

*The Workers' Educational Association  
and the Pursuit of Oxford Idealism,  
1909-1949*

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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

November 2018

# **Abstract – The Workers’ Educational Association and the Pursuit of Oxford Idealism, 1909-1949**

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This study examines the practical application of Oxford Idealism to education reform and the adult education movement. According to Idealist philosophy, enlightened and active citizenship was the cornerstone of a participatory democracy. This thesis thus explores how Oxford Idealists used the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) to pursue the aim of cultivating good citizenship and forming a common purpose for the future society they wished to see emerging. The WEA, founded in 1903, embodied the Idealist vision by promoting its two-fold practices: first, it organised university tutorial classes to foster mutual learning and fellowship between intellectuals and workers; second, it campaigned for a state-funded ‘educational highway’, from nursery to university, so that every citizen would have the opportunity to receive the kind of liberal education which had hitherto been limited to upper and middle classes. By exploring the development of the dual initiative, this thesis examines the achievement and limitations of the Idealist project. In particular, it investigates whether and how this pursuit, in the long run, contributed to the rise of professionalism, a trend which has been ascribed to the efforts of Idealists but which in many ways contradicted the ideal of participatory democracy. In so doing, this thesis explains why the influence of Oxford Idealism—this highly moralistic philosophy which inspired a generation of intellectuals and politicians and lent a distinctive flavour to British public policy at the beginning of the twentieth century—gradually ebbed in the public domain.

# Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other university or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

# Acknowledgements

My primary debt is to my supervisor, Prof. Eugenio Biagini. His suggestion to situate the practice of the WEA within the general context of the rise of professionalism proves wise and invaluable. Along with his careful and patient guidance, he offered every possible help with my thesis no less than with my life in Cambridge. I am really grateful to him for being a constant and supportive presence for me and for always having full confidence in me.

I deeply thank Prof. Alastair Reid for generously lending his support to this project, including offering me boxes of books from his study, which substantially facilitated my work. His reflections on his own intellectual journey, and especially on his indebtedness to Scottish and Chinese traditions, helped me to consider the purpose of my research from a wider perspective.

I wish to express my gratitude to my two examiners, Prof. Jon Lawrence and Prof. Ben Jackson, for their rigorous criticisms and sympathetic comments. Their recognition is truly important to me.

It is my privilege to have received much useful advice and positive encouragement at different stages of this project. I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Peter Clarke, Mark Freeman, Josh Gibson, Lawrence Goldman, Ben Griffin, Ke-chin Hsia, Richard Johnson, Emily Jones, Stephen Leach, Peter Mandler, John Marshall, Jon Parry, Colin Rochester, Tim Rogan, Marcella Sutcliffe, Gill Sutherland, Pat Thane, Deborah Thom, Geraint Thomas, Colin Tyler, Fei-Hsien Wang, Rong Wu, Chong Zhang, and Meta Zimmeck. I am grateful to the convenors and members of the Modern British History Seminar at Cambridge, the Voluntary Action History Seminar at the IHR, and the ICHRE Seminar at the UCL Institute of Education, for providing me with opportunities to present draft Chapters One, Four, and Five of this thesis.

My thanks also go to the Taiwanese Government for granting me a study abroad scholarship, to the Cambridge History Faculty for awarding me a Stanley Baldwin Studentship, and to Jesus College, Cambridge for both financial and non-financial support, all of which made possible my studies in the UK.

This thesis would not be what it is now without the company, help, and encouraging words of Julian Sommerschuh. It was out of our exchanges of ideas, observations, joys and pains (and table tennis shots) that this thesis took shape. I especially thank him for carefully proofreading every chapter of this thesis, in many cases, more than once. Of course, in recording my thanks to him, all errors and mistakes are mine.

My deepest debt of gratitude is to my family. I greatly appreciate the affection and tolerance of my wife, Ming-Fang, during the lengthy process of writing this thesis. It proves a big challenge for a young couple to live in a foreign country. For all the efforts she made to build up a warm and lovely haven for us, I am very grateful. Her emotional and intellectual help was essential to the completion of this journey.

I thank my parents for their unconditional support and care. They offered me financial assistance without any hesitation. It is my great fortune that both of them pursue careers in education and therefore have professional insights about the practice of the WEA. I wish to thank them for being willing to read my drafts and share with me their thoughts and practical knowledge.

This thesis is dedicated to my four late grandparents. After all, my interest in history grows out of the life stories they movingly told me.

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# Abbreviations

<b>[l.a.]</b>	leading article
<b>[corr.]</b>	correspondence
<b>ATAE</b>	The Association of Tutors in Adult Education (before 1929, ATCT)
<b>ATCT</b>	The Association of Tutorial Class Tutors (from 1929, ATAE)
<b>BIAE</b>	British Institute of Adult Education
<b>BOECC</b>	The Board of Education Consultative Committee
<b>CEC</b>	The Central Executive Committee
<b>CJAC</b>	The Central Joint Advisory Committee on Tutorial Classes
<b>CLC</b>	The Central Labour College
<b>FGPC</b>	The Financial and General Purposes Committee
<b>HMI</b>	H. M. Inspector
<b>ILP</b>	The Independent Labour Party
<b>LPEAC</b>	The Labour Party Educational Advisory Committee
<b>LSE</b>	London School of Economics
<b>NCLC</b>	National Council of Labour Colleges
<b>NUT</b>	The National Union of Teachers
<b>ODNB</b>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<b>OUTCC</b>	Oxford University Tutorial Classes (Joint) Committee
<b>UCAE</b>	University Council for Adult Education (before 1945, UEMCC)
<b>UEMCC</b>	Universities Extra-Mural Consultative Committee (after 1945, UCAE)
<b>PPE</b>	Philosophy, Politics, and Economics
<b>SAC</b>	The School Age Council
<b>TB</b>	<i>The Tutors' Bulletin</i>
<b>TES</b>	<i>The Times Educational Supplement</i>
<b>TUC</b>	The Trade Union Congress
<b>TUCEC</b>	The Trade Union Congress Education Committee
<b>WEA</b>	The Workers' Educational Association
<b>WEAEAC</b>	Workers' Educational Association Educational Advisory Committee
<b>WETUC</b>	The Workers' Education Trade Union Committee



## Introduction.

In the progressive division of labour ... we seem to lose our completeness as men ... There is less of human interest to touch us within our calling, and we have less leisure to seek it beyond. Hence it follows that one who has made the most of his profession is apt to feel that he has not attained his full stature as a man ... The relation between the higher and lower classes becomes irritating ... simply from the want of a common understanding ... [E]very class suffers within its own limits ... under the authority of class-convention, which could not long maintain themselves if once placed in the light of general opinion. — T. H. Green.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of Jowett's pupils, especially such men as T. H. Green, Arnold Toynbee and Alfred Milner, ... on the reform of the civil service, on the administration of the British Empire, and on social work in the East End of London, was enormous, and made Balliol one of the mainsprings of the professionalisation of government and of the Welfare State.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Workers' Educational Association and the Practice of Oxford Idealism.**

This study examines the practical application of Oxford Idealism to education reform and the adult education movement. According to Idealist philosophy, enlightened and active citizenship was the cornerstone of a participatory democracy. This thesis thus explores how Oxford Idealists used the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) to pursue the aim of cultivating good citizenship. In particular, it examines whether and how this pursuit, in the long run, contributed to the rise of professionalism, a trend which has been ascribed to the efforts of Idealists but which in many ways contradicted the ideal of participatory

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<sup>1</sup> T. H. Green, 'Value and Influence of Works of Fiction in Modern Times' [1862] in R. L. Nettleship (ed.), *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. III (London, 1888), pp. 40-2.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Perkin, 'The Demise and Resurrection of a Profession' in id., *The Key Profession* (London, 1969), p. 22.

democracy. In so doing, this thesis intends to explain why the influence of Oxford Idealism—this highly moralistic philosophy which inspired a generation of intellectuals and politicians and lent a distinctive flavour to British public policy at the beginning of the twentieth century—gradually ebbed in the public domain.<sup>3</sup>

The WEA was founded in 1903 by a self-taught Co-operative worker, Albert Mansbridge (1876-1952), though the movement significantly owed its origin to Oxford Idealists, with whom Mansbridge associated himself via University Extension lectures and the Church of England. In particular, Charles Gore (1853-1932), then Canon of Westminster and an Idealist, was a mentor figure to Mansbridge and was instrumental in encouraging the latter to launch the initiative.<sup>4</sup> Through Gore and his circle, Mansbridge recruited to the movement a cluster of Idealist graduates and dons, especially those who were affiliated to Balliol College, Oxford—Gore’s alma mater and the cradle of Oxford Idealism. The Balliol connection included also: William Temple (1881-1944), the first WEA President (1908-24), R. H. Tawney (1880-1962), the first WEA tutor and later President (1927-43), and A. D. Lindsay (1879-1952), WEA Vice-President (1924-52), to name but the most prominent ones. Claiming, on its centenary anniversary, to be ‘the largest and most successful’ adult education provider in Britain’s voluntary sector,<sup>5</sup> the WEA reached the peak of its influence between the two wars when the association nearly monopolised the provision of university adult education through a firm partnership with both university authorities and the labour movement and played a pivotal role in campaigns to reform the public educational system.

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<sup>3</sup> For the influence of Idealism on British social policy in the twentieth century, see Jose Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy’, *Past and Present*, 135 (1992), pp. 116-41; John Offer, *An Intellectual History of British Social Policy: Idealism versus Non-Idealism* (Bristol, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> H. P. Smith, *Labour and Learning* (Oxford, 1956), p. 16; Albert Mansbridge, *The Trodden Road* (London, 1940), p. 139. For Gore and Idealism, see Albert Mansbridge, *Fellow Men: A Gallery of England, 1876-1946* (New York, 1970 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1948]), p. 58; Albert Mansbridge, *Edward Stuart Talbot and Charles Gore* (London, 1935), pp. 35-7. Gore also had a significant influence on Tawney. See Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R. H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London, 2013), pp. 181-2; James Kirby, ‘R. H. Tawney and Christian Social Teaching: Religion and the Rise of Capitalism Reconsidered’, *English Historical Review*, 131 (2016), pp. 793-822.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen K. Roberts, ‘Introduction’ in id. ed., *A Ministry of Enthusiasm: Centenary Essays on the Workers’ Educational Association* (London, 2003), p. 1.

In a broader perspective, the rise of the WEA was the climax of decades of effort in extramural teaching by Oxford Idealists.<sup>6</sup> The chief mission of the WEA—to ‘promote the higher education of working men’, as Mansbridge envisioned—had already been put forward when Oxford Idealists, notably led by T. H. Green (1836-82) and Arnold Toynbee (1853-83), embarked on university extension teaching in the 1870-80s. Green, Fellow of Balliol and later Whyte’s Professor of Moral Philosophy, and Benjamin Jowett (1817-93), Green’s undergraduate tutor and Master of Balliol, were responsible for the establishment of the Oxford Extension Committee in 1878.<sup>7</sup> After Green’s premature death in 1882, the Extension work continued to be undertaken by Green’s pupils such as A. H. D. Acland and L. T. Hobhouse in the 1880s,<sup>8</sup> while Toynbee made vain attempts to form an alliance between Oxford and the Co-operative movement.<sup>9</sup> When Oxford Extension petered out by the turn of the century,<sup>10</sup> the nascent WEA timely assumed the Idealist ambition of disseminating university education among labour communities. The WEA’s flagship programme—the ‘university tutorial class’, a scheme to provide workers with three-year intensive study in university subjects—was in fact derived from educational experiments made at another Idealist institute—Toynbee Hall (named after Arnold Toynbee). The social work initiative, which settled university graduates in the East End of London to serve, teach, and live with the poor, became a close ally of the WEA.<sup>11</sup> Its founding warden, Canon Barnett (1844-1913), was an Oxford Idealist who was also instrumental in the development of the early WEA, partly through the influence of his protégé, Tawney, who used to work at Toynbee Hall.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Gordon and John White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers: The Influence of Idealism on British Educational Thought and Practice* (London, 2010 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1979]), pp. 77-8.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 73-4; Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 18-25, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 42-3; Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 56-8.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Mansbridge, ‘The Beginning of the WEA’, *Highway*, 16:3, Summer 1924, p. 132; Arnold Toynbee, ‘The Education of Co-operators’ [1882] in *Toynbee’s Industrial Revolution*, pp. 222-30.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education: Being the Story of the Workers’ Educational Association 1903-1915* (London, 1920), pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> In 1899, Toynbee Hall had tried quasi tutorial classes—classes in higher learning with an emphasis on a close relationship between tutors and students. Henrietta Barnett, *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work, and Friends*, vol. 2, (London, 1918), pp. 105-8; R. A. Lowe, ‘Some forerunners of R. H. Tawney’s Longton tutorial class’, *History of Education*, 1 (1972), pp. 43-57. For the beginning of the Toynbee Hall, see Samuel and Henrietta Barnett, *Towards Social Reform* (London, 1909), pp. 239-54.

<sup>12</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 23-9.

The British idealist movement, which drew its inspiration from Ancient Greek and German philosophy and reached its zenith at the turn of the nineteenth century, was by no means a homogeneous current carrying 'a uniform body of doctrine'.<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, I use the term 'Oxford Idealists' (and 'Idealists' with a capital 'I') to refer to Green and his followers whose thought reflected a marriage of, on the one hand, Victorian radicalism, which derived from the Nonconformist tradition and featured such ideas as communal self-governance and participatory citizenship,<sup>14</sup> and, on the other hand, the idealist philosophical tradition, reaching from Plato, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel to Victorian literati such as Carlyle and Coleridge.<sup>15</sup> Despite discrepancies of opinion over several issues, this latter strand of thinkers concurred on a viable harmony between individual and collective and viewed society as a spiritual community with an ethical purpose. By adopting this prospect, Oxford Idealists diminished Victorian liberal and radical hostility towards state action and collectivism. This did not mean that they endorsed absolute statism, but they did strive for a 'moral partnership' between state and citizens.<sup>16</sup> According to this vision, citizens fulfilled themselves by leading a civically active life with a shared purpose, while the state, as an embodiment of the collective will, was morally obliged to empower citizens to develop their potentials in serving the common purpose, primarily by means of educational provision.<sup>17</sup> This ideal took the concrete form of an educated democracy where informed and responsible citizens devoted themselves to public affairs by means of

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<sup>13</sup> Sandra M. den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 7-8; Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940', pp. 137-8. For a comparison of different strands of idealist political and social philosophy, see e.g. W. J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford, 2011), ch. 7.

<sup>14</sup> On Green and Victorian radicalism, see Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age* (London, 1964), ch.9; Craig Jenks, 'T. H. Green, The Oxford Philosophy of Duty and the English Middle Class', *British Journal of Sociology*, 28:4 (1977), pp. 481-97; R. L. Nettleship, 'Memoir' in id. ed., *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. III, pp. xxv, lxii. For radicalism and the Nonconformist tradition, see E. F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 1; E. F. Biagini, 'Radicalism and Liberty' in Peter Mandler (ed.), *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 101-24.

<sup>15</sup> Earnest Barker, *Political Thought in England, 1848-1914*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (London, 1922), pp. 11-2, 23-30; Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', pp. 126-31; Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 15-27.

<sup>16</sup> Den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, pp. 213-4; Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 140.

<sup>17</sup> Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, pp. 253-7, 350-61. This vision also anticipated the rise of the 'new liberalism' in Edwardian Britain. For Oxford Idealists and the new liberalism, see Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978); Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford, 1978); Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology* (Cambridge, 1979). It is worth noting that Freedon played down the role of Idealism in shaping the new liberal thinking while emphasising the significance of the biological and evolutionary ideas. For a useful review of the literature, see also Andrew Vincent, 'The New Liberalism in Britain 1880-1914', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 36 (1990), pp. 388-405.

either public services or voluntary action. By this definition, the term 'Oxford Idealist' embraces not only Green and his immediate followers, such as Toynbee, Gore and Barnett, but also the younger generation of Balliol scholars, who were intellectually nurtured under Green's spell (through the Mastership of Edward Caird, another protégé of Green) and believed in the ideal of an educated and participatory democracy.<sup>18</sup> The latter group of Oxford Idealists comprises many WEA activists, including Temple, Lindsay, and Tawney.<sup>19</sup>

Here, it is worth noting that this thesis does not adopt the rigid distinction, made by Marc Stears and Matthew Grimley, between Idealists and 'pluralists', an intellectual camp which allegedly included Tawney, Lindsay, and to a lesser extent, Temple.<sup>20</sup> According to Grimley and Stears, pluralists refuted Idealism on two main grounds: First, pluralists expressed a greater distrust toward the state and underscored ordinary people's participation in different intermediate associations. Second, they were sceptical about the Idealist assertion that the degree of personal freedom would increase in proportion to one's service to the community. For pluralists, individual freedom was measured by the opportunities for self-development rather than by the imagined common purpose.<sup>21</sup> This thesis does not follow Stears's and Grimley's line because: 1) 'Oxford Idealism' in this thesis is not reduced to 'statist' Idealism. As shown above, it was the thinkers' faith in a shared ethical purpose and the mutuality between collective action and popular participation that made them Idealists. In other words, scepticisms over the state did not necessarily disqualify one as Idealist. 2) It is true that the pluralistic emphasis on personal freedom over the collective good was a denial of Idealism. Nevertheless, as we shall see in this thesis,

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<sup>18</sup> Edward Caird (1835-1908) succeeded Benjamin Jowett as Master of Balliol from 1893 until 1908. Despite being a year older than Green, Caird went up to Balliol as an exhibitor at age 25 when Green had been elected a tutor.

<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Melvin Richter, Tawney acknowledged his debt (and that of Temple and Lindsay) to Caird and the 'Green tradition'. See R. H. Tawney to Melvin Richter, n.d. [1958], Archive of Balliol College, Oxford, MS 421, fols. 1-2. For the Idealist outlook of Temple and Lindsay, see Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State Between the Wars* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 42-64. For Tawney's indebtedness to Idealism, see Matt Carter, *T. H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Exeter, 2003), pp. 163-85, 189. Terrill emphasises more on the differences between Tawney and Green, but agrees that Tawney is 'heir to the doctrines of positive liberalism of the socialistically inclined followers of T. H. Green'. Ross Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Time* (London, 1974), pp. 122, 175-80.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford, 2002); Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*.

<sup>21</sup> Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State*, pp. 90-123; Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, pp. 65-74.

all the three above-mentioned figures clearly did not prioritise personal freedom over the common good and should hence not be regarded as pluralists.

Oxford Idealists undertook social reform with the purpose of reinstating the spiritual aspect of human life and the moral purpose of society. This approach was in sharp contrast to the 'scientific method', adopted by utilitarians and positivists, with its focus on the discovery of causal laws and the furtherance of material interests.<sup>22</sup> As Tawney put it, social reform was more 'a question of right and wrong' than 'a question of more and less'.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, despite being critical of capitalism, Oxford Idealists were concerned not so much about material inequality as about the demoralising force of possessive individualism which encouraged greed and self-interest.<sup>24</sup> Side-lining political or economic reform,<sup>25</sup> they gave priority to the cultivation of the co-operative morale and 'a deep spiritual ideal of life' in their programme to 'moralise the competitive society of capitalism'.<sup>26</sup> In the words of Peter Clarke, Oxford Idealists were 'moral reformists' who believed that 'reform will flow from the free will, spontaneous endeavours and democratic efforts of the citizens—it [was] a moral argument for structural reform'.<sup>27</sup>

The students of the Oxford Idealist school best embodied this faith in the link between ideas/morals and social reform. A widely quoted observation of R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943) expressed the profound influence that Idealist philosophy exerted on the future career of its pupils:

The 'Greats' school was not meant as a training for professional scholars and philosophers; it was meant as a training for public life in the Church, at the Bar, in the Civil Service, and in Parliament. The school of Green sent out into public life a stream of ex-pupils who carried with them the conviction that philosophy, and in

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<sup>22</sup> For Idealists' critique and appropriation of the positivist and utilitarian approach to social problems, see den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, ch. 3.

<sup>23</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Entry for Nov 1914', in J. M. Winter and D. M. Joslin (eds.), *R. H. Tawney's Commonplace Book* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 80. For Tawney's critique of the principle of 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number', see Tawney, 'Entry for 29 July 1913', in Winter and Joslin (eds.), *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, pp. 62-7.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', pp. 137-8.

<sup>25</sup> As Tawney reflected privately, '[t]o try to cure [the evils of modern society] by politics is like make [sic] surgical experiment on a man who is dying of starvation or who is poisoned by foul air'. R. H. Tawney, 'Entry for 4 May 1912', *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, p. 9. See also Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, p. 290. See also Peter Clarke, 'The Social Democratic Theory of the Class Struggle' in Jay Winter (ed.), *The Working Class in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 3-18.

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, pp. 14-5.

particular the philosophy they had learnt at Oxford, was an important thing, and that their vocation was to put it into practice.<sup>28</sup>

Their excellence in public life was taken as evidence that liberal studies at university—especially, the study of *Literae Humaniores*, or ‘Greats’, an Oxford degree course that mainly consisted of classical philosophy, literature and history—were essential to intelligent and passionate citizenship.<sup>29</sup>

The extension of university liberal education thus formed the core of the Idealist reform project. By making the all-round study of culture accessible to all, it aimed to promote the self-development of every citizen, which was believed ultimately to point to the common good. In Green’s words, the goal of education reform was to make ‘the education of gentlemen’ lose its meaning ‘because the sort of education which alone makes the gentleman in any true sense will be within the reach of all’.<sup>30</sup>

More specifically, with a deeper understanding of culture and society, citizens were expected to ‘acquire the civic qualities which enable [them] to co-operate with [their] fellows, and to judge wisely on matters which concern not only himself, but the whole country to which he belongs’.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, in the case of extramural education, Idealists anticipated that the convergence of university teachers and grassroots workers in the same initiative would invigorate mutual learning and foster cross-class companionship which was considered a requirement for active participation.<sup>32</sup> This ideal of ‘liberal education for all’ gave birth to the WEA, whose two-fold objectives were 1) to stimulate and satisfy the demand of workers for higher education, and 2) ‘[g]enerally to assist the development of

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<sup>28</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1939), p. 17. The graduates of Balliol’s ‘Greats’ school included politicians such as H. H. Asquith, Edward Grey, A. H. D. Acland; civil servants such as Robert Morant, Alfred Milner, William Beveridge; clergymen such as Charles Gore and William Temple; journalists such as L. T. Hobhouse; and academics such as A. V. Dicey, J. H. Muirhead, Ernest Barker, R. H. Tawney, A. D. Lindsay, and G. D. H. Cole.

<sup>29</sup> For the affinity between Oxford Idealism and the study of Greats, see Julia Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics: The Social and Political Thought of Ernest Barker* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 26-9.

<sup>30</sup> Green, ‘The Work to be Done by the New Oxford High School’ [1881] in R. H. Nettleship (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. III, pp. 475-6. See also Eugenio Biagini, ‘The Anglican Ethic and the Spirit of Citizenship: The Political and Social Context’, in Rita McWilliams Tullberg, T. Raffaelli, Eugenio Biagini (eds.), *Alfred Marshall’s Lectures to Women* (London, 1995), pp. 28-31.

<sup>31</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education: Being the Report of a Joint Committee of University and Working-Class Representatives on the Relation of the University to the Higher Education of Workpeople*, (Oxford, 1909), p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Toynbee, ‘The Education of Co-operators’, pp. 222-30. See also Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 39-50.

a national system of education which shall ensure to all children, adolescents, and adults such education as is essential for their complete development as individuals and as citizens'.<sup>33</sup>

### **Idealism and the Professionalisation of English Society.**

Historians broadly agree that Oxford Idealism was 'not merely a philosophical movement, but primarily a reforming force'.<sup>34</sup> The reform work done by the Idealists, as Collingwood's quotation suggests, always remained instructed by the philosophy. Against this background, it is striking that many historians, especially social historians who examine the structural transformation of English society during the Edwardian and interwar periods, have regarded the Oxford Idealist school as one of the main advocates of the trends towards 'the rise of professional society', 'the decline of the industrial spirit', or 'the founding of the welfare state'.<sup>35</sup> As I will explain below, this is striking because these trends, which may be summarily referred to as 'the professionalisation of English society', principally contradicted the vision of Idealist philosophy.

The classic account of the relationship between Idealism and professionalisation is given by Harold Perkin. Perkin's thesis is an extension of Eric Hobsbawm's seminal proposition that the Fabian Society gave expression to the rising professional and administrative class, whose members attempted to distinguish themselves from the self-profiting bourgeoisie by demonstrating the usefulness of their scientifically-trained and impartial expertise.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *WEA Constitution*, 1915, WEA Archive, Central/1/1. My italics.

<sup>34</sup> David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, 2012), pp. 2-3. See also Julia Stapleton, 'Political Thought, Elites, and the State in Modern Britain', *Historical Journal*, 42:1 (1999), pp. 252-6; Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 1-5.

<sup>35</sup> Harold Perkin, *Origins of Modern British Society* (London, 1991 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1969]); Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 2002 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1989]); Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge, 2004 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1981]); Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940', pp. 116-41. Historians' interest in professionalism and professionalisation during this period was partly indebted to the growing critique of expertise in the 1970-80s. See Matthew Hilton, James McKay, Nicholas Crowson, and Jean-Francois Mouhot, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 18-9.

<sup>36</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, 'The Fabians Reconsidered' in id., *Labouring Men* (London, 2015 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1964]), pp. 250-71. See also Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, pp. 34-9; Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament, 1895-1919* (London, 1986), pp. 122-9.

For Perkin, not only Fabians but also Oxford Idealists were the bearers of this 'professional ideal'. He contends that the latter represented 'a new type of don, secular, career-oriented, married, and in close contact with the world outside the ivory tower', an argument supported by the fact that Green was among the earliest married, lay Fellows at Oxford and was the first Oxford don elected a town councillor.<sup>37</sup>

More importantly, Perkin argues that the reason why Green's philosophy resonated well with his contemporaries was because of its capacity to respond to 'the condition of middle-class men and women brought up in Evangelical and often professional homes', people who looked for an ethical justification of their professional services.<sup>38</sup> By emphasising individuals' duty and service to the community, Green, according to Perkin, convincingly disparaged the concept of absolute rights to property, upheld by Victorian entrepreneurs, and demonstrated that professionals, with their expertise, represented a high-minded, progressive elite, superior to the selfish capitalist. Ignoring the Idealists' emphasis on laymen's co-operation and participation, Perkin concludes that Green's philosophy was a product of professionals' 'self-admiration', and that the professionalisation of university, the civil service and social work in the early twentieth century were largely indebted to Green's pupils who played a leading role in these fields and were the practitioners of the professionalism that was ingrained in Idealist philosophy.<sup>39</sup>

At this point, it is appropriate to lay out Perkin's definition of professionalism, a definition which I will adopt in this thesis. Perkin argues that at the core of professionalism was a conviction that social efficiency could be maximised by *trained expertise* and *selection by merit*.<sup>40</sup> Correspondently, esoteric knowledge and effective services were to be the chief determinant of status and power in society. This confidence in 'Intellectual powers' led to an emphasis on education in general and professional training in particular.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, p. 124. For Green's career, see Nettleship, 'Memoir', pp. cx-cxix. On the secularisation and professionalisation of Oxford and Cambridge in the mid-nineteenth century, see A. J. Engel, *From Clergyman to Don: The Rise of the Academic Profession in Nineteenth-Century Oxford* (Oxford, 1983); Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons: Cambridge and Society in Victorian England* (Cambridge, 1968); Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *The Transformation of Higher Learning 1860-1930* (Stuttgart, 1982); H. S. Jones, *Intellect and Character in Victorian England: Mark Pattison and the Invention of the Don* (Cambridge, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 123-7.

<sup>39</sup> Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, pp. 262-4; Perkin, 'The Demise and Resurrection of a Profession', p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> Perkin, *Origins of Modern British Society*, pp. 257-8.

A professional system of education was aimed at selecting and training people to use specialised knowledge and scientific methods to solve practical problems in a given field. Examinations were a major technique to ensure that candidates were competent to perform the function for which they were selected.<sup>42</sup> In challenging the legitimacy of the entrepreneurial ideal which was based on the values of the market, argues Perkin, the exponents of professionalism claimed that professional training would enable doctors, lawyers, civil servants, engineers, social workers to set aside personal or profit considerations and to disinterestedly serve the public interest under the guidance of professional ethics.<sup>43</sup> Based on this understanding of professionalism, Perkin concludes that both the Benthamite Fabians and anti-Benthamite Idealists were united in the pursuit of the professional ideal: both groups searched for some form of public good, both were critical of unfettered market forces and absolute private property, and both reiterated the role of education in social reform.<sup>44</sup>

Perkin is joined by other historians, including Raymond Williams, Sheldon Rothblatt, Martin Wiener, T. W. Heyck, and Thomas Haskell, in identifying the Oxford Idealist school's origin in an elitist tradition which emanated from Samuel Coleridge's 'clerisy' ideal—to replace the aristocracy of land with a new 'aristocracy of talent'. This ideal subsequently inspired Matthew Arnold's criticism of the 'philistinism' of capitalist society, Oxford Idealists' underlining of intellectuals' social responsibility, New Liberals' demand for social intervention from above, and culminated in the post-war foundation of a welfare state, characterised by the dominance of administrators and experts.<sup>45</sup> Raymond Williams, in his influential *Culture and Society*, explains why Oxford Idealists' quest for the common good and popular education resulted in a meritocratic rather than a democratic society. According to Williams, the Idealists understood the concept of service to the community

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<sup>42</sup> Perkin, *Origins of Modern British Society*, pp. 258-9. See also W. J. Reader, *Professional Men: The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1966), chs. 3, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Perkin, *Origins of Modern British Society*, pp. 254-6. See also Reader, *Professional Men*, pp. 158-63. For the confidence in expertise and the rise of social scientists and policy experts in the early twentieth century, see Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy and the Politics of Expertise* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1-6.

<sup>44</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 363-76.

<sup>45</sup> Perkin, *Origins of Modern English Society*, pp. 265-6; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (London, 1990 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1958]); Sheldon Rothblatt, *The Revolution of the Dons* (London, 1968), pp. 86-93; Sheldon Rothblatt, 'The Diversification of Higher Education in England', in Konrad H. Jarausch ed., *The transformation of higher learning 1860-1930*, pp. 131-4; Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, pp. 11-24; T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (London, 1982), ch. 6; Thomas L. Haskell, 'Professionalism versus Capitalism' in id. (ed.), *The Authority of Experts* (Bloomington, 1984), pp. 180-225.

in elitist and individualistic terms. It prompted the construction of 'a ladder in education' to train people in the public service, one which was open to all but could 'only be used individually'. Put another way, though everyone was to have equal opportunities to ascend the ladder, it was those who 'made it'—the qualified experts—that were to be granted power and influence. Therefore, Williams argues, while Idealists helped to bring about a professional society by substituting 'the hierarchy of merit' for 'the hierarchy of money or of birth', they underemphasised collectivist values such as solidarity and participation.<sup>46</sup> This 'aristocracy of talent' was allegedly championed by followers of Green's school. One example is Tawney, who, in the words of Haskell, acted as 'a spokesman for professional and managerial types in his society'.<sup>47</sup>

The affinities of Idealist philosophy and professionalisation are also recognised by historians working on the rise of academic professionalism and the emergence of humanities/social sciences disciplines at the turn of the nineteenth century. In his groundbreaking study of the life and thought of Green, Melvin Richter reveals Green's dissatisfactions with the narrow, amateurish, and exam-oriented teaching of Greats at Oxford, and his attempt to develop a more systematic method of philosophical study which was to be connected with the outside world. In this way, Green is said to be 'the man who for the first time established philosophy as an independent discipline at Oxford' and 'possibly the first in his University, to conceive himself as a professional philosopher'.<sup>48</sup> Echoing Richter, Stefan Collini suggests that 'the culture of altruism' embraced by Idealists was conducive to academic specialisation. By acclaiming selflessness and not-for-profit actions, Idealists encouraged disinterested scientific investigation which led to specialisation.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, these postulates regarding the affinities between Idealism and professionalism are selective and sometimes misleading. First, Williams' accusation that Oxford Idealists' reading of personal service justified a ladder of education which stimulated individualistic and careerist aspirations is certainly inaccurate. As we shall see,

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<sup>46</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp. 328-37.

<sup>47</sup> Haskell, 'Professionalism versus Capitalism', p. 193.

<sup>48</sup> Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, pp. 9, 140, 149-53. See also Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, pp. 173-5; W. H. Walsh, 'The Zenith of Greats' in M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VII, Part 2* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 319-24.

<sup>49</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 4, esp. pp. 204-5.

one of the catchiest slogans adopted by the WEA proposed replacing the educational ladder with an 'educational highway for all'.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, WEA classes were designed to be free from examinations and qualifications, in view of the hope that workers would return to their ranks after receiving higher education.<sup>51</sup> In Tawney's words, the Idealist tradition was in principle 'anti-individualistic', with an emphasis on 'social solidarity'.<sup>52</sup>

Second, the connection between Idealist philosophy and academic professionalism, identified by Richter and Collini, also seems flawed, given that many scholars have suggested that the trend towards professionalisation was responsible for the eclipse of the Idealist influence in university during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, Sandra den Otter attributes the decline of Idealism in academic philosophy partly to its moralistic tone and 'hermeneutical approach', which tended to be met with suspicion by professional philosophers. As den Otter has shown, in pursuit of precision, objectivity and detachment, the new generation of academics increasingly dismissed Idealist philosophy as 'vague and hazy', 'subjective', and dogmatic. From this perspective, Idealist philosophy's lack of the scientific/positivist qualities required by the professional ethos was one of the crucial contexts for its giving way to pragmatism, realism and relativism.<sup>53</sup>

In a similar vein, Julia Stapleton's study of the emergence of politics as an academic discipline also indicates the conflict between Idealism and professionalism. As she argues, at Oxford, the Idealist assumptions regarding the organic and spiritual nature of community underpinned the foundation of the tripartite School of Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) in 1921, which was also known as 'Modern Greats' due to its interdisciplinary nature. Yet, as younger academics were disposed to adopt 'a systematic "empirical" approach to the problems of large-scale social organisation' and transform their subjects into 'technical' and specialised disciplines in the 1930s and 1940s, Stapleton notes, the study of PPE at Oxford gradually abandoned the broader and 'speculative' interest in human society that the Idealists had cultivated.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See below 2-2.

<sup>51</sup> See below Chapter One.

<sup>52</sup> Tawney to Richter, [1958], fol. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, pp. 209-15. See also Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 150-62; Edward Skidelsky, 'The Strange Death of British Idealism', *Philosophy and Literature* 31:1 (2007), pp. 41-51; Mander, *British Idealism*, pp. 544-56.

<sup>54</sup> Julia Stapleton, 'Academic Political Thought and the Development of Political Studies in Britain, 1900-50', PhD Thesis, Universities of Sussex, 1985, pp. 2-3, 171-2, 178-92; Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of*

Above all, Oxford Idealists had little enthusiasm for the dual principle of professionalism that is identified by Perkin. Green and his disciples' criticism of the gaps between university teaching and social problems and their passion for advancing useful knowledge (be it philosophy or social science) were not due to any attempts to promote *trained expertise*. And their radical demand for participation and refusal 'to regard anyone as second-rate', as Maurice Cowling puts it, reflected their distance from the idea of *selection by merit*.<sup>55</sup> Stapleton is correct to note that a major flaw of Perkin's thesis on the rise of professional society (and, indeed, on the above-mentioned lineage from the clerisy ideal to the founding of the welfare state) is its neglect of the distinction and tension between 'the old (gentlemanly) and the new (technocratic, managerial) ideal of professionalism'.<sup>56</sup> This flaw partly accounts for Perkin's failure to recognise the differences between Idealism and 'new' professionalism. One may indeed argue that Oxford Idealists took the classic professionals (clergymen, lawyers, and doctors) as the general cadre for every citizen. This is so, because, to some degree, Idealist education for citizenship was an attempt to propagate the gentlemanly ideal by imparting to all walks of life the qualities which were claimed to form the staple of the old professions, such as intelligence, public-mindedness, and altruism.<sup>57</sup> However, in the Idealists' understanding, these qualities were to be cultivated through liberal learning and cross-class understanding rather than through expert knowledge or scientific techniques. After all, in the eyes of Oxford Idealists, the model citizen was not the dispassionate expert acting in a standardised and authoritative manner, but the compassionate layman who fulfilled his/her moral potential in the process of voluntary and spontaneous co-operation with his/her fellows. Technocracy/meritocracy was quite contrary to the social vision of the Idealists.<sup>58</sup> As Tawney sarcastically remarked on one

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*Politics*, chs. 2, 6. In a more recent book, Collini also admits the demarcation between Idealism and academic professionalism. Stefan Collini, *Absent Mind: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 460-4.

<sup>55</sup> Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2001), p. 129.

<sup>56</sup> Stapleton, *Englishness and the Study of Politics*, p. 4 n. 10. On the characteristics of the gentlemanly professions, see Reader, *Professional Men*, ch. 1. On the tension between the 'old' and 'new' ideals of professionalism, see G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (London, 1971), pp. 72-106.

<sup>57</sup> Thus, when Idealists lauded professionals, the focus was on their character rather than their expertise or training. For example, Tawney argued that the principal difference between industry and a profession was that 'the former was organised for the protection of *rights* ... to pecuniary gain', and the latter was for 'the performance of *duties* [to the public]'. R. H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society* (London, 1952 [1<sup>st</sup> n., 1921]), p. 108. See also Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit* (London, 1994), pp. 248-50.

<sup>58</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (London, 1995), pp. 157-9.

occasion, it was unthinkable to 'live in a paralytic paradise' managed by experts as was promised by the advocates of professionalism such as the Webbs.<sup>59</sup> The rise of a professional and meritocratic society, then, precisely meant the *frustration* of the Idealist project, rather than its fulfilment.

If it is true that there is a contradiction between Idealism and professionalism, then the next question is why the disciples of the Idealist school, who played dominant roles in both the civil service and voluntary movements in early-twentieth-century England, accepted the growth of professionalism, to the extent that Perkin and other historians can ascribe the latter trend to their efforts. Was professionalisation an unintended consequence of the Idealist project? Or was it a hidden agenda disguised by the rhetoric of moral citizenship and participatory democracy? This is the central concern of the current study. By looking at the history of the WEA—an out-and-out product of Oxford Idealism—this study aims to explore the relationship between Idealism and professionalism in their practical application to education reform and adult education.

### **Idealism, Professionalism and the Rise and Fall of the WEA.**

Studies of the history of liberal adult education form another category of historiography that sheds light on the Idealist project and its relation to professionalism.

Systematic studies of liberal adult education in England grew in the 1950s and 1960s when attempts were made to establish adult education as an academic discipline with its own tradition and methods. It is thus not surprising that the pioneering adult education historians, who were often extramural teachers, such as J. F. C. Harrison and Thomas Kelly, tended to view adult education history in terms of a series of spontaneous efforts, made by ordinary people in pursuit of emancipation and self-improvement. In their view, this early stage evolved into the institutionalisation of the movement in the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup> This approach, which fits well with 'history from below', understates the role of

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Terrill, *Tawney and His Time*, p. 191.

<sup>60</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960* (London, 1961); J. F. C. Harrison, 'The WEA in the Welfare State' in S. G. Raybould (ed.), *Trends in English Adult Education* (London, 1959), pp. 1-29; Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (Liverpool, 1992 [1<sup>st</sup>. edn, 1962]). For critiques of the early historiography of adult education, see Malcolm Chase, 'Adult Education as History: Adult Educators as

(university) intellectuals in the adult education movement and is largely blind to the varied and conflicting assumptions and philosophies behind the purportedly teleological movement.<sup>61</sup> Partly in reaction to the optimistic view adopted by Harrison and Kelly and partly in response to the increasingly marginalised space taken by adult education in society in the 1970-80s, Marxist historians during those years interpreted the extramural movement in terms of social conflicts and struggles.<sup>62</sup> In particular, Roger Fieldhouse, Brian Simon, and Stuart Macintyre argued that adult education providers, especially the WEA, acted not as champions of citizen emancipation, but in fact as instruments of social control, by which the ruling class successfully undermined the autonomy and mitigated the radicalisation of the labour movement. As a result of the Marxist hostility towards elites and hegemony, the Idealist project remained little understood and was reduced to a sort of false consciousness.<sup>63</sup>

It was not until the 1990s that more nuanced accounts of the extramural movement were given by a new generation of historians, including Lawrence Goldman, Jonathan Rose and Richard Lewis.<sup>64</sup> According to their studies of both working-class learners (in the case of Rose and Lewis) and university scholars (in the case of Goldman), the university adult education movement came to be regarded as a genuine and reciprocal union of two

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Historians', *1993 SCUTREA Conference Proceedings* (Leeds, 1993), pp. 47-9; Harold Wiltshire, 'The Great Tradition in University Adult Education', *Adult Education*, 19:2 (1956), pp. 88-97.

<sup>61</sup> 'History from below' puts an emphasis on working-class agency and workers' unique culture. For the tenets and assumptions of this approach, see Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 18-20; Mike Savage and Andrew Miles, *The Remaking of British Working Class* (London, 1994), pp. 1-10.

<sup>62</sup> This shift of focus is related to a more general debate concerning the question 'why there was no Marxism in Great Britain'. Key texts about this debate include: Perry Anderson, 'Origins of Present Crisis', *New Left Review* 23 (1964); Tom Nairn, 'The English Working Class', *New Left Review* 24 (1964); E. P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', *Socialist Register*, 2, pp. 311-362; J. Foster, *Class Struggle in the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1974); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983); Ross McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Britain?', *English Historical Review*, 99: 391 (1984), pp. 297-331.

<sup>63</sup> Roger Fieldhouse, *The Workers' Educational Association: Aims and Achievements 1903-1977* (New York, 1977); Fieldhouse, 'Conformity and Contradiction in English Responsible Body Adult Education 1925-1950', *Studies in the Education of Adult*, 17 (1985), pp. 121-34; Fieldhouse, 'The Ideology of English Adult Education Teaching 1925-1950', *Studies in Adult Education*, 15 (1983), pp. 11-35; Brian Simon, 'The Struggle for Hegemony, 1920-1926' in id. ed., *The Search for Enlightenment: The Working Class and Adult Education in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester, 1992); Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933* (London, 1986). See also Stuart Marriott, *Extramural Empires: Service and Self-interest in English University Adult Education, 1873-1983* (Nottingham, 1984).

<sup>64</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*; id., 'Intellectuals and the English Working Class 1870-1945: The Case of Adult Education', *History of Education*, 29 (2000), pp. 281-300; Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales 1906-1940* (Cardiff, 1993).

independent traditions. These included a long-standing grassroots tradition epitomised by autodidacts and mutual improvement societies in the nineteenth century, and an elite tradition initiated by Jowett and Green and continued by subsequent generations of Oxford dons committed to widening educational opportunities in response to the advent of a mass democracy.

Goldman's study of the 'Oxford tradition' is particularly relevant to the present thesis. Goldman demonstrates that at the core of the extension movement there was an 'educational and social project' that cast university in the role to 'integrate the working class into the nation and educate it for the tasks of social and political leadership'.<sup>65</sup> Not only was there no 'bourgeois conspiracy' behind initiatives like the WEA, argues Goldman, but 'they cannot be accused of an unconscious negative influence [on the labour movement] either', for Oxford intellectuals were 'attracted to the adult education by pre-existing values and aspirations in working-class communities, and they were able to serve those communities just because they shared with them certain social and spiritual outlooks'.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, in construing the consistent spirit behind the unrelenting efforts made in the span of over a century, Goldman pays scant attention to the potential tensions and contradictions within the project. As the above discussions about Idealism and professionalism have shown, the plan to integrate the working classes can be seen as part of the Idealist project to create moral citizens with general knowledge. Yet, it can also be seen as part of the professional project to establish a meritocracy by training talents from different social backgrounds to be specialised experts.

Similarly, the two main explanations, offered by Goldman, about the post-war decline of this tradition are problematic, because of his disregarding the potential ideological conflicts or ambiguities. According to Goldman, the failure of the extramural movement was, on the one hand, due to external pressures, such as the opening up of secondary and higher education, the professionalisation of academic life, the emergence of the mass media, and the disappearance of established working-class communities.<sup>67</sup> On the other, Goldman suggests that the movement was a 'self-liquidating' initiative in the sense that its withering

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<sup>65</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 2, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the English Working Class 1870-1945', pp. 283, 299.

<sup>67</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 248-66, 318-26. Rose also provides similar explanations, see Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, pp. 295-7.

was fundamentally due to the fulfilment of its aims of furthering educational opportunities and workers' public participation after 1945.<sup>68</sup> What both of these arguments neglect is the ideological contradictions between Idealism and professionalism within the movement and the role they played in its rise and fall. Especially, if what the movement helped to conduce—the rise of a professional society—was significantly different from its original Idealist aim, it seems to be far-fetched to argue that the movement was a victim of its own success.

To sum up, the questions that this thesis intends to address are two-fold: First, the thesis asks whether and why the pursuit of the Idealist project, as a democratic and moralistic initiative, contributed to the growth of professionalism, a social ideal which was characterised by its meritocratic and positivist assumptions; this will also involve a reassessment of Perkin's thesis on the affinity between Idealism and professionalisation. Second, this study also aims to track the ways in which this complicated relationship between the two social ideals influenced the ascent and decline of the WEA movement.

### **Synopsis and Sources.**

This thesis consists of three parts. The first (Chapters One and Two) examines the relationship between Idealist philosophy and the origins of the WEA movement, as well as how Idealist philosophy unfolded in the dual practices of the WEA—the provision of university tutorial classes and the campaign for the establishment of a national system of education. As I will show, from the very beginning of the movement, proponents of the professional ideal had been strong allies of the WEA, and the blueprint of the university tutorial class, the *Oxford Report* of 1908, implied a working synthesis of Idealism and professionalism. The WEA's effort to co-operate with working-class organisations on the one hand, and with the state and universities on the other, were largely due to a conviction that democratisation and professionalisation could be complementary. However, as the rest of the thesis will show, this was a serious misjudgement.

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<sup>68</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 265.

The second part (Chapters Three to Five) focuses on the development of the tutorial programme between 1919 and 1939. It aims to explore why the programme was increasingly guided by professionalism and deviated from the Idealist vision. By looking at the WEA's efforts in inviting both the government and the labour movement to support the initiative, the debates about the teaching method of the tutorial class among students and tutors, and the institutionalisation of the programme (in terms of tutors' working conditions, the administration, the design of curriculum, and the grading of classes), it shows that pressures coming from the state, universities, and the tutors pushed the tutorial programme away from the democratic, co-operative, and voluntary approach to education.

The final part of the thesis (Chapters Six and Seven) is an examination of the WEA's campaign for education reform. As I will show, during the interwar period, the WEA translated the ideal of 'liberal education for all' into the demand for equality of opportunity, a principle which, partly due to the effort of the WEA, came to be accepted by major branches of the labour movement. Nevertheless, as organised labour increasingly understood the latter concept from individualistic and meritocratic perspectives, the Idealist reading of the concept—emphasising the diversity of human potentials and the cultivation of a common purpose as the aim of education—was understated. From the late 1930s, it became clear that the WEA gradually abandoned the Idealist synthesis of educational diversity and equality of status for different types of school; in practice, it meant that the tripartite model of secondary education gave way to the comprehensive model in the WEA's campaign.

This thesis is chiefly based on five types of primary sources. First, it uses the official records of the WEA and related voluntary bodies such as the Association of Tutorial Class Tutors, the Central Joint Advisory Committee on Tutorial Classes, and the British Institute of Adult Education. They are in the forms of reports, journal articles—especially those in the WEA's organ, *The Highway*, where WEA tutors and students shared their thoughts about the association—pamphlets, minutes, and so on. In particular, the third part of this thesis mainly draws on the minutes of WEA committees on public education reform, which revealed different strands of educational thought within the interwar WEA but have hitherto attracted little attention from both educational historians and historians of intellectual history. The second category of sources is formed by records of university adult education departments/delegacies/committees which were in partnership with the WEA.

This study especially relies on records from Oxford, formerly the stronghold of Idealist philosophy and the first university establishing a formal joint body with the WEA in providing adult education (i.e. the Oxford Tutorial Class Joint Committee). The class reports (written by both tutors and class secretaries), minutes, memoranda and correspondence of Oxford are instrumental in establishing a picture of the rise and fall of Idealist philosophy as the guiding principle of university adult education. Third, this thesis uses government records, because, as time wore on, the state became the major source of funding for the movement. It is important to understand whether and how the Board of Education's understanding of adult education and the Idealist vision affected the development of the movement. The fourth type of source is constituted by personal papers of WEA activists, such as Mansbridge, Tawney, and Temple. Finally, media and periodicals records, such as the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Times*, the *Times Educational Supplement*, the *New Statesman*, are used to link the movement with broader contexts.

## **PART I Idealism and the Advance of the WEA**

### **Movement, 1908-18.**

The first part of this thesis examines the early practice of the WEA between 1908 and 1918, when the association began to pursue its double objectives, namely, to provide university tutorial classes for adult workers and to campaign for the construction of an educational highway from elementary school to university. As I will show, this two-fold initiative was guided by the Idealist reform project which aimed at the formation of a national community where citizens wisely and responsibly co-operated with each other in pursuit of the common good. Nevertheless, this project of democratising university education and generally increasing educational opportunities also invited a distinct, though not entirely contradictory, interpretation, which fitted into the professional logic. According to the second view, a national system of education within the reach of all citizens was necessary because it helped to realise the principle of selection by merit and thus maximise national efficiency.

The first chapter argues that it is important to understand the launch of the WEA project as a collaboration between Idealists and the supporters of professionalism, which anticipated tensions and conflicts within the movement in the following decades. In fact, as the second chapter will show, even in its 'heroic period' before 1918, the WEA had encountered significant difficulties arising from the problematic combination of Idealism and professionalism in its project, on the one hand, and from the distrust between Idealist intellectuals and grassroots workers, on the other. As such, while the first decade of the practice of the WEA partly attested to the Idealist faith in the common people and the possibility of cross-class co-operation, it also revealed the flaws of the WEA project.

## Chapter One

# Idealism, Professionalism and the Origins of the WEA.

The two streams of labour and scholarship unite to make a great and powerful river of education ... That is, at once, the condition and meaning of the Workers' Educational Association ... [The association] has developed because it has drawn together men and women, not infrequently passionate in their divergencies of experience and belief, and has constructed for them a University ... wherein they may ... advance knowledge, increase wisdom, and reveal truth.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction.

This chapter examines the origins of the WEA with a particular focus on the two contrasting philosophies, Idealism and professionalism, that stood behind it. After comparing these I turn to the report on 'Oxford and Working-class Education' of 1908 (henceforward, the *Oxford Report*), which was a key founding document.<sup>2</sup> I show that both philosophies had crucial influence on the report. On this basis I argue that the report not only set the tone for the movement, but also presaged tensions within the WEA in the following decades.

Traditionally, historians have tended to interpret the creation of the *Oxford Report* from the perspective of class relationships. They debate whether the proposed programme of workers' education was a tool of social control in disguise, or it was a reflection of the sincerity of both workers and dons in pursuing knowledge and mutual understanding. While agreeing with the revisionists that the union of labour and scholarship was based more on earnest than conspiracy, I will show in this chapter that there is a third way to make sense of the *Oxford Report*, a view which is concerned not so much with class

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<sup>1</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education: Being the Report of a Joint Committee of University and Working-Class Representatives on the Relation of the University to the Higher Education of Workpeople*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford, 1909).

relationships as with the social ideals behind the report. By revisiting the early history of the WEA, I argue that though cross-class co-operation was a critical factor contributing to the making of the *Oxford Report*, the success of the report was fundamentally due to its capacity to accommodate two social ideals representing contrasting concepts of education and democracy.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I will analyse and compare the two visions of a 'national university' and its relation to democracy, respectively guided by Idealism and professionalism. In the final section of the chapter the affinities of the two ideals will be demonstrated by an examination of the proposals in the *Oxford Report*. This historic document, as I will argue, aimed to achieve both Idealist and professional objectives in the name of meeting the educational needs of the working classes. In other words, the goal was both to democratise and to professionalise university education. A closer look, however, shows that this fusion of Idealism and professionalism was incongruous. Tensions between the two strands of thought meant that the tutorial programme—an icon of the WEA movement and a landmark in the adult education history—was by nature incoherent and precarious.

### **1-1 Oxford Idealism and the Founding of the WEA: University Liberal Education and Enlightened Citizenship.**

The story of the WEA began with an ambitious working-class young man, Albert Mansbridge, who left school at age fourteen but became a keen student of the university extension lectures in London. Narrowly failing to win a scholarship to Oxford, Mansbridge transformed his disappointment into a mission.<sup>3</sup> In 1898, Mansbridge, then a clerk and teacher of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, first presented to his fellow Co-operators the idea that the Co-operative educational programme could be greatly improved by collaborating with the University Extension Movement. Although the proposal was dismissed by his colleagues as '[having] aimed at the moon and hit a haystack',<sup>4</sup> it aroused

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Labour and Learning*, pp. 8-17; Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 261-3.

<sup>4</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, p. 10; T. W. Price, *The Story of the Workers' Educational Association from 1903 to 1924* (London, 1924), pp. 14-5

interest from the university side. In 1903, Mansbridge was invited to publish (in the *University Extension Journal*) a series of three articles on his plan for an association to promote co-operation between university and the labour movement in the field of working-class education.<sup>5</sup> As he contended in these articles, 'lack of thinking power in the rank and file' had nullified democracy. The proposed educational initiative was expected to be a joint effort to help the working classes acquire 'true citizenship'.<sup>6</sup> 'An Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men' was officially launched at Toynbee Hall in July 1903, before rebranding itself as the 'Workers' Educational Association' in 1906.<sup>7</sup>

Like most social movements, the appearance of the WEA was neither merely a personal achievement nor 'a bolt from the blue'. Many contexts contributed to its creation. Firstly, it derived from the Co-operative tradition. As someone who grew up in a family with a strong Co-operative connection, Mansbridge embodied their faith in education as a means to the salvation of the workers, one of the central visions elaborated by the founders of the Co-operative movement.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the movement was also nurtured by Christian religion. Joining the Church of England at age 16, Mansbridge developed an intimate relationship with reformist Anglican clergymen such as Charles Gore and Canon Barnett, both of whom became inspirations for Mansbridge's evangelical zeal.<sup>9</sup> Later in his life, Mansbridge would go so far as to claim that 'Gore was the real founder of the institutions attributed to me'.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the religious drive behind the movement cannot be exaggerated. As A. E. Zimmern (1879-1957), an Oxford classicist and early WEA activist, suggested, 'the "W.E.A. spirit" which believes in the power of love and humility, of sacrifice

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association: the first fifty years* (London, 1953), pp. 24-6. The three articles were reprinted as the first WEA official publication, titled 'Co-operation, Trade Unionism, and University Extension' in 1903.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Mansbridge, 'Co-operation, Trade Unionism, and University Extension', WEA Pamphlet, 1903, pp. 3-5.

<sup>7</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, pp. 12-3. The original full name was 'An Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men primarily by the Extension of University Teaching; also (a) by the Assistance of All Working Class Efforts of a Specifically Educational Character (b) By the Development of an Efficient School Continuation System'.

<sup>8</sup> For Co-operators' long-standing enthusiasm for education, see Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 108-18; W. A. C. Stewart, *Progressives and Radicals in English Education 1750-1970* (London, 1972), pp. 44-50.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Mansbridge, *Fellow Men* (New York, 1970[1948]), pp. 53-63.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *Labour and Learning*, p. 16; Mansbridge, *The Trodden Road*, p. 139.

and service, and desires neither fame nor reward, is the outcome, purely and simply, though unconsciously, of the working of the spirit of Christianity'.<sup>11</sup>

Above all, and in connection with the second source, the foundation of the WEA was informed by a social project drawn up by the Oxford Idealist school, whose disciples included both Gore and Barnett. As Sidney Ball, Fellow of St. Johns, Oxford, an early Fabian who was significantly influenced by Green and Toynbee, commented, the WEA was a 'logical outcome' of the Green-Toynbee tradition.<sup>12</sup> It is clear that, though Mansbridge was a visionary and capable leader in his own right, the immediate success of the WEA was indebted to the support of a group of Oxford dons who embraced Idealist philosophy.<sup>13</sup> In order to understand the vision of the WEA, it is necessary to understand Idealist philosophy.

The ethos of Oxford Idealism, originally outlined by a number of scholars including the Balliol don, T. H. Green, in the 1870s and 1880s, was about devising a rational surrogate for jeopardised Christian religion as a source of moral authority.<sup>14</sup> In Green's words, his Idealist philosophy was a 'reasoned intellectual expression of the effort to get to God' and to relinquish 'theological dodges'.<sup>15</sup> Like many Victorian reformers, Idealists castigated money-grabbing trade and industry that made capital out of people's misery. Though abhorring social inequality, Idealists believed that the nature of modern social problems was more spiritual than material.<sup>16</sup> According to Green, the 'popular philosophy', which grew out of the empirical tradition and utilitarianism, 'derationalised' moral obligation 'by making the satisfaction of an appetite or a sentiment its origin and end'. The consequence was a 'moral desert' where people were motivated by self-interest and where Christian

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<sup>11</sup> Zimmern's comments on Mansbridge's draft of 'A Long-delayed Letter', [n.d.], Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65222 (1932-52), fol. 109.

<sup>12</sup> O. H. Ball, *Sidney Ball, Memories and Impressions of 'An Ideal Don'* (Oxford, 1923), p. 242 quoted in Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, p. 52; Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*, pp. 57-61; F. S. Lee, 'Ball, Sidney (1857-1918)', *ODNB*, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>14</sup> Nettleship, 'Memoir', pp. xi, xxi-xxx; Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, pp. 13-32, 344-76.

<sup>15</sup> T. H. Green to Scott Holland, 6 Oct. 1871 and 21 Dec. 1870, in S. Paget (ed.), *H. Scott Holland: Memoirs and Letters* (London, 1921), pp. 67, 52 quoted in den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, p. 207.

<sup>16</sup> As Tawney put it, 'Modern society is sick through the absence of a moral ideal. To try to cure this by politics is like make [sic] surgical experiment on a man who is dying of starvation or who is poisoned by foul air'. Tawney, 'Entry for 4 May 1912', *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, p. 9. For a recent account of the tradition of 'the moral critique of capitalism', which was significantly indebted to Oxford Idealism, see Tim Rogan, *The Moral Economists: R. H. Tawney, Karl Polanyi, E. P. Thompson, and the Critique of Capitalism* (New Jersey, 2017), p. 5. See also Roger Fieldhouse and Richard Taylor (eds.), *E. P. Thompson and English Radicalism* (Manchester, 2013).

virtues, particularly the sense of duty to neighbours, were abandoned.<sup>17</sup> Oxford Idealists assumed that the solution to the contemporary problem lay in the restoration of a common purpose which would transcend class divisions and encourage citizens' dedication to the community as a whole. This 'craving for solidarity and a higher cause to which one might devote oneself' was the underlying motive behind Idealist philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

Borrowing ideas from German philosophy, Oxford Idealists intended to reinstate a common ideal by articulating the interdependence between individual and collective.<sup>19</sup> As Green argued, 'society is founded on the recognition by persons of each other, and their interest in each other, *as persons, i.e.* as beings who are ends to themselves'.<sup>20</sup> This mutual recognition as moral beings was believed to be able to transcend conflicts of interest among people, and a 'common good' could be achieved when all members of the community co-operated with each other in pursuing their own and others' self-realisation.<sup>21</sup> Put another way, Mansbridge pictured society as a 'vast body of humanity', and the well-being of this 'body' was seen to depend on the correct functioning of each cell, namely the individual.<sup>22</sup> Thus, 'the hurt of "one member of the body" is really and truly "the hurt of the whole body"'.<sup>23</sup> In this way, contrary to the classical liberal claim that conflicts and competitions were the driving force behind social progress, Oxford Idealists maintained that co-operation and mutual help were the only way to achieve the common good.

This belief in the common good was interwoven with a faith in the common people. As the common good was predicated on every member's self-realisation, Idealists argued, all members of society, regardless of their social backgrounds, had their own share in the attainment of the common good.<sup>24</sup> Influenced by the radical and Nonconformist tradition, Idealists placed confidence in 'the powers and capacities of ordinary unprivileged people';

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<sup>17</sup> T. H. Green, 'Popular Philosophy in its Relation to Life' [1868], in Nettleship (ed.), *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. III, pp. 113-6.

<sup>18</sup> Richter, *Politics of Conscience*, p. 374; den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, passim., esp. pp. 208-9.

<sup>19</sup> Richter, *Politics of Conscience*, pp. 199-207.

<sup>20</sup> T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics* (Oxford, 1883), pp. 199-201. Italics in original.

<sup>21</sup> Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>22</sup> Mansbridge, *The Trodden Road*, p. 220. Mansbridge, *Fellow Men*, p. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Mansbridge, 'A Long-delayed Letter', [1917?], Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65222, fol. 78. The parallel between a human community and organism was widely used by new liberals. See Freeden, *New Liberalism*, ch. 3; id., *Liberal Languages: Ideological Imaginations and Twentieth-Century Progressive Thought* (Princeton, 2005), pp. 45-50.

<sup>24</sup> Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, pp. 262, 337.

each individual could potentially add to the common stock of wisdom.<sup>25</sup> As Edward Caird noted, Green ‘was, in the best sense, a democrat of the democrats ... He was strongly inclined to the idea that there is an “instinct of reason” in the movement of popular sentiment, which is often wiser than the opinion of the so-called educated classes’.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, in pursuit of the common good, Idealists contended, a society must help its ordinary members acquire freedom to fulfil their potentials. As Green put it,

When we measure the progress of a society by its growth in freedom, we measure it by the increasing development and exercise on the whole of those powers of contributing to social good with which we believe the members of the society to be endowed; in short, by the greater power on the part of the citizens as a body to make the most and best of themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Here, Green spoke of freedom ‘in the positive sense; in other words, the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributions to the common good’.<sup>28</sup> This is also where Oxford Idealists threw new light on the liberal tradition. While early Victorian liberals had furthered their social project by espousing the concept of ‘negative freedom’—freedom as the absence of interference, the Idealists expatiated on the concept of ‘positive freedom’—freedom as the presence of power; power to perform one’s distinct service in the interest of the community.<sup>29</sup> According to this new definition, freedom and obligation were two sides of the same medal. True freedom meant performing one’s duties to the community. In Tawney’s words, ‘rights and duties [were] reconciled’ in the idea of ‘freedom to serve’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A. E. Zimmern to Mrs. Mansbridge, 29 Aug 1915, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65257 A, fols. 54-59. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, ch. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Caird, ‘Preface’ to Andrew Seth and R. B. Haldane (eds.), *Essays in Philosophical Criticism* (London, 1883), p. 4. In a similar vein, the WEA affirmed ‘the inherent rightness of the instincts of the common mind’ [l.a.], ‘To Our Readers, “A Happy New Year”’, *Highway*, 11: 4, Jan 1919, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> T. H. Green, ‘Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract’ [1881], in Nettleship (ed.), *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. III, p. 371.

<sup>28</sup> Green, ‘Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract’, p. 372.

<sup>29</sup> Tawney, ‘Entry for 21 July 1912’, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, p. 23. For the concepts of negative and positive freedom, see Isaiah Berlin, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ [1957] in Henry Hardy (ed.), *Liberty* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 166-217.

<sup>30</sup> Tawney, ‘Entry for 21 Apr 1913’, *Tawney’s Commonplace Book*, pp. 56-7.

The Idealist vision of the individual and the society invoked a new prospect for the relationship between citizens and the state. Because individuals' positive freedom was in harmony with the collective good, the state, as the embodiment of the collective, was not necessarily a threat to the freedom of citizens, as early Victorian liberals had implied. Rather, for Idealists, citizens and the state were in a partnership to pursue the common good:<sup>31</sup> citizens' active participation in public discussions helped the government to formulate policies in the interest of the community, while the primary function of the state was to ensure that all citizens could fulfil themselves and perform their civic rights and duties.<sup>32</sup>

Since this Idealist vision was largely premised on citizens' qualities, education for citizenship was considered 'a permanent national necessity' by Idealists.<sup>33</sup> Such an education was not merely intended to impart knowledge that was essential to citizens' public life but also to generate a sense of commitment to the community. As James Bryce (1838-1922), jurist and a close ally to Green in educational advance,<sup>34</sup> summed it up, good citizenship

involves three qualities—Intelligence, Self-Control, Conscience. The citizen must be able to understand the interests of the community, must be able to subordinate his will to the general will, must feel his responsibilities to the community and be prepared to serve it by voting, working or (if need be) fighting.<sup>35</sup>

The 'inspiration of a common ideal' thus formed a crucial part of Idealist education for citizenship.<sup>36</sup> As Mansbridge explained:

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<sup>31</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> Avital Simhony, 'Idealist Organicism: Beyond Holism and Individualism', *History of Political Thought*, 12:3 (1991), pp. 515-35; Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, pp. 145-54.

<sup>33</sup> A. L. Smith, 'The Extra-mural Work of the Universities', July 28<sup>th</sup> 1923, A. L. Smith Papers, II.E1/14ii, fols. 13-4.

<sup>34</sup> Being close friends from undergraduate days, Bryce and Green jointly conducted investigations in middle-class education in Midlands and North as part of the Tauton Royal Commission.

<sup>35</sup> James Bryce, *The Hindrances to Good Citizenship* (New Haven, 1909), pp. 7-8 quoted in Richter, *The Politics of Conscience*, p 344 n.

<sup>36</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Education and Social Progress; an Address delivered at the Educational Meeting, held on May 28<sup>th</sup> 1912, in connection with the Co-operative Congress held at Portsmouth', WEA Pamphlet, 1912, p. 3. See also Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, p. 48.

The community is like a living mosaic. It has a pattern, and the impulse and motion of men is towards their rightful place in it ... The conscious or unconscious pursuit of the best is the condition of ordinary human nature. Obscured by lesser affairs, hindered by lesser men, people may forget the objective for a time, but if it be only revealed to them they will rise and pursue it.<sup>37</sup>

To unveil the shared purpose and stimulate active citizenship, Idealists argued that citizenship education must be carried out through a democratic form of learning and interaction between isolated social classes.

This democratic and co-operative approach to citizenship education had been tested as early as the 1870s. Green and his mentor Benjamin Jowett made a significant contribution to the creation of a Standing Committee for University Extension at Oxford in 1878, for which Green was the founding chair.<sup>38</sup> They attempted to generate ‘mutual benefits’ by encouraging conversations between scholars and ordinary people.<sup>39</sup> Their idea was subsequently furthered by Arnold Toynbee in an ‘epoch-making’ address (as Mansbridge put it) to the Co-operative Congress of 1882.<sup>40</sup> In the speech, the apostle of Green’s school proposed a co-operation between the Co-operative movement and the university in providing a new form of education—‘citizen-education’. Through a two-way channel of communication between Co-operative workers and university intellectuals, Toynbee argued, ‘citizen-education’, with a focus on political and industrial knowledge, was the best way to demonstrate ‘the relation in which [each member of the community] stands to other individual citizens, and to the community as a whole’. In so doing, it enabled each citizen to contemplate ‘what [were] his duties to his fellow-men, and in what way union with them [was] possible’.<sup>41</sup>

However, Toynbee’s message was ill-received among co-operators due to the latter’s suspicion of university elites,<sup>42</sup> and the failure of the university extension lectures in

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<sup>37</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *Labour and Learning*, p. 34; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 21-36; Vincent and Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*, p. 152.

