WORKING-CLASS EDUCATION

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PREFACE

THIS little book tells in bare outline the story of a movement which from the outset included groups of workers with different, indeed definitely opposed, aims. It makes no pretence to impartiality, being written by partisans in the "war of ideas" hereinafter described.

But whether or not this precludes any sort of finality in its judgments, its authors can plead that they have honestly tried to set down facts as they see them; and they believe that their account will lose nothing in "actuality" through not having been written by disinterested spectators.

J. F. H. and W. H.

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Working-Class Education

CHAPTER I

THE PIONEERS, 1789–1848

§ 1

TWO different schools of working-class educationists mean two quite different things when they speak of "working-class education."

One school means the *extension* of the benefits of culture, in the general sense of the term, to the class which, by reason of its lack of means and leisure, has been debarred from a full share of those benefits hitherto. From the point of view of this school, culture—the great accumulated mass of human knowledge, ideals and speculations—is, or should be, the common heritage of all men; and the social and economic factors which have cut off the workers from their proper part in that heritage are, from the standpoint of culture, accidental and irrelevant. In other words, this school regards culture as something altogether apart from, and unaffected by, the class division of society.

The other school means by "working-class education" a particular *kind* of education, aiming primarily at meeting the specific needs of the workers as a class, and undertaken by the workers themselves *independently* of, and even in opposition to, the ordinary existing educational channels. This second school takes the view that all human

culture, past and present, has been coloured by the outlook and prejudices of successive ruling (*i.e.* leisured) classes; and that the working class —the great mass of humanity—will add to that culture, not merely a new "note" of its own, but will inevitably revalue all culture by the standards of its own ideals and purposes.

The first group may be said, in brief, to regard Education (with a capital E) as a good in itself; the second to place the emphasis on the Working-Class.

§ 2

The history of working-class education in Britain dates from the early beginnings of the modern working-class movement, in the closing years of the eighteenth century. And from the outset the two differing schools of thought described above are more or less clearly discernible.

In 1789 a Birmingham organisation grimly called the Society for Encouraging the Industrious Poor formed a "Sunday Society" with the object of continuing the education of Sunday school members. In Glasgow, two or three years later, Professor Anderson invited working men to attend his scientific lectures; and his successor, Dr Birkbeck, arranged a regular series of lectures to artisans, "men whose situation in early life had precluded the possibility of acquiring even the smallest portion of scientific knowledge." Birkbeck later removed to London, and there, in 1823–1824, became first director of the London Mechanics' Institute (of which more later). During the next quarter of a century similar institutes were founded, and flourished, in various parts of the country. By 1850 there were over 600 Mechanics' Institutes in England and Wales; though in the early forties

it was "universally acknowledged that the members . . . are, nineteen-twentieths of them, not of the class of mechanics, but are connected with the higher branches of handicraft, or are clerks in offices, and in many cases young men connected with liberal professions." [1]

The literature chiefly used in these institutions was provided by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, founded by Lord Brougham (John Morley's "man of encyclopædic ignorance") in 1826, with the object of imparting "useful knowledge to all classes of the community, particularly to such as are unable to avail themselves of experienced teachers or may prefer learning by themselves." Various religious societies, Tract Societies, etc., were also active in this work.

During the same period, too, the Adult School Movement, mainly under the auspices of religious bodies, grew from small beginnings to considerable strength. Its work, Bible-teaching apart, largely consisted of teaching men and women to read.

Here, then, unmistakably, are the early stages of the education 'extension' movement—the work of philanthropically minded members of the middle or upper classes who desired to hand on to the workers some of the educational benefits they themselves had enjoyed. But the governing classes were by no means unanimous as to the desirability of this diffusion of knowledge among the lower orders of society. Thus a President of the Royal Society declared that "however specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and their

[1] J. Hole, *History and Management of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutes* (quoted by A. E. Dobbs, *Education and Social Movements*, 1700–1850).

happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in those laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory . . . and insolent to their superiors."[1] And even those who favoured "diffusion" were careful to "keep their ambitions within reason." Mrs Trimmer, an early advocate of the extension of elementary education, made it clear that she only aimed at making the children of the poor "so far civilised as not to be disgusting."[2] But the opponents of the 'extension' movement gradually withdrew their opposition as they realised the possibilities of themselves controlling the education of "the labouring part of the community"—of deciding, in short, what was and what was not "useful knowledge" for the workers to acquire.

[1] Quoted by J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, p. 57.

[2] Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 58. Criticising Joseph Lancaster's scheme of elementary education, which included an "Order of Merit" for boys designed to teach them the "origins of true nobility," Mrs Trimmer wrote: "When one considers the humble rank of the boys of which common *Day Schools* and *Charity Schools* are composed, one is naturally led to reflect whether there is any occasion to put notions concerning the *origins of nobility* into their heads; especially in times which furnish recent instances of the extinction of a race of *ancient nobility* in a neighbouring nation, and the elevation of some of the lowest of the people to the highest stations. Boys accustomed to consider themselves as *nobles of a school* may in their future lives, from a conceit of their own trivial merits, unless they have very sound principles, aspire to be *nobles of the land*, and to take the place of the *hereditary nobility*" (*A Comparative View of the New Plan of Education promulgated by Mr Joseph Lancaster and of the System of Christian Education founded by our Pious Forefathers*. By Mrs Trimmer, 1805).

§ 3

In these earliest days of the workers' movement one can trace also the beginnings of that other school of working-class education which defined "useful knowledge" as knowledge likely to be of assistance to the workers in the immediate struggle against exploitation.

Three or four years after the formation of the Birmingham "Sunday Society" mentioned in the last section a group of Birmingham artisans founded a Brotherly Society, which arranged lectures on various scientific subjects and started the first Artisans' Library. These were the years immediately following the French Revolution, when working-men's clubs and groups all over England were eagerly discussing the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity—and their implications. The London Corresponding Society, founded in 1792, may be regarded as the parent organisation. It constituted, says Max Beer, "a sort of democratic and social reform seminary for labour leaders. From it issued most of the ideas and men that made themselves conspicuous in popular movements up to the year 1820."[1] It numbered among its members workmen, small traders and intellectuals; but the latter, who included Horne Tooke, Tom Paine and William Blake, were hardly of the philanthropic turn of mind which characterised the pioneers of the 'extension' movement.

The London Corresponding Society, according to the Report of the Government "Committee of Secrecy" (1794), "meets occasionally in a Body, but its ordinary meetings are in separate Divisions

[1] Beer, *History of British Socialism*, i. 125.

in different Parts of the Town; the number of these Divisions has been gradually increasing; and there are now about Thirty of them established. . . . When the Society originally met . . . it consisted of about Two hundred Persons, but in about Six Months it had considerably increased, and it was agreed that it should divide itself into Ten different Divisions; afterwards it was the Plan, that when the Numbers of any Division amounted to more than Thirty, they should divide themselves again. This has not been strictly adhered to. . . . One of these Divisions is said now to consist of Six hundred Persons, and the number of the others to be various."

The Society held regular "Instructive Meetings" for the discussion of political questions, and its other principal activity consisted in "the artful Dissemination of seditious Publications" (House of Lords Report, p. 9), in particular of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*. The "Committee of Secrecy's" Report quotes from a letter an interesting account of the origin of an affiliated society at Sheffield: "It at first originated in an assembly of five or six mechanics, who, from conversation about the enormous high price of provisions, the unbounded authority of the monopolists of all ranks . . . and the waste of the public property by placemen, pensioners, luxury and debauchery, together with the mock representation of the people, *concluded that nothing but ignorance in the people* could suffer the natural rights of every freeman to be thus violated." They accordingly formed a Society, republished *The Rights of Man* "at the low price of 6d. per copy," and proceeded to form branches in adjacent districts in order "to extend useful knowledge from town to village, and from village to town, until the whole nation be sufficiently

enlightened. . . ." Their conception of what constituted "useful knowledge"—for workers—is sufficiently clear from a reference in another letter to "some Four or Five of us, meeting in each other's Houses in an Evening, consulting and condoling the very low and even miserable Condition the People of this Nation were reduced to by the Avariciousness and Extortion of that haughty, voluptuous and luxurious Class of Beings, who would have us to possess no more Knowledge than to believe all Things were created only for the Use of that small Group of worthless Individuals."

In communication with the London Society were numerous local societies—the Government Report quoted above mentions Sheffield, Manchester, Bristol, Nottingham, Coventry, Derby, Leicester, Norwich, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Royston, York, Hereford, Edinburgh and others—partly political groups, partly educational agencies—in every case specifically *working-class* bodies "created and developed by the English workman under the fierce discouragement of his rulers." Everywhere such societies were propagating what in the eyes of those rulers were "Jacobinical principles." Everywhere such principles quite naturally evolved from the conditions of life in which the workers found themselves. "What came about during this period was the alienation of the working class, due not to the positive influence of ideas or enthusiasms, *but to the effect of experience on ways of thinking and looking at life.* . . . The Industrial Revolution obliged everybody whom it affected to think about the problems it raised, and when they addressed themselves to these problems the rich and the poor started from different standpoints: the rich from the

abstractions of property,[1] the poor from the facts of their own lives. . . . The upper-class explanations ceased to be satisfying to men and women who wanted to know why they were starving in the midst of great wealth. . . . By the end of this period scarcely any aspect of life or society or politics or economics looked the same to the two worlds."[2]

"It makes some difference," indeed, as Mr Brailsford remarks in his sketch of the same period (*Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle*), "whether a man sees history from above or from below." And that difference inevitably expressed itself in very divergent views as to the kind of education which those who saw it from below should receive. It expressed itself even within the sphere of religion; for we read of Mr Wesley's Society (in 1796) expelling certain men for their "democratic sentiments," and for having "imbibed the principles of French Jacobinism"; and of rival Sunday schools being started in Manchester, in opposition to the Methodists, by one of the expelled members.[3]

The ruling classes tried, characteristically, to solve the problem by suppressing (1799) the London Corresponding Society and all similar organisations. But they did not alter the conditions which had given birth to such societies; and therefore they could not stem the tide of working-class thought —or of "Jacobinical principles." By the time the Combination Act was repealed in 1824 many men

[1] "It appears by the probate of the late Mr Ricardo's will that the amount of personal property administered was under £500,000. . . . Besides his personal property above estimated at £500,000, Mr Ricardo died possessed of real property which had cost him £300,000" (*Sunday Times*, October 26th, 1823).

[2] Hammond, *op. cit.*, chapter xv.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 279.

in the workers' movement had become convinced of the need for working-class education with working-class aims and under working-class control.

Foremost amongst these was Thomas Hodgskin (1783-1869). Hodgskin was one of the most ardent advocates of the foundation of a Mechanics' Institute in London, and from the outset he urged that the institution, if it was to be of real service to the workers, must be entirely controlled by them, and must definitely aim at equipping them for the struggle against Capital. He realised quite clearly the antagonism of ideas which resulted from the class divisions of society. "It would be better," he wrote, "for men to be deprived of education than to receive their education from their masters; for education, in that sense, is no better than the training of the cattle that are broken to the yoke."[1] With James Robertson, co-editor with himself of *The Mechanic's Magazine*, he fought hard for the exclusion of upper or middle class philanthropists from the governing body of the London Institute; but his efforts were unsuccessful. The Institute was founded in December, 1823, with Dr Birkbeck (already mentioned above) as its director, and Brougham, Francis Place, T. C. Hansard, the printer, and other prominent figures in the Liberal and Reform Movement among its chief financial supporters.

