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ACCESS

Educating the workers? The W.E.A. in New Zealand, 1915-1938 *

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ABSTRACT
The Workers Educational Association (WEA) was founded in England in 1903, as a non-political, non-sectarian, and democratic association for the promotion of workers' education. In 1915, the Association was established in New Zealand, where it for many years represented the only avenue of adult education outside of the universities. This paper seeks to show both the links and essential differences between the English WEA and its New Zealand counterpart. In critically examining the nature of the WEA in New Zealand, particular attention is paid to the underlying philosophy of the movement, the classes it offered, and the students these served. I have attempted to relate this discussion to the changing nature of the social formation during the period considered, and to the critical issue of whether the WEA functioned as a force for social change or as an agency for middle class cultural hegemony.

Introduction

While it must be conceded that the cultural studies problematic (as it is developing in New Zealand) remains in need of a sustained work of theoretical clarification,[1] one is also mindful that theoretical debates have sometimes obscured the equally necessary task of concrete work and exemplification:

> While theory has been over-developed and has tended to acquire a dynamic of its own, studies at a lower level of abstraction have tended to be neglected. While theoretical starting points are legion, it is not easy to point to models of close p careful but fully conceptualised concrete studies (Johnson, 1979a, p. 49)

It seems to me that theory and concrete studies are clearly inextricably linked, with each serving to inform the other. The nature of this relationship is, however, not always easily resolved, and this paper represents a preliminary attempt to work it through in one historical case.

In tracing the development of the Workers Educational Association in New Zealand, I have therefore been conscious of the need for a theoretically informed history.[2] Originally an historian by training, now teaching ''education'', and with increasing pretensions in the direction of Sociology, (these interests are neatly collapsed into 'cultural studies'), I am increasingly convinced that: (i) historians need to become more aware of the possibilities offered by utilising concepts from sociology; and (ii) sociologists could well historically situate some of their more rarified debates. These two assertions are, of course, far from unproblematic, and are frequently treated with considerable reservation (if not disdain) by both sociologists and historians (See, for example, Stedman Jones, 1976; Fairburn, 1977).

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Association was established in New Zealand, where it for many years represented the only avenue of adult education outside of the universities. This paper seeks to show both the links and essential differences between the English WEA and its New Zealand counterpart. In critically examining the nature of the WEA in New Zealand, particular attention is paid to the underlying philosophy of the movement, the classes it offered, and the students these served. I have attempted to relate this discussion to the changing nature of the social formation during the period considered, and to the critical issue of whether the WEA functioned as a force for social change or as an agency for middle class cultural hegemony.

English Genesis

As Brian Simon, one of the leading historians of the British labour movement, has clearly shown, there existed two distinct traditions in adult education circles at the turn of the century (Simon, 1965). On the one hand were those who looked for a fundamental transformation of the existing social structure, through the introduction of socialism. On the other hand were those who hoped to educate the new generation of labour leaders to continue to throw their weight behind the liberal party and the cause of gradual social reform. To some extent, these two approaches were brought together in the WEA, which represented a liberal, humanist orientation. The WEA's rapid development was challenged by the Labour College movement, which gave rise to the Pleb's League, concerned to promote education exclusively under working class control.

The WEA had its origins in the development of University Extension work in the 1880's and 1890's. Although it had failed to attract significant working class support, University Extension established a link between university teachers and working class audiences, and a new growth point for adult education:

> Its leaders and active workers among the middle and professional classes were … educationists, conscious of the social problem, seeking a means to social harmony, motivated sometimes by a sense of guilt and by sympathy with the aspirations of labour. All shared a liberal-humanist outlook: education was good for its own sake, the workers deserved all the university could offer in the form of extramural teaching; education would spiritualise their lives (Simon, 1965, p. 304).

As Simon notes, such an orientation was reflected in the desire to provide a broadening, humanistic education, an impartial education not necessarily related to the material struggle of the workers. One can argue that such an ideal is impractical, unrealistic, and politically naive, but it was just this ideal that inspired Albert Mansbridge: In 1903 he wrote:

> The appeal of the hour to trade unionists and co-operators is that they make political strokes, promote Bills, register protests, and send deputations to responsible ministers. The true appeal is that they lift themselves up through higher knowledge to higher works and higher pleasures, which if responded to, will inevitably bring about right and sound action upon municipal, national and imperial affairs; action brought about without conscious effort - the only effectual action (Mansbridge, 1944, p. 2).