<sup>39</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 31.

<sup>40</sup> Mansbridge, ‘The Beginning of the WEA’, p. 132.

<sup>41</sup> Toynbee, ‘The Education of Co-operators’, pp. 226-30.

<sup>42</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 42-3.

reaching working people was widely recognised at the turn of the century.<sup>43</sup> It was Mansbridge who restored this Idealist project. Inspired by Toynbee's message,<sup>44</sup> Mansbridge expected the WEA to weave 'a triple cord', namely, a union of the university extension, the Co-operative movement, and trade unionism.<sup>45</sup> The association, as a working-class initiative, vowed to build confidence between universities and the labour movement, an objective that Oxford dons had failed to achieve. By stimulating 'the common zeal for knowledge', the WEA was to contribute to 'a greater realisation of fellowship' between social classes, a crucial function which, noted Temple, in the past had been performed by the Christian Church.<sup>46</sup>

The association between working-class communities and university was intended to be reciprocal. First, it would help to spread university liberal education, which was deemed by the Idealists a condition of good citizenship, 'uniformly and systematically over the whole community'.<sup>47</sup> Second, the WEA also aimed to accelerate reform in university by bringing to it 'representatives of all classes of the nation'.<sup>48</sup> It was believed that a university could not work for the national community until every social class found a voice in it. In this way, the WEA conceived of a project to democratise university, not only in the sense of making university education accessible to all, but also in the sense of making university listen to workers' ideas about education and knowledge.

It is necessary to note that during the same period, a campaign to reform Oxford from within the university was initiated by Canon Barnett and a group of young Oxford dons and graduates.<sup>49</sup> These included Zimmern of New College, Temple of Queen's, Tawney, who

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<sup>43</sup> R. D. Roberts, *Eighteen Years of University Extension* (Cambridge, 1891), pp. 12-20; J. A. R. Marriott, 'The Higher Education of Working Men', *Fortnightly Review*, Aug 1906, pp. 256-7; Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, pp. 6-7. But Sheila Rowbotham shows that workers who went to the lectures, though small in number, did benefit from the extension movement. S. Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country: Responses of Working Class Students to the University Extension Movement-1873-1910', *History Workshop*, 12 (1981), pp. 62-95.

<sup>44</sup> As Mansbridge admitted, Toynbee's message 'laid down' the educational programme of the WEA and 'dominate[d]' its actions. Albert Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes* (London, 1913), pp. 10-1.

<sup>45</sup> Mansbridge, 'Co-operation, Trade Unionism, and University Extension', WEA Pamphlet, 1903, pp. 10, 13.

<sup>46</sup> William Temple, 'The Two Possible Foundations of Society', *Highway*, 7: 74, Nov 1914, p. 17. See also A. S. Firth, 'General Secretary's Notes', *Highway*, 24, Nov 1931, p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, 'The Extra-mural Work of the Universities', fol. 14.

<sup>48</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1904, p. 7. Again, the Idealist project to nationalise university education was clearly indebted to Victorian radicalism. On radicalism and calls for university reform in the mid-nineteenth century, see Christopher Kent, *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England* (Toronto, 1978), pp. xi-xiii, 28-9.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Harrison, 'Oxford and the Labour Movement', *Twentieth Century British History*, 2 (1991), pp. 227-40.

took up a lecturer position at Glasgow University in 1906 after living and working at Toynbee Hall for three years, and William Beveridge, another Balliol man who worked with his close friend, Tawney, at Toynbee Hall as sub-warden between 1903 and 1905 before joining the staff of the *Morning Post*.<sup>50</sup>

From early 1906 to 1908, the group authored a series of articles in the national press, including *Westminster Gazette*, *The Times*, and the *Morning Post*, to urge for internal reform of Oxford. In line with the WEA, their main cause was to bring Oxford to the nation. They demanded higher standards in teaching and research which were to be related to the world outside the walls. Proposed steps in this direction included the substitution of spontaneous collegiate tutorials by a university-based teaching system to ensure systematic learning and the inclusion of social sciences in the university curriculum. Similarly, endowments were asked to be used purely for educational purposes. Moreover, they criticised the existing entrance examination and scholarships system. In particular, the group called for the abolition of the requirement of Latin and Greek which not only perpetuated cramming at the public schools, but also disadvantaged working-class pupils who tended to attend schools where classic languages were not taught. The proposal was intended to transform Oxford into 'a National University ... accessible to men of humble means'.<sup>51</sup> This campaign gained further support from Gore, who, speaking to the House of Lords in July 1907, stressed the need for a royal commission 'to inquire into the endowment, government, administration, and teaching of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and their constituent colleges, in order to secure the best use of their resources for the benefit of all classes of the community'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> It was not entirely a coincidence that Barnett initiated his campaign for university reform soon after the WEA was founded. Mansbridge had presented to Barnett his plan for setting up the WEA to bring university to workers before its official launch in 1903, which was in fact held at Toynbee Hall. See William Beveridge, *Power and Influence* (London, 1953), p. 25. For correspondence and meeting minutes of Barnett's group, see LSE Tawney Papers, T/21/1~3; for accounts of the group, see Janet Howarth, 'The Edwardian Reform Movement', in M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (eds.), *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VII, Part 2* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 821-53. Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 56-60; Jose Harris, *William Beveridge: A Biography* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 76-81.

<sup>51</sup> 'Lambda'[Tawney], 'The University and the Nation. I Introductory', *Westminster Gazette*, 15 Feb. 1906, pp. 1-2 quoted in Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 111.

<sup>52</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 4<sup>th</sup> series, clxxviii, 24 July 1907, 1526, quoted in Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 112. Calls for appointing a royal commission of inquiry into old universities, though never ceasing, were nevertheless cold-shouldered by the government. It was not until 1919 that a commission on Oxford and Cambridge was called, with H. H. Asquith as chair. See John Prest, 'The Asquith Commission, 1919-1922' in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume VIII*, pp. 27-43.

All in all, behind the efforts made by both Mansbridge and Barnett's group, there was the Idealist ambition to make university work for democracy and citizenship. As we shall see, the collaboration of Idealist workers and dons in reforming universities and spreading higher education provided the background for the drafting of the *Oxford Report* of 1908 and the ensuing success of WEA tutorial classes.

However, Oxford Idealists and their ambitions were only one side of the story of the nascent WEA movement. As I will show in the next section, in supporting the initiative to make universities serve the nation as a whole, a different line of arguments was put forward, which emphasised the professional, rather than democratic, function of a 'national university'. Therefore, before examining the making of the *Oxford Report*, I shall first turn to examine the second strand of arguments used by WEA sympathisers. The impact of this group on the rise of the WEA was equally substantial but has not yet been fully appreciated by historians.

## **1-2 Two Visions of a 'National University': Democracy and Professionalism.**

To transform old universities into national institutions was not exclusively an Idealist agenda. In fact, there had been incessant agitations for nationalising Oxford and Cambridge since the mid-nineteenth century, with different understandings of the term 'national' being at play.<sup>53</sup> Alongside the Idealist-democratic understanding of what a 'national' university would mean, a second outstanding view contemplated a 'national university' as a 'professionalised university'. The latter arguments were based on an understanding of the relationship between democracy and education which was distinct from the Idealist vision.

The professional arguments for university reform gave prominence to systematised knowledge and trained expertise. Universities were viewed as the nexus of knowledge

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<sup>53</sup> Alongside calls for democratising and professionalising Oxford that this chapter is focused on, the discourse of national university was also used to justify, for example, the admissions of dissenters and of women. Lawrence Goldman, 'Oxford and the Idea of a University in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Oxford Review of Education*, 30:4 (2004), pp. 582-90; Janet Howarth, 'The Church of England and Women's Higher Education c. 1840-1914' in Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goldman (eds.), *Politics and Culture of Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 153-170.

advancement and intellectual training. From this perspective, the function of a national university was two-fold: first, it generated scientific knowledge for the nation to enhance both industrial efficiency and citizens' welfare; second, it recruited people on the basis of merit and trained them to use expert knowledge to improve different aspects of national life.<sup>54</sup>

In England, this professional ideal of university sprang mainly from two sources. On the one hand, it was indebted to the movement famously led by Mark Pattison (1813-84), Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, who intended to introduce the 'research ethic'—a central feature of the German university—into English universities in the 1860-70s. On the other, the utilitarian thinking, espoused by the Fabian Society, corroborated the link between university and national efficiency.

Pattison was one of the earliest prophets of the professional ideal of university in England. Dissatisfied with Oxford's tutorial system, under which heavy teaching work prevented tutors from conducting original research, Pattison envisioned university as 'a centre for advanced studies' and proposed to turn each college into a specialised faculty.<sup>55</sup> In his ground-breaking work, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation* of 1868, Pattison demanded that

the university be no longer ... a class-school, nor mainly a school for youth at all. It is a national institute for the preservation and tradition of useful knowledge. It is the common interest of the whole community that such knowledge should exist, should be guarded, treasured, cultivated, disseminated, expounded.<sup>56</sup>

Pattison's appeal was based on several assumptions. First, he understood the nature of knowledge and truth in positivist terms. Knowledge was about objective facts and theories, not about subjective values. Therefore, for Pattison, the tutorial tradition, which

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed account of the evolution of the professional arguments for university reform since the late nineteenth century, see Sheldon Rothblatt, *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: An Essay in History and Culture* (London, 1976), chs. 12-3.

<sup>55</sup> Mark Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation* (Edinburgh, 1868), pp. 108-18, 173-96. See also Noel Annan, *The Dons* (London, 1999), pp. 63-4, 70-8; Heyck, *Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, pp. 175-6. For a recent study stressing the continuity of Pattison's thought, see Jones, *Intellect and Character in Victorian England*, pp. 183, 187-92.

<sup>56</sup> Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation*, p. 327.

underscored moral ideas such as 'character' and 'individuality', had nothing to do with knowledge advancement.<sup>57</sup> Second, Pattison assumed that to systematically pursue and preserve factual knowledge for its own sake was the primary mission of university. Teaching work was downplayed by Pattison. As he put it, university dons should act 'as primarily a learner, and [as] a teacher only secondarily'.<sup>58</sup>

Third, it was held by Pattison that university could serve the national interest by advancing knowledge. University was entitled to national endowments, argued Pattison, because it maintained a 'profession of learning' that specialised in pushing forward the frontiers of 'the sciences which form the basis of the various professions'.<sup>59</sup> From this perspective, as long as university could draw talents from all over the nation (by means of lowering the expenses of a university education and guaranteeing the income, prestige and leisure of the profession), it had no further social responsibility such as educating citizens or rectifying inequalities.<sup>60</sup> In Pattison's words, '[t]he true solution of the problem of university extension is to be found at last not in expedients for recruiting more students, but in raising the character and reputation of the body of teachers'.<sup>61</sup> University could best and only contribute to the national community by maintaining its academic standards.

The Fabians and the national efficiency movement at the turn of the century put a utilitarian twist on the professional ideal of university.<sup>62</sup> Like Pattison, the Fabians and the 'efficiency group' considered university an elite institution of research and innovation. Yet, Pattison's emphasis on pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake discounted the immediate utility of science and scientific training,<sup>63</sup> whereas for the latter groups, university elites must work to develop and use expert knowledge to improve both social well-being and industrial development.

The 'ladder of learning', a metaphor which the Fabians used to represent the educational system, was aimed to provide every individual with the right kind of education to reach

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<sup>57</sup> Heyck, *Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>58</sup> Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation*, p. 164. See also Engel, *From Clergyman to Don*, pp. 264-80.

<sup>59</sup> Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organisation*, p. 85.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-86, 203-5.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> For the national efficiency movement and the 'efficiency group' which included several Fabians, see Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*; Jonathan Rose, *The Edwardian Temperament* (London, 1986), ch. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Heyck, *Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, p. 172.

his/her potential, so that national efficiency could be maximised.<sup>64</sup> At the top of the ladder was university education, which was conceived of as the training ground for scientific experts.<sup>65</sup> Based on a self-regulated system of instruction, examinations and peer review selection, universities were intended to cultivate professional disinterestedness that distinguished experts from laymen. Graduates of such an education—the experts—were people who could set aside personal or profit considerations and apply systematic theories and methods to solving practical problems.<sup>66</sup>

As the mastermind behind the reorganisation of the University of London between 1898 and 1900, Sidney Webb (1859-1947) made a case about how a professional university could work for the nation. Deploring the futility of ‘the “Greats” school of Oxford’ to meet the practical requirements of professional training, he envisioned that

The London University ... [would] take on the character of a technical school for all the brain-working professions of its time—not alone law, medicine, and theology, but also every department of science and learning, from engineering and chemistry to pedagogy, banking, and commerce and public administration.<sup>67</sup>

Except for this emphasis on vocational training, the new London University was to be organised largely in line with Pattison’s ideal, such as the non-collegiate and non-residential system, centralised power, and a gradation of the academic staff, whose promotion was decided by merit. The experts trained by such a professional university were expected to benefit the national community by carrying out systematic investigations into the real world and devising practical measures of reform.<sup>68</sup> An illustrative example was the London School of Economics. Founded by the Webbs in 1895, the institute was designed to promote research and training in the social sciences with a view to resolving

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<sup>64</sup> Adrian Wooldridge, ‘The English State and Educational Theory’, in S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (eds.), *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 236-8.

<sup>65</sup> Sidney Webb, *London Education* (London, 1904), pp. 9-11, 26.

<sup>66</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, ‘The Production of Expertise and the Constitution of Expert Power’ in Haskell (ed.), *The Authority of Experts*, pp. 28-80.

<sup>67</sup> Webb, *London Education*, pp. 52-4.

<sup>68</sup> For Sidney Webb and the reorganisation of the University of London, see A. M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 220-2; Beatrice Webb, *Our Partnership* (Cambridge, 1975 [1948]), pp. 95-102.

social problems.<sup>69</sup>

A yet more critical role for university-trained experts, which was identified by the 'efficiency group', was to equip industry and commerce with advanced knowledge and techniques for the keen competition of world markets. R. B. Haldane (1856-1928), a prominent member of the efficiency group who closely collaborated with Sidney Webb on several initiatives including the reform of the London University, well publicised the idea to bring universities and industry into closer relation. Viewing German universities as a model, Haldane proposed that universities be dedicated to 'the training of our captains of industry in science and applied knowledge'.<sup>70</sup> Besides, in the fields of public services, appeals were also made to ask for a substitution of gentlemanly amateurs by professionally-trained administrators.<sup>71</sup> That is to say, the vision conveyed by the Fabians and the efficiency movement was that universities must fulfil their national roles by fostering a class of scientific experts who led the nation in pursuit of social well-being and collective efficiency.<sup>72</sup>

It is worthwhile to compare these professional arguments for a national university with the Idealist arguments discussed above, as there were both contrasts and affinities between the two. As I have shown, for the Idealists, to nationalise universities was to democratise them; namely, to introduce people from the working classes to university education and make both intellectuals and workers better citizens by encouraging reciprocal interaction and social involvement. By contrast, for the exponents of the professional ideal, to nationalise universities meant to professionalise them. They proposed to set up a series of professional measures with regard to selection and training so that the university could exercise its social function in producing useful knowledge and coaching experts who would be the guardians of the national interest.

Professional and Idealist arguments for a national university were based on different world views and social ideals. Professionalism smacked of a rejection or at least an agnostic

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<sup>69</sup> Janet Beveridge, *An Epic of Clare Market: The Birth and Early Years of the London School of Economics* (London, 1960), pp. 18-9.

<sup>70</sup> R. B. Haldane, *Education and Empire* (London, 1902), p. 41. On Haldane's idea of university education, see Vincent and Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*, pp. 156-9; Sheldon Rothblatt, 'The Diversification of Higher Education in England', in Jarausch (ed.), *The Transformation of Higher Learning 1860-1930*, (Stuttgart, 1982), pp. 141-2.

<sup>71</sup> Searle, *Quest for National Efficiency*, pp. 72-7.

<sup>72</sup> Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*, p. 59.

view of the virtues preached by the Idealists. This position was interwoven with a materialistic reading of human well-being. Efficiency was thus considered the ultimate end of society, while the effectiveness of trained expertise and selection justified elitism and meritocracy. Idealist philosophy in contrast was characterised by its moralistic tones and amplification of the intrinsic values of the individual and the community. In quest for the common good, economic efficiency was considered a minor matter. As Tawney put it, '[i]f industry could be so organised that the mass of workers would feel convinced that the social order was just, a decrease in efficiency [would] be cheap at the price'.<sup>73</sup> According to the Idealists, this just social order meant participatory democracy and universal brotherhood.

This demarcation also led to different understandings of citizenship. For exponents of the professional ideal, such as the Webbs, government, like other aspects of society, could be made more efficient by experts who had specialised knowledge of it and knew to use scientific techniques for its management. So long as public policy was piloted by professional administrators, it mattered little whether it was democratically controlled by citizens. For them, citizenship did not involve primarily a participatory civic duty but an entitlement to the 'national minimum'—'a minimum level of wages and of quality of life' that guaranteed every citizen's productiveness and thus guaranteed the efficiency of society as a whole.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, as we have seen, Idealists deemed democratic participation both a right and a duty for citizens. It was held that policy making should not be monopolised by certain cliques, since the common good was dependent on everyone's participation in various aspects of the public sphere and the fulfilment of his/her moral and intellectual potentials.

Education was a key area highlighting the difference between professionalism and Idealism. Proponents of professionalism envisioned a national ladder of education that graded individuals in accordance with their abilities and merit. At its top was university education which offered professional knowledge and skills for the few intellects. For Idealists, however, the national system of education was expected to be a 'highway' for

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<sup>73</sup> Tawney, 'Entry for 3 Dec 1913', *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, pp. 70-1. For Tawney's rejection of positivist social sciences and efficiency as social goal, see Jose Harris, 'The Webbs, the Charity Organisation Society and Ratan Tata' in M. Bulmer, J. Lewis, and D. Piachaud (eds.), *The Goals of Social Policy* (London, 1989), pp. 53-5.

<sup>74</sup> John Davis, 'Webb, (Martha) Beatrice (1858-1943)', *ODNB*, 2004.

every citizen.<sup>75</sup> Since everyone's self-realisation was equally valued, Idealists repudiated educational selection and demanded university liberal education for all.<sup>76</sup> As Tawney argued:

we provide elementary education for all on the ground that it is indispensable to good citizenship. In the same way ... there ought to be a system of higher education which aims at ... universal provision, which is accessible to all who care to use it, and which is maintained not in order to enable intellect to climb from one position to another, but to enable all to develop the faculties which, because they are faculties of man, are not the attributes of any particular class or profession of men.<sup>77</sup>

While the professional education system was a ladder of selection and training so as to turn the talented few into detached experts who mastered specialist techniques, the aim of the Idealist project was to create a community of moral and passionate citizens with general knowledge.<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, it is also true that there were certain affinities between the two ideals, as Harold Perkin has pointed out.<sup>79</sup> Both espoused the ethos of public service and the supremacy of the public good/interest. Both attributed modern social problems to unfettered self-interested motivation, and both aimed to reform society by instilling a concern for the national interests and by ameliorating the class system. In both cases, the state was allocated an active role in social reform. Above all, reflecting a grave concern with social problems, proponents of both philosophies stressed the need to extend knowledge of modern society and thus became precursors of social studies: Toynbee fostered the

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<sup>75</sup> The comparison between an educational ladder and a highway was first made by Mansbridge in a conference paper in 1907. Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, pp. 31-2.

<sup>76</sup> Barnett, *Canon Barnett*, vol. II, pp. 108-14. C.f. Raymond Plant, 'T. H. Green: Citizenship, Education and the Law', *Oxford Review of Education*, 32:1 (2006), pp. 23-37.

<sup>77</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'An Experiment in Democratic Education' [1914] in Rita Hinden (ed.), *The Radical Tradition*, (London, 1964), p. 73. See also Smith, 'The Extra-mural Work of the Universities', pp. 6-7.

<sup>78</sup> Such a distinction between the professional and 'amateurish' ideals of higher education can trace back to the discussions of university reform and the ideal of clerisy in the mid-nineteenth century. See Kent, *Brains and Numbers*, pp. 14-20.

<sup>79</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 124-7, 131-41.

study of economic history and historical economics,<sup>80</sup> while the Webbs' LSE became the hub of social science in England.<sup>81</sup>

Given these similarities between Idealism and professionalism it does not come as a surprise that some early-twentieth-century intellectuals, such as the so-called 'New Liberals', mixed the two strands of thought.<sup>82</sup> For instance, J. A. Hobson (1858-1940), one of the spokesmen of new liberalism and once Oxford Extension lecturer (1892-3), used the Idealist language to justify specialisation and the pursuit of national efficiency:

Little trouble is yet taken to discover the special aptitudes of citizens in relation to the special needs of society, the best methods of training these aptitudes, and of furnishing, not negative and empty 'freedom' to undertake this work, but the positive freedom of opportunity ... Every failure to put the right man or woman in the right place, with the best faculty of filling that place, involves *social waste*.<sup>83</sup>

Here, the Idealist, spiritual quest for positive freedom and the common good was understood in utilitarian terms.

The same inclination could be noted among some of the early WEA sympathisers. They were closely associated with the Idealist circle, used the Idealist language, but were bent on the professional ideal. Richard Haldane was a quintessential figure of this type. As someone who was a student of Hegelian philosophy at both Edinburgh and Göttingen University and an editor of a volume on Idealist philosophy in memory of Green,<sup>84</sup> Haldane

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<sup>80</sup> Gerard M. Koot, *English Historical Economics, 1870-1926* (Cambridge, 1988), ch. 4; James Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, 1870-1920* (Oxford, 2016), ch. 6. For Idealists and political and sociological studies, see J. Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State' in Green and Whiting (eds.), *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain*, pp. 15-28; Stapleton, 'Academic Political Thought and the Development of Political Studies in Britain, 1900-50', chs. 4-6.

<sup>81</sup> In this way, both Idealists and Fabians would have opposed Newman's idea that the object of a university is 'the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement'. Heyck, *Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, p. 175.

<sup>82</sup> For a recent account of New Liberals' intellectual indebtedness to Fabians, see Ben Jackson, 'Socialism and the New Liberalism' in Ben Jackson and Marc Stears (eds.), *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freedon* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 34-52.

<sup>83</sup> J. A. Hobson, *The Social Problem: Life and Work* (London, 1919), p. 10. My italics. Elsewhere, Hobson contradictorily criticised the ideas of an educational ladder and selection by merit and endorsed a universal education for general culture. See J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism* (London, 1909), p. 110 quoted in Ben Jackson, *Equality and the British Left: A Study in Progressive Political Thought, 1900-64* (Manchester, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>84</sup> Vincent and Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*, p. 41.

was a suitable ally of the WEA.<sup>85</sup> Yet, the renowned liberal politician and champion of national efficiency was by no means a devotee to either participatory democracy or liberal education for all. For him, as we have seen, the extension of university education was neither an end in itself nor unconditional: it aimed at selection by merit and was limited to the talented few who had potential to be trained as technical and managerial experts.

The idea of an educational ladder also dovetailed with an elitism held by many friends of the WEA. Michael Sadler (1861-1943), an eminent educationalist who was intimately involved in extra-mural education (especially at Oxford) throughout his career,<sup>86</sup> was unimpressed by the idea of an educational highway from primary school to university. In a book co-authored by Sadler and Halford Mackinder (1861-1947), then an extension lecturer at Oxford and future Director of the LSE, they made it clear that 'University Extension must not seek to inspire unsuitable persons with an ambition for callings for which they are not intellectually fitted'.<sup>87</sup> Rather, the scheme, they argued, was 'to act as roots, sucking out of every class in the nation all who have special gifts for teaching, scholarship, or research, and passing them on to the resident teachers in the University for higher training'.<sup>88</sup> This elitism was bluntly expressed by Robert Morant (1863-1920), Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education (1903-11), who saw through governmental grants for nascent WEA classes. Contrary to the Idealist faith, his support of the WEA and education reform was derived from an attempt to subordinate 'the impulses of the many ignorant' to 'the guidance and control of the few wise'.<sup>89</sup>

Overall, the WEA drew strength from a group of patrons who adopted the professional ideal of education and democracy. They were willing to join the WEA's cause, not because they believed in the common people, but because they wanted universities to be open to talent so as to pave the way towards a democracy led by university-trained experts. This position was summarised by a statement made by J. S. Mackenzie (1860-1935), professor

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<sup>85</sup> Haldane was a frequent speaker to WEA events, and co-founded the British Institute of Adult Education with Mansbridge in 1920. See Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 92-3; Bernard Jennings, *Albert Mansbridge* (Leeds, 2002), pp. 96-7.

<sup>86</sup> Sadler served as secretary to the Oxford Extension Committee (from 1892, the Delegacy for the Extension of Teaching) between 1885 and 1895 and chairman to the Oxford Delegacy of Extra-mural Studies between 1931 and 1935. For Sadler's career and his association with the Oxford Idealist circle, see Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 61-6; Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 73-6.

<sup>87</sup> H. J. Mackinder and M. E. Sadler, *University Extension: Past, Present and Future* (London, 1891), pp. 73-4.

<sup>88</sup> Mackinder and Sadler, *University Extension*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>89</sup> B. M. Allen, *Sir Robert Morant* (London, 1934), p. 125 quoted in Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 171-2.

of logic and philosophy at University College, Cardiff, and chairman to WEA Welsh District (1909-14). In defending an 'aristocratic' democracy, he maintained that '[d]emocracy does not mean trusting important matters to the care of "the man in the street"; it rather means finding for everything the man who is best fitted to take care of it, and leaving him to manage it'.<sup>90</sup>

As we will see in the following section, the alliance between Idealists and the exponents of professionalism constituted a crucial context for the making of the *Oxford Report* of 1908. This alliance marked a milestone in the history of adult education, but it also sowed the seeds of the conflicts between the two sides within the movement.

### **1-3 The *Oxford Report* and the Creation of University Tutorial Classes: A Synthesis of Idealism and Professionalism?**

In spite of its Idealist vision, the WEA in its early years seemed muddled about how to translate the philosophy into practice. The first and second editions of its constitution (adopted in 1903 and 1906) reflected an ambiguity about whether the association should act simply as an auxiliary to university extension or as an independent provider of extramural classes.<sup>91</sup> As Cannon Barnett worriedly warned Mansbridge, the movement risked becoming 'a locomotive engine without rails to run on'.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, had it not been the 1908 *Oxford Report* and its adoption of university tutorial classes, the WEA could have failed.

The making of the *Oxford Report* has been examined by several historians mainly from the perspective of the class relationships involved.<sup>93</sup> As they have pointed out, the passing

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<sup>90</sup> J. S. Mackenzie, 'The Dangers of Democracy', *International Journal of Ethics*, 16:2 (1906), p. 139.

<sup>91</sup> *WEA Constitutions*, 1903, 1906, WEA Archive, Central/1/1. See also J. G. Trevena, 'The Constitution of the WEA', *Highway*, 15:7, Apr 1923, p. 101.

<sup>92</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>93</sup> See Bernard Jennings, 'The Making of the *Oxford Report*' in Sylvia Harrop (ed.), *Oxford and Working-class Education* (Nottingham, 1987), pp. 11-29; Roger Fieldhouse, 'The 1908 Report: Antidote to Class Struggle' in Harrop (ed.), *Oxford and Working-class Education*, pp. 30-47; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, ch. 4; Stuart Marriott, 'Oxford and Working-Class Adult Education: A Foundation Myth Re-examined', *History of Education* 12:4 (1983), pp. 285-299. For a useful account of the historiography of the English adult education which uses social class as a central category of analysis, see Tom Woodin, 'Working-class Education and Social Change in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Britain', *History of Education* 36, nos. 4-5 (2007), pp. 485-91.

of the 1902 Education Act, the rise of Labour in national politics, especially the success of many of its candidates in the 1906 General Election, and the influence of liberal dons, who sympathised with the labour movement and urged the university to accept more working-class students, considerably diminished the social space between the university and working-class communities. As the Secretary of the Oxford Extension Delegation, J. A. R. Marriott, commented after the 1906 Election, 'Labour has "arrived" ... [I]f the Universities are to meet in any complete sense the intelligent demands of "labour", old methods will have to be revised, and new machinery will have to be invented'.<sup>94</sup>

A 1907 conference on 'what Oxford can do for workpeople', co-ordinated by Gore and Mansbridge, is thus seen as a result of the changing relationship between university elites and the working classes. The historic gathering of dons and delegates from 200 working-class bodies was not entirely a pleasant one and criticisms from both sides almost derailed the meeting. Yet, it was finally agreed to form a joint committee consisting of equal numbers of delegates from both Oxford and the WEA, for the purpose of framing a systematic, democratic, and labour-oriented programme of university adult education.<sup>95</sup> In the following year, the committee published the *Oxford Report*, which presented the programme of the university tutorial class.

As mentioned above, this new venture, which aimed to promote conversations and co-operations between classes, invites opposite interpretations. Marxist historians regard the programme as an attempt made by the ruling classes to tame the labour movement,<sup>96</sup> whereas revisionist historians make a case that there was an authentic companionship between workers and intellectuals in mutual learning and co-operation.<sup>97</sup>

What has been left out in the debate, however, is that the new plan of university tutorial classes also accommodated the attempt to make Oxford a hub for professional training and knowledge creation. The professional ideal behind the 1907 conference and the ensuing report has been either overlooked or been mistakenly seen as part of the scheme of democratising Oxford. In fact, the report, as Marriott put it, was 'a large and

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<sup>94</sup> Marriott, 'The Higher Education of Working Men', pp. 247-57.

<sup>95</sup> The Oxford Delegates were T. B. Strong (chair), H. H. Turner, A. L. Smith, Sidney Ball, H. B. Lees Smith, A. E. Zimmern (joint secretary); the WEA delegates were W. H. Berry, C. W. Bowerman, Richardson Campbell, J. M. MacTavish, Mansbridge (joint secretary), D. J. Shackleton (vice-chairman), and Alfred Wilkinson.

<sup>96</sup> Fieldhouse, 'The 1908 Report: Antidote to Class Struggle', pp. 30-47; Marriott, 'Oxford and Working-Class Adult Education: A Foundation Myth Re-examined', pp. 285-299.

<sup>97</sup> Jennings, 'The Making of the *Oxford Report*', pp. 11-29; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 117-27.

comprehensive scheme of university reform',<sup>98</sup> a scheme which, as I will show, delicately, though inconsistently, blended Idealism with the professional ideal of university.

The proposal to boost conversations between labour and the university was not entirely based on the Idealist vision of cultivating citizenship and enhancing democracy. It also contained an ambition to establish social science as an academic discipline at Oxford. Addressing the 1907 conference, Sidney Ball, the Fabian don, expressed the intention to fulfil the research ideal in Oxford by connecting the university with the world outside. As he put it, the expansion of university education

is not only or even so much in the direction of 'extensive' as of 'intensive' cultivation. It gives the University an opportunity of adjusting its education to new needs and new occasions ... The advancement of knowledge is the primary function of a University; but there is a department of knowledge which Oxford is at present doing far less to advance on systematic lines ... the field covered by 'sociological' ... political and economic science ... Oxford has hardly taken its proper share in encouraging and organising scientific investigation into social questions ...<sup>99</sup>

Arguably, what Ball demanded was essentially to introduce to Oxford the London University model that had been developed by Sidney Webb.

Indeed, as Idealists were among the founding fathers of modern social science, the calls for institutionalising studies of social problems could be seen as compatible with the Idealist vision of education and democracy. This was exactly the point made by J. M. MacTavish (1871-1938), a shipwright from Portsmouth who would succeed Mansbridge as WEA general secretary in 1915. At the conference, in support of Ball's request, MacTavish dismissed the economics and history currently taught at Oxford as bourgeois and biased, and alleged that their study would only imbibe the best of working people with 'a desire to escape from their class'. MacTavish contended that only 'a new science of National and International Economics' and 'a history of the people', which took into account the

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<sup>98</sup> 'Minutes of Oxford Joint Conference on Education of Workpeople', August 10 1907, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/3/4, fol. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Sidney Ball, 'What Oxford can do for Workpeople' in 'Papers to be submitted to the National Conference of Working Class and Educational Organisations', WEA Pamphlet, 1907, p. 13.

working-class experiences and interests, could have a general influence in inspiring workers to 'struggle for the higher and fuller life' and thus work to 'lift' the class as a whole. With the creation of such new social studies, argued MacTavish, Oxford's education would promote 'the idea of social service' rather than the idea of 'getting on', with its individualistic undertone of pursuing a personal, professional career.<sup>100</sup>

Clearly, the 'new' social science that MacTavish anticipated was different from what Ball sought after. Ball envisioned the advancement of 'scientific' knowledge, i.e. of knowledge that was systematic, objective, and impartial. By contrast, MacTavish pressed for a social science which respected the solidarity of working people. Far from being value-neutral, the knowledge MacTavish aspired to impart, had a particular social purpose, namely, to make workers realise the injustice they suffered collectively and to set up a guidance for them to improve the situation.<sup>101</sup> Again, this guidance was more about spiritual than about material improvement. In Tawney's words, the purpose of the new social science was to demonstrate to people the veracity of certain 'moral standards' by applying them to 'all relations of life', especially the economic life of modern society.<sup>102</sup>

But in the short term, the two different understandings of social science caused little harm. MacTavish's speech came to be the turning point of the conference, which was reported to have saved the meeting from 'coldness and restlessness' and united both sides to embark on a new adventure.<sup>103</sup> Yet, it is surely a mistake to ascribe MacTavish's success exclusively to his 'impassioned and ferment language' that at once uttered and cleared away workers' suspicions against Oxford.<sup>104</sup> What historians have failed to acknowledge is the ingenuity of his argument which synthesised the Idealist quest for collective moral improvement with scientific experts' ambition in building up academic disciplines. Indeed, if the convergence of 'the two streams of labour and scholarship' made the WEA,<sup>105</sup> the metaphor represented not only the co-operation between workers and intellectuals, but

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<sup>100</sup> 'Report of National Conference held at Oxford, August 10th, 1907; speech by Mr. J. MacTavish', 1907, WEA Archive, Central/5/4, pp. 2-4.

<sup>101</sup> As MacTavish revealed later in his life, his passion lay in 'the raising of this average through the enrichment and enlightenment of working class sentiment by means of education'. J. M. MacTavish to F. E. Hutchinson, 13 Nov 1928, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/45/115. See also Tawney, 'Entry for 19 April 1912', *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> Tawney, 'Entry for 18 Sep 1912', *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, pp. 30-2.

<sup>103</sup> Price, *Story of the Workers' Educational Association*, p. 37.

<sup>104</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 118-9.

<sup>105</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, p. xi.

also the invention of an educational programme which was claimed to simultaneously advance scientific expertise and generate participatory citizenship.

Nevertheless, a re-examination of the *Oxford Report* indicates that the working alliance of the two social ideals was fragile. While the proposed scheme of the tutorial class was a genuine Idealist initiative, recommendations concerning reforms within the university included professional measures which in significant ways were inconsistent with the Idealist spirit.

The proposed university tutorial class was indeed a product of Idealism, with an aim to promote good citizenship and democratic control over higher and adult education. The report outlined a new type of small, long-term, and dialectical classes, in place of the outmoded extension lectures, which were often given to a large audience and adopted a top-down approach leaving little room for workers to have a say.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the new initiative had been launched by the WEA at Rochdale and Longton in January 1908 before the publication of the report, and the report was able to draw on the first-hand accounts of the experiments, for Tawney, one of the chief contributors to the report, was the tutor of these two classes.<sup>107</sup> The proposed class was to be organised by a joint committee of the WEA and Oxford, with no more than thirty students in each class who would meet twenty-four weeks a year; and the weekly two-hour meeting would split into one hour of lecture and one hour of discussion.<sup>108</sup> It would extend to at least two years (In practice, a tutorial class was a three-year programme).<sup>109</sup> For the purpose of cultivating 'civic qualities', the subjects were to be liberal in the sense of concerning 'life, not livelihood',<sup>110</sup> and, the courses were to aim to 'approach the study of human institutions from different points of view', such as history, economic and political science, and literature.<sup>111</sup>

The scheme was characterised by the democratic spirit. A class would be formed on condition that 'a representative body of workpeople [had] expressed their desire for it and determination to do their share in making it a success'.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, the class was

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<sup>106</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, pp. 32-40.

<sup>107</sup> Mansbridge, 'A Long-delayed Letter', fols. 81-2; William Temple, 'Albert Mansbridge', *Highway*, 35, Nov 1942, p. 9; Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and His Times*, p. 38.

<sup>108</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, pp. 56, 60, 64.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

democratically controlled by worker-students, in the sense that the latter were allowed to select the subject studied and tutors offered by Oxford.<sup>113</sup>

As to the teaching method, following Idealist tenets, the intended class adopted a co-operative or mutual-learning approach. As the report designated, not only could workers pursue advanced knowledge with the assistance of university tutors, but also the tutors were expected to look into modern social problems through workers' personal experiences.<sup>114</sup> In so doing, it also attempted to establish a sense of comradeship between tutors and workers during this long-term voluntary co-operation. In particular, each tutor was encouraged 'to become personally acquainted with the students under him, and, if possible, to see them outside the class, in their homes or elsewhere'.<sup>115</sup> On top of that, to avoid authority and conformity, no examination would be taken; instead, students were asked to submit an essay every fortnight.<sup>116</sup>

More importantly, the report asserted an alliance between the tutorial class and the labour movement: the programme was intended to preserve workers' 'loyalty to their order'.<sup>117</sup> The aim of the course was not to assimilate workers, but 'to ennoble the status of every class, by supplying it ... with the form of culture appropriate to its needs'.<sup>118</sup> Students were expected to return to and serve their fellow-workers. As Tawney explained elsewhere, 'because we cannot put our minds in commission, because no class is good enough to do its thinking for another', the aim of the tutorial class was, '[t]o build from within, to help men to develop their own genius, their own education, their own culture'.<sup>119</sup> Thus the tutorial class programme was designed to intellectually empower the labour movement itself, a move which presumably would fortify democracy and the national community at last.<sup>120</sup> In a tone similar to Green (see the opening quote of the above Introduction), the report argued that the specialisation of modern society was

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64. In the same vein, the report also asked Oxford to reform its scholarship and residence policies to accommodate more worker-students, and to invite the working people to its governing bodies. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 71.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50. This was a principle reaffirmed by many labour representatives in the meetings in preparation of the *1908 Report*. See 'Report of Meeting in Balliol College Hall on Sunday Morning, 26 January 1908', 1908, A. L. Smith Papers, WEA/4, fols. 1-7.

<sup>118</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, p. 86.

<sup>119</sup> Tawney, 'An Experiment in Democratic Education', pp. 74-6. See also Tom Steele and Richard Taylor, 'R. H. Tawney and the Reform of the Universities', *History of Education*, 37:1 (2008), pp. 9-11.

<sup>120</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, pp.84-5.

making it increasingly difficult for the various sections of the community to appreciate each other's circumstances or aspirations ... For this reason it seems important that the leaders of every class should have an opportunity of obtaining a wide outlook on the historical development and economic condition of the whole English community, such as is given by a University education.<sup>121</sup>

Indeed, this half of the report was replete with the Idealist spirit and was 'a new step towards the development of a democratic education and of an educated democracy.'<sup>122</sup>

However, concerning the reform of the university itself, the other half of the report was laden with the professional arguments for university reform. Rhetorically, the object was to raise the possibility of workers studying social science at Oxford.<sup>123</sup> But it is clear that the proposal was a plan to professionalise Oxford by ensuring selection by merit and promoting professional knowledge and training.

With respect to the admission of workpeople to Oxford, the report suggested that a series of professional criteria be used to select students. It proposed that a special certificate be awarded by the Oxford Extension Delegacy to a tutorial class student on condition that the student could secure references from the tutor and two university representatives who would test the student's academic capacity by examining his/her essay work. The certificate could be used to prove the candidate's eligibility to take Diploma courses. Namely, the certificate holder could waive certain entry requirements which were considered less relevant to the candidate's academic capacity, such as a command of a foreign language.<sup>124</sup> On top of that, the report proposed removing other factors which might prevent working-class students from studying at Oxford, such as residential requirement and financial provision.<sup>125</sup> In short, the idea was to create a professional admission process which was on the simple basis of merit.

Furthermore, the report argued that in preparing for the admission of working-class students, Oxford needed to provide more social sciences courses in which workers were most interested. Nevertheless, in this respect, the report understated both the mutual-

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-7.

learning approach to social problems and the moral and political purposes of social studies stressed by MacTavish. The proposed curriculum reform was modelled on 'the sociological work done by individuals such as Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb ... and the research work in political and economic science carried on at the London School of Economics'. To promote 'inductive investigation of political and economic problems' at Oxford, the report recommended to establish a new 'Diploma in Political Science', found a 'School of Politics and Economics', endow 'Chairs of Sociology' and recruit 'experts in their own departments of science' to lecture in Oxford.<sup>126</sup> An initial step would be to employ tutorial class tutors who would teach both extramural classes and diploma courses in social sciences in Oxford.<sup>127</sup>

A sceptic might argue that this emphasis on the empirical, professional character of the new studies, and the deliberate omission of the Idealist approach to learning and research can be partly understood as a self-serving act. It is noticeable that the authors of the report included scholars whose interest in social science had either prevented them from securing Oxford fellowships (such as Tawney) or could hardly find a place in the existing curriculum of Oxford (such as Ball and Zimmern, a classicist who cultivated a strong interest in international politics and would become the world's first professor in international affairs in 1919).

At any rate, it was the professional ideal that dominated the proposals concerning the internal reform of Oxford, including the introduction of selection by merit, the establishment of specialised departments in social studies which aimed to produce scientific knowledge and train experts in resolving social problems, and the construction of a professional career ladder for tutorial class tutors and social science experts (by ensuring that they could acquire academic status through teaching and research in social science). This raises the question as to whether the proposed professional measures were compatible with the Idealist vision which formed the basis of the first half of the report.

Privately, Tawney expounded a moralised version of the professional ideal of university and suggested that the two ideals were harmonised. He argued that, in serving the community, universities must perform a two-fold function:

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 88.

to uphold an *intellectual* standard, and uphold a *moral* standard. The intellectual standard it upholds by maintaining a severe intellectual discipline. The moral standard it upholds by making that discipline accessible to all who will submit to it ... by depriving none of it merely because they are poor or uncouth or socially incompetent. In this way a University might become a centre of moral authority ... We require to (a) be taught the infinite difference between what is false and what is true; (b) think of knowledge, like religion, as transcending all difference of class and wealth; and that in the eye of learning, as in the eye of God, all men are equal, because all are infinitely small.<sup>128</sup>

Indeed, to reduce the professionalisation of university to the construction of rigorous disciplines and an open access to university might make professionalism identical to the Idealist faith in education and equality among people. Yet Tawney's definition of professionalism was far too vague and glossed over the tensions between professionalism and Idealism.

This was evident since, to begin with, professionalising the selection process was inconsistent with the Idealist faith that everyone would benefit from—and should therefore have access to—higher education. The elitism looming behind the idea of trained expertise implied that the majority of people would be kept from universities. Nevertheless, in light of all the practical obstacles for universities to accept every working-class applicant, it is unrealistic to criticise the report on the grounds that it was a realisation of the professional ideal at the expense of the Idealist spirit. Arguably, to professionalise the selection process and to allow a few talented individuals from a working-class background to study at university was an inevitable compromise.

The real conflict between the two ideals in the *Oxford Report*, however, was revealed when it came to what kind of graduates this new educational path—from tutorial classes to a university education under a professional school—was meant to produce. It was held by the report that it was possible to achieve the professional and Idealist aspirations at once:

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<sup>128</sup> Tawney, 'Entry for 30 October 1912', *Tawney's Commonplace Book*, pp. 42-3.

The truth is that the education of every class must keep two objects in view, because in a democratic community every man and woman stands in a twofold relationship to the rest of society. On the one hand, as a workman, whether with head or hand, he must obtain the technical qualifications needed to maintain him in independence, or to advance him in life. On the other hand, as a member of a self-governing nation he must acquire the civic qualities which enable him to co-operate with his fellows, and to judge wisely on matters which concern not only himself, but the whole country to which he belongs.<sup>129</sup>

In theory, it seemed possible to train the worker-student simultaneously as a professional with special knowledge in social questions and as a passionate citizen who 'use[d] his education in the service of his fellows'.<sup>130</sup> As the report envisaged, the graduates of this programme could make contributions to labour communities by pursuing a professional career as leaders of the labour movement, working-class representatives at the national or local level, or as a tutorial class teacher.<sup>131</sup> However, the report also noted that the principle of the professional ideal was that 'a career must be opened to talent' and the expansion of professional education meant that 'the movement of the sons of poor parents into the intellectual professions would be facilitated'.<sup>132</sup> The professional demand did not include the moral duty to serve the class to which someone originally belonged. Although the report continued by arguing that selection of talents was 'only one side' of the ideal of the university and that raising up the working classes as a whole was considered more important than individual improvement,<sup>133</sup> this explanation only served to reveal and highlight the tension between the Idealist and professional ideals of education: Idealism valued collective interests of social classes whereas professionalism rewarded individual merits. The simple truth, therefore, is that the construction of a new educational ladder posed a threat to the solidarity of the working classes.

Moreover, even if the graduates of this new system did return to the social milieu from which they had emerged, it remained questionable whether and how 'the future teachers

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<sup>129</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, p. 51.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-4.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

and leaders', whose 'minds [had been] enlarged by impartial study', could advance the labour movement.<sup>134</sup> A detached and non-partisan expert seemed unsuited to the temperament of the labour movement which could not but be politically biased. MacTavish's address to the 1907 conference demonstrated that what labour anticipated from the university was not professional disinterestedness; instead, MacTavish wanted an education and a 'new science' that gave expression to workers' interests and desires. Above all, the emphasis on the leadership of experts contrasted starkly with the Idealist faith in the common people. Those wedded to a vision of rational expertise were unlikely to share an Idealist faith in the ability of laymen to be equals in decision making. All in all, it is difficult to see how a professional vision of university education could fulfil the values desired by Idealists.

## Conclusion.

There can be no doubt that the WEA began as an Idealist initiative, undertaken by earnest intellectuals and workers. Indeed, Oxford intellectuals and WEA officials tended to regard 1908 as a landmark of the victory of Idealism and of the defeat of the utilitarian trend. A. H. D. Acland, an Oxford Idealist who was secretary to the Oxford Extension Committee in the early 1880s, lauded the tutorial classes for keeping education from the 'commercial idea' in 'the age of certificate and honour hunting'.<sup>135</sup> William Temple, who was elected the first WEA President in 1908, argued that the co-operation between the WEA and the university was an effort to secure 'positive freedom' of the people.<sup>136</sup>

However, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, the *Oxford Report* was by no means free from the shadow of utilitarianism and professionalism. Rather, in the proposed scheme, Idealism problematically mingled with the professional ideal. As we shall see, the tension between Idealism and professionalism was heightening in the following decades when the WEA sought closer co-operation with universities and the state, both of which were dominated or were to be dominated by people driven by the professional ideal.

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>135</sup> 'Speeches delivered at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the WEA held in Reading on Oct 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 1910', 1910, WEA Archive, Central/3/6/8, p. 9.

<sup>136</sup> 'Speeches delivered at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the WEA held in Reading on Oct 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 1910', pp. 21-3.

## Chapter Two

# Idealism in Full Swing: Tutorial Classes, Education Reform and the Pursuit of 'a Common Ideal', 1909-18.

[E]ducation has always meant not simply the accumulation of knowledge, or the perfecting of the individual through intellectual discipline ... but the uplifting of society through the inspiration of a common ideal.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction.

This chapter argues that during the first decade after the publication of the *Oxford Report* the WEA worked to put its Idealist vision into practice. The aim to achieve 'a common ideal' was furthered through a two-fold initiative: first, by means of tutorial classes, an initiative which promoted cross-class fellowship and mutual learning. The rapid growth of the number of tutorial classes assured the WEA of being on the way toward creating a 'Workers' University'. Second, during this period, the WEA also demonstrated increased concern over public education reform. Thanks to the ferment caused by the First World War, the WEA developed its own scheme for 'educational reconstruction'. The core of such scheme was to campaign for a free educational 'highway' for all citizens, from nursery to university. In repudiating the specialised and industry-oriented system of education exemplified by Germany, the WEA upheld the allegedly 'English tradition' of liberal education and aimed at cultivating 'intelligent and moral' citizenship among ordinary people.

Nevertheless, the early practice of the WEA's two-fold initiative also revealed challenges to the realisation of the common ideal. As I will argue in the final section of this chapter, tensions within the Idealist programme were threefold. First, the affinity between university education and a professional career raised the danger that students would use tutorial classes as a stepping stone to personal success rather than pursue the collective

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Education and Social Progress', WEA Pamphlet, 1912, p. 3.

interest of the working classes. Second, co-operation between the state and the WEA, though improving the latter's financial stability, also posed a threat to its democratic principle. Third, the relationship between intellectuals and workers was not always harmonious. The cultural elites and grassroots workers proved to have different understandings of education and learning. Although there was no acute crisis, the first decade of the educational 'practice' of Idealism actually foretold its arduous future.

## **2-1 Creating a 'Workers' University': the 'Heroic Age' of WEA Tutorial Class.**

The launch of the tutorial classes at Longton and Rochdale in January 1908 heralded the 'heroic age' of the WEA, as historians have pictured it.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that, at the nascent stage of the movement, a lack of organisation tended to bring out individual members' dedication and *esprit de corps*. But it is out of the question that the practice during this period truly exemplified the Idealist vision of achieving good citizenship through mutual learning and the spirit of comradeship between different social classes.

The early programme was organised by 'heroes' who manifested the Idealist spirit and who were to be remembered by posterity for their achievements in the field of adult education. In accordance with the *Oxford Report's* recommendation, the Oxford University Tutorial Class Committee (OUTCC) was founded in 1908, to co-ordinate the work of Oxford and the WEA in providing tutorial classes. Mansbridge, representing the WEA, served as joint secretary to the committee. His secretaryship was complemented by William Temple, then Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, who would follow his father's steps to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942. Serving on the committee, Temple represented the university although he had been elected WEA President early that year. While Temple would drift away from the movement later in the 1930s and 1940s, he was closely involved in the formation of the tutorial classes. In 1911, Temple was succeeded by another big name, A. D. Lindsay, who would be Master of Balliol and Vice-Chancellor of Oxford later in his career. Meanwhile, their organising work was reinforced by other Idealist dons, such as A. E. Zimmern, a main contributor to the *Oxford Report* and an inspector of the Board of

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<sup>2</sup> Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association*, pp. 44-7; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 127-62.

Education on university tutorial classes later in 1912-15,<sup>3</sup> and A. L. Smith, who was to be Master of Balliol in 1916 and was another staunch ally of the WEA at Oxford. All these sympathisers at Oxford supported the early tutorial classes in various ways, from raising funds and producing memoranda, to attesting to the academic achievement of the teaching work.<sup>4</sup>

However, it was the educational (rather than the organisational) part of the work that best embodied the Idealist vision. The weekly two-hour classes provided great intellectual satisfaction for early worker-students many of whom had previously been involved in various forms of adult education and political initiatives such as the Independent Labour Party.<sup>5</sup> Their pre-existent passion for knowledge was further incited by this intensive and continuous type of study. After attending Tawney's first tutorial class at Rochdale, T. W. Price, a bleaching worker who had been active in organising local adult classes since 1901,<sup>6</sup> wrote, '[I] went home as if I were walking upon air & was so exuberant that my wife wanted to know what was the matter with me'.<sup>7</sup> Price's enthusiasm soon took him to serve on the WEA Midland District and WEA Central Council before publishing the first official account of the early history of the movement in 1924. In Tawney's class at Longton, the class secretary, E. S. Cartwright, who later would act as secretary to the OUTCC for 34 years (1912-45), recorded students' joy about their improvement when the three-year programme was completed:

The Class has broken bonds which kept us from a fuller and freer life. We are not so much possessed of a few more facts, but are changed. The effect of the class has been a development of the spirit rather than of the mind, and though hard facts learned at the Class may be forgotten, something has been gained that cannot die.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D. J. Markwell, 'Zimmern, Sir Alfred Eckhard (1879-1957)', *ODNB*, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> S. G. Raybould, 'University Standards in WEA Work', WEA Pamphlet, 1948, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed survey of the backgrounds of the students of the first Rochdale class, see Gary Heywood-Everett, *Rochdale's Pioneers of Worker Education: The WEA Class of 1908* (Amazon, 2015), pp. 84-144. See also Elijah Sambrook, 'The Story of a Student', *Highway*, 35, Nov 1943, pp. 12-3.

<sup>6</sup> 'Our New Assistant Secretary', *Highway*, 11:9, June 1919, pp. 95-6.

<sup>7</sup> T. W. Price to Albert Mansbridge, 2 Feb 1908, quoted in Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> E. S. Cartwright to R. H. Tawney, Jan 9<sup>th</sup> 1911, Tawney Papers, LSE, Tawney/Vyvyan/29. For Cartwright's biography, see H. P. Smith, 'Edward Stuart Cartwright', *Rewley House Papers*, 3:1 (1949-50), pp. 8-24.

In many cases, such passion overcame the severe working conditions in which most working people found themselves. It was certainly 'heroic' of workers to come to class after working for more than ten hours: On weekdays, the two-hour course normally commenced at 8 p.m. As a tutor reported, most of the students, who had to work until 8 p.m. because of systematic overtime, would 'come straight to class in their working clothes, preferring the discomfort to missing the lecture'.<sup>9</sup>

The workers' passion for learning extended beyond the time they spent in class. Although half of the class hours had been allocated for discussion, the debates often continued 'at the street corners'.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, students also organised themselves after class to improve their learning.<sup>11</sup> For instance, in Luton, 'the class secretary thr[ew] open his house to his fellow-student, on every evening of the week, when groups met to discuss such things as the essay subject, common difficulties'.<sup>12</sup>

A sense of comradeship was firmly established not only between workers, but also between tutors and worker-students. The 'legend' of Tawney acting as a teacher, friend and mentor to his classes in Rochdale and Longton has been told several times by historians.<sup>13</sup> But other tutors, too, won the trust and respect of workers. For example, on Henry Clay, another early Oxford tutor and future Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford, one student remarked that '[Clay] has never been above us, and a real friendship has ensued between students and tutor ... it felt hard to part at the last meeting of our happy family gatherings'.<sup>14</sup> Echoing the *Oxford Report*, the traditional hierarchy between teachers and students was deliberately averted. As Clay reminded his colleagues, a tutor should avoid 'talking down' to his audience.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, another tutor defined a tutorial class as essentially 'a body of people engaged in systematic search for knowledge and truth'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> OUTCC Minutes, Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 1911, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>10</sup> 'Geo. Chester's Class Secretary's Report—Kettering Seminar Class on Sociology', OUTCC Class Report 1915-16, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/3, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> OUTCC Minutes, Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 1911.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 63-73; Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times*, pp. 36-47; Heywood-Everett, *Rochdale's Pioneers of Worker Education*, pp. 165-207; Linden West, 'The Tawney Legend Re-examined', *Studies in Adult Education*, 4:2 (1972), pp. 105-19.

<sup>14</sup> 'Ed. Scott's Class Secretary Report, 4<sup>th</sup>-year Leeds Class on (a) local government (b) problems of the war', OUTCC Class Report 1915-16, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Clay, 'Memorandum on Teaching Work in Tutorial Classes - drafted for discussion at the first meeting of Tutors, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1910 at the Manchester University', Henry Clay Papers, Box 10, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> G. W. Daniels's remarks, 'Unconfirmed Minutes of the Conference of Tutors held at Liverpool, on Friday and Saturday, January 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 1915', Henry Clay Papers, Box 10, p. 2.

The 'corporate spirit' in teaching and learning was not merely rhetorical but had practical implications. As observers noted, the class discussion showed that

most of the students had succeeded in the very difficult task of co-ordinating their own individual economic experiences with wider, systematised experiences embodied in Economic Theory. As a consequence, one felt the discussion to be practical in the highest sense of the word—a result which could only have been achieved through perfect sympathy and confidence between Tutor and class.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, as Tawney keenly acknowledged in the preface to his first book, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century*, published in 1912, this work owed enormous debts to 'the members of the Tutorial Classes ... with whom for the last four years it has been my privilege to be a fellow-worker. The friendly smittings of weavers, potters, miners, and engineers, have taught me much about problems of political and economic science which cannot easily be learned from books'.<sup>18</sup> Workers' 'intimate personal knowledge' of social and economic problems had thrown 'a light upon the study of economics and economic history'.<sup>19</sup>

The achievements of tutors in teaching and building up relationships with workers were particularly notable in view of the tutors being relatively young and inexperienced. Naturally, there were different types of tutors. Some of them were academics in universities or professionals such as civil servants who only took up one or two tutorial classes as part-time work.<sup>20</sup> However, the lynchpin of the movement consisted of university graduates in the early stages of their careers. For instance, in 1909-10, all the four tutors employed by Oxford, namely, Tawney (1880-1962), Clay (1883-1954), F. W. Kolthammer (1884-1941; 'F. W. Cuthbertson' after 1914), and Reginald Vivian Lennard (1885-1967) were graduates of Oxford in their twenties. Lecturing mature workers, who

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<sup>17</sup> J. M. MacTavish and T. W. Price, 'Report of Visits of Members of Joint Committee to Oxford Classes in the Potteries, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1916', [1916], Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/2. Underline in origin.

<sup>18</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Preface', *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1912), p. xi.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Report of the Royal Commission on University Education in London' quoted in *CJAC Annual Report*, 1912-13, p.6-7.

<sup>20</sup> 'Unconfirmed Minutes of the Conference of Tutors held at Liverpool, on Friday and Saturday, January 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 1915', Henry Clay Papers, Box 10, p. 5. Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, pp. 62-4.

had more practical experience of the world than the young tutors, presented a considerable challenge to the latter.<sup>21</sup> As Mansbridge pointed out,

I am always aware that the difficulty of putting a young man fresh from College in a new district, with strong men who really need an influx of power from the tutor in order to bring about high educational results. A thing that has astonished me is that there have been so few instances of tutors failing before the men.<sup>22</sup>

Tutors active service was instrumental in the early success of their teaching. Even though tutors sometimes took up to five classes in an academic year (24 weeks; from September to March) and were busy with traveling between different centres, they always gave private tuition to individual students and undertook extra voluntary work.

As the name 'the tutorial class' suggested, individual tutorials were expected to be a crucial part of tutors work.<sup>23</sup> There were practical reasons to highlight private tuition in the programme. First, because the students were recruited from varied educational backgrounds with varied capacities, private tuition in accordance with different needs was essential. As a class secretary's report put it, 'some students do not attain their fullest development, without this private tuition and individual work'.<sup>24</sup> Second, in terms of developing companionship between tutors and workers, as an official report pointed out, 'direct personal contact between tutor and student is most valuable on more general grounds'.<sup>25</sup>

Limited in time and space, the early tutorial work was usually conducted in a rather irregular way. In some cases, where tutors could not stay overnight, their walks between the railway station and the class were utilised, 'students in turn accompanying the tutor ... for the purpose of tuition'.<sup>26</sup> In other cases where tutors' schedule was allowed, tuition

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<sup>21</sup> There were only sketchy records of the age of the students. According to the CJAC, the average age of students was about 30. *CJAC Annual Report, 1909-10*, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Mansbridge to M. E. Sadler, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1914, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65220, fol. 29.

<sup>23</sup> 'Report as to Individual Tuition in Tutorial Class', n.d., *OUTCC Copies of Special Reports and Memoranda, 1911-15*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/1, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> 'H. Jenkins and Wm. Morries's Class Secretary's report—Longton Class on (1) Secession of American Colonies (2) The French Revolution', *OUTCC Class Report 1913-14*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/1, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> 'Report as to Individual Tuition in TC', p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *OUTCC Class Report 1913-14*, pp. 5-7.

was mainly conducted in an informal way. As Cuthbertson, who served as an Oxford tutorial class tutor for 11 years before taking a lectureship at University College, Southampton, in 1920,<sup>27</sup> reported,

Directly I have met individuals and small groups before Classes, in homes or class rooms, mostly the latter. Indirectly, the Potteries offers only clubs or pubs as facilities—a great deal of good work has been done, I confess, in an atmosphere vilely alcoholic. I do not think our good name has suffered thereby.<sup>28</sup>

In another case a secretary to a Clay's class noted that the 'tea table conference' was organised 'for every member to meet the tutor at "close quarters" at least once or twice during the session, and [for] the exchange of thoughts and ideas on the lectures'.<sup>29</sup> As he put it, on such informal occasions, 'the intimacy created in this manner has resulted in the Class becoming a "brotherhood" in the truest sense of the word'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the Idealist spirit of the tutorial classes benefited from the spontaneous nature of tuition. As Cuthbertson contended, while tutorial work deserved much attention, the authorities should 'avoid [any] strong suggestion of organisation and rigid plan, for 'the very unexpectedness of an essay or "debate" evening counts for much with all students'.<sup>31</sup>

It is also true, however, that tutorial work imposed a heavy burden on tutors. According to J. G. Newlove (1881-1965), an early Oxford tutor who rose from a working-class background through a scholarship to Ruskin College and devoted all his life to the WEA cause, he spent additional 46 hours on private tuition during the six months of the Session

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<sup>27</sup> Cuthbertson continued to teach for the WEA in Southampton until the early 1930s. <http://genealogy.kolthammer.org/Kolthammer/p1777.htm> [Accessed 28 Nov 2016]. Cuthbertson was also an early editor of *The Highway*, and conducted a study on the impact of taxation on working-class families in 1913 sponsored by Ratan Tata Foundation, of which Tawney served as the first director. See Jennings, *Albert Mansbridge*, p. 72; Jose Harris, 'The Webbs, The Charity Organisation Society and the Ratan Tata Foundation: Social Policy from the Perspective of 1912' in M. Bulmer, J Lewis, and D. Piachaud (eds.), *The Goals of Social Policy* (London, 1989), pp. 44-5.

<sup>28</sup> 'F. W. Kolthammer's Class Tutor's report—Burslem Class on Moral and Political Theory', OUTCC Class Report 1913-14, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> 'C. H. Meir's Class Secretary's Report—Tunstall Class on Social and Constitutional History', OUTCC Class Report 1914-15, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/2, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> 'Special Notes by Mr. Kolthammer', OUTCC Class Report 1913-14, p. 66. See also 'J. G. Newlove's notes on Admission of New Students', [1912], *OUTCC Copies of Special Reports and Memoranda, 1911-15*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/57/1.

1913-14.<sup>32</sup> The work was particularly demanding with a view to tutors' whole workload and traveling time. Clay's class report noted in details how tutorial work could exhaust a tutor:

I give some private tuition—usually to little groups meeting in the house of one of the class members—on my free nights ... a great many of my evenings are taken up with lectures or visits to WEA branches ... But it results in my being away from home six evenings a week as a rule; at one time last winter I was away twenty evenings in succession.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, complicated shift schemes adopted by industries meant that tutors had to give extra lectures to students who were working on alternate day and night shifts. For instance, Cuthbertson, complaining that constant overwork began to take tolls on his health,<sup>34</sup> reported to the OUTCC that 'in addition to the usual class hours at Longton, [he] has every other week given two hours in the morning to nightshift students, thus enabling them to keep abreast of the class work. This he has done for the past three or four years'.<sup>35</sup>

In many cases, the devotion to teaching and learning from both sides of the class resulted in the extension of educational work to local communities. As an OUTCC report suggested, '[t]here are very few third-year classes which do not do teaching work of a more or less organised kind'; voluntary classes and lectures for the public were arranged by tutors and students.<sup>36</sup> The fact that a majority of the students were involved in certain public initiatives indicates the publicity of the WEA work. As a survey by the OUTCC showed, about 64% of the students who attended the Oxford classes 'were engaged in some form of public work', such as trade unions, adult schools, co-operative societies, and local

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<sup>32</sup> 'J. G. Newlove's Class Tutor's report—Chatham Class on Economic Theories', OUTCC Class Report 1913-14, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> 'Statements by Tutors as to Individual Tuition', [n.d.], *OUTCC Copies of Special Reports and Memoranda, 1911-15*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/57/1, pp. 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> OUTCC Class Report 1914-15, p. 9

<sup>35</sup> OUTCC Class Report, 1918-19, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/6, p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> OUTCC Class Report 1913-14, pp. 8-9; 'Some Suggestions for the Further Development of TC Organization', July 1912, *OUTCC Copies of Special Reports and Memoranda, 1911-15*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/57/1. See also Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 86.

government.<sup>37</sup> As such, Cuthbertson boasted that he would reach ‘an audience of 20,000’ through the 22 students in his class at North Wingfield.<sup>38</sup>

Yet the landmark of the students’ extension work was undoubtedly the North Staffordshire Miners’ Higher Education Movement, led by Longton students including the class secretary, Cartwright, and his successor from 1912, Henry Jenkins, who maintained a record for never missing a single lesson from the beginning of the class in 1908 until his death in 1919.<sup>39</sup> The initiative, launched in 1911, was a collaboration of tutors and worker-students in the Potteries to provide popular lectures and ‘preparatory classes’ for people of neighbouring villages who ‘were shut off from town amenities and opportunities’ due to the deficiency of public transport.<sup>40</sup> The teaching was entirely voluntary.<sup>41</sup> In the year 1913-14, Jenkins reported that ‘150 lectures have been delivered by 6 of the present, and 4 of the past members’ of the tutorial class.<sup>42</sup> The movement sustained 28 local centres and involved 630 students in 1919-20, before being merged into the WEA and becoming the ‘North Staffordshire District’ in 1922.<sup>43</sup>

On top of that, from 1910, the tutorial scheme culminated in the annual summer school held at universities.<sup>44</sup> In the case of Oxford, students of at least two years’ standing in a tutorial class, were invited to reside in colleges during the summer. The idea, originally put forward by A. L. Smith, was to help ‘students, who had shown eagerness and capacity for a particular subject to pursue that subject further’.<sup>45</sup> It encouraged students to carry out

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<sup>37</sup> OUTCC Class Report, 1918-19, pp. 6-7.

<sup>38</sup> ‘F. W. Cuthbertson’s Class Tutor’s Report—North Wingfield (Derbyshire)’, OUTCC Class Report, 1918-19, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Adult Education Movement: Honouring Pioneers in North Staffs., Late Master of Balliol and Mr. H. Jenkins’, *The Staffordshire Sentinel*, Jan 11<sup>th</sup> 1927, reprinted as a pamphlet by WEA North Staffs. District. Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3 136/14; Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, pp. 87-92.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Mack (ed.), *The History of Tunstall II TC 1913-1934*, 1935, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/126, p. 16; H. Corcer and E. S. Cartwright, ‘Interim Report on the Work of the North Staffs Miners’ Higher Education Movement, 1912-13’, 24 Feb 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>41</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1914, p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> ‘H. Jenkins and Wm. Morries’s Class Secretary’s report—Longton Class on (1) Secession of American Colonies (2) The French Revolution’, OUTCC Class Report 1913-4, p. 46.

<sup>43</sup> Mack (ed.), *The History of Tunstall II TC 1913-1934*, pp. 17-8; C. A. Scrimgeour, *Fifty Years A-Growing: A History of the North Staffordshire District, the Workers’ Educational Association 1921-1971* (Stoke-on-Trent, 1973).

