

# WHY A FEDERATION?

BY WALTER GROTHE

When the Editor of "Let's Dance" first asked me to write an article under the above heading my first reaction was to say "No!" Why should I re-iterate what is common knowledge, what has been stated so many times, what has been pronounced by every Federation President, North and South, Past and Present, at every Festival ad infinitum, ad nauseum. But then, on second thought, it occurred to me that I might be able to tell a little about the early days of our California Federation, its role at that time and its application to the present.

The question: "Why a Federation" would, of course, invite a dual answer. One very positive: "Yes, by all means, it is the solution to all problems." One negative: "Why do we need a Federation? Is it really necessary? Don't we get along just as well, or better, without it?"

There are merits to both view points. To talk about the latter first: There are dangers in organizing into a large body. It tends to become bureaucratic, mechanical, a machine that might stifle individual initiative. Personality frictions, lust for power are other elements that come into evidence. Poor or no leadership can do more harm than good to the folk dance movement (and we have had such leadership, or lack of it). But all in all there is probably no doubt that the advantages of a Federation outway its shortcomings.

Particularly in the early days of folk dancing, 1942/43, it was a necessity - a question of survival. There we were about ten clubs, about two hundred people in the entire State, all struggling to get along, and with very little contact with each other. The idea of joining forces, put into action in 1942 by Henry Glass, was, therefore, natural and imperative, if we wanted to succeed. We felt at the time (and many of us still feel today) that we had a message. We had a great urge to tell others about it and share the pleasure we had found in our new activity. After joining into the Federation we two hundred people were like one family. Everybody participated in everything that was planned; everybody went to every function; everybody was a pioneer. We expanded. If we saw an unused lawn in a community that had no group, we approached the City Fathers and arranged a Festival. We moved on all over the State. Nothing could stop us. The enthusiasm and spirit was terrific. No work was too much. We loved it. Every expansion, every new group helped us. Without a Federation that would have been impossible. We could now talk for thousands, and the larger we grew the more we found open doors. We continued our organization. We started many new ventures and still it was the original spirit, the enthusiasm for the movement, the common ground we had found, that carried us further.

You know the rest of the story. We are now a large organization, well established, with many people functioning in various committees and offices. It is easy now, compared to the early days, where we had

to fight every inch of the way, and yet I am glad I was part of the beginning. If we can retain the spirit and enthusiasm, the willingness to give unselfishly, and to share, many things that bother us today would be overcome. It is fortunate that many still have that approach, and our hopes are that this spirit will always be the spirit of our Federation. That will be the solution to all problems. There is no limit to what we can do. It is in our hands. We are the Federation, and with us it will live or die.



John Mooney

Ted Walker

Presidents, Folk Dance Federation, North & South  
1958-1959

Photo by Henry L. Bloom