Mansbridge was the key figure behind the establishment of the Workers Educational Association in 1903. He believed that higher education for the working class should be fundamentally concerned with their spiritual development, rather than with immediate political or practical issues. Indeed, for him, the function of education was to raise the workers from material considerations: these, he thought, would right themselves in the end. In his published writings, however, Mansbridge tends to be vague about how such a process of change would actually occur. In an article in the University Extension Journal, published in January 1903, he argued that education - "deep draughts of knowledge" - will "divert the strong movements of the people from the narrow paths of immediate interests to the broad way of that rightly ordered social life of which only glimpses have yet been seen even by the greatest of the world's seers" (Mansbridge, 1944, p. 6). He had an idealised view of the working class as the only class which did not subordinate education to "materialistic ends".

The education offered through the WEA's tutorial classes was very much in the liberal tradition, emphasising the "impartial" study of economic, political, and historical questions. Mansbridge's views, and the general liberal-humanist ethos of the WEA, are in interesting contrast to the socialist views which were achieving considerable influence in England in the early years of the century. Both the WEA and the socialists rejected the idea of education purely as a means of material advancement; both also held that the educated workers should not separate themselves from their class, but should remain with it so that through some learning process the working class as a whole would benefit. However, the socialist groups looked to education as a means of transforming the individual. Here was a basic divergence of purpose.

On to New Zealand

The WEA rapidly gained support in England, and the movement soon spread to Australia and Canada. In 1915, a visit by Meredith Atkinson and David Stewart from the New South Wales WEA helped to establish the movement in New Zealand.[3] The various Districts of the WEA were supported from the first by the University of New Zealand, leading civic figures and churchmen, and the trade unions.

The first WEA's in New Zealand made every effort to copy the English model. The rhetoric of the movement's goals strongly reflected the liberal-humanist perspective of Albert Mansbridge and other leading figures in the English WEA. Indeed, publicity material published by the New Zealand WEAs made frequent use of English WEA pamphlets. (We shall return to this point later.) The WEAs adopted the organisational forms of their English counterparts - the District Council and the Tutorial Class Committee. Classes also followed the English pattern: a maximum of 30 students were expected to regularly attend a course of some 20-26 classes; classes consisted of a lecture, followed by up to an hours discussion, and students were expected to write regular essays. (This tutorial class model was a demanding one, and was soon "watered down"; see Thompson, 1945, pp. 86-88.)

It is not my intention here to trace the subsequent history of the movement in any detail; a sketch will suffice. The WEA s steadily increased the numbers of classes offered, extending them to the rural areas as well as the towns. In 1919 total enrolments for the various courses was around 1200, the movement was now firmly established, and the Dominion Report for that year proclaimed "the period of experiment is past". In fact, experiment was just beginning.

During the 1920's enrolments continued to grow, boosted by several noteworthy innovations. The box scheme was developed in Canterbury, as a method of reaching small districts, without the expense of a class tutor. The WEA also utilised the development of radio; by 1928 Auckland, Wellington, and Dunedin radio stations were regularly broadcasting lectures supplied by WEA speakers. Out of the various districts' recreational activities developed the Summer School, the first being held at Oxford, North Canterbury, bet ween 24 December 1920 and 8 January 1921. These schools offered a cheap holiday in picnic living conditions, combined with series. of lectures and discussions often conducted by leading authorities in their fields.

The 1920's represented the Association's golden period with a peak in 1930, when 224 classes were organised, with some 7,355 students (WEA Annual Report for 1930, p. 3.) The effects of the Depression were severe, and the WEA was forced to seriously curtail its activities as financial support was withdrawn. The Labour Government elected in 1935 was more sympathetic towards adult education, and economic circumstances were improving. The WEA's government grant was restored, as an interim measure while the whole organisation of adult education was reassessed. In 1938 the Council of Adult Education was created signalling the dawn of a new era.

An early WEA publicity pamphlet, published about 1917, indicates the clear social purposes of the movement at that time:

The purpose of the WEA is to educate the democracy - in other words, to give the masses of the people a chance of training their minds and securing for themselves rational standards of judgement, so that they may be able to form reasonable and intelligent opinions about all questions of interest to themselves, and more especially about the vitally important industrial, social and political problems of the day.

