bion simply calls it – in its many variations and permutations, forms the model for all human somato-psychological experience from the very beginning of life.

Bion posits a "place" or an "object", which he calls the "container", whose purpose is to take up a "something" which needs to be contained. Through this process both container and that-which-is-to-be-contained are transformed, and something new, a "third" element comes into being. (Lazar, 1988). From this biological pattern, Bion develops his model of the origin of the ability to think which, for him, is a precondition for his central developmental concept, "learning from experience". What Bion means by this is the process he describes as the *mental metabolising* of experiences, perceptions and fantasies, both conscious and unconscious. Bion's starting point is what he refers to as the "proto-mental", the somato-psychic level of experiences, consisting of emotional entities "in the raw", to which he gives the name "beta elements".

When the containing object (the psyche of the container) takes up the contained (i.e. the projected, the not-understood, the painful, needy, as yet uncontained, unthinkable beta elements) from the subject, it must be capable of carrying out this metabolic, disentangling process within itself. And following on from this digestive, metabolic transformation the container must find a way to feed these introjections back to the subject in small, digestible doses, so that they can now be re-integrated and used for mental growth, rather than being expelled, "spat out" again as mentally indigestible. "Negative capability", which enables the object to "dream" (reverie) upon, to ponder and reflect upon these projected parts, requires a state of mind which Bion calls "patience" and which gradually changes into a state of mind which he calls "certainty" when the "to-be-contained" has been understood, detoxicated and re-presented to the subject. (Bion, 1971)

Following Freud's dictum "where Id was, Ego shall be", one could restate Bion's postulate as "where beta elements are, there shall alpha-elements be", that is to say, transformed into dreamable dreams and thinkable thoughts through the workings of alpha-function. And it is this process which, according to Bion, has to take place in every mother, in every therapist, consultant or supervisor and - as I want to suggest - in every leader, if he or she has the intention of being helpful to his/her "baby" (patient, client, supervisee, client system, team, staff, organisation, company, nation or people) to grow and develop in a healthy manner, and to the extent to which the necessity of performing a containing function for those who are to follow his or her lead is both recognised and possible.

Bion's theory of group dynamics, basic assumptions and leadership

It is one of Bion's central tenets of group life, that people who come together to form a group –regardless of its ostensible purpose – are basically always and predominantly concerned with the survival of the group *as a group* as such, no matter what. At the unconscious, "proto-mental" level, group formation takes place in at least three basic forms. Bion has dubbed these "basic assumptions".

1. The whole group remains dependent on a leader for its well-being (basic assumption Dependency – baD)
2. The group chooses a pair whose task it is to create a new "something" (person, idea, structure) which is seen to have a messianic function and makes the group believe that it will thereby be safe from disintegration and destruction (basic assumption Pairing – baP)

3. A kind of group leadership is formed which is seen as guaranteeing the survival of the group by making sure that potential enemies are either fought against or fled from (basic assumption fight/flight – baF)

A basic assumption group, instead of orientating itself according to the task at hand and its requirements, instead of tackling them and creating appropriate structures to get the work done, runs the danger of becoming more and more absorbed by the basic assumption structure and its dynamic, clinging to it until the task and its requirements can hardly be discerned, or even disappears completely. The main focus of attention is on maintaining the illusion that the group will survive no matter what, and that its fear of being destroyed or eliminated is being or has been effectively thwarted.

The work group and its leadership

The work group, by comparison, chooses its leadership according to, and is characterised by, a task-oriented relationship to reality and the job to be done, making the capacity to do work and achieve productive results possible. Therefore, one of the main goals of quality leadership is to keep the group functioning in a work group mode as much as possible in every work situation. When the group manages to do so successfully, the result is apparent immediately. For instance, I am sure you are all familiar with the kind of atmosphere, say, in a kindergarten or pre-school group, where a clear sign that productive and satisfying work is being done can be observed as expressed in that soft background hum of calm activity and a certain sense of satisfaction in the air. Similarly, we all know well the unpleasant feeling of being in a group which is unable to work, although every single member of the group might quite justifiably claim that, as an individual, he or she is trying hard to work effectively. Surely, this means that the group is unconsciously holding on to one of the basic assumptions, and, for whatever reasons, (i.e. rivalry, envy, laziness, fear of the task itself or fear of failing) is not capable of installing and maintaining competent work group leadership, leadership authorised by the group to be effective in getting the group to work at its task.

Fight/Flight mentality and the choice of a leader in the Fight/Flight group

As to the choice of a leader for a fight/flight group, Bion says:" It is usually a man or woman with marked paranoid trends; perhaps, if the presence of an enemy is not immediately obvious to the group, the next best thing is for the group to choose a leader to whom it is". (ibid. p. 67). This statement is important for several reasons. First, it makes it obvious that, according to Bion, it is not the leader who chooses his group - neither according to his own needs or his perception of the

group's needs - but much more the basic assumption group which seeks and chooses its appropriate leader according to its (unconscious) needs. And second, the group's need to find an enemy, against whom they can either fight or from which they can flee, exists even before that enemy has been found, discovered or, indeed, invented. For example, one might say, that if the Jews hadn't been there for the Nazis to identify as the enemy and accuse as being responsible for Germany's miserable plight after Versailles and the collapse of the world markets in 1929, the Nazis would have had to invent them! And as for the leadership role in this fight/flight dynamic, the German people were highly successful in picking a personality from among their ranks (who was, of course not even a German, but an Austrian!), and whose capacities as a leader of the fight/flight basic assumption have remained virtually unparalleled in history, Adolph Hitler.