The struggle for the control of the Institute was explicitly one between the two opposing views of working-class education. It was an exact anticipation of the controversies with which we have all grown familiar in our own day. But the day of 'independence' was not yet. Though Hodgskin delivered at the Institute the lectures on political

[1] Quoted by G. D. H. Cole, introduction to Hodgskin's *Labour Defended* (1922).

economy which were afterwards published as *Popular Political Economy* (1827)—and which, as Mr Cole remarks, might well have been entitled "Proletarian Economics"—the rest of the Institute's curriculum in its first year "ranged from 'jurisprudence' to the 'structure of chimneys' from 'hydrostatics' to 'Greek and Roman antiquities,' and from 'mummies' to 'savings banks.'" [1]

From his *Labour Defended*, which Max Beer calls "the Manifesto of British Labour in the memorable year 1825, the commencement of the organised and systematic struggle of the British working class," we may quote one or two of the concluding paragraphs as showing Hodgskin's clear realisation of the possibility of working-class education:

"The schools which are everywhere established, or are establishing, for the instruction of the labouring classes, make it impossible for the greatest visionary to suppose that any class of men can much longer be kept in ignorance of the PRINCIPLES on which societies are formed and governed. . . . They excite a disposition to probe all things to the bottom. . . . The interest of the different classes of labourers who are now first beginning to think and act as a body, in opposition to the other classes among whom, with themselves, the produce of the earth is distributed, and who are now only for the first time beginning to acquire as extensive a knowledge of the principles of government as those who rule, is too deeply implicated by these principles to allow them to stop short in their career of inquiry. *They may care nothing about the curious*

[1] Dobbs, *Education and Social Movements*, 1700–1850, p. 177.

researches of the geologist or the elaborate classification of the botanist, but they will assuredly ascertain why they only, of all classes of society, have always been involved in poverty and distress. . . .

"They will carry out their investigations undelayed by the pedantry of learning and undiverted by the fastidiousness of taste. By casting aside the prejudices which fetter the minds of those who have benefited by their degradation, they have everything to hope. On the other hand, they are the sufferers by these prejudices and have everything to dread from their continuance. Having no reason to love those institutions which limit the reward of labour, whatever may be its produce, to a bare subsistence, they will not spare them whenever they see the hollowness of the claims made on their respect. *As the labourers acquire knowledge the foundations of the social edifice will be dug up from the deep beds into which they were laid in times past, they will be curiously handled and closely examined, and they will not be restored unless they were originally laid in justice, and unless justice commands their preservation.*"

Hodgskin was not the only prominent figure in the workers' movement of his time who stood for 'independent' working-class education as opposed to 'extension' of ruling-class culture. Cobbett himself, whose *Grammar* was published in 1818, wanted working men to be able to read, write and express themselves accurately in order that they should be better fitted to demand and work for definite political reforms; and his *Grammar*, indeed, is an emphatically partisan political pamphlet. Cobbett, too, had a deep-seated dislike of universities; discussing some trivial grammatical point he writes: "It is for monks and for

Fellows of English colleges, who live by the sweat of other people's brows, to spend their time in this manner, and to call the result of their studies Learning; for you, who will have to earn what you eat, and what you drink, and what you wear, it is to avoid everything that tends not to real utility."

During the eighteen twenties and thirties many working-class teachers and writers were expressing, in Hampden Clubs, in Halls of Science and in countless journals similar "Doubts as to the Correctness of some Opinions Generally Entertained on the Subject of Political Economy" to those outlined by Ravenstone in his book so entitled (1821). They were studying history, too, and the spirit in which they studied it may be gathered from Holyoake's remark (*History of Co-operation*, vol. i., ch. 2) that "those of them who were politicians believed that the history of the world began with the French Revolution."[1]

John Doherty, the Lancashire cotton workers' leader, in his *Voice of the People*, urged the workers "to organise their own education, in opposition to upper and middle class movements, like the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge."[2] Rowland Detroisier, who established Mechanics'

[1] Robert Owen's educational experiments, despite his close association with the working-class movement, savour so much of "paternalism" as to belong rather to the philanthropic 'extension' school. According to a recent writer (West, *History of the Chartist Movement*), they had "a touch of the Montessori method." But Owen was almost exclusively concerned with the "formation of character" and with the "improvement" of the "moral habits" of the workers—probably a quite desirable first step in view of the demoralisation which had inevitably resulted from the horrible social conditions brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

[2] Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

Institutes at Hulme and Salford, and won wide fame as a public lecturer, combined an enthusiasm for education with strong democratic beliefs. His practice of performing chemical experiments in the pulpits of Dissenting chapels caused some scandal and much comment. He it was who cited the remark of a large employer who asked him to recommend a man for a particular job: "I don't want one of your intellectuals; I want a man that will work and take his glass of ale; *I'll think for him.*"[1] John Francis Bray, in his *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedies* (1839), warned the advocates of educational extension that a national system of education would, unless the existing constitution of society were altered, "infinitely increase their [the workers'] susceptibility and render insupportable that which was once an almost unconscious burthen." For "knowledge will conduce to the advancement of virtue and morality only while it is allied to comparative ease of conditon." "The producers," he declares, "have nothing to do with the alleged sacredness of established institutions," and he urges them to obtain for themselves the requisite knowledge for changing "that social whole which keeps them poor" by themselves "going at once to first principles."

But the crushing defeat of the workers, industrially and politically—marked by the collapse of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and of the great agitation for the People's Charter—was a defeat also for the independent working-class educationists. The victory of Birkbeck, Place and Brougham over Hodgskin and Robertson in the case of the London Institute foreshadowed a

[1] Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

similar triumph all along the line. Not for close upon a century were the ideals of Hodgskin and Doherty again to inspire a group of British working men—and when that time came the ideas, and almost the names, of the pioneers were practically unknown. Such definitely working-class educational organisations as survived the great debacle were soon swamped by those philanthropic—or ruling-class-conscious—efforts towards 'extension' which form the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE PHILANTHROPISTS, 1848-1908

§ 1

PHILANTHROPY is a somewhat elastic term; and, as applied to the educational developments described in this chapter, it must be taken as covering various attitudes of mind—ranging from a sincere desire on the part of those more fortunately placed in the world to do something to mitigate the hard lot of their social inferiors, to a feeling on the part of rulers and governors that certain carefully selected educational activities might prove a useful sort of "insurance" against the dangers of disaffection among the lower orders.

The workers' own educational efforts described in the latter part of our first chapter were, from the time of the failure of the Chartist Movement onwards, literally swamped, first, by a rapid development of the 'extension' movement—in part genuinely philanthropic and in part a new and subtler offensive on the part of the employing class; and, later, by the half-century of British commercial prosperity, in which workers, as well as capitalists, shared, and which led to the ready acceptance by the mass of the workers of the employing-class view of society which regarded the existing social order—with perhaps a minor reform here and there—as the highest attainable.

We have already noted the progress of what

was, to a large extent, a genuinely philanthropic movement in the rapid increase, between 1825 and 1850, of the Mechanics' Institutes; though many of these, as time went on, were losing a large proportion of their mechanic members. "The attorney's clerk out-talked and ultimately out-voted the working mechanic," as the writer of a *History of Adult Education*, published in 1851, remarks. The Institutes were supported by Whigs and Radicals, and, so far as they touched on the social sciences at all, they stood for a definitely "liberal" (*i.e.* capitalist) social philosophy. Dr Birkbeck himself, so the historian of Birkbeck College tells us,[1] "like many other scientists, was not critical of social customs, and his speeches were generally suffused with a gentle glow of admiration for social rank." A *Report on the State of Mechanics' Institutions* (1841) complains of interference on the part of other classes "for the systematic exclusion from Mechanics' Institutions of political science and theology in almost any shape."[2] Some few years later the instruction given at the London Institution had become so fragmentary and futile as to cause the author of a Government report to remark that "the members appear to relish amusement more than instruction . . . the course of lectures for the present quarter is—The Atlantic and Ocean Telegraph; A Gossiping Concert; Christmas Books of Charles Dickens; A Second Peep at Scotland; A Broad Stare at Ireland; Characters in Imaginative Literature . . . Gems of Scottish Song; Explosive Compounds[3]; Entertainment by

[1] C. Delisle Burns, *A Short History of Birkbeck College* (p. 49).
[2] Quoted by Burns, *op. cit.* (p. 61).
[3] Presumably chemical, not social.

Elocution Class." To such depths can philanthropy sink!

§ 2

Meantime, certain of the more far-sighted employers had begun to make use of education as a weapon in a new anti-working-class campaign. From 1833 onwards, and particularly after the Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1836, these men followed, as R. W. Postgate tells us in *The Builders' History*, a policy of "disarming and training rather than fighting their employees, and to this end they employed, from the best motives, small reforms and great educational propaganda." Cheap books and pamphlets, written in simple language, were issued in increasing numbers. "A very considerable amount of the work was done by one publishing firm, Charles Knight, originally agent for Brougham's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. His period of activity dates from 1833 to 1869. He was author as well as publisher. He wrote, for example, the books entitled *The Results of Machinery, Capital and Labour, The Character and Effects of Trade Unions*, especially addressed to working men and spread broadcast at a low price. Besides these, which of course explained and supported the orthodox political economy, he issued at the same time, in cheap monthly or weekly parts, a Shakespeare, a Pictorial History of England, a Pictorial Bible, a Penny Cyclopædia, and many other such works. In a manner which has been followed ever since, valuable information, actual technical education and a broadening study of the humanities were combined with history and political economy, which were really veiled propaganda. The history taught

that all progress had led up to and culminated in the truly free society of Liberal capitalism, where there were no restrictions and all men were legally equal. The political economy taught that free competition was the highest possible stage of development, and supply and demand the only inexorable law. Temperance, hard work and self-improvement, with a view to rising from the ranks, were recommended as the sole means of advancement to the working class. Trade unions were dismissed briefly as nearly useless, with a word of praise, if any at all, for their friendly benefits." [1] (And it should be remembered that not a few workers would be in agreement with one Stephen Knowles, a miner of Grassington, of whom tradition records that he was a great reader and believed all he read; "for," said he, "it is not likely that anyone would go to the expense of printing lies.")

It was a "barrage" of this kind of literature which blotted out even such mildly aggressive experiments in workers' education as that associated with William Lovett, who had been one of Hodgskin's pupils at the Mechanics' Institute,

[1] R. W. Postgate, *The Builders' History*, pp. 198-199. It is worthy of note that even in the voluntary elementary schools of the mid-nineteenth century the elements of this employing-class political economy were taught to the workers' children. The report of a school inspector of the time mentions among the subjects taught to the boys of twelve years of age—"the principles of political economy with especial reference to questions which touch on the employment and remuneration of labour, principles of taxation, uses of capital, etc., *effects of strikes on wages*, etc." Such matters, he declares, "are taught with great clearness and admirable adaptation to the wants and capacities of the children of artisans" (Quoted by Dr T. J. Macnamara, in appendix on "Elementary Education," contributed by him to *A Century of Education*, 1808–1908, by H. Bryan Binns).

and was the leader of the "Moral Force" section of the Chartists. Lovett profoundly believed in education as a means towards working-class emancipation, and even pointed out the insufficiency of orthodox educational systems which sought "to train up the youths of our country to be submissive admirers of 'things as they are.'" He even suggested that the right to vote should rest on an educational qualification, and not on a property one. He included among the aims of the London Working Men's Association, founded by him in 1836, "the education of the rising generation . . . and the extirpation of those systems which tend to future (!) slavery." But he always, during the Chartist Movement and afterwards, worked for co-operation between the workers and middle-class reformers; and the programme of his Association, as even a friendly historian remarks, "betrays the influence of the middle-class group who were interested in the diffusion of useful knowledge."

The same influences were predominant in the Workmen's Club and Institute Union, founded 1859; and that its members must have made considerable use of Charles Knight's and similar publications is evident from the fact that the Union held examinations in, and gave prizes for, knowledge of history, political economy and current social questions. Occasionally a worker realised that the mere dissemination of knowledge —however "useful" from the middle-class point of view—was not of itself sufficient, as is evident from an anecdote told in W. J. Davis's *Recollections of the Trades Union Congress* of Alex. Macdonald, the Scottish miners' leader. "He once received a circular asking for financial aid from the Society for the Spread of Christian Knowledge. His reply was that he had read one of their publications,

which cautioned the youth of this country against the evil consequences of combination, and depicted Trade Unionism as a monster to be killed by Christian endeavour. "I find," he wrote, "that your society does not impart Christian knowledge, but teaches the young prejudice against the poor, and influences their mind to evil and malice."

§ 3

Meantime, in 1854, a philanthropic educational enterprise of more than ordinary interest had been embarked upon. This was the London Working Men's College, set up by F. D. Maurice, Kingsley, and the Christian Socialists, at which Ruskin and some of the more famous Pre-Raphaelites, notably Rossetti, Madox Brown and Burne-Jones, acted as teachers of drawing. But though the lecturing and teaching staff included, as will be noted, the names of many men in revolt against the social philosophy of Victorian Liberalism, the "note" of the College was predominantly "philanthropic," and its conception of the education needed by the workers marks it off clearly as another step in the 'extension' movement, rather than as a definitely Socialist or working-class venture.

