

A classic example of a tendency is the Industrial Syndicalist Education League, essentially a syndicalist faction within the wider UK labour movement from 1910-1914, though there are plenty of others. Sometimes, where appropriate tendencies do not exist; the political organisation may have to set them up from scratch, attempting to find allies throughout the broader mass organisation. Tendencies may also be multi-layered, with tendencies working within other tendencies to build or reform them.

This model of organisation quite naturally fits in to the ladder of engagement. Typically the political organisation will want to recruit experienced militants, and obviously those militants should be politically close to the organisation. Those individuals who start out joining the mass organisation, then a tendency, have already gone on a political and experiential journey, developing their skills and ideas and drawing closer to the political organisation. It is therefore within these tendencies that recruits are to be found.

In real life of course, things are never quite so simple, and most political organisations, rather than falling neatly into one of the above strategies, alternate between them, at times agitating at the whole of the working class, at times within mass organisations and sometimes in tendencies. For example, when it comes to propaganda, most socialist groups produce all their own materials, usually aimed at the general public, as ineffectual as that may be due to their limited capacity, instead of distributing propaganda for a mass organisation, which a member of the public is more likely to join, and consequently take their first step on the ladder of engagement.

The same is often true of community work, where rather than trying to build a mass organisation such as a residents group the political organisation will instead set up temporary campaigns, with the only permanent organisation being the political group itself.

Hopefully, the model outlined above can serve some use in understanding how political organisations interact with the working class. The left's

current partyist trends away from mass organisation work in all but the industrial sphere, and the inadequate use of tendencies and other alliances have contributed greatly to the ineffectualness of the left. If we change our tactics to account for our limited capacity, I believe we can achieve far more, increasing our capacity many times.

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The Political Organisation and the Mass Organisation

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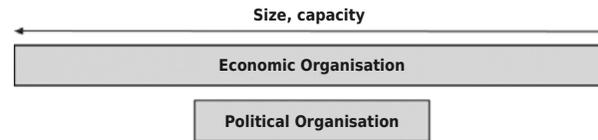


Whilst organising closely with politically like-minded comrades may seem like an obvious instinct, it is worth evaluating what role a political organisation can or should play. In this essay I will build a model of working class organisation, as a means of comparing the nature and functions of the political organisation and the mass organisation. Like all such models, this will be idealised, and more of a statement as to how things perhaps ought to be, than how they are at present.

How mass organisation should relate to political organisations is a key question for socialists as clearly permanent mass organisations are required to sustain and grow class-consciousness, and to allow victories to be built upon and turned into further victories.

So what are the key attributes of a coherent political organisation? Tight theoretical and tactical unity are to be expected, with everyone being on the same page and pushing in the same direction. Because of this, the size of a political organisation is often greatly limited; as there are only so many people out there who believe in whichever specific brand of socialism the organisation defines itself as, and who simultaneously have a shared attitude towards the practical day-to-day tasks of activism.

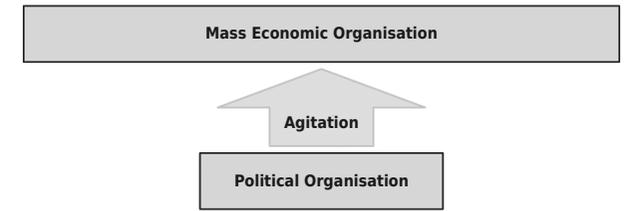
In contrast to this is the mass economic organisation, which for most libertarians is the key to the revolution. This most obviously could be a trade union, however other organisations such as residents groups may also fall under this banner. As the name suggests, mass organisations are very large in size, but consequently lack a great deal of political coherency. Another important factor in analysing organisations is their capacity. A small political group will have little capacity, as this capacity is primarily derived from financial resources and man-hours, however, with collective discipline, its capacity can be increased somewhat. In contrast mass organisation have large capacity, generally having a lot of funding and human resource available to them, however whether or not this capacity is utilised, and in what direction, is another question.



Some socialists, both in the libertarian and statist camps, believe that the mass organisation should be the political organisation, in other words, they are "partyists". A good example of partyism from the statist side is the Scottish Socialist Party, who's basic strategy is growth. However, in the Libertarian camp we can also find similar ideas, the most obvious example being the IWA affiliated groups, each of which seeks to build hybrid political/economic mass organisations.

This approach however, can only succeed where either the revolutionary politics of the organisation are de-emphasised (such as in the case of the SSP), as most working class people in the UK at least are social democrats and thus unlikely to join a revolutionary organisation, or the political "mass" organisation remains small, such as in the case of IWA affiliates. It is worth noting at this point that I am observing general trends, and I am sure there are people in both the SSP and IWA who do not think their organisations should work this way.

A more sophisticated approach to mass organisations can be found in both statist and libertarian camps, where the political organisation participates and agitates within the wider mass organisation. This is the model adopted by most platformist anarchist groups and also many trotskyist groups, at least when it comes to their industrial work. This model typically means that the political organisation will attempt to engage directly with the mass membership of the economic organisation in which they find themselves. This model allows the mass organisation to grow and play some role in developing the consciousness in the wider working class, through the implicit strengthening of the class that comes through organisation.



The flaw with this model however is that a small political group still has little capacity, and its constituency, now the membership of the mass organisation rather than the whole of the working class, is still very large and whilst closer to its politics, is still most likely to be social-democratic, therefore the influence of the political organisation is constrained.

Enter the tendency organisation. The tendency organisation sits in between the political organisation and the mass organisation, both in terms of size, capacity and political coherency. The tendency allows the political organisation to pursue a subset of its goals with like-minded allies, thus granting it larger capacity. The tendency also creates a smaller, though politically closer, constituency where the political organisation can hope to wield greater influence and has better prospects of recruitment.