The WEA works on the assumption that true education does not consist in accumulating knowledge, but in exercising and strengthening the mental facilities; not in teaching a vast multitude of miscellaneous subjects, but in giving instruction on any given subject in such a way that the men and women who have gone through this process of training will be able afterwards to understand and to learn and to think for themselves by applying the experience they have already gained (The WEA: What it Is, 1917, p. 1).

The emphasis here is on the understanding of contemporary social issues, although it is worth bearing in mind that contemporary WEA publicity also frequently referred to "the need for a development of all the human functions of man so as may enable him to enter into his heritage of all the joys of civilisation" (Mr. Temple, President of the English WEA, approvingly quoted in the above pamphlet and elsewhere.) This is very much in accord with Mansbridge's "higher works and higher pleasures".

The relative importance of these goals is indicated in the nature of classes offered in these early years. The first Annual Dominion Report, for 1915, shows the following:

1915	: Tutorial Classes	Study Circles/ Series of Lectures
Auckland	: Economics (several classes)	Chairmanship; International Law
Wellington	: Economics (2), English Literature, Theory of Electricity	Psychology
Christchurch	: Economics (2); Psychology	Electricity; Chemistry, History of the Pacific Ocean
Dunedin	: Economics	–
Invercargill	: Economics; Literature	–

This was very much the pattern for the following years. For example, the Annual Report for 1921 shows Auckland now offering six tutorial classes: Psychology (3); Economics, Modern History, and English Literature. These same subjects are predominant in the offerings by the other WEA districts, with the considerable popularity of psychology reflecting its emergence as the panacea of the age.

If WEA classes did indeed deal with "the vitally important industrial social and political problems of the day" (1917 WEA pamphlet) just how were these tackled? The WEA made considerable play of its being a non-party political organisation concerned to offer "objective" studies.

The WEA offers a meeting ground for all shades of opinion on most subjects. It encourages the clash of minds in their endeavour to arrive at the truth. No propaganda of any kind is allowed, but every student is given the right to explain his or her opinions, and must, in turn allow the same right to other students (WEA : Its Aims and Objects, 1924, p. 3 my emphasis).

One is here reminded of Francis Bacon's comment. "But what is truth, cried jesting Pilate, as he turned his face and fled". The goal is the liberal ideal, reflecting notions of objective inquiry and value free forms of (social) science.

This orientation was not, however, always evident to the Association's critics. The WEA incurred disapproval and opposition from both the left and the right (see Thompson, 1945, pp. 76-77; 92-93), and frequently felt misunderstood, if not victimised:

> Hampered always by lack of funds for organisation, and even for teaching, viewed with suspicion either as a revolutionary propagandist association or as a subsidised agency of the capitalist class, it has steadily adhered to its ideal of education as a process of self-development and self-realisation. In this way it has avoided the whirlpool of politics and has built up, from men and women of most diverse views, a staunch body of students, united only in their desire for a fuller life and a more understanding citizenship (WEA Annual Report for 1920, p. 2).

The WEA was to change in its orientation during the following years. In the 1920's it moved away from the English tutorial class model, to offer an increasing number of shorter courses and discussion groups. It moved, also, from the rather narrow range of courses which could be broadly labelled "contemporary social studies", to pay more attention to courses of a recreational and artistic nature. The Dominion Annual Report for 1930 provided figures which indicated the interest shown by students in various subjects: in the study of Arts subjects there were 125 classes and 4187 students; for Social Science subjects there were 75 classes and 2701 students; for Natural Science subjects there were 13 classes and 467 students. As the Report concluded: "These figures illustrate the great appeal made by the purely art subjects, when close on 57 percent of the total students belong to such classes" (Annual Report for 1930, p. 5).

An Auckland WEA publicity pamphlet of 1933 refers to the two main current goals of the association; the first argues that:

> ... the rescue of civilisation from its present mess calls for a much greater understanding of the facts and principles of politics and economics and the social sciences by the mass of the people than exists at present.

The second reminds us "that civilised man does not live by bread alone, that the mechanical arrangements by which we feed and clothe and organise ourselves are only a means to an end." Accordingly, the WEA "aims to develop those qualities of appreciation and character without which even the most perfectly organised society would remain uncivilised in any true sense.''