In his first circular-letter on the College (February, 1854) Maurice wrote: "Some of us who belong to professions, as lawyers, physicians, ministers of the Gospel, artists, schoolmasters, have thought that we might fulfil our own duties far better . . . if we could come into closer intercourse with working men, if we could bring them into a college with us, if we could spend some of our evenings in *helping them to set their thoughts in order* on the subjects in which they are most interested, and to gain information on points about which they feel

ignorant." He, and the group who worked with him, wanted, he declared, "to make our teaching a bond of intercourse with the men we taught." His social aim, therefore, like Lovett's, was essentially one of co-operation between the different classes; and in such co-operation, inaugurated from above and not below, there is inevitably more than a tinge of patronage. Workers are quick to feel and to resent any such tinge. The Working Men's College still survives. But throughout its whole career always less than 50 per cent. of its students have been working men.

§ 4

The next step in the educational 'extension' movement was made by the Universities. Already, in the fifties, a writer in *The Christian Socialist* had urged the desirability of "lowering the benefits of University education to the reach of the many"; and Lord Arthur Hervey, M.A., Cambridge, had published (1855) a pamphlet entitled *A Suggestion for Supplying the Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institutes of Great Britain and Ireland with Lectures from the Universities.* In 1871—the year after the passing of the Elementary Education Act of 1870—Professor James Stuart of Cambridge addressed an appeal to the University, in which he wrote: "The desire for education exists, and I believe it is incumbent on us to supply it, and I believe that some such system, which will carry the benefits of the University throughout the country, is necessary in order to retain the University in that position with respect to the education of the country which it has hitherto held, *and to continue in its hands that permeating influence which it is desirable that it should possess.*"

The result was the inauguration of the University Extension Movement, begun by Cambridge University in 1873, and by Oxford in 1885 (after an earlier effort in 1878, inspired by Jowett, had come to nothing). At first the lectures were arranged for three separate classes of hearers: "(1) women and such persons as are unemployed during the day; (2) young men of the middle class, clerks and business people, free only in the evening; and (3) working men." The "permeating influence" was, accordingly, confined chiefly to fashionable women and elderly gentlemen, since the working men, naturally resenting their segregation from their "superiors," mostly stayed away. The inexpediency of this arrangement was soon realised, and class distinctions were formally abolished, the aim being revised in order that the lectures should provide "a mutual ground on which those belonging to every rank could meet in common work." Yet, in spite of this, the University Extension Movement, as a whole, has remained a middle-class movement—middle-class, that is, not only in its outlook, but as regards the great majority of its students and adherents.[1] H. W. Nevinson, in his reminiscences, tells of his first meeting with Edward Carpenter in 1887, and of how Carpenter talked about University Extension work in the North, "how the 'swells' get hold of it, build a college, leave the people no voice in the choice of lectures, etc., and so the thing dies." Once again the flavour of "patronage" repelled working-class students. Moreover, goodwill was not a sufficient qualification for a university tutor or lecturer desirous of teaching adult workers

[1] There are exceptions, of course—*e.g.* Northumberland, where for many years the movement was very successful among the miners.

—men and women with a very different mentality and living in a very different environment to his own. "The effect of experience on ways of thinking and looking at life" resulted in a great gulf being fixed between teacher and taught. The "democratising" of education was not quite so simple a business as some of its advocates had dreamed.

§ 5

It was the recognition of this fact which led to that further development of the 'extension' movement—the University Settlement Movement. A generation of University men, influenced by Ruskin and his strange blend of philanthropic idealism and anti-capitalist ethico-economics, decided on taking the drastic step of going to live among the poor—in 'poor' neighbourhoods, if not actually in poor dwellings—and so endeavouring to bridge the chasm between the classes. Toynbee Hall was founded in 1884, and it was followed by many other experiments of the same kind. Along with that somewhat vague field of activities described as "social work," the Settlements specialised in popular education; and by means of "smoking conferences" and other attempts to de-rarefy the atmosphere of the classroom they endeavoured to reach the poorer proletariat of the great industrial cities.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to analyse the precise proportion of genuine philanthropy and of patronage in the individuals who devoted themselves to the Settlement Movement. A man like Arnold Toynbee, whose life and ideals were its original inspiration, could say to an audience of working men: "We, the middle classes I mean, not merely the very rich—have neglected you.

. . . You have—I say it clearly and advisedly—you have to forgive us, for we have wronged you; we have sinned against you grievously—not knowingly always, but still we have sinned, and let us confess it; but if you will forgive us—nay, whether you will forgive us or not—we will serve you, we will devote our lives to your service, and we cannot do more." But it is doubtful whether all the young men from Oxford and Cambridge who have followed Toynbee into the East End of London and other cities have been animated by quite such disinterested zeal. Even if they were, it is probably true that the degree of spiritual satisfaction they themselves derived was greater than the benefits, educational or other, conferred by them on the "raw material" they set themselves to "refine." One recalls Shaw's phrase about "goodness being the self-indulgence of a good man."[1]

§ 6

The University Extension and Settlement Movements tried to "take the University to the working men." Ruskin College, established at Oxford in 1899, the first residential institution for adult working-class students in England, aimed at bring-

[1] The essential unreality of such experiments is well illustrated by a passage in H. W. Nevinson's *Changes and Chances* (ch. vii.), in which, describing life at Toynbee Hall in the early days, he mentions that young business men from the city came down to assist in evening classes, etc., and tells how one of them, Vaughan Nash, once remarked, "We shear the lamb all day, and temper the wind at night. . . ." Another of Mr Nevinson's stories is of a young woman who came to help and who, "being warned of the complexity in the character of different 'cases' submitted to her care, replied: 'Character presents no difficulty to me; I took a First in Moral Philosophy at Cambridge.'"

ing working men to the University. Its founders were Mr and Mrs Walter Vrooman, two American admirers of John Ruskin; and associated with them was a distinguished American University man, Dr Chas. Beard. Its origin, therefore, was purely philanthropic. But when a few years later the founders returned to America, Ruskin College appealed directly, and to a certain extent successfully, to the organised working-class movement—Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, the Working-Men's Club and Institute Union, etc.—for support; although it remained in part dependent on individual subscribers. Gradually it became the exception for a student not to hold a scholarship granted by a Trade Union (or other working-class body); and in 1907 the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress made history by issuing an appeal on behalf of the College, in the course of which it declared that: "Now that Labour is showing that it is determined to take its rightful position in the country, it more than ever needs the knowledge and training necessary to maintain that position. There can therefore be no better investment for our money than the maintenance of a Labour College."

The "philanthropists" were at last challenged—by the central organisation of the Labour Movement itself. Once again the issues raised by Hodgskin at the time of the founding of Birkbeck College were coming to the front. But the response of the movement to this appeal was inadequate. Ruskin College had still to depend to a certain extent on financial support from individual philanthropists. And to ensure this support it had to give assurances that its teaching should be "safe"—from the point of view of those whose interests were bound up with the maintenance of the

existing social order. It accordingly declared its aim to be the provision of a "thoroughly broad" education, which should fit working men for "a judicious share" in the affairs of "the community"; the kind of education, in short, which in view of the rapidly increasing political and industrial strength of the Labour Movement, far-sighted philanthropists outside that movement would be likely to consider desirable. This kind of education was defined, in the Report on "Oxford and Working-Class Education" issued by a Joint Committee (see below) in 1908, as one which, "by broadening his knowledge and strengthening his judgment, would make him (the Trade Unionist) at once a more efficient servant of his own society and *a more potent influence on the side of industrial peace* . . . that he may be a good citizen and play *a reasonable part* in the affairs of the world."

§ 7

We have seen how the various experiments in the 'extension' of Education (with a capital E) to the working class met with only partial success; a result due in the main to the fact that these experiments were initiated "from above," and had no roots in the working-class movement itself. By the end of the nineteenth century the growing power and consciousness of Labour was making it less and less possible for any educational movement which was openly patronising or philanthropic in tone to make headway. Conditions were obviously ripe, therefore, for "co-operation" between the custodians of ruling-class culture—the Universities — and the organisations of the workers themselves. This coalition of forces was realised in the last great development of the 'extension'

movement—the Workers' Educational Association, founded in 1903.

Its founder was a worker—Albert Mansbridge; up to that time a clerk in a Co-operative Society in East London, and a student at Toynbee Hall. He was a man with a passion for education—eager to accept what the philanthropists were holding out, and apparently unsuspicious of any ulterior motives on their part. He believed with a religious fervour in the power and glory of knowledge—any knowledge, all knowledge; and he saw his fellows turning their backs on the custodians of knowledge, who were spreading out their treasures in vain. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the University Extension Movement; but he saw clearly (1) that it was not reaching the workers, and (2) that in any case the educational facilities it was providing were too disjointed, too scrappy, to have much educational effect. These two shortcomings he set himself to remedy, first by a campaign amongst the workers aiming, in his own words, at "making ready and preparing the Democratic Mind for the operations of University Extension"; and second, by an appeal to the University Extensionists to revise their methods.

His ideas found support both among the workers and University men; and at a conference of representatives of Co-operative Societies, Trade Unions and University bodies, held in Oxford, August, 1903 (and presided over by a Bishop), the W.E.A.[1] was founded "as a co-ordinating Federation of Working-Class and Educational interests." The Executive Committee appointed at the conference "well represented the union between Labour and Education for which the Association stood,"

[1] The original name was the "National Association for Promoting the Higher Education of Working Men."

consisting of two Trade Union leaders, a Co-operative secretary, Albert Mansbridge himself, a University professor and three other well-known University men.

The new organisation, then, stood definitely for extension'; and it set to work at once to improve and develop the existing machinery, and to appeal to the workers to join in the "fight for educational equality and the restoration of their educational heritage." Local Committees, consisting of two representatives each from the University Extension Centre and the Co-operative Society, and one from each "working-class organisation of standing" in the district, were formed to undertake propaganda and to arrange meetings and lectures. As an example of the actual educational work done in a particular district we may quote the historian of the W.E.A.'s account of the "wave of educational enthusiasm" at Rochdale in 1905: "Barriers of party, class and creed were broken down. . . . There were two courses of Extension lectures, with average audiences of over 500, and classes were run in connection with each. A course of six lectures on 'The Care of the Horse' was arranged at the suggestion of the Carters' Union, and was attended by over 100 carters. Reading circles were held in various parts of the town, and members of the Guild [the local branch of the Association called itself 'The Rochdale Educational Guild'] gave a course of six lectures on 'English History' in three of the outlying districts. Four 'talks' on 'Botany' and four on 'Geology' were given in the Museum and three on 'Pictures' in the Art Gallery. Two courses of afternoon lectures on 'The Home and the Children' were arranged for women, and at the request of the Guild the Local Education

Authority provided classes on Elementary and Advanced English, and on Citizenship and Economics, and also special classes for adults at the Evening Schools, at which elementary subjects such as Arithmetic and Composition were taught." [1]

Co-operation with local Education Authorities and with the State educational departments was an integral part of the scheme. In August, 1905, another conference was held in Oxford to discuss the subject of Evening Schools, and this was followed by a deputation to the Board of Education " to urge the Board to ascertain from Local Educational Authorities how far, and under what conditions, employers and employed in their respective areas would welcome legislation to secure *compulsory attendance* at Evening Schools."

Two years later (1907) came the conference from which an invitation was sent to the Vice-Chancellor of the University, urging him to appoint seven members of the University to confer and report with seven persons nominated by the W.E.A. on " Oxford and Working-Class Education." The following year the report with that title was issued. It recommended the provision of education for the workers—of the reasonable kind referred to in our previous section—by means of Tutorial Classes, in place of the miscellaneous Extension Lectures provided hitherto.

So far as methods were concerned, and apart altogether from the kind of education provided, this represented a tremendous step forward. In place of such lectures as those mentioned above—" with average audiences of over 500 "—the tutorial class consisted of not more than thirty students ; and this made possible that vital essential of all adult working-class education—the discussion following

[1] T. W. Price, *The Story of the W.E.A.*, pp. 25-26.

the lecture. The class students of a Tutorial Class were also expected to do a certain amount of private work—written essays and a regular course of reading. Equally important was the fact that such a class planned a course of study extending over two or three years, in place, as we have already noted, of the random jumping from subject to subject which is the bane of all "popular" lectures.