<sup>44</sup> Oxford held the first summer school for tutorial class students in 1910, whereas Cambridge, Durham and Bangor Universities all followed Oxford’s step from 1913. *CJAC Annual Report*, 1912-13, p.8.

<sup>45</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 100; Oxford University Tutorial Classes Committee, ‘Report on the working of the Summer Classes held during the Long Vacation at Oxford in Balliol College’, 1912, WEA Archive, Central/3/6/9, p. 10.

research by using Oxford's academic resources, 'under the guidance of teachers who are high authorities in each subject'.<sup>46</sup> It also had the Idealist aspiration to introduce 'college life and *esprit de corps*' to students and to foster a sense of solidarity among teachers and students from different parts of the country.<sup>47</sup>

Statistics also proved the success of WEA tutorial classes. By 1914, the WEA, in collaboration with 15 universities or university colleges, was responsible for 152 classes, with 3,110 students.<sup>48</sup> Although the war temporarily hampered the growth of WEA tutorial classes, the pre-war standard was achieved again in 1918-19 (152 classes, with 3,799 students), and the characters of the practice, except an increased proportion of female students after 1914, remained the same.<sup>49</sup>

The overwhelming evidence of cross-class fellowship, mutual learning and the cult of community work led the WEA to claim its success in establishing a 'Workers' University' which promoted the Idealist aims of self-realisation and social service simultaneously.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand, as Cartwright remarked, 'the Tutorial Class movement has brought to the students some of the best things that the University has to offer, viz., the love of learning for its own sake, and that spirit of comradeship which is developed by common study'.<sup>51</sup> On the other, tutorial classes also cultivated active citizenship. As a student put it, '[the class] was a real and valuable preparation for the social and political work each of us will be called upon to engage in, when we remember ... that it is a better democracy and a newer England that we have to build'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> 'OUTCC Memo on Summer Classes for Research and for Guidance of Students from Tutorial Classes', OUTCC Minutes, Jan 29<sup>th</sup> 1910, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>47</sup> Oxford University Tutorial Classes Committee, 'Report on the working of the Summer Classes held during the Long Vacation at Oxford in Balliol College', p.10.

<sup>48</sup> *CJAC Annual Report*, 1914-15, p. 5. By 1916, the WEA had built up formal connections with all universities in England. *CJAC Annual Report*, 1915-16, p.6.

<sup>49</sup> For the statistics of WEA tutorial classes and students between 1908 and 1919, see Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, p. 68. On the limited influence of the war on the tutorial classes, see *H. M. Inspector's Report on University Tutorial Classes 26 May 1922*, by Inspectors J. Owen, J. Dover Wilson and W. S. Dann, Board of Education, 1922, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/2, pp. 3-4; William Temple, 'The WEA: A Retrospect', *Highway*, 16:3, Summer 1924, p. 130. Before 1914, female students generally accounted for less than 20% of total tutorial class students, whereas the figure rose to about one third after 1918. See *CJAC Annual Reports*, 1912-13, 1913-14, 1918-19, 1919-20.

<sup>50</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1917.

<sup>51</sup> E. S. Cartwright [class secretary], 'Longton Tutorial Class—Report on the work of the past session and also since', 10 Apr 1911, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/136/6.

<sup>52</sup> 'J. S. Rainer's Class Secretary's Report—Bournemouth Class on Social, Economic, and Political Reconstruction [tutored by G. D. H. Cole; 4<sup>th</sup> year; 2<sup>nd</sup> course]', OUTCC Class Report, 1917-18, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/5, p. 8.

## 2-2 The First World War and the Formation of a WEA Scheme of Education Reform: Liberal Education for All.

Alongside the practice of tutorial classes, the WEA became more active in the campaign for wider education reform from the late 1900s.<sup>53</sup> In a 1907 conference, Mansbridge first revealed his ambition to promote ‘an open and free highway’ to replace the existing ‘Educational Ladder’ which offered narrow opportunities for the poor.<sup>54</sup> The WEA Annual Meeting of 1909 formally endorsed Mansbridge’s idea and adopted a resolution calling for ‘the development of a national system of education ensuring to every child, adolescent and adult, that education which is essential for the complete development of their individual and corporate capacities’.<sup>55</sup> But it was not until the outbreak of the war that the WEA started to consolidate the Idealist project of an educational highway and begin a full-fledged campaign for education reform.<sup>56</sup>

Despite its intellectual connection to German philosophy, Idealism was by no means waning during (and after) the First World War.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, if the war clouded the WEA vision of universal brotherhood,<sup>58</sup> it also reinforced the WEA's faith in the righteousness of Idealism in a world increasingly dominated by pragmatic and self-interested thinking. As Temple argued, ‘the long strain of effort and anxiety will produce its inevitable effect in weariness; and weariness is naturally selfish ... It is difficult for tired folk to be idealists. Yet if we enter on the new time without idealism the next stage of the world’s history will be worse than the last’.<sup>59</sup>

WEA leaders used the exaggerated contrast between Idealism, allegedly encapsulating the English liberal tradition, and utilitarianism/professionalism, seen to embody German

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<sup>53</sup> Ernest Green, ‘The WEA and Public Education’, *Highway* 31, Apr 1939, p. 196.

<sup>54</sup> Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working-class Education*, p. 31.

<sup>55</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1910, p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> J. M. Mactavish, ‘The WEA after the War’, *Highway*, 16:3, Summer 1924, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup> See Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870-1940’, pp. 116-41; Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, pp. 43, 54-64. den Otter, *British Idealism and Social Explanation*, pp. 208-14.

<sup>58</sup> For Idealists’ concept of the relationship between patriotism and universal brotherhood, see Julia Stapleton, ‘Citizenship Versus Patriotism in Twentieth-Century England’, *Historical Journal*, 48 (2005), pp. 151-178.

<sup>59</sup> William Temple, ‘Tradition, Policy and Economy in English Education, being the Presidential Address at the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the WEA’, WEA Pamphlet, 1915.

culture, to justify educational reconstruction at home.<sup>60</sup> As Zimmern contended, it was the English national character, indebted to 'Liberty and the Sea', that had created democratic government and full civil liberty—the 'indispensable element of a modern society'—which had allegedly been denied by 'Prussia'.<sup>61</sup> Thus, to make English people realise and reveal their national character was crucial. As Tawney argued,

[T]he national impulse which creates citizen armies springs from the feeling that a country is identified with certain principles whose claims are absolute ... We shall have made all classes understand that what is threatened is not merely England or the Empire, but principles the defeat of which would involve the gradual extinctions of all kinds of liberty ... it is only by means of something like an internal revolution that a war of principles can be carried on.<sup>62</sup>

For Tawney, this internal revolution was aimed at creating a democracy where the poisons of materialism, social distinctions and 'soul-destroying' bureaucracy were extirpated.<sup>63</sup> The construction of such an Idealist democracy was claimed to be solely dependent on education. As Clay put it, '[t]he foremost obstacle' to democracy, 'has been not so much the existence of an aristocratic caste ... as the boundless and dispiriting indifference of the masses'.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, 'the whole problem of our future', Temple argued, 'is a problem of education'.<sup>65</sup> In the presidential address to the WEA Annual Meeting of 1915, he outlined the principles of the intended educational reconstruction again, by comparing the English tradition with its German counterpart. Whilst the German model put an emphasis on specialisation and intellectual authority, Temple noted, the English tradition educated people 'not chiefly through instruction, but chiefly through membership in a society'. He admitted that the German system was 'good for brains' and produced 'wonderful

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<sup>60</sup> For the contrast between liberal/moral England and militaristic/scientific Germany, see David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 270-86.

<sup>61</sup> A. E. Zimmern, 'Germany', *Highway*, 7:74, 1914, pp. 18-21.

<sup>62</sup> A WEA Soldier [R. H. Tawney], 'Democracy or Defeat' [reprinted from *The Welsh Outlook*, Jan 1917], WEA Pamphlet, 1917, pp. 4, 7, 9.

<sup>63</sup> 'A WEA Soldier' [R.H. Tawney], 'Democracy or Defeat', pp. 9-11.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Clay, 'Education and Public Opinion', *Highway*, 8:85, Oct 1915, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> Temple, 'Tradition, Policy and Economy in English Education', p. 3.

efficiency', whereas English 'intellectual training has often been very amateurish in method, and very feeble in result'. Nevertheless, German education, as Temple alleged, was 'fatal to any strong individuality or corporate life in the various Universities themselves'. By contrast, the English tradition

mould[ed] the whole personality by the silent appeal to imagination and sympathy which a common tradition embodied in a social life is alone able to make. That is the only way to train those elements in our nature which determine how we shall act in an emergency, when there is no time for reflection, or when ordinary standards are displaced.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, as Temple maintained elsewhere, 'English education is a thing generically superior to the German. It is to perfect our own, and not to imitate theirs, that we must now exert ourselves'.<sup>67</sup> To carry out educational reconstruction by fulfilling the ideal of the English educational tradition, Temple argued that, first, it was to propagate the ideal of the public school and old universities, which was characteristic of corporate life and liberal education.<sup>68</sup> The goal was to extend this tradition to people who had so far been excluded from these two educational institutions. In the words of MacTavish, who succeeded Mansbridge as WEA President in 1915, educational reform meant to 'equip the working class in its racial heritage'.<sup>69</sup>

Second, echoing Tawney, Temple envisioned that educational reconstruction must eradicate the 'utilitarian motives' in education. As Temple put it, education should 'not be sought as a means to happiness or any form of success, but as an end in itself'. The conceptions of 'the educational ladder' and 'a necessary minimum' should be refuted. For the former could not but 'train a nation of self-seekers' who, due to competition, were led to 'despise [their] own people'; the latter misled students to aim at the minimum and

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<sup>66</sup> Temple, 'Tradition, Policy and Economy in English Education', pp. 6-8.

<sup>67</sup> William Temple, 'Education in England' [Extracts from the Presidential Address to the Educational Science Section of the British Association, 1916], *Highway* 9:97, Oct 1916, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> This aspiration was by no means novel and had been drawn up as early as the Taunton Commission in the mid-1860s. See Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, pp. 16-8. Noticeably, T. H. Green was appointed an assistant commissioner to this secondary schools inquiry commission.

<sup>69</sup> J. M. MacTavish, 'What Labour Wants from Education', WEA Pamphlet, 1916, p. 4.

prevented them from realising their full potential.<sup>70</sup> The only way to secure for ‘the community the maximum benefit’ was to offer free education for all, from elementary school to university.<sup>71</sup>

It was based on the two aims—to spread the liberal tradition of English education and to substitute an ‘educational highway’ for the selective educational ladder—that the WEA initiated a national campaign for education reform during the war.<sup>72</sup> The chief tenet of this campaign was liberal education for all. In its revised constitution of 1915, the WEA, for the first time, declared that, aside from promoting adult education, the other object of the association was ‘to assist the development of a national system of education which shall ensure to all children, adolescents and adults such education as is essential for their complete development as individuals and as citizens’.<sup>73</sup>

The first step of this educational campaign, as MacTavish pointed out, was to overcome ‘the apathy of working people’.<sup>74</sup> In a letter to J. H. B. Masterman, later Bishop of Plymouth and ‘the first person to hand in his subscription’ when the WEA was founded,<sup>75</sup> MacTavish explained that ‘[w]e must launch a propaganda with the definite object of idealising education. What I mean by that is, that we must grip the imagination of the people by getting them to understand what true education means’.<sup>76</sup> From 1916, the WEA started a series of campaigns targeting labour organisations and communities.<sup>77</sup>

Following numerous educational conferences co-convened by the WEA and local labour bodies, a pamphlet, ‘What Labour Wants from Education’, was drafted by MacTavish in early 1916 and sent to all branches of the labour movement.<sup>78</sup> The pamphlet argued that without consulting workers, the government arbitrarily adopted a view of education that featured ‘commercialism’ and exclusively aimed at ‘industrial efficiency’.<sup>79</sup> For the latter,

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<sup>70</sup> Temple, ‘Education in England’, *Highway* 9:98, Nov 1916, pp. 22-3.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Price, *The Story of the Workers’ Education Association*, pp. 61-3.

<sup>73</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1916; see also, J. G. Trevena, ‘The Constitution of the WEA’, *Highway*, 15:7, Apr 1923, p. 101.

<sup>74</sup> J. M. Mactavish to [J.H.B.] Masterman, 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1916, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65220, fols. 195-8.

<sup>75</sup> Albert Mansbridge, ‘The Bishop of Plymouth—an Appreciation’, *Highway*, 26, Jan 1934, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> Mactavish to Masterman, 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1916, fol. 198.

<sup>77</sup> Roughly around the same time, a group of educationalists, most of whom were associated with Oxford, such as Gilbert Murray, M. E. Sadler, Henry Mier, founded the Education Reform Council. Its reform proposal was more moderate than the WEA’s and was closer to the final version of the 1918 Education Act. Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 349-50.

<sup>78</sup> J. M. MacTavish, ‘What Labour Wants from Education’, WEA Pamphlet, 1916, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

‘educational reform is only to concern itself with equipping the workers to become more efficient bees in the industrial hive’.<sup>80</sup> Bucking this utilitarian trend, the pamphlet attempted to acquire a mandate from the working classes to demand liberal education for all.

Complementary to Temple’s presidential address, which gave general characteristics of ‘English’ liberal education, MacTavish elaborated on the practical implications of the kind of liberal education desired by the WEA: its end was to ‘make its members efficient, self-supporting citizens of a free self-governing community’.<sup>81</sup> Aside from ensuring provision for physical well-being, liberal education must help every child ‘to explore, understand, and adapt itself to its own world’ so that it would ‘develop its own personality’ and ‘learn self-discipline’.<sup>82</sup> On this point, MacTavish acknowledged his intellectual indebtedness to the emerging ‘progressive’ educationalists, Maria Montessori and Margaret McMillan, later the founder of the Nursery Schools Association.<sup>83</sup> MacTavish used the ‘child-centred’ teaching ideal, developed by the latter, to substantiate the idea of liberal education for citizenship and the Idealist thesis of the reciprocity between self-realisation and the common good.<sup>84</sup> As he suggested, because democracy required autonomous and compassionate citizens, methods entailing ‘a blind obedience’, such as ‘large classes, rigid class discipline, regimentation, and over-crowded time-tables’, were to be avoided.<sup>85</sup> By the same token, drawing on the findings of the progressive educationalists, which suggested ‘that specialisation under the age of sixteen checks all-round growth and tends to stereotype the mind’, MacTavish demanded raising the school leaving age to 16 and avoiding any technical education ‘in the nature of mechanical specialisation’ under the same age.<sup>86</sup>

MacTavish’s pamphlet was closed by a questionnaire about the controversy between liberal and technical education, with a view to alerting the ranks of organised labour. Two

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> For the educational thought of Montessori and McMillan, see Stewart, *Progressives and Radicals in English Education 1750-1970*, pp. 213-20.

<sup>84</sup> It is noteworthy that there were crucial differences between the educational ideals of Idealists and progressive educationalists, and, as we will see in the interwar period, the progressive educational theory was indeed a competing paradigm to the Idealist counterpart. See below Chapter Six and Seven; Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 155-9.

<sup>85</sup> MacTavish, ‘What Labour Wants from Education’, pp. 5-6.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

main questions were raised: first, whether education should aim at the full development of the child rather than at mechanical training or profit, i.e. whether Labour preferred liberal education to technical education; and, secondly, at what age leaving school should be allowed.<sup>87</sup>

After a six-month long enquiry, the WEA appointed a committee to gather opinions and published its recommendations to the nascent Reconstruction Committee on educational reform in December 1916.<sup>88</sup> The proposals, alleged to be a combined effort of 'Trade Unionists, Co-operators, Socialists, Liberals and Conservatives—men and women, workman and don, teacher and preacher',<sup>89</sup> mainly encompassed three themes. Firstly, it demanded a national system of education. Every citizen was to be entitled to receive three phases of education for free, namely: 1) nurseries from age two to six, 2) universal, full-time, compulsory education from six to fifteen, and 3) part-time or full-time secondary education 'of varying types', followed by university or technical education depending on students' abilities. Yet 'the requirements of a liberal education should be regarded as paramount in the organisation of every type of secondary school'.<sup>90</sup> As we will see in Chapter Six, the last proposal was to be adopted by the Labour Party in the 1920s (mainly through the effort of Tawney), and anticipated the 'tripartite system' of secondary education established by the 1944 Education Act.<sup>91</sup>

Second, the WEA proposals, in accordance with Temple's emphasis on the informal education of the English tradition, were characterised by their focus on corporate life and pupils' development in non-academic fields. Playgrounds and games, a flexible timetable and syllabus, and the development of a sense of beauty were underlined.<sup>92</sup> Besides, the

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> 'Education Reconstruction: The Recommendations of the WEA to the Reconstruction Committee' in G. D. H. Cole et al. (eds.), *The WEA Education Year Book 1918* (Nottingham, 1970 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1918]), pp. 341-9. For the founding of the Reconstruction Committee by the Lloyd George Government, see Paul B. Johnson, *Land Fit for Heroes: The Planning of British Reconstruction, 1916-1919* (Chicago, 1968).

<sup>89</sup> [l.a.], 'Educational Reconstruction', *Highway*, 9:99, Dec 1916, pp. 50-1. But the proposals were largely drafted by Zimmern. See J. M. MacTavish, 'The WEA after the War', p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> 'Education Reconstruction: The Recommendations of the WEA to the Reconstruction Committee', pp. 342-5.

<sup>91</sup> For criticisms of the WEA's secondary education policy, see William Leach, 'A Suggested Labour Education Programme', Cole et al. (eds.), *WEA 1918 Education Year Book*, p. 65. Leach was one of the contributors to the famous 'Bradford Charter' of 1916, which elaborated the 'common school' model of secondary education. For the reasons why WEA leaders preferred a diverse system of secondary education than a uniform one, see below Chapter Six.

<sup>92</sup> 'Education Reconstruction: The Recommendations of the WEA to the Reconstruction Committee', p. 346.

state was asked to take responsibility for children's health by offering school medical service and adequate facilities for physical training.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, in order to ensure that equal services would be delivered across the country, the proposals also demanded adequate training facilities for the teaching profession, the extension of public libraries, and enquiries into the use of educational endowments.<sup>94</sup> The state was expected to play a major role in establishing this educational system. The WEA insisted that 75 per cent of the total cost of public education be met by the central government.<sup>95</sup>

As the tutorial class movement was initiated by the 1907 Oxford Conference, the educational campaign culminated in a national conference to consider the proposals. Convened by the WEA in May 1917, the conference was attended by more than 700 delegates representing over 400 bodies. While teachers' organisation, universities, and local educational authorities also sent their delegates, around two thirds of attendants were members of working-class organisations.<sup>96</sup> Thus, as the WEA put it, the conference was a milestone in the sense that education was subsequently 'no longer regarded ... as a specialism to be discussed only by those who have professional reasons for being interested in it'.<sup>97</sup> More importantly though, the WEA acquired a strong mandate from labour representatives who endorsed the preference for liberal education over technical instruction: a proposed amendment that demanded 'training in useful work as a main part of the curriculum' was scorned and voted down, whereas most working-class delegates agreed that education should not be 'subordinate to the interests of industry'.<sup>98</sup>

The resolutions of the conference, generally consonant with the 1916 WEA recommendations, were sent to the President of the Board of Education, H. A. L. Fisher, who had just been appointed by Lloyd George at the end of 1916, with a mission to bring in a new Education Bill.<sup>99</sup> The appointment of Fisher was generally welcomed by the WEA.

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 346-7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 347-9.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>96</sup> 'Report of National Conference on Educational Reconstruction', WEA Pamphlet, 1917, pp. 56-74.

<sup>97</sup> Editor, 'The WEA National Conference', *Highway*, 9: 105, Jun 1917, p. 150. The approved programme formed the basis of WEA statement of policy, first published in 1923. 'A Record of Thirty Years' Service', WEA Pamphlet, 1936, p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> 'Report of National Conference on Educational Reconstruction', pp. 26-7, 33-4, 37-41.

<sup>99</sup> 'Report of National Conference on Educational Reconstruction', pp. 53-5; J. M. Mactavish to A. L. Smith, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1917, A. L. Smith Papers, WEA/4, fols. 47-8. But Fisher had already submitted his bill to the cabinet

As someone who confessed that Green's Idealism had 'made a deep impression on [his] mind',<sup>100</sup> Fisher had not by chance been involved in the formation of WEA tutorial classes and subsequently been a strong supporter of the WEA when he was Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield University before entering the Cabinet.<sup>101</sup>

Nevertheless, Fisher turned out to be less driven by the Idealist faith than the WEA had anticipated. As one historian comments, 'Fisher had no desire for radical change. In general, he fitted in easily with the attitude of the chief Board officials'.<sup>102</sup> He was willing to continue the schemes of the Asquith government, which were mainly written by proponents of educational utilitarianism, including Lord Haldane. The champion of education for industrial efficiency told the Lords that the 'want of experts' had led England to its backwardness in industries and inefficient transformation of coal into electricity. Education reform should thus aim at 'a system of training the son of the workman in the expert knowledge which is required if he is to attain to high excellence in his industry'.<sup>103</sup> It was to Haldane's surprise that, as he revealed, Fisher and he were 'entirely at one'.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, in an address of 1917, Fisher openly endorsed the professional ideal of an educational ladder:

We demand of our system that it should be selective, that it should offer a free career for talent, that intellect should not be fruitlessly wasted on tasks unworthy of it, and that there should be no social and economic obstacles ... In other words, one of the functions of a good system of national education is to create an aristocracy of ability.<sup>105</sup>

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before the conference and the bill had been approved at the end of February 1917. Brown, 'The Workers' Educational Association and Educational Reform', p. 20.

<sup>100</sup> H. A. L. Fisher, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (London, 1940), p. 50.

<sup>101</sup> *Oxford and Working Class Education*, p. 109.

<sup>102</sup> G. E. Sherington, 'The 1918 Education Act: Origins, Aims and Development', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 24: 1 (1976), pp. 66-85. See also Hee-Chun Kang, 'Equality of Educational Opportunity: Ideas and Politics 1900-1918', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 32:1 (1984), pp. 72-3.

<sup>103</sup> *Hansard* (Lords), 5th Series, vol. 22, 12 July 1916, cols. 655-683. For Haldane's role in the formation of the Fisher's Education Act, see J. M. Lloyd, 'The Asquith Reconstruction Committee and Educational Reform', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 8:2 (1976), pp. 38-45.

<sup>104</sup> Haldane MSS., 5997, fols. 6 and 10, Haldane to his mother, 14 and 16 Jan. 1917. quoted by G. E. Sherington, 'R. B. Haldane, the Reconstruction Committee, and the Board of Education, 1916-18', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 6:2 (1974), pp. 18-25.

<sup>105</sup> H. A. L. Fisher, *Educational Reform* (London, 1918), p.65 quoted in Kang, 'Equality of Educational Opportunity: Ideas and Politics 1900-1918', p. 72.

Sharing such an assumption, Fisher and Haldane worked well together to prepare an education bill, which was presented to the Cabinet in February 1917.

The tendency to put industrial efficiency above the development of individuality and citizenship was reinforced by the Report of the Board of Education Departmental Committee on 'Juvenile Education in Relation to Employment after the War', published in April 1917 (also known as 'Lewis Report'<sup>106</sup>). The recommendations of the report were twofold. First, it proposed to establish a uniform school leaving age of 14; second, it requested an extension of day continuation classes from 14 to 18 with attendance for not less than 320 hours a year.<sup>107</sup> Although the WEA had submitted its memorandum to the committee in mid-1916 to restate its Idealist views,<sup>108</sup> the report largely fell short of the WEA's expectations. As the WEA commented, the alleged principles in the report were merely hot air, for 'young people are still regarded as being pre-eminently wealth-producers'. The report was lacking in 'courage which deprived it of its opportunity to render great service to the future of the nation'.<sup>109</sup>

In August 1917, Fisher introduced his Bill to the Commons. The Bill widely echoed the views of Haldane and the Lewis Committee. Apart from an emphasis on the supply of teachers and giving the Board more power over regulating local educational authorities, it basically restated the demand of the Lewis Report, that is, to abolish the half-time system so as to ensure every child to remain at school until 14 and to make compulsory 320 hours of continuation classes every year for adolescents up to 18.<sup>110</sup> Accordingly, the Bill abstained from the WEA's proposal to extend the leaving age to fifteen. Moreover, although measures prompted by the WEA, such as the establishment of nurseries, medical services for schools at all levels and physical education, were introduced by the Bill, they were under permissive clauses and thus their implementation was at the mercy of local authorities.

Greatly disappointed by the Bill, the WEA levelled extensive criticisms against both the Bill and Fisher. The organ of the WEA, *The Highway*, commented with sarcasm that it was

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<sup>106</sup> The Committee was chaired by Herbert Lewis.

<sup>107</sup> *The Times*, 3 Apr, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> 'WEA Memorandum to Board of Education Departmental Committee on Employment of Children during the War', *Highway*, 8:94, July 1916, pp. 166-9.

<sup>109</sup> 'Editorial', *Highway*, 9:104, May 1917, pp. 134-5.

<sup>110</sup> Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, p. 352.

a sign for 'the lack of interest in education in this country that a great believer in education, such as Mr Fisher is, should have felt that he could not go beyond the proposals of the Lewis Report'.<sup>111</sup> The Bill was dismissed as dominated by the utilitarian ideal of national minimum, rather than by 'the ideal of free personal development, irrespective of class or creed'.<sup>112</sup> The WEA was not convinced by Fisher's apology that the Bill should be regarded as 'an instalment of a larger policy'.<sup>113</sup> As the WEA put it bluntly, it was Fisher's cowardice in the face of 'one timid economic interest after another' which led to the legislation of this 'comparatively low national minimum'.<sup>114</sup> Thus, when Fisher was forced to withdraw his first Bill due to lack of parliamentary time, the WEA merely ridiculed his vain endeavour to woo industrial leaders by compromising principles.<sup>115</sup>

In early 1918, Fisher presented his revised Bill to Parliament, which in many ways was similar to its predecessor, except for the exclusion of the provisions to increase the Board's control over local authorities.<sup>116</sup> The Bill was passed and became law in August 1918. On the unsatisfactory result, the WEA commented that

The principal obstacle to educational progress in England is in 1918 what it was in 1850, the materialism which regards working-class children, not primarily as potential parents and citizens, but as wage-earners, and which, therefore, insists on subordinating the interests of education to the supposed exigencies of industrial productivity.<sup>117</sup>

Yet, the WEA also admitted that the Act was 'a big step' towards 'equality of educational opportunity', without which 'visions of a true democracy [were] but idle dreams'.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the WEA vigorously campaigned for a new Bill across the country, helping Fisher to counter reactionary forces and broaden popular support for the bill.<sup>119</sup> From this

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<sup>111</sup> 'Editorial', *Highway*, 9:108, Sep 1917, p. 198.

<sup>112</sup> 'Editorial', *Highway*, 9:103, Apr 1917, p. 121.

<sup>113</sup> Fisher to A. L. Smith, 2 November 1917, Ed. 24/1694, quoted by D. W. Dean, 'H. A. L. Fisher, Reconstruction and the Development of the 1918 Education Act', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1970), pp. 259-76.

<sup>114</sup> 'Editorial', *Highway*, 9:103, Apr 1917, p. 121; 'Editorial', *Highway*, 10:112, Jan 1918, p. 52.

<sup>115</sup> 'Editorial', *Highway*, 10:110, Nov 1917, pp. 22-3.

<sup>116</sup> Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, p. 355.

<sup>117</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1918. p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> [Editor], 'The Passage of the Education Act', *Highway*, 10:120, Sep 1918, p. 156.

<sup>119</sup> 'A Record of Thirty Years' Service', WEA Pamphlet, 1936, p. 5.

perspective, the 1918 Act was by no means a defeat of the WEA campaign. As I will argue in the next section, what was really alarming were the tensions *within* the campaign and its discourse.

## **2-3 Idealism and Its Discontents: University, State, and Workers.**

By 1918, after a decade's effort, the WEA's dual initiative had obtained considerable results: tutorial classes successfully bridged universities with labour communities, and the Idealist blueprint of an 'educational highway' was drawn up and endorsed by trade unions, co-operative societies and educationalists.<sup>120</sup> As we will see in following chapters, achievements in both directions increased and continued to influence the development of democracy and education in post-1918 England. Nonetheless, during the first ten years of practice of the Idealist project, the discrepancy between theory and practice also became palpable. Even at the peak of its popularity, the Idealist faith showed its limitations. By looking at the relationship between the WEA and different 'stakeholders' involved in the dual initiative, this section analyses the major challenges to the Idealist project to cultivate good citizenship and inspire a common ideal.

### ***Tutorial Classes and University Education: Tutorial Classes as a 'Workers' University'?***

The relationship between tutorial classes and university education remained elusive in the Idealist project. If tutorial classes constituted a 'Workers' University', or, as Tawney claimed, were not 'a preparation for study in a university... [but] are themselves a University education',<sup>121</sup> then it was less important, if not irrelevant, whether worker-students should proceed to study at university. However, the early records of the tutorial classes immediately impress one with the fact that to certify the value of the courses by

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<sup>120</sup> In addition, the success of the 1917 WEA Conference on education reconstruction might partly account for the Labour Party including 'a genuine nationalisation of education' and 'a systematic reorganisation of the whole educational system, from the nursery school to the university' into its 1918 programme, 'Labour and the New Social Order'. For the programme, see G. D. H. Cole, *A History of the Labour Party from 1914* (London, 1948), p. 68; Denis Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies 1900-2001 and Beyond* (London, 2012), p. 25.

<sup>121</sup> Tawney, 'An Experiment in Democratic Education', p. 80.

encouraging students to pursue university certificates was a priority of the tutorial class joint committee. As I will argue, the clash between such attitudes largely resulted from the Janus-faced scheme outlined in the *Oxford Report*. Attempts to use the extramural programme as leverage to reform Oxford, and to integrate the programme into part of the professional system of university had deflected, and sometimes undermined, the Idealist initiative for cultivating common citizenship.

To start with, as the first group of tutorial class students were finishing their three-year programme, the question whether to create a unique certificate for the tutorial classes was raised. In May 1910, the OUTCC carried a resolution that students who completed a three-year course be granted a 'testamur' stating the period of study and the essays written. Besides, the committee proposed to offer an optional *viva voce* or written examination to prove students' competence after the three-year study.<sup>122</sup> This rather non-Idealist move was a realisation of the professional measures recommended in the *Oxford Report*. In addition, it was also an attempt to achieve a professional status of the tutorial programme at the university. As Mansbridge explained to Lindsay, he was 'rather anxious to get the testamur finished', for he wanted a special testamur different from those granted by the University Extension movement so that the tutorial classes could 'grow their own distinctions, and not adapt other things'.<sup>123</sup> A distinct system of certificate awarding would not only demonstrate the merit of the tutorial programme, but also enable the Tutorial Classes Committee to gain independence from the old system of the Extension Delegacy.

Nevertheless, the idea of a special certificate perplexed workers. In January 1911, H. H. Turner, Professor of Astronomy and a Fellow of New College and an early supporter of the tutorial class, was sent by the OUTCC to enquire into the attitudes of the Longton and Rochdale students (who were going to finish the first three-year course) towards the proposed certificate. As he recorded, half of the student-speakers were either against, or lukewarm about, the proposal.<sup>124</sup> Workers were acutely aware that a certificate of the

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<sup>122</sup> OUTCC Minutes, May 23<sup>th</sup> 1910, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1. CJAC Main Minutes, July 1<sup>th</sup> 1910, WEA Archive, CJAC 1/2/1/1.

<sup>123</sup> Albert Mansbridge to A. D. Lindsay, OUTCC Correspondence, Jan 26 1911, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/66.

<sup>124</sup> 'Professor H. H. Turner's report on his visit to the Longton and Rochdale classes', Jan 1911, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/97, p. 1.

course was irrelevant to their needs and contradictory to the Idealist motive of learning. Labour's indifference consequently led to the sabotage of the proposal.<sup>125</sup>

A more successful measure to connect the tutorial classes to the university was to encourage students to study for a university diploma or degree. Again, on this matter, the OUTCC showed far greater enthusiasm than the workers did. Indeed, the *Oxford Report* had revealed the intellectuals' eagerness to bring working-class students to Oxford so as to nationalise and democratise the university. But the problem always lay in the fact that the not-for-profit study for self-improvement and social service could be disturbed by the temptation to take a university degree/diploma for the purpose of professional advancement. While the dangers had all been pointed out, Oxford intellectuals still pursued the scheme eagerly, if not recklessly.

In 1910, a sub-committee was appointed by the OUTCC to consider scholarships for studying at Oxford. However, its report which recommended securing three scholarships for Rochdale and Longton classes was soon shelved because the Rochdale class explicitly opposed the proposal 'on the ground that the offer of one or two would introduce an unhealthy element of rivalry into the class'.<sup>126</sup> Likewise, in the above-mentioned 1911 report by Turner, he carefully noted the general animosity among workers towards the scholarship plan. The scholarship proposal was criticised as a threat to working-class solidarity on the one hand, and a betrayal of the original aim of the tutorial classes on the other. First, workers preferred 'something for the whole class' to picking out the talented few; especially, they doubted that workers who received such an education at Oxford would ever go back to the social environment from which they had come.<sup>127</sup> The limited offers were regarded as patronising and, as a student put it, 'we absolutely refuse their offer, thanking them for nothing'.<sup>128</sup> Second, workers pointed out the incongruity between the scholarship proposal and the Idealist vision. The proposal was regarded as a violation of the democratic or labour-oriented principle of the tutorial classes, as the scholarship scheme was 'not bringing the Universities to the people, which [was] the Tutorial Class principle ... [but] taking the people to the Universities'.<sup>129</sup> In a more belligerent tone,

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<sup>125</sup> The CJAC's Memo on 'The Tutorial Class Movement', May 1919, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/1/part 1, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> OUTCC Minutes, May 23 1910, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>127</sup> 'Professor H. H. Turner's report on his visit to the Longton and Rochdale classes', p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

another student argued that the scheme 'is thin end of wedge [sic] for democratizing universities. If so, take it out! Will kill the WEA! When we go let us go as a right; and our first business is to education [sic] public opinion so that it may recognise this right'; what is worse, 'it would attract pot hunters—men aiming at the scholarships'.<sup>130</sup> With a deep sense of labour solidarity, the students refused to compromise the Idealist spirit.

Moreover, the scholarship proposal was perceived to be flawed in terms of the financial difficulties and staff shortage in the existing tutorial class system. As MacTavish told Tawney, he was not sorry about students' indifference towards scholarships because 'it relieves the financial strain' and there were greater needs to facilitate individual tuition for students, to secure more books for use, and to strengthen the programme of summer schools.<sup>131</sup>

Notwithstanding suspicions and practical obstacles, the desire to showcase the achievement of the tutorial classes and the expectation that worker-students could transform Oxford were so strong that considerable effort from Oxford's side kept going into the scholarship scheme. In seeking to eliminate labour's animosity, a report, submitted by Turner, Smith, and Lindsay to the Oxford Committee in 1912, suggested

That while as a rule the general feeling among the Classes was that it would not be advisable to take isolated students and bring them up to the University for two or three years' course, yet if such students went up to the University with the idea of becoming fully-qualified Tutorial Class teachers, then the objections in this case would not hold good.<sup>132</sup>

If the scholarship students were all trained to become tutors in the movement, the allegation that Oxford took the talented few away from the working classes could be refuted. Moreover, to recruit tutors from the ranks of labour students was also desirable in terms that the growing adult education movement, especially in the Potteries, would soon need more tutors.<sup>133</sup> As such, the scholarship programme was transformed into a scheme

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>131</sup> J. M. Mactavish to R. H. Tawney, Nov 20 1910, R. H. Tawney Papers, LSE, Vyvyan/29.

<sup>132</sup> OUTCC Minutes, May 18 1912, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>133</sup> 'WEA Memorandum on the Admission of Tutorial Class Students to Universities, private and confidential and for use at the Adjourned Annual Meeting to be held at Derby on Sat, May 16<sup>th</sup> 1914', WEA Archive, Central/4/2/2/12, p. 3.

‘to provide opportunities of University training for such students, with a view to their ultimately becoming fully-qualified Tutors’.<sup>134</sup>

Probably anticipating labour resistance, after 1913, the campaign for scholarships to Oxford was stepped up by the Longton class, though it was apparent that this move was prompted by the OUTCC through the influence of Tawney, the class tutor. In May 1913, a memorandum on Oxford scholarship was presented to the committee by Tawney, Henry Jenkins, the class secretary, and Albert Emery, a potter’s thrower who was to be one of the first two awardees of the proposed scholarship scheme. Except for minor corrections, the memorandum was generally endorsed by the committee.

In a nutshell, the memorandum was an effort to ‘Idealise’ the scholarship scheme and to appease labour’s suspicion that scholarships would be used as a means for individuals’ professional furtherance. First, the scholarship scheme was asserted to be solely for the purpose of tutorial class teacher training.<sup>135</sup> Thus it would benefit the WEA and the working classes as a whole rather than a few gifted individuals. Likewise, the candidates were expected to take the Diploma in Economics and Political Science instead of degree courses, for the former was more relevant to their future intended duties in workers’ education.<sup>136</sup> Second, the memorandum required that the selection of candidates, who had to have studied in a tutorial class for at least three years, ‘be made only upon the joint recommendation of the Tutorial Class to which he belongs and the Class Tutor’.<sup>137</sup> As Mansbridge explained in his book, *University Tutorial Classes*, published also in 1913, ‘a student, sent to Oxford by a strong group of students looking to him to come back a finer, nobler, better man, more full of care and affection for his own people, will probably remain true to the cause. It will be difficult for him to break loose’.<sup>138</sup> The democratic selection process gave expression to labour solidarity and the corporate spirit. Third, the successful candidates should be fully-funded to reside in Oxford for no less than two years to avoid

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<sup>134</sup> ‘Some Suggestions for the Further Development of Tutorial Class Organization’, July 1912, *OUTCC Copies of Special Reports and Memoranda, 1911-15*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/1.

<sup>135</sup> ‘Extract from Minutes of the Oxford University Tutorial Classes Committee, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1913’, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187, p. 1.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> The scheme was not limited to manual-worker students, for, as it argued, ‘The danger that persons would use the facilities for professional advantage is sufficiently guarded against by the rule that students must be selected by the Classes’. ‘Extract from Minutes of the Oxford University Tutorial Classes Committee, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1913’, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 98.

‘excessive specialisation’ and to undertake a broader horizon of studies including learning through collegiate life.<sup>139</sup> Finally, as Mansbridge added in his book, worker-students would make university education ‘more complete’. In an Idealist tone, he argued that ‘It would ... greatly enhance the value of a University course if men who have grappled with life did move freely amongst young men. Misunderstandings would vanish, the pursuit of knowledge would rise to a plane removed from prizes and degrees’.<sup>140</sup>

However, the implementation of the scheme was not as Idealist as the memorandum and Mansbridge contended. Poor communications first hampered the alleged democratic support of the proposal. Surprisingly, the WEA had not been informed of the matter until August 1913 when the two candidates put forward by the Longton class had been interviewed by Oxford. Before then, all the manoeuvres seem to have been carried out between the Longton class and the Oxford Committee through the mediation of Tawney and Cartwright, who was now a secretary to the OUTCC. Although Mansbridge was well aware of the plan, his visit to Australia starting in July prevented him from being a negotiator between Oxford and the WEA. Therefore, when the news reached the WEA in August, it must have shocked Temple. The WEA President, who had left Oxford and became headmaster of Repton School, was always cautious about labour’s suspicions against Oxford. Even though Temple immediately called for a special secretaries’ meeting to consider the scholarship scheme, Oxford’s arbitrary move inevitably annoyed the representatives of the workers.<sup>141</sup> At the conference, E. J. Hookway—Secretary to WEA North-Western District and a Welsh worker who had influence on his labour comrades—contended that, without any firm guarantee, the scheme could not but drive the students away from the labour movement.<sup>142</sup> Trying to defend Oxford’s policy and to alleviate labour’s suspicion at the same time, Temple could only assure his labour comrades that the Longton case was an ‘exceptional’ and ‘purely experimental’ one.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> ‘Extract from Minutes of the Oxford University Tutorial Classes Committee, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1913’, p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 126.

<sup>141</sup> ‘WEA Notes on specially convened secretaries’ meeting held at Oxford on Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1913’, pp.1-2. Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187.

<sup>142</sup> Hookway was one of the earliest WEA activists from the labour side, but his outspoken criticism of WEA national policy created increased tension between his District and the Central Office, which might account for his leaving the WEA to take a post in the Labour Party in 1918. See Norman Wyld to Albert Mansbridge, March 10<sup>th</sup> 1916, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65221, fols. 20-22; ‘E. J. Hookway’, *North-Western District Supplement to The Highway*, Feb 1936, pp. iii-iv; *WEA Annual Report*, 1936, p. 56.

<sup>143</sup> ‘WEA notes on specially convened secretaries’ meeting held at Oxford on Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1913’. Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187, pp. 1-3.

The subsequent fulfilment of the scheme largely deviated from the Idealist aspiration. The first two scholarship awardees, Albert Emery and Miss Maud A. Griffiths, the former a potter's thrower and the latter an elementary school teacher, were recommended by their interviewer, A. L. Smith, to study for a degree in Modern History, instead of attending a diploma course.<sup>144</sup> Arguably, Smith was eager to see worker-students being trained by the Honour School of Modern History, where he took a dominant role. However, he was clearly over-optimistic about the abilities of the two and made a troublesome and impractical suggestion (see below). Writing to Cartwright, Tawney showed his anger towards such a reckless move by Oxford: 'Surely it is absurd waste of time, and leads [Emery] from his main object which is to prepare for teaching classes. It is a pity the Oxford people do not consult one before doing the sort of thing. If such a plan is criticised (as it will be) I shall have to defend it; and I can't do so'.<sup>145</sup> Certainly, the arrangement was not only impractical, but also harmful to the Idealist prospect that Oxford scholarships were to benefit the movement as a whole. As Tawney later complained to Smith:

[The scholarship scheme] would be fatal, not only to the idea of students going to a university, but to the tutorial classes, if it was felt that students went up in order to get on. That is the danger at our end, and that is the criticism we have to meet. I am a little afraid ... if one of the first students take a degree, it should lead to the whole movement being prejudiced in the eyes of our (WEA) members and working people generally.<sup>146</sup>

Although Tawney proposed to postpone the scheme and to prevent publicity, matters were too advanced to be stopped.<sup>147</sup> Tawney could do nothing else but compromise, and

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<sup>144</sup> 'Report on University Scholarships held by Tutorial Class Students', Nov 1916, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/2.

<sup>145</sup> R. H. Tawney to E. S. Cartwright, Sep 15 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187.

<sup>146</sup> R. H. Tawney to A. L. Smith, Sep 19 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187. Underline in original.

<sup>147</sup> R. H. Tawney to E. S. Cartwright, Sep 25 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187; R. H. Tawney to E. S. Cartwright, Sep 27 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187.

pinned all the hopes on both the students 'refut[ing] all our critics by showing that they can get the best out of Oxford and remain working people'.<sup>148</sup>

In October 1913, Emery and Griffiths began their study at Oxford, admitted by Balliol and St Hilda's Hall respectively, with the aim of a period of three years training.<sup>149</sup> Tawney's worries soon came to fruition: both of them were not even able to pass the Oxford Higher Local Examination in two languages to take the Honours School in Modern History.<sup>150</sup> After a few months' trial, Emery was advised to follow up the work of the Honours History School without attempting the degree,<sup>151</sup> whereas Griffiths, who struggled with the language tests for two years in vain, finally secured a Diploma in Economics and Political Science (with distinction).<sup>152</sup>

The subsequent careers of the scholarship students were not exempt from criticism either. Emery was a perfect example of scholarship students who became prominent tutorial class tutors after finishing their study at Oxford.<sup>153</sup> But Griffiths' case was far from satisfactory. She did not obtain work as a tutor 'allegedly' because the First World War had reduced the opportunities; instead, she took a position at Cadbury's 'as a regular member of the staff'.<sup>154</sup> Although a report on her mentioned her involvement in the educational project for Cadbury's employees, there was no evidence indicating her return to the WEA movement.<sup>155</sup> The case of Griffiths confirmed workers' worries that a university education for professional qualifications could deprive the labour movement of its ablest members—which would threaten the realisation of the Idealist goal of raising the working classes as a whole. As we shall see in the second part of this thesis, problems arose from the ambiguous positioning of the tutorial class would continue to trouble the movement during the interwar period.

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<sup>148</sup> R. H. Tawney to E. S. Cartwright, Sep 28 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187.

<sup>149</sup> A. D. Lindsay, 'Statement as to the bringing to the University of students from the Longton class for training as teachers', Oct 1913, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/187.

<sup>150</sup> To take an honours degree, the candidate had to pass exams in Arithmetic, Algebra, two languages. Emery chose Latin and Greek, while Griffiths Latin and French.

<sup>151</sup> 'Report on University Scholarships Held by Tutorial Class Students', Nov 1916, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/2, pp. 7-9

<sup>152</sup> 'Report on University Scholarships Held by Tutorial Class Students', Nov 1916, pp. 10-1

<sup>153</sup> 'Report on University Scholarships Held by Tutorial Class Students', Nov 1916, pp. 7-9.

<sup>154</sup> The allegation was questionable because the Oxford committee reported a difficulty in recruiting new tutors for the session 1917-18. OUTCC Class Report, 1917-18, pp. 2-4.

<sup>155</sup> 'Report on University Scholarships Held by Tutorial Class Students', Nov 1916, pp. 12-3.

### ***State, Voluntarism and Democratic Control***

Idealists welcomed state action in so far as the latter was conducive to the self-realisation of the citizens. Thus, WEA leaders assigned the state a major role in promoting both the tutorial programme and education reform. However, in either case, the presence of the state turned out to be a potential threat to the voluntary and democratic principles that were the core values of the movement.

This became evident in several ways. First of all, state funds had been an important financial source for the tutorial classes from the very beginning.<sup>156</sup> In 1909 an independent national committee, the Central Joint Advisory Committee on Tutorial Classes (henceforward, CJAC), had been founded,<sup>157</sup> whose major function was to 'place the financial claims of tutorial classes with due weight before the Board of Education, and other national sources of revenue'.<sup>158</sup> Thanks to the CJAC's effort, from 1909, the tutorial classes had received a higher rate of grants (than other private adult education providers, including technical schools), on the basis that 'the standard of work must correspond with that required for university degrees in honours'.<sup>159</sup>

Due to the connections of the university intellectuals, a mutual understanding existed between the CJAC and the Board of Education, and the latter was by and large willing to cater for the special needs of the burgeoning movement. For instance, before 1913, under 'Regulations for Further Education', the governmental grant was paid on the basis of students' hours of attendance. The regulation, however, was rather tough, given the workers' poor working conditions and systematic overtime.<sup>160</sup> In 1913 the Board

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<sup>156</sup> For the finance of the tutorial programme in its early years, see S. G. Raybould, *The English Universities and Adult Education* (London, 1951), pp. 92-4.

<sup>157</sup> 'Constitution of the Central Joint Advisory Committee on Tutorial Classes', 1909, WEA Archive, CJAC 1/2/1/1. But we should not exaggerate the independence of the CJAC from the WEA. For the former's first secretary and treasurer were Mansbridge and Temple respectively, and the two bodies had shared the same premises until the very end of the Committee in the 1950s.

<sup>158</sup> *CJAC Annual Report*, 1915-16, p.5. The CJAC also co-ordinated cross-district matters such as book circulations, the transference of students from one area to another, the welfare of tutorial class tutors, and the circulation of information about tutor-candidates and job vacancies. CJAC Main Minutes, Feb 26<sup>th</sup> 1910, WEA Archive, CJAC 1/2/1/1.

<sup>159</sup> 'Extract from the Board of Education Regulations for Further Education in England and Wales from 1 August, 1908 to 31 July, 1909' in Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, appendix II, p. 137. See also *Special Report on Certain Tutorial Classes in Connection with the Workers' Educational Association*, by Inspectors J. W. Headlam and L. T. Hobhouse, Board of Education, Special Reports, No. 2, 1910, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/169/3.

<sup>160</sup> E. S. Cartwright [class secretary], 'Longton Tutorial Class—Report on the work of the past session and also since', Apr 10<sup>th</sup> 1911, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/136/6.

responded to the demand of the CJAC by introducing special 'Regulations on University Tutorial Classes in England and Wales', which set up the principle of the 'block grants'—the Board covered half of the tutor's fee or a fixed maximum sum of £30 per class (whichever was the less) on condition that the class reached 'the standard of University work in Honours' and satisfied certain requirements concerning attendance and essay work.<sup>161</sup> (From 1917, the annual grant to a tutorial classes was further raised to a maximum of £45.<sup>162</sup>) Though the new regulations entailed new difficulties,<sup>163</sup> WEA leaders generally considered them more feasible.<sup>164</sup>

Nevertheless, though the label 'the university standards' attached to the programme secured more generous public grant, it resulted in a problematic focus on essay work, which students were asked to hand in every fortnight. A consensus had been reached between the state and the WEA that the tutorial classes must claim to have achieved university standards by producing sufficient and qualified essays. The problems ensuing with this approach were two-fold. Firstly, it was questionable if essay work really represented university education, whose strength, as WEA Idealists recognised, particularly lay in tutorials and collegiate life. Secondly, it was even more questionable to make written work the main focus of a course that aimed to cultivate active citizenship. Written work could show students intellectual understanding and abilities in expression, but according to the original Idealist project, the education desired was not only about understanding: it was also about civic virtues and actions. The latter aspects were simply ignored by state bureaucrats. The consequence was that essay work had become not so much a means as an end to the courses.

Because of the link between essays and state grants, the amount of students' written work had been of great concern to the class organiser. On the development of the first WEA tutorial class (in Rochdale), what troubled Mansbridge was not students' learning,

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<sup>161</sup> 'Memorandum on Regulations for University Tutorial Classes, 1913-14, with special reference to organising classes', July 1913, *OUTCC Copies of Special Reports and Memoranda, 1911-15*, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/57/1. In 1913, Oxford paid tutors £80 per class or £400 per annum for full work. Cambridge paid £72 a class and London £60, whereas other Universities paid less than £60. Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 116.

<sup>162</sup> Fisher to Sir Henry Miers, 3 Nov 1917, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65197, fol. 33; *CJAC Annual Report, 1916-17*, p.7.

<sup>163</sup> Before the implement of the 1913 regulations, the drop in the number of students would not cause serious financial loss, whereas under the new regulations, this could lead to a loss of the entire block grant.

<sup>164</sup> Albert Mansbridge, 'Memorandum on Board of Education Grant to University Tutorial Classes since the Inception of the Tutorial Class Movement', 1916, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65197, fols. 14-7.

nor their spirit, but the number of the essays they submitted, for failing the latter target would put the WEA in financial difficulties.<sup>165</sup>

As Zimmern warned Mansbridge privately, 'the spirit of routine and academicism will kill us if we do not constantly strike fresh sources of inspiration'.<sup>166</sup> Zimmern's caution was not groundless. In fact, several tutors had pointed out the absurdity of estimating the worth of a class by the sum of submitted essays. As Cuthbertson put it bluntly, '[t]o measure achievement by penmanship or to estimate financial grants by the number of essays written is mere folly'.<sup>167</sup> He revealed that the written work was largely responsible for voluntary absence of the students, who 'would have been glad to attend the classes with regularity'.<sup>168</sup> Certainly, the process of forging mutual learning and cross-class fellowship was highly spontaneous and could not be evaluated by paper work. In seeking to relax the Board's regulation on written work, Tawney argued that tutors should have discretion over deciding how many essays a given student should write by taking into account the person's public duties.<sup>169</sup>

Nonetheless, 'to maintain a university standard' seemed to be such a crucial element in distinguishing tutorial classes from other educational initiatives that the legitimacy of essay work remained unchallengeable. At a 1912 meeting of tutorial class tutors, a motion was raised to grant tutors power over exempting students from writing essays. As Evan Hughes, a tutor at Liverpool, explained, it was a pity for tutorial classes to lose a great many night-workers, who, while able to attend regularly and take a great part in discussion, could not find time to do written work.<sup>170</sup> However, the motion did not draw support from leading tutors and WEA managers. Henry Clay argued that 'a strict rule [on essay work] was very useful',<sup>171</sup> whereas H. H. Turner maintained that 'it would be more valuable to the

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<sup>165</sup> Albert Mansbridge to R. H. Tawney, OUTCC Correspondence, Mar 11<sup>th</sup> 1909, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE/3/93.

<sup>166</sup> A. E. Zimmern to Albert Mansbridge, 25<sup>th</sup> Aug 1915, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65257 A, fols. 48-53.

<sup>167</sup> 'F. W. Kolthammer's Notes on Causes of Leaving Tutorial Classes (at Oldham, Chesterfield, Glossop, and Huddersfield), OUTCC Minutes, Jan 29<sup>th</sup> 1910, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>168</sup> 'FW Kolthammer's Notes on Causes of Leaving Tutorial Classes (at Oldham, Chesterfield, Glossop, and Huddersfield), OUTCC Minutes, Jan 29<sup>th</sup> 1910, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1.

<sup>169</sup> 'Report of the Conference of Tutors held in Trinity College, Cambridge, on Saturday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1911', Henry Clay Papers, Box 10, pp. 6-7.

<sup>170</sup> 'CJAC's Unconfirmed Report of the Conference of Tutors, held in New College, Oxford, on Saturday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1912', [1912], Henry Clay Papers Box 10, p. 13.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

movement ... [to keep] good men out of the classes in order to maintain the high standard'.<sup>172</sup> Mansbridge's response to the motion was even harsher: it was better to have 'a good many slack men ... kept out ... [for] it was extremely difficult when a student had once tasted the imagined delights of not writing essays to get him to do them'.<sup>173</sup>

Mansbridge's criticism was utterly unfair, for students' failure in meeting the requirement of essay work was not necessarily due to 'slackness'. In fact, sometimes their 'excuses' were legitimate. For instance, as we have seen, in the early tutorial classes, the students were often simultaneously involved in many branches of the labour movement and were keen to deliver to their comrades what they had learned in class. But even in such cases, tutors tended to downplay extension work to ensure the number of submitted essays. Take Cuthbertson as an example. Even though he was critical of the regulations on essay work, he was unsympathetic toward extension work when it threatened the completion of essay work. As he remarked, even though the students extension work was noble and provided 'complete satisfaction of the [local educational] demands', this effort was not 'justified in exacting... the quota of class essays' and thus should be stopped.<sup>174</sup>

Obviously, under the spell of the university standards, essay work was considered more important than students' voluntary service, which was unmistakably the essence of good citizenship and one of the purported objectives of the movement. This reveals how professionalism gained more influence on the movement through government pressure. Guided by the ethics of professionalism, state bureaucrats assumed that the merit of an educational initiative was to be judged by the extent to which the students acquired a systematic way of thinking and a 'scientific' method to understand practical problems. Voluntary and spontaneous work done by the students, which was by nature immeasurable and failed to be proof of the academic achievement of the programme, was thus increasingly to be marginalised.

The WEA scheme of educational reconstruction revealed another aspect of the problematic role of the state in the Idealist project. As we have seen, the 1916 WEA scheme

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>173</sup> Tawney's response to the motion was tricky. Though he had demanded a relaxation of the number of essays on the similar occasion in 1911 (as mentioned in the last paragraph), he was now in line with Mansbridge to reject the motion. 'CJAC's Unconfirmed Report of the Conference of Tutors, held in New College, Oxford, on Saturday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1912'[1912], Henry Clay Papers Box 10, pp. 13-5.

<sup>174</sup> 'General Remarks by F. W. Cuthbertson', OUTCC Class Report, 1916-17, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/4, pp. 42-3.

of education reform was, in essence, a campaign for a state-driven system of education, or at least 'an increase of the central control over the policy of the Local Educational Authorities'.<sup>175</sup> Even though WEA leaders maintained the reciprocal relationship between state-funded education and an educated democracy, several members of the Association had pointed out tensions between the intended national system of education and the democratic principle.

To begin with, there was a long-standing aversion to the state in the labour movement.<sup>176</sup> When the WEA presented its educational scheme to workers, it inevitably aroused the latter's opposition. For example, in defence of individual liberty, Henry Bevan, the Secretary of West Ham Tutorial Class, deplored the state's power over education. As he put it,

If there are bad cases of bad parents it does not justify all children being regarded as children of the State. The State will always think of itself to the disadvantage of the individual. Therefore this question goes right to the root of the whole controversy as to which should be supreme, the State or the individual. Here, again, the WEA should not take official sides.<sup>177</sup>

Indeed, a different reading of the top-down coercive power could lead to a different understanding of the relationship between state and democratic society.

If Bevan's opposition was somewhat instinctive, criticisms from the intellectuals' side revealed the tension between state-driven education and democracy in a more elaborated way. As a correspondent of *The Highway* warned, the psychological breakthrough had 'placed in the hands of governments powers of influencing and manufacturing opinion, of checking or frustrating and sublimating the popular will ... *scientifically by experts*'. Hence, educational reform could unintentionally 'arm the ruling classes with education as *an instrument of government*' and impair democracy.<sup>178</sup> This was an alert echoed by Sybilla

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<sup>175</sup> 'Report of National Conference on Educational Reconstruction', WEA Pamphlet, 1917, p. 50.

<sup>176</sup> See H. Pelling, 'The Working Class and the Origins of the Welfare State' in id., *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 1-18; Pat Thane, 'The Working Class and State "Welfare" in Britain', *Historical Journal*, 27:4 (1984), pp. 877-900.

<sup>177</sup> Henry Bevan (Hon. Secretary of West Ham Tutorial Class), '[Corr.] What Labour Wants from Education', *Highway*, 9:102, Mar 1917, pp. 112-3.

<sup>178</sup> H. A. Grimshaw, '[Corr.] Education and Government', *Highway*, 10:109, Oct 1917, p. 14.

Branford, a former member of WEA Central Council. Worrying about the WEA's support for 'an ever-increasing measure of State control', she asked for 'leav[ing] [educational] control to localities and associations'.<sup>179</sup> Another correspondent, under the pseudonym of 'A.E.', elaborated on this point further. He/she argued that the WEA's insistence on making compulsory the permissive clauses in the Bill was a proposal 'to catch the majority asleep and coerce it'. 'A.E.' made a case that

to force the process by law is surely not democratic, but the very negation of 'trusting the people'. Mr Fisher, in effect, refers the point to the ratepayers, who in each district can have exactly what degree of educational efficiency they choose ... Too often we talk as if the State had inherited the quality of the Deity as defined by Matthew Arnold, and were 'Something other than ourselves that makes for righteousness'. But it is not so; we are the State ourselves, and the great responsibility to-day is ours, and no one else's.<sup>180</sup>

Indeed, the Idealist assumption that coercive, bureaucratic, and professional power was in harmony with voluntary action and moral responsibility was questionable in practice. The tension between the positive role of the state and democratic values was the second challenge to the WEA's initiatives.

### ***The Relationship between Dons and Workers: Fraternal or Patronising?***

If, according to 'A.E.', the state was distrustful because 'something other than ourselves could not make for righteousness', then it was senseless to count on the judgment of the cultural elites. It is natural that university dons and grassroots workers did not see eye to eye on every issue. The mutual learning approach and cross-class fellowship were tarnished when intellectuals' interpretation of education and knowledge was understood as patronising by workers. Although there was never a serious crisis of the co-operation between intellectuals and workers in the early WEA, disagreements over education did spark tensions between the two sides from time to time.

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<sup>179</sup> Sybilla Branford, '[Corr.] Reform in Education', *Highway*, 10:110, Nov 1917, pp. 30-1.

<sup>180</sup> A.E., '[Corr.] Education Bill', *Highway*, 10:111, Dec 1917, pp. 42-3.

To start with, it is not surprising that the exponents of the professional ideal tended to arouse animosity among the rank and file. This can be exemplified by the controversy between Edith Morley, an early academic supporter of the WEA, and G. H. Thompson, a self-educated Yorkshire worker whose activism and eloquence made him one of the most prominent working-class members of the WEA (as we shall see in the following chapters). In an article published in *The Highway*, Morley, the Fabian and suffragette who was a staunch advocate of professional women and herself the first woman professor at British higher education institutes, brought home the professional ideal of university, and implied that university education should not be extended at the expense of the principle of selection by merit.<sup>181</sup> While modern universities were well justified to establish 'agricultural, engineering, commercial and technical departments' in order to serve the national interest, Morley argued, 'the door [could not] be open to everyone'. It was considered a harm to social efficiency if 'the unfit should be forced through a University curriculum'. She insisted that '[a] true University must be aristocratic in that it caters for the intellectually select'.<sup>182</sup>

Morley's elitism drew a stern rebuke from Thompson, who disparaged the idea of selection by intellect as 'hoary' and 'detestable'. Thompson maintained that in the name of serving the national interest, university liberal education should not be monopolised by 'the intellectually select' or those who aimed at professional careers, but should be open to those who displayed 'the spirit of service'. By this criterion, 'the future trade union leader, co-operative society, or workers' educational enthusiasts' should be offered a place in university.<sup>183</sup> Morley's assumption that professionals were more functional than manual workers and thus universities must cater for the former clashed with both Thompson's demand for equality and solidarity.

Yet, the tensions were not just between professional scholars and Idealist workers. Idealist intellectuals' passionate messages were sometimes castigated as condescending.<sup>184</sup> An illustrative example was the controversy arising from Temple's 1916 presidential address to the Educational Science Section of the British Association (later

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<sup>181</sup> For Morley's professional ideal, see Edith Morley, *Women Workers in Seven Professions* (1914).

<sup>182</sup> Edith J. Morley, 'The WEA and the University Ideal', *Highway*, 7:78, Mar 1915, pp. 97-8.

<sup>183</sup> G. H. Thompson, '[Corr.] The WEA and the University', *Highway*, 7:80, May 1915, pp. 139-40; G. H. Thompson, '[Corr.] The WEA and the University', *Highway*, 7:82, July 1915, p. 176.

<sup>184</sup> See also Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, pp. 262-3.

published in *The Highway*).<sup>185</sup> In the speech, Temple argued that there were only two types of educational systems: 'One is the religious, the other is the atheistic'. 'Faith in God' was the basis of the education for 'Goodness, Truth, and Beauty' and it was implausible to leave open the question of God. Further, he proposed that, in order to achieve such a religious education, 'the training college [be] filled with and inspired by living faith', namely, the instruction in theology.<sup>186</sup> Though he did not represent the WEA when delivering this speech, his contention prompted misgivings among both secular academics and recalcitrant workers.

Graham Wallas, the prominent New Liberal who maintained a loose but continuous relationship with the WEA, warned that this arbitrary interpretation of education was by no means conducive to religious sincerity. Instead, the policy to guide the religious education in the training college would only 'destroy liberty of teaching' and give rise to a 'heresy-hunt', which 'will lower the whole intellectual and spiritual vitality of English working-class education'.<sup>187</sup>

A more severe attack came from a working-class correspondent, J. Fothergill. He dismissed such Idealist dispositions as 'the dread portals of authority'. For him, truth, goodness and beauty were 'purely relative', and Temple's theory of religion was 'not sufficiently capable of proof to justify its being included in any curriculum'.<sup>188</sup> He further pleaded with Temple 'to keep his ideas on this matter for the pulpit' and to 'use his great powers in assisting the working classes to develop themselves in order to choose intelligently among the maze of theories in the world'.<sup>189</sup> This reaction again pointed to internal differences in the WEA between Idealist intellectuals and other WEA members in their respective attitudes towards education reform. The Idealist discourse on educational reconstruction had produced unrest within the association, among secular social scientists, on the one hand, and self-conscious workers, on the other. The latter criticisms were especially painful to an association with the aim of giving voice to grassroots workers.

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<sup>185</sup> William Temple, 'Education in England [Extracts from the Presidential Address to the Educational Science Section of the British Association, 1916]', *Highway*, 9:97-9, Oct-Dec 1916, pp. 4-6, 21-3, 43-7.

<sup>186</sup> Temple, 'Education in England', *Highway*, 9:99, Dec 1916, pp. 43-7.

<sup>187</sup> Graham Wallas, '[corr.] Education in England', *Highway*, 9:100, Jan 1917, pp. 76-7.

<sup>188</sup> J. Fothergill, '[corr.] Education in England' *Highway*, 9:101, Feb 1917, p. 95.

<sup>189</sup> Fothergill, '[corr.] Education in England', p. 95. My italics.

However, the official discourse of the WEA, which imbibed Idealist faith, did not provide persuasive answers in response to workers' doubts. As another correspondent observed in late 1917, '[t]he WEA quite rightly directs many of its efforts to securing increased facilities for higher education [i.e. secondary education], but it needs also to direct no small part of its energy to convincing the worker of the value of that education'.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, the official WEA tended to impute the working class's indifference to the 'materialistic conception of working class struggles' or the 'materialistic conception of rights',<sup>191</sup> thereby ignoring the divergence between Idealist intellectuals and workers concerning the content of education. Notwithstanding the ideals of mutual learning and democratic control over education, it was hard for the Idealists to escape the criticism that they peremptorily defined what self-realisation meant and wherein people's positive freedom lay. Wherever agreements could not be reached, the democratic principle of teaching and learning could lapse into platitudes. The discrepancy between high-minded Idealists and self-asserting workers somehow reflected the self-contradiction of the Idealist project, at the bottom of which, as Maurice Cowling puts it, was an 'anti-elitist elitism'.<sup>192</sup>

At any rate, the consensus about an Idealist educational reform among WEA members was not as strong as the WEA officials alleged. The war boosted enthusiasm about educational reform. Yet the leaders and the rank and file of the WEA were not always united on how to construct the desired educational highway, a question left to be solved during the interwar period.

## Conclusion.

The first decade of WEA tutorial classes and the educational campaign signalled a significant step towards the practical realisation of the visions of Idealist philosophy, but it also exposed flaws of the project. Of course, external obstacles, such as material shortage

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<sup>190</sup> V. T. C. '[corr.] Secondary Education', *Highway*, 10:109, Oct 1917, p. 13.

<sup>191</sup> 'Editorial', *Highway*, 8:96, Sep 1916, pp. 206-7.

<sup>192</sup> Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, vol. iii, p. 129. See also Julia Stapleton, 'Political Thought, Elites and the State in Modern Britain', *Historical Journal*, 42:1 (1999), pp. 251-68; Matthew Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture, c. 1930-1950' in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 231-47.

and predominant economic concerns, thwarted the expansion of tutorial classes and limited the achievement of the WEA in demanding a new education act guided by Idealism. But, more importantly, internal strains emerged from the early practice of the WEA. Due to the problematic combination of Idealism and professionalism in its scheme, the WEA was ambivalent about the question as to whether the tutorial programme should be one of its own right or serve as a channel to university education; there was no formal discussion on the identified threat of the state to voluntarism and the democratic principle, and disagreements between intellectuals and workers on teaching and learning indicated that the mutual understanding was not as profound as suggested by the WEA. As Zimmern summed up in a pessimistic tone to Mansbridge in 1915,

We are not yet a working-class University, our students are comparatively few of them doing Honours work ... We have secured rather the names than the real support of most of our affiliated working-class bodies. We are not really democratic either in our Central [Council], our Districts or our Branches, even our rank and file are not yet anything like 'an educated democracy'.<sup>193</sup>

All of these problems indicated that the reality was more complicated than the designers of the programme understood; they took for granted cordial co-operation between different stakeholders in pursuit of the common ideal. To the contrary, academics and state bureaucrats could be unsympathetic to the ideal of democratic participation and working-class solidarity, whereas some workers understood the vague concept of 'educated democracy' in a way significantly different from their tutors. As we will see, dealing with these discrepancies formed the main theme of the post-1918 history of the WEA.

