
SECONDARY ASPECTS OF MASS ORGANIZATION

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THE primary purposes of mass organizations of workers, farmers and other toilers are the fundamental aims for which they are organized; their secondary aspects are the effects, intangible or concrete, produced within them by the impact of other movements and social forces. Thus, while an organization is founded to accomplish a basic task—its primary purpose—such as the achievement of specific political objectives, the attainment of certain economic ends, or the carrying on of educational activities, the organization invariably presents numerous secondary aspects. These are of two general categories, ideological and functional, and may be political, economic, fraternal, religious, cultural, technical or social, which the organization absorbs into its practice and structure from contact with the innumerable other organizations and trends in our national life.

There is an intermingling going on among the many mass movements and social currents. It is this that creates

the secondary aspects we are discussing. Thus, the primary function of one organization becomes a secondary aspect of others. The auxiliary features in question are of profound significance to a mass organization and may determine whether it shall live or die. Sometimes the secondary aspects operate as reactionary capitalist controls over the masses and sometimes as healthful stabilizers of the given movement; altogether the question is one of the most complex and important phases of popular movements. Let us, therefore, signalize some of the two general groups of secondary aspects of mass organizations and learn what lessons we can about them.

1. IDEOLOGICAL SECONDARY ASPECTS

This type of secondary aspect of mass organizations originates in deep-running opinions, beliefs and prejudices among the masses. It includes various kinds of moods and movements, although here I shall deal with only a few of major consequence.

A. CAPITALIST ILLUSIONS

A secondary ideological characteristic of basic importance in American proletarian mass organization arises

because the working class in this country (despite its groping for a way out) has not yet broken with perspectives within capitalism. Although the workers in other countries—Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, and to a lesser extent, Latin America—have come to realize, in a general way at least, the necessity to abolish capitalism, and notwithstanding that in the Soviet Union the workers and peasants have actually built socialism, the bulk of the workers in the United States, the greatest of all capitalist lands, have not yet become class conscious, and do not look beyond the framework of capitalism for the final solution of their class problem. Such capitalist illusions, originating, briefly stated, in the relatively better economic and political conditions enjoyed historically by the toilers, especially the labor aristocracy, in this country, have played a profound role in shaping their mass activities. They constitute a secondary aspect of vital importance, one which deeply affects every feature of American proletarian mass organization. They have enormously facilitated capitalist domination of these movements and of the working class as a whole, by opening the doors for betrayal by corrupt labor leaders, and by confusing the thought and crippling the action of the workers.

This secondary aspect of American mass organization being of course wholly harmful, our job is to remove it by giving the workers a socialist perspective. In this task is involved the whole question of building the democratic front, of organizing the struggle of the people against fascism and for peace and democracy, of

educating the masses with our Party's fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism. The systematic liquidation of capitalist illusions and the achievement of a socialist outlook by the workers will have far-reaching consequences, not only upon every phase of their own organization and struggle—policy, structure, leadership and tactics—but also on popular mass movements in general.

B. RELIGION

Religion is another extremely important secondary aspect of American mass organization. Inevitably a social current so well organized and so deeply ingrained in the mind of the masses as religion has exerted a far-reaching effect upon the people's mass organizations of all types throughout their entire history. Political parties, trade unions, farmers' associations, fraternal orders and the many other kinds of broad mass movements in which the toilers participate in huge numbers have been fundamentally influenced in various ways by this powerful force. The employers have tirelessly exploited religion to control the people's organizations and they have often been unwittingly aided by Left-wing mistakes in dealing with it.

The numerous churches (and American bourgeois-democracy has served to multiply greatly the number of Protestant sects) have sedulously cultivated their causes within the mass organizations, and the resultant conflicts, especially those between Protestants and Catholics, have at times been acute. Consequently, the employers have been alert to provoke such sectarian clashes. In the main, however, the spirit of democratic

tolerance has prevailed and mass solidarity been preserved. In the great fraternal organizations (which, with duplications, are estimated to number 50,000,000 members, including many millions of workers and farmers) there is a wide split between Catholics and Protestants; but this is not the case in mass organizations generally. Thus, there are in the United States no Catholic trade unions and, in our time, no special political parties based upon religious lines.