As regards finance, each Tutorial Class carried on under W.E.A. auspices could claim a Board of Education grant of £30.[1] Grants were also made in many cases by Local Educational authorities, and from such bodies as the Gilchrist Educational Trust, a philanthropic organisation which provides funds for public lectures and other 'extension' activities. The balance of the cost of each class (after students' fees have been paid) comes from the Universities, or from individual colleges, through the Joint Committees, composed of University and W.E.A. representatives, which are responsible for the conduct and management of the classes. The W.E.A. also asked for and received donations from wealthy individuals—*e.g.* it benefited considerably under the will of Sir E. Cassel, the eminent financier, from whose trustees it received a grant of £2000 a year for five years.[2]

Henceforth 'extension' work was recognised, both by the State and University authorities, as a "normal and necessary" part of the work of a university; and the "gulf" between the different classes—so far as this could be achieved by educational machinery—was "bridged."

We have traced in this chapter the growth and development of the educational 'extension'

[1] Increased in 1917 to £45 a class.
[2] Price, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

movement, from its twin sources—genuine philanthropy and a desire on the part of the ruling class to control the education of the workers—to its culmination in the W.E.A., with its aim of "co-ordinating working-class and educational interests," and its consequently inevitable practice of subordinating the former to what it believed to be the latter. Our next chapter will describe the revolt of a section of the workers against the whole 'extension' conception of education, and a return on their part to educational aims similar to those of Hodgskin, Doherty and the early pioneers of the opposite school.

CHAPTER III

THE PROLETARIANS, 1908-1924

§ 1

WHILE the 'extensionists' were busy trying to bridge the gulf between the classes—a gulf which had grown considerably wider towards the end of the nineteenth century, after the "golden age of middle-class Liberalism" had passed—the Socialist Movement was being reborn in England. The early eighties saw the foundation of the Social Democratic Federation and the Fabian Society. Ten years later came *The Clarion* and the I.L.P. Inevitably the revival of Socialist propaganda, by speech and pen, paved the way for a rebirth of the idea of independent working-class education.

It is impossible to draw any hard and fast line between "propaganda" and "education"—at any rate, in connection with an issue so fundamental as that raised by the Socialist challenge to the capitalist order of society. Socialist "dogmas" are based on a re-reading of the whole course of history and the whole field of economics; and while the most elementary kind of propaganda may be merely a more or less rhetorical statement of certain conclusions, any propaganda which sets out to state the reasons leading up to these conclusions must be, in part at least, "educational." To suggest, as some orthodox educationalists do, that the learning by repetition, and without question, of certain currently accepted ideas is "education"—

while the teaching of ideas running counter thereto, and the consequent awakening of an audience's critical faculty, is mere "propaganda"—is to write oneself down a hidebound pedant.

The challenge of the new Socialist societies to existing institutions, conventions and ideas was a real educational stimulus. The books and pamphlets in which H. M. Hyndman, for example, sought to popularise Marxian economics inevitably roused once more many "doubts as to the correctness of some opinions generally entertained on the subject of political economy"; and the men who felt, and endeavoured to resolve, such doubts were emphatically *educating* themselves, in the most vital sense of the term. The Fabian Society undertook a certain amount of definitely educational work. It arranged a system of "book boxes" which were loaned to workmen's clubs, etc.; and it organised classes in economics, industrial history, local government, etc., for the members of Socialist societies.

But among the pioneers of the Socialist revival no one perhaps realised more clearly than William Morris the need for an education which should be based on a recognition of the antagonisms existing in a class society. Morris had a magnificent contempt for the "intellectuals" of capitalism—"the crowd of useless, draggle-tailed knaves and fools who, under the pretentious title of the intellectual part of the middle classes, have in their turn taken the place of the mediæval jester." He saw clearly that a mere 'extension' of education as ordinarily understood was of no use from the working-class point of view. "Everyone who has thought over the matter must feel your dilemma about education," he wrote in a letter to Mrs Burne-Jones (1883); "but think of many not• uneducated people that you know, and you will I am sure see

that education will not cure people of the grossest social selfishness and tyranny *unless Socialistic principles form part of it.*" He goes on to declare that "the necessary education which must in good truth go before the reconstruction of society" will necessarily consist in part of a "stirring up" of the exploited classes; and that unless it aims at such a reconstruction of society "our education will but breed tyrants and cowards."[1]

Morris's point of view regarding education is clearly expressed too, in a handbill (a copy of which is in the writers' possession) advertising a "Free Education Demonstration" in Trafalgar Square in 1886. The demonstration was apparently organised by the Radicals. The handbill announces that a Socialist League meeting would be started immediately the original demonstration ended, and prints the following under the heading, "Line of Speakers' Argument":—"(1) That Socialists are in full sympathy with real and thorough Education for the People; (2) that Education to-day is not what it ought to be, but a mere training to fit the people as tools for the capitalists; (3) that the struggle for Education must be made part *of the great struggle for a complete change in the conditions of life.*"

The longer his experience of work in the Socialist Movement, the more Morris became convinced of the importance of educational work. After the unemployed riots of 1886 he wrote in *The Commonweal*:—"At the risk of being misunderstood by hot-heads, I say that our business is more than ever *Education*. . . . Education towards Revolution seems to me to express in three words what our policy should be; towards that New Birth of Society which we know must come, and which,

[1] J. W. Mackail, *Life of William Morris*, ii. 112.

therefore, we must strive to help forward so that it may come with as little confusion and suffering as may be." And seven years later, in 1893, in his address on Communism, he indicated what must be the goal of workers' education in the memorable words: "Intelligence enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel. If our ideas of a new society are anything more than a dream, these three qualities must animate the due effective majority of working people; and then, I say, the thing will be done."

§ 2

But it was not until 1908—twelve years after Morris's death—that the issues raised by Thomas Hodgskin at the time of the foundation of Birkbeck College in 1823 once again became prominent in connection with an educational institution the nominal aim of which was the education of working men.

We noted, in our last chapter, how Ruskin College, Oxford, originally founded by philanthropists, had come to appeal directly to the organised Labour Movement for support; and how, in 1907, the Trade Union Congress had called on that movement to "take the College in hand and make it an assured success." But at the very time when this appeal was being made the 'extensionists'—with the best of motives—were striving to increase the University's control over Ruskin College (which had hitherto been practically independent of such control); and these approaches were apparently welcomed by the College authorities. Certain of the students then in residence realised the anomaly of an appeal to the workers' organisations for financial support for an institution whose curriculum was certainly not based upon anything

approaching a working-class point of view. They decided that the best remedy for this was to ensure entirely Labour control of the College; and in October, 1908, they formed themselves into an organisation called the Plebs League, the aim of which was "to bring about a more satisfactory connection between Ruskin College and the Labour Movement."

But the new organisation had not been very long in existence before its founders realised that a bigger issue than that of mere *control* was involved. In the first issue (February, 1909) of the monthly journal, *The Plebs*, issued by the students, an article on "The Relation of Ruskin College to the Labour Movement" opens thus:

"The march of events in the industrial history of the twentieth century has produced in a more tangible form than ever the definite appearance of the workers as a class. All the avenues of social activity present to-day the appearance of a determined effort on the part of the workers to gain recognition as a distinct element in the composite body of society. Where the workers have attempted to stand out clearly and definitely on the basis of their economic activities—*i.e.* as an independent class—there they have been most successful; as witness the political struggle in which the independent element has dominated and triumphed all along the line.[1] With the successful growth of independence in the political arena the hosts of reaction, in their innumerable guises, are making desperate attempts to prevent the same success in other departments. Nowhere is this more evident than in the controversial sphere of education.

[1] Note that this was written within a year or two of the newly founded Labour Party's signal victories in the General Election of 1906.

"The number of attempts to impose education from 'above' are legion. Prominent among them stands the University Extension Movement, with its powerful ally, the Workers' Educational Association. While probably the intentions of the promoters of these movements are of the most benevolent character, few will deny that the effect of their success would be to militate against the self-reliance of the workers in their own educational movement. Workers who have thought their way to an independent movement will recognise a parallel between these educational movements and the Radical and Liberal-Labour movements in the field of politics. Others will cavil at a parallelism between education and politics. They will say: 'Though it is true that you must have different parties in politics, because of different economic interests, the same thing does not apply to education, which is far above party squabbles.' This contention might hold good in that sphere of knowledge known as the physical sciences. But the veriest tyro in the study of social science—*e.g.* history and economics—knows full well the fundamental division of opinion that, traced to its foundation, is seen to originate in diverse social strata."

Here was a clear recognition of the need, not only for working-class-controlled education, but for an education of a different *kind* to that "imposed from 'above.'" In the editorial, in this same issue, the aim of the Plebs League is expressly defined as "the education of the workers in the interests of the workers." And the following month the question is further elaborated in an editorial which, after references to recent speeches by University men in which a "synoptic mind" and "that statesmanlike education which Oxford alone can give" are prescribed as highly desirable

for working men, goes on to declare—"Education cannot be imposed from above, it cannot be handed down by a superior class to an inferior class. The working class must achieve its own salvation. It must develop its own social intelligence, an intelligence which grows out of the economic world in which it lives and moves and has its being. . . ."

All this, of course, implied a criticism of the actual tuition which the students were receiving in Ruskin College; the character of which may be gauged from the appeals then being sent out by the College authorities to private individuals. In these the aim of the College was described as "the giving working men a sound, practical knowledge of subjects which concern them as citizens, thus enabling them to view questions *sanely* and *without unworthy class bias.*" Working men, according to another apologist for Ruskin College, were to come to Oxford to "get their natures sandpapered." The result was some friction between the College authorities and the students organised in the new League; and this came to a head in the authorities demanding the resignation of the Principal, Mr Dennis Hird (March, 1909), and the students promptly going on strike.

This was bringing working-class tradition into University life with a vengeance. The result of this direct action was the foundation, a few months later, of a new college, the Central Labour College, which was supported by several districts of the South Wales Miners and by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. It was established in premises in Oxford, and it remained there for two years; but in 1911 (largely owing to the opposition of the University landlords) it was removed to London. *The Plebs* heralded the

opening of the new College with not unjustifiable enthusiasm: "We heed no longer the cry of the academic dignitary: 'Back to Kant! Back to Aristotle!' The slogan we sound has no such falsetto tones. It is in harmony with the movement of the wheels of history. It is 'Forward to Freedom.' And the Central Labour College answers the call and moves forward along the historic highway, obedient to the impulses and aspirations of that class of whose body and blood it is." The movement for Independent Working-Class Education had at last definitely begun.

Inevitably this meant war on the 'extensionist' conception of education. The 'extensionists' concentrated in the main on the argument that Education was something greater and more fundamental than the class divisions of society; they declared that real Education could not be "partisan," and dwelt on the desirability of a "humane" education for all classes. *The Plebs* replied that "schemes for non-partisan education, movements which pretend that the educational territory is neutral, contain nothing but a snare for the working class. The high-sounding shibboleths of 'humane education for the workers,' 'opening of Universities to the working man,' 'the merging of class with class' are the last relics of an ideology incompatible with the historic mission of the workers. For, as the struggle deepens, the spirit of revolt grows and matures in the working class, evolving out of its experience a new ideology which rises far above the trifling level of the 'humane' and the 'liberal,' and in which social salvation becomes the burning question of the day."[1]

For the first few years the new College had an uphill fight. The number of residential students

[1] *Plebs*, vol. i., No. 7 (1909), p. 136.

holding Trade Union Scholarships varied from twelve to twenty, and their fees were scarcely sufficient to meet the necessary expenses of the institution. But rank-and-file interest in the educational aims and policy of the College steadily grew, and a strong movement in both the South Wales Miners' Federation and the Railwaymen's Union was at work pressing for official union support. This movement was successful in 1914, in which year the two unions, at their respective annual meetings, decided jointly to purchase and control the College. Certain alterations in their constitutions were necessary before this could actually be carried into effect; by 1916 these were put through and the two unions took over the College, henceforth known as the Labour College, London.