According to Bion, leadership is a *product* of the group mentality, not its origin. He writes:

The leader, on the basic assumption level, does not create the group by virtue of his fanatical adherence to an idea, but is rather an individual whose personality renders him peculiarly susceptible to the obliteration of individuality by the basic group's leadership requirements. (ibid. p. 177)

And here Bion links this phenomenon with the Kleinian theory of projective identification:

To me the leader is as much the creature of the basic assumption as any other member of the group, and this, I think, is to be expected if we envisage identification of the individual with the leader as depending not on introjection alone but on a simultaneous process of projective identification. (ibid.)

This "loss of individual distinctiveness" applies to the leader as much as to anyone else.

Thus the leader in the fight/flight group, for example, appears to have a distinctive personality because his personality is of a kind that lends itself to exploitation by the group demand for a leader who requires of it only a capacity for fighting or for flight; the leader has no greater freedom to be himself than any other member of the group. (ibid.)

Bion compares this leader with "an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his own will. He is leader by virtue of his capacity for instantaneous, involuntary combination with every other member of his group and only differs from them in that, whatever his function in the work group, he is the incarnation of the basic assumption group leader. (ibid.)

Let us consider the characteristic behaviour of the fight/flight group. Bion points out that it is incapable of tolerating frustration in the long run, because in the sphere of basic assumption phenomena, time itself is not a relevant, not even an existent dimension of reality.

Flight offers an immediately available opportunity for expression of the emotion in the fight/ flight group and therefore meets the demand for instantaneous satisfaction – therefore the group will take flight. Alternatively, attack offers a similarly immediate outlet – then the group will fight. The fight/flight group will follow any leader who will give such orders as license instantaneous flight or instantaneous attack. (ibid. p. 180)

The capacity for "containment" as a prerequisite for good leadership

So, how can Bion's Container-Contained model serve as a model for good leadership in groups? Following the work group model mentioned above, only a group which feels sufficiently contained will be able to function successfully over a long period of time as a work group. If anxieties, irrationalities, aggressions, envy and rivalry, disruptive unconscious fantasies and ideas, etc. are not adequately contained, they threaten to paralyse the group or to blow it up. If this is the case, then the group will be forced to fall back on functioning in a basic assumption mode in order to prevent such threats and disturbances from destroying the group altogether. The price paid for this is the loss of task orientation and with it, the capacity to do work. When, however, the work group leader is capable of offering the group enough containment, these disturbing factors can be "digested", can be better metabolised into the group's dynamic life, and it can then "feed" on this experience, can grow on it, learn from it, and thereby improve its capacity to devote itself to the task at hand and to achieve good results.

Containment as a leadership style– where does it come from?

Anton Obholzer, psychoanalyst and psychoanalytically oriented consultant to organisations in London, offers us the following answer to this question:

How containing the style of the leader and how given to blaming others when things go wrong (paranoid/schizoid position) versus acknowledging one's or one's institution's contribution towards the trouble one is in (depressive position), depends to a very large degree on the individual's capacity to maintain a relatively mature stance as opposed to falling into a defensive/paranoid one, and this capacity is based on early experiences and their later reworking as the life-cycle progresses. (Obholzer, p. 53)

The assumption underlying this aspect of psychoanalytic theory suggests that the conditions necessary in order for a proper Container-Contained relationship in the Bionic sense to come into being are:

a)   when an individual has him-or herself had sufficient experience of containment in the course of his or her personal development, and

b)   when he or she has thereby developed a capacity to identify both with the container as well as with "being contained" and then, through the process of *introjective* identification, has been able to include this as a significant and stable aspect of his or her own internal life.

This developmental process thus enables one to increase one's capacity to contain, and to employ containment of anxiety as a psychic tool, which can then be utilised as necessary in the authoritative execution of leadership roles.

Having said all that, I now want to go on to present my two "cases", each of which demonstrates a particularly virulent form of basic assumption leadership; and, concomitantly, neither of which demonstrates the kind of containing, work group leadership described above.

Two current political "case" studies: George W. Bush and Joerg Haider

When, over a year ago, I started gathering my ideas for this paper, I was very struck by two phenomena on the recent political scene, which, to my mind, clearly demonstrate such split and splitting, basic assumption oriented, *non-containing* leadership particularly well. First, the efforts of President George W. Bush to gather a followership to follow his lead into war against Iraq, and second, the zig-zag course followed by the right-wing Austrian politician, Joerg Haider, around political responsibility and the leadership of his party. I collected my evidence for these two "cases" mainly from the daily press, especially from my "local" paper, the Suedd. Zeitung, (Germany's largest daily) but also from other on-line news and archive services. First the Bush case:

George W. Bush: fight/flight leader for a "safer" world?

Over the past year or so, an unprecedented and frightening political development has taken place. John Brady Kiesling, a career diplomat for over twenty years, who resigned his post as Political Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Athens in February of this year, stated in his letter of resignation "…until this Administration, it has been possible to believe that by upholding the policies

of my president, I was upholding the interests of the American people and the world. I believe it no longer.