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<sup>193</sup> Zimmern to Mansbridge, Aug 25<sup>th</sup> 1915, fols. 48-53.

## PART II

# The Professionalisation and Democratisation of the WEA Tutorial Programme, 1919-39.

The end of the First World War marked a new phase of the tutorial class movement. There is a great degree of exaggeration in A. H. Halsey's assertion that '[t]he extension movement so brilliantly led in Rochdale by R. H. Tawney was largely displaced by the provincial university colleges after 1918'.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it was during the interwar period that the movement began to be institutionalised and embarked on massive expansion. According to official statistics, while there were 156 WEA tutorial classes in Britain in 1918-19, the number had risen to 779 by the year 1938-39, in addition to some 2,440 classes with a less exacting character.<sup>2</sup> The increase in the number of WEA students (in all classes) was even more remarkable, from 5,665 in 1918-19 to 61,719 in 1938-39.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, at least in terms of numbers, there is no indication that the movement declined before 1939. Nevertheless, it is true that the quantitative growth did not mean the removal of the difficulties that had cropped up in the early practice of the WEA.

The second part of the thesis is an attempt to explore how the WEA, as the tutorial programme was expanding, grappled with the three-fold tensions within the movement, namely, the ambiguous relationship between university education and tutorial class teaching, the conflict between state intervention and the voluntary spirit, and the tension between Idealists' preconceptions about education and workers' demand for self-determination. As I will argue, the interwar WEA adopted two strategies to substantiate the Idealist project. On the one hand, it was proposed to professionalise/institutionalise

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<sup>1</sup> A. H. Halsey, *Decline of Donnish Dominion: The British Academic Professions in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1995), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1922, p. 140; *WEA Annual Report*, 1939, p. 69. Here, the category of 'WEA tutorial classes' includes not only three-year tutorial classes but also 'advanced tutorial classes'. The less exacting classes include 'university sessional courses', 'university extension lectures', 'one-year classes', 'terminal courses' and 'short-term courses'. For the expansion of WEA short classes, see below Chapter Five.

<sup>3</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1922, pp. 140-1; *WEA Annual Report*, 1939, p. 69.

the tutorial programme so that the WEA could more efficiently and sustainably provide workers with a kind of higher education equivalent to that offered in universities. On the other hand, a great deal of effort went into democratising the programme, the idea being that the more genuinely the programme reflected workers' educational demands, the more workers it would attract.

Previous studies on the interwar WEA have identified these two strands of initiatives behind the development of the tutorial programme. The interplay between the two, however, has hardly been examined and therefore historians reach conflicting conclusions on the changed nature of the programme during this period. For historians focusing on the relationship between the tutorial programme and public agencies, such as Lawrence Goldman and J. A. Blyth, the interwar period was a time when voluntarism gave way to bureaucracy. They argue that the closer co-operation between the WEA, universities and the state was at the expense of the WEA's independence.<sup>4</sup> The consequence was an expanding movement moving away from its former preoccupation with workers' education for social emancipation.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, for historians who look at the tutorial programme and its connection to organised labour, such as Mary Stocks and Bernard Jennings, the interwar period was an era when the organisation realised the principle of labour control over adult education and built up a closer co-operation between the WEA and the labour movement. As a result, during this period, '[f]rom university leadership the Association had swung over to trade-union leadership'.<sup>6</sup>

While both accounts are in a sense defensible, they clearly are not compatible. As I will show, what actually happened was that the application of the principle of democratic control was largely frustrated, firstly by clashes between the WEA and Marxist educational groups and the trade union movement's indifference to workers' education, and secondly, by its conflict with the principles of professionalism.

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<sup>4</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 191, 215-7; J. A. Blyth, *English University Adult Education 1908-1958: The Unique Tradition* (Manchester, 1983), pp. 100-1.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, pp. 273-4; Roger Fieldhouse, 'Bouts of Suspicion: Political Controversies in Adult Education, 1925-1944' in Brian Simon (ed.), *The Search for Enlightenment* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 153-172.

<sup>6</sup> Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association*, pp. 80-102; Price, *The Story of the WEA*, pp. 80-8; Bernard Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power: A Short History of the Workers' Educational Association, 1903-1978* (Hull, 1979), pp. 24-41; Brian Simon, 'The Struggle for hegemony' in id. ed., *The Search for Enlightenment*, pp. 57-64.

This part of the thesis divides into three chapters. Chapter Three argues that the principle of institutionalisation was outlined by the *1919 Final Report* of the Adult Education Committee and put into practice in early 1920s, whereas the initiatives to deepen democratic control over the tutorial programme had largely foundered by 1926. Chapter Four examines the implications of the two principles of professionalism and democracy for the teaching of the tutorial class. As I will show, as a majority of WEA tutors favoured the ‘professionalised’ teaching method, in the sense of promoting objectivity and detachedness, the social purpose of the tutorial programme—to encourage workers’ democratic participation—was generally under-emphasised. Finally, Chapter Five turns to the organisational side of the programme after 1924. By examining the institutionalisation of the tutorial programme in terms of establishing tutors’ professional status and developing a well-organised and graded system of adult learning, I suggest that the process of professionalisation significantly harmed the democratic spirit of the movement.

## Chapter Three

# 'The WEA at the Cross Roads': Institutionalisation and the Question of 'Workers' Control', c. 1919-26.

[I]t may be laid down that it is essential that the spontaneousness of the [extramural education] movement, its democratic basis, its enlistment of the enthusiasm of the volunteer, should be preserved. But the time has come for other marks of the pioneer stage, namely its precariousness, and undue reliance on unpaid work, its lack of professional stability, [to] be remedied ...<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction.

In the short term, the First World War stunted the growth of the tutorial class programme (see above 2-1). However, over the following years, the war certainly acted as a stimulus for the movement. Due to the experience of total war and the coming of universal suffrage, the first few years after 1918 saw mounting concerns of both the state and the labour movement over adult education.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the Adult Education Committee, appointed under the Reconstruction Committee (later the Ministry of Reconstruction) in 1917, published its *Final Report* in 1919 (henceforward, the *1919 Report*). As we shall see, the *1919 Report*, which was drafted largely by WEA Idealists, formulated a general theory of adult education and envisioned its institutionalisation by normalising the public support for the voluntary movement. On the other hand, the war encouraged the idea of 'workers' control' over industries and other social institutions, which had a crucial implication for the

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<sup>1</sup> A. L. Smith, 'Labour and the Universities: Extramural Education', 1923, ALS Papers II.E1/13i, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> For the increased co-operation between the state and voluntary movements in educational and welfare provisions after 1918, see Hilton, McKay, Crowson, and Mouhot, *The Politics of Expertise*, pp. 6-9; Peter Grant, 'Voluntarism and the Impact of the First World War' in Matthew Hilton and James McKay (eds.), *The Ages of Voluntarism: How We Got to the Big Society* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 27-46; Bernard Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800-1945* (London, 2004), pp. 184-90.

WEA movement. In pursuing the democratic control over the movement, the WEA launched a series of initiatives to build up closer relationship between the WEA and organised labour, especially trade unions.

This chapter traces the two-fold development of the WEA tutorial programme between 1919 and 1926. As I will show, proposals to institutionalise the programme were by and large implemented, as the first Labour government introduced the Adult Education Regulations in 1924 and universities worked to establish independent extra-mural departments. By contrast, efforts to democratise the movement were much less successful. Not only did measures of institutionalisation limit the application of the democratic principle—a trend which began to show in the early 1920s but became much clearer from the late 1920s, and which I will examine in the following two chapters. But also the attempts to connect the WEA to organised labour were largely frustrated. The fierce rivalry between the WEA and Marxist educational groups hindered the former's plan to persuade trade unions to sponsor and organise tutorial classes for their members. At the same time, the decline of the trade union movement, reaching its nadir with the 1926 General Strike ending in disaster, prevented it from carrying out further engagements in the field of adult education. Thus, standing at the 'cross roads' of institutionalisation and democratisation, the WEA showed a tendency to pursue the former instead of the latter.<sup>3</sup>

### **3-1 Framing the Movement: The 1919 Report, Extra-mural Departments, and the Adult Education Regulations of 1924.**

The *1919 Report* has widely been acknowledged as the most important document on English adult education.<sup>4</sup> Its significance lies not only in its comprehensive account of the theory and practice of adult education, but also in its vision of constructing a practical framework to sustain the voluntary initiatives by the support of public agencies, especially the state and the university. As a governmental report written by different hands, the *1919*

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'The Next Twenty-One Years', *Highway*, 16:3, Summer 1924, pp. 142-3.

<sup>4</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 204; Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, p. 267; Raybould, *The English Universities and Adult Education*, pp. 75-6; John Taylor, 'The Making of the 1919 Report' in the reprint of *The 1919 Report: The Final and Interim Reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-19* (Nottingham, 1980), p. 27.

*Report* was certainly not as systematic as 'a tight philosophical statement'.<sup>5</sup> However, as I will argue, the *Report* was in general an application of the Idealist theory of democratic education, and a deliberate intention of its authors was to address the practical difficulties encountered by the WEA after the ten-year practice of the voluntary tutorial classes.<sup>6</sup> The proposed measures to institutionalise the adult education movement, including the construction of extra-mural departments in universities and a well-designed state funding policy, both of which were soon to be fulfilled, would carry profound implications for the interwar practice of WEA tutorial classes.

The *1919 Report* was in many ways a product of the WEA movement.<sup>7</sup> The Adult Education Committee, which published three *Interim Reports* in 1918 and the *Final Report* next year, was critically influenced by WEA opinions: eleven out of twenty-one members were WEA members, including Mansbridge and Tawney.<sup>8</sup> The Committee was chaired by A. L. Smith, who, as Henry Clay put it, was 'the great ambassador for the WEA in the academic world'.<sup>9</sup> Its two secretaries were E. S. Cartwright, a former student of Tawney and then secretary to the OUTCC, and Arthur Greenwood (1880-1954), a Labour politician and former tutorial class tutor, who had just been elected as WEA Vice-President (1919-34). In fact, Smith and the Joint Secretaries, plus Tawney, formed the 'dynamo' of the Committee and were responsible for most parts of the *Report*.<sup>10</sup> It was not a coincidence that the WEA gave full endorsement to the *Report* and made efforts to increase its publicity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Harold Wiltshire, 'A General Introduction to the Report' in the reprint of *The 1919 Report: The Final and Interim Reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-19* (Nottingham, 1980), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> C.f. Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Final Report of Adult Education Committee*, Ministry of Reconstruction, Parliamentary Papers 1919, Cmd. 321, p. 209.

<sup>8</sup> Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association*, p. 78. For biographical accounts of each member of the Committee, see Taylor, 'The Making of the 1919 Report', pp. 31-3. The three *Interim Reports* dealt with specific issues related to adult education, including 'Industrial and Social Conditions', 'Education in the Army', and 'Libraries and Museums', whereas the *Final Report* was a comprehensive survey of adult education in Britain and put forward all-round policy recommendations.

<sup>9</sup> Cited by Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, 'The Making of the 1919 Report', p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> A. Greenwood, 'The Relation of the Board of Education, the Universities & the Local Educational Authorities to Adult Education', WEA Pamphlet, 1919; William Temple, 'An Important Document', *Highway* 12:3, Dec 1919, p. 44; [l.a.], 'WEA Policy and the Adult Education Committee Report', *Highway* 12:6, Mar 1920, p. 104; Arthur Greenwood, 'The Education of the Citizen; being a summary of the proposals of the Adult Education Committee prepared at the request of the Workers' Educational Association', WEA Pamphlet, 1920; 'Adult Education: Recommendations of the WEA; based on the Final Report of the Adult Education

In principle, the *1919 Report* inherited the central proposition, put forward by the *Oxford Report*, that democracy and adult education were interdependent. As Smith argued in his covering letter to the *1919 Report*, his committee assumed that

the essence of democracy being not passive but active participation by all in citizenship, education in a democratic country must aim at fitting each individual progressively not only for his personal, domestic and vocational duties, but, above all, for those duties of citizenship ... [T]he necessary conclusion is that adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there ... but that adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.<sup>12</sup>

Smith, in particular, maintained that liberal adult education for every citizen should occupy a prominent place in the post-war 'Reconstruction' plan, because, first, the implementation of universal suffrage had been on the agenda, and, second, such an education could counteract the trend of specialisation in economic activities, which led to the 'growing tyranny of machinery' and the 'increasing soullessness of much of our industrial conditions', and thus drove citizens away from civic participation.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of the report was to examine what should be taught in this programme of universal and lifelong education for citizenship, and how it could be carried out through public institutions. In this way, the scope of the *1919 Report* was broader than that of its predecessor: The new report aimed to formulate a general theory of *adult education* rather than limiting itself to *working-class education*. Also, the potential contributors to this national programme included voluntary bodies and universities, as well as central government and local authorities.

It is clear that Idealist philosophy played a great role for the authors of the *1919 Report*. In the text, the Idealist dictum—namely, that freedom/self-realisation consisted in performing one's distinct service to improving the common good—manifested in 'the twin principles of personal development and social service', which were established as the

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Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction', WEA Pamphlet, 1920. See also Albert Mansbridge, 'Organisation', in R. St. John Parry (ed.), *Cambridge Essays on Adult Education* (Cambridge, 1920), pp. 64-89.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 'Covering Letter' to The Final Report of the Adult Education Committee, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

fundamental norms of adult education. With a view to 'fit[ting] a man ... for his place as a member of [a] community', the report argued that adult education must serve the dual function of encouraging 'self-expression and cultivation of ... personal powers and interest' and of preparing citizens for their active and enlightened participation in public affairs.<sup>14</sup>

The two educational aims, the report implied, were complementary and reciprocal. As the committee's first Interim Report explained, '[t]he citizens of the country cannot fully contribute their experience or ideals to its service unless they are articulate, and possess knowledge'.<sup>15</sup> This assumption was an ingrained element of the Idealist project to disseminate the tradition of liberal education to the whole nation. As the report contended, the twin principles of adult education were 'in accordance with the better side of the traditions of the older universities', where general education for fuller personal development had 'aimed at qualifying men for the service of Church and State even more than at scholarship'. Fundamentally, it aimed to command 'general sympathy'.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, adult education was expected to be an equivalent to university education, and the adult education movement was essentially one 'to make higher education as universal as citizenship'.<sup>17</sup>

By the same token, the committee rejected the idea of 'the educational ladder' as erecting 'a small apex of highly-trained intelligence upon the basis of an uninformed and uncultivated population'.<sup>18</sup> Instead, adult education should be universal, because it was intended to 'encourag[e] every type of student to think out and state his position'.<sup>19</sup> This statement reminds us of Mansbridge's metaphor of democracy as a mosaic picture.

This approach also determined the pedagogy of adult education. Since adult education was not to cast citizens in a uniform mould but to inspire diverse views and abilities, the report took it for granted that students came to adult education with some definite point of view and it argued that it was unnecessary for adult tutors to convert students. After all,

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4; *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, p. 168.

<sup>15</sup> *Interim Report of the Adult Education Committee on Industrial and Social Conditions in Relation to Adult Education*, Ministry of Reconstruction, Parliamentary Papers 1918, Cd. 9107, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

The real danger to the national welfare is not from students pursuing their studies animated with a particular view of things, but rather from the far larger number of those who pursue no intellectual interests and have made no efforts to equip themselves for the duties of citizenship and the organised activities of the community.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the teaching and learning in adult classes, as Smith put it, must be left to 'spontaneous initiative'.<sup>21</sup> Here, the experience of the WEA had a formative influence. Adult teachers were expected to 'work in a new way, sympathetic, imaginative, resourceful, utilising local environment and history as the ground from which to start, acting as comrades and fellow students with the members studying in their classes'.<sup>22</sup>

The need of voluntary co-operation in learning sanctioned the voluntary organisation in adult education. According to the *1919 Report*, this method of 'group study', epitomised by the tutorial programme, was dependent on a corporate spirit, which could be found in voluntary bodies with a shared purpose. Also, the flexibility and activeness of the voluntary organisations would be instrumental in stimulating and ascertaining the educational needs of adult students, which could not be adequately identified by the universities or the local education authorities through their perfunctory and rigid procedure. In sum, voluntary agencies were seen to form 'the best nucleus for adult classes'.<sup>23</sup>

As to the curriculum of adult classes, the *1919 Report* drifted away from the *Oxford Report's* narrow focus on social studies and demanded 'a wide range of subjects' including natural science, modern languages, craftsmanship, music, and literature.<sup>24</sup> In the words of the *Report*, '[t]he scope of adult education should be as wide as the interests of the men and women to whom it makes its appeal'.<sup>25</sup> The new position was allegedly justified by the twin principles of personal development and social service. For example, the study of natural science, which 'offer[ed] a training in the dispassionate examination and weighing of facts ... [,] should be a stimulus to right thinking and wise action in other fields'.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, 'Covering Letter' to *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, pp. 113-5.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-91.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

Meanwhile, the aesthetic subjects could form a 'natural bridge between the discipline of the mind and practical activities', for they helped to 'unite thought with emotion and action'.<sup>26</sup> It is noticeable that the Idealist faith that 'labour and learning were part of one unity' underpinned the proposal for an all-embracing curriculum.<sup>27</sup> As the report contended,

A conception of education which limits it to the training of intellect without seeking to humanise all social activities will lay no spell upon ordinary men, and will ultimately find that the very schools on which it relies as its strongholds are invaded by materialism. Unless education is to be sterile it must draw its materials from the natural impulses of common life, including its labour and its recreations.<sup>28</sup>

In the same vein, the report proposed to 'liberalise technical studies' by 'the inclusion of studies which will enable the student to relate his own occupations to the industry of which it is a part, to appreciate the place of that industry in the economic life of the nation and the world, and to interpret the economic life of the community in terms of social values'.<sup>29</sup> The report claimed that, once social subjects, such as economic history and sociology, were combined with technical instructions, the latter could perfectly be part of general education for adult citizens.<sup>30</sup>

In sum, regarding the aims and methods of adult education, the *1919 Report* was more an extension than an alteration of the principles set up by the *Oxford Report*. The twin principles of personal development and social service were an expression of the Idealist understanding of citizenship which permeated the *Oxford Report*. The use of 'adult education' in place of 'working-class education' cannot be taken to indicate that the Adult Education Committee had turned its back on the working classes' particular demands. As we have seen, by emphasising the importance of spontaneous initiative, the *1919 Report* reserved a special place for working-class identities and concerns in the programme for adult education. Likewise, the proposal to expand the range of subjects, to include subjects

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 85-6.

<sup>27</sup> Mansbridge, 'The Beginning of the WEA', p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152. I will come back to the WEA Idealists' position on technical education in Chapter Six.

which worker-students had evinced less interest in, was not due to a disrespect of workers' intellectual inclination. Rather, it was out of the Idealist faith that a more comprehensive study would allow workers to make a greater contribution toward the common good.

A yet more significant breakthrough made by the *1919 Report* lay in its second theme, namely, the investigation into how public agencies could facilitate voluntary adult education. Indeed, such a question arose from the Idealist approach to co-ordinate voluntary and bureaucratic forces, which had been developed in the *Oxford Report*. Nevertheless, the new report was audacious enough to propose fundamentally changing the practice of the whole movement. Although the report had made it clear that the provision of adult education must rely on spontaneous initiative and voluntary organisation, it diagnosed the major defect of voluntary adult education to be that it was 'too haphazard in design, too intermittent in execution, too prone to live on its abundant capital of energy and enthusiasm and to improvise solutions of difficulties as they arise, instead of seeking to think out a solution of the problem as a whole'.<sup>31</sup> This was where public assistance could be of use.

To begin with, the state was asked to encourage a systematic organisation of adult education by devising a comprehensive funding scheme.<sup>32</sup> The report urged the Board of Education to take an active role in allocating state grants for an array of adult courses, from university tutorial classes, extension lecture courses, summer schools to short-term classes under non-university auspices.<sup>33</sup> The report stressed the need to create co-ordinating bodies to organise less advanced adult courses, such as one-year classes. As existing tutorial class joint committees were co-operative ventures between universities and the WEA in organising university tutorial classes, the proposed 'Adult Education Joint Committees', though never implemented, would provide 'non-university adult education' by uniting efforts from voluntary educational bodies, Local Educational Authorities and universities.<sup>34</sup> In so doing, a systematic provision of adult education, from elementary to advanced level of learning, would be made possible.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160. According to the proposal, up to 75 % of tutorial class teachers' salary could be eligible for the state fund.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162-5.

With regard to the role of the university, the report proposed the construction of ‘a department of extra-mural adult education’ at each university.<sup>35</sup> The proposed department was looked upon almost as a panacea which could once and for all eliminate existing problems of university adult education, including a lack of co-ordination between tutorial classes and extension lectures, universities’ aloofness from extramural work and reluctance to sponsor the movement, tutors’ inferior working conditions, and the lack of a link to intramural work.

The proposed extramural department would vow to amalgamate the discrepant provisions of adult education in universities, especially Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>36</sup> Evolving from extension lectures, the joint tutorial class committees at old universities had been founded under the existing Extension Delegacy at Oxford and the Syndicate for Local Examinations and Lectures at Cambridge. By 1919, the growth of the ‘advanced’ tutorial programme had cut off its predecessor from the mainstream of university adult education. A new department giving equal status to the two initiatives was expected to mitigate their mutual hostility and bring about a more systematic arrangement of university adult classes.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, a central ambition of the proposed department was to make ‘the provision of a liberal education for adult students ... a normal and necessary part of [universities’] functions’.<sup>38</sup> The report expected that the recognition of the departmental status of extramural work would be followed by a large increase in the expenditure of universities for the provision of adult teaching. Tutorial class teachers were likely to have better payment and achieve a professional status, which could attract more talented individuals to the job. Also, it would be more likely to ‘combine some intra-mural universities work with the teaching of tutorial classes’—an idea which had been put forward in the *Oxford Report* but had not yet been fulfilled.<sup>39</sup>

Above all, the new extramural department would be responsible for connecting the university with ‘the general life of the community’. As the report put it,

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-104.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-3, 169.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

The extra-mural departments we propose would be the eyes and ears of the universities. They would be concerned, to use a convenient metaphor, with questions of foreign policy. They would report on the needs of new types of student, on the value of novel educational experiments, on the possibility of extending the influence of the universities into fields which as yet they have not touched.<sup>40</sup>

Conversely, the report also expected that the new departments would lead to the decentralisation of universities in being setting up 'local colleges of adult students' in whatever location educational demand was identified.<sup>41</sup>

Yet all the requests for public assistance for adult education led to the same troublesome problem of how to balance bureaucratic power and the voluntary spirit. As the movement received more financial assistance from the government and universities, it was foreseeable that bureaucracy, guided by the principle of 'administrative symmetry', would impose regulations on the voluntary work and thus to check 'the corporate spirit'.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the Committee was unequivocal about the supremacy of voluntarism or the principle of democratic control with regard to adult education.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the proposal to defend this principle was rudimentary. True, the report made clear that while the government could carry out certain supervisions on regularity of attendance and the quality of students' work, it could not interfere with the intellectual activities in adult classes or reduce students' freedom to pursue studies at their will.<sup>44</sup> Yet, important as the doctrine of intellectual freedom was, government censorship was by no means a major threat to the tutorial class movement. As we have seen in above Chapter Two, it was bureaucratic demands for standardisation, such as requesting the submission of a certain number of essays by each student, which could thwart the spontaneous efforts of the students which did not gain credits under the so-called 'university standards'. Similarly, given that the early practice of the tutorial class had depended considerably on tutors' voluntary contribution, it is striking that the *1919 Report* did not even discuss the implication of the professionalisation of adult tutors through the proposed extra-mural departments.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 170.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

However, without further discussion, the proposed measures to institutionalise voluntary adult education were implemented within five years from the publication of the report. Although a large part of the Reconstruction programme drawn up during the wartime was shelved in the wake of economic crisis in the early 1920s, the spirit of the *1919 Report* informed the Board of Education's post-war policy on adult education.<sup>45</sup> The founding of the Advisory Committee on Adult Education under the Board in 1921 symbolised that the state formally assumed the responsibility to promote adult education and to secure 'mutual help' between the state, local authorities and existing voluntary organisations in this field.<sup>46</sup> The appointment of Temple as the first Chairman of the advisory committee, alongside MacTavish and G. H. Thompson as WEA representatives, cemented the relationship between the WEA and the Board.<sup>47</sup>

A major task undertaken by the advisory committee was to consider the finance of adult education and formulate a wide-ranging funding policy.<sup>48</sup> The result was the Board of Education Adult Education Regulations, introduced by the short-lived Labour government in 1924. These regulations satisfied the *1919 Report's* demand for constructing a more systematic provision of adult education by setting up different scales of grants in accordance with different levels of classes. Replacing the 'Regulations on University Tutorial Classes', the new regulations increased the amount of the block grant for university tutorial classes, from covering 50% of the cost of a class with a cap of £45, to 75% with a maximum of £60 per class.<sup>49</sup> Besides, grants were guaranteed to the university extension lectures for the first time. More importantly, under the new regulations, any national voluntary association, once approved by the Board as a 'responsible body', would be eligible to independently organise grant-aided classes with a less demanding character, such as one-year or sessional classes.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 209-10.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of the Board of Education, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1920, PRO ED 24/1219. 'Adult Education', *TES*, no. 314, Apr 21 1921, p. 183.

<sup>47</sup> 'Adult Education Committee', Board of Education Memorandum, 1921, Board of Education Papers, ED 24/1219. *WEA Annual Report*, 1921, p. 179. Besides, Tawney and Mansbridge were elected by Temple as co-opted members, while Smith represented Oxford on the Committee.

<sup>48</sup> 'Work of the Adult Education Committee', Board of Education Memorandum, [n.d.; 1927?], Board of Education Papers, ED/24/1220, fol. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Board of Education (Adult Education) Regulations, 1924, article 10.

<sup>50</sup> Board of Education (Adult Education) Regulations, 1924, chapter III. See also Robert Peers, *Adult Education: A Comparative Study*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London, 1972), pp. 97-9; Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, pp. 267-8.

Given the WEA's affinity with the Board, it is not surprising that the WEA was the organisation that gained most from the introduction of the new Regulations. In the following years, grant-aided adult classes under the Adult Education Regulations were largely run by joint efforts of the WEA and universities or by the WEA alone: In 1924-25, there were 346 tutorial classes (including preparatory and advanced classes), co-ordinated by the WEA and the universities, and another 335 (one-year or terminal) classes organised by the WEA alone, while other 'responsible bodies' merely accounted for 35 classes. In 1937-38, the figures for university tutorial classes and other WEA classes were 660 and 793 respectively, whereas only 235 classes were run by other bodies.<sup>51</sup>

Regarding universities share in providing adult education, the *1919 Report's* proposals soon came true as well. The first Department of Adult Education in England was founded by University College Nottingham in 1920, followed by Exeter in 1922 and Bristol in 1923.<sup>52</sup> As to Oxford, the Report of the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge, published in 1922, reaffirmed the principle that extramural instruction should be established as part of 'the normal work of a University'.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, in 1924, the Oxford Delegacy for the Extension of Teaching gave way to the Oxford Delegacy for Extramural Studies, under which the Tutorial Classes Committee was no longer a sub-committee of the Extension Lectures Section but was equal in size and status to the reorganised Extension Lectures Committee.

The creation of extramural departments made a major impact on the tutorial work. First, it brought immediate financial relief. Secure grants from the universities greatly improved the financial position of the tutorial class committee. At Oxford, this immediately led to an expansion of classes, increases in the scale of tutors' fees, an initiative to enable tutors to spend the summer break at the university taking 'refresher' courses or doing research, and a re-introduction of the adult scholarship scheme which had been terminated by the war.<sup>54</sup>

Second, the founding of extramural departments entailed the transformation of the administration of university tutorial classes, which tipped the balance of power within the joint committees where the WEA and the university had had equal numbers of delegates.

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<sup>51</sup> Raybould, *The English Universities and Adult Education*, p. 118.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>53</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge Universities*, Parliamentary Papers, 1922, Cmd. 1588, p. 123.

<sup>54</sup> *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1924-25*, the OUTCC, 1925, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/12, p. 10.

Having been recognised as a constituent part of the university, extramural departments were under pressure from university administrators who required every department to conform to professional standards.<sup>55</sup>

The attitude of Oxford Vice-Chancellor, Lewis Farnell, towards the new Extra-Mural Delegacy perfectly showed the extent to which the voluntary principle was at odds with the logic of professionalism. In a letter to F. E. Hutchinson (1871-1947), secretary to the Oxford Delegacy for the Extension of Teaching, Farnell complained about the idea of labour's control over education, and regarded workers decisions as a 'grave danger' to the university as a professional institute. He was appalled by half of the places in the Delegacy being taken up by 'outsiders', which might let the department 'pass into outside control'. Likewise, he opposed the need for flexibility in appointing the Delegacy secretary and tutors, which was intended to allow labour to have a say on the appointment. Farnell proposed to add a qualification requirement respectively for the secretaryship (an M.A. from Oxford) and for extramural tutors (a university degree), for 'It would wreck the whole idea of the scheme if the teaching should by mischance pass into the hands of outsiders who have not had a thorough University training'.<sup>56</sup> Though none of Farnell's protectionist proposals were immediately adopted, they provided a foretaste of later conflicts between democratic voluntarism and professionalism.

At any rate, by 1924, the *1919 Report's* two major plans to institutionalise the tutorial class movement had come into force. In the following two chapters, I will examine whether and how these measures could work to attain the twin goals of adult education set up by the *1919 Report*—self-development and social service. Before that, we must examine the other side of the movement, namely, the application of the principle of democratic control between 1919 and 1926.

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<sup>55</sup> Therefore, there had been tensions between WEA branches/districts and adult education departments, see e.g. Peers, *Adult Education: A Comparative Study*, p. 92.

<sup>56</sup> Lewis Farnell to F. E. Hutchinson, Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 1923, Records of Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/80.

### 3-2 The Pursuit of 'Workers' Control' over WEA Education.

Side by side with the trend towards the institutionalisation of the tutorial programme, efforts were made to democratise the movement. As we have seen in the previous chapter, although the WEA had boasted about grassroots workers' participation in the movement, neither the policymaking of the association nor the practice of the tutorial classes were democratic in its early years.<sup>57</sup> After 1918, the catchphrase, 'workers' control', which had been chanted by organised labour during the war, prompted calls for democratising the WEA by connecting it with organised labour.<sup>58</sup>

The popularity of the idea of 'workers' control', especially among trade unionists, was partly indebted to the impact of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution on the British labour movement and partly a reaction to the growing state intervention in industry.<sup>59</sup> While supporting nationalisation plans, trade unions began to press for public ownership of major industries on condition of workers' democratic control over them during the war. As Tawney noted in 1920,

It is a commonplace that during the past six years the discussion of industrial and social problems has shifted its centre. Prior to the war students and reformers were principally occupied with questions of poverty. Today their main interest appears to be the government of industry. An increasing number of trade unionists regard poverty as a symptom of a more deeply rooted malady which they would describe as industrial autocracy and demand 'control'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Place of the WEA in Working Class Education—A paper read at the COMING-OF-AGE CONVENTION held on July 13th, 1924', WEA Pamphlet, 1924, pp. 2-3.

<sup>58</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Re-stated* (London, 1920), pp. 98-111.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* (London, 1997), pp. 45-6; Cole, *A History of the Labour Party From 1914*, pp. 41-2.

<sup>60</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Foreword' to Carter L. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics* (New York, 1920), p. vii.

Guild Socialism, espoused chiefly by G. D. H. Cole and Harold Laski in the 1910s and 1920s, gave expression to trade unionists' demands.<sup>61</sup> As Cole summarised it later in the 1950s, the tenet of Guild Socialism was a faith in

the need for industrial as well as political self-government and for the decentralisation of social structures in order to counteract bureaucratic tendencies, and to diffuse social responsibility over as many persons as possible, or a foundation of democratic control through face-to-face working groups.<sup>62</sup>

In so doing, Guild Socialists aspired to effect 'the reconciliation of Socialist planning with personal freedom', and to 'mak[e] democracy real in face of the need for large-scale organisation and control'.<sup>63</sup> The demands for direct workers control over economic and social institutions were so strong that the Labour Party, in order to secure supports from trade unions, included proposals for 'the Democratic Control of Industry' in its 1918 Manifesto, *Labour and the New Social Order*, drafted by Sidney Webb, who was in fact the spokesman of State Socialism and 'a strong opponent of Guild Socialism'.<sup>64</sup>

Through the influence of Cole, who started to teach tutorial classes in London and Oxford in 1915, the idea of democratic control over industry and the labour movement came to the WEA during the War.<sup>65</sup> The principle was applied to the movement itself soon after 1918. In the 1920 Annual Meeting of WEA Central Council, which was set to endorse the *1919 Report's* recommendations about co-operations between public agencies and voluntary bodies, a special statement was approved which stressed the importance of 'the Control of Adult Working Class Education'. In this statement, the WEA branded itself as 'an educational expression of the working class movement' and promised the fulfilment of the

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<sup>61</sup> Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State*, pp. 1-19; Marc Stears, 'Guild Socialism', in Mark Bevir (ed.), *Modern Pluralism: Anglo-American Debates since 1880* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 40-59; Michael Freedon, *Liberalism Divided: A Study of British Political Thought, 1914-39* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 40-1.

<sup>62</sup> G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought: Volume IV, Part I, Communism and Social Democracy, 1914-1931* (London, 1958), pp. 25-6; R. Eisfeld, 'The Emergence and Meaning of Socialist Pluralism', *International Political Science Review*, 17:3 (1996), p. 273.

<sup>63</sup> Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought: Volume IV, Part I*, p. 26.

<sup>64</sup> Cole, *History of the Labour Party From 1914*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>65</sup> E.g. SHIPWRIGHT, 'Labour in War Time: an Appreciation' [a review on G. D. H. Cole's *Labour in War-time*], *Highway*, 8:85, Oct 1915, pp. 6-7; J. H. Matthews, 'Labour Problems after the War', *Highway*, 9:100, Jan 1917, pp. 67-8; Marion Phillips, 'Some Criticisms of Welfare Work', *Highway*, 9:105, Jun 1917, pp. 153-4. See also Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State*, pp. 207-8; Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association*, pp. 81-2.

principle of 'working-class control' in the sense that the organisation and administration of WEA classes were to come into the hands of the working-class movement.<sup>66</sup> Further, the WEA urged that major branches of the labour movement and labour educational bodies, namely the trade unions, co-operative societies, Working Men's Clubs, and Ruskin College, 'should act together in the closest possible relationship' in order that all the working-class educational needs could be addressed in a systematic manner.<sup>67</sup>

In a way, democratisation was considered more important to the whole movement than institutionalisation. As Lindsay, who was elected WEA Vice-President in 1924, suggested:

The most helpful line of development of adult education into an institution was that it should become, like some of the early medieval universities, a university governed by its students, its permanent nucleus being more or less permanent classes. If they could create a real students' university for adult education all would be well, if they could not, the movement, as hitherto conceived, was bound to fail.<sup>68</sup>

In practice, the principle of workers' control meant, Cole argued,

inviting the General Council of the Trade Union Congress and the Co-operative Union and the Working Men's Club and Institute Union to play a greater part in the control of the movement, by increasing their representative on the Executive as well as on the Council. It means devising similar appropriate methods of securing Trade Union control over the district and branch as well as the national organisation. It means, in fact, making the WEA really what it already is in theory, a movement controlled in co-operation by its individual members and by the representatives of the Trade Union and Co-operative movements.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> 'Adult Education: Recommendations of the WEA; based on the Final Report of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction (Cmd.321)', WEA Pamphlet, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> 'Adult Education: Recommendations of the WEA; based on the Final Report of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction (Cmd.321)', p. 2. Founded in Oxford in 1899, Ruskin College was a residential college providing university education for workers.

<sup>68</sup> A. D. Lindsay, 'Universities and Adult Education—Master of Balliol's View', *The Times*, Sep 19<sup>th</sup> 1925, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Place of the WEA in Working Class Education', p. 10.

From 1919, the WEA made a serious commitment to strengthening its bond with both individual workers and working-class bodies.

To begin with, a period of 'constitutional mongering' commenced with a view to winning the support of organised labour.<sup>70</sup> In 1923, a revised WEA constitution was adopted, which stipulated that each of the 'national co-ordinating bodies', namely, the General Council of the Trades Union Congress, the Co-operative Union, and the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, were to hold a seat on the WEA's Central Executive Committee (henceforward, CEC).<sup>71</sup>

More importantly, the first few years of the interwar period saw a number of joint efforts made by the WEA and other branches of the labour movement to serve workers' educational needs. For example, in 1920 the WEA established a permanent joint committee with Ruskin College, with a view to co-ordinating the work of the two bodies, while the Working Men's Clubs adopted a scheme to urge every branch to form educational committees in association with the WEA.<sup>72</sup> WEA local branches were asked to assist the Independent Labour Party in organising its educational scheme.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, closer relations were secured between the WEA and the Co-operative Union.<sup>74</sup> Later in 1926 compulsory affiliations between local Co-operative societies and WEA districts, were approved by both bodies.<sup>75</sup> As a result, the 1920s saw organised labour rising as a proportion of WEA affiliated bodies (See Table 3.1).

However, the most significant effort made by the WEA in drawing support from the labour movement was towards trade unions, whose membership grew exponentially during the wartime and reached a record high in 1920, at over 8.3 million.<sup>76</sup> The Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee (WETUC) was co-founded in 1919 by the WEA and the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation to set up short classes and weekend schools for the latter's members and remit the fee to those who joined WEA tutorial classes.<sup>77</sup> Its first

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<sup>70</sup> 'Notes of the Month', *Highway*, 15:3, Dec 1922, p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> WEA Constitution, 1923, WEA Archive, Central/1/1.

<sup>72</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1920, p. 198.

<sup>73</sup> 'Memorandum by the Finance & General Purposes Committee on How Best to Give Effect to the Decisions of the Central Council to Link up the Work of the Association Much More Closely with the Educational Needs of the Organised Working-Class Movement', WEA FGPC Minutes, Sep 18<sup>th</sup> 1924, WEA Central/1/2/1/7, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> The WEA was invited to appoint a delegate to attend the meetings of the Central Education Committee of the Co-operative Union. *WEA Annual Report*, 1922, p. 141.

<sup>75</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1926, p. 26.

<sup>76</sup> Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London, 1976), p. 303.

<sup>77</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1920, p. 195.

chairman was Arthur Pugh (1870-1955), a founding father figure to the Confederation, who would later be appointed Chairman to the TUC and WEA President (1926-28). Guided by the principle of workers' control, the trade union delegates were in a majority on the WETUC and thus commanded the 'finance and the general policy of the educational work', while the WEA was mainly to organise classes in response to the Union's demands.<sup>78</sup> In so doing, the WETUC allegedly 'avoided the heavy costs and dislocation of trade union business involved in building up an educational organisation of its own by using the WEA organisation for this purpose, while retaining control over its own educational machinery'.<sup>79</sup> By 1925, there were nine national trade unions affiliated to the WETUC, including the Union of Post Office Workers and the Transport and General Workers' Union.<sup>80</sup>

Table 3.1 The figures for the major branches of the labour movement affiliated to the WEA, 1913-30<sup>81</sup>

Year	The Major Branches of the Labour Movement			Sub-total (A)	All Affiliated Bodies (B)	A/B (%)
	Trade Unions and Councils	Co-operative Societies	Working Men's Clubs			
1913-14	953	388	175	1516	2555	59.3
1917-18	1034	465	96	1595	2709	58.9
1923-24	1157	365	211	1733	2529	68.5
1929-30	880	459	114	1453	2055	70.7

Coupled with the WETUC scheme, the WEA during the same period launched a series of appeals to increase trade unions' support. In 1920, MacTavish, who had been an active trade unionist in Portsmouth before succeeding Mansbridge as WEA General Secretary, issued an open letter to demand his 'fellow trade unionists' to make larger contributions

<sup>78</sup> Arthur Pugh, 'The WETUC and Working-Class Education', *Highway*, 18, Jan 1926, pp. 52-3. See also Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1921, p. 176.

<sup>80</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1925, pp. 19-20. For a detailed account of the development of the WETUC during the interwar period, see A. J. Corfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education: A History of the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee* (London, 1969), ch. 5.

<sup>81</sup> The figure includes bodies affiliated to WEA branches, districts and the central office. *WEA Annual Reports*, 1914, 1919, 1930; 'Workers' Educational Association', WEA Pamphlet, 1924[?], p.1. No official figure for the period between 1924 and 1930 was given.

to the WEA's work in order to sustain its voluntary spirit.<sup>82</sup> What followed was the publication of numerous articles and pamphlets whose aims were to draw the support of trade unionists.<sup>83</sup> In 1924, the WEA formed a Central Propaganda Committee, whose sole task was to carry out propagandist work among trade unionists and co-operators.<sup>84</sup> J. W. Muir (1870-1931), a prominent 'Red Clydesider' who lost his parliamentary seat in the 1924 General Election, was appointed as National Organiser with a view to securing trade unionists' interests in WEA classes.<sup>85</sup> On top of that, after Temple tendered his resignation as WEA President in 1924, two trade union leaders were in turn elected to the position: Fred Bramley (1924-25), then general secretary to the TUC, and Arthur Pugh (1926-28).

The flip side of the pro-trade union policy was a growing gap between the WEA and some of its early proponents from Oxford who were critical of the WEA's leaning towards trade unions. Zimmern, who dismissed the policy to forge a special relationship between the WEA and the trade union movement as 'far too narrow and "political"', retreated to other initiatives after 1919.<sup>86</sup> Charles Gore and T. B. Strong, who were also instrumental in making the *Oxford Report*, no longer played a role in the WEA and turned to the Church Tutorial Classes movement,<sup>87</sup> an initiative that was launched in 1919 with the assistance of Mansbridge. Above all, the WEA's trade union policy must partly account for the resignation of Temple, who was increasingly disillusioned with organised labour, which in his eyes, began to put class interest before the common good.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, considering also the death of Smith in 1924, the Oxford-WEA link had significantly weakened and was

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<sup>82</sup> J. M. MacTavish, 'Open Letter by the General Secretary—To My Fellow Trade Unionists', *Highway*, 8:2, Nov 1920, pp. 24-5.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. G. D. H. Cole, 'Workers' Education: Achievements-Needs-Prospects', *Highway*, 15:7, Apr 1923, pp. 97-8; G. D. H. Cole, 'Crisis in Workers' Education', *Highway*, 16:1, Winter 1923, pp. 18-21; 'The Workers' Educational Association: What It Is. What It Does.—A Souvenir presented to the Delegates to the 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Trades Union Congress, held at Hull, September, 1924', WEA Pamphlet, 1924; 'Workers' Education: An Appeal to Trade Unionists', WEA Pamphlet, 1924.

<sup>84</sup> WEA FGPC Minutes, Sep 30 1924, WEA Central/1/2/1/7, p. 1; *WEA Annual Report*, 1925, p. 18; Stocks, *The WEA*, p. 89.

<sup>85</sup> [l.a.], 'Our Trade Union Campaign', *Highway*, 17:1, winter 1924, p. 1; *WEA Annual Report*, 1925, pp. 18-9.

<sup>86</sup> Zimmern to Mansbridge, 25<sup>th</sup> Aug 1915, fols. 48-53. Zimmern became an active campaigner for the League of Nations between the Wars. See Julia Stapleton, 'The Classicist as Liberal Intellectual: Gilbert Murray and Alfred Eckhard Zimmern' in Christopher Stray (ed.), *Gilbert Murray Reassessed: Hellenism, Theatre, and International Politics* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 262-92.

<sup>87</sup> Gore and Strong were respectively the first President and Chairman to the Church Tutorial Classes movement.

<sup>88</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*, pp. 103-39. But Temple's drifting away from the WEA was gradual. After resigning as WEA President, Temple remained Chairman of WEA North-Western District between 1924 and 1929. 'Formation of the North-Western District WEA', *North-Western District Supplement to The Highway*, Jan 1935, p. ii.

only maintained by the trio of left-wing dons, namely, Tawney, Cole and Lindsay, who continued to play pivotal roles in the WEA in the 1920s and after.<sup>89</sup>

The preliminary response of the trade union movement to the WEA's 'courting' was favourable. In 1921, the General Council of the TUC agreed to set up a joint committee between the TUC and the Trade Union Education Enquiry Committee, an initiative launched by the WETUC. The purpose of the joint committee was to consider how to co-ordinate existing workers' education and to conceive of 'the best means of providing for the educational needs of its members'.<sup>90</sup> In the following year, the committee, to which MacTavish (joint secretary) and Cole were appointed,<sup>91</sup> contrived a comprehensive programme of workers' education, which was essentially an application of the 1920 WEA Policy Statement. It proposed to set up 'a co-ordinated workers' educational organisation that [would] be accepted by the Board of Education, and other public bodies concerned as being a recognised education authority for the education of the adult and adolescent members of the working-class movement'. It also asked the trade union movement to fund such an institution.<sup>92</sup>

In early 1925, the proposal developed into an agreement (henceforward, TUC Agreement) on establishing a co-operative educational scheme for trade unionists, with the assistance of the WEA, Ruskin College, the Co-operative Union, and the Marxist educational institutes, namely, the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) and the Central Labour College (CLC). A 'National Committee of educational bodies', which would accommodate representatives from above bodies, was set to be appointed by the TUC and thus 'be controlled by bona fides Trade Union, Labour and Co-operative Organisations'. The primary object of the proposed committee was to co-ordinate various educational initiatives to 'assist the working-class movement in its efforts for social and industrial emancipation'.<sup>93</sup> However, the TUC Agreement carefully avoided subscribing to any

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<sup>89</sup> Tawney was WEA Vice-President from 1920 to 1928 when he was elected the President. Lindsay and Cole were elected Vice-Presidents respectively in 1924 and 1928. However, Tawney had moved to the London School of Economics in 1920 after briefly serving as a WEA resident tutor in North Staffordshire for a year.

<sup>90</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1921, pp. 176-7; *WEA Annual Report*, 1922, p. 139.

<sup>91</sup> The other joint secretary was C. W. Bowerman, one of the labour representatives who signed the *1908 Report*. Other members of the Committee included T. W. Burden (Railway Clerks' Association) and Eleanor Calthrop (National Union General Workers), both of whom were long-serving members of the WEA General Purpose and Finance Committee, which was responsible for drafting WEA policies.

<sup>92</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1923, p. 136.

<sup>93</sup> 'Terms of Agreement between the WEA, Co-operative Union, NCLC, Ruskin College and the Labour College as approved by the Central Council for the WEA for the consideration of the Sub-Committee of the Education

particular doctrines with regard to the content of teaching. It was signed by all parties concerned, and was finally ratified by the TUC, in September 1925.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, the TUC Agreement turned out to be a dud cheque and the national committee was never set up. Many reasons resulted in its foiling. For example, within the WEA, key members were hostile toward trade unions, and such a deal inevitably caused apprehension that the association was ‘on the highroad to becoming “an adjunct of the Trade Unions”’.<sup>95</sup> An outspoken critic of the agreement was Reuben George (1864-1936), a founding member of the WEA and sometime chairman to WEA Western District. As someone who abandoned Social Democratic Federation/Marxist doctrines after being a keen student of Oxford extension lectures, George cast doubts on the growth of trade union influences.<sup>96</sup> For George, the handing over of extra power to trade unions would not generate a more democratic movement. As he argued, the WEA had been ‘sufficiently democratic for all’, because ‘[i]t meets all parties and all classes’; it would be ‘a great mistake’ to subordinate it to the control of ‘men who ... are fettering the cause of Labour by their tinkering multiplication of unions, whose policy is that of the Ishmaelite—his hand against everybody’s, especially that of his own fellows’.<sup>97</sup>

In a similar manner, the Board of Education and local authorities also raised concerns that the TUC Agreement would make WEA classes succumb to trade unions’ sectarian interest, despite being funded by public money. As Roger Fieldhouse has carefully traced, after the document came to light in 1925, both central and local governments set out certain conditions that WEA classes should observe in order to continue receiving grants, and tried to prevent WEA teaching from ‘unduly upsetting the social status quo’.<sup>98</sup>

Yet neither the agitated WEA members nor the state bureaucrats who sought to minimise the effectiveness of the TUC Agreement were root causes of the latter’s unfortunate fate. Certainly, the agreement provoked some upheavals in the WEA, including

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Advisory Committee of the General Council of the TUC’, Minutes of WEA Central Council, Jan 24<sup>th</sup> 1925, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/5.

<sup>94</sup> Cole, ‘The WEA and the Future’, pp. 98-101; ‘An Educational Scheme for the Trade Union Movement’, *Highway*, 17:3, Summer 1925, pp. 125-9.; ‘WEA Principles: A Reminder’, *Highway*, 18, Feb 1926, pp. 71-2; Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, p. 33.

<sup>95</sup> Wootton, ‘The Next Twenty-One Years’, p. 143.

<sup>96</sup> For George’s life and thought, see *WEA Annual Report*, 1936, pp. 54-5; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 85-7.

<sup>97</sup> Reuben George, ‘Correspondence’, *Highway*, 16:4, Autumn 1924, p. 206.

<sup>98</sup> Roger Fieldhouse ‘Voluntaryism and the State in Adult Education: the W.E.A. and the 1925 T.U.C. Education Scheme’, *History of Education*, 10:1 (1981), pp. 48-59.

WEA Edinburgh Branch's notable breakaway from the national movement in protesting against the deal.<sup>99</sup> However, by and large, the WEA's chief negotiators for the agreement, Cole and Lindsay, were able to convince members that WEA teaching needed to avoid being dovetailed with trade unions' policy under the new scheme, and the dissenters were never strong enough to challenge the decision.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, the state's attempts to sabotage the educational scheme were futile. The WEA and the state managed to work out a deal to ensure that under the TUC scheme the grant-earning classes would be free from 'party bias' and 'political propaganda',<sup>101</sup> and thus the WEA was never pushed into a position to take sides between the continuation of public funding and its co-operation with the TUC. Thus, even as someone who is sympathetic to the Marxist interpretation of history and who highlights the implication of the state's surveillance for working-class adult education, Fieldhouse admits that the infertility of the agreement was mainly imputed to the side of organised labour.<sup>102</sup>

This is where the rivalry between the WEA and the National Council of Labour Colleges is relevant to our analysis. The NCLC, founded in 1921, was an initiative to provide workers with non-residential courses on Marxism, alongside the Central Labour College, which was a residential type of Marxist education and a secession from Ruskin College, established after a controversy broke out over the latter's independence in 1909.<sup>103</sup> Like the WEA, the NCLC also strove to form official connections with the trade union movement, so as to organise education for trade unionists. In fact, in its early years, the NCLC outmanoeuvred the WETUC in securing trade union affiliations. By 1924, there were twenty-two trade unions associated with the NCLC, including the Building Trades Workers and the Amalgamated Engineering Union.<sup>104</sup>

The bitter and protracted disputes between the WEA and the NCLC, surrounding the latter's accusation of the WEA as a 'capitalist' proxy, have been analysed by many historians,

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<sup>99</sup> 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 18, Feb 1926, p.66; Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>100</sup> Cole, 'The Place of the WEA in Working Class Education', pp. 6-14; A. D. Lindsay, 'Where We Stand', *Highway*, 17:2, Spring 1925, pp. 50-1; 'An Educational Scheme for the Trade Union Movement', *Highway*, 17:3, Summer 1925, pp. 125-9.; 'WEA Principles: A Reminder', *Highway*, 18, Feb 1926, pp. 71-2.

<sup>101</sup> Minutes of WEA FGPC, Feb 11<sup>th</sup> 1926, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/8, pp. 2-3.

<sup>102</sup> Fieldhouse, 'Voluntaryism and the State in Adult Education', p. 58.

<sup>103</sup> For the controversy over Ruskin College, see Valerie Quinney, 'Workers' Education: A Confrontation at Ruskin College', *American Journal of Education*, 92:1 (1983), pp. 52-78; Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, ch. 9; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 165-77.

<sup>104</sup> Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, p. 33.

and it is thus unnecessary to repeat them here.<sup>105</sup> While I will examine the implication of the NCLC's criticism for the teaching method of WEA classes in the next chapter, I will here simply quote the NCLC's 'birthday greeting' to the 'coming-of-age' WEA in 1924, an example which perfectly captured the intensity of the conflict between the two organisations:

All we can say is that it is no fault of ours you have reached your twenty-first anniversary: we should be much happier to attend your funeral ... You exist to extend the benefits of University culture to the working man that you patronise. We show our readers that your education, and all education that is not based on the central fact of the class struggle, is false history and false economics ... We hope and anticipate that when our 'twenty-first birthday' comes—not so long now—we shall be able to celebrate also your complete disappearance.<sup>106</sup>

This mutual hatred, or at least hatred from the side of Labour Colleges, was never placated, not even following the signing of the TUC Agreement by both parties in 1925. Such conflict became a good reason for trade union leaders, who arguably never considered workers' education a priority, to side line it. Then, as the storm of a general strike was gathering in early 1926, the TUC Agreement was quietly shelved.<sup>107</sup>

The final blow to the agreement came later in 1926, when the defeat of the General Strike had not only dampened the spirits of the trade union movement, but also worsened its finances. A year before, the Countess of Warwick offered her country house, Easton Lodge, to the TUC, for the purpose of founding a residential educational centre under trade union control. Proposals were then made to combine the two existing residential workers'

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<sup>105</sup> The most detailed account of the WEA-NCLC controversy is Corfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education*, 17-55. For WEA-based interpretations of the event, see Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association*, ch. 7; Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, pp. 30-40. For pro-NCLC (or Marxist) views, see J. P. M. Millar, *The Labour College Movement* (London, 1979), pp. 54-80; Roger Fieldhouse, *The WEA: Aims and Achievements 1903-1977* (New York, 1977), pp. 11-13. For criticisms of the Marxist interpretation of the struggle, see Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 177-83. See also Joseph J. Senturia, 'The Trades Union Congress and Workers' Education', *The American Economic Review*, 20: 4 (1930), pp. 673-84; Simon, 'The Struggle for hegemony', pp. 37-50.

<sup>106</sup> R. W. Postgate [Chairman to the Plebs Executive Committee], 'Greetings from "Plebs"', *Highway*, 16:4, Autumn 1924, p. 186.

<sup>107</sup> The General Strike of 1926 also led to the closing down of the CLC in 1929, as its previous major sponsors, the National Union of Railwaymen and the South Wales Miners' Federation, were not financially allowed to fund the College. Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power*, p. 36; Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, p. 283.

colleges, namely, Ruskin College and the CLC, at the new site.<sup>108</sup> While Ruskin College and the WEA backed the Easton Lodge plan, the Labour College movement urged to scrap it, for fear that a new college would absorb a major part of trade union educational finance and the NCLC would no longer secure funds from the TUC.<sup>109</sup> Partly due to the NCLC's boycott, and partly due to trade unions' fiscal burden, at its 1926 Congress, the TUC overwhelmingly voted down the proposal, which was estimated to cost £50,000.<sup>110</sup> The defeat of the Easton Lodge proposal, as Brian Simon notes, 'marked the end of all efforts in this direction [of establishing a system of education under trade union control]' for another twenty years'.<sup>111</sup>

As a consequence, the scheme to pursue workers' control of WEA education by building up official connections with organised labour, especially trade unions, ended in stalemate. After 1926, even though the WEA still stressed the concept of workers' control, the idea was mainly about democratic control *within* the movement or the tutorial classes.<sup>112</sup> The TUC Agreement proved to be the apex of the collaboration between the WEA and organised labour, which was never reached again.<sup>113</sup>

## Conclusion.

The above examination of the development of the tutorial programme during the first few years of the interwar period shows that the trend towards institutionalisation developed more vigorously than that towards democratisation. Through the contacts Oxford intellectuals had with the Board of Education and the universities, the WEA and public bodies came to a mutual understanding that public money should be used to sponsor the

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<sup>108</sup> Corfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education*, p. 53; Senturia, 'The Trades Union Congress and Workers' Education', pp. 679-80.

<sup>109</sup> The NCLC made this point in a secret circular (No. 83) sent out on the eve of the 1926 Congress. The issue was quoted at length in [l.a.], 'An Open Letter to the Trade Unions of Great Britain', *Highway*, 19, Nov 1926, pp. 24-5.

<sup>110</sup> The proposal was defeated by 2,441,000 to 1,481,000. Corfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education*, pp. 54-5.

<sup>111</sup> Simon, 'The Struggle for hegemony', p. 50.

<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the gap between Cole and the trade union movement grew after the defeat of 1926. Neil Riddell, 'The Age of Cole? G. D. H. Cole and the British Labour Movement 1929-1933', *Historical Journal*, 38 (1995), p. 937.

<sup>113</sup> John Holford, 'Unions, Adult Education and Post-War Citizenship: The WEA and the Construction of Trade Union Education', in Stephen K. Roberts (ed.), *A Ministry of Enthusiasm* (London, 2003), p. 156.

programme without checking its voluntary spirit and restricting the intellectual freedom of students and teachers. By contrast, the initiative to democratise the programme by inviting organised labour to fund and organise WEA classes proved a failure, largely due to lack of consensus over what kind of workers' adult education was required and even what education meant—with WEA leaders and Marxists disagreeing on fundamental issues.

The next question to consider is to what extent the *1919 Report's* assumption that institutionalisation and voluntarism were compatible, would stand the test of practice. The purpose of the next two chapters is to examine whether influences from universities and government further undermined the democratic organisation of the tutorial programme. As we shall see, the *1919 Report* grossly underestimated the conflict between the logic of bureaucracy—featuring professionalised workforce, standardised methods, and disinterested services—and the democratic character of the movement—entailing voluntary participation, flexibility, and an acknowledgement of members' moral and political concerns. The idea to engender and strengthen voluntarism by bureaucratic support would prove to be unsustainable, a fatal mistake over which Tawney would express bitter regret in the 1940s.

## Chapter Four

# Debating the Aims and Methods of the Tutorial Class, 1919-39.

Education is not propaganda ... In propaganda you are trying to persuade the other fellow to accept your point of view. In education you are trying to find out the truth, and get the knowledge and training which will help you to spread it ... The WEA and WETUC have no quarrel with any propagandist body; but they stick to their own job—which is education.<sup>1</sup>

We are [undergoing] ... a revival of the issue about education versus political action. In the days of comparative peace[,] the WEA ... could put partisanship in its place with the greatest of ease and convince all comers that its sole mission was to persuade people to think accurately ... [T]o-day it is a distinction which no one perhaps has the heart to plead for. Where it is vital and realistic, education is political.<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction.

As G. H. Thompson noted in 1938, to define the aims and method of the tutorial class was 'the eternal problem' for the movement.<sup>3</sup> Theoretically, the twin principles of adult education envisioned by the *1919 Report*—self-development and social service—were consistent and complementary. But, in reality, the balance between the two norms proved hard to sustain. This chapter studies the debates on the aims and method of the tutorial classes within the WEA between 1919 and 1939. As I will argue, both the Marxist challenge

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<sup>1</sup> 'Workers' Education: An Appeal to Trade Unionists', WEA Pamphlet, 1924, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 29, Nov 1936, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> G. H. Thompson, 'The Eternal Problem', *Yorkshire (N.) Record—Supplement to The Highway*, March 1938, p. iii.

and the professional trend influenced the way in which the WEA balanced the two-fold aims of the tutorial programme. The view which was adopted involved placing a particular emphasis on the objective and impartial method of teaching, whose function in cultivating critical thinking and a sense of learning for its own sake, as the WEA claimed, was also the best way to serve the social purpose behind the tutorial programme. A distinction between propaganda and education was therefore made; while the propagandist approach taught students 'what to think', the 'educational' approach, allegedly adopted by the WEA, only concentrated upon teaching 'how to think'. This chapter will explain how the WEA came to this stance in the 1920s, and why this strategy had become untenable by the mid-1930s when the new catchphrase, 'the constructive teaching', was put forward to revise the objective method.

The chapter consists of three sections. The first shows how the WEA began to highlight the objective method of tutorial teaching in the wake of its conflict with the Marxist NCLC. I suggest that this shift in discourse was not due to any conspiracy, as Marxist historians have implied. In fact, the WEA's growing emphasis on the neutrality of the teaching was prompted more by the NCLC's attack than by the 'capitalist regime'. In the second section, I will turn to look at how this objective method was put into practice in the 1920s and 1930s by WEA tutors, who were increasingly influenced by the trend towards academic specialism. As I will argue, they reinforced the objectivity of their teaching to the extent that the social purpose of the programme was substituted by an apolitical professional standard with an emphasis on detachment.

In the third section, I argue that the rise of fascism and communism and the need to defend democratic values stimulated a growing demand for reviewing the academic/objective method. It was against this backdrop that the 'constructive teaching', in the sense of promoting students' action, came to be a new watchword from the mid-1930s. Accordingly, the line between education and propaganda could no longer be drawn as clearly as before. Yet, a positivist reading of the constructive method, backed up by the younger generation of WEA tutors, meant that the tension between the academic/objective method of tutorial teaching and the ethos of the labour movement ultimately remained unaddressed.

#### 4-1 The Objective Method: Distinguishing Education from Propaganda.

As the interwar practice of the tutorial class was increasingly based on co-operative efforts between the WEA, the public agencies (esp. the state and the university), and organised labour, it was necessary for the WEA to develop a discourse on the purpose and method of the programme that could be accepted by both sides of its supporters. The emphasis on the aim to cultivate independent thinking and critical judgment appeared to be the ideal answer. To the state and statutory bodies, this politically neutral approach allayed the suspicion that the WEA used public money to promote sectarian interest. Meanwhile, to teach students a disciplined way of thinking was considered a more tenable object in pursuit of the university standards. As Francis Sydney Milligan (1895-1966), a lifelong adult educationalist who tutored WEA classes (1921-24) after completing an MA in Social and Political Science at Birmingham,<sup>4</sup> noted, in terms of professional knowledge, tutorial class students could by no means reach the same level as the intramural students did. Nevertheless,

if one means by [the university standard] a way of treating problems with a breadth of mind and readiness of judgment, willingness to accept new facts, and to give up positions proved untenable, the perseverance to follow an argument to its logical conclusion, then undoubtedly the standard can be applied and in regard to these points there has been a marked improvement.<sup>5</sup>

University education, as Cole contended, could best meet workers' need by 'equip[ping] them, not so much with positive knowledge of any subject, as with a method of thought

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<sup>4</sup> Milligan studied politics under J. H. Muirhead at Birmingham, who introduced Milligan to the WEA. According to Brian Groombridge, due to dissatisfaction with the WEA's sole 'reliance on classes as the medium of teaching', Milligan left the WEA to take the wardenship of Beechcroft in 1924. Brian Groombridge, 'The Wincham Experiment—Frank Milligan and the Unemployed', *Studies in Adult Education*, 8:2 (1976), pp. 113-33.

<sup>5</sup> F. S. Milligan, 'Tutor's report on Newcastle-Under-Lyme's class (shift class) on Social Problems', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1922-23, 1923*, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/10, p. 32.

and work which they can apply for themselves both for further study and in the practical concerns of their daily life'.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, the emphasis on independent and critical thinking was an effective way to respond to attacks from the radical wing of the labour movement. Rather than blunting the labour movement, the 'objective method' was advertised as a tool that enabled workers to effectively understand social problems they encountered and work out solutions by themselves. As Smith explained, the tutorial class would benefit workers by providing 'the two educational essentials', namely:

(a) the development of an open habit of mind, clear-sighted and truth-loving, proof against sophisms, shibboleths, clap-trap phrases and cant; (b) the possession of certain elementary information and fundamental facts about such main questions as the Empire, the relations between Capital and Labour, the relations between science and production...<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the personal motive (discipline of thought) and the social motive (social service) were united in learning the method of critical thinking.

Marxist historians suggest that this emphasis on the objective method was an instrument of social control in disguise—its real function being to neutralise the radical voices in the labour movement. This theory, famously proposed by Stuart Macintyre, maintains that, via the influence of the Board of Education, the WEA was given a 'mission':

to break down the isolation of working-class students and integrate them in a national culture; in political terms the proletarian intellectual was encouraged to widen his narrow class horizons for a broader progressive polity; in cultural terms the old, dogmatic, autodidact knowledge was discredited in the light of university studies.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Doubtful Value of Lectures in University Education', *New Statesman*, 10:495, Oct 7<sup>th</sup> 1922, pp. 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, 'The Extra-mural Work of the Universities', fols. 13-4.

<sup>8</sup> Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, pp. 89-90.

For Macintyre, the enforcement of the objective method was a deliberate attempt to eradicate working-class consciousness. By the same token, in his study of the tutorial class syllabuses between 1925 and 1950, Roger Fieldhouse alleges to have confirmed Macintyre's indictment. As he concludes, most of the syllabuses conformed to the ideology of the establishment and gave a poor presentation of Marxist ideas.<sup>9</sup>

Yet these allegations are flimsy because, first, they simplify the complexity of the movement, which as I have shown in the previous chapter, contained different attitudes towards the relationship between class teaching and the labour movement. It cannot explain why the WEA itself—if it was really, as it was supposed to be, controlled by the state after 1919—became more left-leaning and more emphatic about labour's representation within the movement. Second, as revisionist labour historians have pointed out, Marxism was far from attractive to English workers and trade unionists, who tended to adopt a moderate, liberal, consensual and less theoretical approach to politics.<sup>10</sup> On his turning back on Marxism, Elijah Sambrook, a lifelong WEA worker-student in Tunstall since 1909, explained:

I was an Atheist and Marxian Socialist. I did not leave that because of its socialism but who can believe in dialectic materialism when philosophy has placed Kant, Rashdal and A. E. Taylor on its government front benches, and who can help but shed his dogma of a materialist universe when personal human values out-weigh it in the balancing of what is real in our lives.<sup>11</sup>

The marginal place of Marxism in the WEA curriculum was more like a reflection of its unpopularity among the rank and file of English workers.

Third, the Marxist interpretation underrates the agency of workers, or, indeed, the autodidacts, who were a crucial force in the WEA movement and who generally admired the non-partisan and non-dogmatic approach. The case of G. H. Thompson is especially

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<sup>9</sup> Fieldhouse, 'The Ideology of English Adult Education Teaching 1925-50', pp. 14-6.

<sup>10</sup> McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain', pp. 1-41; Eugenio F. Biagini & Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Currents of Radicalism, Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 1991); Jon Lawrence, 'The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War', *Past & Present*, 190 (2006), pp. 185-216.