§ 3

But the pioneers of the new movement had never limited their aims to the establishment of a college for residential students. The first number of *The Plebs* called for the formation of branches wherever possible. "As soon as a branch is formed efforts should be made to start classes in sociology, history and economics." In various industrial districts, notably in South Wales, in the West Riding of Yorkshire and in Lancashire, classes carried on under Plebs or Labour College auspices began to appear. These classes, of course, received no Government grants, nor any subsidy from University funds; nor did the Union control of the London Labour College involve any financial support of the provincial classes. These had to depend on donations from local T.U. branches or from Trades Councils; and the tutors were almost invariably unpaid. Every class was a practically autonomous unit, the only link between them

being the Plebs League, in which the active spirits enrolled themselves as members, and *The Plebs Magazine* (published monthly without a break since February, 1909).

In this class-work men and women of every section of the Labour Movement took part—I.L.P.ers, S.L.P.ers, "plain Trade Unionists," and members of various Left Wing and "minority" movements. The years between the formation of the Plebs League and the outbreak of the war were years of "industrial unrest," and in such an organisation as the League many of the active spirits who were seething with ideas—more or less revolutionary—found a common ground for discussion and argument. The classes themselves were almost invariably in economics and industrial history, and those subjects naturally lent themselves to keen debating on all those problems which lay closest to the everyday life of the workers. The 'extensionists,' who complained of the "dogmatic instruction" given in Labour College classes, had little first-hand experience of what such classes actually were. In the first place, the tutor was almost invariably a working man, engaged in the daytime at the same trade as some of his students, and therefore regarded by them as "a man like unto themselves"; in the second place, the students were active workers in the industrial or political activities of the Labour Movement; and therefore eager to relate their studies to the facts of which they had actual experience. Under such conditions "dogmatic instruction" is somewhat difficult. True, there might be relatively little discussion on points which a University lecturer might regard as eminently arguable, for the simple reason that to a group of workers these would appear as

self-evident propositions. But such points were precisely those which formed the common stock of ideas of the Labour Movement; and their very acceptance implied proportionately keen argument about matters which the University lecturer, in his turn, would probably never look upon as controversial questions at all.

During the years of the war this class movement grew enormously. In Scotland especially the idea of independence in workers' education, once it had been grasped, was taken up with enthusiasm, and the Scottish Labour College came into being. The Plebs League, during the same period, made a start in the work of providing text-books, etc., for the classes, since it was evident that the educational principles of the movement involved the writing and publishing of literature expressing the same working-class point of view. And after the war, despite the slump in Trade Unionism, progress in neither department slackened. At "Text-book Conferences," convened by the Plebs League, plans for further developments were elaborated, and a scheme evolved for a series of books which should be drafted by one or two hands, and then discussed by a committee of tutors and students.

§ 4

In October, 1921, representatives of the classes in various parts of Great Britain met in conference at Birmingham to discuss the desirability of organising the class work on a national basis, and decided on the formation of the National Council of Labour Colleges. The Council comprises the numerous non-residential provincial Labour Colleges,[1] the

[1] There were seventy-five of these in 1923-1924.

Labour College (London), the Scottish Labour College, and the Plebs League; and its Executive includes a representative from each Trade Union which arranges an educational scheme for its members through the N.C.L.C.

The first union to inaugurate such a scheme was the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers, and to it belongs the honour of being the pioneer in providing independent working-class education for the rank and file of its members (as distinct from the granting of residential scholarships to selected students). Its example was quickly followed by the National Union of Distributive Workers; and this year (1924) the Amalgamated Engineering Union, the Sheet Metal Workers, and the Tailors and Garment Workers have decided to put similar schemes into operation. The National Federation of Building Trade Operatives and several other unions also support the N.C.L.C. and its work.

The finance of the National Council of Labour Colleges thus comes entirely and directly from workers' organisations; either in the form of annual grants from such national Trade Unions as those mentioned, or in the shape of affiliation fees or donations from T.U. branches, Trades Councils, Labour or Socialist Parties and Co-operative Societies. Working-class *control* is accordingly complete. But the Council does not stand simply for workers' control. It stands for the same educational principles and policy as those which inspired the founders of the Plebs League and the Central Labour College—and which, a century ago, inspired Thomas Hodgskin—that is, for " the education of the workers in the interests of the workers " as a class.

Not only has the educational movement which

it represents grown enormously in numbers and influence during recent years, but its subjects of study have also increased, and a steady effort been made in applying its method and point of view to fresh material. Its aim in so doing has not, of course, been merely "cultural," in the sense of seeking knowledge for its own sake; but the strictly "utilitarian" one of exploring every subject which had any direct bearing on the problems of the workers' movement here and now. To Economics and Industrial History, therefore, have been added such subjects as general Social History, Modern History—especially the History of the Working-Class Movement, and of Capitalist Imperialism — Economic Geography, Literature, Psychology, and a general outline of the physical sciences, especially Biology (this last primarily for its usefulness as a training in scientific methods of thought), English, and Public Speaking. It omits from its curriculum, on the principle of "first things first," many subjects of admittedly great "cultural" value; agreeing with Hodgskin that while the workers "may care nothing about the curious researches of the geologist or the elaborate classifications of the botanist," they should "assuredly ascertain why they only, of all classes of society, have always been involved in poverty and distress"; and with Morris that an education which does not aim primarily at a reconstruction of society will to-day "only breed tyrants and cowards."

Its tutors and lecturers are, in the main, working men, self-taught or trained at the London Labour College or in its own evening classes, though these have been augmented recently by an increasing number of University-trained men and women, professional teachers, etc., whose own experience

of " orthodox " education has left them convinced of the need for Labour to take in hand its own educational work. The great bulk of this teaching is done voluntarily, but the financial support of large Trade Unions has made possible the division of the country into districts, and the appointment in each of these of a whole-time paid tutor-organiser.

§ 5

This *independent* working-class educational movement is certainly not the least valuable contribution made by British workers to the international working-class movement. In no other country have its implications been more thoroughly worked out, and certainly nowhere else have these found expression in so large and widespread an organisation. The whole International Labour Movement, of course, takes its stand on the central fact of the class struggle ; but it has as yet only partially realised that that fact results in a class antagonism of ideas, and that for precisely the same reasons which make a Labour Press necessary, the working-class movement must own and control its own educational institutions.

We have no space here to give even a bare list of workers' educational experiments in other countries. In Russia, of course, where post-revolutionary conditions prevail, the problems are very different. In Germany, Belgium and other Continental countries there are Trade Union educational centres which aim primarily at training union organisers and officials in the technical side of their duties. The relative freedom of Continental universities from clerical and ultra-conservative control has, of course, resulted in a large measure

of academic freedom; and this makes possible the expression of Radical, and even Socialist, ideas. The foundation of independent workers' colleges —except for such technical and "vocational" studies as we have just mentioned—is consequently a less urgent matter. But it is tolerably certain that, as the workers' movement becomes stronger and more "dangerous" to the existing social order, the ruling classes of every country will see to it that the academic freedom enjoyed by University professors and lecturers is very definitely curtailed.

In America, where capitalist control of schools and universities is open and unashamed—and even blatant—an independent workers' educational movement has developed, mainly as a result of the pioneer work of one or two Trade Unions. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union inaugurated a "Workers' University" in 1916, and this was followed a year or two later by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. In 1921, a central co-ordinating body, the Workers' Education Bureau, was formed by the various existing educational groups; and through the Bureau the official support of the American Federation of Labour has been secured. The movement is 'independent' to the extent of excluding any class or centre not carried on directly under Labour auspices; but the conservatism of the mass of American Trade Unionists and their leaders—the natural result of American commercial prosperity —very definitely limits the extent to which the Bureau can subscribe to a Declaration of Independence as regards a *class* point of view in education. It would appear that, faced by the alternatives of remaining a minority movement for years, as the British 'independents' did, or adapting their

educational principles to their environment, with a view to securing wider and more immediate support, the leaders of the American workers' educational movement have chosen the latter course. It remains to be seen whether this policy will enable them more effectively to achieve the object of workers' education, which is (in their own words) " to adjust the environment " to the needs of the workers.

These varying conceptions of the aims and functions of working-class education all find expression in the International Federation of Labour Organisations concerned with Workers' Education, established at an International Conference on Workers' Education held at Oxford, August, 1924. Some seventy delegates, from twenty-six different countries, attended the conference ; and an international committee was appointed and charged with the delicate task of drawing up a constitution which should exclude none of the various organisations. Inevitably, therefore, the conflict between the rival principles of 'independence' and 'extensionism' will in the near future be fought out on a wider field.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRESENT-DAY POSITION

§ 1

SO far, in our sketch of the growth and development of the idea of working-class education in Britain, we have traced the activities of the two distinct schools of 'Independents' and 'Extensionists' as quite separate movements, only coming into contact with one another by way of conflict. It remains for us now, in order to bring our survey down to current events, to describe briefly an attempt, on the part of the central organisation of the workers' industrial movement, the Trade Union Congress, to "unify" the two schools.

So long ago as 1907 (as we have seen) the Congress, approached by the authorities of Ruskin College for support, issued an appeal to the Labour Movement on behalf of the College, and urged that there could be "no better investment" for Trade Union money than "the maintenance of a Labour College."

But unfortunately this attitude was not the result of any very clear-cut views about education on the part of the majority of the Labour leaders. To many of them "college" and "education" were still merely magic words, symbolising something vaguely desirable—something, therefore, in which the workers had every right to demand a share. "Education" was a commodity, produced

in certain "factories" called universities and schools; and of this commodity, as of every other, the masters had taken the lion's share for themselves. The steadily developing class consciousness of the workers' movement thus produced a frame of mind which went half-way to meet the 'extensionists.' The question of what *kind* of education would be helpful to Labour was never raised, because the possibility of education being of different kinds—and values—had never been realised. Education "in itself" was a good thing; and the organised workers—the producers—were content to accept the assistance of the "producers" of education—the University men and professional teachers. It was precisely as if the Trade Union Congress, having decided that the workers were entitled to more information about the news of the day, had welcomed the co-operation of capitalist newspaper proprietors and urged working men and women to make full use of the many excellent journals available.

This attitude was gradually undermined by the steady propaganda of the Plebs, supported by the more clear-thinking Socialists; as well as by the further growth of a real class consciousness on the part of the mass of the workers, due to the widening of the "gulf" between them and the exploiting classes. The long, persistent and very vigorous controversy carried on between the Plebs and the W.E.A. (or perhaps it would be truer to say, the persistent offensive carried on by the former against the latter) made more and more workers aware of the principles at issue. During the war years, as we have already said, Plebs propaganda and Plebs classes increased enormously; until even so distinguished a champion of 'extension' as R. H. Tawney, after commenting on the general

increase of educational activity, is impelled to admit "below the surface . . . a still more fundamental change . . . the emergence among the rank and file of the working-class world of a conviction that education may be used *as an instrument of social emancipation.*"

This conviction found expression within the extension movement itself. In the W.E.A. a Left Wing group, led by G. D. H. Cole, pressed for closer "contact" with working-class organisations and a greater share of control by those organisations of the machinery of educational extension work. This group seemed to be intent on formulating a sort of middle position between 'independents' and 'extensionists.' They admitted that "the power of the governing class depends . . . on the educational system, which they are able to turn to their own ends"; that "as long as the economic system and the needs of the few under that system are allowed to dominate our entire social organisation we must not expect education to be immune from this general domination"; and that "it is true that for real and effective working-class education most of the text-books will have to be re-written, at least as far as history and economic science are concerned . . . and that the working class ought to make all speed with the creation of teachers and text-books to suit its needs."[1] But they also insisted that the working class "ought to be ready to avail itself of all really friendly assistance in the process." And by this they meant the "friendly assistance" not merely of individuals but of institutions and corporations—such as universities, etc.; the members of the group presumably feeling themselves strong—and subtle—

[1] G. D. H. Cole, *Labour in the Commonwealth* (chapters viii. and ix.).

enough to ensure that such assistance was genuinely "friendly," and to hold in check the power of the governing class to "turn the educational system to its own ends."

About such an attitude there is, of course, more than a tinge of the "philanthropy" of Francis Place or of the Fabians. There is also a strong streak of craft pride—the consciousness of the professional, university-trained man that as teacher or lecturer he is free from many of the "crudities" of the working man turned tutor; and his quite natural feeling that, as a specialist, he is entitled to an officer's commission—or even to Staff rank—in any educational movement.