The policies we are asked to advance are incompatible not only with American values but also with American interests. Our fervent pursuit of war with Iraq is driving us to squander the international legitimacy that has been America's most potent weapon of both offence and defense since the days of Woodrow Wilson. We have begun to dismantle the largest and most effective web of international relationships the world has ever known. Our current course will bring instability and danger, not security". (Kiesling, 2003)

This development exemplifies how a paranoid-schizoid form of leadership could rapidly gain power and commence to threaten the hard won state of "containment", painfully achieved over more than 40 years of US and international security politics; without ever really being seriously questioned, not to mention refused, by those in power in the United States.

Yet according to an editorial in the Suedd. Zeitung, this new "Bush doctrine" does not stem from Bush himself but rather from a "small circle of thinkers and politicians, whose influence is in inverse proportion to their number…. The complex of thoughts rests on a series of speeches the President himself gave and on some rather blunt formulations from the period after Sept. 11 to the tune of "either they are for us or they are against us". But, in fact, the new "defence" strategy is the work of his close-knit coterie of ministers and advisors (Donald Rumsfeld, Condolezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz and up until recently Richard Perle, to name just a few of the most prominent and well-known) and of a whole number of other hawks, who, for years, have been breeding their aggressive doctrine against all rules of conventional diplomacy and strategic thinking. Here we have two of the most important characteristics of such a paranoid-schizoid fight/flight leadership, that is

1. an extreme splitting into good and bad, black and white, and

2. the instrumentalisation of a fight/flight leader by an "invisible" and relatively anonymous group operating behind the scenes.

Though at first one could still hear at least one voice from within the governing body in Washington which contradicted this trend (Secretary of State and former Desert Storm general, Colin Powell), it was a lone voice, soon drowned out (although not entirely silenced) by the shrill cries of the warmongers. Powell, who, at times, even today still seems to prefer subtlety and diplomatic

nuances to simplistic reductionist black-and-white slogans; and who, more than anyone else in the Bush administration, still stands for a "politics of integration and agreement with America's allies". He, Powell, was, and perhaps still is, the only government official who is acting in anything like the well established tradition of American foreign policy, a policy of "containment" [i] whose past aim has always been to try to achieve the greatest possible consensus amongst its international friends and allies and which has never claimed moral superiority over the rest of the world to the extent that the Bush Administration does today. (Kornelius, p. 4).

Kiesling, in his letter, confirms this assessment of Powell, both as a person and as a government minister, while at the same time warning him of the dire consequences of his position. He writes, "Mr. Secretary, I have enormous respect for your character and your ability. You have preserved more international credibility for us than our policy deserves, and salvaged something positive from the excesses of an ideological and self-serving Administration. But your loyalty to the President goes too far. We are straining beyond its limits an international system we built with such toil and treasure, a web of laws, treaties, organisations and shared values that sets limits on our foes far more effectively than it ever constrained America's ability to defend its interests." (Kiesling, 2003)

As the nation prepared for war, and the atmosphere in Washington became more and more heated and more and more bellicose, even this single voice fell silent. In its place, only the loud and simplistic slogans of autocracy could be heard. According to another Suedd. Zeitung editorial writer, Heribert Prantl, "America wants to be the leader [of the world] by virtue of its strength and without consideration for any previously existing contracts (based on a quote from Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld). In other words, "what's good for America, is good for the world – and *what is good*, is defined by America alone". This, Prantl proclaimed, is nothing other than "*unvarnished, imperial politics.*" (Prantl, p.4)

But what to me seems to be the most frightening and threatening aspect of this dynamic, and at the same time to be a clear sign of the basic assumption nature of its unconscious and collective character, are the numerous appeals and allusions to religious metaphors and images based on a most simplistic and slanted Christian eschatology. Immediately after Sept. 11, President Bush was already calling for a "crusade". The Suedd. Zeitung continues:"… and he believes God to be on his side. He sees the US casting itself in the role of the divine Saviour in a battle against Evil. (ibid).

Norman Birnbaum, emeritus professor of law at Georgetown University, writes of the deeply rooted conviction of "America's moralistic supremacy and its right to act as the ultimate ruler of world

history". Bush, he says, is trying to replace *conscience* with *self-righteousness.* And with that, a basic element of the depressive position, upon which the capacity for true containment is based. For without conscience, that is without an acute sense of the consequences which one's own actions have upon others, one is simply not capable of taking responsibility for those actions and reflecting on them. Lack of conscience, lack of reflection, lack of alpha-function, equals a lack of containment. Instead, a doctrine of salvation is preached, which to my mind approaches perversity and which blatantly claims that God hasn't only authorized the US to *lead* the world, but has called on them to *rule* the world! (Birnbaum, p. 3)

And since Bush to this day, even though the war has already been fought and "won", still hasn't succeeded in convincing world opinion with facts and data, he has to trust more and more in the power of his propagandistic formulations, and hope that the American people will continue to believe and follow him. His slogans escalate according to his audience, for the more militaristic his listeners are, the more 'offensive' his tone. The new doctrine clearly intends to turn the previous security and defence policies upside down. "Freedom" and "democracy" are to be spread (actively), not defended (passively). In an address to cadets at West Point, for example, Bush announced "we have to carry the battle to the enemy, cross his plans and face his worst threats *before* they come true." (Kornelius, 18.10.02, p.3)