The triumph of mass solidarity over religious sectarianism is a tribute to American democracy. Communists must ever be keen to cultivate the democratic spirit of mutual tolerance among the religious sects in the people's mass organizations. A still greater lesson for us to learn, however, is how to work freely with religious strata for the accomplishment of democratic mass objectives, while at the same time carrying on our basic Marxist-Leninist educational work. A very serious mistake of the American Left wing during many years, and one it would not have made had it understood Marx and Lenin, has been its attempt arbitrarily to wave aside religious sentiments among the masses. Reactionary forces have always known how to take advantage of this short-sighted sectarian error by instigating the religious masses against the Left wing. In recent years, however, the Communist Party, with its policy of "the outstretched hand," has done much to overcome the harmful Left wing narrowness of former years and to develop a more healthy cooperation with the religious masses of the people in building the democratic front.

C. AMERICANISM

Patriotism, which naturally has always played a profound role in American popular movements of all kinds, is another vitally important secondary feature of mass organizations. The reactionary forces have been especially energetic in utilizing the patriotic sentiments of the masses for the purpose of dominating the organized movements of the people. They have never failed to cover up their every villainy with the Flag, distorting the whole body of revolutionary and democratic tradition of the country to their own anti-social ends. Thus, the isolationists use as their patron saint George Washington, who fought the Revolutionary War in alliance with France and with the support of Holland and Spain; the fascist-minded Liberty Leaguers bedeck themselves with the mantle of the revolutionary Thomas Jefferson; the big bankers profane the name of Abraham Lincoln to justify the open-shop policy, and the ultra-tory D.A.R. befools the tradition of the American Revolution. Now, more than ever before, the fascists, with their demagogic nationalism, are shamelessly twisting and warping American historical traditions and mass patriotic sentiments to suit their destructive purposes.

On their own part, the progressive forces in the mass organizations have made considerable appeal to American patriotism and traditions for constructive ends. But this appeal has usually been weak, spasmodic and ineffective. The workers, farmers, professionals have not understood how to bring forth in their agitation the basically constructive role they have

played historically in building American democracy.

In this respect the revolutionary movement has been especially weak. From the foundation of the Socialist Labor Party in the 1870's, down through the life of the Socialist Party and the I.W.W., and during the early years of the Communist Party, there was a dominant tendency to ignore and to scorn American tradition and love of country. This arose out of a narrow, sectarian conception of internationalism, and it did much to weaken the position of the revolutionaries in the organizations of the patriotically minded toiling masses. Here again, a better study of Marx and Lenin would have prevented this grievous error. Only during the past few years, notably since the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International and through the writings of Comrade Browder, is real progress being made by our Party in correcting this costly mistake and in basing itself upon a correct Leninist line.

The cultivation of the democratic, revolutionary American traditions among the mass organizations is one of the most important tasks in the building of the democratic front. We must not permit the reactionaries to steal and distort the national traditions and aspirations of the people. The great democratic masses must be taught by constant reference to American history that it was their struggles in the past that built our republic, that the democratic front movement of today is the continuation of all the fights for liberty in the history of our country; that in the achievement of the current demands

of the masses lies the fruition of all that is progressive and glorious in American history; that socialism is the climax toward which the entire historic struggle of the democratic American people inevitably tends. Doubly necessary also is it for the organizations of the foreign-born to develop and to link up their democratic national traditions with Americanism, in order to offset the present desperate efforts of the fascists to capture these many important organizations by reactionary-nationalistic agitation.

D. RACISM

National and racial chauvinism has long constituted an important secondary aspect of American mass organizations of various types. It is a potent instrument of reactionaries. In the middle of the 19th century there was the widespread Know-Nothing nativist movement, directed against the foreign-born workers, especially the Irish. Then, for generations there have been Jim-Crow color lines against Negroes in many kinds of mass organizations. And now we have to contend with the sinister growth of fascist-bred anti-Semitism. The malignancy of the danger of racist prejudice was exemplified by the tremendous spread of the anti-Negro, anti-foreigner, anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic Ku Klux Klan a few years ago and the upspringing in the present period of a whole series of fascist-like Black Legions, Silver Shirts, Crusaders, Coughlinites and similar movements, animated by a similar spirit of intolerance.

The Communist Party has always militantly fought against all racial and national chauvinism. Our Party's

fight for Negro rights notably has been effective. The mass organizations of the growing democratic front are by no means yet free of narrow chauvinism. Especially there are still to be noted shameful barriers against Negroes in the A. F. of L. and Railroad Brotherhood unions. To eradicate all such prejudices of race and nationality among the masses now becomes more necessary than ever, in view of the rise of fascism, which feeds and lives upon such reactionary currents. Mass solidarity, regardless of race, creed, color and nationality, is an indispensable requirement for the building of a real democratic front of all the progressive forces.

E. DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND YOUTH

Under capitalism women have always occupied a position of inferiority—economically, politically and socially—a discrimination which has often reflected itself as a harmful secondary aspect within democratic mass organizations, including those of proletarian composition. Thus, some trade unions have “male” clauses in their constitutions which bar women from membership and from work in their crafts, and many others hinder them from becoming official leaders. Young workers of both sexes have also suffered various discriminations and repressions in economic, political and social organizations.

This situation is rapidly improving, however. Women, especially during the twenty years since they have gained the right to vote, have made spectacular progress in the fields of industry, education and politics. They are building up great organizations

of their own and are also breaking through barriers and prejudices in the trade unions and other popular mass movements. For example, the New Dealers of the Democratic Party, realizing the women’s new status, have outstripped the Republicans by securing to women many responsible party posts and elective political positions, including a seat in Roosevelt’s cabinet. Woman’s role in other mass organizations is likewise rapidly on the upgrade.

The youth also, notably within the past half-dozen years, have come forward politically in seven-league boots, overturning many hoary obstacles that stood in their way. They have initiated a big independent youth movement whose main center is the American Youth Congress, and they have also organized their forces within other mass movements. The Democratic and Republican Parties, becoming acutely youth-conscious, are building elaborate youth sections, and the churches, both Protestant and Catholic, have long since developed huge youth movements. The C.I.O. is rapidly expanding its youth program; but the A. F. of L. is still dangerously backward in this whole matter.

Discrimination against, and underestimation of, women and youth in democratic mass organizations, however subtle in form, constitute a detrimental secondary aspect of these movements and they must be abolished. This is especially necessary now, in view of the attempts of the reactionaries and fascists to capture politically the women and youth with demagogic agitation. Bringing the masses of women and youth into the fullest membership and leadership in

the democratic front will broaden its outlook and vastly strengthen the whole movement.

F. RITUALISM

Ritualism is a characteristic secondary feature of American mass organizations of various sorts containing many millions of workers, farmers and professionals. It is widely prevalent and has been so since before the American Revolution. Americans love to lay aside the humdrum routine of life, dress themselves up as Christian Knights, Indian Chiefs, Chinese Mandarins or Oriental Potentates, and engage in ritualistic pomp and ceremony. In his *Cyclopedia of Fraternities*, Albert C. Stevens asserts: "In the United States there are more secret orders and a larger aggregate membership than in all other civilized countries." Much of the characteristic ritualism dates from the days of the medieval guilds and harks back to legendary times, and even to savagery.

Ritualism, aside from that of the churches, has its principal seat in the great fraternal societies. The trade unions, also, have long been permeated with it, as have the farmers' organizations. In the early days the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor and the Knights of St. Crispin, both genuine labor organizations, had elaborate, secret rituals; the Railroad Brotherhoods of today also possess extensive rituals; and scores of A. F. of L. craft unions still have symbolistic grips, signs, passwords, initiation ceremonies, burial services, secret conventions and other ritualistic practices.

Ritualism is a reflection of cultural

poverty and backwardness, a hang-over of medievalism. It has many roots and has served various purposes in mass organizations. It is one form of expression of the people's love of the imaginative and legendary, of pageantry and colorfulness, of cultural cravings that find no rational outlet. In early trade unions the ritualistic secrecy doubtless was a protective measure for the members, and in many instances ritualism has lent an element of interest to the mass organizations. But the fiery crosses, blood oaths and ghostly regalia of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan show that the reactionaries have understood how to adapt ritualism to their purposes.

During the upswing of capitalism, notably since about the turn of the century, with the development of increasing opportunities for mass education and recreation, the masses began to display a diminishing interest in ritualism. Hence, the newer fraternal orders (Moose, Eagles, Owls, etc.) have less ritualism, and that which they have tends to run more to horseplay, and the younger trade unions have almost no ritualism whatever. Now, however, with the decay of capitalism and the spread of fascism, there is a fresh development of mystic ritualistic tendencies, with mysterious emblems, pagan gods and legends, and the other obscurantist medievalism which is being cultivated by reactionaries to capture the minds of the masses.

In progressive mass organizations little function can probably be found for typical ritualism, and Left elements have, therefore, been much (and unwisely) inclined to ignore the

whole phenomenon. In this connection it is interesting to note that mass organizations predominantly of the foreign-born of Central and Eastern Europe, which for the most part were organized under Social-Democratic influence, are freer from ritualism than are native American organizations. Thus, characteristically, bodies such as the Workmen's Circle, International Workers Order, German Krankenkasse, Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and International Ladies' Garment Workers have no ritualism of any kind.