But this Left Wing group of the 'extensionists' was fully conscious of the extent to which the W.E.A. was compromised in the eyes of working-class militants, both by its refusal to regard education as a weapon of social emancipation and by its partial dependence on funds contributed by members of the governing class. They therefore formed, in 1919, a new body, the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee, which, while making use of the machinery of the W.E.A., was to negotiate directly with Trade Unions desirous of inaugurating schemes of education for their members, and to depend entirely upon Trade Union funds. It commenced its operations by arranging such a scheme for the Iron and Steel Trades Federation.[1]

The following year the W.E.T.U.C. called a conference of national Trade Unions, at which a

[1] For accounts by opposite "sides" of the negotiations, etc., hereinafter described, see *The Plebs*, July, 1924, article by J. P. M. Millar, "The Trade Union Congress and Workers' Education," and *The Story of the W.E.A.*, by T. W. Price, chapter vii.

committee representing some seventeen or eighteen unions was appointed, to be called the Trade Union Education Inquiry Committee. This Committee (which had not, note, been appointed by the Trade Union Congress, but which contrived, after it had come into being, to get itself "adopted" as a sort of special sub-committee of the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee) presented a report to the Parliamentary Committee recommending the W.E.T.U.C. as the most desirable organisation for "co-ordinating the educational activities of Trade Unions." This report was endorsed at the Trade Union Congress, held at Cardiff, in September, 1921, and in addition a resolution was carried declaring that "the time has arrived when the Trade Union Movement should consider the best means of providing for the educational needs of its members"; and instructing the General Council (the new title of the Parliamentary Committee) "to co-operate with the Trade Union Education Inquiry Committee as to the best means of giving effect to the aims and objects of the inquiry."

Up to this point, therefore, the 'extensionists' had carried the day—so far, at least, as gaining the official blessing of the central organisation of the Trade Unions was concerned. Through, first, the W.E.T.U.C., and then the Inquiry Committee, they had practically manœuvred themselves into the position of authorised educational officers for the Labour Movement. (Their success in getting their own way is a little reminiscent, again, of Francis Place.) Meantime, the 'independents' had held aloof, justly pointing to the origin of the new Committee as sufficient reason for non-co-operation. The only two national unions whose support they, till then, had secured (the

Railwaymen and the South Wales Miners) were concerned solely with the London Labour College, and with securing, if possible, financial support for that institution from the T.U. Congress.

But in autumn of that year the 'independents' took a big step towards the co-ordination of their own movement by the formation of the National Council of Labour Colleges. And this new organisation was immediately confronted by the necessity for deciding the course of policy it was to pursue if it were not to find the Trade Union Movement, through its central body, already committed to another educational organisation, with other principles.

The General Council, in pursuance of the Congress resolution quoted above, had formed a Joint Education Sub-Committee, half the members of which were representatives of the General Council, and the other half members of the Trade Union Education Inquiry Committee (therefore representatives of the W.E.A.). Only one member of this sub-committee, Mr Geo. Hicks, of the Building Trades Workers, was a supporter of the Labour Colleges and of independent working-class education. In March, 1922, this Joint Education Sub-Committee invited the Governors of the London Labour College to meet it for discussion, but extended no invitation to any representatives of the extensive provincial class movement now organised in the National Council of Labour Colleges. With the connivance of the London Governors, however, N.C.L.C. representatives were enabled to attend; and the N.C.L.C., along with the other educational organisations, shortly afterwards received a circular from the Joint Sub-Committee asking whether it was prepared to participate in a T.U. Congress educational scheme on the understanding

that its present policy and principles should not be interfered with.

To this it replied in the affirmative. And at the Southport Congress that year a resolution was passed instructing the General Council to continue to co-operate with the Trade Union Education Inquiry Committee; and empowering the Council to "take over Ruskin College, the Labour Colleges, and the organisation set up by the Iron and Steel Trades Federation (*i.e.* the W.E.T.U.C.) as soon as satisfactory financial and other conditions can be agreed upon." The Labour Colleges (plural) thus received definite recognition by the T.U.C.; and the possibility of any educational scheme which was entirely 'extensionist' in character being officially adopted by the Labour Movement thus became more remote. Nevertheless, the report presented by the Joint Sub-Committee and adopted by the Congress is sufficient evidence that the 'extensionists' were still controlling the "inquiry," for, as a W.E.A. writer rather naïvely points out, it "coincided in every particular with the view of working-class education for which the Workers' Educational Association stands." Thus it declared that, while the workers "need certain specialised forms of education . . . their needs are by no means confined to such specialised training" ("specialised training" being the term used to describe that kind of education based on a working-class point of view). "They (the workers) seek a knowledge not only of economic and industrial history but also of the general and social history of their own and other peoples, of literature, and of the arts and sciences. Therefore, in putting forward an educational scheme for the Trade Union Movement, while we have endeavoured to make provision for the various forms of specialised training,

we have in mind above all an education broad enough to give to every worker who desires it a new sense of understanding; and therewith of power to mould the world in accordance with his human and social ideals."

During the following year several meetings took place between the Joint Sub-Committee and the representatives of both schools of educationists; and it became increasingly clear that the quite real difference of principle between them would make it impossible to "unify" the two in a single scheme. The sub-committee, as we have seen, was made up so far as half its members were concerned of the direct representatives of one of the two controlling groups—the 'extensionists.' So that it was perhaps a little difficult for it to function with that absolute impartiality and freedom from bias which, one is assured, are the necessary qualifications for any judicial body. But it apparently lacked courage to come down definitely on the 'extensionist' side, and preferred to shift the responsibility for any such decision on to other shoulders. Accordingly, being confident of their power to command a majority of Trade Union representatives, the 'extensionists' agreed to recommend to Congress a postponement of the previous year's resolution to "take over" the Labour Colleges and the W.E.T.U.C., and instead, the calling of "a conference of representatives of affiliated unions which have provided or contemplate the provision of educational facilities for their members, with a view to developing a united purpose and policy in Trade Union educational work."

These recommendations were accepted by the Plymouth Congress, September, 1923, after a debate, however, in which the arguments of many speakers for the 'independents' made a considerable impression. The Conference accordingly met in

March, 1924; but it did not result in a verdict for the 'extensionists.' The delegates from unions supporting the National Council of Labour Colleges pointed out that a number of unions which supported the N.C.L.C. had not been invited to attend; that their own unions had deliberately chosen to support an educational organisation standing for *independence*, and had no intention of modifying that position; that it should be clear by this time that a vital difference of principle was involved; and that a necessary first step towards any sort of T.U. Congress educational scheme was the formation of a new sub-committee which should be really representative of existing educational bodies, and not be "packed" by the representatives of one side.

The result of these arguments was the recommendation by the Conference to the General Council that a new and representative Education Sub-Committee be appointed.

The General Council accepted the recommendation, dissolved the old sub-committee, and set up (May, 1924), a new Education Advisory Committee, with the following terms of reference:—"To evolve a policy with regard to educational work for the Trade Union Movement, through the Trade Union Congress; to endeavour to co-ordinate such activities as are already in existence; to undertake educational work on behalf of Trade Unions; and to deal with any matters relating to Trade Union educational work, both in its national and international aspect, as the General Council of the Trade Union Congress may approve." The Committee is to consist of five representatives of the General Council, one from the Executive of each union which has, or has decided to have, an

educational scheme, one representative each from the Labour College and Ruskin College, and two each from the Co-operative Union Central Education Committee, the National Council of Labour Colleges and the W.E.A.

§ 2

One may agree with the historian of the W.E.A.[1] that the action of the General Council in setting up the Education Advisory Committee is "a step of very great importance"; and also with his decision that "it is not possible at this early date to forecast its effect upon the organisations at present engaged in the field of working-class education." One significant variation between the phrasing of the terms of reference of the new Committee and that of previous resolutions may be noted: previous committees had been appointed "to co-ordinate" the educational activities of the Trade Unions; the Education Advisory Committee is "*to endeavour* to co-ordinate," etc., etc.

This would appear to indicate that even those Union leaders who had not previously given the subject very full consideration had at length realised the difficulties in the way of co-ordinating two organisations holding diametrically opposed views and based on diametrically opposed principles. This book has certainly been written in vain if any doubt is left in the mind of the reader about the possibility of such co-ordination. Whatever temporary or provisional arrangement may be made by the Trade Union Congress to permit of both 'extensionists' and 'independents' receiving Congress recognition and support, sooner or later the Labour Movement will have to make up its

[1] T. W. Price, *The Story of the W E.A.* (pp. 87-88).

mind which of the two points of view about education is the right one—and act accordingly. Labour does not only control its own daily newspaper, in the sense of undertaking financial responsibility for it, but it also sees to it that that newspaper is edited and written from a Labour point of view. An arrangement by which the T.U. Congress ran two newspapers, one definitely Labour and one "impartial," would obviously not last long. (And to the argument that education is something too fine and great, too eternal and unchanging a thing, to be compared to anything so ephemeral as a newspaper, one can only reply that, to those who see the struggle of the workers for social emancipation as the central fact in present history, education and the Press are alike weapons to be used in *making* history.)

The attempt of the 'extensionists' to find room in their own educational activities for "forms of specialised training," in the belief that this covers what is meant by independent working-class education, is an illustration of the fundamental divergence between the two points of view. Independent working-class education is not merely a form of "specialised training." It implies a re-valuation of all culture in terms of working-class principles. Its field is as wide as education itself. If it concentrates at the present time on certain specific branches of study because these are of most immediate, practical usefulness to the workers at the present stage of their struggle—"to make progress," as Viscount Grey has remarked in an introduction to a volume of essays on Adult Education,[1] "we must select the things that are most practicable, urgent and essential, and on these we

[1] *The Way Out; Essays on the Meaning and Purpose of Adult Education* (1923).

must concentrate attention and effort "—it is only postponing the day when it will take all knowledge for its province, and finally make all knowledge the heritage of the whole of humanity, and not of a leisured class. If it bases its outlook on the point of view of one class — the working class — here and now, that is because it sees in the enlightened, purposeful action of that class the one way to a new and better order of society.

To call such an attitude " narrow," as some of the 'extensionists' have done, is to write oneself down as too stupid and unimaginative to grasp vital ideas. To imagine, on the other hand, that an education is " broad " which deliberately avoids any such concrete purpose, and which shuts its eyes to the central fact of the class struggle, is to brand oneself as belonging—intellectually at any rate—to some other class than the workers. When an 'extensionist' like G. D. H. Cole pleads for a scheme of co-ordination in working-class educational work which would make the Tutorial Classes of the W.E.A. provide the " general training " necessary as a preliminary to the " specialised propagandist training " of the Labour Colleges, he is conveniently ignoring his own previous declaration that the workers will have to create their own teachers and text-books. The declared object of the W.E.A. Tutorial Classes is to bring the workers " into contact with the universities and other educational institutes "—that is, with the teachers and text-books of another class. What part of a " preliminary general training " is Mr Cole prepared to leave in the hands of these institutions? Courses in English?—in " the three R's " of adult education? Well and good. No 'independent' will worry much about that—though he may doubt whether an Oxford accent is an altogether

desirable asset for a teacher of English to working-class students. But apart from such elementary matters, surely a grounding in general history must be the basis of any "general training" for such students. Would Mr Cole entrust the teaching of history to university-trained tutors?

It is clear that as soon as the Labour Movement realises the implications of its own declaration of political and industrial independence it will decide on precisely the same independence in its educational work. That does not mean that it will refuse as its teachers any man or woman not born a manual worker. But it emphatically does mean that it will not regard a bourgeois University diploma as a sufficient guarantee of a tutor's fitness. And this will not be because it will demand a "bias" on the workers' side as either a necessary or a desirable qualification, but because it will know that the working-class view of history is the true one, and it will demand of its tutors, and for its students, "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

The Labour Colleges cannot compromise on their educational principles, because they know those principles to be implicit in the whole industrial and political organisation of Labour; and sooner or later the Labour Movement will realise this. Once it does so, it will refuse any longer to rest content with the crumbs from the masters' table offered it by the 'extensionists.' It is much to be hoped that when that day comes not a few of the many able and sincere supporters of the 'extension' idea will finally cut free from their old associations and come over to work in Labour's own educational movement.

§ 3

The Co-operative Movement's attitude towards education reflects its—as yet—somewhat uncertain attitude towards the organised working-class movement; that is to say, it hovers between demanding from the capitalist State "increased educational facilities" of the ordinary kind (and actually granting scholarships at Oriel College, Oxford, to its members) and providing, independently of State educational machinery, education aiming at "the formation of co-operative character and opinion."