According to another prominent German commentator, Stefan Kornelius, the truly revolutionary characteristics of this new Bush doctrine are its moral overtone, its sense of mission, and its lack of decision-making criteria. Through the national over-estimation of its own abilities, through the emphasis on the military, and the ignorance shown towards a *truly* Christian system of values, Kornelius claims that this doctrine cannot last. He adds, however, that this won't bother President Bush in the least! His view of the world is to be found in this new school of thinking, in which his urge for simplification, moral judgement and claimed superiority is satisfied. And, commentator Mark Hujer warns, "Those who will not be *seduced* by these simplifications, will be *persecuted* or at least, have to fear persecution. Nine-eleven has divided America into patriots and non-patriots. Whoever is for war, is for America, whoever protests, risks his reputation" at the very least. (Hujer, 12./13.10.02, p. 3)

As far as I know, and partly for this reason at least, there still haven't been any significant votes cast against any of these new Bush doctrine policies in either house of the US Congress. With 296 votes to 133 in the House of Representatives, and 77 votes to 23 in the Senate, the Democrats

swore followership to the President on the Iraqi question. And why? Not because they are so convinced of the rightness of his new politics, but rather because they are without leadership, without a significant alternative and more "containing" leader. They not only lack the kind of more integrated and integrating leadership which might offer a better alternative, a way of thinking that is less split, more balanced, but they don't seem to have any effective leadership whatsoever; and this evidently because they are too busy preparing their pre-election campaigns for the presidency in 2004. From what I gather, there are already at least half a dozen potential candidates, if not more. But none of them, it seems, has been, or is capable of, and has the courage to defy the President and his followers with the necessary consequence and power. What, for example has become of ex – presidential candidate and nearly president of the United States of America, Al Gore, Hillary Clinton? ex-Governor Howard Dean? Senators Kerry or Gephardt? or the latest new candidate, anti-Iraq-war militarist, Wesley Clark…? Where is the kind of Senate leadership that Ted Kennedy once represented? What the American opposition is lacking is a clear voice which could galvanise the growing discontent which is spreading across the nation into useful coordinated action. But such the voice to lead such an opposition is nowhere to be heard. Gore, for instance, who after all won more votes in the election than Bush is "silent as a well trained servant". (Lepenies, p. 14)

According to the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan, former professor at Harvard and member of the Senate of many years' standing, his Democratic colleagues qualify as what he bluntly referred to as "brain dead"! According to Moynihan, since F.D.R.'s New Deal and its continuation in Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society, the Democrats haven't had a single further new thought, not a single new idea. Even back then, Moynihan claims, they had already stopped thinking, and without generating new thoughts and new political ideas, they will obviously never manage to assert a new, justifiable and convincing claim to leadership.

President Bush, on the other hand, unflinchingly takes up positions of principle, thereby taking high risks. And "the American people" seem, to a large extent, to agree with their President and his policies, more in fact than ever halfway through his first term of office. No previous president has had a better public opinion record at mid-term, than George W. Bush. And why? Because Bush demonstrates in *his* way, the quality that is expected and appreciated most of all: leadership. But what kind of leadership is it, and what is being asked for? Evidently, and for a plethora of reasons, the "group", i.e. "the American people" want and need, and "chose", for the time being at least, a fight/flight leadership, and with George W. Bush, this is exactly what they got.

Down in Midland, Texas, which the President now calls "home", and which is also where Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans, First Lady Laura and General Tommy Franks hail from, people are proud of their president and think he is doing a great job. Bush, they say, is a good president because he "has taken up the values of Midland – a good sense of right and wrong, for black and white, solid values, which one just absorbs when one lives here". At least that's what the blurb in the Chamber of Commerce's advertising brochure says. What's more, people in Midland are convinced that what's good for Midland, Texas would also do Great Britain, France and Germany a lot of good. (Hujer, 03./04.05.03, p. 3)

So far, the Democrats have failed to build up anything like a common front or formulate a common political line. No Democratic contender is yet in a powerful enough position to offer acceptable leadership to his party nor to the many opponents of war (who did after all, go out into the streets in great numbers). Clearly, a more containing, less splitting form of leadership is needed in order to act as a counterbalance and provide an alternative to the Bush doctrine. Yet where is it to come from? Indeed, does it even exist in the minds and hearts of anyone of the relevant political spheres in the US today? Or are those who do think this way, and who fear the worst, already so resigned to the way things are going that they have no choice but to resign themselves?

Paradoxically, according to Birnbaum, it may well turn out to be the religious approach itself which may lead many Americans to completely different conclusions than the aims pursued by the fundamentalist tendencies of the Bush administration. "Sympathy and solidarity are the qualities that should prevail in a nation", and "generosity as a basic democratic impulse" all have their roots in religious values. In Birnbaum's opinion, the 90 million Republican Party voters haven't forgotten those values altogether, in spite of the great influence which the fundamentalist fanatics have had, adept as they are at exploiting Bush for their cause.

With more integrated moral and ethical convictions, anchored more in the depressive position, a different kind of politics would indeed be possible, acknowledging all the while - and by no means ignoring or denying the danger and "evil" stemming from the likes of Saddam Hussein and his cruel and dictatorial regime. But a more holistic relationship to reality would have made it more possible to decide what would have been best for the entire world situation, given the extreme difficulty of the circumstances. But the American opposition lacked and still lacks a clear voice to express the growing discontent across the country. The Democratic leadership, still evidently caught in a "trap of patriotism", has not yet offered any really strong opposition. One may still hope that

Birnbaum's optimism is justified, but without relevant leadership, one must fear that those 90 million people, whom he claims still adhere to "true" Christian values, will remain as silent and ineffective as all the others who disapprove of the government's new policies, but who are too frightened or who feel too helpless to act.