<sup>11</sup> Elijah Sambrook, 'The Story of a Student', *Highway*, 35, Nov 1943, p. 13.

noteworthy. Being a quintessential autodidact, Thompson was at first a student in Arthur Greenwood's tutorial class in Leeds before he resigned his day-job as a carpenter in 1913 to begin his distinguished career with the Yorkshire WEA (Yorkshire District Secretary, 1914-23; Yorkshire (North) District Secretary, 1931-45).<sup>12</sup> Despite being a persistent critic of WEA national policy (as we shall see in this and following chapters), Thompson was unimpressed with the NCLC's dogmatic approach and acknowledged that the WEA could best contribute to the labour movement by 'helping the workers to gain for themselves the power to exercise a reasoned judgment on the personal and social issues'.<sup>13</sup> The truth is that the WEA's moderate approach won over these self-taught, liberal and independently thinking workers.<sup>14</sup> It was mainly because the WEA was less dogmatic than its Marxist counterpart that the former was able to enlist the support of working-class 'organic intellectuals', such as Thompson, who acted as a bridge between the WEA and grassroots workers.

Above all, although the Board and the H. M. Inspectors (henceforward, HMIs) did examine the achievement of the tutorial class by the university standard, in that the scientific method and the impartiality of study were stressed, there is no direct evidence suggesting that either the WEA or the tutors had reached a 'deal' with the state in regard to toning down the Marxist theory or the social purpose behind the teaching programme.<sup>15</sup> In fact, it would be wrong to think of the WEA tutors from the university as the sort of people who tended to conform to authority in any manner.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the class reports and other records left by tutors (such as the minutes of their meetings) substantiate the impression that most of them were passionate, independently-minded and, indeed, intellectually left-wing.

Indeed, the explanatory power of the Marxist conspiracy theory is very limited, but the rivalry between the WEA and the Marxist groups in the historical context, as I will show,

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<sup>12</sup> For the life and thought of G. H. Thompson, see Tom Steele, 'From Class-Consciousness to Cultural Studies', *Studies in Adult Education*, 19:2 (1987), pp. 109-26; Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 290-6.

<sup>13</sup> G. H. Thompson, 'The Eternal Problem', p. iii.

<sup>14</sup> Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 297-9.

<sup>15</sup> There were indeed records showing that the Conservative protested against WEA local branches organising events with a political character—which was in general pro-Labour—under the reign of the National Government in the early 1930s. Nevertheless, these incidents were nothing related to the class work, and clearly did not entail any influence on the class work. See Board of Education Papers, ED24/1916.

<sup>16</sup> As Macintyre also admits, the honesty of Lindsay and Tawney was unquestionable. Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 89.

was consequential. It was against the backdrop of Marxist criticism that the WEA accentuated its focus on independent thinking and the objective method. In refuting the NCLC's claim that the WEA was a capitalist agency to 'dope' the workers with capitalist knowledge,<sup>17</sup> the WEA made a sharp contrast between *education* and *propaganda* to defend its own place in the field of workers' education.

The WEA 'education' was allegedly distinguished from their Marxist counterpart's 'propaganda', firstly on the ground that the WEA pursued 'education for education's sake', not for any sectional, political interests.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the WEA argued that it did not seek to inculcate doctrines or dogmas into workers. Even though WEA members or tutors could be Marxists or socialists out of class, they did not put their faith before knowledge.<sup>19</sup> Rather, they educated themselves by undertaking independent enquiries and free discussion so as 'to see that there are two sides to every question, to have an open mind and a sense of paramount duty of truth'.<sup>20</sup> As a WEA pamphlet to trade unionists claimed, its approach was, 'not to convert the workers to some particular view, but to help them to make up their own minds'.<sup>21</sup> This 'educational' approach was expected to better serve the labour movement. '[A] wide and catholic and impartial education', wrote Lindsay, 'is a far more potent weapon for social purposes than a narrow and unscientific and avowedly partial education'.<sup>22</sup> Compared to doctrines imposed from above, 'the knowledge which a worker gains for himself by the study of social problems', as the above pamphlet argued, would generate a stronger motivation for one to participate in social reform.<sup>23</sup> In essence, the intended objective method was aimed to help a worker to 'think things out for himself'.<sup>24</sup>

By making this dichotomy between education and propaganda, between teaching *how to think* and teaching *what to think*, the WEA controverted the NCLC's allegation. The advantages of this argument were, firstly, that it manifested the WEA's commitment to the labour movement without violating the non-partisan principle. Secondly, the focus on 'way of thinking', 'habit', 'method' accommodated both the cultural and social motives behind

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<sup>17</sup> 'Notes for Speakers Series 1', WEA Pamphlet, 1924.

<sup>18</sup> Cole, 'Crisis in Workers' Education', pp. 18-21.

<sup>19</sup> Cole, 'The WEA and the Future', p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, 'The Extra-mural Work of the Universities', fol. 18.

<sup>21</sup> 'To all trade unionists workers' education - why and how', WEA Pamphlet, [n.d.; c.1924], p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Lindsay, 'Where We Stand', pp. 50-1.

<sup>23</sup> 'To all trade unionists workers' education - why and how', p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> 'The Workers' Educational Association: What It Is. What It Does., a souvenir presented to the Delegates to the 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Trades Union Congress, held at Hull, Sep 1924', WEA Pamphlet, 1924, p. 3.

the movement; the habit of critical thinking not only improved oneself in purely educational terms, but also contributed to enlightened action in the interest of the labour movement.

Yet, it proved difficult to draw a fine line between education and propaganda, a fact which dragged the WEA into endless controversies. In particular, the emphasis on the objectivity of education invited a rigid definition of education—to instruct facts, methods, but not values—which, as T. W. Price warned in 1920, was to erode ‘the bedrock upon which the faith of the WEA is founded’, that is, ‘education as a means to service’.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4-2 From Critical Thinking to Detachment: University Tutors and the Cult of the ‘University Standard’, c. 1925-35.**

From the mid-1920s education in contrast to propaganda, had increasingly been understood by university tutors, as cultivating not only independent and critical thinking but also an impartial and detached attitude of learning. They tended to adopt a stricter definition of ‘education’, and dismissed as propagandist the attempt to bond tutorial classes with the labour movement.

Within tutors’ professional body, the Association of Tutorial Class Tutors (ATCT), founded in 1919, there was a growing hostility towards the ‘social purpose’ of tutorial classes.<sup>26</sup> At the annual meeting of the ATCT in 1925, when MacTavish, WEA General Secretary, and D. A. Ross, a London tutor and later editor of *The Highway* (1927-29),<sup>27</sup> urged tutors not to instil middle-class culture into worker-students, but to ‘bring out the expression of a new working-class culture’, these labour-oriented views were seriously challenged. Despite the support of Cole, then chairman to the ATCT, most of the tutors questioned this labour-centred approach by contending that ‘the study of fundamentals’ in the tutorial class was not to serve a particular social class. The reaction of Robert Peers, the Head of the Department of Adult Education at Nottingham and the first professor of adult education in

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<sup>25</sup> T. W. Price, ‘The Task of the WEA’, *Highway*, 13: 2, Nov 1920, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> For the ATCT and the professionalisation of the tutorial class tutors, see below 5-1.

<sup>27</sup> Ross was both secretary of the ATCT and editor of *The Highway* between 1927 and 1929. For Ross’s biography, see Margaret Cole, ‘David Amyas Ross’, *Highway*, 34, Nov 1941, pp. 7-8.

England, was archetypal: 'the object of a University Extra Mural Department was to provide a number of keen tutors, of whom all movements might avail themselves ... the differentiation between middle class and working class culture [was] unnecessarily sectarian, and in fact, unreal'.<sup>28</sup>

Peers' view represented two strands of thinking which minimised the social purpose of the tutorial class. First, it reflected the ambition of the administrators of the newly founded extramural departments, who would have liked to see a universal provision of adult education and were reluctant to limit the services to working class communities (we will come back to this point in the next section.) Second, his view embodied a prevailing tendency to establish social studies as a professional discipline that could generate objective and impartial knowledge of human society. Peers' succeeding Cole as ATCT Chairman in 1929 was just one of the indicators for the changed attitudes towards knowledge and education among university teachers

Throughout the 1920s, the drive to establish social studies as professional disciplines made the objective method less and less compatible with the social or moral purposes behind the tutorial class. To underline that these new disciplines could discover scientific truths as natural science did, it was claimed that value judgment was avoided.<sup>29</sup> The speech of Michael Sadler, then Vice-Chancellor of Leeds, to the 1922 ATCT Conference captured this shift in the paradigm or *Zeitgeist*:

To my generation, the historical method [developed by Arnold Toynbee] was a revelation. It was a moral solvent of difficulties. But too great a sense of history involved the danger of having the fierce edge of one's savage indignation blunted. One should look at existing evils quite objectively if one was to be stirred into a determination to remove them. The ordinary highly-educated person was filled with the prestige of the old. But certain things should be seen in their beauty and their ugliness as they are.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 'Notes on the Tutors' Conference, May 29th to Jun 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1925', *TB*, 13, July 1925, pp. 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Stapleton, 'Academic Political Thought and the Development of Political Studies in Britain', pp. 179-85; A. H. Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 47-69; Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, pp. 127-31; Jose Harris, 'Platonism, Positivism and Progressivism: Aspects of British Sociological Thought in the Early Twentieth Century', in E. F. Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 358-9.

<sup>30</sup> 'Notes of the Speeches and Discussion at the Leeds Conference', *TB*, no.1, Nov 1922, p. 2.

The young tutors, most of whom joined the movement after finishing training in newly founded departments of social sciences, were bent on proving that developed 'objective' methods, could be employed by workers who received their professional tutoring.<sup>31</sup>

For the new generation of tutors, the object of the tutorial teaching was to remove student prejudice and cultivate an unbiased and detached view of society. Hence, 'moralising' in discussions was not deemed desirable; instead, students were encouraged to 'debate political problems calmly and without showing too much prejudice'.<sup>32</sup> Workers' political consciousness and moral passions on contemporary issues were considered an obstacle to the adult teaching. As Arthur L. Dakyns, honorary secretary to the ATCT (1922-25) and a tutor in Economics, put it bluntly, '[g]reat care ... on the Tutors' part was needed to discourage "mushiness", or a constant reference to present day problems on the part of the student'.<sup>33</sup> In short, 'the WEA Attitude', noted J. A. Mack, an Oxford tutor in Political and Social Theory, meant an effort to 'achieve freedom from prejudice, impartiality and objectivity of mind'.<sup>34</sup>

The emphasis on critical judgment and the positivist distinction between facts and opinions evolved into a war against prejudice or personal faith in the classroom, even if the tutor sympathised with labour's political or moral cause. Frank Pakenham (the Earl of Longford, 1905-2001), who was appointed a tutor for Longton WEA classes in 1929 after graduating from Oxford with a first-class degree in PPE, exemplified this tendency. As someone who was brought up in an aristocratic and conservative family, Pakenham was shocked and attracted by working-class culture in Stoke. The experience in North Staffordshire led to Pakenham's conversion from Tory to Labour in the early 1930s, if only catalysed by his wife, Elizabeth Pakenham (née Harman), who was introduced by Frank to

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<sup>31</sup> For the growing suspicion about 'general ideas' (such as the common good) and dislike of 'sentimentality' in university in the 1920s, see Hugh Gaitskell, 'At Oxford in the Twenties' in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History: In Memory of G. D. H. Cole* (New York, 1967), pp. 6-19.

<sup>32</sup> A. M. Cameron, 'Tutor's Report on Lincoln III (Shift) Class on Moral Philosophy', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1923-24*, 1924, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/11, p. 23; T. Purcell, 'Class Secretary's Report on Chesham Class on Political Theories and Institutions', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1935-36*, 1936, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/23, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> 'Notes on the Tutors' Conference, May 29<sup>th</sup> to June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1925', *TB 13*, July 1925, p.2.

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Mack, 'Tutor's Report on Talke Class on Modern History (1870-1914)', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1930-31*, 1931, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/18, p. 79.

teaching in the Potteries and became an ardent 'Socialist' even before her husband.<sup>35</sup> However, even if the future Labour Leader of the Lords (1964-8) no doubt had strong compassion for the labour movement, he reckoned that workers' political and social concerns became the 'chief difficulties' in his economics class:

The world depression and the so-called overproduction, though acting beneficially as provocative of stern and indignant thought and writing, began in the end to divert too much attention and to cast red herrings over too many promising trails ... Difficulties of a different kind were met with ... when political susceptibilities were touched. Again, a special interest gave a special impetus to study, but here it was harder to secure a fair hearing for any academic principle. Questions such as reduction of wages and Land Nationalisation did not evoke a purely intellectual response.<sup>36</sup>

A lack of detachment hindered the absorption of the objective method by the students. After another year's work, Pakenham concluded that lectures and discussion, though 'lively and provocative', were insufficient; '[w]ithout the subduing and canalizing influence of examinations, it would appear to be difficult just now to get students to accept as final the orthodox laws of static analysis. And it is equally difficult to know what to put in their place'.<sup>37</sup> This examination proposal certainly went too far to be accepted by the joint committee. Probably due to his disappointment with the academic achievement of the class, Pakenham ended his brief career as a tutorial class teacher in 1931.

Even tutors from a working-class background shared the passion to propagate the new scientific discipline among their working-class comrades while keeping social purposes away from the classroom. For instance, the class reports of A. E. Emery, the first WEA worker-scholar to study at Oxford (see above Chapter Two) and a long-serving WEA tutor, were infused with his emphasis on the sense of detachment. For him, it was desirable for

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<sup>35</sup> Frank Pakenham, *Born to Believe: An Autobiography* (London, 1953), pp. 60-7. See also Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 223-4.

<sup>36</sup> F. A. Pakenham, 'Tutor's report on Longton Class on Economics', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1930-31*, 1931, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/18, p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> F. A. Pakenham, 'Tutor's report on Longton Class on Economics', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1931-32*, 1932, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/19, p. 62.

students to keep '[personal] bias under control and pa[y] attention to historical fact',<sup>38</sup> and to 'put knowledge and scholarship before individual belief or party spirit'.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, what students should achieve was a 'sense of detachment', which meant 'not to use [historical fact] for the emphasising of some personal view or particular religious belief'.<sup>40</sup>

In consequence, the cult of the university standard—to be objective, critical, detached, and, above all, professional—tipped the balance between the twin aims of the tutorial class. Even the veteran tutor, Henry Clay, later admitted that what he regarded as essential was not the class's social service but the growth of the 'dispassionate spirit'. As he put it:

students of the class are at pains to justify their work in the class by reference to some external and ulterior purpose—social service, political work, their usefulness to the church. I never believed—though I hardly dared to utter such a heresy—that the class needed any such justification ... the life of the student, the element of study in any life, needs no ulterior justification.<sup>41</sup>

Personal development, or the idea of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, thus became a self-contained goal of the tutorial class.

Several tutors, who sympathised with the social purpose of the educational programme, testified to the tendency to downplay the concern over social action or practical reform in the class. '[S]eriousness and responsibility ... is lacking in many Tutorial classes more advanced academically', observed T. W. Harries, a resident tutor in the Potteries.<sup>42</sup> Another tutor made the criticism that the detached teaching, 'infested by a plague of generalisations', encouraged 'mere booming noises, all powder and no shot ... many of our "problems" are unreal, being but the interbreeding of these mental creatures of our own making'.<sup>43</sup> In reflecting on the movement before leaving the position of editor of *The*

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<sup>38</sup> A. E. Emery, 'Tutor's Report on North Wingfield (Derbyshire) class on History of Civilisation', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1932-33*, 1933, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/20, p. 72.

<sup>39</sup> A. E. Emery, 'Tutor's Report on Stafford Class on History of Civilisation', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1933-34*, 1934, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/21, p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> Emery, 'Tutors' Report on Burton-on-Trent Class on History of Civilisation', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1933-34*, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Clay, 'Introduction' in J. A. Mack (ed.), *The History of Tunstall II Tutorial Class 1913-1934*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> T. W. Harries, 'Tutor's Report on Wolstanton Class on Philosophy', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1923-24*, 1924, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/11, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> 'A Tutor', 'What the WEA Has Meant to Me?', *Highway*, 20, Feb 1928, pp. 77-8.

*Highway*, Ross pointed out that ‘the evils of specialisation’ had cast a shadow on the tutorial class. In quest of professionalism,

intellectual pursuits are divorced from the practical conduct of life, and kept in logic-tight to which the thinker may retire for indulgence in pleasant speculations away from a reality which he does not attempt to mould to his desires ... [T]his specialisation of studies, and this divorce of thinking from action is a profound evil, since it makes impossible the conception of a good life as a whole, and prevents its realisation.

As he concluded, as long as the trend towards academic professionalism persisted, the Idealist vision of ‘the uniting of life and learning’ would not be fulfilled.<sup>44</sup>

In the same vein, dissatisfactions over the distance between the class and students’ life were expressed by worker-students from time to time. An unnamed correspondent to *The Highway* pointed out that the detached method had distracted the tutorial class from working on practical solutions to social problems:

We have to use the weapon of thought in that struggle as others use the industrial and the political weapon ... When we study economics do we try to answer our own particular questions, or do we imbibe an ill-assorted mass of theories and facts? And where are *our* books, where the evidence of *our* conclusions? ... The tutor reproduces the old stuff, the student suffers from an excess of humility and good manners.<sup>45</sup>

Consequently, he/she argued that the value-neutral approach, in addition to workers’ deference to class tutors, was in effect suffocating ‘a distinctive working-class point of view’. Arising from the autodidactic tradition, the student-correspondent meant that the unique beliefs of the working classes, including co-operation and equality, were apt to be neutralised by the teaching method, and action based on the working-class beliefs was

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<sup>44</sup> D. A. Ross, ‘Reflections on Leaving’, *Highway*, 22, Nov 1929, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> ‘A correspondent’, ‘What’s wrong with the WEA’, *Highway*, 20, Oct 1927, pp. 8-9. Italics in original.

thus stultified.<sup>46</sup> This was a view supported by another working-class member who made the accusation that ‘Academic Standards’ were the ‘false God’ to worship. He argued that the alleged product of the detached method—students with ‘an attitude of philosophical doubt, critical, with a well developed spirit of curiosity as opposed to dogmatism ... [and] of tolerance and goodwill’—was merely a delusion. Not only did ‘class antagonisms’ persist between middle-class and working-class members, but the detached method was also unhelpful in curing ‘social ills’. For ‘[i]t is incumbent on anyone who speaks on a WEA platform either in class as a tutor, or elsewhere, on a controversial issue ... to measure his words with such precision that he leaves an atmosphere of such impartiality or uncertainty, that it is impossible to determine clearly their meaning’.<sup>47</sup> In the words of the first correspondent, the tutorial class with a detached spirit could not generate missionaries, ‘because the faith is not there’.<sup>48</sup>

Notably, such a development was a betrayal to the original ideal espoused in the *Oxford Report* and the *1919 Report*. As the former had stated, political science was, ‘with a view to action, studied not (as a rule) by pure scholars who love knowledge for its own sake, but by men who regard knowledge as a means to an end’.<sup>49</sup> And, as the latter report added, because the study of history and social sciences naturally involved ‘judgments not only as to facts but as to values’ and ‘the truths which [students] discover will depend partly upon the truths which they seek’, the premises or prejudices of adult students were not something to be eliminated from the class.<sup>50</sup> At any rate, the disinterested spirit and the scientific method were only implemental; as the *Oxford Report* maintained, they were ‘as necessary for thinking out political problems as for solving problems of electricity and engineering’.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, the consequence of pursuing the university standard was that the objective method and its promised reward—critical judgment—came to be ends in themselves, whereas the objective to empower the labour movement in practice was largely side-lined.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> ‘A Worker’, [corr.] ‘What is wrong with the WEA?’, *Highway*, 20, Dec 1927, pp. 36-7. In the 1932 *Highway* essay competition, similar criticisms of the impartial method were again put forward by several worker-students. ‘Views in Brief – What’s Wrong with the WEA’, *Highway*, 24, Apr 1932, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> ‘A correspondent’, ‘What’s wrong with the WEA’, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, p. 156.

<sup>50</sup> *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, pp. 80-1.

<sup>51</sup> *Oxford and Working-class Education*, pp. 156-7.

### 4-3 In Search of the 'Constructive Method', c. 1934-39.

Roughly around the mid-1930s, the WEA found itself in a 'hurricane of criticism', as calls for reviewing the aims and method of the tutorial class were rising remarkably.<sup>52</sup> In a way, it appears natural that, after a period of expansion in terms of both classes and students between 1919 and 1935, the movement saw the need to 'look at itself'.<sup>53</sup> Yet, the main driving force behind the renewed scrutiny was indubitably the wider context—the breakdown of the political and economic order'.<sup>54</sup> The political atmosphere in the 1930s pointed to a general crisis of confidence in the ideal of educated democracy. At home, the haunting economic issues perplexed most citizens and reduced the importance of democratic participation in favour of central planning. Abroad, both fascists and communists contrived to replace respect for human reason with the cult of emotion and violence, and both demanded total submission from average man and woman to either the leader or a singular ideological front: or, at any rate, this is how the WEA conceptualised the problem.<sup>55</sup>

The guiding principle of the tutorial programme was thus faltering. For many, the Idealist social theory seemed to be at odds with the new situation dominated by economic and anti-democratic forces. As Cole provocatively claimed, to understand contemporary politics, '[y]ou will get more ... out of the newspapers than out of Bosanquet or T. H. Green'; there was no way to fit the working of communism, fascism or international associations into 'the pattern of T. H. Green's *Principles of Political Obligation*'.<sup>56</sup> More belligerently, W. H. Marwick (1894-1982), a tutor in economic history, remarked that '[u]nless one accepts a mystical Hegelianism, it is literal nonsense to say that everyone must sacrifice for the community'.<sup>57</sup> Speaking to an audience of adult educationalists in 1935, Richard Crossman (1907-1974), then an ambitious junior don and a WEA tutor who had recently ended a one-

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<sup>52</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1935, p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association*, pp. 105-7. In 1919-20, there were 557 classes (including tutorial and non-tutorial classes), with 12,438 students, whereas, in 1934-35, there were 2,986 classes in total, with 59,132 students. *WEA Annual Report*, 1920, pp. 191-2; *WEA Annual Report*, 1935, pp. 56-7. For a more detailed discussion of the interwar expansion of WEA classes, see below Chapter Five.

<sup>54</sup> *Report on the Purpose and Organisation of the Association*, 1934, WEA Archive, Central/4/1/2/2, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Lancelot Hogben, 'Science and the New Humanism: I. The Methods of the Social Sciences', *Highway*, 28, Jan 1936, p. 62.

<sup>56</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Approach to Politics', *Highway*, 24, Nov 1931, pp. 8-9.

<sup>57</sup> W. H. Marwick, 'The Financial Crisis – A Reply to T. S. Ashton', *Highway*, 24, Nov 1931, p. 25.

year visit in Germany,<sup>58</sup> reflected on his disillusionment with '[t]he ideal democracy of equal rational intelligent men'.<sup>59</sup> Since most people would never be sufficiently interested and informed about public affairs, Crossman noted, the democratic ideal was just a 'political myth' serving the interest of politicians, who used it to woo and mislead the masses in much the same way as Hitler and Stalin.<sup>60</sup>

For others, even if the Idealist vision of an educated democracy was still worth pursuing, the rise of dictatorship with popular support indicated at least that the method of WEA teaching required a radical rethink. This was a need elaborated by J. H. Nicholson (1889-1972), educationalist and a key figure in WEA Western District.<sup>61</sup> The Vice-President of the national WEA (1933-49) and newly-appointed Principal of University College, Hull (1935-56), noted with regret in a book published in 1936 that

Whatever we may think of the policy of the present governments in Soviet Russia, Italy and Germany, we cannot burk[e] the fact that they have succeeded in generating a force of will and a sense of purpose for which democratic England can show no parallel ... [Those Blackshirts understood that] [t]hey were members of a successful movement and they shared *common purposes*.<sup>62</sup>

The achievement of these regimes in connecting teaching with purposeful activities exposed the limitations of the English approach to solely stressing 'straight and impartial thinking' to the neglect of 'a gap between knowing and doing'. If England was to make all its citizens the 'guardians' of democracy in a practical sense, it was necessary, urged Nicholson, to carry out 'a radical revision of most of our present methods of teaching citizenship'; the first step in this direction would be to 'create or recover a sense of social purpose'.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 224-5; Victoria Honeyman, *Richard Crossman: A Reforming Radical of the Labour Party* (London, 2007), p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> 'Fourteen to Eighteen: A Report of the [BIAE's] Fourteenth Annual Conference held at Selwyn College, Cambridge, September 20-23, 1935', *Adult Education*, 8:2, Dec 1935, p. 161.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 162-3. Crossman maintained the suspicion about the ideal of an educated democracy towards the end of his career. Richard Crossman, 'Entry for Sunday 14th April 1968', *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, Vol. II (London, 1976), p. 780 quoted in Honeyman, *Richard Crossman*, p. 137.

<sup>61</sup> Before moving to Hull, Nicholson was the Director of Extra-mural Studies at Bristol University (1925-33) and chairman to WEA Western District. 'Notes and Comments', *TB*, 16, Nov 1935, pp. 2-3.

<sup>62</sup> J. H. Nicholson, *Education and Modern Needs* (London, 1936), pp. 172-3. My Italics.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholson, *Education and Modern Needs*, pp. 160, 171-4.

From 1934, a range of initiatives was introduced to regenerate the 'social purpose' of the tutorial class. In the wake of the political turmoil, the need for 'constructive teaching' was gradually recognised: intelligent and critical citizens were not sufficient for a democracy to survive anti-democratic tides—WEA education 'ought to have political consequences'.<sup>64</sup> Put another way, Tawney heightened the need for the WEA, 'not merely to prepare men to exercise the rights of citizenship, but to aid them to preserve those rights'.<sup>65</sup> Yet, as we will see, the so-called constructive teaching also invited contrasting interpretations, just as the objective method had.

In 1934, the question how to 'attract to the WEA those thousands of working people who for one reason or another are still unresponsive to our methods' was posed to *The Highway* readers.<sup>66</sup> The first response came from a staff tutor under the Leeds Joint Committee, J. R. Williams, who brought home the discontents with the objective method. Williams was cynical about the alleged reciprocity between 'working-class aspiration and the University spirit', arguing that the university method, at its best, generated 'the "impartial", scholarly examination of all points of view [which] notoriously does not promote rapid action'. As a result, Williams noted, the WEA had failed to 'play any considerable part in creating leaders with drive—the men who shape the course of live working-class movements'. In seeking to arouse workers' passion for social and political participation, he asked to promote 'propagandist intentions' in the class.<sup>67</sup>

Although Williams' thesis on the incoherence of the working-class movement and the university spirit was echoed by worker-students in the following numbers,<sup>68</sup> the proposed propagandist approach was generally rejected by other tutor-correspondents, who continued to take the firm line that the function of the tutorial class was purely to foster 'independence of judgment' and that it was to remain 'a clearing-house' for all opinions and doctrines.<sup>69</sup> The most trenchant counter-argument was that put forward by Marwick.

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<sup>64</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Why a Special Number', *Highway*, 29, Feb 1937, p. 97.

<sup>65</sup> Tawney, 'Presidential Address to the Seventh Annual Conference, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1937' in *WEA Annual Report*, 1938, p. 16. See also G. D. H. Cole, 'Democracy in the Twentieth Century', *Highway*, 28, Nov 1935, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 26, Jan 1934, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> J. R. Williams, 'How Do We Stand with the Workers', *Highway*, 26, Jan 1934, pp. 18-9.

<sup>68</sup> N. B. Dolan, 'The WEA To-morrow—Readers' Views', *Highway*, 26, Feb 1934, p. 20; Albert J Allaway, 'The WEA To-morrow', *Highway*, 26, March 1934, pp. 30-1.

<sup>69</sup> J. A. Mack, 'The New Element', *Highway*, 26, Jan 1934, pp. 19-20; John Thomas, 'Whither the WEA?', *Highway*, 26, Apr 1934, p. 15; A. E. Teale, 'Can We Sustain Our Non-Political Basis?', *Highway*, 26, Mar 1934, pp. 28-9.

He made a case that the critics of the objective method failed to indicate 'what precisely the WEA should propagate'. The fact was that the working-class movement inherited 'no theory of its own'; thus, '[a]ny attempt at formulating an ideology means imposing an authoritarian and external dogma'. At the same time, the tutor noted that a lack of detachment and calmness would inevitably degrade the class into 'street-corner chit-chat and exchange of prejudices'.<sup>70</sup>

The stalemate over the revision of the tutorial method was responsible for the Jekyll and Hyde character of the *Report on the Purpose and Organisation of the Association*, adopted by the WEA Annual Conference in November 1934 (Henceforward, *1934 Report*). As the report stated, with a view to the emergence of 'a new social order ... which working people must play their part in shaping', the WEA perceived a need to inspire 'a new *belief* in its mission', which was to 'enable every student to make his own contribution to *corporate thinking and corporate action*'.<sup>71</sup> The *1934 Report* acknowledged that 'this revived fervour' would not come to exist without 'new methods' and 'experiments'. Thus, the university standard/method was intentionally left out of the text, whereas the report promised a new kind of 'political education' for ordinary workers who stood 'confused and overwhelmed' in the 'welter of political and economic ideas'.<sup>72</sup>

Radical as the vision was, however, there was hardly anything novel in the suggested 'new' teaching methods. In what followed, the report literally restated the principles of the objective method. Impartial and independent judgment remained the desired product of the class. As it stated:

It is not intended ... that [students] should go out in support of a party or sectarian solution of any particular problem, but rather that they should illuminate current problems by throwing on them the light that comes from inquiry and research, from accurate presentation of the facts and an objective interpretation of them.<sup>73</sup>

The suggested experiment was less a departure from the objective method than a practical extension of the method: students were encouraged to 'apply their knowledge and

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<sup>70</sup> W. H. Marwick, 'The WEA and the Working-Class Movement', *Highway*, 26, Apr 1934, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> *Report on the Purpose and Organisation of the Association*, p. 5. My Italics.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

experience to social issues in their communities',<sup>74</sup> an idea which had been put into practice since the early days of the movement.

To a large extent, the *1934 Report* revealed the fact that the WEA was wavering between two potential strategies to reform the academic method, and each was associated with a distinctive way to understand the organisation's 'social purpose'. The first strategy was to return to the Idealist tradition by reiterating that there was a *purpose* behind education and democracy. The 'social purpose' of the class was to strengthen students' *faith* in knowledge and democratic participation. Since education was understood as a process involving the confirmation of such values as the reciprocity between individual and collective and the unity of knowledge, this approach directed criticisms against the value-neutral and specialised method of teaching and learning. By contrast, the second strategy did not challenge the authority of the objective method. Here, the 'social purpose' meant the 'social function' of the objective method. Thus, the key was to develop the practicality of the method and to avoid a detached attitude, in order to show that the method could not merely produce critical thinking, but also promote action. In this way, the second strategy was more like a restatement of the official stance in the early 1920s that independent judgment and theoretical knowledge could be useful for the labour movement.

The first strategy, rejecting the value-neutrality and specialism of the academic method, was advocated by WEA veterans, such as Tawney, Cole, and Thompson. At the same conference that passed the *1934 Report*, Tawney warned his audience of the ominous trend of specialisation in the tutorial class:

When I look at some syllabuses on some branches of the social sciences ... [o]ccasionally they remind me of the familiar definition of an expert as a man who knows more and more about less and less. What is needed ... is the *humanistic spirit* ... which makes study attractive, without making it cheap, by using it to illuminate significant problems.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>75</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1935, pp. 14-5. My italics.

By the 'humanistic spirit', Tawney meant a broad vision about what human society *ought* to be. As he explained in a speech at the Annual Conference in the following year, in human history, all significant educational movements were essentially about practising 'the training of mind and character' in a new light of 'the outlook on life and society'.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, education was not so much 'a matter of absorbing information' as of acquiring social faith; and knowledge was 'not a series of unrelated specialism but a unity, which has a direct bearing on [the students'] own lives';<sup>77</sup> fundamentally, education 'is the process by which men transcend the limitations of their individual personalities, and become partners in a world of interests which they can share with their fellows'.<sup>78</sup>

In more realistic terms, Cole, who, by the mid-1930s had abandoned his early position concerning a clear distinction between education and propaganda, urged that education for citizenship should inculcate faith in democratic institutions and liberal norms. He regretted the futility of the 'liberal view' of education—the view 'that the final purpose of education is not so much to teach people facts or doctrines as to help them to think for themselves'.<sup>79</sup> Cole reflected that the threat of dictatorship had compelled the 'educational liberal', including himself, to see the truth that

men can live together within the framework of a real community—that is, on a basis of fellowship rather than coercion—provided that there is among them a large common factor of social faith and a large measure of agreement concerning the basis on which society is to rest. The freedom to think for oneself will tear society to pieces unless this agreement exists in sufficient measure to hold it together as one ... The restated 'liberal' ideal must, therefore, include the attempt to build up through education, as well as in other ways, a sufficient community of outlook among the members of the community to enable them to work and live together in reasonable harmony.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'The Realities of Democracy—The Presidential Address delivered to the Annual Conference of the WEA at Sheffield, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1936', *Highway*, 29, Jan 1937, p. 71.

<sup>77</sup> Tawney, 'Presidential Address to the Seventh Annual Conference, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1937', p. 14; R. H. Tawney, 'Chairman's Address [to the Third WEA Annual Conference, Nov 4<sup>th</sup> 1933]' in *WEA Annual Report*, 1934.

<sup>78</sup> Tawney, 'Presidential Address to the Seventh Annual Conference, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1937', p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Objects of Education', *New Statesman and Nation—the Education and Citizenship Supplement*, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1934, p. 62.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 64.

In this sense, Cole concluded, 'civic' education must involve an element of 'indoctrination'.<sup>81</sup>

The initiative to unite left and progressive forces in containing fascism after 1935, culminating in the formation of a British popular front, for which Cole made substantial efforts, also encouraged WEA members to defy the policy of impartiality.<sup>82</sup> The truce between the WEA and the NCLC meant the disappearance of one of the main causes for that policy,<sup>83</sup> and the anti-fascist consensus within the association reduced the legitimacy of the value-neutral method. In 1937, *The Highway* published a provocative article by Arthur Bryant, the conservative popular historian and sometime WEA tutor in Oxford, who expressed his preference for Franco's fascist campaign over the Republicans in the on-going Spanish Civil War and articulated a right-wing reading of democracy, which highlighted order, obedience, and Christian faith as its foundations.<sup>84</sup> Among outraged readers who disparaged the decision to publish the article as 'disgraceful',<sup>85</sup> Dryden Brook, Vice-Chairman of WEA North Yorkshire District and a former WEA worker-student, proposed to relinquish 'the academic method'. He argued that it was impossible to balance the social purpose of the WEA with the attitude of 'being completely neutral as between different social and political philosophies' and 'treating ideas as curiosities to be labelled and put in a museum'. According to him, the association should only welcome social and political thought that bore some relation to its purpose of empowering the labour movement in pursuit of a new democratic order; otherwise, the growth of the WEA would only lead to the disintegration of its cause and the WEA would be doomed to be 'a body working for its own death'.<sup>86</sup>

Another outspoken critic of the academic method from Yorkshire WEA was Thompson, who noted that the problematic neutrality of the WEA was intertwined with the 'pull' towards specialisation in the university. As intramural courses became more specialised,

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>82</sup> For Cole and the popular front campaign in Britain, see David Blaazer, *The Popular Front and the Progressive Tradition: Socialists, Liberals and the Quest for Unity, 1884-1939* (Cambridge, 1992), ch. 7; Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain!: A New History of the Labour Party* (London, 2011), pp. 246-7.

<sup>83</sup> There seemed to be no formal deal between the WEA and the NCLC, but their ameliorated relationship revealed in facts such as the appearance of the NCLC's ads in *The Highway* in the mid-1930s.

<sup>84</sup> Arthur Bryant, 'The Foundations of Democracy?', *Highway*, 30, Dec 1937, pp. 38-46.

<sup>85</sup> W. E. Williams, 'The Bryant Affair', *Highway*, 30, Feb 1938, pp. 97-9. See also J. Hampden Jackson, 'More Foundations of Democracy', *Highway*, 30, Feb 1938, pp. 99-100; 'The Bryant Affair' [extracts of relating correspondence], *Highway*, 30, March 1938, pp. 130-2.

<sup>86</sup> Dryden Brook, 'Where are We Going?', *Highway*, 31, Nov 1938, pp. 14-5.

Thompson argued, 'the Universities do not provide training fully suitable for WEA work'; junior tutors who made tutorial classes 'replicas of internal University courses' had weakened the morale of the movement.<sup>87</sup> Not only had the technical definitions and jargon 'muddled' workers, but '[a] subject encased in high walls of specialisation' had also prevented students from making 'political and moral judgments'.<sup>88</sup> In an apocalyptic manner, Thompson concluded his remonstrance against such scientific teaching:

There are many workers who enter WEA classes whose intellectual contacts have been very meagre, but who, notwithstanding, have possessed themselves of a faith as to the society of the future. This faith may be too simple and leave many things out of account, and a clever critical tutor ... can easily bring it tottering to the ground. But it must not be forgotten that this faith ... is the dynamic which has inspired such a student to devote himself to the working-class movement. He may recollect nothing of Paul and his sayings, but nevertheless to him also 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen'. *To rob him of his faith without giving him a better one is a crime, and if done in the name of education is doubly so.*<sup>89</sup>

This explication of the workers' faith in social improvement by co-operative efforts was an effective rebuttal of the critique that the labour movement had 'no theory of its own'. According to Thompson, the academic method should be of service to the profession of this social faith.

On top of that, grievances over the specialisation of academic disciplines were also vented by highbrows, loosely affiliated with the WEA. In particular, the Moot (active from 1938 to 1947), a group of Christian intellectuals who shared a common interest in education and met to discuss the construction of cultural leadership in mass democracy, concurred with the assessment that university courses had regrettably been 'taught in

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<sup>87</sup> G. H. Thompson, 'The Conference on the Study of Political Science and Social Philosophy', *Yorkshire (N.) Record—Supplement to The Highway*, March 1937, p. ii.

<sup>88</sup> G.H. Thompson, 'The Field of Study for WEA Classes', WEA Pamphlet, 1938, pp. 11-2; G. H. Thompson, 'Views on Literature', *Yorkshire (N.) Record—Supplement to The Highway*, Apr 1939, p. iii.

<sup>89</sup> Thompson, 'The Field of Study for WEA Classes', pp. 18-9. My italics. See also G. H. Thompson, 'What are We After?', *Yorkshire (N.) Record—Supplement to The Highway*, Feb 1939, pp. iii-iv.

value-neutral terms without any overarching moral context'.<sup>90</sup> Alongside other members who were associated with the WEA, such as T. S. Eliot, poet and once WEA tutor in London, and Walter Moberly (1881-1974), a close friend to both Temple and Lindsay and chairman of the CJAC (1931-47), was Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), the pivotal figure of the Moot and a founder of the sociology of knowledge. Mannheim postulated that specialised teaching was demoralising the adult education movement (and, above all, the university). Addressing the annual meeting of the tutors' association of 1937, he urged the adult tutor not to 'hide his head in the sand of some specialism but ... to face problems as they present themselves in their original setting, as organic parts of a social interaction where nothing stands by itself'.<sup>91</sup> Echoing Thompson, Mannheim argued that the 'integration' of specialised knowledge was instrumental in reorganising a dissolving society, especially because it enlarged people's outlook and raised their 'social awareness' which 'compartmentalised' education tended to block.<sup>92</sup>

However, even though WEA national leaders, working-class veterans, and associated intellectuals all pressed for a closer connection between tutorial teaching and faith in democratic action, this did not necessarily entail the use of the first of the two strategies mentioned above to revise the academic method. As WEA tutors were allowed full freedom in working out class syllabuses, they effectively had a final say on the question at issue. The tutors tended to interpret the social purpose of the movement in terms of being able to practically apply the knowledge in the classroom. The second strategy thus prevailed: as long as the objective method was applied to practical problems, its value-neutrality and specialisation could be a sound basis for WEA class work.

From 1934, the WEA summoned a series of annual conferences of tutors to discuss the teaching of particular subjects in the tutorial class.<sup>93</sup> While most tutors uttered a certain

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<sup>90</sup> Matthew Grimley, 'Moot (act. 1938–1947)', *ODNB*, 2016; Matthew Grimley, 'Civil Society and the Clerisy: Christian Elites and National Culture, c.1930-1950' in Jose Harris ed., *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 231-47; W. Taylor, 'Education and the Moot', in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *In history and in education: essays presented to Peter Gordon* (London, 1996), pp.159-81.

<sup>91</sup> Karl Mannheim, 'Adult Education and the Social Sciences', *TB*, 20, Feb 1938, p. 31.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 32-3; Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time: Wartime Essays of a Sociologist* (London, 1943), pp. 54-72.

<sup>93</sup> The topic of the first conference of 1934 was the teaching of International Relations, followed by that of Economics (1935), Politics (1936), Psychology (1937), and Literature (1938). See 'Minutes of WEA Central Executive Committee', Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 1935, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/12, p. 3; 'Psychology and the Adult Student', WEA Pamphlet, 1937, p. 5; H. C. Sherwood, 'The Teaching of Literature', *TB*, second series n. 22, Apr 1939, pp. 23-33.

extent of dissatisfaction with the academic method, few of them gave priority to the idea of strengthening social faith among students.

The 1935 conference on 'the Teaching of Economics in Adult Classes', as Cole, the chair, remarked, turned out to be a confrontation between the 'critical' and 'analytical' approaches to economic teaching, which represented the above two strategies. As Cole put it, while himself and the first speaker, Erich Roll (1907-2005), belonged to the first school which inclined 'to stand outside [the existing economic system] ... to criticise it in the light of a different standard' and thus 'to pass into the realm of doctrines', the other speaker, Barbara Wootton (1897-1988), the first Director of Studies for Tutorial Classes at University of London, along with several other tutors, preferred the second approach which 'start[ed] with a series of abstractions based on the existing system'.<sup>94</sup>

The conference began with a reflection on the alleged value-neutrality of economics by Roll, a talented economics tutor at Hull, who would become a leading figure in the UK delegation to the post-war initiatives for European integration. Roll questioned 'the positive [i.e. positivist] nature' of economics, and reminded his peers that economics was 'historically determined' and ultimately governed by 'certain political and philosophical doctrines held at different times'. If the positivist distinction between subjective values and objective facts was conditional, it seemed to him that the class needed neither to avoid considering social aims, nor to eradicate the 'bias' of worker-students (for '[b]ias is nothing more than the particular approach which the student adopts').<sup>95</sup> This historical and anti-positivist approach arguably accounted for the success of Roll's 1938 bestseller, *A History of Economic Thought*, but was nevertheless scorned by most tutors present who were prepared to fight for economics as a positivist science. His respondent, Evan Durbin (1906-48), an LSE economics lecturer with a close association with the Labour Party, derogated 'ultimate judgments of value' as 'personal matters'.<sup>96</sup> The prominent member of the New

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<sup>94</sup> 'Report of Conference on the Teaching of Economics in Adult Classes, held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1935', 1935, G. D. H. Cole Papers, E2/3/1/2, p. 10. It was actually Cole who recommended that the post be created and be offered to Wootton in 1927. See Ann Oakley, *A Critical Woman: Barbara Wootton, Social Science and Public Policy in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2011), pp. 96-7.

<sup>95</sup> 'Report of Conference on the Teaching of Economics in Adult Classes, held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1935', pp. 2-4.

<sup>96</sup> For Durbin's contribution to the social democratic thought in the 1930s, see Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, pp. 117-36; Jeremy Nuttall, "'Psychological Socialist"; "Militant Moderate": Even Durbin and the Politics of Synthesis', *Labour History Review*, 68:2 (2003), pp. 235-52. On the role of Durbin, alongside the first generation of university-trained left-wing economists, in shaping Labour's policy in the 1930s and 1940s, see Stephen Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party and the Second World War* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 28-33, 231-68.

Fabian Research Bureau and the XYZ Club, both of which advised Labour on social and economic policies, argued that the mission of the economics class was to cultivate 'a worship of logic'. Admitting that adult classes in economics should be connected more to practical problems he maintained the existence of 'a body of economics which is independent of any class purpose', insofar as 'the proposition that 2 and 2 = 4 is not riddled with class bias'.<sup>97</sup> Another two tutors concurred that, in order to 'approach the matter in a logical manner' students' 'prejudices' must not be taken for granted.<sup>98</sup>

In the second session, the 'analytical' approach was articulated by Wootton, who, by then, had become a well-established figure in the WEA movement and, as we shall see, went on to become the most influential voice in determining the official policy on the 'constructive method'. This distinguished lady, who is acknowledged as one of the four founding figures of academic sociology in pre-1950 Britain,<sup>99</sup> contended that economic studies must not succumb to the political interests and moral judgments of the 'politically minded' students. The objective method could still serve the purpose of the emancipation of the working-class by helping ordinary workers understand the objective 'laws' and 'machinery' that affected them. For her, the main pitfall of the method was failure to connect economic theories with students' everyday life, a problem that could be remedied by tutors offering more opportunities for the practical application of theoretical knowledge.<sup>100</sup>

A similar trend to defend the value-neutrality of the discipline and distance tutorial teaching from students' social faith could also be observed in the following year's conference on the teaching of politics. Compared to economics, politics was a less established social science in English universities by the 1930s, a fact that partly explains why politics tutors were even keener to demonstrate the scientific nature of the discipline.<sup>101</sup> During the conference, most tutors agreed with Cole's earlier vindication that the traditional philosophical approach to politics, notably upheld by the Idealists, had

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<sup>97</sup> 'Report of Conference on the Teaching of Economics in Adult Classes, held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1935', pp. 5-6.

<sup>98</sup> They were J. Thomas and W. H. Bolton. 'Report of Conference on the Teaching of Economics in Adult Classes, held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1935', pp. 8-9.

<sup>99</sup> Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain*, pp. 62-5. See also Pat Thane, 'Barbara Wootton (1897-1988): Pioneering Social Scientist, Feminist and Policymaker', *Women's History Review*, 23:3 (2014), pp. 793-8.

<sup>100</sup> 'Report of Conference on the Teaching of Economics in Adult Classes, held on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1935', pp. 15-8.

<sup>101</sup> See Stapleton, 'Academic Political Thought and the Development of Political Studies in Britain, 1900-1950', *passim*.

led to a *cul de sac*; however, junior tutors were far less impressed by Cole's own approach which was more or less concerned with ethical questions.<sup>102</sup> Instead, the mainstream, as a tutor summed it up, was convinced that 'study of politics should have nothing to do with political ideals, or, as the philosophers say, "ends", but should isolate for its exclusive attention questions of organisation and non-ethical activity, or "means"'.<sup>103</sup> A prominent supporter of this positivist approach and also a speaker to the 1936 Conference was Reginald Bassett, a long-serving resident tutor in Sussex (1929-44), working under the Oxford Extra-mural Delegacy. Despite having risen from a working-class background, Bassett, who made his way to study at New College, Oxford, by winning an adult scholarship, was aloof from the idea that social studies were to serve certain political ends of the labour movement.<sup>104</sup> To the contrary, he envisaged that the 'new politics' should be an objective study of political organisations or political methods. Thus, the emerging discipline could meet modern citizens' need for political education, by introducing to them, on an impartial basis, the way how the political system worked in practice.<sup>105</sup>

The method of the 'new politics' was explained more carefully by Bassett's ally, A. E. Teale (1900-82), a Manchester tutor and a protégé of Lindsay. Unlike Lindsay though, Teale was a patent supporter of academic specialism.<sup>106</sup> In an article published ahead of the conference, he complained that politics classes had been too general to penetrate 'the central problems of politics'.<sup>107</sup> To make political studies both scientific and practical, the new politics was promised to concentrate on 'the method of taking and applying political decisions'.<sup>108</sup> For, as Teale noted, '[i]t is one of the most distressing features of modern politics that few people seem to realise how much the society we now live in depends, not so much on the nature of the political decisions taken from time to time, but on the method employed in reaching and in applying those decisions'.<sup>109</sup> The scientific method of the new

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<sup>102</sup> J. A. Mack, 'The Scope of Politics', *Adult Education*, 9:4, Jun 1937, pp. 261-3.

<sup>103</sup> Mack, 'The Scope of Politics', p. 259.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263; 'Editor's Notes', West-Midland WEA Torch—the Local *Supplement to The Highway*, Nov 1935, pp. 1-2. For the biography of Bassett, see Michael Oakshott, 'Introduction to Second Edition', in Reginald Bassett, *Essentials of Parliamentary Democracy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London, 1964), p. xxi.

<sup>105</sup> Mack, 'The Scope of Politics', p. 265; see also Bassett, *Essentials of Parliamentary Democracy*.

<sup>106</sup> In 1949, Teale was appointed to a founding Chair in Moral and Political Philosophy at the nascent University College of North Staffordshire, the brainchild of Lindsay. See Stuart Brown (ed.), 'Teale, Alfred Ernest', *Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Philosophers* (London, 2005).

<sup>107</sup> A. E. Teale, 'The Teachings of Politics', *TB*, 16, Nov 1935, pp. 8-11.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>109</sup> A. E. Teale, 'Reply to E.C.', *TB*, 17, Feb 1936, p. 15.

politics was justified, not only because of its impartiality, but because it was the allegedly 'objective' policy making process that mattered in the real world.

This tendency to underscore the social function of the objective method—the second strategy to renovate the tutorial teaching—was reinforced by Wootton in a 1937 article, titled 'A Plea for Constructive Teaching'.<sup>110</sup> Wootton imputed the failure in stimulating students' action entirely to the slanted emphasis on critical thinking in tutorial teaching. She was persuaded by her ten-year experience in co-ordinating London tutorial classes that the 'conventional academic tradition' was responsible for students' common criticism of the class that it 'doesn't get you anywhere'.<sup>111</sup> The essence of that tradition, argued Wootton, was a 'combination of scepticism with contempt for the useful' and 'the habit of analysis without construction, of one-sided concentration upon difficulties ... [which] insidiously induces a divorce between education and life that ultimately deprives the former of all real vitality'.<sup>112</sup> Calling for the implement of 'a constructive approach', she urged 'the expert' not merely to content himself with critical and disinterested exposition, but always to come back to the question: 'if I were the man who has to act in these matters, what kind of action does the knowledge and insight that I have been able to acquire from my studies indicate as most desirable'?<sup>113</sup>

A WEA conference to consider Wootton's proposal on constructive teaching was held a year later, and turned out to be a head-on confrontation between the two strategies to revise the academic method. By then, Wootton had developed her reform project into two practical measures. To prevent the teaching from being 'critical, and only critical', firstly, the tutor was asked to explicate his own position to a certain problem or controversy and prompt students to make their own judgment after an objective inquiry into the question from different points of view had been conducted.<sup>114</sup> Secondly, she requested the setting-up of 'some over-riding criterion or objective' for teaching a given subject. For example, in economics, the criterion was to work out 'efficient and just economic organisation'; and,

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<sup>110</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'A Plea for Constructive Teaching', *Adult Education*, 10:2, Dec 1937, pp. 91-105; for a similar discourse by C. A. Mace, Reader in Psychology at University of London and a WEA tutor, see C. A. Mace, 'Making up Our Minds', *Highway*, 31, Jan 1939, pp. 75-6.

<sup>111</sup> Wootton, 'A Plea for Constructive Teaching', p. 92.

<sup>112</sup> Wootton, 'A Plea for Constructive Teaching', pp. 95-7. C.f. George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (London, 1941), part I, section 5.

<sup>113</sup> Wootton, 'A Plea for Constructive Teaching', pp. 98-9.

<sup>114</sup> 'Report of Conference on Constructive Teaching', Nov 1938, G. D. H. Cole Papers, E2/3/4/1-12, p. 2.

in international relations, the criterion was to save peace.<sup>115</sup> Behind these proposed measures was the concerted attempt to reconcile the positivist approach to intellectual pursuits with the demand for action. Value judgments were to be made only after the analytical method had been employed. Furthermore, Wootton deemed it possible to find a uniform criterion for each subject, believing that such criteria could be proven by facts.

Yet Wootton's diagnosis and prescription did not convince such people as Cole who did not share the positivist presumption. For Cole, Wootton's proposal omitted a critical element of a successful tutorial class, that is, social motives which 'moved people in adopting various courses'. The tutor's task was rather 'to help the students to carry out their purposes with greater enlightenment', to which the formation of a common policy front was irrelevant.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Cole looked askance at the positivist distinction between the reasoning process and the value judging process. He doubted the assumption that the teaching could be purely analytical before tutors revealed their judgments at the end of the class. As he contended, '[h]istory was a study of things that had happened, but it should be in relation to the question "Why do people behave like this?"', a question which could not be objectively answered. But, as Cole went on to argue, this impossibility to be objective also meant that humanities classes were an opportunity for 'the linking together of thought and emotion'.<sup>117</sup> This point was crucial because, as Nicholson, the chair, added, 'the sense of value was more closely related to emotion than to reasoning'. To reinforce students' social motives, the key, as Cole summed it up, was not to adopt any standard procedures or criteria, but to develop 'a right relation with the students by getting to understand ... what their interests and feelings about things were'.<sup>118</sup>

It is an irony that the conference on 'constructive teaching' did not lead to any constructive agreement. Wootton was indifferent to Cole and Nicholson's criticisms, and exchanges between the two sides were heated but desultory. The conference ended inconclusively with Wootton restating her own position: 'the problem was to get people to make a series of provisional judgments ... [The proposal was about] an intellectual problem on an intellectual plane, and ... emotional experience was outside this field altogether'.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3, 5.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Indeed, there was no need for Wootton and younger tutors to respond to the contentions of their well-respected predecessors. For, roughly at the same time, an official report to review and re-define the aims and standards of WEA classes was published by a sub-committee, in which Wootton was one of the six members and set the tone about the teaching method.<sup>120</sup> In addition to examining problems resulting from the expansion of WEA classes, an issue I will discuss in the next chapter, the report, which was meant to inform new tutors of the ideal class method, held forth about the constructive teaching.<sup>121</sup> Quoting at length from Wootton's above-mentioned article of 1937, the report officially endorsed the second view of revising the academic method. Again, the process of education was understood as 'a two-sided affair', thereby the critical and objective method must be amended by 'practical applications'. As the report put it,

good teaching [is] opposed to the detached and—in the bad sense— 'academic' lecturing ... We are thus back to the old principle of [teaching students] 'how to think': but how to think constructively as well as critically ... Such a constructive teaching ... gives confidence that practical policies can be devised, and is thus far from inhibiting action.<sup>122</sup>

In many ways, such a revision, based on the positivist assumption, was moderate and workable for tutors who had received professional academic training. Nevertheless, the adoption of this approach also meant that the reflections over academic specialism, the fallacy of value-neutrality, the emotional element of citizenship education, as well as the cultivation of 'an outlook on life and society'—questions which arguably revealed the ultimate inconsistency between the Idealist aims of the WEA and the academic teaching—remained unaddressed.

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<sup>120</sup> The sub-committee consisted of E. S. Cartwright, Wootton, L. J. Edwards, a trade union representative, J. H. Matthew, a shipbuilding worker and WEA Southern District Secretary, Ernest Green, WEA General Secretary and H. C. Shearman, a former resident tutor in Bedfordshire and, from 1935, WEA Education Officer. 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes', WEA Pamphlet, 1938, pp. 1-3.

<sup>121</sup> 'Standards of Work Review: Report of Discussions', July 1<sup>st</sup> 1938, WEA Archive, Central/3/2/5, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes', pp. 21-2.

## Conclusion.

To a large extent, the two strategies to revise the academic method represented two different views of the mission of the tutorial class, held respectively by the older and younger generations of WEA tutors. The growing popularity of the second strategy indicated a generation shift. As Henry Smith, a Liverpool tutor, commented at the 1938 conference on the constructive teaching, Cole was

the craftsman, responding to a specific demand from a class which had a social purpose—as the early WEA and some present day classes had. In such a situation the tutor had to exercise direction rather than leadership. Mrs Wootton's position, however, corresponded to the need of many students to-day, who joined classes with a vague desire to learn; to them the tutor was in a semi-clerical position, with less to teach but much to interpret.<sup>123</sup>

As WEA students increased and became more heterogeneous, a common social motive among class members was hard to maintain. Under the new circumstances, the emphasis on applying knowledge to practical issues seemed to be a more realistic way to promote students' action.

What Smith failed to appreciate, however, was the fact that the two generations viewed the problem of tutorial teaching in the light of completely different intellectual traditions and philosophical assumptions. As I have shown, the Cole-Wootton debate was not about whether tutors should be auxiliaries or leaders to the class, but about whether teaching should be value-neutral. For people who were influenced by the Idealist tradition, including Cole, Tawney, Nicholson and Thompson, the alleged objectivity of the academic method was fundamentally misleading because of its neglect of the co-operative spirit between tutors and students in promoting social reform and of its failure to demonstrate a wider social vision to the students. But for people who gravitated to the positivist tradition, these Idealist educational values were not only ephemeral, but also inconsistent with their professional training to distinguish facts from opinions. For sure, these junior tutors were

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<sup>123</sup> 'Report of Conference on Constructive Teaching', p. 7.

not, as the Marxist historians allege, conspiring to tame the labour movement. People like Wootton, Durbin and Bassett were unmistakably 'left-wingers'. Their indifference to preaching and boosting a certain kind of social faith in their classes was neither due to any insincerity vis-a-vis the labour movement, nor to any pressures from the government.<sup>124</sup> Rather, it sprang from their adherence to positivism and, indeed, to their own field expertise. In this sense, the conflicting attitudes towards the question of revising the academic method indeed represented the transformation of the movement, but that transformation was not so much on the students' as on the tutors' side. It consisted in a general shift in the intellectual paradigm adopted by WEA tutors, from Idealism to professionalism.

After 1939, as Britain went to war, the WEA was again preoccupied with meeting the mounting need for adult education among both soldiers and ordinary people, and there was little room for debating on the teaching method. In fact, the wartime ferment largely overshadowed the discrepancy between the two attitudes towards revising the tutorial method, between the older and younger generations of tutors.<sup>125</sup> However, as we will see in the final chapter, no sooner had the war come to an end, than concerns over the university method were raised again. Wootton's positivist solution—to stress the need for judgment/decision making after the objective process—proved incapable of resolving the tension between the academic teaching and the labour movement.

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<sup>124</sup> As Jackson points out, the use of the value-neutral arguments by no means meant that the younger generation of left-wing economists had drifted away from egalitarian values. Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, pp. 129-30.

<sup>125</sup> See e.g. R. H. Tawney, 'The WEA in Wartime', *Highway*, 32, Nov 1939, p. 4.

## Chapter Five

# Towards a Systematic Provision of University Adult Education: Tutors' Status, Organising Work, Curriculum and the Construction of the 'Ladder' of Adult Learning, 1919-39.

[T]he growth of [the WEA's] machinery, and the increase in the scale on which its work is carried on, makes it all the more essential to consider the spirit which informs it and the ideals by which it is inspired. Movements decay, as they grow, from within. They begin as an adventure and end as a system or a machine, and the difficulties which surround their infancy are small compared with the perils which confront them in success.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction.

After examining the transformation of the teaching work of the tutorial class during the interwar period in the previous chapter, the present one turns to other aspects of the tutorial programme, including tutors' working conditions, organising work, curriculum, and the grading of WEA students. As we shall see, the driving force behind developments in these aspects was an attempt, guided by the ideal of professionalism, to build a machinery to systematically provide university adult education.

More precisely, the purpose of this machinery was to ensure: a) an adequate supply of qualified tutors, b) the identification and organisation of students' educational needs, c) a wide range of subjects for students to study, and d) a systematic provision of classes catering for students with different levels of intellectual achievement. Largely due to the influence of the Board of Education and universities, the interwar period saw the

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'The Future of the WEA', *Highway*, 22, Nov 1929, p. 3.

construction of such a professional machinery in organising WEA classes. Nevertheless, as I will argue, these four-fold developments were promoted at the expense of the Idealist spirit of the movement, and especially undermined its democratic organisation. The consequence of a systematic provision of WEA classes was a growing distance between WEA classes and the Idealist ambition to create an informed democracy by voluntary co-operation.

### **5-1 The Making of the Tutorial Profession.**

Following the suggestions of the *1919 Report*, the 1920s saw the professionalisation of tutorial class tutors when more and more extra-mural departments appointed full-time, permanent 'staff tutors', who specialised in adult teaching and had a university status and superannuation. As I will argue, the making of the tutorial profession undermined the democratic basis of the tutorial work but hardly delivered the promised benefits to the movement.

The demand for a professional status of tutors had been pressed from the early years of the movement. Compared to university lecturers, the position of tutorial class tutors was much less stable whereas extramural work was arguably more demanding. For one thing, a tutor had to travel to different local centres to deliver lecture and private tuition. For another, the position did not give the tutor security of tenure, because the number of classes was determined by local demands which varied every year. While this unsystematic and volatile character of the post provided the backdrop for the idealistic and heroic reputation of tutors, they were generally unsatisfied with their working conditions. The Tutors' Conference, an annual event which convened first in 1910, became the Association of Tutorial Class Tutors (ATCT) in 1919. The aim of the association was 'the organisation as a full-blown profession, with professional standards, of that great mass of scattered and individual work which we call adult working-class education'.<sup>2</sup>

In a 1916 report on the status and payment of tutors, the tutors sarcastically dubbed themselves as 'intellectual casual[s]', who worked full-time without a fixed salary or

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<sup>2</sup> 'Foreword', *TB*, 21, Sep 1927, p. 1.

tenure.<sup>3</sup> They attributed the problem to a lack of professional recognition of their work, and proposed to acquire the status of university teaching staff recognition by introducing a more stringent requirement for academic qualifications and involving intra-mural departments or faculties in the selection process.<sup>4</sup>

Though this proposal was dismissed by Mansbridge as weakening the power of the joint committees in appointing tutors,<sup>5</sup> it was generally agreed by leaders of the movement that it was desirable to make tutorial work a profession with an equal status to intramural academics.<sup>6</sup> As Mansbridge admitted, 'the fact that, at present, the employment is not in all cases assured and settled hinders many who do not hold internal University appointments from taking up the work, even when they passionately desire to do so'.<sup>7</sup> In the same vein, H. A. Mier, Principal of University of London and Chairman of the CJAC, noted that, in order to attract talents, it was important to avoid the danger that the tutors 'came to be regarded as inferior to the general university staff'.<sup>8</sup>

Being the first WEA tutor, Tawney's account of the need to give tutors career prospects was more telling. In a 1920 letter in which Tawney invited Graham Wallas, who was a frequent lecturer to WEA summer schools, to join the tutors' cause, the former made a case for tutors' dissatisfaction from a career perspective. As Tawney put it, because the tutor 'has no secure income ... [and] does not know from year to year whether classes will be forthcoming' and '[t]he salary does not advance with years and experience', the tutorial work literally 'offers no future'. Consequently, 'tutors are compelled often to give up the work, though they would prefer to remain at it, were prospects better'.<sup>9</sup> This was in fact a confession of Tawney himself. Just a few months before writing the letter, Tawney terminated his work in the Potteries as a full-time resident tutor and joined the LSE staff.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The report was drafted by Henry Clay. 'Minutes of the Conference of Tutorial Class Tutors, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> January', 1916, Henry Clay Papers, Box 10, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> 'Minutes of the Conference of Tutorial Class Tutors, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1916', pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Mansbridge's comments on the draft report on the status and payment of tutors, [n.d.], Henry Clay Papers Box 10.

<sup>6</sup> For the professionalisation of university teachers during the same period, see Harold Perkin, 'The Professionalization of University Teaching' in id., *The Structured Crowd: Essays in English Social History* (Sussex, 1981), pp. 144-8.

<sup>7</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, pp. 60-2, 127.

<sup>8</sup> 'Extract from the Minutes of the Conference of Tutors, Jan 4<sup>th</sup>, 1913' in 'Recommendations of the Subcommittee with regard to the Resolutions of the Tutors' Conference'[1913], CJAC Guard Book 1913-20, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/1 Part 1.

<sup>9</sup> Tawney to Wallas, Nov 29<sup>th</sup> 1920, Graham Wallas Papers, 1/64, fols. 81-4.

<sup>10</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, p. 133.

If people like Tawney, who developed a great passion for the tutorial work, could have been discouraged by a lack of career prospects, the need for making tutors a profession, with a view to progressive careers, superannuation and a university status, seemed to be compelling.

Apart from attracting talents, there appeared to be good reasons for employing more (full-time and permanent) staff tutors, with a view to improving the standard of class work. Firstly, it is self-explanatory that, as a tutor complained, a three-year class with a different tutor every year could 'do little continuous work'.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, conflicts of interest might arise when non-staff tutors, who worked full-time and whose income depended entirely upon the number of classes they attracted, were 'compelled to persevere with classes so weak that in other circumstances [the tutors] would recommend that they should be closed down'.<sup>12</sup> Besides, it was also undesirable to see the increasing proportion of part-time tutors who took only one or two classes as an addition to their professional work. For, although part-time tutors' discretion over the standard of their classes might be less vulnerable to financial considerations, they tended to be more alienated from the WEA movement.<sup>13</sup> An ATCT report reached a conclusion that, in every area, full-time tutors were more active than part-time ones in voluntary work, a crucial aspect in the design of the tutorial programme.<sup>14</sup> As Henry Clay, then Secretary to the ATCT, summed it up in 1919, it was in the best interest of the tutorial classes to see an increase in the number of 'staff tutors, with an adequate salary and the usual privileges of members of a University staff'.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the interwar period, this assumption of the interdependence of tutors' professional status and good tutorial work remained unchallenged.<sup>16</sup> As extra-mural departments were gradually set up in different universities and extra-mural teaching attracted more attention (following the recommendations of the *1919 Report*), the

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<sup>11</sup> T. W. Harries, 'Tutor's Report on Longton Class in Modern History, 1782-1832', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1923-24*, the OUTCC, 1924, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/11, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> H. C. Sherwood, 'The Problem of Full-time Non-staff Tutors', *TB*, 21, July 1938, pp. 28-9.

<sup>13</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'Some Notes on the Organisation of WEA and Tutorial Classes in the London District', a memorandum attached to Cole to William Beveridge, Jan 1927, William Beveridge Papers, 2B/26/3, pp. 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> R. S. Lambert, 'The Condition and Policy of the Workers' Educational Association; Report No.1', Apr 1926, ATAE Records, Box 17, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> [Henry Clay], 'Position of Tutors in Universities and University Colleges', [1919], Henry Clay Papers, Box 7, p. 2. For a similar argument, see W. E. Salt, 'The Organisation of Adult Education in the Sheffield Area', *TB*, 17, May 1926, pp. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. *The Tutor in Adult Education: An Enquiry into the Problems of Supply and Training*, the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees, 1928; Robert Peers (ed.), *Adult Education in Practice* (London: 1934).

appointments of staff tutors came to be more common. In 1919, it was noted that there were only two full-time tutors with guaranteed income across the nation,<sup>17</sup> whereas, in year 1925-26, just over half of universities in England and Wales appointed staff tutors.<sup>18</sup> By 1934, almost every university was reported to have staff tutors.<sup>19</sup>

The professionalisation of tutorial class tutors was most successful at Nottingham, where the first extra-mural department in Britain was founded (1920). According to Robert Peers, in 1920 he was the only staff of his department, but, by 1925, Nottingham employed twelve full-time tutors in adult education, five of which were the so-called staff tutors who 'enjoyed the ordinary conditions of University appointments'.<sup>20</sup> The ambition was to have senior staff tutors who specialised in each important subject in extra-mural teaching and had their own staff of tutors in a more junior rank. Thus, a progressive career was made possible for extra-mural tutors, and the senior tutorships were expected to become comparable to professorships.<sup>21</sup>

At Oxford, the same tendency can be observed after the extra-mural department was established in 1924. From 1925, the joint committee was allowed to give its full-time tutors a five years' guarantee to make them staff tutors.<sup>22</sup> The service of staff tutors was complemented by that of full-time 'resident tutors', a special post which was created by Oxford in 1919 to cope with classes in districts distant from the university and to allow the tutor to take both tutorial classes and pioneer work in the same area without enormous travel costs.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, as the professional status of tutors was secure and the number of staff tutors increased, the democratic basis of the movement was under threat. The appointments of either staff or resident tutors weakened students' power in deciding their tutors. A tenure guarantee for the tutorial work meant that the joint committee must manage to organise 4-5 classes for a permanent tutor to take every year, and that students'

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<sup>17</sup> [Clay], 'Position of Tutors in Universities and University Colleges' [1919], p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> 'Table Showing Remuneration and Status of Tutorial Class Tutors—Winter 1925-26', 1926, ATAE Records, Box 3.

