

Revolutionary Dancing

by Barbara [Mettler]

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All over the country groups of class conscious young workers are getting together for the purpose of forming proletarian dance groups. In the last few months, particularly here in New York, the activity of some of these groups has been vital enough to make the bourgeois as well as the proletarian world sit up and take notice. Why? What need among the workers are these dance groups filling? And what effect are they likely to have on the future of the working class?

Dancing is probably the most thoroughly healthy activity in the world. It is rhythmic physical movement based upon coordination of body and mind. It is different from other forms of physical activity, such as ordinary gymnastics and sports, in its quality of expression. Why do we dance instead of play basketball, for instance? Because basketball only exercises our muscles. Dancing exercises all of us. In dancing we use our muscles to express our feelings and ideas. How do we do it? By means of rhythm. We learn to move rhythmically and in doing so, find that our movements take on meaning and give us a new satisfaction. How much more exhilarating than swinging Indian clubs is it to swing our arms in a gesture of defiance or revolt, expressing all the strength and courage of the working class!

And dancing is the most natural activity in the world. If it were not for the cramping effect that our ridiculous clothes and artificial forms of living have on our lives, we should all be dancers! If we keep in mind that dancing is merely expressive rhythmic movement, we will realize that we dance before we talk. Young children dance at play. Watch them sometime. Whether they are running and skipping or dramatizing their little games, their movements are free, rhythmic, expressive. Among primitive peoples dancing is not the privilege of a chosen, specially trained few, but the natural heritage of the whole group. Somewhere along the road of civilization we have lost this natural ability to move freely, expressively--to dance. And we miss it and need it. The fact that we miss it and need it is one of the reasons for the rapid growth of the amateur dance groups among the workers. Here, as in all things, the class-conscious workers are leading the search for lost social values and fighting to re-establish them.

The workers' dance groups are amateur groups, based upon the fact that dancing is natural and necessary for the health and satisfaction not only of a few individuals, but of the whole group. When young workers who are being urged to join one of these groups reply, "Oh, I can't dance, I'm not graceful", little do they know what a mighty bourgeois prejudice has them in its grip! It is a bourgeois conception that dancing must be "graceful" and the privilege of only a few. Everybody can dance, and everybody should

dance. The new collective dance will be as different from the "graceful" dance of the bourgeois individual as the strong arm of the worker is from the delicate hand of the princess. And it will belong to everybody. Its purpose will be to develop healthy, coordinated members of a group which will be able to give rhythmic expression to the ideology of a collective society.

Just how do these proletarian dance groups work? They meet once or twice a week in the evening and under the leadership of some more experienced member, lay the foundation for dancing in a thorough rhythmic-gymnastic training. They strengthen their muscles, learn to control and coordinate the various parts of the body, making the body as a whole capable of expressing inner feelings. They learn to move as a group. Each individual learns what it feels like to move rhythmically, harmoniously, purposefully with other individuals; he finds a new freedom of expression in rhythmic co-ordination. When the group feeling has been established and the bodies, through gymnastic training, have begun to come to life, the group will be ready to create dances not only for themselves but for audiences of their fellow-workers. The dances will express ideas common to all members of the group--proletarian ideas which will move and inspire both performers and audience. Dancing can thus become one of the most potent weapons in the class struggle through its power to weld performers and audience into a solid unity and its ability to give vital expression to the revolutionary ideas common to all.

(The above type of a revolutionary Dance Group has been formed by the Harlem Prolets. The group portrayed "Fascism and Revolt" in a dance at the Variety Program arranged by the Prolets, Saturday March 10th--Edit. Note.)