So why, why were so many Americans prepared to be seduced, cajoled and/or persecuted into supporting this new, aggressive doctrine? If Bion is correct in his hypothesis that the basic assumption group (in this case the fight/flight mentality) chooses its leader according to *its* needs, and his suitability to fulfill them, we can only assume that Bush was their man, and that war is what was unconsciously wanted and needed.

Why war? Because it is the best way to siphon off all the pent up, split off anger and violence that would otherwise implode upon the society and tear the nation apart? Because it deflects attention from the overnight transformation of the greatest federal budget surplus to the greatest federal debt in history? Because it helps to ignore the 10 million unemployed, the 35 million Americans (12 million of which are children) living in poverty, and the $500 billions in tax cuts which go to 1.2 million of our richest citizens, instead of to the 15 million workers who are struggling because they can't afford to buy the housing, the health insurance and the education that they and their children need?

These and other key questions about the wisdom of the Bush administration's policies were raised in an impassioned editorial in the L.A. Times by the ex-governor of the State of New York, Mario Cuomo. He concludes, "God forbid we should allow history to record that the best thing this generation did as a nation was to destroy enemies and win wars, instead of helping people help themselves earn a good life. We know we can frighten people with our awesome military might; what they need to be sure of is that they respect us for our wisdom and fairness as well." (Cuomo, p. B11) One can only hope that it isn' t too late for that already.

Joerg Haider: leadership by seduction - dependency leadership…without dependency!

Let us look now at my second example taken from current European politics, Joerg Haider, (still) the head of the Carinthian provincial government in southern Austria near the Slovenian border, and former head of Austria's so-called "Freedom" party, the FPÖ.

Here we can observe a completely different form of basic assumption leadership in action. Here the prevailing basic assumption is baD, the dependency basic assumption. But Haider gives only the *appearance* of being a dependable dependency leader. In fact, one cannot count on him for anything but his inconsequence and his unpredictability, hardly suitable characteristics of a good dependency leader! And yet, by virtue of his highly skillful and successful ability to create the necessary illusion of dependability, by seducing people into believing that they can depend on him, it works!

Searching for his biographical roots, I was able to find some salient facts about the Haider family's political orientation, but unfortunately, no details about Joerg Haider's upbringing nor his childhood or youth. (It may well be worth mentioning that all biographical sources available to me, consistently disregarded their subject's early life). The father, a shoemaker by profession, was a zealous fascist and declared Nazi. He had been a member of the HJ, the Hitler Youth and the SA, and acted as head of the regional youth administration of the German Work Front in Linz. Joerg's mother, a teacher, is characterized by Haider's biographer, Christa Zoechling, as an "ardent national socialist" and was a *Bannjugendführerin* right up until the end of the war. We learn that young "Joergie" studied law in Vienna, graduating in constitutional law in 1973. From 1972 to 76 he worked as a scientific assistant there, and in 1979, he even spent 6 weeks at Harvard studying budget politics and public finance. He started his political career at the age of 15, when he took up an active part in the youth movement and later, when he built up the "*Ring Freiheitlicher Jugend*" (the Freedom Youth association of the Freedom Party of Austria).

Looking at Haider's documented political career, it is difficult to know where to start to unravel the contradictions, the ambivalence, the backs and forths of his claims to leadership, and their negation, all of which he himself caused. Let us concentrate first on the contradictory signals he sent out to his followers, and how they dealt with them.

Right from the start of his career as an elected representative of the people, Haider was able to gain votes for himself and for the FPÖ, mainly because of the mesmerising effect of his scintillating image in the media (the rich and handsome Porsche driver, the super athletic skier-mountain climber-playboy, as well as at one and the same time the Tribune of the people, the populist from a poor, humble social background, the friend of right wing war veterans and those living in the glorified past, and, last but not least, the clever and agile statesman just as at ease on the international stage as in the pubs and beer halls of his lower class supporters). According to his

biographer, Haider knew only too well how to gather an increasing number of votes from the right side of the political spectrum – but not only from there. Thanks to his charismatic talent, his acting skills (which according to Zoechling, every politician in our media society nowadays badly needs) and his extremely skillful use of the electronic media, Haider was able to win the votes of a whole range of Austrian citizens, who were fed up with the consensus so-called "Proporz" [ii] politics of the last 30 years. As an "oscillating, contradictory and demagogic figure" and as "cynical, two-faced and complex politician" Haider mastered the art of "putting reason to sleep through argumentation", that is through doublethink and doublespeak at a very high level.