<sup>19</sup> H. A. Silverman, 'The Tutor in Adult Education', in Peers (ed.), *Adult Education in Practice*, p. 174.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Peers, 'The Organisation of Adult Education in the East Midlands', *TB*, 14, Oct 1925, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> 'Report of Chairmen and Secretaries on Proposals for Improving the Conditions of Service of Full-Time Tutors', Jan 1926, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/3/15, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> As mentioned above, the first post of resident tutor was offered to Tawney. *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1919-20*, 1920, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/7, pp. 4-7.

voices in determining their tutor must be tuned down. As an ATCT's survey of 1926 showed, the power of appointing a staff tutor had fallen either into the hands of university administrators outside the joint committee (who could exercise the controlling influence over university appointments) or into those of the secretaries to the committee.<sup>24</sup> In either case, students' opinions were not taken into account in the selection process of staff or resident tutors.

The effect of the creation of staff tutors on the practice of democratic control over classes was generally disregarded. Even at Oxford, where the WEA had the closest relationship with the university, the mainstream opinion was that the democratic principle was not above the discretion of the joint committee over appointing permanent tutors. In 1922, the committee appointed D. A. Ross as full-time resident tutor in North Staffordshire, over the veteran tutor, F. W. Cuthbertson, much against the will of members of the local district who had expressed their preference. The committee defended its decision by arguing that, because the resident tutor was not merely a class tutor, and the resident tutorship was partly funded by the local educational authority, students' opinion over its appointment was only consultative.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, the final decision remained with the committee and the latter 'could not acknowledge any obligation to give their reasons for so doing' to the North Staffordshire WEA members.<sup>26</sup>

Although the dispute did not escalate, the position of the Oxford Committee was no doubt arbitrary and untenable. The argument about funding source can be easily dismissed by the principle articulated in the *1919 Report*, that public funding should not change the voluntary character of the movement. Moreover, the distinction between resident tutors and normal tutors made by the committee, in terms of the nature of their work, was also groundless. Except the fact that a resident tutor would live with the local communities whereas a normal tutor would not, they did the same work, which was leading tutorials. Indeed, a resident tutor used to take fewer classes than a normal full-time tutor did (the former would have 3-4 tutorial classes whereas a full-time tutor could take up to 5 classes), since the former was also responsible for carrying out pioneer work in local areas to reach potential tutorial class students. Yet it was just because resident tutors also conducted

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<sup>24</sup> Lambert, 'The Condition and Policy of the Workers' Educational Association; Report No.1', pp. 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of the OUTCC, Aug 5<sup>th</sup> 1922, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

elementary courses and propagandist work among labour communities that workers' confidence in the resident tutors seemed to be even more critical for the success of the latter.<sup>27</sup> The Oxford incident only revealed that the democratic principle came to be vulnerable to a professional process of selecting tutors. It was too convenient for the committee managers to take away workers' power in the name of the new type of professional posts. (Apart from threatening the principle of democratic control, the appointment of resident tutors also eroded the WEA's influence in local organising work, a point which I will explain in the next section.)

Another question arising from establishing tutorial work as a profession was a concern that this reform would prevent the movement from losing talented tutors to other professions. Naturally, it is impossible to gauge to what extent better working conditions and brighter prospects would have avoided this problem. However, the examples of the first two tutors, Tawney and Clay, may indicate that the permanent post of tutors was not so attractive as they alleged to be. Both of them left the full-time post in the early 1920s, when the professional status of tutors was more established thanks to their efforts.<sup>28</sup> Both of them chose to take a university post—Tawney became a university staff member of the LSE in 1920, whereas Clay was made the Stanley Jevons professor of political economy at Manchester in 1922. True, their departure after more than ten years' service was partly justified, for, as Clay explained later, 'when the class had exhausted my repertoire and I could think of nothing more to teach them, I gave up tutorial class work altogether'.<sup>29</sup> However, there was no denying that their decisions also involved an element of career considerations. It is explicit that many tutors left the movement mainly out of a career concern, and a better employment status of adult tutors was no guarantee of retaining talents. For instance, in the ten years following 1925 when the OUTCC gave tutors long-term contracts, it had appointed eight full-time tutors. Among them, three worked for no more than three years before taking a post in academia or school.<sup>30</sup> One took a post in

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<sup>27</sup> As the OTCC had noted elsewhere, 'it is important that the person appointed as resident-tutor should have the confidence of the local people'. *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1919-20*, the OUTCC, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Clay was the first secretary to the ATCT and Tawney the first Chairman.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Clay, 'Introduction' in J. A. Mack (ed.), *The History of Tunstall II Tutorial Class 1913-1934*, p. 8. Another example was G. D. H. Cole, who was made the first Staff Tutor at London University in 1922, but resigned in 1926 on his appointment as Reader in economics at Oxford. Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (London, 1961), p. 208.

<sup>30</sup> A. B. Gibson, appointed staff tutor in 1925 before taking up a lectureship at Birmingham in 1927. *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1927-28*, the OUTCC, 1928, Records of the Department for Continuing

adult school after six years' serving.<sup>31</sup> Only half of the appointed would have held the post for more than six years. Three of the four long-serving tutors were former tutorial class/extension lecture students who won adult scholarships to study at Oxford.<sup>32</sup> It is likely that they maintained the post not because of improved working condition but because of a sense of loyalty to the movement as adult scholarship awardees.

On this point, the point of view of the HMI proved to be more down-to-earth. As the 1922 HMIs' report contended, it was desirable for the joint committees to keep 'a nucleus of full-time tutors',

each of whom might serve in this capacity for a few years. But such a policy ought not to be confused with a policy which aims at creating a sort of professional Tutorial class tutor ... [For] experience has shown that the man who is good enough to be a successful full-time tutor is wanted for other work as well, and it seems likely that if there were a large number instead of a small number of full-time tutors there would be a tendency for the good tutors to go off to other posts whilst the inferior tutors remained.<sup>33</sup>

The professional project did not fit well with the tutorial work which by nature had strong voluntary and democratic character. The work may indeed 'offer no future', as Tawney complained, but it was hard to build up career prospects for tutors without losing tutorship's character and undermining its *raison d'être*. In response to the HMIs' comments, Robert Peers questioned 'why this work should not be taken up as a profession equally with Intra-mural University teaching'.<sup>34</sup> As he argued, provided that the university was

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Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/15, p. 9. W. G. K. Duncan, full-time tutor from 1927, who left the post in 1929 and later became the director of the department of tutorial classes at Sydney. For Duncan's biography see Hugh Stretton, 'Duncan, Walter George Keith (1903-87)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 17 (Melbourne University Press, 2007). H. K. Prescott, full-time tutor from 1927, who was appointed Assistant Master to Eton College in 1930. *OUTCC Annual Report*, 1927-28, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> J. A. Mack, staff tutor from 1931, who was appointed sub-warden of an adult college at Newbattle in Scotland. *OUTCC Annual Report*, 1935-36, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> The four remaining tutors were C. H. Harrison, J. Thomas, R. Bassett, and AT D'Eye. Except Thomas, all were former tutorial class/extension lecture students who were awarded adult scholarships to Oxford. See 'The Adult Scholarship Scheme', *Rewley Papers*, 7 (Mar 1934), pp. 294-5.

<sup>33</sup> *H. M. Inspector's Report on University Tutorial Classes 26 May 1922*, Board of Education, 1922, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/2, pp. 9-10.

<sup>34</sup> 'Additions made to the Statement on HMI Report by members of the CJAC Sub-Committee', 1923, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/2, pp. 3-4.

willing to sponsor the creation of more tutorial classes, 'tutors can find a career in this important branch of University work'.<sup>35</sup> Yet, what Peers had shirked was, first, to what extent the principle of democratic control could be maintained if permanent professional tutors were employed. And, second, Peers also shunned the question whether a professionalised tutorial career helped to retain more competent tutors in the movement. In light of the inevitable 'professional/academic snobbery' and the need to secure career advancement, the consequence of making tutors a profession in the image of the academic profession was to make their job a less favourable academic post.<sup>36</sup>

What made the tutorial work unique was its missionary nature, which entailed both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it enabled a young graduate to acquire practical experiences from worker-students, to forge fellowship with people from different social backgrounds and to undertake various types of work (teaching, organising, propagandising, etc.). On the other, it was certainly not materially profitable and was less promising in comparison to established professions. But, after all, the reason why the movement could attract university graduates was not prospects but a sense of commitment. As Gilbert Murray recalled of his pupil, Philip Anthony Brown (1886-1915), who received a First Class Honours Degree in History from Oxford and later became a tutorial class tutor at Durham University before being killed in trench warfare in 1915,

He had in the WEA exceedingly hard work; he had an extremely small salary ... He had many offers of easier work, more ambitious openings, and much higher salaries. But he refused them all because he wished to devote himself to the work that he considered most important, the work of a tutor to classes of working men.<sup>37</sup>

It was from this perspective that G. H. Thompson's criticism of the campaign of the tutors' association looks not entirely naïve. As he later protested to the secretary of the Association of Tutors in Adult Education (ATAE)<sup>38</sup>, 'I have always held the view that

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<sup>35</sup> 'Additions made to the Statement on HMI Report by members of the CJAC Sub-Committee', pp. 3-4.

<sup>36</sup> For a study of tutors' career patterns, see Janet Coles, 'Adult Education as a Source of Employment and Vocation in England, 1919-1939', PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 1999, ch. 9.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Labour and Learning*, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> The ATCT was rebranded as the Association of Tutors in Adult Education in 1929 as the body accepted not only tutorial class tutors but tutors in short adult classes.

movements like ours were outside the capitalist system and should not have capitalist ethics and methods applied to them'.<sup>39</sup>

The consequence of competing with established professions for talents in the professional terms was, as Cole observed in 1930, 'a good many of [tutors] come to us less in the missionary spirit of the early days and more in the mood of men and women embarking on an ordinary professional career'.<sup>40</sup> A few years later, Dryden Brook lamented that

to become a WEA tutor in those days was to embark on a great adventure of which no one could tell the end. Only those who believed embarked on the adventure. Now things are different; adult education is attractive from the vocational point of view ... many of [the tutors] at best knew little about the movement, and at the worst cared little about it ...<sup>41</sup>

The making of the tutorial profession not only shed the missionary character of the work, but disconnected tutors from the grassroots movement.

## **5-2 Extra-Mural Departments and the Transformation of the Organising Work of the Tutorial Programme.**

The transformation of the organising work was another aspect of the quest towards a systematic provision of university tutorial classes. During the interwar period, the acknowledged division of labour—universities providing tutors whereas the WEA recruiting and organising students—was under great pressure. The newly-established extra-mural departments gradually gained an upper hand in delivering efficient organising work. In particular, the institutionalisation of full-time resident/organising tutors, appointed by universities, weakened the WEA's power in organising the programme.

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<sup>39</sup> G. H. Thompson to Ernest Green, May 5<sup>th</sup> 1942, WEA Accession 152, West Yorkshire Archives, Leeds quoted in Steele, 'From Class-consciousness to Cultural Studies', p. 118.

<sup>40</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Tasks before Us', *Highway*, 23, Sep 1930, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> Dryden Brook, 'The Service and Contribution of the WEA to the Working-Class Movement and the Working-Class Student', *Highway*, 28, Feb 1936, p. 112.

The so-called 'organising work' of the tutorial programme was not simply about meeting the existing educational needs by setting up classes, but also about stimulating and sustaining local interest in tutorial classes by carrying out publicity and community work, such as giving single lectures and networking among voluntary groups and other working-class movements. To a large extent, it was the outcome of the latter task that determined whether the tutorial classes could flourish in an area. A strong WEA branch that actively engaged in propagandist work with grassroots working-class support usually ensured the long-term success of the tutorial programme.<sup>42</sup> It was based on this assumption that the *1919 Report* justified the place of voluntary forces in adult education provision and the division of labour between universities and the WEA.<sup>43</sup>

This model, nevertheless, had considerable flaws in practice. To begin with, the strength of voluntarism or organised labour varied in different areas across the country. In industrial areas like Yorkshire where working-class communities were longstanding and well-organised, it was true that a well-connected WEA branch provided such an 'essential driving power of voluntary enthusiasm' that, without the WEA's local support, the extramural program would fall into 'total decay', as Thompson contended.<sup>44</sup> Yet, it was a different case in non-industrial or agricultural areas. For instance, a correspondent from WEA South Eastern District observed that '[t]here is no real organisation among the workers themselves, and, even where classes are started, there is not the same tradition of "keeping together" as in places where the workers have been organised for some years'; consequently, most classes were rather short-lived.<sup>45</sup> The situation was exacerbated by poor public transports in the district, and, inevitably, the few keen WEA members who organised classes and gave addresses at local centres, as a tutor in Kent noted, 'are worked almost to death'.<sup>46</sup> Voluntary organisation was apparently not sustainable in rural areas.

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<sup>42</sup> *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1927-28*, the OTUCC, 1928, p.12a; J. Thomas, 'Report of Resident Tutor in North Staffs Session 1934-35', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1934-35*, the OTUCC, 1935, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/22, pp. 110-2.

<sup>43</sup> *Final Report of the Adult Education Committee*, pp.112-6.

<sup>44</sup> 'Report of the Tutors' Conference, held at Swanwick, 13th-15<sup>th</sup> September, 1919', *Highway*, 7:2, Nov 1919, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> [Anon.], 'A Letter from the South Eastern District', *Highway*, 20, Oct 1927, p. 7. WEA South Eastern District was founded in 1926, covering Kent and Sussex, both of which were largely agricultural at the time. *WEA Annual Report, 1926-27*, pp. 13-4.

<sup>46</sup> G. L. de Vere, 'Kent Resident Tutor's Report on WEA Work other than tutorial classes for session 1930-31', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1930-31*, the OTUCC, 1931, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/18, p. 101.

Finance was another serious issue. Although the majority of tutors' fees were covered by the Board's grants,<sup>47</sup> the cost of organising work, such as tutors' and organisers' travel expenses and other administrative costs, were still to be met by local WEA districts/branches. Thus, the flip side of the growth in class numbers was greater administrative and financial burden upon the WEA. The *WEA Annual Report of 1928* revealed that the movement was 'carry[ing] on a volume of educational work, which has probably trebled in the course of the last eight years, with a staff and equipment but little larger than it possessed in 1920'; the total paid staff, serving some 35,000 students, merely numbered forty-five.<sup>48</sup> As a result, a WEA pamphlet noted, '[t]he WEA organisers [had] to endure the constant strain of overwork, and the constant mortification of seeing the best part of their work left undone.'<sup>49</sup> As the movement expanded, it was untenable to finance organising work purely by students' class fees and individual subscriptions.<sup>50</sup>

It was partly in view of the limitation of voluntary organisation that the Oxford Joint Committee appointed Tawney as the first resident tutor in the movement in 1919 after a request made by the North Staffordshire Miners' Higher Education Movement (later WEA North Staffordshire District).<sup>51</sup> It is self-evident that to have full-time tutors reside in local districts not only reduced the cost of travelling expenses, but also made tutors more available for individual tuition, students' socials, and voluntary propagandist work.<sup>52</sup>

Following Tawney's example, the OUTCC created three residential tutorships, respectively in North Staffordshire, Kent, and Lincoln, from 1921. The reports of Oxford resident tutors gave a taste of their work. As G. L. de Vere, who was made resident tutor in Kent in 1920, noted, apart from teaching tutorial and one-year classes, he visited small towns or villages, with a view to opening up study circles. The pioneer work, which he carried out with the assistance of his tutorial class students over the year, was listed in detail:

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<sup>47</sup> See above 3-1 for the implications of the 1924 Adult Education Regulations.

<sup>48</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1928, pp. 33-4; R. H. Tawney, 'The Future of the WEA', *Highway*, 21, Oct 1928, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> 'WEA—an Outline of Its Growth and a Statement of Its Needs', WEA Pamphlet, 1929, pp. 18-9.

<sup>50</sup> 'The Annual Conference at Easton Lodge—Summery of Discussions', *TB*, 18, Aug 1926, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Minutes of the OUTCC, 24 May 1919, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 1/15/1, p. 2. See above 2-1 for the origins of the North Staffordshire Miners' Higher Education Movement

<sup>52</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, pp. 117-8; *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1919-20*, the OUTCC, pp. 4-5, 7; *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1920-21*, the OUTCC, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/8, p. 5.

Near Ashford:

Sellindge. 4 visits. Subjects: 'Agricultural Revolution', 'Industrial Revolution', 'Italian Art', and 'Modern Italy'.

Great Chart. 1 visit. 'Industrial Revolution'.

Hothfield. 1 visit. 'Agricultural Revolution'.

Near Maidstone:

Sutton Valence. 2 visits. 'Italian Art'.

Swanley. 1 visit. 'Aims and Methods of WEA'.

Penshurst. 2 visits. 'Agricultural Revolution' and 'Agricultural in 19<sup>th</sup> Century'.

Wrotham and Boro' Green. 1 visit. 'Aims and Methods of WEA'.<sup>53</sup>

In the Potteries, the work of F. C. C. Egerton, who took up the position vacated by Tawney from 1920, was markedly different. Besides conducting one tutorial class and four weekly or fortnightly classes at different centres, Egerton focused the work on connecting the WEA with working-class bodies, by visiting or addressing Working Men's Clubs, Co-operative Guilds, the Pottery Workers' Union, etc. He reported with satisfaction that, once at a club, his lecture on Psychology attracted more than 150 miners.<sup>54</sup>

The variations in resident tutors' work for rural and industrial areas were another signal indicating the usefulness of the posts. Because resident tutors were not preoccupied with teaching obligations, they could invest more time and efforts in leading voluntary organising work and to help the movement penetrate working-class communities in a more systematic way.<sup>55</sup>

The success of Oxford's venture in resident tutors anticipated two reports commissioned by the ATCT on 'the condition and policy of the Workers' Educational Association' in 1926. Both reports pointed out the 'unsatisfactory way' of voluntary organisation. They thus urged the tutors, who by nature 'have the most extensive influence in the WEA', to actively

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<sup>53</sup> G. L. de Vere, 'Report on the Adult Educational Work (Other Than Tutorial Classes) in Kent by the Resident Tutor, 1920-21', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1920-21*, the OTUCC, pp.44-5.

<sup>54</sup> F. C. C. Egerton, 'Report on the Adult Educational Work (Other Than Tutorial Classes) in North Staffs by the Resident Tutor, 1920-21', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1920-21*, p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> Egerton, 'Report on the Adult Educational Work (Other Than Tutorial Classes) in North Staffs by the Resident Tutor, 1920-21', p. 48.

join organising work and recommended every joint committee to appoint more full-time tutors whose regular duties would include organising and propagandist work among working-class communities.<sup>56</sup>

Notably, the proposal drew polarised reactions when it was presented to the 1926 ATCT Annual Conference. On the one hand, for pro-WEA delegates, the proposal was regarded as an opportunity to narrow the widening gap between tutorial classes and the labour movement. J. W. Muir, the newly appointed WEA National Organiser, argued that 'teachers were already too apt to hold themselves aloof from social movements', and, thus, W. Lowth, a tutor and Assisting Secretary to WEA Central Office, commented, 'Every tutor ought to be a propagandist for the movement'.<sup>57</sup> It was tutors who should take on 'real leadership' of organisation work outside the classes, added Cole.<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, led by Robert Peers, a group of tutors bluntly expressed their dislike for the idea of getting tutors more involved in voluntary organisation. Peers firmly denied that 'the key to the movement lay with tutors'. As he put it, '[t]utors should do propaganda for the WEA only if drawn to the work voluntarily. Their real job was to teach, and no pressure should be brought to bear on them to do more'.<sup>59</sup> Joining Peers' opposition, E. Hickinbotham, a Liverpool tutor, complained that the WEA must not 'coerce them in activities which should be voluntary'.<sup>60</sup> Other tutors also worried that the proposal would undermine the impartial character of tutors' work.<sup>61</sup> At first glance, these criticisms appeared to be an attempt to defend the acknowledged division of labour between professional university teaching and voluntary WEA organisation. Yet, as we will see later, what Peers really intended was not to draw a line and leave organising matters in the hands of the WEA. Rather, the real reason why Peers and his circle opposed the use of tutors'

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<sup>56</sup> Lambert, 'The Condition and Policy of the Workers' Educational Association; Report No.1', p. 7; D. A. Ross, 'The Condition and Policy of the Workers' Educational Association: Report No.2', Apr 1926, ATAE Records, Box 17, pp. 12-3.

<sup>57</sup> 'The Annual Conference at Easton Lodge—Summary of Discussions', p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11. Indeed, the campaign to get tutors involved in voluntary organisation was not only endorsed, but, in fact, prompted by the Central WEA. Before the two reports, the WEA had sent a memo on the need of tutors' 'active participation in general WEA work' in 1925. WEA FGPC Minutes, 27 Aug 1925, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/7, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> 'The Annual Conference at Easton Lodge—Summary of Discussions', p.10.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>61</sup> See comments by F. Garstang and B. I. Macalpine in 'The Annual Conference at Easton Lodge—Summary of Discussions', p. 11.

labour to assist WEA organising work was because they, standing for the rising power of extra-mural departments, meant to wrest the control of organising work from the WEA.

Indeed, it was against the backdrop of the changing balance of power between extra-mural departments and the WEA that the issue of tutors' role in organising/propagandist work was brought onto the table. It was no coincidence that another session of the same conference considered the question of 'the organisation of Extra Mural Departments of Universities'. As R. S. Lambert, a London tutor and then Highway Editor, who was responsible for one of the two above-mentioned ATCT reports, warned the conference, 'the situation was a changing one. Extra Mural Departments of Universities were springing up and taking definite form. The question of control over the work was urgent'.<sup>62</sup> In Lambert's written report, the point was made more explicitly:

in those cases where the University is enlarging the size, scope and importance of its extra-mural department ... [and where] the local WEA is inert[,] there may be a tendency for it to get elbowed out of its position as equal partner in the Tutorial Class movement, and to be relegated to a position of being merely one among many voluntary bodies associated with the University.<sup>63</sup>

The consequence of the growth of extra-mural departments could be the eclipse of the working-class character of the tutorial classes which might 'become subordinated to "adult" education', argued H. L. Beales (1889-1988), a left-wing economic historian and an acclaimed WEA tutor.<sup>64</sup>

It is rather curious that Peers, who chaired the session, did not respond to these allegations (at least according to the minutes), for the tendency that Lambert and Beales feared to see was exactly what was happening at the Department of Adult Education,

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12. The same concern had been expressed by a memorandum issued by the WEA prior to the Conference. See 'Memorandum on University Extra-mural Boards and Their Relation to University Joint Committees', appended to WEA FGPC Minutes, 29 Apr 1926, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/8, pp. 1-2.

<sup>63</sup> Lambert, 'The Condition and Policy of the Workers' Educational Association; Report No.1', p. 7.

<sup>64</sup> 'The Annual Conference at Easton Lodge—Summery of Discussions', p.12. Beales was lecturer in economic history at Sheffield before moving to LSE in 1926, where he kept his passionate interest in extra-mural teaching. His influential work, *The Industrial Revolution*, published in 1929, was primarily written for WEA classes and became 'almost a bible for the whole adult education movement'. 'Tutors' Association Annual Report, 1929', *TB*, 29, Feb 1930, p. 9. See also Alexander Hutton, "'A Repository, a Switchboard, a Dynamo": H.L. Beales, a Historian in a Mass Media Age', *Contemporary British History*, 30:3 (2016), pp. 407-26.

Nottingham, where Peers was the chief. By creating a 'Departmental Committee' which was above the old joint tutorial classes committee and made final decisions on class organisation, the Nottingham department reduced the influence of WEA's equal representation on the latter committee.<sup>65</sup> In 1925, the department, in collaboration with Loughborough College, created a joint committee to conduct an extra-mural scheme in Leicestershire, but the committee did not give the WEA representation and the words 'working-class' were intentionally omitted from its constitution.<sup>66</sup> Later in 1926, in a report on 'Adult Education in East Midlands' (published after the above ACTC Conference), Peers went so far as to propose to sabotage the 'fifty-fifty university-WEA principle' underlying the tutorial classes committee, recommending both the L.E.A. and non-working-class voluntary bodies to be represented on the committee. As it were, he had little sympathy with the idea of workers' control over class organisation. From the viewpoint of the department administrator, workers' control did not predicate the success of an adult class, and, at any rates, he argued, the last word lay with the students 'who are at liberty either to attend or to stay away'.<sup>67</sup>

At any rate, by the late 1920s, it had been widely recognised that organising work done by the WEA alone was inadequate. As the scheduled revision of the adult education regulations came close at hand,<sup>68</sup> opinions divided on how to reform the situation, and in particular on what role the burgeoning extra-mural departments should play in organising work.<sup>69</sup> For people who favoured professional administration and preferred 'adult education' to 'workers' education', such as Peers, they would like to consolidate departmental power and thus to restrain the influence of the WEA. As Hickinbotham put it bluntly, '[t]he Joint Committee, the WEA, the Tutorial Class, etc., are not necessarily God-given institutions. They have done, and are doing, good work, yet they may not be the only or the final, word'.<sup>70</sup> For Peers and his allies, the problem of WEA organising work indicated

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<sup>65</sup> A. H. Dainton, 'Adult Education in the East Midlands', *TB*, 19, Jan 1927, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> WEA FGPC Minutes, 28 May 1925, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/7, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Peers, 'Adult Education in East Midlands', 1926, quoted in A. H. Dainton, 'Adult Education in the East Midlands', p. 2. Another critic of the principle of workers' control was Wootton. See Barbara Wootton, *In a World I never Made* (London, 1967), pp. 77-8.

<sup>68</sup> The prefatory note to the Adult Education Regulations of 1924 suggested the arrangement was only an 'interim measure' and subject to review after 1929.

<sup>69</sup> J. H. Nicholson, 'Extra-Mural Departments and Voluntary Bodies', *TB*, 30, Mar 1930, pp. 19-20.

<sup>70</sup> E. Hickinbotham, 'The Adult Education Regulations', *TB*, 24, May 1928, p. 11.

the plight of the old division of labour, and the new extra-mural departments must seize the chance to end the monopoly of the WEA.<sup>71</sup>

By contrast, for people who were left-wing or pro-WEA, the remedy lay in tutors. It was believed that the established division of labour between universities and the WEA would be preserved, as long as the newly-created positions of resident/organising tutors were taken by people who respected the working-class character of the movement and sharing its co-operative values. In this way, as the pro-WEA reformers understood it, even though the new appointments were made by universities and sponsored by the state, the equal representation principle would remain justified, because it was still the WEA that was in charge of organising work among labour communities whereas organising tutors' function was auxiliary.<sup>72</sup>

In 1930, on behalf of the WEA, the CJAC, the ATAE, and the Universities Extra-Mural Consultative Committee (UEMCC)<sup>73</sup>, a memorandum on revising the adult education regulations was submitted to the Board of Education. The reform in organising work was highlighted.<sup>74</sup> Amendments to the regulations were issued by the Board two years later. The most remarkable addition of the new regulations of 1932 was the recognition of organising tutors (Article 11). It stipulated to cover up to three quarters (or a maximum of £280) of the salary of full-time organising tutors who were appointed by 'a University or University College' to conduct at least one tutorial class and 'pioneer work intended to develop adult education' or other types of short classes (see the following section).<sup>75</sup> Each university or university college was limited to two such tutors, though a third tutor might be so aided 'in exception cases'.<sup>76</sup> To the WEA's disappointment, however, the Board did not agree to sponsor class organisers who were employed by bodies other than universities (namely, by the WEA).<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Peers, *Adult Education: A Comparative Study*, pp. 92-3.

<sup>72</sup> 'Report on National Policy in respect to WEA Relationships with Universities & LEA', 1931, WEA Archive, Central/4/1/1/4.

<sup>73</sup> The UEMCC was founded in 1926, for the purpose of co-ordinating the work of the extra-mural departments of different universities. The body, which had no delegates from the WEA in the beginning, represented the growing power of the extra-mural departments.

<sup>74</sup> 'Board of Education (Adult Education Regulations) 1924—Proposals for Revision, submitted on behalf of, the UEMCC, and the Tutors' Association', Mar 1930, CJAC Guard books, 1927-30, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/2 Part2.

<sup>75</sup> Board of Education (Adult Education) Regulations, 1932, article 11 (a)(b).

<sup>76</sup> Board of Education (Adult Education) Regulations, 1932, article 11 (a).

<sup>77</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1931, p. 25.

This arrangement was a compromise between the two sides of opinions. It did not fundamentally challenge the existing division of labour between universities and the WEA. The pro-WEA tutors and the WEA were pleased to see that the new clause admitted the flexibility of tutors' role without legitimising the power of universities over organising work.<sup>78</sup> Under the new system, the Oxford model of resident tutors, who worked hand in hand with WEA local bodies, was more likely to be adopted by other universities which had hitherto been prevented from doing so due to financial difficulties. WEA officials were thus sanguine about the implementation of the new regulations. Ernest Green (1885-1977), a long-serving WEA administrator who would be appointed General Secretary in 1935, claimed that the appointment of the new type of organising tutors did not 'ma[ke] the contribution of the WEA less essential'; the recognition that organising tutors' work and the WEA were interdependent, argued Green, was 'a standing discouragement to the professionalism which would kill the spirit out of which the Adult Education movement has grown'.<sup>79</sup>

However, the clause also left a loop-hole regarding how the work of organising tutors was to be carried out, which indicated that Green's interpretation was over-optimistic. The clause remained elusive on whether organising tutors should focus on working-class communities, and whether the nature of their work involved collaboration with the WEA.<sup>80</sup> In effect, it opened up the possibility for universities to manipulate the organising work of the tutorial programme. As Cole observed in 1939, 'as extra-mural activities come to play a larger part in the work of the Universities, the University authorities ... are less willing to leave them to be run almost exclusively by a handful of University teachers who are strong WEA supporters'.<sup>81</sup> When Peers reflected on the implications of the 1932 Regulations later in the 1950s, he reckoned that the real effect of the employment of full-time organising tutors 'was to break down the distinction between the purely teaching function and the organisation of the demand, which had hitherto in theory been the prerogative of the

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>79</sup> Ernest Green, 'The Voluntary Movement: Its Place in Adult Education in Great Britain', WEA Pamphlet, 1937, pp. 2-3. Before elected General Secretary, Green was Yorkshire District Secretary (1923-28), Assistant General Secretary (1928-31), and (National) Organising Secretary (1931-35).

<sup>80</sup> 'Adult Education Regulations—Memorandum to Responsible Bodies', Board of Education, May 1932, CJAC Guard books, 1932-35, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/2 Part2, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Tutor and the Working Class Movement', *TB*, second series no. 22, Apr 1939, p. 5.

voluntary body [i.e. the WEA]'.<sup>82</sup> The trend, of which he was in favour, was that the extra-mural departments were thus able to organise classes which did not solely cater to working-class interests. Peers defended this development by arguing that a university should aim to provide 'adult education' rather than 'workers' education'. As he argued,

A university cannot limit its service to any one section of the population ... many people who were not at all unsympathetic to working-class aims felt themselves to be excluded by a body which appeared to exist specifically for 'workers' in the narrower sense ... [The universities] had to be in a position to ensure that they were fully used. So long as the creation of the demand was exclusively in the hands of another body, there could be no guarantee of this ...<sup>83</sup>

Peers did make a point that universities, as national institutions, should serve every community. Nevertheless, what Peers failed to appreciate was the Idealist objectives behind the original tutorial programme. The ideal to promote voluntary learning and mutual improvement through cross-class co-operation and democratic control over education was thus replaced by a top-down, uniform and bureaucratic organising machine. Similarly, the social purpose of the tutorial class—to intellectually empower the labour movement—was understated in Peers' argument—a marked trend which is also detectable when we turn to the curriculum development and course design of the tutorial programme in the following two sections.

### **5-3 Extra-Mural Departments and the Expansion of the Scope of Tutorial Class Subjects.**

The development of the curriculum of the tutorial classes was another aspect showing the ways in which extramural departments changed the movement. It is remarkable that the scope of subjects studied by tutorial classes was significantly enlarged during the interwar

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<sup>82</sup> Peers, *Adult Education: A Comparative Study*, p. 99.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

period, but a more striking development, as I will argue, was a more aggressive attitude of university administrators and tutors to prompt students to take subjects other than social studies.

In comparison to the situation before 1918, the interwar tutorial classes featured an expansion in the range of subjects studied. By 1918, there had generally been around 70-80% of students studying social sciences and history classes, which were where worker-students had a 'living interest'.<sup>84</sup> However, during the 1920s, the proportion of social sciences classes shrunk from 61% in 1920-21 to 42% in 1929-30. The figure would remain unchanged throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In the similar vein, the figure for history courses plunged from 21% in 1914-15 to merely 3% in 1920-21, while slowly recovering to just under 10% in the 1930s. By contrast, the interwar period saw a significant increase in literature and arts tutorial classes. The percentage of the classes doubled from 10% in 1914-15 to 21% in 1919-20. By 1930, literature classes had accounted for 29% of total classes. There were also moderate increases in philosophy and psychology, and science courses during the interwar period.<sup>85</sup>

The reasons for this extension of the scope of subjects studied and thus the decline of the proportion of social science classes were multiple, and they did not necessarily point to, as some studies suggest, the 'bourgeoisification' of WEA tutorial classes—in terms of the social backgrounds and intellectual interest of the students.<sup>86</sup> For, first, after finishing a three-year course, the same group of students could continue to take another three-year programme. And it was natural for students, whose initial demand was for social studies, to expand their interests to other disciplines after a few years.<sup>87</sup> Second, the extension of the scope of study in tutorial classes was not due to the alleged decline of worker-student participation. Although it is impossible to define 'workers' with exactness, different statistics suggest that the social composition of students during the interwar period was basically unchanged—at least two thirds of the students were working-class.<sup>88</sup> Third, the

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<sup>84</sup> *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1918-19*, the OUTCC, pp. 4-5.

<sup>85</sup> The classes in philosophy and psychology rose from 10% in 1919-20 to 18% in 1937-38; the classes in science rose from 3% in 1919-20 to 8% in 1937-38. 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes', WEA Pamphlet, 1938, p. 46.

<sup>86</sup> Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, pp. 285-6.

<sup>87</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 42.

<sup>88</sup> The WEA's official statistics showed that the percentage of 'manual workers' in interwar tutorial classes was constantly around 30 to 35%, with a similar amount of 'non-manual worker'. Raybould reaches a similar conclusion that the proportion of working-class students in tutorial classes remained steadily at about two

growth of literature and arts classes was not a reliable indicator that students' interest shifted away from social questions to high culture. If we look at the syllabus of WEA literature courses, they usually consisted of the works of social critics and realist novelists, such as John Ruskin and Thomas Hardy.<sup>89</sup> Hence a good literature class, noted Thompson, could be 'a fount of enthusiasm' for the movement. The increase in literature and art classes did not necessarily imply a demoralisation of students' passion in social reform. After all, as Margaret Cole put it, 'it is not the subject which is either uneducational, dreary, or "escapist", but the teacher'.<sup>90</sup>

A more significant factor behind the expansion of the scope of tutorial class subjects was the attitudes of university administrators and tutorial class tutors. It is remarkable that people from the university side became more eager to direct the study of tutorial class students during the interwar period.

By the early 1920s, the WEA and the joint committees of tutorial classes generally took a non-interventionist approach to the curriculum of the tutorial class. This position was based on two assumptions. First, the voluntary spirit and students' democratic decision in choosing subjects were prior to a systematic provision of learning which implied top-down planning and direction. Therefore, when F. H. Muirhead (1855-1940), a leading Idealist philosopher at Birmingham and chairman to WEA Midland District, presented his scheme of 'systematized study of the principles of citizenship' to the CJAC in 1919, the feedback was lukewarm and hostile. Muirhead pointed out the drawback of tutorial students taking different subjects separately and urged the CJAC to reform the programme by introducing students to 'look at the different aspects of man's social life in relation to one another and to construct for themselves something in the nature of a comprehensive social philosophy'. He envisaged a three-year programme to systematically study psychology and economics (1<sup>st</sup> year), Industrial History, Economic Analysis and Social Philosophy (2<sup>nd</sup> year), and 'Social institutions in relation to the individual' (3<sup>rd</sup> year), with complementary activities such as visiting local institutions.<sup>91</sup> Although members of the CJAC broadly agreed that the

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thirds. 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes', WEA Pamphlet, 1938; S. G. Raybould, *The WEA—The Next Phase*, WEA Pamphlet, 1949, pp. 103-6.

<sup>89</sup> C.f. H. M. *Inspector's Report on University Tutorial Classes 26 May 1922*, pp. 20-1.

<sup>90</sup> Margaret Cole, 'What's an "Escapist"?', *Highway*, 32, Jan 1940, pp. 72-3.

<sup>91</sup> J. H. Muirhead, memorandum on 'Systematisation of Social Study in Tutorial Classes', 1919, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/1, p. 1.

curriculum lacked a systematic organisation, they maintained that the respect of students' orientations must come before a uniform and definite scheme of training. As the representative of the Leeds Joint Committee made it clear, it was important that '[c]onsiderable modifications are made to suit the needs and experience of the students[,] and so a syllabus is very little guide to the character of the work'.<sup>92</sup>

The second ground of the democratic or non-interventionist approach to the tutorial-class curriculum was that, as the *Oxford Report* had suggested, worker-students' preference for social studies was sound and justified. As the OUTCC argued in 1920, 'the University's teaching function that the Tutorial Classes exist to serve' was

to assist in creating an educated and responsible body of citizens by the diffusion of humane education, especially in the Political and Social Sciences, with the main object of enabling the individual to fit himself for the responsibilities of citizenship, and to understand and help in the solution of the common problems of society.<sup>93</sup>

From this point of view, the focus on social sciences, which was understood as the realisation of the social purpose of the programme, would not prevent the tutorial classes from fulfilling the function of university education.

From the mid-1920s, however, the above two assumptions were challenged, and the newly established extra-mural departments had taken a more interventionist attitude towards curriculum arrangement of adult classes. The internal discussions of the OUTCC offered an insight into this paradigm shift. In contrast to the previous acknowledgement of a tutorial programme focusing on social studies, a note on 'the Range and Correlation of Class Studies' of 1927 was prepared by the OUTCC to demonstrate the limitation of the range of study in university adult education.<sup>94</sup> In the following year, Oxford tutors elaborated this stance in a memorandum released in a more systematic way. The document

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<sup>92</sup> 'Final Report on the replies received from Joint Committees with regard to Professor Muirhead's Memorandum on "Systematisation of Social Studies in TCs"', 1920, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/1, pp. 3-5.

<sup>93</sup> 'Memorandum to the Royal Commission on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge', Apr 1920, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/77, p.7. My italics.

<sup>94</sup> 'Memorandum on the Range and Correlation of Class Studies', Feb 1927, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/3/27.

played down the social purpose of the programme, and advocated that the joint committee should play a more active role to steel the programme. Oxford tutors now argued that:

The aim of the Joint Committee is to provide higher education for those outside the University ... with a *purely educational and non-vocational purpose* ... It is therefore desirable that such a Committee should have an Educational Policy, a *thought-out* scheme of the subjects which should be included in its educational provision, of the subjects and types of subject which are *essential* to education, of their relative importance, of the special educational value of each, and of the relation of each to the others.<sup>95</sup>

As the differences between intra-mural and extra-mural education were mitigated, the tutors disparaged the bias towards social studies in the curriculum and urged to widen the scope of study of tutorial classes.

According to the memo, knowledge was divided into four fields, that is, social studies, science, aesthetics and languages, all of which were 'necessary to a full education'.<sup>96</sup> It was argued that subjects other than social studies were particularly conducive to the study of worker-students, because they would help worker-students to achieve 'the dispassionate attitude of mind of the genuine searcher for truth', which was considered 'the most valuable contribution that the adult education movement can make'.<sup>97</sup> The growing emphasis on impartiality, as I discussed in the previous chapter, was certainly behind the new policy. Assuming that 'detachment is apt to be in inverse proportion to interest', Oxford tutors argued that it would be most difficult for workers to acquire impartiality in social studies, which interested them most.<sup>98</sup> Instead, a subject less relevant to students' ordinary life, such as biology, could be conducive to attaining the disinterested attitude. The tutors thus concluded that it was not wise to depend completely on the students' personal interest when it came to deciding their course of studies; the joint committee

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<sup>95</sup> The Oxford Tutors' Group, 'Memorandum on the Range and Correlation of Class Studies', Nov 1928, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/3/39, p. 1. My italics.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

should 'have a policy as to the subjects which it should be able to offer and as to the principles on which choice should be made among them'.<sup>99</sup>

The Oxford memorandum, endorsed later by the CJAC, represented a general shift in the attitude of class organisers and tutors towards what should be taught in tutorial classes.<sup>100</sup> Like the emphasis of the objective teaching method, the 'purely educational' or 'cultural' approach to extra-mural studies understated the social purpose behind the programme. A *Highway* correspondent justified such a development:

Certainly study economics to seek for and try to bring about reforms and improvements, but is it not equally, if not more, important for the WEA to provide the wider culture [?] ... Thereby man can find intellectual pleasure and study which will lift him above his work-a-day surroundings ... Let the WEA insist always on its broad basis, and find its members everywhere, not only amongst politically-minded people who cannot get away from the desire to upset the present system.<sup>101</sup>

By the same token, W. E. Williams, editor of *The Highway* (1930-41), sometime WEA tutor and an outspoken supporter of the cultural approach, argued that:

Anyone who is joining a class ... simply because he would like to know something about Hamlet, the Reformation, Behaviourism or the Republic, need not be perturbed by those who would prefer him to be a colporteur of the gospel according to the Marx, Pollitt or Attlee ... that 'personal' motive or 'cultural' motive, which brings so many thousands into our movement, is an authentic and a valuable one.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-3.

<sup>101</sup> 'W', '[corr.] What's wrong with the WEA?', *Highway*, 20, Nov 1927, p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 30, Nov 1937, p. 1. Williams was later made the editor-in-chief of the *Penguin Books* (1935-65).

This new approach was certainly supported by a number of WEA students. According to a survey conducted by Williams in 1936, a considerable number, though not the majority, of tutorial class students attended the class exclusively out of this personal/cultural motive.<sup>103</sup>

However, the cultural approach to education was not consistent with the original end of the movement. As Dryden Brook pointed out, 'the academic mind' which had been raised by the WEA's 'contacts with academic bodies', could not but evince 'a universal interest, whereas [the WEA's] interest is a limited one. [The WEA] came into being to serve a particular class of people and for a particular purpose'. The danger of being 'universal providers of education', argued Brook, was that the courses without specific social purpose could lapse into 'the means of escape from social responsibility'.<sup>104</sup> Tawney's insights into the problem of the cultural approach were illuminating. Addressing the 1932 WEA annual conference, he maintained that

Most serious educational movements ... have been the product of other than purely intellectual interests. They have been the expression in one sphere of activity—the cultivation of mind and character—of some view of human nature, of some distinctive conception of what a man's relation with his fellows should be and the kind of society in which he should live ... It is the conviction that [WEA students] were the pioneers of a movement with immense social possibilities which has given the Association throughout its history its missionary enthusiasm ... *Our object, in short, ought to be not merely to increase the number of persons with access to what is conventionally described by the rather depressing word culture. It should be to create a new culture drawing its materials from the experience and outlook on life, not of a leisured minority, but of the mass of the people.*<sup>105</sup>

The image of a universal provider of culture was harming the original ethos of the WEA, because, as Brook remarked, '[a] movement which begins to try to be all things to all men

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<sup>103</sup> W. E. Williams and A. E. Heath, *Learn and Live: The Consumers' View of Adult Education* (London, 1936).

<sup>104</sup> Brook, 'The Service and Contribution of the WEA to the Working-Class Movement and the Working-Class Student', pp. 110-3.

<sup>105</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'The Education of the Citizen, being the Presidential Address of R. H. Tawney', WEA Pamphlet, 1932, pp. 3, 6. My italics.

will inevitably end by being nothing to anyone'.<sup>106</sup>

But the affinity between the WEA and universities and that between the tutorial class and the university culture meant that the cultural approach to education kept thriving within the movement. In the months following the outbreak of the Second World War, controversy was raging over the provision of 'cultural subjects'.<sup>107</sup> Williams's editorial that heightened the need of 'escapist' aesthetics in the wartime provoked Thompson's bitter criticism. The latter rejected Williams's proposal to meet the 'leisure needs' of 'the man-in-the-street' by providing more classes on cultural subjects.<sup>108</sup> As Thompson contended,

The 'escapist' avenues may be mildly pleasant ... but do not ask those who prefer to get their escapist atmosphere in the cinema, theatre, pub or club and to reserve the WEA for a more solid use of their leisure to devote time, energy and money to making roads for the 'escapist'. Let those who want escapist 'education' do their own road making.<sup>109</sup>

In responding to Thompson's criticism, Williams made an interesting point that the cultural approach was more 'democratic' than a programme with specific social purpose: 'Thompson wants this movement to be a nice little aristocracy of the book-learned, I want it to be a democracy, where there is room for every capacity and every taste; and I don't fear contamination of the "serious" by the "simple"'.<sup>110</sup> As we shall see in the next section, Williams' discourse was arguably due to a simplistic reading of democracy. The consequence of making the WEA a universal provider of adult education was a growing gap between the association and different branches of democratic movements.

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<sup>106</sup> Brook, 'The Service and Contribution of the WEA to the Working-Class Movement and the Working-Class Student', p. 110.

<sup>107</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 32, Nov 1939, pp. 1-2; G. H. Thompson, 'Beehive Incident', *Highway*, 32, Dec 1939, p. 55; W. E. Williams, 'Beehive Incident', *Highway*, 32, Dec 1939, p. 55; M. Cole, 'What's an "Escapist"?', pp. 72-3; F. H. Bell, 'Correspondence', *Highway*, 34, Dec 1941, pp. 43-4; R. T. Budden et al., 'Correspondence', *Highway*, 34, Feb 1942, p. 90; Edmund Hobson, 'Social Studies and the WEA', *Highway*, 34, Apr 1942, p. 138; E. F. Hurt, 'Escapism', *Highway*, 34, Apr 1942, p. 138.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway* 32, Nov 1939, pp. 1-2.

<sup>109</sup> Thompson, 'Beehive Incident', p. 55.

<sup>110</sup> Williams, 'Beehive Incident', p. 55.

## 5-4 The Construction of a Ladder of Adult Learning.

The 1920s also saw the institutionalisation of WEA short classes and the creation of an 'Adult Education Pyramid' that catered to all citizens with different academic achievement.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, as it became clear in the 1930s, the systematic provision of elementary adult classes did not fulfil its intended purpose, which was to supply tutorial classes with 'a reserve of prepared students';<sup>112</sup> instead, short classes distracted students from taking the more demanding tutorial classes. In this way, the expansion of WEA short classes turned out to be another example showing how the professional trend thwarted the Idealist ambition of the movement.

The need to establish elementary classes in preparing less advanced students for three-year tutorial classes had been identified from the beginning of the movement,<sup>113</sup> and, as we have seen, active tutorial class students and tutors had voluntarily organised study circles and short courses for local communities even before 1914<sup>114</sup> After the publication of the *1919 Report*, which envisioned a systematic provision of adult education (see above 3-1), both bureaucrats and tutors stepped up the demand for short and less exacting classes. Following their 1922 inspections on the tutorial classes, the HMIs concluded that a fundamental flaw of the programme was a wide variation in students' intellectual capacity.<sup>115</sup> To make tutorial teaching more efficient, the HMIs recommended 'more selection in the membership of tutorial classes' and the supplying of more basic courses for inexperienced students.<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, the need to grade students, as the HMIs reckoned, was pressing also in view of the changing nature of intramural teaching. As inspectors of Oxford Tutorial Classes commented on the teaching of economics in 1925,

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<sup>111</sup> Albert Hodson, 'Future Policy and Prospects of the WEA', *Highway*, 18, Feb 1926, p. 73.

<sup>112</sup> Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, pp. 46, 69.

<sup>113</sup> As Mansbridge noted, as early as 1909, preparatory classes had been formed by tutorial class students themselves. Mansbridge, *University Tutorial Classes*, p. 69.

<sup>114</sup> For instance, there were about 200 WEA short classes and reading circles in 1913-14, only very few of which secured grants from local authorities, see *WEA Annual Report*, 1914, pp. 35, 49-56.

<sup>115</sup> *H. M. Inspector's Report on University Tutorial Classes 26 May 1922*, p. 13.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

The simple truth is that modern economics is a vast and intricate subject. Thirty or forty years ago economic theory was supposed to be something which a 'Greats' man or a clever barrister could 'get up' in a term. That conception of the subject is happily obsolete ... if tutorial-class students are to get anything approaching the equipment they require for the exercise of judgment informed by real knowledge upon the problems which interest them, the single general course ... should be supplemented by further studies.<sup>117</sup>

For the HMIs, the professionalisation of academic disciplines meant that the teaching of university subjects must be provided in a more systematic way. Overall, they recommended the WEA to develop a multilevel system to recruit and train adult students, from 'Lecture courses', one-year classes, short-term tutorial classes, and then the three-year tutorial classes, as 'the apex of the pyramid'.<sup>118</sup>

The HMIs' advice was endorsed by WEA tutors. Tutors testified to the difficulties arising from a heterogeneous class. As Ross claimed,

The reason why the standard of Tutorial Classes is lower than it originally was is that entry is too easy ... [T]here are the old members who have been in the class for years ... They monopolise the discussion and strike terror into the hearts of the other members ... [whereas] the new members ... are hopelessly elementary for a Tutorial Class. The medley presents the lecturer with an insoluble problem.<sup>119</sup>

Many tutors believed that the provision of short classes could reduce the disunity in tutorial classes and became 'a gathering ground' for the latter.<sup>120</sup> As a 1923 ATCT report concluded, 'the only way of providing for satisfactory recruitment and selection of Tutorial

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<sup>117</sup>Report by H. M. Inspectors upon University Tutorial Classes under the Supervision of the Joint Committee of the University of Oxford, for the Period Ending 31st July 1924, Board of Education, 1925, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/57/3/6, pp. 8-10.

<sup>118</sup> H. M. Inspector's Report on University Tutorial Classes 26 May 1922, pp. 25-6.

<sup>119</sup> D. A. Ross, 'Notes on the Recruitment of Tutorial Classes and on WEA Organisation', *TB*, 6, March 1924, pp. 1-2. Complaints of classes' lack of unity were often made by tutors in the 1920s, see e.g. T. W. Harries, 'Class Report on Longton Class in Modern History', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1923-24*, the OTUCC, 1924, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/11, p. 29; A. E. Emery, 'Class Report on Stafford Class in Modern History', *Report of the Work of the Classes for the Year 1924-25*, the OTUCC, 1925, Records of the Department for Continuing Education, Oxford, CE 3/61/12, p. 48.

<sup>120</sup> 'Notes of the Speeches and Discussion at the Leeds Conference', *TB*, 1, Nov 1922, pp. 2-3.

Class students is by a great extension of the number of One-Year Classes'; to achieve this end, governmental grants to elementary classes should be 'greatly increased'.<sup>121</sup>

This confidence in professional training — believing that a well-organised system of selection and instruction was a more efficient way to education—gave birth to the Board of Education's Adult Education Regulations of 1924. The regulations defined different types of adult classes and entitled the WEA to organise not only three-year tutorial classes but also grant-earning one-year and short classes. An educational ladder was expected to be constructed under the guidance of the regulations, from 'terminal' (or sessional) courses, one-year classes, preparatory tutorial classes, to three-year tutorial classes and advanced tutorial classes.<sup>122</sup>

In general, the WEA was willing to conform itself to the educational programme defined by the Board.<sup>123</sup> A major consequence of the 1924 Regulations was, as a WEA official report noted, 'a great development of the less exacting courses'.<sup>124</sup> As we can see from Table 5.1, while the tutorial classes (including one-year preparatory and advanced classes) constituted almost half of the WEA classes in 1924-25, the proportion of them had soon fallen to no more than one third of the total number by 1931 and the gap between the numbers of the tutorial classes and the one-year and terminal classes widened thereafter. Similarly, Table 5.2 shows a rapid growth in students taking WEA short classes between 1924 and 1938, whereas the number of tutorial classes students remained at the same level. Indeed, the enforcement of the 1924 Regulations contributed to the increase of students in both kinds of classes. But the growth in tutorial classes was vastly disproportionate to that in short classes.

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<sup>121</sup> ATAC's 'Interim Report on the Development of Tutorial Classes, One Year Classes and Kindred Work', Apr 1923, WEA Archive, CJAC/5/1 Part 2, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> **Terminal Courses:** classes with no less than 12 weekly meetings in a year, each meeting lasting for no less than 1.5 hours. Written work was not required. **One-year Classes:** classes with no less than 20 weekly meetings in a year, each meeting lasting for no less than 1.5 hours. Written work was required. The number of students in each class should be under 32. **Preparatory Tutorial Classes:** classes with no less than 24 weekly meetings in a year, each meeting lasting for no less than 2 hours. Written work was required. The number of students in each class should be under 32. **Three-year Tutorial Classes:** classes with no less than 24 weekly meetings in a year, each meeting lasting for no less than 2 hours. Written work was required. The number of students in each class should be under 24. **Advanced Classes:** a small one-year class with 9-15 students who had passed through three-year classes. *WEA Annual Report, 1925*, pp. 22-3.

<sup>123</sup> In fact, the WEA was the major beneficiary of the regulations. In 1927-28, in England and Wales, there were 652 short classes (i.e. terminal and one-year classes), with 12,622 students, receiving grants under the 1924 Regulations. More than 85% of these classes (556 classes, with 11,431 students) were run by the WEA. *WEA Annual Report, 1929*, p. 12.

<sup>124</sup> 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes', WEA Pamphlet, 1938, pp. 5-6.

Table 5.1 Number of WEA Tutorial, One-Year, and Terminal Classes in England, Wales and Scotland, 1924-34<sup>125</sup>

	1924-25	1927-28	1930-31	1933-34
Tutorial classes	550	672	707	724
One-year classes	367	468	766	722
Terminal classes	315	522	808	965

Table 5.2 Number of Students in WEA Grant-earning Tutorial Classes and Short Classes in England, Wales and Scotland, 1919-38<sup>126</sup>

	Tutorial classes		Short classes		Total
1919-20	5,320	43%	7,118	57%	12,438
1924-25	12,180	39%	19,069	61%	31,249
1928-29	11,636	33%	23,292	67%	34,928
1932-33	13,264	25%	39,951	75%	53,215
1937-38	14,237	23%	46,795	77%	61,032

From the mid-1930s, disapproval of the over-expansion of WEA short classes was expressed by both WEA leaders and students. To begin with, the disproportional increase in short classes indicated that the hope for elementary classes acting as a gathering ground for tutorial classes was mostly wishful thinking. As several WEA members pointed out, the tutorial classes had ‘taken the cream of the workers’, and thus ‘to act on the assumption that there are substantial numbers of these is to ask for disappointment’.<sup>127</sup> In fact, the effect of the provision of short classes was more likely to distract worker-students from the three-year classes which were more demanding and costly. As Tawney noted with regrets later in a private letter,

<sup>125</sup> ‘Aims and Standards in WEA Classes’, p. 5. The ‘Tutorial Classes’ includes Advanced Tutorial Classes, Three-year Tutorial Classes, and Preparatory Tutorial Classes.

<sup>126</sup> *WEA Annual Reports*, 1920, 1925, 1929, 1933, 1938. The ‘Tutorial Classes’ includes Advanced Tutorial Classes, Three-year Tutorial Classes, and Preparatory Tutorial Classes; the ‘Short Classes’ includes One-year Classes, Terminal Classes, Short Term Classes, and Extension Courses.

<sup>127</sup> A. A. W., ‘There’s Only Skim-Milk Left’, *Highway*, 26, Apr 1934, p. 14; T. S. Benson (Burnley WEA Branch), ‘What’s Wrong with the WEA?’, *Highway*, 24, Apr 1932, p. 5.

the view that the ideal is a graded system of classes, in which students pass from the easier to the more arduous ... seems all right in theory, but it does not work in practice ... As things have worked out in many areas, short classes have not been a preparation for, or supplement to, tutorial classes, but a substitute for them, a substitute attended by students of whom many would have been in a tutorial class if the softer option had not been offered.<sup>128</sup>

The logic of professionalism turned out to be less applicable to the field of voluntary learning. In effect, the standards of WEA classes were lowered in general under the regulations. 'Grant grabbing (at the expense of standards)' allegations were made from time to time. H. A. J. Martin, a tutorial class tutor, complained that most class organisers and tutors tended to prioritise 'numbers and grants, with quality as a very secondary consideration'.<sup>129</sup> Attempts to secure governmental funds risked demoralisation. As Tawney observed, '[t]here is too much running of classes for all and sundry, and of begging people to join them whether they mean business or not'.<sup>130</sup>

More importantly, the expansion in WEA short classes dampened the voluntary spirit. The Idealist aspiration to form long-term fellowship between tutors and students through voluntary co-operation was nullified when the three-year classes was largely replaced by short-term and self-standing courses. In reflecting on the development of WEA tutorial classes, Clay concluded that the attempt 'to grade and classify and segregate its students' conflicted with the voluntary character of the original programme.<sup>131</sup> It was hard to maintain the morale of the movement by a well-designed but divided programme of study.

In the same vein, more short classes meant that there were more students who did not share close affinity with the movement. The expansion of less intensive classes, as a WEA student complained, was to 'lower our standards to suit the languid' and to create 'a large body of dilettantes'.<sup>132</sup> On this point, W. E. Williams, in line with his support of the WEA as a universal provider for adult education, did make a case to defend the strategy to attract

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<sup>128</sup> R. H. Tawney to S.G. Raybould, 29 Sep 1948, S. G. Raybould Papers, Box 37, folder 5.

<sup>129</sup> H. A. J. Martin, 'This Grant-grabbing Racket', *Highway*, 27, March 1935, pp. 155-7.

<sup>130</sup> Tawney to Raybould, 29 Sep 1948.

<sup>131</sup> Henry Clay, 'Learn and Live', *Bulletin* [of the World Association for Adult Education], 2:7, Nov 1936, pp. 24-6.

<sup>132</sup> 'Views in Brief – What's Wrong with the WEA', *Highway*, 24, Apr 1932, p. 10.

more students by increasing popular short classes. As he contended:

the mission of the WEA in the modern world is to apply democratic ideals to education: to provide facilities not for a coterie but for a community ... we have to stop being 'long-haired' about education. We have to talk in such a way and about such things as really do 'come home to the business and bosoms' of working people.<sup>133</sup>

Indeed, if the WEA believed that every worker could make a contribution to democracy or the common good, it seemed to be reasonable for the WEA to make efforts to popularise its classes even at the expense of educational standards.

As time went on, however, more and more WEA members pointed out the limitation of the popular approach to WEA education. A worker-student asserted that a large number of his peers would 'never avail themselves of WEA services ... The hope that lower rungs on the ladder would help is forlorn, because no matter how low the rungs are people will never mount the ladder if they do not desire to get on to it'.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, John Brown, a sailor's son who went up to Ruskin College, dismissed the popular approach as something which would negatively affect education and 'cheapen its appeal to the workers, giving them "what they want" in the worst sense, and copying the methods of ... [the] "tabloid knowledge" systems', which could not but obscure the WEA's cause. For him, it was necessary for the movement to concentrate on the training of 'an intellectual Samurai of the workers', who would exercise 'an intellectual leadership' in their communities.<sup>135</sup>

Tutors' reactions to the popularisation of WEA classes were sometimes even harsher. As R. H. Coats, a long-serving tutor in English Literature, put it bluntly:

It was obvious that the masses of God's children were not endowed with brains. They had inferior minds to begin with and could not assimilate the education we had to offer ... No serious thinker ... now expects the masses to rise up and regenerate mankind ... In both politics and industry power is passing from the

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<sup>133</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway* 26, Apr 1934, pp. 1-2.

<sup>134</sup> H. M. Learmouth, 'The WEA To-morrow—Readers' Views', *Highway*, 26, Feb 1934, p. 19.

<sup>135</sup> John Brown, 'Is the Adult Education Movement Doomed?', *Highway*, 27, Dec 1934, p. 63; 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 27, Oct 1934, pp. 1-2.

common people into the hands of the intelligent expert and the trained worker ...  
It is in the aristocratical elements of the democracy that our hope lies.<sup>136</sup>

The popular approach thus invited a refutation of the Idealist faith in mass democracy and everyone's potential in fulfilling 'positive freedom'.<sup>137</sup>

Thompson was another outspoken critic of the popularisation of WEA classes. But, for him, the focus on tutorial classes (and on the labour aristocracy) was coterminous with the Idealist faith in common people. As he implied, the popular approach to adult education—to attract to adult classes as many citizens as possible—was based on a simplified assumption of the nature of democracy, because

Our democratic order is a great deal more than a mass of voters which decides who shall go to Parliament or into the local Council. It is, in fact, a complicated net-work of social groupings ... In each of the groupings there is usually a much smaller minority, who accept all the responsibility, serve on the committees and do all the work ... it is they who make [democracy] work and give it a stability which neither the worst blunders of the high-ups nor the deficiencies and failings of the mass can undermine.<sup>138</sup>

The fact that local active groups were often led by this minority, or 'the socially effective', as Thompson put it, explained the reason why the elitist approach was more effective than the popular approach to adult education. On the one hand, these group leaders' activism and practical experiences meant that they would 'benefit most by adult education of the class type'. On the other, they could 'also serve as a bridge to reach the less effective or ineffective', Thompson argued, 'for they have considerable influence with the general body of their members who are guided and persuaded a good deal by them'. As such, the WEA was more likely to penetrate a local community through the influence of the socially effective than through self-standing elementary classes. From this perspective, Thompson

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<sup>136</sup> 'Is the WEA on the Wrong Track?', *West-Midland WEA Torch—the local supplement to The HIGHWAY*, Mar 1935, p. iii. Coats had been a WEA tutor in English Literature in Birmingham from 1922. R. H. Coats, *West-Midland WEA Torch—the local supplement to The HIGHWAY*, Feb 1939, p. iii.

<sup>137</sup> Marwick, 'The WEA and the Working-Class Movement', p. 14.

<sup>138</sup> G. H. Thompson, 'Progress and Aims in Adult Education', *TB*, Apr 1945, pp. 6-7.

noted, 'It is an utter fallacy to believe that a graduation of courses is necessary', for 'a short course is of little service to one active in affairs who has read a good deal on his own, within the range of his special interest'.<sup>139</sup> As Thompson concluded, the effort to multiply WEA short classes could not but reach 'the stage of chasing its own tail': Those who were attracted to short classes were not the 'socially effective' who had real potential to mobilise the community, but people 'who feel no call to take an active part in affairs outside their vocation, who have mild intellectual interests and who attend classes in much the same mind as they will go to the theatre or a concert.'<sup>140</sup> As we can see, Thompson's rejection of short classes was not due to his contempt for ordinary people's potential for contributing to democracy. Instead, it derived from his understanding of the organic structure of democracy and of the pivotal role of grassroots leaders in democratic movements.

At any rate, the expansion in WEA short classes was not halted by its critics, and was in fact accelerated during the wartime.<sup>141</sup> In 1938, the WEA published a report on 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes' for the purpose of reviewing the problem of expansion. As the Report concluded,

the WEA itself has not always completely succeeded in avoiding *the opposite dangers of an aimless popularisation and an almost equally purposeless academic quality*; either of which, by its complete lack of significance for the lives of the workers, fails to realise the aims which the movement has set itself.<sup>142</sup>

As we have seen, the paradoxical developments could actually be traced back to the same source: The logic of professionalism, introduced to the movement by state bureaucrats and professional academics, not only prompted tutorial class tutors to employ the objective/positivist teaching method (see above Chapter Four), but also gave rise to a graded system of adult education, the consequence of which was the disproportional

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>141</sup> By 1945, students in short classes (71,964) accounted for just below 90% of the total 80,698 WEA students, whereas the number of tutorial class students had shrunk to 8,734, which was even below the figure for 1924. *WEA Annual Report, 1945.*

<sup>142</sup> 'Aims and Standards in WEA Classes', p. 24. My italics.

increase in WEA short classes. Both developments severed the connections between the WEA and its original purpose, which was to encourage workers' enlightened participation.

## **Conclusion.**

To conclude, this chapter has argued that, by 1939, the pursuit of a universal and systematic provision of adult education, through a close association between the state, universities and the WEA, had distracted the movement from its Idealist project. It is notable that professionalism had penetrated every aspect of the movement: tutors strived to establish their professional status at the expense of the principle of democratic control over classes, university administrative power intervened in the field of organising work and curriculum design, and the grading of adult classes resulted in the popularisation of less demanding short courses. 'As the Universities ... assume a larger part in the organisation and provision of classes', observed Cole in 1939, 'the sense of loyalty among both students and tutors is less exclusively directed to the WEA'.<sup>143</sup> Under the new system, shaped by the adult education regulations, the original spirit of participatory co-operation between universities and the WEA, between intellectuals and workers, was greatly damaged.

In general, the interwar practice of the tutorial programme revealed the limitation of the Idealist project in two senses. First, it indicated that the Idealists had largely underestimated the bureaucratic threat to the voluntary spirit and moral concerns of the movement. It is true that the expansion in WEA classes and students during the interwar period shows that, as Pat Thane and other scholars have pointed out, the 'Big Society' remains vibrant with a 'Big State' and they 'reinforced and complemented each other'.<sup>144</sup> Nonetheless, the case of the WEA also suggests that the co-operation between voluntary groups and public bodies (i.e. the state and universities) tended to introduce a growing element of professionalism into the voluntary sector and significantly undermined the latter's democratic ethos. The neglect of the conflict between professionalism and

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<sup>143</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Tutor and the Working Class Movement', pp. 5-6.

<sup>144</sup> Pat Thane, 'The "Big Society" and the "Big State": Creative Tension or Crowding Out?', *Twentieth Century British History* 23:3 (2012), pp. 408-29. See also J. Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History. Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003); Geoffrey Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain, 1830-1990* (Oxford, 1994), chs. 2-4.

voluntarism was the fatal flaw of the Idealist project.