The funds which it is within its power to devote to educational work make its attitude a matter of highly practical interest to all Labour educational organisations; and both 'extensionists' and 'independents' have secured the support of certain groups of co-operators. The founders of the movement, the Rochdale pioneers, laid it down as a rule "that a definite percentage of profits should be allotted to education"; and the model rules of the Co-operative Union recommend that every society should put aside 2½ per cent. of its surplus for an educational fund. This, however, remains for the most part only a "model" rule.

The actual educational work as yet undertaken independently by the Co-operative Movement is comparatively small. Under the auspices of the Co-operative Union classes are held in history, politics, economics and "the ethics of voluntary co-operation." But according to the official report in the *People's Year Book* (1924) only 1365 adult persons (out of four and a half million co-operators) were enrolled in such classes. In addition, a number of summer schools and week-end schools were arranged, the latter chiefly by individual societies or district associations.

More important than the class-work is the work done by the Women's Guilds in organising lectures, discussions, etc. There are over 80,000 members of these, and they undoubtedly form one of the most hopeful working-class "audiences" in the country.

A Co-operative College has also been established in Manchester ("not yet housed in a suitable building," says an official statement); and here study and research work is to be undertaken with a view to "creating an organised body of co-operative doctrine."

Whether or not the Co-operative Movement lines up with the Trade Unions in its educational work depends, of course, on the clarity of its ideas about its own place and mission in the workers' movement. If its primary aim is dividends—"a slightly altered form of joint stockery," as Morris put it—then it will interest itself in the teaching of capitalist economics, with some slight "ethical" modifications, and in bourgeois education generally; itself merely providing a certain amount of so-called "co-operative propaganda," which is in reality little more than "publicity" for co-operative shops and factories. If on the other hand it regards itself as a definite wing of the working-class army, it will, with the rest of that army, concentrate on an education whose main aim is the ending of capitalist society.

As noted above, two representatives of the Co-operative Union Central Education Committee have been appointed to the new Education Advisory Committee of the Trade Union Congress. It is probable, therefore, that co-operators will in the near future be faced with the necessity of making up their minds.

CHAPTER V

THE AIMS AND METHODS OF WORKING-CLASS EDUCATION

§ 1

"NO education is of use," says H. G. Wells, somewhere, "which does not go through to an end"; and, in fact, it is impossible to conceive of any sort of education which has not a more or less conscious aim.

Yet there are still a great many educationists who shy at the idea of any practical aim for education—any aim, that is, related to the needs of particular groups of men living under particular social conditions, as against the supposed needs of Man, in the abstract. This is probably due, as Professor James Harvey Robinson has pointed out, to the survival of the Greek tradition "that education should be 'liberal' and based on 'liberal arts,' by which they [the Greeks] meant those studies and that training which they believed appropriate for a freeman who was supported by slaves and who had before him a life of leisure. When a particular study suggested in any way practical usefulness it forthwith lost its 'liberal' character, for it could only be advantageous to a slave."[1]

That is a characteristically ruling-class conception, and it has continued to flourish in all typical "feudal" ruling-class "seats of learning"; such

[1] J. Harvey Robinson, *The New History* (p. 133).

for example, as the older English universities. As often happens with ideas, too, it has survived the particular social conditions which first engendered and then encouraged it, and is still passionately proclaimed by traditionalists, even though capitalism has brought to power a new ruling class, with new needs and, therefore, with new educational ideals expressed in a newer type of university.

As a ruling-class conception it has no interest—other than an historical one—for the working class of the modern industrial world. Their position, as a class, is much more closely akin to that of the Greek slaves than to that of the Greek freemen and philosophers. They are therefore much less interested in so-called "liberal" studies than in studies which have a practical bearing on their own needs and aspirations.

To quote another distinguished American writer on education, Professor John Dewey: "Since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a *particular* social ideal."[1] And the social ideal inspiring working-class education—that is, education undertaken by the workers as a class apart from the education provided for them by another class—must obviously be the same as that inspiring the whole working-class movement; indeed, working-class education must aim at making *conscious* that social ideal which, though implicit in every form of independent working-class organisation, is still but dimly realised by millions of workers.

In plain language, working-class education must aim at the ending of Capitalism and the building of a new social order. As William Morris puts it:

[1] J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, p. 115.

"The knowledge we have to help people to is threefold—to know their own, to know how to take their own, and to know how to use their own."

Now an education such as the 'extensionists' offer to the workers, an education based mainly on "liberal" studies, is obviously irreconcilable with a point of view and an aim such as this. "Liberal" educationists start from the assumption that, under existing social conditions, it is both possible and desirable for the workers to regard themselves as "freemen," and to devote themselves, in their scanty hours of leisure, to the pursuits and studies deemed proper to m nkind by those whose whole life consists of leisure. They argue that the worker is a human being before he is a wage-slave. And when the wage-slave replies that until he has ceased to be a wage-slave it will be impossible for him to do more than pretend to be a human being during odd moments of his life, the 'extensionist' accuses him of uttering "propaganda."

What the 'extensionists'—or, at any rate, the quite sincere and philanthropically minded among them—do not realise is that ordinary education to-day, elementary or "higher," is definitely propaganda for the existing order. Propaganda does not consist simply of the dogmatic assertion of certain conclusions. It is much more effective when it relies on the quiet taking for granted of certain assumptions. And the fundamental assumption of all education which does not consciously challenge the existing order of society is that the existing order is, on the whole, desirable and likely to be permanent.

The idea advanced by certain 'extensionists that education is concerned neither with a challenge

to, nor a defence of, the existing order; that it is essentially "impartial" and "above the battle," may be traced to the above-mentioned ruling-class conception, with its aristocratic disdain for practical issues. In any case it is an argument with singularly little appeal to the organised working class. As a class they are engaged in a battle, and if education is too intangible, too spiritual a thing to serve as a weapon in that battle, then education is no concern of theirs. A declaration of "impartiality" in such circumstances is likely to provoke the retort: "He that is not with us is against us!"

Neither is "bias," in the derogatory sense of the word, the only alternative to impartiality, as so many 'extensionists' have sought to show. Impartiality, in relation to issues so fundamental and so insistent as those facing the workers to-day, can only mean either a pedantic or a cowardly avoidance of unambiguous statement. There are *not*, any longer, two points of view about the broad, underlying facts of history on which the Labour Movement is based. Or if there are, one of them is no more than an attempt to minimise, distort or conceal some of the facts. What the workers want is honest investigation and a plain statement of the findings. And it may be remarked that the working class is the only class with no interest in the concealment or distortion of any historical facts whatsoever.

In any case, even if working-class education implied "bias," it would be a singularly naïve view which asserted that this was inconsistent with the sacred cause of Truth. "*History*," as James Harvey Robinson has pointed out, "*is not fixed and immutable, but ever changing. Each age has a perfect right to select from the annals of mankind those facts that seem to have a particular bearing*

on the matters it has at heart." Nobody, least of all a class engaged in a life-and-death struggle, has time to survey the whole mass of facts which go to make up the great total of human knowledge; and any *selection* of those facts is bound to be made as a result of a bias in one direction or another.

If, then, the primary aim of working-class education be to assist the workers in their class struggle against Capitalism, the general methods by which this aim will be realised may be classified in four main groups:

(i) Elementary education for the rank and file of the workers' movement, aiming at giving a sound grasp of broad, essential facts and principles.

(ii) More advanced education for the minority who desire, and are able, to carry their studies further.

(iii) The training of tutors.

(iv) The training, in the technical details of their work, of Trade Union organisers and officials, Labour propagandists, etc.

We may note a few main points about each of these divisions:

(i) *Elementary Education for the Rank and File.*—This is certainly the most important, as it is the most extensive, sphere of workers' education. It is the particular aspect which is beginning to appeal more and more to the thoughtful Trade Union leader, who has learnt from experience that "the man who does not know why he is a Trade Unionist is a potential blackleg," and who is accordingly anxious, not merely to get men into his union, but to keep them in it by providing union educational machinery designed to create and increase an intelligent class consciousness.

Not merely is the "back-sliding" of uneducated

Trade Unionists a very real danger in times of crises, but at such times also the officials of a union are necessarily, to a great extent, dependent on reliable men and women who can act as "N.C.O.s" in their branches. No union can afford to pay a staff which would be equal to the demands made upon it in periods of emergency. The larger the proportion of educated Trade Unionists in its ranks, therefore, the greater the union's effectiveness.

This is, of course, stating the case for elementary workers' education on the most obvious practical grounds. But precisely these same grounds form the basis of effective working-class action from the wider point of view. All working-class progress, political or industrial, is conditioned by the degree of *consciousness* of the mass of the workers—consciousness, not merely of the immediate problems to be faced, but of the ultimate issues of the struggle. A blind devotion to leaders—even if it were attainable—would be a poor substitute (in an army fighting in such a cause) for a discipline based on a common realisation by leaders and followers alike of their "historic mission" as a class.

The great problem which working-class educationists have to face and solve in this particular field of their work is that of *simplifying* their teaching methods and their treatment of the subjects taught, so as to avoid, on the one hand, "talking over the heads" of their hearers, and, on the other, making their teaching so sketchy and "popular" as to rob it of any real educational value. In such work the tutor drawn from the ranks of the workers has obviously one enormous advantage over the professional teacher or university-trained man: his appeal is more direct, his outlook and his

language are both more closely akin to those of his students, and he is able accordingly to talk simply without "talking down" to their level. Equally obviously the working-class tutor can often learn from the trained teacher a good deal about the effective presentation and arrangement of his material.

The basis of this elementary education—as, indeed, of all workers' education—will be History; particularly the history of Trade Unionism and of the Modern Working-Class Movement, and the development of Modern Capitalism (Imperialism, International Problems, etc.). Such courses will be followed by studies of Economics, Economic Geography, Psychology, etc., the aim of the tutor being always to show clearly the *interrelation* of all these subjects, and, above all else, their relation to the facts and problems of the everyday life of the workers. His chief task, in short, is to answer, briefly but convincingly, the three fundamental questions: *What* the present position of the workers, as a class, is; *How* and *Why* it came to be so; and *How* the workers can alter it.

The length of particular courses in all these subjects will depend, to a very large extent, on local conditions. Until recently the Labour College evening classes in Britain for the most part arranged courses of twelve or twenty weekly lectures in any given subject. During the past two or three years, however, there has been an increasing tendency to run shorter courses, of four or six lectures each, in each of the three or four principal subjects, so covering, roughly, within the duration of a single winter session, the whole ground-work of later studies. A course of six lectures on the History of Trade Unionism might thus be followed by a similar course on the Economics of Modern

Capitalism; and this, again, by six lectures on Economic Geography, or on Imperialism. By this method the student is brought to realise more clearly the common aim of all these studies, and to develop a reasoned, working-class point of view in relation to current problems as distinct from merely accumulating detailed knowledge in any separate department of study.

Each separate lecture in such courses will, of course, always include adequate time for questions and discussion. It may itself depend on a "question and answer" method of treatment; though it is doubtful, in view of the general shyness and self-consciousness of the average new student, whether the lecture will ever be superseded.

(ii) *More Advanced Education for the Minority.*—Obviously only a small proportion of the mass of the workers whom it is essential that we should reach in our educational work will be *students* in the full sense of the term. But a minority everywhere will always be eager to pursue their studies further and to carry them into new fields. Even if there were no other good reason for providing them with opportunities for doing so, the single fact that such more intensive courses of study are essential, if our elementary work itself is to be revivified and enriched, would alone be sufficient justification. In addition, of course, there is the fact that these more advanced courses are a necessary first step in the training of new tutors.

What has to be avoided in such work is the encouragement of study for study's sake. The studiously inclined worker who finds his greatest pleasure in the pursuit of knowledge must realise that his class has the right to demand of him certain sacrifices in this respect. He may ask for nothing better than a certain minimum of leisure

and opportunity for quiet study, and the pleasures of learning may be, for him, as effective a drug as alcohol is to many of his fellows. If his education does not lead him to regard himself as dedicated to the service of his class, and does not make him a more active and efficient servant of the workers' movement, then, from the point of view of that movement, it has been a failure — whatever his individual spiritual or intellectual gain.