We will get back to Haider's techniques of seduction and persecution in a minute, but first let us look for a moment at his public, his following. Wherein lies the fascination with Haider's personality and appearance? For, after all, it was enough to gain him and his party a full third of the Austrian votes, despite the fact that Haider provided no real consistent leadership of any kind. And yet many people still were inspired by him, and some continue to be. (Trumpfmann)

The German Haider commentator, Karl-Markus Gauss, also writing in the Suedd. Zeitung, sees it this way:

> *Austria was, at the time of the unfolding of this populism, one of the richest countries on earth. The political scientists explain the phenomenon of this strange movement with the fact that modernization has its losers, and that they are susceptible to simplistic slogans. But in Austria, it wasn't those who lost out through modernization who were carried away by such populist solutions. Not the unemployed, not the people on welfare or those with a minimal income were mobilized, but rather the 'beasts of prosperity', those 'respectable Austrians', who over the last 40 years had gained considerable wealth, had become relatively socially secure, and who under no circumstance wanted to give <u>any</u> of this away, neither to refugees, nor to false asylum seekers, nor drug addicts, nor people without income, nor any other 'social parasites'. They were not interested in anything other than that which was purely materialistic and/or the entertaining. After four decades of improvement in this specific Austrian way, people had come to a point where they had lost interest in practically anything except getting another little bit and another little bit more. But in the mean time, things definitely are getting worse for many of these people, and in that situation populist loudspeakers have an easy game of it, finding a scapegoat and in making empty promises to everyone.* (Gauss, 18.09.02, p. 17)

Indeed, Haider's party had "always presented itself as a movement of 'ordinary people', even if it never was, and the suitable man to fool people into believing it was Joerg Haider, the man who surrounded himself with the insignias of wealth, yet at the same time successfully playing the role of a Robin Hood, who was going to help the disinherited to their rights". (ibid.)

In other words, the greedy, who, due to their own success, felt more or less guilty towards the less fortunate, but at the same time were afraid to lose whatever they had gained, chose a personality as their leader who promised to dissipate their fear of loss as well as their feeling of shame, and even to do so *anonymously*! For, as Bion says, the basic assumption group always chooses as its' leader the person who promises to deliver maximum safety against the forces of destruction which threaten the group, while managing to do so anonymously… it happens, yet Nobody did it! Nobody takes responsibility for what happens, and nobody has to! It was *the group itself* that did it, not me or you or any one of us individually!

For although the FPÖ continued to gain more and more votes from one election to the next, and therefore more political offices, power and influence, one could hardly find anyone in the whole country who would actually admit having voted for them. This means that *at least* a third of the Austrian population (if not more) secretly *wanted* (and still want?) this kind of split and splitting leadership; always ready to locate "the bad guy" in the 'Other' and, switching into baF mode, promising to find the enemy, even if he has to be invented! And Joerg Haider was always their man! He knew how to fan the flames both against those at the top as well as those at the bottom. Those up at the top he cursed as the *Nomenklatura*, accusing them of selling the country out to the European Union. The ones at the bottom, he decried as "social scroungers", using up other peoples' savings while enjoying the sweet *dolce vita* of unemployment". (ibid.)

For years people acted as if it were disgraceful to think this way, and consequently were ashamed to admit to having such thoughts. With Haider this suddenly all changed. For Haider had the courage to speak up, to say out loud what people were secretly thinking anyway but dared not voice, because it was felt to be so indecent to do so. Suddenly there was somebody who had the "chuzpe to take up the repressed myth, the Nazi myth about the defeated and disgraced fathers and grandfathers" and name it by name. When Haider, in taking this calculated risk and breaching all the old rules of decency, thereby not even shying away from stirring up anti-Semitic resentments, turned out to be so successful, people joined in with him silently, anonymously, vicariously, but nobody else was prepared to take any public responsibility for it. His voters, his followership, it seemed, needed to

split itself off from its true political views. One Viennese psychoanalyst called the populist's rhetorical technique "psychoanalysis-in-reverse". That is, instead of helping the patient to get rid of his fears and neuroses, the populist fans the flames of these fears in order then to be able to say to them , 'Don't be afraid, I'm here with you". (Suedd. Zeitung, 18.09.02)

But when and how was Haider ever truly available for his electorate, for his party or his comrades? One day he proclaimed that he would run for the party chairmanship; the next day, he withdrew his candidacy. In the end no one knew which was for the worst, or if it even mattered! Michael Frank writes: "Haider usually leaves it open as to whether he can be made responsible for anything or not" (for his party's poor results at the time of the parliamentary elections last October, for instance). Frank continues: "thus he threatens [both] to *abandon* the FPÖ or take up the leadership again after all… the leadership of a party he profoundly *detests* for giving him the blind obedience that he himself demands". (Frank, p. 3)

"A brilliant division of labor" Frank continues, "both governing and playing the opposition at one and the same time". This scheme worked so long as the obedience to the true leader remained unbroken, but Haider, evidently driven by his fears of losing importance, began to fancy himself in more and more destructive operatic acts…. He still has the power to destroy things, but because the FPÖ believes itself to be doomed without Haider, it would rather sacrifice any rational politics than emancipate itself from its shadow chairman. One cannot imagine a better example of anti-work, anti-task leadership, indeed even promising total basic assumption dependency leadership while providing nothing of the kind.

With his caricature of dependency leadership, Haider goes further than even Bion had in mind. For Haider's message to his following is: 'You (fools) are completely dependent on me and will remain so... but be warned, lest anyone be so foolish as to think that he can actually depend on me! No one should let himself depend on me, because I always know how to steal my way out of any responsibility, and can do it in such a way that you still remain faithful to me, in spite of or rather because of this… ("And what's more, it is exactly because of this that I despise you all!"). Gauss continues: "he may not have the power to show his party the way any longer, but he's the only one who can distract the voters from what's really going on!".

To my mind It is exactly this which the voters, which the group needs him for, lacking as it does, a truly mature leader who could offer more containment for today's and tomorrow's problems. But that leader doesn't seem to exist anywhere at the moment, at least not in any position of power.