While this was very similar to earlier statements, like that of 1917 (cited above), there was a noticeable change of emphasis. The first objective continued to be pursued through the now firmly established tutorial classes in economics, psychology, and international relations; the second objective was reflected in newer courses, such as ''New Horizons in Art'', ''Music; Melody and Harmony'', and ''Literature''. The highly successful ''box'' scheme, began in Canterbury in 1926, also indicated a move towards the arts and their appreciation. Thompson (1945, p.102) notes that the boxes "introduced modern plays and painting to thousands who (otherwise) might have remained indifferent to forms of art of higher value than 'The Stag at Bay ' and the Weldon supplements that still grace the walls of some country homes''.

This ''cultural'' side of the WEA's activities was very much in terms of an Arnoldian conception of culture as ''the best that has been thought and said''. It also reflected then prevalent bourgeois conceptions of what constituted suitable ''cultural'' studies in the humanistic tradition. As Taylor reminds us, the ''art tradition'' is ''the outcome of a certain class situation in the society, rather than something springing from rational deliberation. Within contemporary society the sustaining of the art tradition, and growth within it, stem from social processes within upper-middle class or bourgeois society. 'High culture 'is an integral part of bourgeois life''' (Taylor, 1978, p. 32). The courses of this nature offered by the Auckland WEA in the 1930 's provide concrete illustrations of bourgeois art: ''Music; Melody and Harmony''. (offered in 1933), for example, includes ''a practical introduction to musical composition and advanced ear training''; ''students should have some knowledge of musical notation, and compositions by Mozart and Beethoven are to be studied in some detail.''

The trend to increasingly offer courses of this nature was indicative of the Association ' s moving towards catering more for a middle class (and, to some extent one suspects, middle aged?) clientele. Contemporaries involved in the Association during this period frequently argue that the WEA was forced to move towards the middle class market as the demand for the established ''social'' subjects ebbed away.

Several reasons suggest themselves as explanations of this trend: (i) the increased state provision of secondary schooling satisfying the educational aspirations of many who were coming into the workforce; (ii) possible worker dissatisfaction with the WEA ' s liberal orientation, with a consequent turning to more radical groups such as the Plebs League of New Zealand, founded in 1924; and (iii) the embourgeoisement thesis:

> … which asserts that the well-paid worker sloughs off his proletarian origins and moves towards a middle class existence. Class consciousness is replaced by status consciousness and the concept of a militant and potentially revolutionary working class is presumed to be a Marxist anachronism. The argument is buttressed by evidence of decisive shifts in the labour force from manufacturing industry to the services sector, the expansion of clerical and professional occupations, the rapid contraction of old industries (coal, shipbuilding), and the consequent decline of the class-consciousness and radical working class communities whose members played such prominent roles in the growth of the labour movement (Swingewood, 1975, p. 120).

There is some evidence that the embourgeoisement thesis nay be relevant to New Zealand during the early twentieth century. Many witnesses to the 1912 Royal Commission on the Cost of Living noted how, in dress, food, housing, furnishing. and entertainment, "workers" had since 1890 assimilated the consumer patterns of the affluent. The Commission's report observed that a great part of the increased consumption of "the necessaries and common comforts and luxuries ... is accounted for by the greater demand of the workers, since the wealthier classes do not increase their expenditure on such articles at a similar rate in times of growing prosperity" (AJHR, 1912, H-18, p. xliv). The nature of the workforce was also changing. Census figures suggest that from 1896 to 1926 total manual workers fell from 65 percent to 58 percent of the workforce, while salaried white collar workers increased from 10 percent to 22 percent (Fairburn, 1977, p. 193). Much more inquiry is needed, however, to sustain the view that the New Zealand worker was experiencing embourgeoisecent (see Bedggood, 1977). Any debate on embourgeoisement @ust be placed within its wider context: the nature and importance of class as a factor in New Zealand history, to which we now turn.