Second, the interwar development also showed that the ambiguity of the Idealist doctrines had severe consequences. The alleged mutuality of personal development and social service was hardly established in practice. As we have seen, the cultural approach to adult education and the sole emphasis on pursuing knowledge for its own sake effectively undermined the social purpose of the WEA movement. Similarly, the principle that the common good depended on the perfection and participation of every member of the society, could be used to justify opposite strategies of class provision. The principle was used by people who were less sympathetic to the social/political cause of the WEA to demand the expansion of less demanding, 'escapist' classes. But a more refined reading of the principle and of the nature of local democracy might lead to a refutation of the strategy to make the WEA a universal provider. As Tawney and Thompson pointed out, the elitist approach to adult education, with a focus on tutorial classes, was more likely to attain the ideal of an educated and participatory democracy. Without clarifying the meaning and implications of the Idealist doctrines, the WEA had been driven away from its original purpose in the current of professionalisation.

## PART III WEA and Liberal Education for All:

### WEA Educational Campaigns, 1919-44.

The third part of this thesis is a study of the WEA's campaign for reforming public education, especially in seeking to construct a universal 'educational highway', from nursery to university. The central theme is to examine how this Idealist ambition was reformulated when it was put to practical test after 1919. Though the WEA programme of the 'educational highway' was launched in the midst of wartime ardour, it was the interwar period that saw the programme expand into more detailed proposals. I will argue that, while the ideas of education reform became more precise and concrete, they subtly moved away from the original vision of Oxford Idealism, especially after 1935.

The WEA's education campaign between 1919 and 1944 is worth studying because the period was a crucial stage in which the issue of education reform attracted public attention and a structural transformation of the British educational system took place. The public interest in education reform between the wars was reflected by, and partly indebted to, wide coverage of the issue by national newspapers, such as the *Manchester Guardian*, for which Tawney wrote many articles on education, and the nascent *Times Educational Supplement*, which became a separate publication in 1914.<sup>1</sup> By the later 1920s, as Barbara Drake, niece of Beatrice Webb and an educational activist, observed, '[i]t is significant of the change in public opinion that "secondary education for all", which a few years ago was only the dream of idealists, today is accepted by all political parties as the next step in public education'.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, bucking the trend towards public retrenchment, this growing concern over educational inequalities forced the state to carry out (albeit sluggishly,) reform in national education.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the 1944 Education Act, which extended compulsory education to age 15, was a milestone in the efforts in this direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary McCulloch, 'Educating the Public: Tawney, the Manchester Guardian and Education Reform' in R. Aldrich (ed.), *In History and In Education* (London, 1996), pp. 122-4.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Drake, 'The New Prospect in Education', *Highway*, 20, July 1928, p. 102. Barbara Drake was a long-serving member of the London County Council Education Committee, and the Secretary of the LPEAC in the 1930s.

<sup>3</sup> Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society*, pp. 247-8.

Claiming to be ‘the only national voluntary body concerned exclusively about education’ during the interwar period,<sup>4</sup> the WEA played a significant role in the advance towards a national system of education. The educational policies of both the Board and organised labour were significantly indebted to the association and its members. On the governmental side, throughout the 1920s, Tawney served as a member of the Board of Education Consultative Committee (Henceforward, BOECC), a body which after its reconstitution in 1920, came to be ‘a major part of the education policy-making apparatus’.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Tawney made a significant contribution to the report produced by the committee—‘The Education of the Adolescent’ (1926), also known as the *Hadow Report*.<sup>6</sup> When Tawney resigned from the BOECC in 1931, the vacancy was filled by Shena Simon (1883-1972), who was also a WEA member (later WEA Deputy President) and became a prominent member of the committee responsible for the 1938 report on ‘Secondary Education with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools’, or the *Spens Report*.<sup>7</sup>

In respect of the labour movement, the influence of the WEA was even greater. As we shall see, WEA leaders, including Tawney, Cole and MacTavish, were co-opted to the newly founded educational committees of both the Labour Party and the General Council of the TUC after 1918. By the same token, as late as the eve of the 1931 crisis, mainstream organised labour, whether trade unions, the Co-operative Union, or Working Men’s Clubs, were disposed to rally around the WEA’s cause concerning education reform.

Indeed, if, as many historians have shown, the labour movement had been the driving force behind the progress of public education by 1945,<sup>8</sup> the WEA, with its influential

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<sup>4</sup> J. W. Muir, ‘The Tasks Ahead Us’, *Highway*, 21, Oct 1928, p. 6. But the National Union of Teachers must also be added to the list.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin J. Brehony, ‘The “School Masters’ Parliament”: the Origins and Formation of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education 1868-1916’, *History of Education*, 23:2 (1994), p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> William Henry Hadow (1859-1937), a historian of music, chaired the BOECC from 1920 to 1934. Under his chairmanship, the Committee published six reports on issues including the education of the adolescent, the primary school, and infant and nursery schools. Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 121-2; Tom Steele & Richard Taylor, ‘R. H. Tawney and the Reform of the Universities’, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> William Spens, Master of Corpus Christi College (1927-52), Cambridge, succeeded Hadow as Chairman of the BOECC in 1934. For Tawney, Lady Simon and the formation of the *Spens Report*, see Joan Simon, ‘The Shaping of the Spens Report on Secondary Education 1933-38: An inside View: Part I’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 25:1 (1977), pp. 63-80; id., ‘The Shaping of the Spens Report on Secondary Education 1933-38: An inside View: Part II’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 25:2 (1977), pp. 170-85.

<sup>8</sup> Rodney Barker, *Education and Politics, 1900-51: A Study of the Labour Party* (Oxford, 1972); Roy Lowe, ‘Education, 1900-39’ in Chris Wrigley ed., *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 427-8; Denis Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies 1900-2001 and Beyond* (London, 2012), pp. 24-

leaders and strong connections to both the government and the labour movement, was to the forefront in the campaign for educational reform in post-1918 England. How its Idealist faith played a part in this great movement and influenced the national system of education is an important question.

Nevertheless, most studies on the history of the WEA focus on the practice of adult classes and have little to say on the development of its educational campaign.<sup>9</sup> As regards works which touch on the connection between Idealist philosophy and public education in England, it is striking that, without examining the practical campaigns led by the Idealists or the WEA, they tend to, in one way or another, make the Idealist thinking a scapegoat for the slow progress of education reform in interwar England. A first type of such accounts, put forward by historians such as Jose Harris and Martin Wiener, argues that the dominance of Idealism was an important cause of 'the powerful anti-vocational bias' of the English curriculum, but does not demonstrate how the Idealists influenced the policy process.<sup>10</sup> Contradicting this first type of accounts is a second type, represented by Brian Simon. Arguably the most prominent historian of education in England, Simon exhibits a strong preference for the comprehensive schools with a uniform liberal curriculum.<sup>11</sup> He blames Tawney and his circle for their support of educational differentiations (including technical schools), which, according to Simon, prolonged class distinctions in the English educational system.<sup>12</sup>

It is evident that these accounts are incompatible, and the purpose of the following two chapters is to reassess the development of Idealist thought on the topic of education reform after 1918 by looking at the WEA's campaign, a topic that has not been addressed

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36; Michael Parkinson, *The Labour Party and the Organization of Secondary Education 1918-65* (London, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> All major works on the history of the WEA pay scant attention to its educational campaign, see e.g. Price, *The Story of the WEA*; Stocks, *The WEA*; Smith, *Labour and Learning*; Jennings, *Knowledge Is Power: A Short History of the Workers' Educational Association*; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*; Roberts (ed.), *A Ministry of Enthusiasm*. An exception is G. F. Brown's 'The Workers' Educational Association and Educational Reform' in the reprint of *The WEA Educational Year Book 1918* (Nottingham, 1981), pp. 15-26. However, the article is largely focused on the campaign during the WWI, while galloping through the interwar and post-1939 development.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 138; Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, pp. 22-4, 115-26, 132-7.

<sup>11</sup> For Simon's educational thought, see Adrian Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind: Education and Psychology in England, 1860-1990* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 295-300; Deborah Thom, 'Politics and the People: Brian Simon and the Campaign against Intelligence Tests in British Schools', *History of Education*, 33:5, pp. 515-29.

<sup>12</sup> Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 43-4, 137, 185, 219-24, 268-72.

by above studies. In particular, the focus will be on: 1) how the Idealist educational objective of promoting citizens' positive freedom—in terms of self-development and social service—led the WEA to endorse the ideal of equality of opportunity; and 2) how the non-Idealist interpretations of this concept were gradually adopted by the younger generation of WEA policymakers, which eventually watered down the Idealist cause of the WEA's campaign for education reform.

## Chapter Six

# From Positive Freedom to Equality of Opportunity: the Labour Movement and WEA Education Campaign, 1919-34.

Most social systems need a lightning-conductor. The formula which supplies it to our own is equality of opportunity. The conception is one to which homage is paid to-day by all, including those who resist most strenuously attempts to apply it. But the rhetorical tribute which it receives appears sometimes to be paid on the understanding that it shall be content with ceremonial honours ... it is encouraged to reign, provided that it does not attempt to rule.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction.

The passing of the 1918 Education Act was more a start than an end for the WEA's educational campaign. The network that had been built up through the wartime campaign, continued to be exploited by the WEA, particularly for the purpose of making itself the labour movement's representative on educational reform. Labelling itself as 'the educational expression of the labour movement' in its 1920 annual report,<sup>2</sup> the WEA not only sought closer co-operation with working-class bodies in providing adult education, but was also keen to co-ordinate activities with trade unions, Labour politicians, and working-class organizations to put pressure on the Board of Education throughout the 1920s and early 1930s.

During this period, the WEA's education campaign was waged in two ways. On the one hand, the campaign passively counteracted educational retrenchment, or the so-called

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, *Equality*, (London, 1931), pp. 138-9.

<sup>2</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1920, pp. 189-90. The phrase was adopted by 'WEA Statement of Policy', first published in 1923. (WEA Archive, Central/1/1/1.)

‘economy in education’, which literally shelved the 1918 Act. On the other, the campaign was also fought positively in the sense that, in the 1920s, the WEA saw the maturing of its programme of secondary education which prioritised the universal provision of *secondary education of varying types* (i.e. the tripartite model) over a *uniform curriculum of secondary education* (i.e. the comprehensive model).

To examine the two-fold campaign between 1919 and 1934, the current chapter is divided into four sections. The first section gives an overview of how the WEA worked to achieve its ambition to become ‘the educational expression of the labour movement’ by co-ordinating campaigns with organised labour to fight cuts in education from 1919 until the collapse of the second Labour government in 1931. The second section explains why WEA Idealists put forward a reform programme of secondary education which was characterised by an emphasis on educational differentiation and a diversified curriculum. The third section shows that, while Fabians and progressive educationalists rallied behind the labour movement in support of the programme prompted by WEA Idealists, their points of departure, and especially their understanding of the principle of educational equality, were very different from that of the Idealists. In the wake of the 1931 crisis, the WEA campaign was forced to reformulate its discourse and to soften the demarcation between itself and its left-wing comrades: a process which forms the theme of the final section.

## **6-1 Labour and the Nation: the WEA to the Fore of the Protests against Education Cuts.**

The defence of public spending on education began soon after the war, as attempts were made by the government to postpone the enforcement of the 1918 Education Act.<sup>3</sup> Across the country, WEA branches urged local educational authorities to adopt the permissive clauses in the Act, with regard to increasing nurseries and ensuring pupils’ physical well-being.<sup>4</sup> However, a strong blow came in 1921 when the Committee on National

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<sup>3</sup> Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, 28-36.

<sup>4</sup> ‘A Record of thirty Years’ Service’, WEA Pamphlet, 1936, p. 5. For the background of Geddes Axe, see Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England 1914-1951* (Oxford, 2010), p. 45-9.

Expenditure (also known as the Geddes Committee) recommended the reduction of state expenditure on education by eighteen million pounds, which in effect delayed the implementation of the 1918 Act.<sup>5</sup> Repudiating the 'Geddes Axe', an impediment to a democratic system of education, the WEA launched a national demonstration, in March 1922.<sup>6</sup> While local protests continued, in 1923, Temple led a WEA deputation with delegates from the three main labour bodies to the Board to express the workers' concern over cuts in secondary education and problems such as unemployed adolescents, the deterioration of school buildings, the rationing of the expense on school meals, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Although the regulations of 1921 were revoked by the short-lived 1924 Labour government, similar protests and lobbies against the reduction of expenditure on public education were repeatedly organised by the WEA after 1925 when the succeeding Tory government reintroduced austerity measures. In late 1925 and early 1926, the Board issued Circular 1371 and Memorandum 44, both of which attempted to reduce the amount of the education grants to the local educational authorities and in effect nullified the former government's experiment in expanding nursery schools, scaling down the size of classes, and increasing free secondary school places.<sup>8</sup> In response, the campaigning machine of the WEA was activated once again and contributed to the withdrawal of both documents.<sup>9</sup>

The WEA's co-ordinating work was greatly facilitated by its leaders' connections to labour organisations. Tawney had maintained dominance over the Labour Party Educational Advisory Committee (henceforward, LPEAC) from its inception in 1918, and was instrumental in the formulation of Labour's educational policy in the 1920s.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Arthur Greenwood (WEA Vice-President, 1918-34), Harold Clay (WEA Vice-President, 1929-44; WEA President, 1944-58), and Arthur Creech Jones (WEA Vice-President, 1938-?) were all at one time on the LPEAC. Prominent members of the TUC were also recruited to the WEA. For example, Arthur Pugh, the first chairman to the TUC

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<sup>5</sup> Price, *Story of the WEA*, p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1922.

<sup>7</sup> 'Interview Memorandum. Deputation from the Workers' Educational Association', Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 1923, Board of Education Papers, ED/24/1913, pp. 1-5.

<sup>8</sup> Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> The WEA boasted of its share of the credit for the result. *Highway*, 18, Apr 1926, p. 82. C.f. Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, pp.101-3.

<sup>10</sup> Barker, *Education and Politics*, 1900-51, pp. 37-8; Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 199-216.

Educational Committee (1921-36; henceforward, TUCEC) and the first chairman to the WETUC, was elected WEA President in 1925, and Alec S. Firth (1892-?), TUCEC Secretary between 1924 and 1931, was made WEA General Secretary in 1931.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, as mentioned in above Chapter Three, J. W. Muir was appointed WEA National Organiser in 1925 and played an important role in seeking support for the WEA's educational cause among trade unionists.

There were several reasons why the campaign against educational economy was an ideal task for the WEA to undertake. Primarily, the issue was one solely concerning the interests of workers, whom the WEA sought to represent. As a TUC member put it bluntly, '[t]he question of education is our question. It does not affect the Prime Minister or Mr. Fisher or the middle-class people at all. Their children do not go to these crowded and inefficient schools'.<sup>12</sup> The imminent consequence of educational economy, as *The Highway* claimed, would be that '[t]he babies whose mothers go to work, and who are penned up in stuffy, overcrowded homes in working class districts, are to find the school door shut in their faces'.<sup>13</sup> Acting as the organiser of protests against education cuts was a convincing demonstration that the WEA was on the side of the labour movement. It became evident that this strategy had paid off when the *Manchester Guardian* acclaimed *The Highway* as 'representative of Labour' in the campaign against cuts.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the campaign on education cuts also manifested the Idealist faith that the interest of labour was coterminous with that of the whole nation. If the common good was dependent on the full development of every social member, economy in education, which deprived the working classes of educational opportunities, 'would be disastrous in its effect upon the nation'.<sup>15</sup> The issue of public spending on education reform provided a perfect example to illustrate the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the working classes and the nation. This was the logic behind Tawney's recommendation to Labour that the

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<sup>11</sup> 'The New National Secretaries', *Highway*, 24, Nov 1931, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> The speech of John Hill (delegate of the Boilermakers), *TUC Annual Report*, 1922, p. 412ff. quoted in Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> [l.a.], 'Hands off the Schools – A Call to Arms for the WEA', *Highway*, 18, Dec 1925, p. 35; Editor, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 18, Jan 1926, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 Nov 1932.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of WEA Central Council, Jan 28<sup>th</sup> 1922, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/5.

latter should manifest its concern over ‘deeper and more permanent interests of the nation’ by adopting a firm line on education.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, the WEA used the campaign to show that organised labour could work hand in hand with intellectuals and middle-class bodies in pursuit of the welfare of both workers and the nation. Indeed, although delegates of working-class bodies constituted the majority at WEA demonstrations, these gatherings were also joined by representatives of universities, education authorities, teachers’ organisations, etc.<sup>17</sup> It did not cause unrest among workers when the association stated, with a considerable degree of self-satisfaction, that ‘[t]he WEA, more than any other body in the world, is able to bring together representatives of all the different interests concerned—the Local Educational Authorities, the Trade Unions, the Churches, the parents, the teachers, and the general body of students’.<sup>18</sup>

Just as Labour used the terms ‘the people’, ‘the community’, and ‘workers’ interchangeably during this period,<sup>19</sup> so the WEA found no difficulty to simultaneously ‘fight the workers’ battle for education’ and defend a national system of education which was ‘not of a particular class’.<sup>20</sup> As Temple and trade union leaders concurred earlier, ‘[n]o more important service than [campaigning for education reform] can be rendered either to the working class or to the community as a whole’.<sup>21</sup> The Idealist assumption of the harmony between labour and the nation, and that between society and state was perfectly evidenced by the issue of education reform. It was against this backdrop that the other, and more positive, part of the WEA’s interwar campaign—the construction of a universal system of secondary education—was launched.

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<sup>16</sup> R. H. Tawney, ‘Memo on Educational Policy to be followed by a Labour Government’ (1929) quoted in Steele & Taylor, ‘R. H. Tawney and the Reform of the Universities’, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Highway*, 18, Feb 1926, p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Notes and Comments’, *Highway*, 18, Feb 1926, pp.66-7.

<sup>19</sup> Jon Lawrence, ‘Labour and the Politics of Class, 1900-1940’ in David Feldman and Jon Lawrence (eds.), *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 252.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Notes and Comments’, *Highway*, 18, July 1926, p. 98.

<sup>21</sup> William Temple, Harry Gosling, G. J. Wardle, Marion Phillips, W. R. Rae, Geo. Peverett, and J. J. Dent, ‘Preface’ to Mactavish, ‘What Labour Wants from Education’, WEA Pamphlet, 1916, p. 2. Or, as Tawney later put it, ‘[t]he principle on which we stand is the only principle which can command itself either to the educationalist or to a working class organisation’. R. H. Tawney, ‘Presidential Address [to the 2nd Annual Conference of the WEA, March 1932]’, *Highway* 24, Apr 1932, p. 22.

## 6-2 'Universal Secondary Education of Varying Types': Idealism and Educational Differentiation.

In 1922, Labour published its education manifesto, *Secondary Education for All: A Policy for Labour* (henceforth, *1922 Report*).<sup>22</sup> Written by Tawney, the *1922 Report* represented not only the party's new perspective for public education but also the success of the WEA-Idealist approach to the reform of secondary education. The WEA's wartime programme for free, universal but diverse secondary education was elaborated by the *1922 Report*, a policy that continued to be endorsed by subsequent educational programmes of Labour and the TUC.<sup>23</sup> More generally, the report 'shift[ed] the issues of the extent and structure of secondary schooling to the heart of the educational debate', providing a strong foundation for the *Hadow Report* of 1926 and the *Spens Report* of 1938, and anticipating the 1944 Education Act, which ushered in the 'tripartite system', namely, a universal system of secondary education divided into three types of schools: the grammar school, the secondary modern, and the technical school.<sup>24</sup> As I will explain in this section, the programme of secondary education of varying types, which was seriously criticised by educationalists in the 1960-70s, was neither a compromise nor a mistake made by the WEA and Tawney, its foremost supporter; instead, the programme was a well justified application of the Idealist concept of positive freedom to secondary education, and demonstrated the possible reciprocity between labour communities and the nation.

The chief purpose of the *1922 Report* was to unify the fragmented system of national education. By the early 1920s, education in England was conducted mainly through three types of institution.<sup>25</sup> First, there was a system of private preparatory and public schools,

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<sup>22</sup> *Secondary Education for All: A Policy for Labour* [drafted by R. H. Tawney], the LPEAC, 1922.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. *From Nursery to University: A Labour Policy*, the TUCEC and the Labour Party (London, 1926), pp. 21-5; *Labour and the Nation*, the Labour Party (London, 1928), pp. 36-9.

<sup>24</sup> Lowe, 'Education, 1900-39', p. 434; Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, p. 349; Lawrence Goldman, 'History and Continuity in English Education Since 1800', *East Asian Journal of British History*, 5 (2016), p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> Grammar schools also had their own preparatory schooling open for fee-payers. Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, p. 22. According to the *Hadow Report* of 1926, the percentage leaving elementary schools passing into grammar schools in different areas varied from 5 per cent to over 27 per cent, the average being 8.3 per cent. *The Education of the Adolescent*, pp. 80-1. See also Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 210-1.

the fees of which only wealthy families could afford. Second, grant-earning grammar schools (or 'secondary schools'<sup>26</sup>), with their own section of preparatory education, mainly admitted fee-paying students, while offering a certain proportion of free places for academically gifted pupils from elementary schools at age 11.<sup>27</sup> But the majority of children merely attended elementary schools from 5 to 14.<sup>28</sup> The 1918 Education Act stipulated compulsory 'day continuation schools' for part-time continued education up to the age of 18, but very few of these schools survived Geddes Axe. A small number of the children attending primary school might, from age 11, be accepted by central schools or junior technical schools, which existed mainly in urban areas and provided vocational and specialised instruction.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the three institutions educated pupils from different social backgrounds: public schools catered for the upper class, grammar schools the middle class and a few academically talented working-class pupils, and elementary and central/technical schools the working classes. The essence of Tawney's proposal was to do away with this class-ridden system of education, at least with regard to the two latter types of schools, which were publicly funded.

Echoing the WEA's wartime demand for an educational highway for all citizens, the *1922 Report* envisaged a system 'under which primary education and secondary education are organised as two stages in a single and continuous process'.<sup>30</sup> The term 'elementary education' was abandoned, because of its implication that such education was all the vast majority of citizens (or, the working classes) needed. Rather, the new system was to ensure that 'all normal children, irrespective of the income, class, or occupation of their parents,

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<sup>26</sup> During the 1920s, 'secondary schools' were generally referred to schools with an academic bias, namely, the 'grammar school', a term which was adopted by the 1938 *Spens Report* to distinguish it from the other two proposed types of secondary schools, i.e., modern schools and technical high schools.

<sup>27</sup> Free places roughly accounted one third of the total places of grammar schools in the early 1920s. For the statistics, see Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 364-5.

<sup>28</sup> On average, just below 10 % of elementary pupils won a place at grammar school during this period. For the statistics, see Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, p. 366.

<sup>29</sup> Although central and junior technical schools provided post-elementary education, they were not recognised as part of secondary education. Central schools were administered under the Regulations for Elementary Schools, whereas special Regulations for Junior Technical Schools were adopted in 1913. *Secondary Education for All*, pp. 104-6; Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, 21-2. For the origins of central schools, see Michael Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum: Technical School Education in England, 1900-1990s* (London, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> *Secondary Education for All*, p. 1.

may be transferred at the age of eleven+ from the primary or preparatory school to one type or another of secondary school, and remain in the latter till sixteen'.<sup>31</sup>

Tawney pressed for such a universal system of education, based on the Idealist cause of an educated democracy. Phrasing his concern in a similar way to some paragraphs of the *Oxford Report*, he argued that the aim of the proposed kind of education was

not to impart the specialised technique of any particular trade or profession, but to develop the faculties which, because they are the attribute of man, are not peculiar to any particular class or profession of men, and to build up the interests which, while they may become the basis of specialisation at a later stage, have a value extending beyond their utility for any particular vocation, because they are the condition of a rational and responsible life in society.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, general education with a liberal spirit, offered at the primary and secondary schools, would 'lay the foundations of a democratic society'.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, as Tawney admitted, neither the proposal for a universal system of education until the age of 16 (on the basis of a selection at age 11), nor the thesis on education and democracy was 'novel' by the time the report was published.<sup>34</sup> What was remarkable about this programme though, was its endorsement of different types of secondary school. While stressing the importance of liberal education, the report recognised that 'the more secondary education is developed, the more essential will it be that there should be the widest possible variety of type among secondary schools', including technical ones.<sup>35</sup> This position, according to Brian Simon, signified a turning point of the educational policy of the English labour movement—a departure from their earlier policy, culminating in the 'Bradford Charter' by the Bradford Trade Council in 1916, which advocated a common secondary school and was subsequently adopted by both Labour and the TUC.<sup>36</sup> Simon

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1. The proposal to divide full-time compulsory education into primary and secondary stages was soon adopted by the WEA Statement of Policy. 'WEA Constitution and Statement of Policy', 1923, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Secondary Education for All*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p. 212.

<sup>35</sup> *Secondary Education for All*, pp. 1, 104-13.

<sup>36</sup> Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 346-9; Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, p. 62; Barker, *Education and Politics*, p. 55. C.f. Cole, *History of the Labour Party from 1914*, p. 68.

argues that it was pressures from the campaign for economy that forced the labour movement to sacrifice the radical ideal and accept the existing types of schools as they were. Being an enthusiast of comprehensive schooling, Simon is critical of such a 'compromise', which ignored the ensuing problems of selection and 'the real practicalities in other than heavily populated urban areas'.<sup>37</sup> For Simon, this unfortunate miscalculation vitiated the strength of the efforts to sever the connection between schooling and class discrimination.

Yet, clearly, Tawney's reform proposal was not a compromise due to external pressures. For, as we have seen in Chapter Two (above), a free, universal, but diverse system of secondary education was a policy that had been consistently pursued by the WEA. Even before 1914, Tawney had made clear in a speech that 'educational institutions must be of various kinds, for there are diversities of gifts'.<sup>38</sup> His interwar proposal was no more than a continuation of this position. And the fact that Tawney remained loyal to educational differentiation at the secondary level towards the 1960s also indicates that his aloofness to the comprehensive model was principled rather than strategic.<sup>39</sup>

Was the proposal a misjudgement, then, which arose from a lack of knowledge about non-urban areas and the nature of society? By 1922, Tawney had taught working-class students for more than ten years and had just ended his one-year service as a resident tutor in the Potteries. It would therefore be hard to criticise his view on the ground of his lacking practical understanding of the differences between local areas. In fact, to cater for local needs was one of the justifications for varied secondary schools provided by the *1922 Report*.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, as Goldman reminds us in his recent biography of Tawney, the latter's secondary education proposal was produced at a time when most pupils were debarred from secondary schooling. It is thus anachronistic to accuse Tawney of having been a lofty prophet who lacked empirical insight into the nature of educational inequality.<sup>41</sup> For Tawney, the priority was to resolve 'the division between primary and secondary education'

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<sup>37</sup> Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>38</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Education and Social Progress', WEA Pamphlet, 1912, pp. 7-8.

<sup>39</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 213-4.

<sup>40</sup> *Secondary Education for All*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 213-5.

along lines of social class, a problem which he deemed ‘the most disastrous legacy of [the] odious system of class stratification’.<sup>42</sup>

However, plausible as all these defences are, they do not entirely counteract Simon’s criticism that, instead of certifying the tripartite system, Tawney could have advocated labour’s ‘allegedly’ original vision—the common/comprehensive schooling—which would have been more conducive to an equal society.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, as a correspondent to *The Highway* who disagreed with the WEA’s secondary education policy argued, ‘[i]f we had one class of school for all, rich and poor alike, if the wealthy merchant’s son, the nobleman’s son and the gutter child sat side by side in the ‘common school’, [social] reform would come very rapidly’.<sup>44</sup> Given that Tawney and the WEA were aware of this presumably more equalitarian proposal, why did they fail to put it forward?

In what follows, I will discuss why Tawney and other WEA Idealists took a relatively moderate approach to secondary education reform, and why they called for ‘liberal education for all’ and a ‘common culture’, on the one hand, while supporting technical schooling and the differentiations within the system of secondary education, on the other. I will argue that there was no element of self-contradiction or insincerity in their proposals; instead, the proposals were genuinely based on the Idealist faith in self-realisation and the common good and the pursuit of such non-individualistic values as solidarity and craftsmanship. This intellectual disposition led WEA Idealists to look askance at the common school model and to reason that secondary education of varying types could best serve the interests of the whole community.

To begin with, it must be remembered that the idea of positive freedom was at the heart of the WEA’s education campaign. For WEA Idealists, the chief aim of public education had always been to help every citizen make his/her *unique* contribution to the common good—the completion of the mosaic painting, as Mansbridge imagined it. Thus, an ideal educational system was, noted Mansbridge, one ‘which would allow every citizen to develop and use his God-given powers to the best advantage in the service of his fellows’. As he carried on, ‘[i]n a society working in correspondence with the Divine Law ... there

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<sup>42</sup> R. H. Tawney, ‘The Education of the Adolescent’, *Highway*, 19, July 1927, pp. 129-30.

<sup>43</sup> For Simon’s account of the early educational ideal of the labour movement, see his *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 126-33, 200-6.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Hoyle (Secretary, Oldham C.C. Teachers’ Association), ‘[corr.] Educational Reform’, *Highway*, 9:105, 1917.

would arise a sufficient number of all kinds of necessary workers—poets, musicians, navies, wood-workers, stone-workers, farmers'.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, G. H. Thompson contended that 'a system of Universal secondary schools' should not 'conform to one type. We shall probably have secondary education with a literary bias, with a commercial bias, with an agricultural bias, and with a mechanical bias'.<sup>46</sup> Recognising everyone's distinct potential and rejecting the notion that people 'are born with equal endowments', Idealists were liable to favour an educational system prompting diverse developments.<sup>47</sup>

As Tawney explained in the 1930s, his proposal for educational equality was not

to substitute for the variety and spontaneity of educational effort a drab and lifeless mediocrity ... It is to be achieved not by meeting different requirements in the same way, but by taking equal care to ensure that varying requirements are met in the ways most appropriate to each. What it does involve is that varieties of educational provision shall be based on educational grounds alone, and that the existence of differences of educational treatment or opportunity which have their source merely in differences of economic circumstance shall be recognised as an evil ... Were such a view accepted, so far from its result being a mechanical uniformity, it would be a great increase in the range and variety of educational provision.<sup>48</sup>

In this sense, to blame the WEA's reform programme for failing to take up the fight against social inequality and class discrimination is to miss the wood for the trees. As Temple once argued, after all, 'social reform is a means to an end; the end is a fellowship of richly various human life'.<sup>49</sup> For both Tawney and Temple, equality was best seen as a guarantee for all members of society to work towards self-fulfilment, and it would be absurd to pursue equality at the expense of citizens' diverse development.

The second reason why the Idealists preferred secondary education with varied curriculum to the common school model is related to their appreciation of collectivist

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<sup>45</sup> 'Teachers' Christian Union Conference', *Highway*, 10:113, Feb 1918, pp. 66-7.

<sup>46</sup> G. H. Thompson, '[Corr.] The WEA and the University', *Highway*, 7:82, Jul 1915, p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'A Review of Our Policy' [presidential address to the 1935 WEA Annual Conference, on 13-14<sup>th</sup> December 1935], *Highway*, 28, Feb 1936, p. 109.

<sup>48</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Lecture to the New Education Fellowship', Jan 1934, R. H. Tawney Papers, LSE, 17/1, fols. 21-3.

<sup>49</sup> William Temple, 'Personal Values in Education', *Highway*, 25, Nov 1932, p. 2.

values, including tradition, identity, and solidarity, as the basis of universal participation. As the *1922 Report* put it, 'if education is to be an inspiration, not a machine, it must reflect the varying social traditions, and moral atmospheres, and economic conditions of different localities. And within the secondary system of each there must be more than one type of school'.<sup>50</sup> A universal secondary education should not become an enemy to the cultures and identities of different areas and social classes. The construction of secondary schools of varying types was essentially a way to preserve 'the peculiar excellence of particular institutions' from 'a pedantic State-imposed uniformity'.<sup>51</sup> By so doing, 'the amenities of culture' would not give way to 'the sake of a utilitarian efficiency'.<sup>52</sup>

This conviction was interwoven with the Idealist cause for universal participation. An organic rather than individualistic, understanding of human society led WEA Idealists to respect and cherish the sense of solidarity or class consciousness among working-class communities. As MacTavish complained in 1920, educationalists had given too little consideration to class consciousness 'other than to strive to eradicate it'; but, the truth was, as he contended, that, if class consciousness could be 'recognised, stimulated and educated in the right way [by an educational system], it [would] become the most powerful factor in a peaceful solution of the serious problems that confront us'. For the sense of working-class solidarity could be 'harness[ed] ... to the needs of humanity', and could form a basis for 'social passion' and 'world service'.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the mission of education, as Tawney understood it, was 'not simply to individuals'; it was to social classes and the national community.<sup>54</sup> The last two were seen not as conflicting, but as complementary. When WEA Idealists urged to pursue the national interest by demolishing 'class barriers', they were referring to the barriers of income, status, and power, rather than to class identities.<sup>55</sup> Just as the tutorial programme was carefully designed to raise the working classes *as a whole*, so the Idealist programme of secondary education prioritised solidarity and participation over the 'social mobility' of individuals. Endowed with an individualistic

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<sup>50</sup> *Secondary Education for All*, p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> J. M. MacTavish, '[Review] Creative Revolution', *Highway*, 13: 3, Dec 1920, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Chairman's Address, at the Fourth Annual Conference in Manchester, Nov 1934' in *WEA Annual Report*, 1935, pp. 17-9.

<sup>55</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', [1934], in his *The Attack and Other Papers* (London, 1953), pp. 60-1; G. D. H. Cole, 'Secondary Education—For Whom', WEA Pamphlet, [1932], p. 1.

view of equality and the social good, the advocates of the comprehensives in the 1950s and 1960s failed to appreciate the insight of WEA Idealists that diversity, much more than uniformity, encouraged participation and the corporate spirit.<sup>56</sup>

Last but not least, the WEA Idealists' attitude towards technical education reinforced their support for secondary education of varying types. Admittedly, in stressing the value of liberal education, which in some contexts was understood as the antonym of vocational instruction, the Idealists were never committed supporters of technical education.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the respect for the working-class identity and culture invited an admiration of manual labour and, in particular, a nostalgic feeling for craftsmanship, which not only lent a unique flavour to Tawney's historical works, but also led the WEA to acknowledge the worth of technical education.

It is noticeable that after 1918, the WEA began to actively develop its discourse on technical education. In a 1920 article, T. W. Price, then assistant secretary to WEA Central Council, warned that

The time has now come for the WEA ... to define its attitude to vocational education ... if our idealists in education insist upon divorcing education for livelihood from education for life the effect will be to leave vocational education in the hands of those whose aims are purely materialistic and utilitarian, and whose primary interests will be those of their particular industry and not those of the student. And so vocational training may remain a soul-deadening process when it might so easily become a means of enriching life as in the old days of craftsmanship ... the culture which stands haughtily aloof from the work of the world is a false one; the true culture should diffuse our daily tasks with its sweetness and light.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For the left-wing criticism of educational differentiation in the 1950s and 1960s, see Rubinstein and Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School 1926-1972* (London, 1973), pp. 60-6; Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, pp. 196-200.

<sup>57</sup> For Idealists' criticism of technical education, see Temple, 'Education in England', *Highway*, 9:97-9, Oct-Dec 1916, pp. 4-6, 21-3, 43-7. It is worth noting that Temple no longer pursued this line from the mid-1930s and took a much more positive view of vocational instruction. William Temple, 'The Need for a New Culture', *Highway*, 27, Oct 1934, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> T. W. Price, 'Life or Livelihood', *Highway*, 12: 5, Feb 1920, p. 80. Price's position was criticised by Reuben George. See Reuben George, '[corr.] Life or Livelihood', *Highway*, 12: 6, Mar 1920, pp. 102-3. But, as we will see, Price largely reflected the mainstream view within the WEA.

This intention to recognise and press for the fulfilment of the liberal element of vocational education, had in fact, already been displayed in the *1919 Report* of the Adult Education Committee which, as we have seen, was dominated by the WEA-Idealist opinions.

Despite its focus on adult education, the report contained a short chapter on technical education, which was indicative of the Idealist programme for reforming vocational education at the secondary level. Though denying the ‘universal need’ for technical education, the *1919 Report* recognised that ‘[t]echnical education must always be a necessary and important part of a national system of education’.<sup>59</sup> For the committee, the ideal type of technical education was medieval apprenticeship which at that time, as ‘the chief medium of education and culture for the bulk of people’, provided ‘some of the chief essentials of a liberal education’.<sup>60</sup>

The Idealists were convinced that ‘handcrafts [were] an important branch of humane education’.<sup>61</sup> As Tawney explained in the *1922 Report*, ‘[p]ractical work in the sense, not of specialised training for a particular occupation, but of work which is closely related to the living interests of the children, is eminently desirable on strictly educational ground. Wisely used, it is a stimulus, not an impediment, to intellectual development’.<sup>62</sup> On another occasion, he went so far as to argue that he would not have insisted on raising school leaving age to 15, ‘[i]f every boy could be sent at 14 into a nice joiner’s shop, or stone-mason’s yard, or printing works’.<sup>63</sup> For, if ‘life’ and ‘livelihood’ had been one, as they used to be in the medieval times, economic life itself could be a form of liberal education in the sense that people were motivated to fulfil their potential and serve ‘a public purpose’ simultaneously.<sup>64</sup>

The problem with both modern industries and vocational education was, as the *1919 Report* identified, their ‘narrowness’ and specialisation, and thus their lack of a common

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<sup>59</sup> *Final Report of Adult Education Committee*, p. 150.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>62</sup> *Secondary Education for All*, p. 110.

<sup>63</sup> Tawney to Fred Clarke, 30 Sep 1940, R. H. Tawney Papers, Institute of Education, fol. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Final Report of Adult Education Committee*, p. 151; *Education: The Socialist Policy* [drafted by R. H. Tawney], the Independent Labour Party, 1924, p.33.

purpose.<sup>65</sup> With the degeneration of modern industries into a tool solely for private acquisition, noted the report, vocational training came to be ‘a device not so much for the better satisfaction of the community’s needs as for the exploitation of the worker’.<sup>66</sup> As a result, technical studies might be ‘a means of personal development’, but it failed to promote any ‘social motive’ or ‘*esprit de corps*’ among students.<sup>67</sup> However, as the report argued, technical schools could definitely act as a vital branch of general education, as long as vocational instruction was reunited with the community and social purpose, for example, by including economic history, economics, and sociology in its curriculum and replacing specialised training with ‘all kinds of craftsmanship’.<sup>68</sup>

It is important to note that the Idealists appreciated the liberal potential of vocational training and therefore did not exclude technical instructions from their programme of ‘liberal education for all’. For WEA Idealists, liberal education required precise definition; it was to be understood as a form of instruction capable of contributing to self-development and yet at the same time, wholly dedicated to ‘the social’. Since technical education could cater for certain students’ special capacity and direct them to serving the community, it was well qualified to form a part of liberal education. It was for this reason that the Idealists ruled out the proposal for a uniform curriculum; this also shows why it is untenable to impute the anti-vocational bias in the English educational system to Idealist philosophy.<sup>69</sup>

Of course, WEA Idealists were no utopians and were fully aware of the possible repercussions of their programme—namely, that the differentiations of secondary education might be at the service of class distinction, with students choosing their type of school, not based on their ability but on the school’s social prestige.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the WEA reiterated the principle of equal quality and status between different types of schools, and urged for measures to facilitate transfer from one type of school to another and to thwart unnecessarily competitive entrance examinations.<sup>71</sup> However, WEA Idealists insisted on

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<sup>65</sup> *Final Report of Adult Education Committee*, 150; for a more comprehensive examination of the problems of modern industries by the Adult Education Committee, see its ‘Interim Report on Industrial and Social Conditions in Relation to Adult Education’ [Cd. 9107], 1918, pp. 6-21.

<sup>66</sup> *Final Report of Adult Education Committee*, pp. 150-1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 173-4.

<sup>69</sup> Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, p. 138.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. Tawney, ‘The Education of the Adolescent’, pp. 129-30.

<sup>71</sup> ‘WEA Constitution and Statement of Policy’, 1929, WEA Archive, Central/1/1/1, p. 7; R. H. Tawney, ‘The School-Leaving Age Bill’, *Highway*, 22, Feb 1930, p. 5; ‘Reorganisation and the School Leaving Age, WEA Pamphlet, 1930.

secondary education of different types and remained critical of the comprehensive model with a common curriculum, because of 1) their faith in people's different and unique potential in contributing to the common good, 2) their assertion of the connection between diversity, identity, and participation, and 3) their recognition of the liberal values of technical education.<sup>72</sup>

All of these positions implied an Idealist interpretation of 'equality of opportunity', a slogan embraced by every branch of the labour movement during the interwar period. Yet as I will show, the Idealist reading of equality of opportunity was not shared by all the educational activists rallying behind the labour movement.

### **6-3 The Varied Faces of 'Equality of Opportunity'.**

The idea of equality of opportunity had been used at least since the turn of the nineteenth century to justify a national education open to all members of the community.<sup>73</sup> However, it was only in the 1920s that the term came to be a keyword of education reform.<sup>74</sup> A major context for the growing popularity of this catchphrase was Labour's bid to become a national party after 1918. As historians have shown, although its pitch was characterised by conflicting strategies, a central tactic adopted by the party was to label itself as 'a party of useful citizens': rather than serving the interests of particular sections or classes of the nation, the party was to ensure the realisation of equality of opportunity, whereby workers, whether manual or professional, would receive the opportunities and rewards they deserved.<sup>75</sup>

Being a major ally to Labour in pursuing education reform,<sup>76</sup> the WEA adopted the language of equality of opportunity and interpreted it in Idealist terms. However, the concept of equality of opportunity also invited other interpretations. As we shall see, both

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<sup>72</sup> C.f. Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, p. 122.

<sup>73</sup> Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 201-3; Kang, 'Equality of Educational Opportunity: Ideas and Politics 1900-1918', pp. 60-2.

<sup>74</sup> Eustace Percy, *Some Memories* (London, 1958), p. 94 quoted in McCulloch, 'Educating the Public: Tawney, the Manchester Guardian and Education Reform', p. 122.

<sup>75</sup> McKibbin, *Parties and People*, pp. 50, 72; Lawrence, 'Labour and the politics of class, 1900-1940', pp. 246-7; Lawrence, *Speaking for the People*, pp. 257-63; Cole, *History of the Labour Party from 1914*, pp. 40, 54-8.

<sup>76</sup> 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 18, Jul 1926, p. 98; C. R. Morris, 'The Idea of a Non-Political Association', *Highway*, 25, Feb 1933, p. 11.

‘progressive educationalists’ and Fabians agreed on the notion of equality of opportunity as the basis for education reform, but they worked with either an individualistic or utilitarian understanding of the concept,<sup>77</sup> a fact which foretold the frustration of the Idealist vision of education reform in the 1930s.

There is no denying that largely through the influence of Tawney, the WEA-Idealist discourse on equality of opportunity pervaded Labour’s educational policy throughout the 1920s.<sup>78</sup> Aside from the *1922 Report*, the Labour Party manifesto of 1928, *Labour and the Nation*, put forward the Idealist vision of education reform, stating that

the only organisation of education which deserves the support of a democratic nation must be one based on the fullest recognition of the two complementary principles of complete social equality and of the necessity of adjusting the types of education offered to wide individual differences of taste, capacity and character.<sup>79</sup>

This definition of social equality as the fulfilment of every member’s unique potential reflected the Idealist thesis on the reciprocity between self-realisation and the common good.

For the Idealists, equality of opportunity meant that every citizen, both as an *individual human being* and as a *member of society*, had the right to be educated. As the WEA’s policy statement, first unveiled in 1920, claimed, ‘the primary purpose of all education should be to develop individual capacity, judgment and personality, always with a deep sense of responsibility for the well-being of the community’.<sup>80</sup> The first and foremost reason why education should be brought within the reach of all was that the need of education and self-development was ‘the attribute of man’ rather than ‘the monopoly of any class or section of men’.<sup>81</sup> Or, in the words of Richard Rees, treasurer of WEA London District and a protégé of Tawney, universal provision of education was required because

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<sup>77</sup> Lowe, ‘Education, 1900-39’, pp. 427-8.

<sup>78</sup> Barker, *Education and Politics*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>79</sup> *Labour and the Nation*, p. 37. The Manifesto was largely Tawney’s work. See Terrill, *R. H. Tawney and His Times*, p. 63.

<sup>80</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1920, pp.189-90.

<sup>81</sup> R. H. Tawney, ‘The Future of the WEA’, p. 3. C.f. J. H. B. Masterman: [The WEA] believed that a man should be educated first and foremost as a human being, and that there should be a common educational basis. ‘The Workers’ Educational Association’, *TES*, 316, May 5<sup>th</sup> 1921, p. 206.

it is not the 'living wage', nor yet the six-hour day, nor yet the Dictatorship of the Proletariat that can give a man happiness and peace, but only the mastery of *himself* ... It matters little whether we are rich and seek solace on the golf-course, or poor and seek solace at the football match, we are equally damned ... What we need is ... something *to give value to our individual lives*.<sup>82</sup>

In turn, Charles Gore noted that since the need to develop one's own capacity and character was universal, '[j]ustice ... means the equal right of every single man and woman to have the opportunity to make the best of himself or herself'.<sup>83</sup> In short, for Oxford Idealists, equality of opportunity meant an equal chance for 'each member of a community' to pursue positive freedom in the sense of 'using to the full his natural endowments of physique, of character, and of intelligence' in the interest of the common good.<sup>84</sup>

Again, equality of opportunity was justified in terms of the collective good, which was predicated by active and responsible citizens. As Tawney explained,

Our problem today is ... to enlist the active and critical intelligence of the mass of mankind in the solution of our common problems ... A good school is not a place for compulsory instruction, but a community of young and old engaged in learning by co-operative experiments ... [and] encouraged to assume responsibility ...<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, whenever pupils' educational opportunities were limited 'less by their individual needs and capacities than by the incomes of their parents', it was a harm to the common good.<sup>86</sup> Put another way, equality of opportunity was to guarantee solidarity and participation. In his classic work, *Equality*, Tawney contended that:

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<sup>82</sup> Richard Rees, '[corrs.] The Purpose of Education', *Highway*, 19, July 1927, p. 141. Italics in original.

<sup>83</sup> Charles Gore, *Christian Moral Principles* (London, 1921), p. 93 quoted in Carter, *T. H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism*, p. 70. See also J. R. Brooks, 'R. H. Tawney and the Reform of English Education', PhD Thesis, Wales University, 1974, pp. 502-3.

<sup>84</sup> Tawney, *Equality*, p. 139. See also G. D. H. Cole, *A Guide through World Chaos* (New York, 1934 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1932]), p. 495 quoted in Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, p. 32 n. 78.

<sup>85</sup> R. H. Tawney, *The British Labour Movement* (New Haven, 1925), pp. 131-2.

<sup>86</sup> Tawney, 'Presidential Address [to the 2nd Annual Conference of the WEA, March 1932]', pp. 22-3.

Social well-being does not only depend upon intelligent leadership; it also depends upon cohesion and solidarity. It implies the existence, not merely of opportunities to ascent, but of a high level of general culture, and a strong sense of common interests, and the diffusion throughout the society of a conviction that civilization is not the business of an elite alone, but a common enterprise which is the concern of all.<sup>87</sup>

However, this version of equality of opportunity, moralised in both personal and collective terms, was only shared by few of the WEA's allies in the campaign for education reform.

The first alternative to the Idealist reading of equality of opportunity came from the 'progressive educationalists'.<sup>88</sup> The 'progressive' movement, which gained strength at the turn of the nineteenth century was by no means a concerted action. In practice, the 'progressive' educationalists urged different and sometimes contradictory alternatives to traditional education. Nevertheless, their thought did share similar characteristics such as the use of scientific, especially psychological, findings and the child-centred approach to education.<sup>89</sup> One of the leaders of the 'progressive' movement in England was Thomas Percy Nunn (1870-1944), first director of the London University Institute of Education, who served on the LPEAC (and also on the BOECC) alongside Tawney in the 1920s. In view of their co-operation in working out several important reports, it is beyond doubt that their ideas were partially complementary.<sup>90</sup> In fact, Tawney, though distancing himself from the 'educationalists', did use scientific and psychological findings to support his Idealist cause for reforming school teaching.<sup>91</sup>

Nonetheless, a significant difference between Idealists and progressive educationalists was that, contrary to the former's emphasis on the connection between personal fulfilment and social well-being, the latter focused exclusively on individual

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<sup>87</sup> Tawney, *Equality*, p. 146.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, p. 150.

<sup>89</sup> Stewart, *Progressives and Radicals in English Education*, p. 143. It is worth noting that, in the American contexts, the 'progressive' movement tended to refer to the educational movement, led by John Dewey, which was aimed to educate competent citizens for democracy. This school was different from the 'progressive' movement in England I discuss in this and next chapters.

<sup>90</sup> For example, the *Hadow Report* of 1926 was largely co-drafted by Tawney and Nunn.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. Tawney, 'Education and Social Progress', p. 5.

development.<sup>92</sup> As Gordon and White put it, '[i]n reverting to the older atomist-individualist tradition of British philosophy, Nunn revives an ahistorical attitude towards educational thinking'.<sup>93</sup> The child was construed as a 'self-contained entity' and the only purpose of education was to encourage their inborn impulse towards intellectual and artistic development. Temple's trenchant distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' education fully applied here, too: while 'traditional', or indeed Idealist, education—with its archetypes, the public school and the old university—took a 'sub-conscious' method to encourage sympathy and corporate spirit, the method of 'modern education', which, as Temple understood it, derived from Rousseau, was solely a training of 'intelligence and memory', regardless of social responsibility.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, for progressive educationalists, educational equality meant the dissemination of the right to 'self-expression', whereas the social purposes of education and pupils' connection to the community were entirely ignored.<sup>95</sup> As Adrian Wooldridge sums it up, the vision of the progressive educationalists was characterised by 'nuclear families, self-help, and competitive individualism', in place of 'a culture of communal loyalties, extended families and irregular work'.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to progressive educationalists, Fabians, especially the Webbs, interpreted the principle of equality of opportunity from the utilitarian perspective. They argued that national efficiency increased in proportion to the extent of equality of opportunity. As mentioned in above Chapter One, Fabians understood the educational system as a ladder. The best education was therefore one that ensured talents were rightly selected and trained. Sidney Webb once drew an analogy between 'the capacities of the whole population' and 'iron and coal': national efficiency was maximised when all talents, as all mines, were discovered and used.<sup>97</sup> Thus, for him, the justification of equality of opportunity was not that everyone's equal worth and unique capacity should be respected,

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<sup>92</sup> For the affinity between the progressive educational theory/psychology and individualism, see Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind*, ch. 8; Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 155-9.

<sup>93</sup> Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 155-6.

<sup>94</sup> Willaim Temple, 'Education in England', *Highway*, 9:97-9; Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, vol. iii, p. 287.

<sup>95</sup> Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>96</sup> Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind*, p. 209.

<sup>97</sup> Sidney Webb, *London Education* (London, 1904), pp. 9-10.

but that 'each child should receive the specific form of education which would maximise his efficiency'.<sup>98</sup>

Haldane's interpretation of equality of opportunity reflected a mixture of Idealism and utilitarianism, as did his view of university and adult education. The former War Minister became inclined towards Labour in the 1920s partly due to his support for the latter's educational policy. Indeed, he occasionally argued in such an Idealist tone that education reform in his words became something that was to awaken the 'sense of the Divine' in everyone and to realise 'equality in that deeper sense in which it meant freedom from the fetters of ignorance and from the hindrances which these fetters imposed'.<sup>99</sup> But when it came to the social implications of educational equality, he defended the principle in utilitarian terms. On the one hand, he considered equal chances of education as an instrument of social control. 'Ignorance', Haldane noted, 'was the producer of social unrest, and knowledge was the great way to equality and the great averter of strikes'.<sup>100</sup> On the other, he acclaimed educational opportunities on the ground that they entailed social mobility, allowing individuals to move from one class to another.<sup>101</sup> Not surprisingly, Haldane's view of educational reform was dismissed by worker Idealists such as Thompson as 'a good deal of tosh'.<sup>102</sup>

In short, the Fabian view of equality of opportunity was characterised by its functionalism and individualism. Equality of opportunity was regarded as a means to maximise efficiency. But, although its ultimate goal was collective interest, this view was individualistic in the sense that it focused on equality between individuals instead of social groups or classes. This version of equality of opportunity thus differed significantly from the Idealist interpretation. In *Equality*, Tawney was critical of the non-Idealist concept of equality of opportunity, a theme to which he would come back again in criticising British left-wing thinking. As he noted,

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<sup>98</sup> It was also on this ground that Sidney Webb preferred educational differentiations to the common school model. Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, pp. 204-6.

<sup>99</sup> 'Adult Education', *TES*, 320, June 4<sup>th</sup> 1921, p. 254. See also R. B. Haldane, 'Education and Democracy', WEA Pamphlet, 1920.

<sup>100</sup> 'Lord Haldane on Education', *TES*, 254, Feb 26<sup>th</sup> 1920, p. 114.

<sup>101</sup> Vincent and Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>102</sup> Harrison, *Learning and Living*, p. 297.

the doctrine which throws all its emphasis on the importance of opening avenues to individual advancement is partial and one-sided. It is right in insisting on the necessity of opening a free career to aspiring talent; it is wrong in suggesting that opportunities to rise, which can ... be seized only by the few, are a substitute for a general diffusion of the means of civilisation, which are needed by all men, whether they rise or not ...<sup>103</sup>

The narrow focus on mobility would not contribute to solidarity.<sup>104</sup> Later in his life, Tawney would go so far as to suggest that it was in fact unscrupulous for the Labour Party to emphasise mobility, because '[n]othing could be more remote from Socialist ideals than the competitive scramble of a society which pays lip-service to equality, but too often means by it merely equal opportunities of becoming unequal'.<sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, the conflict between Idealist and non-Idealist approaches to educational equality hardly ever became explicit during the 1920s. In the short term, possible conversations between the two sides were further deferred by the 1931 crisis. The immediate issue for the WEA was how to maintain its relationship with the labour movement when new political situations increasingly dissociated WEA leaders from Labour and the trade union movement.

#### **6-4 Frustrations and Alienation, 1931-34.**

In hindsight, 1931 was a watershed for the alliance between the WEA and the labour movement in education campaign. The defeat of the Education Bill, intended to raise the school leaving age to 15, in the Lords in February 1931, was a precursor to another period of stagnation for the reform campaign. In the months that followed, the economic depression persuaded Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden to reintroduce economy

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<sup>103</sup> Tawney, *Equality*, pp. 147-8.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>105</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'British Socialism Today'[1952] in Hinde (ed.), *The Radical Tradition*, p. 179. For Lindsay, this problematic concept of equality was rooted in 'atomic individualism', see A. D. Lindsay, *The Essentials of Democracy* (London, 1935 [1<sup>st</sup> edn, 1929]), pp. 1-2. For post-war criticisms of the individualistic understanding of equality of opportunity and the problematic focus on social mobility, see T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge, 1950), pp. 62-8; Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, pp. 163-76.

measures, which ushered in the Committee on National Expenditure (known as the May Committee) and the Committee on Local Expenditure (known as the Ray Committee): The *May Report* proposed to reduce public spending on education by about 10%, while the *Ray Report* suggested an additional cut in education of £6 million.<sup>106</sup> More importantly, this retrenchment in social services was widely considered a betrayal of Labour's policy and led to the split of the party in 1931. The 1931 crisis not only led to Labour's catastrophic failure in the general election of the same year, but also, as McKibbin points out, indicated the demise of the ILP-autodidactic tradition within the party, a tradition that stressed fellowship and ethical improvement and had connected the party to left-wing intellectual circles, including the WEA. The strict social and economic reality left this tradition to be forsaken by MacDonald—who had been its prime exponent—and by subsequent Labour leaders ascending from trade unions.<sup>107</sup>

Yet this change did not occur overnight. In fact, there were signs suggesting that mutual distrust between organised labour and the WEA had been exacerbated since the General Strike of 1926.<sup>108</sup> Temple's tepidity toward the miners' cause was exploited by NCLC members and militant trade unionists who launched so effective an attack on the WEA that Temple, though having resigned from WEA presidency in 1924, was forced to clarify his position in public.<sup>109</sup> Two years later, Arthur Pugh, chairman of the TUCEC and secretary of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, resigned from the WEA Presidency (1925-28) without providing any explanation.<sup>110</sup> The relationship between the WEA and trade unions suffered another bitter blow when Muir, having served as a bridge between the two sides, died in 1931. Although Alec Firth, who had joined the TUC staff from 1921, took up the post of WEA General Secretary in 1931, the effectiveness of this step in dispelling trade unionists' suspicion about the WEA was limited. For Firth was largely an administrative

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<sup>106</sup> 'The Practical Effects of Education Economy', WEA Pamphlet, 1932; 'The Means Test in Education', WEA Pamphlet, [1932]; Barbara Drake, 'The Cuts in Education', *Highway*, 24, Mar 1932, pp. 14-6; Shena Simon, 'Education and the Ray Report', *Highway*, 25, Jan 1933, pp. 3-5. See also Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 171-91; Pat Thane, *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London, 1996), pp. 191-2.

<sup>107</sup> McKibbin, *Parties and People*, pp. 69-70, 78-9, 83-4.; Pugh, *Speak for Britain*, p. 222; Geoffrey Foote, *The Labour Party's Political Thought: A History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London, 1997), p. 39. See also Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, pp. 85-9; G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought, Volume V: Socialism and Fascism, 1931-1939* (London, 1960), pp. 66-9, 73-6.

<sup>108</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, pp. 111-2.

<sup>109</sup> William Temple, 'Correction of a Falsehood', *Highway*, 19, Oct 1926, p. 6. For Temple's attitude toward the Strike, see Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, pp. 104-13.

<sup>110</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1929.

professional with few links to the grassroots of the trade union movement: he held an external University of London degree and had lectured at a technical college before undertaking research work respectively for the War Office, the Board of Trade, and the TUC.<sup>111</sup> Seeing that trade unions remained lukewarm about the WEA's work, T. S. Benson, a worker-student and active member of WEA North-western District, suggested that 'we should cease to regard trade union affiliation as a favour conferred upon us'. As he continued in his *Highway* prize essay of 1932,

A really frank understanding between workers' education and workers' industrial movements can only arise out of a condition of equality and a recognition on the part of unions that the matter of education is, in its own way, as important as superannuation or strike funds. Why should unions need to be dunned into affiliation?<sup>112</sup>

In addition, the stagnation of the WETUC scheme during this period was another indication of the growing distance between the WEA and trade unions.<sup>113</sup>

As to Labour, Richard Crossman observed that, in the 1930s, there existed within the party a fear of being intimidated by the WEA, because the latter, as 'an independent educational movement with access to local government and central government funds and with unrivalled teaching facilities, was setting up all over the country small centres of critical independent political activity, most of them Labour, but also intensely critical of the Labour Establishment'.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, the WEA in general, and Tawney, who was WEA President from 1928, in particular, were overwhelmingly negative about Labour's policy. Throughout the 1930s, Tawney's attack on the party was relentless, if not reckless.<sup>115</sup> He ascribed Labour's failure to its lack of democratic and socialist conviction and 'its tendency

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<sup>111</sup> As Griggs notes, Firth was once described as having the 'temperament of a University lecturer and the training of a civil servant'. Clive Griggs, *The TUC and Education Reform 1926-1970* (London, 2002), pp. 5-6. See also 'The New National Secretaries', *Highway*, 24, Nov 1931, p. 19.

<sup>112</sup> T. S. Benson, 'What's Wrong with the WEA?', p. 5. See also [Anon.], 'Views in Brief— What's Wrong with the WEA', *Highway*, 24, Apr 1932, p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> 'Editorial Notes', *Highway*, 21, Nov 1928, p. 22; Marwick, 'The WEA and the Working-Class Movement', p. 14. See also Corfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>114</sup> Richard Crossman, 'The Role of the Volunteer in the Modern Social Service'[1973] in A. H. Halsey (ed.), *Traditions of Social Policy* (Oxford, 1976), p. 265.

<sup>115</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 156-61

to rely for success on the mass support of societies' which meant that the party won over 'a mob' at the expense of its 'Socialist' principle.<sup>116</sup> On another occasion, reversing the above position, he criticised the trade unions' monopoly of the party machine on the grounds that it made 'the Labour Party appear too much a party of the industrial workers, and fail[ed] to rally the great mass of discontent which approaches politics by other roads'.<sup>117</sup> This inconsistency reflected the extent to which Tawney was frustrated with the distance between his social ideal and the party.<sup>118</sup>

The WEA's alienation from organised labour impelled attempts to reinforce connections to ordinary workers and to reconsider its educational policy.<sup>119</sup> For fear of the growing distance between itself and rank-and-file workers, constitutional reforms were implemented to prompt devolution within the WEA.<sup>120</sup> In order to give the rank and file a chance of 'making its voice heard' and encourage democratic control over the national policy, from 1931 an annual conference, at which WEA branches, districts and affiliated societies had direct representation, replaced the WEA Central Council as the final authority in the policy making process.<sup>121</sup> Later on, a scheme 'to strengthen the ties between the national body, its Districts and Branches, and to bring about a greater unity of policy' was adopted by the annual conference.<sup>122</sup>

More importantly, alongside constitutional reform, the WEA reinvigorated its discourse on education reform. It is noticeable that, from the 1930s, the Idealist vision of realising positive freedom was no longer perceived as the sole justification for educational equality; instead, the WEA began to adopt the discourse on the link between equality and efficiency, which, as we have seen in the preceding section, was the major feature of the Fabian

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<sup>116</sup> Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', pp. 57-8.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, p. 160.

<sup>118</sup> Disappointment over the labour movement was also voiced by Lindsay, who complained that centralised organisation and machinery had choked the spirit of democratic movement. Lindsay, *The Essential of Democracy*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>119</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 25, Apr 1933, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> For criticisms of the disconnection between the central office, districts and branches, see e.g. R. S. Lambert, 'Correspondence', *Highway*, 22, Feb 1930, p. 2; Cole, 'The Tasks before Us', pp. 25-6.

<sup>121</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1930. The proposal to substitute an Annual Conference for the Central Council was first discussed within the movement by the Committee of Financial and General Purposes in Nov 1928. WEA FGPC Minutes, 15 Nov 1928, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/8, p. 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Report on the Purpose and Organisation of the Association*, 1934, WEA Archive, Central/4/1/2/2, p. 1.

reading of equality of opportunity.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, it is striking that, in a pamphlet, titled 'The Practical Effects of Education Economy' of 1932, the WEA protested against the *May Report* from a purely utilitarian perspective. For example, the cancellation of the special building grant was dismissed as a 'lack of efficiency', and the proposed means test for the parents of free placers in secondary school described as 'a severe blow ... [on] the future efficiency of the nation', and the reduction of teaching staff termed as 'a waste' of abilities.<sup>124</sup>

Even Tawney's arguments during this period were characterised by considerations of economic efficiency. In a satirical article, titled 'The New Children's Charter', first appearing in *The New Statesman & Nation* and later published as a WEA pamphlet, Tawney cited economists' verdicts to make a case that educational cuts would be detrimental to the national economy.<sup>125</sup> Likewise, in a 1934 lecture, he demanded equality of opportunity by arguing that

capricious educational inequalities, which make it difficult for the nation to develop to the full the powers of all its children, or prevent ability moving to the tasks for which it is best fitted, are not merely, as they always were, offensive to good manners and good sense; they are an economic burden which we cannot afford to carry.<sup>126</sup>

Here, the ideas of selection by merit and national efficiency were juxtaposed with the Idealist vision as the justifications of educational equality.

It may not be surprising that, confronted with the unprecedented economic crisis in Europe and the dazzling performance of Russia's planned economy, the Idealist WEA could but adjust to the *zeitgeist*.<sup>127</sup> In another article of 1934, Tawney's advice to Labour disclosed the mentality behind his softened Idealist stance and his ostensible turn to Fabianism:

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<sup>123</sup> For an analysis of the general shift to emphasising the compatibility, or even reciprocity, between equality and economic efficiency among left-wing thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s, see Jackson, *Equality and the British Left*, ch. 5, esp. 120-31.

<sup>124</sup> 'The Practical Effects of Education Economy', pp. 7, 11, 14.

<sup>125</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'The New Children's Charter', WEA Pamphlet, 1932, pp. 7-8.

<sup>126</sup> Tawney, 'Lecture to the New Education Fellowship', fol. 29. My Italics.

<sup>127</sup> For Russia's success in state planning and Labour's turn to state socialism in the 1930s, see Richard Toye, *The Labour Party and the Planned Economy, 1931-1951* (Suffolk, 2003), pp. 34-64.

[The] variety of educational experience and economic condition [within the Labour Party] ... means that the bond of common experience is weaker than in parties whose members have been taught at school and college to hang together. Hence it makes the cohesion which springs from common intellectual convictions all the more indispensable.<sup>128</sup>

For Tawney, the common principle of the left wing was to achieve a society, 'in which varieties of individual endowment, not contrasts of property, income and access to education are the basis of differentiation', with people who justified this goal in either economic or ethical terms.<sup>129</sup> To reach a consensus among the Left, Tawney downplayed his Idealist convictions.<sup>130</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, this strategy would guide the WEA educational campaign after 1935.

## Conclusion.

This chapter argues that, as a major force behind the interwar campaign for education reform, the WEA's campaign for universal secondary education of varying types was clearly justified by Idealist philosophy, and was presented in the context of collectivist values such as solidarity/class consciousness and apprenticeship. That is to say, WEA Idealists had good reasons to turn their back on the comprehensive/common school model. At the same time, their positive attitude towards technical education also exempted them from the 'non-vocation bias' of the English curriculum.

Nevertheless, as the latter two sections have shown, the supporters of education reform rallying behind the labour movement were in many ways at odds with each other. More importantly, there were significant differences between their interpretations of 'equality of opportunity'. As these discrepancies became more and more palpable after the 1931

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<sup>128</sup> Tawney, 'The Choice before the Labour Party', p. 61.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

<sup>130</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 194-6. For efforts to reach a consensus among the progressives and the left in the 1930s, see e.g. Arthur Marwick, 'Middle Opinion in the Thirties: Planning, Progress and Political "Agreement"', *English Historical Review*, 79:31 (1964), pp. 285-98.

crisis, the WEA, in order to reach ordinary workers and to unite left-wing forces, was inclined towards softening its Idealist tone. By the mid-1930s, there were signs that the WEA's 'conviction'—a keyword in Tawney's vocabulary—of the interdependence of self-realisation and the common good, and that of equality and diversity, was to be compromised.

## Chapter Seven

# The Multilateral School, the Common School, and the Eclipse of the Idealist Spirit in WEA Educational Reform Programme, 1935-44.

Year after year my [adult] students fall over themselves in their eagerness to score the same point against Plato's *Republic*. The point is that government in the Ideal State is carried on by a single superior class ... that there is, therefore, no equality of opportunity, and that democracy is denied. The charge is, of course, untrue ... Plato's governing class was ... in theory open to all, the only qualifications for governing being moral virtue and intellectual eminence, expressing themselves in the willingness and the ability to govern in the interests of the community.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction.

