

On slime mold, and the 'One Worlders'

by Jonathan Tennenbaum

The Reagan-Gorbachov summit of last December seems to have triggered a new period of growth and proliferation of the phenomenon known variously as the "One World Movement," the "New Age Conspiracy," or the "New Globalism." More and more politicians, religious leaders, business executives, scientists, and artists have declared that they, too, are part of "the Movement." The Soviets are expected to announce soon that the entire Red Army has joined.

The most prominent characteristic of "the Movement" is its instinctive urge to dissolve all political, cultural, and institutional boundaries separating mankind, and engulf the entire human race into a new kind of "global Organism." The One Worldists think of themselves as seeds or spores of "the Organism," proud little spores of the great "Thing" that one day will envelop the planet! They reveal the inner ambitions of "the Organism" as soon as they open their mouths; for, they are always talking about the "the world family," "the global ecology" and "the new planetary consciousness."

Although the "One World Movement" believes itself to be something very new and revolutionary, it is actually many hundreds of millions of years old. Indeed, anyone familiar with the elements of mycology—the scientific study of fungi—will immediately note the striking similarities between "the Organism" of the One Worldists, and the ubiquitous slime mold *Physarum polycephalum*. The two are so nearly identical in their instincts and behavior, that we are practically forced to regard the "One World Movement" as the reincarnation of a slime mold!

It may therefore be of interest for those concerned with the present rapid growth of "Globalism," to make themselves familiar with the habits of the slime mold. For this purpose, we provide the following brief summary. (More details are available in any standard text on fungi.)

First, as their name suggests, these organisms leave a thick trail of slime behind them wherever they go. But their most remarkable feature is their mode of proliferation, which involves two distinct phases, the "liberal phase" and the "collective phase." In the "liberal phase," the organism exists as a large number of individual amoebas, moving about without any apparent coherence or order. Although they insist on absolute freedom of motion and reproductive behavior within the oozing mass as a whole, these liberal amoebas are all completely alike. The term, "liberal" is especially appropri-

ate, in view of the fact that these organisms attempt to reproduce themselves by both sexual and asexual means.

It is most remarkable that sooner or later, the liberal phase invariably develops into the "collective" or totalitarian phase. At some invisible signal, the amoebas abandon their chaotic motions and gather into a great mass called a plasmodium. Here we see the clear manifestation of a "collective soul." The amoebas actually fuse together and disappear into a great undifferentiated blob of protoplasm. Within the plasmodium, all vital processes are strictly regulated and synchronized.

Now, a plasmodium can grow in several ways. First, it can simply expand and take over larger areas. Second, it can fuse with or absorb other plasmodia. When it encounters obstacles to further growth in either of these modes, it sprouts structures called "fruiting bodies," which scatter spores in large numbers. These spores spread far and wide, and, wherever they find favorable conditions, proliferate into new colonies of liberal amoebas. These, in turn, relaunch the whole process.

So, by a constant "ying-yang" alternation of liberal and collective phases, the slime mold expands and proliferates, driven by an *inexorable biological urge to envelop the entire Earth*.

But, our organism has a fundamental limitation: It is a *parasite*. It can only feed on the activity of higher forms of life, and only prospers in conditions of degeneration and decay of the higher forms. Thus, if our slime mold would ever actually succeed in its goal—covering the whole Earth with its imperial ooze—that moment would be its downfall. For then it would have nothing more to feed upon.

A horror movie become reality?

There is an unmistakably nightmarish, but at the same time realistic, quality to this account of the slime mold's life cycle. We are reminded of those horror movies, common in the late 1950s, whose generic title was "The Invasion of the Abominable Blob." The Blob would engulf its victims, dissolving them somehow into its own disgusting, slimy mass. Indeed, the thought of a *Homo sapiens* being *taken over by a lower form of life* awakens a kind of elementary horror in us, a justifiable feeling that this would be a fate worse than death. So, when we witness the elites of entire nations, and together with them myriads of normal, seemingly sensible people, suddenly begin babbling about "planetary consciousness," "dissolving institutional barriers" and "joining with the Russians in a new global community," we cannot help but think of "The Invasion of the Abominable Blob."

Has Nature expended countless millions of years of evolution, to develop a life form capable of divine Reason, only to watch it degenerate into a pathetic fungus, a slime mold? It must not be so. For those of us who are still human, it is worth recalling one of the earliest discoveries of the human race: It is easy to outsmart a lower form of life, once one has become familiar with its instincts and habits.