Sound policies of mass organization demand, however, that care be taken to satisfy the mass love of mystery, secrecy, ceremony, legend, romance and splendor that gives birth to ritualism under American conditions. This can be done, in a substantial measure at least, by cultivating democratic pageantry, parades, demonstrations, carnivals, the theater, music, art, choral singing, rhythmic dancing and the like, in popular mass organizations. In all such features the democratic people's movements, especially those of the workers and farmers, are at present poorly developed. Improvements along this line will pay big dividends in the shape of more solid mass organization and additional safeguards against fascist mystic demagogy.

2. FUNCTIONAL SECONDARY ASPECTS

This type of secondary aspects has to do with definite objectives of the given mass organization. In themselves they may be extremely important; nevertheless, they do not constitute the primary purpose of the organization. They, like the ideological

secondary aspects, are many in number, but here I shall cite only a few of the greatest importance in mass organizations generally.

A. POLITICS

Politics, the primary function of political parties, has always manifested itself as a secondary aspect of great importance in every type of popular mass organization. For the most part in such movements of the people, including trade unions, farmers' associations, professional guilds, fraternal societies, veterans' movements, etc., politics, as a secondary aspect, has appeared traditionally under the guise of "non-politicalism" and "non-partisanship." Despite such neutral-sounding slogans, however, the leaders of the Republican and Democratic Parties early developed effective techniques of political control in the various mass organizations and have successfully exploited them to cultivate conservative moods among the people, to make war against progressive legislation, and to elect reactionary candidates to political office. The worst sufferers in this respect have been the trade unions and the farmers' organizations, the history of which is saturated with shameful sell-outs by corrupt leaders sailing under flags of political non-partisanship.

But a great change is now taking place in this whole situation. Under the blows of the economic crisis, with its consequent political awakening of the masses, sharpening of the class struggle on all sectors, and rapid building of the democratic front, there is a new political breeze blowing through the people's mass organiza-

tions of all kinds. Capitalist controls over them are weakening. This is true most of all in the trade unions and farmers' organizations. But it is also true in varying degrees of innumerable other mass organizations of women, youth, veterans, unemployed, Negroes, professionals and foreign-born, and also of the huge popular fraternal orders, the lay religious associations, the peace groups, etc., all of which contain huge numbers of workers. These mass movements are casting off their old garments of non-politicalism and non-partisanship, which served the reactionaries so well, and are constantly assuming a more definitely democratic position on political questions. The New Deal ferment is everywhere at work among them.

To politicalize these great mass movements of the people, especially those of the workers and farmers, and to draw them together into a firm political alignment against reaction, are a central task in building the democratic front. It is a job requiring intelligence, persistence and flexibility. Among the workers' and farmers' organizations the route is a relatively straight one, breaking through old policies of "non-politicalism" and "non-partisanship" and bringing about direct affiliation with, and support of, the democratic front. Among other popular mass movements, however, which have either a heavier admixture of petty-bourgeois elements or have primary functions of not so immediately a class-struggle character and where non-political traditions are very strong, it is necessary to proceed with more diffused forms and methods in order politically to educate these

organized masses to get them to support individual New Deal programs, to enlist their endorsement of specific election candidates, etc., and at the same time to avoid harmful splits.

B. FRATERNAL INSURANCE

Still another significant secondary aspect of American mass organizations is fraternal insurance. The masses have always felt a great need for financial protection against sickness, accident, old age, death and other hazards. This need, long practically ignored by the government, was only partially met by the big bourgeois insurance companies and fraternal societies, with the result that many types of mass organizations adopted fraternal insurance as auxiliary features. Especially in the case of the trade unions of skilled workers the sick-and-death-benefit institutions grew quite elaborate. Under conservative union leadership these union benefit systems dulled the political struggle for government social insurance; but, on the other hand, they have also unquestionably often served as important stabilizers of the unions through giving the workers added incentives for membership. Too frequently in the past Left wingers have summarily condemned all such benefit systems as harmful and reactionary.

In view of the present-day development of state and national government social insurance in the United States, the whole question of auxiliary insurance features of mass organizations presents itself under new conditions and requires careful re-study. Already fresh trends are observable regarding such insurance. Among others, there are the new-type

medical plans now being developed in various C.I.O. unions, which differ considerably from the customary trade union sick and death benefits. Undoubtedly these new mutualist systems of furnishing medical aid directly to the membership on the basis of small monthly payments, if properly organized, can become serious factors in stabilizing the young C.I.O. organizations. But they should not be considered substitutes for general economic and political pressure upon the employers and the state to establish comprehensive health and other social insurance provisions within their respective spheres.

C. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Social activities constitute another important secondary aspect of mass organizations, there being a widespread tendency to incorporate them into organized movements of the most diverse character. The bourgeois-controlled mass organizations have been very alert in this matter, their leaders realizing the attractive power of such features for the masses. The big fraternal and religious bodies especially stimulate many kinds of social activities, and the employers, too, did not fail to add many similar institutions, particularly sports, to their company unions to give them more allurements for the workers. The Democratic Party, in its local branches, has long concerned itself with these matters.

While the organizations of workers and farmers have also paid much attention to their social side, nevertheless, in general, they have confined themselves too narrowly to their main economic and political programs. They have underestimated the edu-

cational and organizational value of cultivating social and entertainment activities among their masses. Especially have they grievously neglected to organize their youth's sports. In this whole matter, they have lagged far behind European workers' organizations.

In recent years the Communist Party and the Young Communist League have become increasingly conscious of the important role of organized sociability in the mass movement. In particular they have come to appreciate the great significance of sport. It is a political necessity also that the trade unions and other democratic mass organizations should expand their present altogether too sketchy social life. Picnics, dances, card parties, concerts, banquets, excursions, tours, hiking, physical culture and the like are great cementers of mass organization and are of first-rate significance in building the democratic front.

D. EDUCATION

Mass organizations of all kinds, in order to explain their primary purposes, must carry on a certain amount of educational work. In many instances, especially in proletarian organizations, this educational work tends to become an important secondary aspect by extending far beyond the narrow needs of popularizing the organization's basic function. In working-class political parties—the early Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party of twenty years ago, the various Farmer-Labor Parties, the Communist Party—this educational work reached its highest development. The Communist Party of today, with

its network of daily papers, literature publications and schools, is by far the most elaborate educational institution ever built up by the American working class.

The A. F. of L. craft unions have been notoriously weak in their educational work, venturing only scattering beyond the immediate economic and political problems of their own spheres, although in recent years their outlook has been considerably broadened politically. For the most part they have no definitely organized department for educational activities. The needle trades unions have been the pioneers in trade union educational work. The new C.I.O. unions are also making big strides in this matter and are generally on a higher educational level than the old craft unions.

The importance of developing the educational activities of the mass organizations cannot be overstressed. This educational work, starting from the basis of explaining the primary function of the given mass organization of workers, farmers, veterans, unemployed, Negroes, youth, etc., must proceed in the direction of giving the masses a broad understanding of their general economic, political, cultural and social problems. Communists, above all others, should be leaders in developing this vital educational work.

SUMMARY

In the preceding pages I have indicated some of the major secondary aspects of mass organizations, namely, capitalist illusions, religion, patriotism, racism, discriminations against women and youth, ritualism, politics,

fraternal insurance, social activities and education. Sometimes these and other secondary aspects manifest themselves within a given organization as definite institutions and sometimes merely as currents of thought among the membership. Frequently, as negative forces, they serve as means by which reactionaries maintain mass control; and often, constructive in character, they are healthful elements in strengthening the given organization. In all cases they are extremely important, and even decisive.

Communists especially should study carefully this fundamental, if secondary, phase of mass organization. To do this, we should draw upon the rich experience of all the mass organizations of the people—political parties, trade unions, farmers' organizations, religious bodies, fraternal societies, national group organizations, co-operatives, veterans' organizations, unemployed movements, cultural societies, women's clubs, patriotic orders, peace movements, technical guilds, youth associations and many others.

While we are examining more sharply the forms and practices of these great organizations, with their tens of millions of worker and farmer members, we should also pay much closer attention than in the past to winning them for the democratic cause. The capitalists, on their part, have always been conscious of the great significance of the huge mass movements and have left no stone unturned to control them.

A mistake of the American Left wing, covering two generations past, was to ignore and underestimate the secondary aspects of mass organiza-

tions, enlarged upon in this article; that is, to attempt to confine popular mass movements too narrowly to their primary objectives. This was a sectarian tendency to over-simplify the whole question of mass organization. The result was a great deal of lost mo-

tion, much needless isolation from the masses. A large part of the Communist Party's recent improvement in mass work is precisely its growing understanding in utilizing the secondary aspects of mass organization for building the democratic front.