And anyway, it is much easier to follow a basic assumption group leader, to let oneself be seduced by him, maybe even persecuted a bit, rather than face the naked truth, the existential fears and the uncertainty of the future.

No matter whether Haider illegally used police data against his political opponents, whether he visited Saddam Hussein in Iraq (which he did on three occasions), whether he insulted Jews, foreigners, gypsies or the unemployed; whether he denied the Holocaust, glorified the SA or praised the "employment policies" of the Third Reich as a future model for the present-day job market problems – it doesn't seem to matter what he does or doesn't do, what he says or leaves out. So along as the group needs him to provide this type of "leadership" for those group feelings, thoughts and fantasies, Haider will keep his enormous influence and appeal and serve the group accordingly. Only when he becomes superfluous in this role, will he be sacrificed, destroyed or simply ignored and will then presumably just disappear from the political scene.

Puzzlement, perplexity and paralysis…

Lest one gain the impression that I have deviated from the "scientific" path of description, analysis and concern for understanding these various dynamics, in favour of polemics and proselytising, let me reaffirm that my primary aim in all this is in Bion's sense " + K", i.e. getting to know them better, as that, to my mind, is the key to any significant and sensible plans of action to counteract them. Clearly, it is of no use simply to exclaim (and perhaps to agree) how "bad", or "evil", how manipulative or threatening these two political leaders are, or how "stupid" their followers might be to allow themselves to be duped into following them.

No, we need to look beyond that to the various levels of narcissism and anxiety, both conscious and unconscious, both individual and collective, which create the necessary conditions for such followership and therefore, following Bion, the necessity for the group to seek and find the "appropriate" basic assumption leadership, rather than being in a position to seek and find a more concerned, more integrative and more containing leadership. The mechanisms at the root of these phenomena are ubiquitous and have presumably been operative – more or less – since the beginning of civilisation on this planet.

The particular constellations which I have tried to illustrate with my two examples, are, however, new variations on these themes, at least they seem new to us at the moment, and are, in my view at least, forebodings of worse to come. But, on the other hand mere analysis, or just playing

Cassandra is also of little use. The need to declare oneself, and indeed, if possible to act, is of the utmost urgency, and it is clear that we, especially we as consultants and in the sense that many other colleagues here have spoken, need to use our understanding to influence and if possible to change the direction of this dreadful dynamic, even if at the moment we feel we have little clue as to how to proceed, and even though the felt need to do so becomes more pressing every day.

A crisis of world leadership ?

Everywhere, in Europe in the USA and throughout the world the call for divisive, opportunistic, dis-integrative, non-containing leadership continues to flare up again and again. Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, Sergio Berlusconi in Italy, the murdered Pim Fortuyn in Holland, George W. Bush or Ariel Sharon in Israel: all have followed the call of those groups in the population, who, because of their uncontained paranoid anxieties, feel an acute need to split off and project, to fight, to flee or to eject what they experience as life threatening and out of control. Even leaders like Tony Blair or Gerhard Schroeder (or Bill Clinton, for that matter) seem unable to offer true "containment leadership", consisting of thoughtful and balanced policies which do the least harm and the most good for all. Instead, they offer a kind of "pseudo-containment" consisting of the unclear half-hearted shouldering of responsibility and a dangerous lack of decisive, decision-making leadership. Indeed, it seems that to get re-elected, they cannot act any in other way – or so they and their advisors believe.

Indeed, those few who possibly might be equipped to provide more mature, more "containing" leadership are either wise enough and cautious enough not to even consider taking on such a role, or couldn't get elected anyway, exactly because they would <u>not</u> promise the group (the electorate) the kind of basic assumption leadership which it again and again feels the need for.

I am aware that this statement is a rather pessimistic one and that you may feel I still owe you a suggestion of what "good enough" containment leadership in a Winnicottian sense might be. For if it is just some utopian notion, it might make for an interesting discussion, but with no chance of it becoming practical political reality, it becomes meaningless. One might speculate whether such leaders as the late Mahatma Ghandi, the Dalai Lama or Nelson Mandela might qualify, but Ghandi is dead, the Dalai Lama in exile and Mandela no longer in power. The question remains moot.

In closing…

At the beginning of my researches, when I started surfing the Internet, unsuspectingly looking for the text of that ancient English song, I discovered two remarkable textual variations in the older versions of it. It appeared to me to be almost prophetic when I read in the original that instead of the word "whither", i.e. *where* shall I follow, the word "*whether*" appeared, that is the question of *whether to follow the lead offered or not…* and, that in the original, we are not led to the "greenwood tree" at all, but to the "gallows tree" instead!

In a therapy session recently, Marius, age six asked me, "Bush and Bin Laden…you're against them too, aren't you? They're the baddies, aren't they?" which leads me to my final question: Do we not, have we not all too often fatalistically followed those who lead us, who seduce us down a path ultimately leading to our doom? In supporting such paranoid-schizoid leadership, do we not threaten to destroy what little of the painfully achieved containment of our primary anxieties as we as a civilization have managed to create thus far? And without that fundamental containment of our anxieties, are we not destroying the necessary pre-conditions for exactly that ability for emotionally informed thought and reflection which provides the basis for our existence and our survival on this planet?