Class and the WEA

In examining further just who the early WEA was catering for in New Zealand, it is important to consider the nature of the social formation evident at the turn of the century. There has been considerable historical debate on the question of the existence and influence of a class structure in late nineteenth century New Zealand. Professor Oliver has argued that the concept of class does not help to explain change in New Zealand because the "short expanse from floor to ceiling" and "the persistence of social osmosis" have eroded class distinctions (Oliver, 1969). Erik Olssen has attacked this position. He accepts that "in the last thirty years of the century … it is not possible to assume the existence of a national stratification system although national elites, such as the pastoral or commercial elites, probably existed" (Olssen, 1977, p. 22), but suggests that nevertheless nascent class-based interest groups were identifiable by the 1890's. "The pace of urbanisation, increasing residential segregation, and the depression of the 1890's sharpened disparities of income, life-style, status, and opportunity, At the same time the industrial sector grew very quickly" (ibid. p. 34; see also Olssen, 1974). This debate has continued, at times in a confused (and confusing) fashion, owing to a somewhat uncritical mixing of Marxist and Weberian notions of class (see Toynbee, 1979; Wood, 1981; Bedggood, 1980).

The debate to an important extent rests upon the incidence of upward social mobility and its importance in forstalling the development of class antagonisms (see Fairburn, 1979; Campbell, 1975). The contribution of education to social mobility is a significant element here (see Shuker, 1979, pp. 43-44). My reading of the various arguments (and the very limited empirical evidence they are based on), suggests that working men and women did look for the schools and, at times, the universities to provide entry for their children into the middle class in the early 1900's. While these hopes frequently went unrealised, a tradition of social advancement through education - schooling and its certificates representing a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; McKenzie, 1981) - was clearly established, The existence of this tradition partly explains the enthusiastic response to the development of the WEA after 1915. In a society where opportunities for postprimary education remained severely limited, the emergence of a new avenue for educational aspirations was readily seized by many previously denied such opportunities.

To what extent was the WEA in New Zealand catering for the workers? An early report from the Auckland District notes:

> The WEA is essentially a working-class movement; 90 percent of the class members are drawn from the wage earners, and it is gratifying to the officers of the Association to find the Trade Union organisations assisting it in increasing numbers (Annual Report for 1917 1 p. 8)

A significant number of trade unions affiliated to the various districts of the WEA[5], thus realising the hopes of the founders of the movement: ''Many friends warned the promoters that the time was inopportune for the inception of our work, but our own confidence that the working classes were ready and awaiting the movement has been more than justified in fact '' (Annual Report for 1915, p. 5). The extent of union support, however, was subsequently sometimes cause for concern. "The support from the various Labour Unions is ... not so encouraging as we have a right to expect", noted the Invercargill report of 1918 (p. 25), while the Auckland Report of the following year conceded that "there is much room yet, it is true, for the spread of the movement among those for whom it was primarily organised - the manual toilers of the community" (1919, p. 2). The same report also observed: "workers in other vocations have shown a growing appreciation of the privileges the Association offers", and the movement was accordingly broadly established. That the WEA should soon broaden its clientele was hardly surprising. New Zealand provided a very different context from England, with a less rigid class system and a small town society with a significant rural population. (As late as 1927, 46 percent of the population was classified as rural.)

Information on who the students were during the early years is meagre. In the 1920 's, however, Canterbury attempted to ascertain the occupations of its students. While the categories used are frequently problematic, and the situation no doubt varied amongst the various districts, there is enough in these figures to suggest that the WEA was continuing to serve ''the manual workers of the community'' (cf. Hall, 1970, p. 60; Williams, 1978, pp. 18-19).

The Canterbury WEA tabulated the occupations of its students in 1922 "in order to show to whom the movement appeals.'' Of the 753 students, 212 were manual workers: 82 primary school teachers; 179 domestic duties, 266 salesmen, office workers, etc., and 14 were unaccounted for (Annual Report for 1922, p. 27). Similar breakdowns are provided by Canterbury during the next few years, and the 1928 Annual Report noted that ''the occupations of the students as shown in the Canterbury and Auckland reports reveal the fact that the majority of the students are drawn from the artisan class" (Annual Report for 1928, p. 7). The 1930 Report includes the first national breakdown of students ' occupations: manual workers, 731; office workers, 612; salesmen and women 208; teachers 468; professions 224; domestic duties 1,420; nurses 97; retired 20; miscellaneous 82; Paparoa Prison (men) 65; not recorded 365; total 4,292. The Report argued that the figures showed the WEA was still serving ''the types for whom the movement was intended'' (namely manual and office workers and women), while the fact that ''the classes attract all kinds of students" was necessary if different viewpoints were to be presented in classes ''a condition of the success of the WEA method of education'' (Annual Report for 1930, p. 6).