This, perhaps, is the chief danger of such extensive courses as the three-year Tutorial Classes of the W.E.A. But it is a danger by no means confined to any one educational movement. The point to be borne in mind is that, from the point of view of the working class, education is a means to a definite end; and the very natural temptation to regard the means as an end in itself has to be resisted. The cultivation of the individual worker's intellectual faculties and powers of judgment is only legitimate if those acquired characteristics are forthwith applied to the service of his fellows.

These advanced groups will study the same subjects as those taken in the elementary classes, but, of course, in greater detail, and enlarging their historical studies to cover, in outline at least, the whole field of World History. Their curriculum will also include more theoretical subjects—*e.g.* Theoretical Economics, Scientific Method and the Science of Understanding, etc., as well as courses in such "utilitarian" subjects as English Public Speaking and Esperanto.

A live educational movement will also be constantly adding to its range of subjects, not at all with a view to increasing the number of its students' "accomplishments," but with the double aim of applying its own point of view to fresh material and opening up new channels by which to appeal

to new types of workers. The parrot-cry of the "liberals"—that purely working-class education is necessarily "narrow," both in spirit and scope—is too absurd to deserve polite reply.

(iii) *The Training of Tutors.*—Here, for the first time, we touch on a field of workers' education which necessitates—or will necessitate, so soon as finances permit—residential institutions. The only two English residential colleges — the London Labour College and Ruskin College—do not exist primarily to train tutors for the Workers' Educational Movement. The Trade Unions which send students to them expect those students to become organisers or officials; and though many students from both colleges do actually become tutors in the provincial classes at the present time, the need for an institution specially devoted to this work is becoming more and more evident in the N.C.L.C. Movement as the demand for tutors steadily increases.

The actual resident staff of a tutorial training centre need not be large, and its work should consist of individual teaching and coaching rather than of lecturing. Specialists could be brought in from outside to deliver short courses in particular subjects, and an important part of the curriculum would be study-groups and discussion-circles in which the students themselves would take the principal part. Mutual criticism would probably be the most effective single factor in the whole course of training.

If, as is much to be hoped, the curriculum of this residential training college is closely related to that of the classes, the actual term of residence at the college can be very considerably reduced—with proportionate financial economies. A good deal of the work done in existing residential colleges

could be done perfectly well in the more advanced evening classes; and it is highly probable that, if this were systematically planned, as good results would be achieved in six months' residence as are now attained in two years. At present the men and women taking up residence at the London Labour College or Ruskin College are of very varying "grades." Some of them will have actually been tutors in the provincial classes; others will have done no study of any kind since their elementary education finished eight or ten or more years previously. The result is that—teaching staffs being necessarily limited—the best men may have to "mark time" for months of their term, while the more backward ones are brought up to their level. Such a state of affairs is thoroughly wasteful in every way, and it is a matter for regret that the unions which have provided the money and men for the residential colleges have so far, in the main, failed to recognise the importance of classes for the rank and file of their members.

Only so far as they do recognise the importance of the class work, of course, will they consent to regard the residential colleges supported by them as training centres for tutors. But even if those colleges continue to aim, as at present, primarily at training union organisers and officials, the same considerations of economy, both of time and money, would hold good.

As we have already noted in an earlier chapter, the vast majority of the tutors in the N.C.L.C. classes are "part-time" voluntary workers—that is to say, they are men and women working at their own trades during the day and teaching classes on one or more evenings a week. On the whole it is emphatically desirable that this condition of things should continue It will, of course,

be necessary, as the Workers' Education Movement grows and develops, to have a certain number of whole-time paid tutors, particularly in the more densely populated industrial areas. But the ideal tutor, in such educational work as we are here considering, is undoubtedly the man or woman who is still undergoing daily experience of workshop (or mine or goods-yard) conditions. From our point of view academicism is the deadly sin, and—broadly speaking, at all events—the best safeguard against it is for tutors to continue in their own persons to live the same kind of life as their students.

This is not at all to say that the working-class educational movement will not avail itself of the services of all such University men and women and professional teachers as are ready to admit that their diplomas are, in relation to the needs of that movement, drawbacks rather than assets.

(iv) *The Training of Organisers, Officials, etc.*—There is little need to say much under this head here; all the more since certain considerations applicable to this field of work have been referred to in the preceding section.

In addition to a general grounding in Working-Class History and Economics, training schools for Trade Union organisers and officials of various kinds will have to provide tuition in such special subjects as Trade Union Law, the History of Industrial Legislation, Trade Unionism in other countries, and in the technical details of Office Administration and Management. (Probably most, if not all, of the tuition in this latter department could more economically be arranged for at the ordinary commercial colleges.)

It would, however, be a pity if training centres of this sort regarded themselves in the very narrowest

sense as "technical schools" and nothing more. Obviously the effectiveness of a Union Official is to as great an extent dependent on his general *savoir faire* as on his knowledge of technical details; and a school of this kind should aim at bringing the students into touch with as many types of men—workers of all grades and of all industries—and as many of the activities of modern life—*e.g.* journalism of various sorts and schools—as possible. The discussion and planning of such work offers a fascinating field of opportunity for the live educationist anxious to apply his principles to the solution of new problems.

§ 2. *Curriculum*

We have already, in the preceding section, outlined the actual curriculum of independent working-class educational centres and classes of various kinds. All we have space for here is to discuss briefly one or two general aspects of the subject.

The essence of the whole curriculum, in every department, must be *practical usefulness to the workers in their class struggle.* But there is no need to interpret "practical usefulness" too narrowly. As the Workers' Educational Movement develops it will have energy to spare for many things which circumstances compel it to ignore in its earlier stages. The British Labour College Movement, for example, has begun to realise comparatively recently the usefulness of such activities as musical and dramatic performances, play-readings, etc. Not only are such things invaluable as methods of appeal to new groups of workers, but they can very definitely become means of deepening and stimulating the class consciousness of every worker.

The ground-work of all our studies, as we have

already noted, will be History; ***not merely the history of the workers as a distinct and separate class, but the whole of History, regarded from the working-class point of view.*** This means a great deal more than that our *selection* of facts will differ from that of the bourgeois historian; it means that we shall regard as the truly significant and fundamental factors in history movements, events, and tendencies which the historian of another class will probably ignore altogether.

A concrete example may make this point clearer. An "advanced" school history-book written by Professor C. R. Beazley, and entitled *Nineteenth-Century Europe and Britain*, will provide us with sufficient illustration—and we cannot be accused of unfairness in our choice of a bourgeois historian, since Professor Beazley is not entirely unconnected with the Labour Movement. His subject in this little book is nineteenth-century political history. Now it is safe to say that the two outstanding political tendencies or movements of this period are (i) the development of bourgeois nationalism, culminating in Imperialism; (ii) the growth of the Labour Movement. Not merely from the specifically working-class point of view, but—one may almost say—from any point of view claiming to be fully informed and aiming at seeing facts in perspective, an understanding and an exposition of these two movements or tendencies is essential to a right handling of the history of the period.

Professor Beazley, in this book, gives a fair summary of the first-named movement; but he entirely fails to realise, much less to make clear, the significance of the second. True, he appends to each chapter a few "Notes on Culture History" (in small type), and in these he notes a few facts—

sometimes incorrectly—about the growth of the workers' movement. For instance, he gives the date of the "legalisation of Trade Unions" as 1871—only half-a-century out! And its place in the book rules out the possibility of its being a misprint. A small point, you say; but if you consider the vital importance of an event like the repeal of the Combination Acts to the Workers' Movement you will realise that only a writer entirely ignorant of the whole course of that movement could make an error so profound. Professor Beazley's "Notes" for 1870-1871 mention neither the Commune nor the First International. Yet he finds room for "The Prohibition of Infanticide in India," "The Foundation of Keble College, Oxford," "The First Piercing of the Alps," and "The Foundation of Catholic and Protestant Socialist Parties in Germany."

More important, he has apparently no conception of the importance of economic development as a factor in history. He describes the political and diplomatic events leading up to the Great War without so much as a hint of its fundamental economic causes. He does not even remark that there had been any economic development in Germany from 1866 onwards. In short, he writes as a typical bourgeois historian, regarding politics and political events as the proper theme and main substance of history, and utterly ignoring the fact that political happenings are but the result of other and far more fundamental changes.

Now we assert roundly that History viewed (and taught) from the working-class point of view does put the essential facts in better perspective than this. It is not merely a question of accuracy in details. "To make true statements," as James Harvey Robinson has remarked, "is not

necessarily to tell the truth." And what working-class educationists have to aim at is to tell the truth by grouping facts in such a way as to reveal the underlying factors and tendencies making for *change* in human societies.

Our historical courses will be based on a general outline of World History, and that outline will treat of social developments and class struggles which we shall see to have been essentially similar, however unlike as regards conditioning factors, to the struggle we are ourselves waging to-day. We shall study in greater detail the History of the Bourgeoisie and the Rise of the Modern Working Class—that is, European history from the decay of Feudalism down to the nineteenth century, when the development of Imperialism, and the rise of America and Japan, brings the whole world "into the picture."

We shall study Economics and Economic Geography as subsections of our historical scheme. And our aim in every department of our work must be to *relate* the knowledge we are acquiring to the specific problems, national and international, confronting us, as a class, at the present time. "The *facts* which History collects and presents to us are our raw material—the foundation on which we base our estimate of the possibilities of the present and of the future." [1]

Such an aim necessitates, to a very considerable extent, the writing and publishing of our own text-books, and that, as should be apparent, from no mere infantile dislike of using bourgeois or capitalist books—but because those books simply *do not tell the truth as we see it.* Here, however, we are touching on the much wider field of working-class literature in general—too big a subject to discuss

[1] *Do Your Own Thinking* (Plebs League pamphlet).

at the end of a small book. The important point to note is, that the work has begun and that the literature of Socialism has already provided us with the nucleus of a library which, in the near future, will rapidly increase and multiply.

§ 3. *Finance*

It remains to say a word on the question of finance. The 'extensionists,' as we have seen, rely to a very considerable extent on Government grants; and they also have no hesitation in accepting financial assistance from such sources as the Cassel or Carnegie Trust Funds.

So far as these latter are concerned, we imagine that few class-conscious Labour men or women would disagree with the 'independent' view that the acceptance of such assistance is both dangerous and humiliating. The question of Government grants—with a Labour Government (at the time of writing) in office—is not quite so simple. But it is surely obvious that, until such time as Labour is permanently and irrevocably "in power," it is better for the workers' educational movement to retain exactly the same independence of other classes of the community as the workers' industrial movement does. Labour may press—and rightly—for a considerable 'extension' of elementary and secondary education, at State expense. But it will do well to keep control of its own adult educational machinery by itself providing the necessary finance.

The classes of the National Council of Labour Colleges are wholly financed from grants made by the supporting unions. It is perfectly true that this has, up to now, necessitated not only a tremendous amount of entirely voluntary work, but the payment of whole-time workers at rates often

considerably lower than those regarded as minima by organised teachers in State or private employ. But there is no reason for such a state of affairs to be permanent. It should be the pride of the Labour Movement to see to it that the men and women working directly in its service, in whatever capacity, enjoy at least the same standard of living as their fellows have been able, by organisation, to win for themselves from the exploiters. And since, as we have already suggested earlier in this chapter, it is desirable that a large proportion of the work should continue to be done by voluntary or "part-time" tutors, this need not entail any very enormous expenditure of funds.

APPENDIX

WORKING-CLASS EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

'Independent'

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LABOUR COLLEGES—Hon. President, A. A. Purcell, M.P. (Chairman, Trades Union Congress); General Secretary, J. P. M. Millar, 22 Elm Row, Edinburgh.

Affiliated to the N.C.L.C. is the PLEBS LEAGUE—Hon. Sec., (Mrs) Winifred Horrabin, 162a Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.1—membership of which is open to individual sympathisers (subscription, 1s. per annum).

The Plebs League publishes the monthly organ of the Labour College Movement—*The Plebs* (4d. Annual postal subscription, 5s.)—and numerous text-books, pamphlets, cheap editions, etc., for list of which apply to Sec., *Plebs*, 162a Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.1.

'Extensionist'

THE WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION—President, F. Bramley; General Secretary, J. M. Mactavish, 16 Harpur Street, London, W.C. The organ of the W.E.A. is *The Highway*, published quarterly (6d.).

The Workers' Education Trade Union Committee is a special department of the W.E.A., founded to arrange educational facilities for the members of particular Trade Unions.

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