In a passionate statement of her views on state of the world after 9/11, Hanna Segal wrote,

*We cannot annihilate all evil and terror without destroying ourselves, because it is part of us. Even a 'crusade against terrorism' to obtain freedom and democracy is as dangerous and illusory as other fundamentalist beliefs that we will attain paradise if we destroy the evil that we attribute to others. The real battle is between insanity based on mutual projections and sanity based on truth…**the problem is that we submit to the tyranny of our own groups**. When we project too much into our own group, we surrender our own experience, and the group tyrannises us. (Segal, 2003)*

So if we are to be neither seduced nor cajoled, nor persecuted into following those who would lead us to our own destruction, we need leaders mature enough and capable enough in terms of their "negative capability" and their capacity to contain anxiety to provide more containing leadership, *and* the prevalence of group mentality mature enough, rational enough and task-oriented enough to follow that lead. The overcoming of the depressive position in the Kleinian sense is not some luxury to be enjoyed by the privileged few who have had 20 years of Kleinian psychoanalysis, but a vital guarantee, an existential necessity for our continued existence. It is a question of our survival that

such leadership be found and followed if, as a civilization, we are not to end up on the collective
"gallows tree".

Come follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!

Whether shall I follow, follow, follow,

Whether shall I follow, follow thee?

To the gallows, to the gallows,

To the gallows, gallows tree!

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[i] Bion's use of the concept of "containment" in the political/military sense is referred to in <u>Attention and Interpretation</u> (Bion, 1970, p. 94) and is based on the meaning of the word as defined in Webster's Dictionary as follows: "To retain (the enemy) within a given area, as by attacking or threatening" (Webster, p. 179)

The origins of the American "policy of containment" date back to the year 1947, when George F. Kennan, then Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, articulated it as the West's strategy against the growing threat of Communism, following the USSR's establishing itself in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of WW II. Although thought by some to have created and prolonged the Cold War, those who believed in it were convinced it was the most effective way to protect the world against the rampant spread of communism. Despite its many drawbacks and extremely expensive spin-offs (for example the Arms Race, the Space Race), it did help to check whatever expansionist aims the Soviet government and it allies had planned, and indeed, in the end "achieved its goal -the destruction of communism". (www.AntiEssays.com). Kennan himself, in a CNN interview, addressed this point himself, saying, "My thoughts about containment were, of course, distorted by the people who understood it and pursued it exclusively as a military concept; and I think that that…led to [the] 40 years of unnecessary, fearfully expensive and disoriented process of the Cold War." Whether this means that Kennan, who is after all credited with the authorship of this approach to foreign policy, now so undermined and weakened by the Bush regime, had a more sophisticated, humane idea in mind, which might have been more in line with Bion's concept, remains to be seen.

[ii] **Post-War Austrian history and the emergence of "Proporz" politics**: Due to their own bad experiences during the period of 1918-1933, the leading political groups in the major political parties agreed to cooperate in all aspects of political and economic life. This led to a continuation of a coalition of Social Democrats and Conservatives that had become necessary during the Nazi occupation. Now, this coalition was further extended by what was referred to as the "social partnership" (Sozialpartnerschaft), which was intended to bring together all significant economic interest groups in the socio-political decision-making process. In 1966 the coalition was ended and replaced by a Conservative government. The "Sozialpartnerschaft" still exists, although in modified form, to the present day.

In the period 1983-86, the power of the Social Democratic Party declined. At the same time, there was a loss of support for the Conservative Party as well. Until 1986, a two-party system had existed with only a minor third power playing any role at all. During these four years, however, the situation changed dramatically.

On the one hand, a new group called "The Green Alternative" ("Die Gruene Alternative") emerged, which, originating from ecologically oriented-politics and socialism, rapidly advanced into the traditional territory of the Social Democratic electorate and then further advanced into the middle of the political spectrum.

On the other hand a new conservative reactionary movement emerged among the until then fairly insignificant "Freedom" party (although they had been partners in a coalition government with the Social Democrats form 1983 to 1986, the year that Joerg Haider was elected party chairman), but which under these new circumstances was now able to make significant inroads into the electorate of the Conservative party.

The year 1986 definitely marked the end of Austria's post war period. During this campaign, the question arose as to whether Kurt Waldheim had been a Nazi or not. This developed into a political battle for power between Social Democrats and Conservatives, but mainly, it gave rise and support to the ultra-reactionary Joerg Haider, who, backed by extreme right-wing Austrian organisations, was started on a political career that helped him ultimately to break the dominance of the Christian conservative camp.

The politics of "**Proporz**" the ÖVP and SPÖ's *Proporz* system, which created fiefdoms in which political affiliations were the main criteria for filling high-level management positions in post-war Austria, has meant that since the end of World War II, practically all elected and appointed offices, committees, city councils, water boards, governing bodies of the railroads, public industries etc. as well as all other official and semi-official political bodies have been neatly and evenly divided up between the two ruling parties, the SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria) and the ÖVP, the Austrian Peoples' Party) who formed a coalition government under Social Democratic leadership which ruled for nearly 10 years. This produced intransigent and rampant stagnation at all levels of government and communal life, as well as what in German is called "Filz" - which can be officially translated as "corrupt nepotism" - but which has the added connotation of being "smutty", "filthy" or "matted" (as in unwashed hair). In the year 2000, and after many resounding local victories, it was against this monolithic, inflexible and inefficient Establishment that Haider and his party campaigned and won over 10% of the electorate in the national parliamentary elections.