The Wellington WEA report for 1938 provided ''figures which give a good indication of the composition of the WEA student body'':

Manual workers	503
Craft workers	250
Professional	174
Farmers	160
Office workers	150
Teachers	138

(Married women students were classified under the occupations of their husbands.) These figures were regarded as very satisfactory, "for while the Association has never been in any sense exclusive, it has considered that its first duty was to the workers (in the narrower sense of the term) and that it was failing if it did not attract a reasonable number of them to its classes and groups" (Annual report for 1938, p. 20). The Canterbury WEA's breakdown of students' occupations reveals a similar pattern, with more than 50% of the male students in tutorial classes being manual workers (ibid, p. 28).

These various figures suggest that the Association had lived up to the logic of its name, while at the same time catering for a cross-section of the population. As we have seen, this situation was partly reflected in the changing nature of the WEA's classes, with the increased emphasis on cultural and recreational studies evident by 1930. It also reflected the changing emphasis between the Association's two main goals: to promote an understanding of contemporary social issues, and to develop qualities of appreciation and character through the study of "higher works and higher pleasures". These two goals had, for founders of the movement like Albert Mansbridge, been inevitably linked. Such a link, however, was difficult to sustain in any practical sense. The liberal ideal of change through a "civilising" of the workers frequently sat uneasily alongside the radical ideal of education for social change which many of the movement identified with.

There developed two broad camps in the WEA: the reformists, often supporters of the Labour Party, who believed in gradual reform of the social system; and the revolutionaries, usually Marxist, who argued that a basic restructuring of the social system was required. This division mirrored the earlier situation in Britain where the revolutionaries left the WEA and formed Labour Colleges within the trade union movement (see Simon, 1965, p. 311ff). This formal division did not occur in New Zealand, where the Marxists were always in a minority. Some, however, like Norman Richmond in Auckland, played important roles in shaping the movement.

Richmond Director of Tutorial classes for the Auckland WEA, 1928-1938, did not believe in the 'disinterested' pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, or in the 'impartial' teaching of subjects like economics and politics. He argued rather that "Education in an unsatisfactory community must bend itself above all to social change" (Memo to University Senate, 1936; cited in Horton 1980; p.6). Workers had to be made aware of their social situation and become educated for leadership.

Thompson (1945) refers to this philosophy of "education for social change", and the criticism that Richmond and other left-wing WEA figures attracted in the 1930's, but dismisses their influence as both unfortunate and overrated. More recent and comprehensive appraisals (Horton, 1980; Colquhoun, 1976) have shown that this dismissal is too abrupt. The various WEA Districts can be usefully regarded as sites of struggle, where from time to time there was vigorous debate between the radical and liberal elements in the movements, with the liberal element generally dominating.

We have seen how the WEA emphasised the objective study of social issues, in line with its official "non-political" stance. It was soon clear, however, that for many "objective" really meant "non-radical". While there was strong criticism of radical tutors such as the Rev. Archer in Christchurch and Richmond in Auckland, members of that time have remarked that there were no such protests at blatant examples of racism and imperialism which featured in early WEA public

lectures during the First World War (Colquhoun, 1979, p. 24). The support of the University of New Zealand, which was primarily responsible for establishing the WEA on a firm basis financially, was predicated on the view that: ''By means of the WEA the University may provide higher education and training in civic ideals for a large body of citizens for whom no other educational institution exists'.' (University Colleges' report to Senate, Senate Minutes, 1919, p. 127; my emphasis). There were several instances of arguments between the WEA and the University over the question of academic freedom - essentially the right of WEA tutors to hold radical opinions. Early in 1921 the Chancellor of the University of New Zealand made his feelings clear :

During the year considerable discussion has appeared in the public press regarding the appointment of one of the Instructors in Economics in Canterbury. He does not appear to be a University graduate, and judging by his public utterances he is a Marxian in theory and may properly be termed a revolutionary communist". In my opinion these Workers Educational Associations will not be beneficial to our people if they are conducted by revolutionaries ... and I do not think the University should use its funds for the propagation of any special economic theory and especially should not lend its aid to a propaganda of revolution (Senate Minutes, Chancellors Report 19 January, 1921, p. 5).

The tutor was the Reverend J. K. Archer, who subsequently survived a Senate Committee's investigation and went on to become mayor of Christchurch in 1926! (see Thompson, pp. 92-93). The extension of state support to the WEA in the 1920's provided a further incentive not to "rock the boat". In 1921-22 there was a danger that the Government Grant would be withdrawn, but a Wellington WEA deputation convinced C. J. Parr (the Minister of Education) that the WEA was "a purely cultural and educational association" (Annual Report for 1922, p. 14).

The attitudes of both the government and the University of New Zeal and indicate that they implicitly regarded the WEA as an agency for middle class cultural hegemony.[6] This nicely accorded with those in the association who emphasised its philosophy of liberal improvement through educating the democracy" rather than radical social change. One aspect of this philosophy was the support for bourgeois culture as the desirable artistic norm; another was the implicit support of a meritocratic educational ideology. The notion of hegemony, however, does not refer to a smooth, uninterrupted bourgeois domination of cultural sites; the situation is rather one of continual struggle as the ruling class alliance attempts to secure ideological domination. In the period 1915-1938, the various Districts of the Workers Educational Association provided such a site and such a struggle.

Notes

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1. "Cultural Studies is a problematic, centrally concerned with the relationship between consciousness and society, and with the processes of signification through which that relationship is expressed" (NZ Cultural Studies Working Group Journal, Issue No. 3, Autumn 1982: Editorial Policy). For aspects of this on-going debate, see the pieces by Steve Maharey and Sharon Mast therein, and the Working Group's reply to Mast. See also the work published by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, especially Stuart Hall's paper in Hall et al (1980).
2. I view 'history' as a form of social science, ultimately dependent upon a theory of social causation. I have argued elsewhere (Shuker, 1979) that historians need to become more conscious of the relationship between history and theory, and more explicit about their theoretical perspectives.
3. It is important to bear in mind here that the WEA in New Zealand has existed as a national body only since the setting up of a Dominion Council in 1920, while one of the Association's most significant characteristics has been its in-built regionalism. Local variation in approaches and emphasis has

frequently been marked. For a useful overview of the WEA's development between 1915 and 1938, see Thompson (1945).

4. For my own part, I accept what Giddens (1981, p. 132) terms "the Marxian emphasis on the explanatory salience of class as central to the notion of class society. A class society is not one in which there simply exist classes, but one in which class relationships are of primary significance to the explanatory interpretation of large areas of social conduct." Rather than speak of the 'existence' or 'non-existence' of classes, we should refer instead to types and levels of class structuration, which can be weakly or strongly defined. (See Giddens, 1981, pp. 20, 105, 107-112).

5. For example, the Annual Report for 1917 shows the following number of unions affiliated to the various WEA's (the number in brackets is the total number of organisations affiliated): Auckland 24 (37); Wellington 19 (27); Christchurch 20 (31); Invercargill 4 (5); no comparable figures are available from Dunedin, but 9 unions were represented on its District Council. While there was a predominance of skilled or craft unions (typographers, bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, bootmakers etc.) there was also significant representation from unskilled and manual unions (such as general labourers, freezing workers, watersiders). The relative involvement of various types of union in the WEA needs further investigation.

6. The concept of hegemony has come to the force with the recent popularisation of the work of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, most of whose writing was done in prison in the twenties and thirties (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci was primarily concerned to explain how the political and economic supremacy of particular social forces, classes, or class alliances, was secured and maintained. Clearly, he argued, force alone was not sufficient. While command of sufficient force to create and maintain such supremacy was necessary, so also is "intellectual and moral leadership", which involves an attempt to gain consent. This process of establishing hegemony involves the dominant class projecting its own particular way of seeing the world, human and social relationships, so that this is accepted as "common sense" and part of the natural order by those who are in fact subordinated to it. Hegemony, then, may be defined as "an order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society, in all its institutional and private manifestations, informing with its spirit all tastes, morality, customs, religions and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in the intellectual and moral connotations" (cited in Abercrombie, 1980, p. 115).

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