The ten years from 1935 to 1945 marked one of the most significant periods in the history of English education. After years of 'educational economy' in the 1920s and early 1930s, the issue of education reform was once again put on the public agenda. Thanks to the improved economic prospects, from 1934, a new wave of educational campaigning was launched by the WEA and other interest groups.<sup>2</sup>

The achievements during this period were groundbreaking. The modest 1936 Education Act at last initiated the process to raise the school leaving age to 15, whilst the *Spens Report*, published by the Board in 1938, reaffirmed the principle of educational differentiation by outlining three types of secondary schools—as we have seen, all of these measures and norms had been advocated by the WEA for more than a decade. Though the outbreak of

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<sup>1</sup> C. E. M. Joad, 'After the War', *Highway*, 34, Apr 1942, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 196-8.

the war disrupted the scheduled reform, wartime ferment further stimulated the demand for educational equality, just as it had done during the First World War. Concerns over the social exclusiveness of the public schools gave birth to a Departmental Committee on the Public Schools, while a new Education Bill, which envisioned a 'statutory system of public education', from nursery, primary, and secondary education to 'further education', became law in 1944.<sup>3</sup>

In essence, the ten years between 1935 and 1944 were a period during which the concept of equality of opportunity was brought into effect. The central theme of this chapter is therefore how the WEA translated the concept into practical programmes, and how the three different views of equality of opportunity (see above 6-3) affected the WEA's policy making. I will argue that, as the WEA became supportive of both the *Multilateral School* scheme—to have all students, whether pursuing an academic, practical or technical type of course, in the same school and the *Common School* system—to merge private schools into the state system at least at the primary stage—the Idealist understanding of equality of opportunity was replaced by its Fabian counterpart as the dominant ideology behind the WEA's campaign.

The chapter is divided into three parts: The first shows how the WEA's policymaking process was changed as the WEA and other educational campaigning groups united to press for educational reform in the late 1930s. The second section explores why, from 1940, many WEA members had been in favour of the Common School system and the abolition of public schools, which had been regarded by many Idealists as the archetype of liberal education. The final section is an examination of the WEA's programme of educational reconstruction. In this programme, I will argue, the Idealist spirit was largely replaced by the individualist/Fabian view of equality of opportunity. Thus, by 1945, the WEA's campaign for educational reform could no longer be called Idealist.

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<sup>3</sup> Lawson, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies*, p. 39. In the terms of the 1944 Education Act, 'further education' included university education and adult education. *Education Act*, 1944, Section VII.

## 7-1 The WEA and the Convergence of Educational Campaigns: from Tripartism to Multilateralism, 1935-39.

Around 1935, the educational reform movement in England entered into a new phase. The beginnings of economic recovery weakened the arguments for educational austerity and drew more and more activists and groups into initiatives aiming to end the period of stagnation in education reform. While, in the 1910s and 1920s, the WEA could comfortably boast its leading role in education campaigns at the national level, by 1935, the association represented just one major stream of the current of education reform.<sup>4</sup> For this vast army of educational groups, the immediate mission was to generate concerted action so as to force the state to implement education reform. That is to say, although each group had its own vision of public education, there was an implicit consensus that they should cooperate in pressing on three main issues, namely, secondary education for all, the raising of the school leaving age to 15, and the improvement of pupils' well-being in schools.<sup>5</sup>

From the mid-1930s, a series of attempts was made to align education reform groups. One of the most successful cases was the formation of the School Age Council (SAC) in the summer of 1934. Particularly active in 1935 and 1936, the SAC rallied various social groups and institutions behind its cause of raising the school age to 15. The backbone of the movement were the left-wing groups which had engaged in education campaigns throughout the 1920s, that is, the TUC, the WEA, and the National Union of Teachers (NUT).<sup>6</sup> The WEA in particular was instrumental in forming the SAC and J. J. Mallon (1874-1961), warden of Toynbee Hall and long-serving WEA Treasurer (1918-49), was the secretary to the council.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the SAC secured representatives from many local educational authorities, from both the Church of England and the Free Churches, and from industrialists as well as youth organisations. The alignment strategy partly paid off, as the National Government, which, by then, was dominated by the Conservative Party, promised

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<sup>4</sup> C.f. Corfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education*, pp. 171-2.

<sup>5</sup> Issues regarding pupils' well-being included the construction of modern buildings, free meals and medical care, and the reduction of the size of each class, etc. Tawney, 'A Review of Our Policy', pp. 108-9.

<sup>6</sup> Asher Tropp, *The School Teachers: The Growth of the Teaching Profession in England and Wales from 1800 to the Present Day* (London, 1957), pp. 215-7.

<sup>7</sup> Moreover, after the raising of school leaving age was made law in 1936, Mallon handed over to the function of the Council to the WEA. H. C. Shearman to Tawney, 20 Aug 1940, Tawney Papers, Institute of Education, London, TY/2/6, p. 1.

to raise the school age to 15 in its election manifesto of 1935 and passed the 1936 Education Act.<sup>8</sup>

Similar joint initiatives followed the example of the SAC. The widespread dissatisfaction among educationalists with the modest 1936 Act gave rise to a national conference, organised by the Association of Education Committees and joined by the WEA, the TUC, the NUT, and the SAC.<sup>9</sup> In 1937, the Council of the Ten-Year Plan for Children, in co-operation with the WEA and the Nursery School Association, organised a national exhibition to 'urge the need for the provision of modern school buildings consistent with the present standards of health and efficiency'.<sup>10</sup> About the same time, the WEA and the NUT launched the 'Education Advance Campaign' and pressed for pupils' well-being in schools and equal opportunity in secondary education.<sup>11</sup> One of its actions was to send a deputation to the Board, in conjunction with the Ten-Year Plan Council and the New Education Fellowship, an international organisation founded by 'progressive' educationalists in 1921, to warn the president of the inappropriate size of the classes in schools.<sup>12</sup>

The convergence of educational campaigns had significant implications for the WEA's educational policy. From 1935, the contribution made by Idealism in the WEA campaign was increasingly diluted. As we shall see, 'progressive' and Fabian thinking were incorporated into the WEA's educational discourse. Likewise, more and more educationalists who did not share an Idealist vision of education, were invited to join the WEA's policy-making circle.

The first signal indicating the altered character of the WEA's policy was its 1935 memorandum to the BOECC (i.e. the Spens Committee, see below) on 'the organisation

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<sup>8</sup> Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 199-202.

<sup>9</sup> The 'modesty' of the 1936 Education Act lay in its exempting pupils from compulsory attendance before 15, if they secured 'beneficial employment', and its not including provision of maintenance allowances without which it was literally impossible for poor children to remain at school. See Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 218-20; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 214-5. See also H. C. Shearman, 'Exempting children from school', WEA Pamphlet, 1936; R. H. Tawney, 'The School Age and Exemptions', WEA Pamphlet, 1936.

<sup>10</sup> 'Schools of Today and Tomorrow', WEA Pamphlet, 1937, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> The main lines of the programme of the EAC included: 'more nursery schools and classes, a reduction of all classes to a maximum of thirty, the extension of health services and of free meals, equal opportunity in Secondary Education, the effective raising of the school age and completion of reorganisation'. *WEA Annual Report*, 1938, pp. 30-1.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of WEA CEC, July 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> 1938, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/17. For the origins of the New Education Fellowship, see Stewart, *Progressives and Radicals in English Education*, pp. 194-201, 211-2.

and interrelation of schools, other than those administered under the Elementary Code'. In the memorandum, the WEA continued its endorsement of compulsory secondary education of varying types regulated under a single code. However, as I will argue, the Idealist justification of this policy was markedly replaced by the discourse of industrial efficiency and the one-sided emphasis on powers and rights.

A comparison between the draft memorandum and the submitted version of the document shows this subtle shift and the fact that the WEA policymakers intentionally played down Idealist positions.<sup>13</sup> In the draft memorandum, written by Alec Firth, then General Secretary, the Idealist principle was expressly stated:

the different types and courses of education for children of 11 to 16 within a single system of secondary provision ... shall have as its principal aim the fitting of pupils to take their place as responsible members of modern society ... our educational system should aim at equipping the individual to acquire a wider conception of citizenship and a deeper realisation of *individual responsibility to the community* ...<sup>14</sup>

This Idealist conception, argued Firth, was the single basis of the WEA's proposal for school reform.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, the above paragraph was removed from the submitted version of the memorandum, which was finalised by a special committee (the membership of which was not recorded).<sup>16</sup> The revised document elaborated on the diverse aims of secondary education. The cultivation of active citizenship was not regarded as the sole aim, or even the most important aim, of secondary education. Taking a more 'practical' view, the memorandum argued that 'education should be designed to stand [students] in good stead

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<sup>13</sup> According to *WEA Annual Report* of 1935, a special committee was appointed to draft the memorandum; however, the official minutes did not record this committee and its members.

<sup>14</sup> A. S. Firth, 'First Draft of Memorandum of Evidence for submission to the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education', Jun 1934, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/4, p. 2. My italics.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> What we can know from the remaining records is that the draft memorandum was written by Firth in June 1934, and the definitive memorandum was submitted to the Board in January 1935. It is worth noting that Firth resigned from the secretaryship in December 1934. Though Stocks explains that this move was due to Firth's deteriorating health, the official minutes were ambiguous about his resignation. One may suspect that Firth's dissatisfaction with the non-Idealist shift of WEA policy was a reason for his resignation. Stocks, *The WEA*, p. 114; Minutes of WEA CEC, 12 Jan 1935, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/12, p. 4.

in the many-sided activities of life, in employment, in leisure, and in social organisation'.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, on citizenship education, the memorandum adopted a non-moralistic language: the focus was on the *intellectual* aspect of citizenship. Therefore, the memorandum urged to teach history, economics and the method of social survey in schools, and stressed the need to give students a sense of how social organisations worked. Indeed, these practical suggestions regarding 'civics' learning had appeared in the WEA's previous reform proposals. However, the way in which the WEA pointed up the importance of these reforms was significantly changed. The 1935 memorandum emphasised that the aim was to cultivate '[a]n understanding of the functions of citizenship in the modern world', whereas the moral or emotional aspect of citizenship was side-lined.<sup>18</sup> Here, we can see the influence of the progressive educational thought on the WEA—this method of 'modern education', as Temple put it (see above 6-3), with an emphasis on intellectual development replaced that of 'traditional education', with an emphasis on the emotional or 'sub-conscious' dimension of education.

The WEA also recast its position on vocational education in the memorandum. As before, it insisted that specialised vocational training be avoided at the secondary level: but the argument that a general/liberal education was crucial for every pupil's self-realisation was no longer made. Instead, the WEA had bought into the utilitarian discourse. As the memorandum contended, a non-specialised curriculum for technical schools was necessary because of 'the increasing number of industrial operations which call for manual dexterity rather than technical knowledge and skill'.<sup>19</sup> The lack of 'adaptability' of students was alleged to 'check industrial development'.<sup>20</sup> Liberal education at secondary school was thus justified by its contribution to economic efficiency. In sum, the 1935 memorandum was a mixture of Idealist philosophy, progressive educational theory and utilitarian thinking. It was a programme that, on the outside, was veneered with Idealist purposes such as citizenship cultivation and liberal education for all, but, on the inside, was imbued with the other two strands of educational thought.

This trend towards convergence was reinforced by the organisational reform within the

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<sup>17</sup> 'WEA Memorandum to the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education', WEA memorandum, 1935, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/6, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

WEA. Being aware of the public's mounting interest in education issues, the central WEA created an Education Office and an Education Advisory Committee (henceforward, the WEAEAC), respectively in 1935 and 1936, so as to develop and advocate its education policy in a more efficient and effective way.<sup>21</sup> These new bureaus injected fresh blood into its policy process. Harold Shearman (1896-1984) was appointed Education Officer, a position which was responsible for drafting WEA publications. As an Oxford graduate who had been part of the movement for about six years, first as class tutor and later as chairman of WEA Eastern District, Shearman was familiar with Idealist philosophy but was also influenced by progressive educational thought.<sup>22</sup> Later in his life, Shearman would be elected as the chair to the London County Council Education Committee (1955-61) and went on to play a pivotal role in establishing the comprehensive school system in London.

The founding of the WEAEAC had a more profound implication for WEA educational campaign. Before the creation of the advisory committee, the WEA educational policies were normally drafted by the Financial and General Purposes Committee (FGPC), a committee including about ten people who were WEA national officers,<sup>23</sup> and was thus dominated by veteran members, such as Tawney, Cole, and Lindsay; the drafts were then scrutinised but more often than not rubberstamped by the CEC, where the same officers constituted a significant proportion of the membership. After 1936, however, WEA policy statements and memoranda, as far as public education was concerned, were discussed and drafted by the WEAEAC.

The two-fold mission of the WEAEAC was, on the one hand, to strengthen the ties between the national body, districts, and affiliated bodies, and, on the other, to formulate more sophisticated programmes of education reform and to more promptly respond to on-going controversies and governmental enquiries.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, unlike the FGPC, the advisory committee was not monopolised by the national officials. The above-mentioned national figures were all excluded from the WEAEAC.<sup>25</sup> Instead, it accommodated representatives from local districts and had power to co-opt educational experts outside

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<sup>21</sup> Minutes of WEA CEC, 22 June 1935, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/1/12; *WEA Annual Report*, 1936, pp. 25-6.

<sup>22</sup> W. E. Williams, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 28, Nov 1935, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> I.e. the General and Assistant Secretaries, President, and Vice-presidents.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the WEAEAC sometimes bypassed the Central Executive Committee and submitted policy statements or recommendations to the Board of Education. E.g. 'Education After the War—Memorandum Submitted to the Board of Education', WEA memorandum, Nov 1941, WEA/3/3/6, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Occasionally Tawney participated in WEAEAC meetings during the war, but he was never a formal member.

the movement. Accordingly, many of the delegates were less influenced by the Oxford Idealist tradition and their commitments were not merely to the WEA cause but also to other educational movements.<sup>26</sup>

Among the nine founding members of the WEAEAC were Clara Rackham (1875-1966; WEAEAC member, 1936-48) and Lionel Elvin (1905-2005; WEAEAC member, 1936-38), both from WEA Eastern District and relatively new to the national policy-making machine.<sup>27</sup> Rackham was a prominent suffragist, who completed her undergraduate study at Newnham College, Cambridge, and was active in local Labour politics in Cambridge, dealing among others with education reform. She was reported to have been involved with a WEA class as early as 1912, but it appears that she did not very much engage in WEA activities until 1934 when she was elected to be a co-opted member to the CEC.<sup>28</sup> Lionel Elvin was son of H. H. Elvin, a leading trade unionist who had for years been the representative of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (1925-35) and of the National Union of Clerks (1936-38) to the WEA CEC. Elvin junior, who received his degree from Cambridge, made a career as a professional educationalist. He would be appointed to important posts such as principal of Ruskin College and director of the Institute of Education, London, coupled with commitments to governmental committees and international educational organisations.<sup>29</sup> Probably influenced by the rise of logical positivism in Cambridge, both Rackham and Elvin identified themselves with 'scientific humanism', which endeavoured to use the sciences and non-religious methods to allow people 'to live as reasoning and reasonable citizens'.<sup>30</sup> They were disenchanted with the Idealist approach, which as Elvin put it with scepticism, inclined to contemplate 'the great questions' and to believe that 'reality lay in general ideas' rather than 'the experience of particular phenomena'.<sup>31</sup>

Another founding member of the WEAEAC advocating this 'scientific humanism' was Barbara Wootton (serving on the committee in 1936-38). As we have seen in above Chapter

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<sup>26</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1936, pp. 25-6.

<sup>27</sup> Rackham served on the WEA CEC from 1934, and Lionel Elvin from 1935.

<sup>28</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1934, p. 8. Joyce Bellamy and Eileen Price, 'Rackham, Clara Dorothea (1875-1966)' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. 9 (London, 1993), p. 234.

<sup>29</sup> Elvin was also a prominent member on the Robbins Committee on higher education, director of the UNESCO Department of Education, and sometime president of the English New Education Fellowship and of the Council for Education in World Citizenship. Richard Aldrich, 'Elvin, (Herbert) Lionel (1905-2005)', *ODNB*, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Lionel Elvin, *Encounters with Education* (London, 1987), pp. 124-6; Bellamy and Price, 'Rackham, Clara Dorothea (1875-1966)', p. 236.

<sup>31</sup> Lionel Elvin, 'The Good Life in the Twentieth Century', *Highway*, 33, Dec 1940, 48-9.

Four, Wootton had been involved in WEA national affairs since the mid-1920s but was unsympathetic to the Idealist approach to education. As she explained in an article in *The Highway*,

By scientific humanism I mean, first, that we must go behind all the myths and the symbols, the jargon about patriotism and national honour, and make ourselves approach political questions in a scientific spirit. We have got to set about finding out just what kind of life it is that the plain ordinary man and woman wants and needs to live, and just how this life may be planned, with the patient and accurate observation of the scientific investigator.<sup>32</sup>

This tendency to reject metaphysics and *a priori* moral obligations, and to investigate social problems in a positivist and professional manner revealed the mindset of the new generation of WEA policymakers, one that was very different from that of their predecessors.

Other notable recruits to the WEAEC included Elsie V. Parker (1897-1950; WEAEC member, 1939-47) and Shena Simon (WEAEC member, 1940-49[?]).<sup>33</sup> Parker was a former elementary school teacher, who was elected president of the NUT in 1938. Her thought embodied a combination of Idealist thinking and progressive theories. While stressing schools' role in eliminating 'self-seeking' and 'competitiveness' and in promoting 'true co-operation and mutual help', she was also an early advocate of the Multilateral School and of child-centred pedagogy.<sup>34</sup>

Simon, like Rackham, was a product of Newnham College and was active in local politics (in Manchester). Long before joining the central WEA, Simon had been an established educationalist, serving on the Manchester Education Committee (1924-70) and on the BOECC (1931-40), where she was involved in the drafting of the *Spens Report*.<sup>35</sup> Although

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Wootton, 'Can Democracy Survive?', *Highway*, 31, Mar 1939, pp. 132-3. See also Wootton, *In a World I Never Made*, pp. 162-90.

<sup>33</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1939, p. 8; *WEA Annual Report*, 1940, p.8. Simon was appointed Chairperson to the WEAEC in 1947 after Tawney turned down the offer. Minutes of WEAEC, May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1947, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/2/3, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> For Parker's life and educational thought, see her daughter's autobiography: Barbara Tizard, *Home Is Where One Starts From: One Woman's Memoir* (Edinburgh, 2010), pp. 96-8.

<sup>35</sup> Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, p. 11; Brendon Jones, 'Simon, Shena Dorothy, Lady Simon of Wythenshawe (1883-1972)', *ODNB*, 2004.

working closely with Tawney for the cause of education reform in the 1930s,<sup>36</sup> Simon had less sympathy for the Idealist tradition. She shifted her party allegiance from Liberal to Labour in protest against the National Government's educational policy,<sup>37</sup> but, as we shall see, the way she understood equality of opportunity was individualistic rather than Idealist or collectivist. Altogether, these newcomers to the central WEA contributed to intense debates on education reform within the association and partly accounted for the eclipse of the Idealist character of WEA educational policy from the late 1930s.

There were two major events concerning the WEAEAC before 1939. The first was the revision of the association's 'Statement of Policy', and the second was the publication of the *Spens Report* in late 1938.<sup>38</sup> In 1937, the WEAEAC was instructed by WEA Annual Conference to re-draft the policy statement, a document which had not been altered since 1928.<sup>39</sup> The new statement reflected the WEA's growing concern over education reform. Sections on adult education remained almost the same, whereas those on public education were greatly expanded.

At first glance, the WEAEAC's revision did not change the Idealist vision of the WEA programme. The twin principles of Idealism were reiterated by an opening statement—'[t]he WEA ... looks on education not only as a means of developing individual character and capacity, but as an equipment for the exercise of social rights and responsibilities'.<sup>40</sup> And the statement repeated calls for free and compulsory secondary education of varying types adapted to the varying capacities of different children, a policy which, as I explained in the previous chapter, was justified by Idealist philosophy.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, when we look into the details of the statement's proposals for education reform, it transpires that Idealist elements in the vision were blurred. Apart from adding extended demands regarding pupils' physical and mental well-being, which had become commonplace among different strands of educational campaigners, the revised statement,

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<sup>36</sup> Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 12, 188.

<sup>37</sup> Simon, 'The Shaping of the Spens Report on Secondary Education 1933-38', pp. 64-5.

<sup>38</sup> Another important document produced by the WEAEAC before 1939 was the report on 'Standards of Work in Classes', which has been considered in above Chapter Five.

<sup>39</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Preface' to 'Education for Freedom—A Statement of Policy with an Introduction by R. H. Tawney', WEA Pamphlet, 1938, p. 1; Minutes of the Seventh Annual Conference, 6-7<sup>th</sup> Nov 1937, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/3/1, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> 'Education for Freedom—A Statement of Policy', p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. See also 'The Blackpool Conference – A Summary of the Proceedings', *Highway*, 31, Jan 1939, p.91.

echoing the 1935 memorandum, suggested that the cultivation of a sense of responsibility to the community was not the major aim of school education. According to the statement, while schools should encourage ‘the exercise of the rights and duties of citizenship’, they must be concerned about students’ ‘use and enjoyment of leisure’ and their future employment. It was for the purpose of enabling pupils to face subsequent ‘changing [working] conditions of life’ that ‘narrow vocational aims’ should be avoided in school teaching.<sup>42</sup> Regarding the need of general education for all, this ‘adaptability’ argument contrasted starkly with the WEA’s previous emphasis on the all-round development or self-realisation of pupils.

A month after the 1938 WEA Annual Conference adopted the revised statement,<sup>43</sup> the BOECC published the *Spens Report* on ‘Secondary Education with Special Reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools’.<sup>44</sup> It endorsed the triple demands that had been put forward by the WEA and its allies, namely: that the school leaving age be raised immediately to 15 without exemptions, and that all post-primary schools be regulated by a single ‘Secondary’ code, and be subject to similar conditions as to buildings, staffing and size of classes.<sup>45</sup> The vision of the report amounted to a free and universal secondary education of varying types with equality of status, a plan which had been developed and advocated by Tawney and the WEA since the 1920s and was based on an Idealist understanding of equality of opportunity.<sup>46</sup>

Compared with preceding reports on secondary education, namely, the *Secondary Education for All*, and the *Hadow Report*, a major venture of the *Spens Report* was its invention of the ‘Technical High Schools’. On the basis of psychological research, the report rejected ‘a curriculum common to all pupils’,<sup>47</sup> and recommended educational

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Education for Freedom—A Statement of Policy’, p. 11

<sup>43</sup> Minutes of the Eighth Annual Conference, Nov 12-13<sup>th</sup> 1938, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/3/1, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> The report was the result of five years’ work by the BOECC, where Mansbridge was a member. Tawney left the Committee in 1932 and therefore did not take part in the drafting of the report. For members of the Consultative Committee from 1933, see Joan Simon, ‘The Shaping of the Spens Report on Secondary Education: Part I’, pp. 64-6.

<sup>45</sup> *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education (the Spens Report)*, Board of Education, 1938, pp. 375-80.

<sup>46</sup> Tawney, ‘Preface’ to ‘Education for Freedom—A Statement of Policy’, pp. 3, 5-6.

<sup>47</sup> Here, the report referred to the ‘discarded “faculty” psychology, according to which every normal individual was supposed to possess certain faculties of mind which could be exercised and disciplined by appropriate studies’. *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education*, p. 70. For psychological theories and the *Spens Report*, see Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind*, ch. 9; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 230-1.

differentiation at age 11 (though different types of schools should follow the same curriculum up to age 13): while the existing grammar schools were for pupils with academic potential and the ‘modern schools’ (or ‘senior schools’<sup>48</sup>) for those without particular bents, the technical high schools were designed for pupils who showed an inclination to practical knowledge and skills—this was the renowned tripartite system.<sup>49</sup>

Publicly, the WEA welcomed the proposed tripartite system with only minor criticisms of the practicality of the plan.<sup>50</sup> Yet the minutes of the WEAEC show that several members of the committee in effect questioned the proposal and, more generally, raised doubts regarding the whole idea of educational differentiation. Rackham implied that the idea of the division of secondary education was backward. Being sceptical about technical education, she lamented the fact that a majority of the children were left outside the grammar school.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, within the WEAEC there was a growing interest in the device of ‘the Multilateral School’—an experimental type of school to mix children with different bents, whether pursuing an academic, practical or technical type of course.<sup>52</sup> By the time the *Spens Report* was published, many of the WEA’s allies in the cause of education reform, including the TUC, the Co-operative Union and the Labour Party, had signalled support for the experimental idea, as they began to argue that the universal provision of Multilateral Schools was the only way to prevent inequality of status between different types of schools and thus to avoid ‘pre-determin[ing] the social and industrial status of children before they leave school’.<sup>53</sup> In many ways, the Multilateral proposal, put forward by Labour, did not fit into an Idealist vision of education.<sup>54</sup> The provisions of different types of education by the same school were less likely to guarantee that the curriculum was adapted to each type of

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<sup>48</sup> As the *Spens Report* explained, ‘[w]e gave the name of “Modern Schools” to what are called “Senior Schools”. This term is at present used by the Board of Education to designate both “non-selective Central Schools” and also “selective Central Schools”’. *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education*, p. xviii.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8, 314-5.

<sup>50</sup> ‘The Future of Secondary Education: A Review of the Spens Report’, WEA Pamphlet, 1939, pp. 10-2.

<sup>51</sup> Minutes of the WEAEC’s Discussion on the *Spens Report*, [n.d.; 1939], WEA Archive, Central/3/3/5, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Rubinstein and Simon, *The Evolution of the Comprehensive School*, pp. 15-6; Simon, *Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 141-5.

<sup>53</sup> ‘TUC Statement on the Spens Report’ (London, 1939), p. 11. See also Barker, *Education and Politics*, pp. 69-74; Griggs, *TUC and Education Reform*, p. 27; Lawton, *Education and Labour Party Ideologies*, p. 34. There was also an element of political calculation for Labour to press on the Multilateral idea.

<sup>54</sup> For the political calculation behind Labour’s Multilateral proposal, see Barker, *Education and Politics*, p. 74.

capacity. Besides, the Multilateral School would be too big and too diverse to generate a common ethos in school.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, before the mid-1930s, even though WEA policymakers accepted that the Multilateral School could be an experimental type of secondary school, they were lukewarm about the idea to convert all types of schools into the Multilateral.<sup>56</sup>

However, by 1938, probably influenced by the Labour Party and other educational groups, several members of the WEAWAC had been prepared to endorse the general implementation of the Multilateral School. In particular, Shearman was convinced that 'Multilateralism' was preferable to 'Tripartism' in secondary education.<sup>57</sup> As the Education Officer told the WEAEC, he inclined to regard technical education at the secondary stage as unnecessary, and sympathised with the view that the goal of the Multilateral project was 'to have the Senior [i.e. Modern] School raised to the standard of the Grammar School and the two schools become more and more assimilated in their curricula'.<sup>58</sup> In other words, the division in secondary education should be reduced.

For strategic reasons,<sup>59</sup> the changed attitudes toward educational differentiation within the WEAEC were not revealed in the official pamphlet on the *Spens Report* prepared by Shearman.<sup>60</sup> But, as the WEAEC's inner records have shown, Idealist philosophy and the ensuing educational programme—universal secondary education of varying types—had failed to command loyalty from WEA policymakers. The same trend can be detected when educational activists switched their attention to another aspect that had not been discussed in the *Spens Report*, namely, the reform of private schools.

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<sup>55</sup> Minutes of the WEAEC's Discussion on the *Spens Report*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> 'Reorganisation and the School Leaving Age, WEA Pamphlet, 1930. This position was, in fact, adopted by the *Spens Report*. *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education*, pp. xxi, 292-3, 376.

<sup>57</sup> Minutes of the WEAEC's Discussion on the *Spens Report*, pp. 3, 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> The priority of the WEA was to urge the carrying into effect of compulsory education to age 16 and a single code of secondary education. As Kenneth Lindsay, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, soon denounced the proposal to have all post-primary schools under a single code, there was no reason for the WEA to create a second front. *Hansard*, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> 1939, col. 372.

<sup>60</sup> 'The Future of Secondary Education: A Review of the Spens Report', pp. 15-6.

## 7-2 The Common School Ideal and the Question of the Public School, 1940-43.

The 'public school' was doubtless a key point of reference when the Idealists contemplated school reform.<sup>61</sup> As we have seen, Temple acclaimed the public school as the embodiment of liberal education and as striking an ideal balance between individuality and corporate life, superior to the specialised and intellect-oriented mode of education in Germany. Prior to this, when Green proposed to make 'the education of gentlemen' so common as to lose its meaning, what he had in mind was obviously education in public schools and old universities. The ideal product of the public school—someone who received all-round cultivation and was prepared to perfect himself by serving his community—was exactly the citizen that Idealists endeavoured to create. Therefore, when public-school education was severely criticised by WEA policymakers after the late 1930s, it was a distinct sign that Idealist theory of education no longer held water in the movement.

Given that the access to public schools, especially boarding schools, was mostly restricted to children from wealthy backgrounds, it is not surprising that there had always been animosity towards private schooling among rank-and-file workers. As early as 1932, the abolition of private schooling had been debated at WEA Annual Conference. A resolution was put forward to demand that 'all children should be educated in publicly controlled schools up to the Compulsory School-leaving Age'. But at a time when the secondary school system was patchy, the proposal looked too radical to gain much support.<sup>62</sup>

However, the situation changed after 1939. Firstly, the construction of a national system of secondary education by state power had been accepted across the political spectrum

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<sup>61</sup> The definition of the 'public school' is ambiguous and controversial. The most accepted definition, which was also adopted by the WEA, is that a public school is one whose headmaster is a member of the Headmasters' Conference. 'Plan for Education—A Programme of Educational Reconstruction', WEA Pamphlet, 1942, pp. 27-8. According to a WEA survey, by this definition, there were 172 public schools in England by 1940. Among them, 84 schools were entirely independent, 57 in receipt of direct grant from the Board of Education, and 31 receiving grants from local educational authorities. 'The WEAEC's memo on the Common School and a Unified Educational System', Jan 1941, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/1, pp. 6-7. For the development of the public schools in the first half of the twentieth century, see McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 236-49; Ernest Green, *Education for a New Society* (London, 1942), pp. 44-6.

<sup>62</sup> 'Minutes of the Second Annual Conference held at Rowntree's Hall, York', Mar 19-20<sup>th</sup> 1932, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/3/1, p. 3; 'The Conference Proceedings', *Highway*, 24, Apr 1932, pp. 26-7.

and by all parties following the publication of the *Spens Report*. Secondly, the private sector in secondary education, especially some of the public schools, was undergoing financial crisis and requested governmental support.<sup>63</sup> It was natural for the WEA and, indeed, the public, to turn their attention to private schools, a field that remained unaddressed by the above report.<sup>64</sup> Above all, when Britain went to war again in 1939 and the principle of social equality was publicly asserted, the time seemed ripe for the WEA to develop a programme to reform public schools, the existence of which was seen as a potent symbol of the English class system.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, the direct implication of the war, with regard to education, was the urgent need of evacuation of pupils from urban areas and the delay of the extension of the school age to 15.<sup>66</sup> Yet both issues were rather undisputed and involved merely practical, rather than principled, questions.<sup>67</sup> When the WEA once again agitated and joined in the public discussion of post-war 'Educational Reconstruction' after mid-1940,<sup>68</sup> the most contentious subject to debate was the reform of public schools.<sup>69</sup> As we shall see, the question of the public school and the Common School significantly divided the WEAEAC. The anticipation of a much more equal society after the war radicalised a group of members who began to call for abolishing public schools, whereas other liberal and progressive members, though dissatisfied with public-school education, castigated the measure as an intrusion into individual freedom and were disturbed by the idea of using uniform education to eliminate economic inequality.

In July 1940, the WEAEAC formally discussed the ideal of the 'Common School'—which

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<sup>63</sup> Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform*, pp. 271-5.

<sup>64</sup> For public discussions on public school reform, see Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London, 1991), pp. 38-45.

<sup>65</sup> Tawney, 'Preface' to 'Education for Freedom: A Statement of policy', p. 6; 'The Future of Secondary Education: A Review of the Spens Report', p. 15; J. H. Matthews, 'Memo on Educational Reconstruction', Jul 1940, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/6, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> The 1936 Education Act had promised to implement on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, two days before Britain declared war on Germany.

<sup>67</sup> For the WEA's proposals on evacuation and the raising of the school age during the wartime, see 'WEA Draft Statement of Education Policy', WEA memorandum, 1939, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/5; Shena Simon, 'The Children in War-Time: How to Rebuild the Educational System', WEA Pamphlet, 1939; 'Public Education and the War', WEA Pamphlet, 1940.

<sup>68</sup> H. C. Dent, *Education in Transition: A Sociological Study of the Impact of War on English Education, 1939-1943* (London, 1944), ch. 4, esp. 199-201. Several books on educational reconstruction were published in 1940-41 and attracted considerable public attention, including Geoffrey Vickers's *Educating for a Free Society* (1940), Fred Clark's *Education and Social Change* (1940), F. H. Spencer's *Education for the People* (1941), and Richard Livingstone's *The Future in Education* (1941).

<sup>69</sup> Simon, *Education and the Social Order*, p. 46.

required all parents to send their children to a unified system of education administered by the state. The leading advocates of the ideal were Shena Simon and J. H. Matthews, the long-serving secretary to WEA Southern District and another founding member of the WEAEC.<sup>70</sup> Matthews's memorandum drafted prior to the meeting made explicit the ambition behind this radical proposal. In pursuing a more egalitarian society, he contended that the WEA should not merely aim at compulsory education for all members of society, but should also use education to 'make [society] an efficient social and economic organisation'.<sup>71</sup> The new goal of education reform, argued Matthews, should be to reduce the 'social and economic privilege', which was 'still strongly entrenched in our educational system'. This major obstacle to an equal and efficient society would only be removed by 'a much more unified and equalitarian ... [and] fully open system of education at all stages ... [including] the public schools'. Matthews urged that, instead of referring to 'old values', the WEA must give full expression to 'a new spirit of social democracy'.<sup>72</sup> Although he did not elaborate what he meant by the latter concept, it was arguably based on the assumption that socio-economic equality, rather than the equal respect for everyone's intrinsic worth and potential, was the foundation of democracy.

This radical proposal was, however, cold-shouldered by the progressive side of the committee, represented by Shearman. The latter, firstly, dismissed Matthews' proposal as a method of achieving educational equality 'by levelling down: by destroying the private school system and bringing all children into the "common school", with its large classes and other grave defects'.<sup>73</sup> For Shearman, while the public-school system should be changed, the flattening of the public school was a convenient but superficial solution. Secondly and more generally, Shearman refuted Matthews's approach to regard education as an instrument to bring about direct changes in social and economic systems. As a follower of the progressive educational school, Shearman reckoned that the Common School proposal meant a betrayal of 'educational liberalism which sought to safeguard the development of the child's personality'.<sup>74</sup> In pursuing uniformity between children and between schools,

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<sup>70</sup> Minutes of the WEAEC, July 19<sup>th</sup> 1940, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/2/3, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> J. H. Matthews, 'Memo on Educational Reconstruction', pp. 1-2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> H. C. Shearman, 'Notes on Educational Reconstruction', WEA memorandum, Jul 1940, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/6, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

the radical plan, argued Shearman, risked falling unwarily into dogmatism. At a time when the society was going through a transitional period and the content of common values was intensely debated between left and right, Shearman maintained that there was no need to, as Matthews proposed, connect education with ‘whatever dynamic is at work in social affairs’.<sup>75</sup> Instead, Shearman argued, ‘it is important to shield the children, as far as possible, from the strain and pressure of these events’ and to support ‘the claim to independence for the teacher’s function’.<sup>76</sup>

As a result, both sides had subtly deviated from an Idealist synthesis of education and democracy—the mutuality between self-realisation and the cultivation of a sense of social responsibility. For Matthews and Simon, their Common School proposal prioritised a direct transformation in the social and economic structure of society over intellectual and moral elevation among citizens. Shearman’s defence of public schools and ‘educational liberalism’, in turn, led to a denunciation of the social purpose of school education.

The disagreement on the Common School ideal between the radical and progressive sides of the WEAEAC determined that the issue was left out of the WEA war-time manifesto published at the end of 1940.<sup>77</sup> But, over the following years, as the debates went on, an agreement was gradually reached between the two sides: both the existence and the teaching method of public schools, which had been considered by Oxford Idealists as the archetype of school education, were declared undesirable.

A memorandum on ‘The Common School and a Unified Educational System’ was issued by the WEAEAC in January 1941. Again, there was not an agreed programme on creating a Common School system. Nevertheless, the committee now promulgated the view that public-school education was inimical to the community. First, the committee affirmed that the exclusiveness of the system was ‘not tolerable in a democratic society’. The memorandum conceded that radical measures, either by ‘bringing about the closure of all private schools’ or by ‘absorbing some or all of them into the national system’, were self-defeating in practice.<sup>78</sup> Yet it was said that measures must be taken to make public schools

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<sup>75</sup> Matthews, ‘Memo on Educational Reconstruction’, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Shearman, ‘Notes on Educational Reconstruction’, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Instead, the document was focused on the implementation of evacuation and the raising of the school age. ‘WEA Manifesto: Public Education and the War’, WEA Pamphlet, 1940.

<sup>78</sup> ‘The Common School and a Unified Educational System’, WEA Memorandum, Jan 1941, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/1, p. 5.

really 'public' and open to talents from across the nation.<sup>79</sup> Throughout the war, WEA members were almost unanimous in 'democratising' public schools, a position which was *de facto* very similar to the one which Green held a couple of decades before.

What was controversial and thus remarkable was the second proposal of the memorandum, i.e. to abolish the boarding-school system—the quintessential method of public-school education. While not taking sides on whether the boarding schools had the alleged function in 'training boys in independence, judgment, and the qualities needed for leadership', the WEAEC asserted that, from 'the national point of view', boarding-school education was 'a luxury' and not worth maintaining 'until the essentials of educational opportunity have been provided for all'.<sup>80</sup> However, there was no firm plan about what functions the public schools ought to perform after the boarding system was terminated.<sup>81</sup> The whole question of public school reform was then thrown to the WEA Regional Conferences of 1941.

The climax of the 1941 regional conferences was an address on 'Planning the New Educational Order', made by Mary Stocks (1891-1975), then editor to *The Highway*, WEA tutor and Vice-President (1934-45; Deputy President, 1945-53[?]).<sup>82</sup> Despite not being a member to the WEAEC, Stocks sometimes attended its meetings during the war and was well-informed about its members' controversy over reforming public schools. In many ways, her speech to the conferences was an effort to incorporate both radical and progressive views of public school reform into a single programme. Echoing the radicals, she deprecated the presence of the 'two educational systems'—the public system for the poor and the private one for the rich. However, Stocks embraced a unified system of education not only on the basis that the divided systems 'perpetuate[d] inequalities of opportunity and of wealth'—the core argument of the radicals. She also made a case that the problems of public schools could be approached from the angle of progressive educationalists.<sup>83</sup> As the limited opportunities to receive higher education and to pursue a professional career

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<sup>79</sup> The proposed measures included the introduction of a new form of entrance examinations solely 'of capacity and perseverance', and a significant reduction of the expensive charge of tuition. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> Minutes of the WEAEC, March 15<sup>th</sup> 1941, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/2/3, p.1

<sup>82</sup> Because of the war, three WEA Regional Conferences, with a same programme, were respectively held in Bangor, Oxford and Leeds in April and May 1941 in place of a national conference. The following discussions were based on those at the Banger Conference. 'Educational Problems in War Time; a Report of Three Regional Conferences of the WEA in April and May, 1941', WEA Pamphlet, 1941.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

were mostly taken by pupils whose family could afford expensive private schooling, Stocks argued that ambitious pupils in the state system were locked into ‘a desperate struggle’ to ‘[climb] hand over foot up the educational ladder’ and to scramble for the even more limited opportunities to enter the ‘protected occupations’.<sup>84</sup> The consequence was the prevalence of careerist considerations and snobbery in the public sector of education. The mentality, as Stocks starkly described it, was that:

If you cannot be a secondary school teacher—if you do not get your degree or cannot get to the university [sic]—be an elementary school teacher with lower salary and shorter holidays. If not this, then compete for one of the black-coated professions. If you cannot do this, then you must be a manual worker or a domestic worker, with lower wages and holidays almost nil.<sup>85</sup>

As such, the uneven distribution of educational opportunities prompted ordinary pupils to ‘accept that weary treadmill of preparation for examinations’, and to learn things which were most profitable but did not necessarily fit their aspirations and capacities.<sup>86</sup>

By establishing a Common School system, Stocks assumed that the counter-productive competition for educational opportunities and professions would be brought to an end: ‘the selection of that minority whose natural capacities were academic would be much simpler, as it would be uncomplicated by the natural urgency of the unacademic to get through the university to a privileged position’.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, completely ignoring the potential advantages of the boarding school tradition, Stocks suggested that the amenities of boarding schools be used to accommodate disadvantaged children, such as juvenile delinquents and those whose families were deemed to be not functioning properly.<sup>88</sup> Overall, this proposal envisaged that the abolition of the public school could simultaneously achieve both the radical aims—to use education reform to bring about socio-economic changes and benefit the underprivileged—and the liberal/progressive aims—to encourage self-development and the motive of pursuing knowledge for its own

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

sake.

However, during the course of the conferences, Stocks' view was challenged by the Idealist diehard, Lindsay, who questioned how this new educational order could possibly 'retain the good points in the public schools'. Claiming that '[t]he best English public school education is the best education in the world', Lindsay was entirely dismayed by Stocks' address.<sup>89</sup> Lindsay's rejection of the construction of a unified system of education was two-pronged. First, he argued that though the unsystematic, improvised, and voluntary character of the English educational system contained certain disadvantages, its variety and autonomy excelled in serving the interests of different types of talents.<sup>90</sup> As he explained in an article published just before the conference, the evil of the divided systems might be cured by

one system of education for everybody. But the great variety of types of secondary schools in this country—from the Public Schools at the one hand to technical schools at the other—is not an evil ... [The evil was that] the decision as to which boys should go to which schools, or be trained in which system, depends not on ability or fitness, but on wealth and class.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, what should be done was to make public schools open to all, rather than 'to make our education over-tidy'.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, Lindsay postulated that public-school education was in principle superior to state-school education (i.e. grammar schools). Unimpressed by Stocks' argument that the strain on grammar school students would be alleviated when public schools were abolished, Lindsay praised the all-round education in public schools and looked askance at the over-intellectualisation of the grammar school curriculum. As he put it, while the former 'g[ave] a variety to secondary schooling which you would not get under any other system', the latter forced students to be 'ground down by examinations the whole of their time'. 'These exceptional creatures' who made their way to universities, regretted Lindsay, 'are not really fitted for anything except to be librarians. It is an awful puzzle what to do

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>91</sup> A. D. Lindsay, *Picture Post*, 4 Jan 1941.

<sup>92</sup> 'Educational Problems in War Time', p. 34.

with them'.<sup>93</sup> Hence, he summed up the above-mentioned article by arguing that dangerous as educational inequalities were: 'we ought not to let this danger force us into adopting a rigid system of academic secondary education for all'.<sup>94</sup> Such a balance between diversity and equality was indeed the Idealist assumption behind the WEA's campaign for equality of opportunity throughout the 1920s.

Lindsay's Idealist defence of public schooling, vis-à-vis both the radical and progressive reform views, however, only found a hostile audience. Mallon was outspoken in his opposition to Lindsay's idea. Reverting to the old question which had been raised when university tutorial classes were set up, he suggested that, without taking other measures, the democratisation of public schools would only lead to the 'lamentable' effect that 'those who should naturally be the leaders of the working-class movement would tend to pass over to the other social grade'.<sup>95</sup> Shearman's attack on the master of Balliol was even harsher. Lindsay's criticism of the grammar schools was disparaged as 'a reaction against the success of secondary [i.e. grammar] school pupils in the spheres formerly reserved for the privileged classes'.<sup>96</sup> Shearman implied that Lindsay's comments on these pupils were due to his blindness to the economic pressure on them. Certainly irritated by Lindsay's praise of public-school education, Shearman, in a rather contentious manner, remonstrated that '[i]n any case the defects of the Civil Service [exposed by the war] were defects of a system governed by the public school tradition, not by the secondary [i.e. grammar] schools'.<sup>97</sup>

The session ended with Lindsay awkwardly trying to respond to these criticisms. He made a somewhat self-contradictory statement that he 'did not mean to make a comparison between secondary [i.e. grammar] schools and public schools', but he was sure that 'there is nobody who has been so well taught and so well trained as the good public school boy'.<sup>98</sup> The only message the statement left was that within the WEA the Idealist position on public schools had come to be indefensible. Now, 'education for leadership' was considered snobbish and its affinity to the privileged class could not be tolerated by

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>94</sup> A. D. Lindsay, *Picture Post*, Jan 4<sup>th</sup> 1941.

<sup>95</sup> 'Educational Problems in War Time', p. 36.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

radicals, whereas progressive educationalists drove home how the privilege enjoyed by public school students had demoralised teaching and learning in state schools. As the Idealist synthesis of diversity and equality was refuted, there was no place for ‘gentlemen education’ in the proposed Common School system.

The regional conferences proved successful in uniting the radical and progressive sides of the WEA in the cause of the Common School. Soon after the event, the WEAEAC concurred in stating that ‘the aim of the Association was the Common School, at least at the primary stage’.<sup>99</sup> In a memorandum submitted to the Board of Education at the end of 1941, the WEAEAC demanded that the post-war educational system be endowed with a positive role in reducing socio-economic inequality by limiting rich parents’ freedom to send their children to preparatory schools. As it pointed out, ‘[t]he child who is taught from 7 to 11 by an unqualified teacher in classes of 50, in an antiquated and insanitary school building, cannot have equality of opportunity with another who enjoys the conditions which obtain in the best of the preparatory schools’. Only by ‘establishing a truly national system of education, based on the ‘Common School’ for all children up to 11’, the committee suggested, ‘equality at the secondary stage can become a reality’.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, this extension of equality of opportunity, coupled with measures such as creating more state scholarships to universities, was expected to attenuate the competitiveness in secondary schools and to prevent the university entrance test from ‘put[ting] an unnatural pressure on the curriculum of the Secondary schools’<sup>101</sup>—it was in this sense that social equality, demanded by the radicals, and learning for its own sake, demanded by the progressives, were in harmony. At the 1942 WEA Annual Conference, the WEA’s ‘Programme of Educational Reconstruction’ (see the next section), which gave top priority to a Common School system which required all parents to send children to publicly-governed primary schools, was eventually carried, notwithstanding minor disputes.<sup>102</sup>

The position of the WEAEAC was further radicalised in 1943 when it issued a statement in evidence to the Board’s Departmental Committee on the Public Schools and the General

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<sup>99</sup> Minutes of the WEAEAC Meeting, May 17<sup>th</sup> 1941, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/2/3, p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Education After the War—Memorandum Submitted to the Board of Education’, WEA memorandum, Nov 1941, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/6, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Education After the War—Memorandum Submitted to the Board of Education’, pp. 9-10.

<sup>102</sup> A motion to refer back the proposal on the Common School was put forward but defeated. Minutes of the Annual and Special Conference, 11-12<sup>th</sup> July 1942, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/3/1, p. 2; ‘Plan for Education’, pp. 7-8.

Educational System (the Fleming Committee, appointed in July 1942). Continuing to press for the common primary school scheme, the WEAEC articulated the problem of public-school education in a more reproachable way. In essence, it was alleged that there was no value in public schooling at all. As the statement suggested, the educational achievement of public schools was the result partly of ‘the power of wealth’ and ‘largely of the social prestige and influence which education at highly select schools confers—a freemasonry which is often lifelong in its effects’.<sup>103</sup> As to its teaching method, the public school’s ‘segregated community life’ was dismissed as insidious to the students. The WEAEC rebutted the argument that public schools delivered ‘training in discipline and responsibility’; in reality, the committee noted with sarcasm, ‘the Public School succeeds in implanting such a sense of superiority that its products are able to make others ... feel uncomfortable, rather than themselves feeling conscious of their own peculiarity’.<sup>104</sup> In this way, these ‘separate institutions for the training apart from their fellows, and from a relatively early age, of the future “leaders” of the nation’ were ‘undemocratic’ and harmful to the community.<sup>105</sup> The WEA thus opposed ‘not only the restricted scope of the schools for leadership, but their very existence as such’.<sup>106</sup> An immediate measure recommended by the statement was to give power to the local educational authorities to take over and adapt certain types of public schools.<sup>107</sup>

While the WEA, after four years of debate, came to entirely reject the place of public-school education in a democratic society, it is worth noting that the great warhorse of the movement, Tawney, never backed the policy. This was another sign showing that the WEA had drifted away from an Idealist understanding of education.

By that time, the long-serving president, in his sixties, was undoubtedly the most respected voice in the WEA, and his theoretical works, especially *Equality*, and policy remarks were widely quoted in the WEAEC’s discussions, including those on public school

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<sup>103</sup> ‘The Public Schools—A Statement Presented in Evidence to the Fleming Committee’, WEA Pamphlet, 1943, p. 8.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

reform.<sup>108</sup> Yet, it is clear that Tawney never wanted the extinction of public schools.<sup>109</sup> By 1941, Tawney took a line similar to that championed by Lindsay. Both in a 1937 article in the *Manchester Guardian* and in his 1941 memorandum to the LPEAC he focused on how to democratise public schools.<sup>110</sup> The educational value of public schooling was largely taken for granted by Tawney.

It is noticeable that after 1941, as the WEAEC was forming a more negative view on public schools, Tawney adopted a tougher tone himself. In an article which aimed to put pressure on the Fleming Committee, Tawney, in line with the WEA's 1943 statement, claimed that the social exclusiveness of public schools harmed not only the excluded but also their own students.<sup>111</sup> The public-school system had failed to produce leadership, argued Tawney, because '[t]he qualities needed by a leader depend on the social environment in which he works, on the nature of the problems that he is called upon to solve, and ... on the political psychology of those who are to be led'.<sup>112</sup> As Tawney put it, it was an irony that '[t]he team-spirit, which leads individuals to play for their side rather than for themselves, is commonly counted among the public school virtues. It cannot be said that those schools themselves are a shining example of it'.<sup>113</sup>

It must be noted, however, that Tawney was still positive towards certain parts of public schooling. He acknowledged that those who received public schooling and went on to hold high offices in the civil service 'have many virtues';

What too frequently they lack is not intelligence, or expert knowledge, or public spirit, or devotion to duty. It is personal experience of the conditions of life and

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<sup>108</sup> E.g. Matthews, 'Memo on Educational Reconstruction', p. 2; Minutes of WEA Educational Advisory Committee, May 17<sup>th</sup> 1941, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/2/3, p. 2; Minutes of WEA Educational Advisory Committee, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1941, WEA Archive, Central/1/2/2/3, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Goldman, *Life of Tawney*, pp. 215-6; Brooks, 'R. H. Tawney and the Reform of English Education', pp. 372-83. Gordon and White are certainly wrong in suggesting that Tawney dismissed the public schools. Gordon and White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers*, p. 121.

<sup>110</sup> The measures proposed by Tawney at this stage included to make the governing bodies of public schools more representative and to make the schools open to merit. [I.a.; R. H. Tawney], 'Our Schools', *Manchester Guardian*, August 17, 1937; 'Synopsis of Mr. Tawney's Memorandum on the Public Schools', WEA Memorandum, Apr 1941, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/6. See also Brooks, 'R. H. Tawney and the Reform of English Education', pp. 374-8.

<sup>111</sup> The article first appeared in *Political Quarterly* (April/June 1943), and was later published as a WEA pamphlet. R. H. Tawney, 'The Problem of the Public Schools', WEA Pamphlet, 1943, pp. 9-10.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-7.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

habits of thought of those for whose requirements in the matter of health, housing, education and economic well-being, they are engaged in providing.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, once public schools were made 'partners in a community of educational effort' and 'cast [their] net wide', they could still be an ideal form of 'education for leadership'.<sup>115</sup> By the same token, Tawney asked for much stricter public supervision and control over the administration of public schools on the ground that these measures would not '[injure] the spirit or personality of a [public] school'.<sup>116</sup> All in all, there was nothing about the abolition of public schools in Tawney's new programme.<sup>117</sup>

One obvious reason for Tawney's appreciation of public-school education was the fact that he himself was a product of the prestigious Rugby School. But it is also true that his position was consistent with Idealist values which were the backbone of the programme of universal secondary education of varying types, which he helped to formulate in the 1920s. An educated democracy was dependent on the cultivation of different talents. Because diversity was good in itself, a certain type of education should not be banned as long as it proved to suit particular talents. In Tawney's words, what was desirable was not 'mechanical systematisation' but 'co-operation within a framework which finds room for wide diversities of educational type, but ensures that such diversities contribute to the common end of an educated nation'.<sup>118</sup> In this framework, it was certainly possible to have a type of education for future leaders, and, for Tawney and Lindsay, public schools could perfectly serve this function when they were accessible on the basis of merit. Arguably, what Tawney and Lindsay projected was turning public schools into training schools for 'Guardians of the Republic', as Plato had envisioned them; guardians, that is, who had compassion for the people and guarded their interests intelligently and responsibly. But, as the concerns of WEA policymakers increasingly lay in socio-economic inequality and the free development of children, few could appreciate the need of education for leadership

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10, 17.

<sup>116</sup> R. H. Tawney to Douglas Miller, 30 Jan 1943, R. H. Tawney Papers, Institute of Education, London, TY/2/26, fols. 4-5.

<sup>117</sup> Tawney's recommendations included that the governing bodies of public schools should include representatives of Local Educational Authorities and those appointed by the Board of Education, their financial arrangements should be under public scrutiny, and all places of the public schools should be free and open to all. Tawney, 'The Problem of the Public Schools', p. 31.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

and that of having different schools 'play their varying roles as conscious partner in a common effort'.<sup>119</sup>

As the Fleming Report on public school reform, published in 1944, turned out to be conservative and limited its scope to grant-receiving private schools (known as 'Direct Grant Schools'),<sup>120</sup> and public attention was directed to the introduction of a new education bill in late 1943, the whole issue of public schools was side-tracked and thus the WEA's controversy about whether to democratise or to abolish public schools was eventually a storm in a teacup. Nevertheless, the transformation of mainstream WEA opinion over public schools within the movement embodied the changed nature of its education campaign.

### **7-3 The WEA's Programme of Educational Reconstruction and the Decline of the Idealist Spirit, 1942-44.**

During the war, the shift of emphasis from the Idealist concern over moral improvement and diversity of abilities to the pursuit of social and economic equality characterised not only the WEA's policy on public-school reform but also its whole programme for educational reconstruction. In general, a more unified and uniform system of education was demanded by the WEA.

Side by side with the TUC, the Co-operative Union, the NUT, and the Conservative Party, the WEA published its scheme for post-war educational reform in 1942.<sup>121</sup> While pressing on its long-standing causes including free and compulsory education until age 16, secondary education under a single code, the improvement of pupils' well-being,<sup>122</sup> the WEA's programme of educational reconstruction was remarkable for its formulation of a

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>120</sup> Shena Simon, 'The Fleming Report and the Public Schools', *Highway*, 36, Nov 1944, pp. 7-9.

<sup>121</sup> J. H. Nicholson, 'Preface' to 'Plan for Education—A Programme of Educational Reconstruction', WEA Pamphlet, 1942, p. 3; see the TUC's 'Memorandum on Education After the War', 1942; the Co-operative Union's 'Plans for an Educated Democracy', 1942; the NUT's 'Educational Reconstruction — A Report of Proposals', 1942; the Conservative Party's 'Educational Aims and Plan for Youth', 1942. The LPEAC appeared to be too divided to present a coherent programme; also, compared to welfare reform, education reform was no longer a high priority for Labour during the War. Barker, *Education and Politics*, pp. 76-80; *Education and Labour Party Ideologies*, pp. 39-45.

<sup>122</sup> 'Plan for Education', pp. 9-14.

five-point 'Educational Charter', which I quote below:

1. Equal opportunities for every child to develop his personality and abilities, so that he may grow up healthy in body and mind and ready to make his full contribution to the life of the community.
2. A 'common school' system, in which social distinctions and privileges no longer play any part.
3. An education in which the full achievement of personality and the idea of service to the community will replace the competitive motive as the main principles of school life.
4. Lifelong education ...
5. Education to be recognised as the central constructive service of society and provided accordingly on a more generous scale, adequate to the vast and inspiring task of creating for the first time in history a genuine social democracy.<sup>123</sup>

There are three points worth noting here: to start with, the dual Idealist aims of personal development and a sense of social responsibility were reiterated, though they were rephrased in a weaker version. The thesis of the reciprocity between individual freedom and collective good—that one must fulfil oneself by serving one's neighbours—was not maintained. According to the charter, 'the full achievement of personality' and 'the idea of service to the community' could be seen as two separate goals of education.

Secondly, the focus on diversity in education was missing from the charter. Following the trend that I described above, the charter did not press for schools of varying types for the purpose of catering to different talents. Now the WEA placed a stronger emphasis on *equal* services and opportunities for everyone. Therefore, it was desirable to have a Common School system for all pupils up to 11 as well as plans for adapting and taking over the public/boarding schools.<sup>124</sup> More importantly, compared to the WEA's ambiguous attitude towards the Multilateral School before the war, the new scheme was outspoken in its support of the experimental type of school. Though not protesting against the tripartite system at the secondary stage, the document argued that it was 'of the greatest

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

importance that no sharp cleavages should be allowed to reappear within the new secondary system'. Accordingly, the Multilateral School, where students with different bents could 'share and interchange many of their activities', was proclaimed as the best way to insure against such divisions'.<sup>125</sup>

Above all, this preference for a unified and uniform system of education was due to the radical understanding of the mission of national education expressed by J. H. Matthews. As the final point of the charter suggested, the aim of national education lay not so much in creating intelligent and active citizens than in producing a more equal society. The use of 'social democracy', rather than 'educated democracy', was revealing. Previously, equality of opportunity had been understood as the equal chance to achieve good citizenship. But according to the new charter, the concept was interpreted as a means to create an egalitarian structure of society in the sense that 'social distinctions and privileges' would not determine a person's status.<sup>126</sup>

There were several reasons for this paradigm shift: The composition of the WEA policymaking circle had been greatly changed since 1935, when experts influenced by non-Idealist thinking were recruited. The war also accounted for the desire for a structural transformation of society. Yet the fundamental factor behind this shift was that the Idealist theory of education and social reform was no longer convincing to many WEA members.

The Idealist programme of national education was based on the assumption that educational diversity and equality between social groups could be achieved simultaneously. It assumed that, as the educational system became more diverse, individuals were more likely to achieve positive freedom (the realisation of one's unique potential), and they would be respected by society on the ground that they made a special contribution to the collective good. This assumption thus entailed the programme of universal secondary education of varying types including the public school, i.e. the type of education for leadership.

Nevertheless, the limits to achieving a synthesis of diversity and equality were exposed in practice. Although the parity of status for different types of schools had been demanded since the publication of Tawney's *1922 Report*, the inferiority of the modern schools to the

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>126</sup> See also 'The Public Schools—A Statement Presented in Evidence to the Fleming Committee', WEA Pamphlet, 1943, p. 5.

selective and prestigious grammar schools had been obvious by the late 1930s. Likewise, as the clumsiness of Lindsay's defence of the boarding school shows, it was paradoxical to retain a certain type of 'education for leadership', which was labelled as the best, while claiming the equal status and worth of different types of schools.

In a memorandum prepared by Matthews for drafting the 1942 programme of educational reconstruction, he explained why educational differentiation at the secondary level became unpopular among left-wing educationalists. The key was the fact that 'there has been a failure on the part of the working-class to create ... an educational ideology of its own'.<sup>127</sup> Ideally, as WEA activists had envisioned in the 1920s (see above 6-2), under a national system with varied types of schools, the working classes could develop some types of education, probably technical education, which not only met their members' interests and capacities, but also sustained their social traditions and identities. The cultivation of local or class solidarity, in terms of encouraging self-esteem and social participation, was deemed beneficial to both the labour movement and the national community. However, by the early 1940s, as Matthews noted, such an optimistic view was indefensible. In reality,

middle class culture ... [was accepted by the working classes] not only as a social standard but because the education which is the basis of this culture has the added advantage of leaving open for a large number of individual workers, or rather their children, the door of escape from manual labour. The social superiority of the black coat to the dungaree jacket has been accepted.<sup>128</sup>

Matthews believed that working-class communities failed to sustain the internal cohesion and force of attraction, which in the past had inspired educated members to remain in the labour movement. Accordingly, it was impossible for them to support or establish certain types of education, which could share a similar social prestige as grammar schools based on middle-class values. In more materialistic terms, another WEA member pointed out the fact that

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<sup>127</sup> J. H. Matthews, '[memo to the WEAEC on] Cultural and Vocational Education', WEA Memorandum, June 1942, WEA Archive, Central/3/3/6, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Matthews, '[memo to the WEAEC on] Cultural and Vocational Education', p. 2.

the real status of the schools will be determined, not by the code under which they are recognised, but by their relationship to the social and economic structure. If one type of school is counted as the avenue to the University and to the best jobs, and another as the school where those go who are expected to follow the lower paid working-class occupations, equality of status will be a sham and the class distinctions in the educational order, so far from being eliminated, will be intensified.<sup>129</sup>

As competition for wealth and status was constant fact, the relationship between diversity and equality in practice turned out to be contradictory rather than complementary.

While veteran Idealists, such as Tawney and Lindsay, were determined to pin faith on the reciprocity between diversity and equality and defend educational diversity at the expense of parity of status in extreme cases (such as public-school reform), most WEA members, facing this value conflict, preferred equality to diversity. As we have seen, not only did the radicals regard a unified and uniform system of education as the chief weapon to eliminate social distinctions, but progressive educationalists also admired this system for its (supposed) efficacy in reducing the competitive spirit in school and promoting the motive of learning for learning's sake.

In the new scheme of a unified and uniform system of national education (in favour of the Common and Multilateral school), the Idealist elements of WEA educational policy were considerably diluted and Idealist criticisms of the Common and Multilateral school, which had been voiced in the early 1930s, were simply discounted. In protesting against the proposed resolution on a Common School scheme at WEA Annual Conference of 1932, J. R. Armstrong, an organising tutor in Sussex, trenchantly explained why a Common School system was 'far more likely to retard these very ends for which the WEA in theory stands'.<sup>130</sup> He pointed out that such a system would inexorably reduce the ideal of equality of opportunity to 'competitive individualism' and the principle of selection by merit, both of which had been condemned by WEA members since the first discussions on the formation of tutorial classes. '[T]he inevitable consequences of introducing a modicum of educational equality while leaving the main competitive structure of society untouched', Armstrong

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<sup>129</sup> X.Y.Z., '[corr.] Equal Status', *Highway*, 35, Jan 1943, pp. 56-7.

<sup>130</sup> J. R. Armstrong, '[corr.] A Challenge to our National Policy', *Highway*, 25, Nov 1932, p. 17.

argued, were that competitions and examinations would become ‘an even more insidious and dominating concern in the child’s life’ and hinder their freedom to develop themselves.<sup>131</sup> A competition-ridden school system, was expected to encourage an ‘over-emphasis of the intellect’. This tendency could not only ‘atrophy the spontaneous development of intellectual interests’, but also contributed to ‘depressing uniformity’ and ‘creative lethargy’. In sum, Armstrong argued, a uniform system of education could give rise to ‘a highly “efficient” culture’, but could not deliver a society with co-operative, voluntary and free spirit.<sup>132</sup>

Ten years after Armstrong’s warning, another correspondent to *The Highway*, E. D. Healing, made a similar point in criticising the 1942 Programme:

To expand the present system, devoted as it is almost exclusively to the cultivation of the intellect, would not produce an educated nation. Standardisation may result in the schools turning out masses of robot-minded individuals, full of text-book knowledge and general information, yet lacking in artistic creativeness, imagination, sympathy, kindness and understanding of the real issues of life ... The present-day general system of education [makes] no attempt ... to see life as a whole, to which all knowledge and experience can be related.<sup>133</sup>

If the mission of the WEA was to give a common purpose to modern life, the campaign for the extension of uniform educational provision was missing the point.

However, amidst the optimism regarding the achievement of a much more egalitarian society after the war, these Idealist critics were liable to lose the argument and be labelled as reactionary. In his 1941 bestseller, *The Future in Education*, Richard Livingstone, Principal of Corpus Christi, Oxford, who was a student of the Oxford Idealist school and had been involved in the formative process of tutorial classes, suggested that, in view of achieving an educated democracy, the extension of adult education could be more functional than that of standardised schooling.<sup>134</sup> Even if the author was a widely respected figure in the movement, his opinion was openly criticised by Stocks and Matthews. Without addressing

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.

<sup>133</sup> E. D. Healing, '[corr.] Education for a New Life', *Highway*, 35, Feb 1943, p. 79.

<sup>134</sup> Richard Livingstone, *The Future in Education* (London, 1941).

the possible negative effects of a uniform system of national education, they simplified the controversy and accused Livingstone of implying that working-class children did not need extra school years and that 'education up to 14 or 16 [was] in many ways unimportant', which invited 'negative popular reaction'.<sup>135</sup> The great expectation of post-war social reconstruction had the effect of encouraging an attitude to favour comprehensive schemes of reform and to believe that social evils could thereby be wiped out, whereas the connection between the means and the aims was taken for granted and hardly scrutinised.

After the publication of the *Beveridge Report* at the end of 1942, the issue of social insurance somehow stole thunder of the agitation for education reform. The mentality to grasp the rare opportunity for securing a comprehensive scheme of reform explained the WEA's willingness to accept the Board's moderate White Paper of 1943 and the 1944 Education Act, which envisioned a national system of education from 5 to 15 but endorsed a tripartite system at the secondary stage and adopted a non-interference policy on the public school.<sup>136</sup> The compromise made by the WEA largely camouflaged the paradigm shift behind its policy programme. But, as shown above, by 1942, many of the WEA's proposals were in conflict with Idealist philosophy. They were put forward due to an emerging attitude which was disillusioned with the Idealist synthesis of diversity and equality and prepared to use education to directly redress social inequality. In so doing, the new generation of WEA policymakers in effect gave priority to social mobility, or as Armstrong put it, 'competitive individualism'. As such, there were very few differences between the WEA's educational programme and the one proposed by Fabians to promote a professional/efficient society by applying the principle of selection by merit, of which the WEA had been critical since its inception.

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<sup>135</sup> Mary Stocks, 'Notes and Comments', *Highway*, 34, Dec 1941, p. 27; J. H. Matthews, 'The Future in Education', *Highway*, 34, Feb 1942, pp. 77-9. But a WEA working-class member's support of Livingstone's 'political incorrectness', see T. S. Benson, 'Priorities in Education', *Highway*, 34, Mar 1942, pp. 104-5.

<sup>136</sup> 'The Workers' Educational Association in Conference, October 1943', *Highway*, 35, Dec 1943, pp. 25-6; H. C. Shearman, 'The New Education Act: A Citizen's Guide', WEA Pamphlet, 1944, pp. 27-8. For the compromising character of the 1944 Education Act, see Peter Mandler, *Educating the Nation I: Schools*, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 24 (2014), pp. 12-3.

## **Conclusion.**

This chapter explains how and why the Idealist view of equality of opportunity gave way to the individualist/careerist view which embodied a combination of Fabian and progressive educational thinking. The paradigm shift could be ascribed partly to the new recruits who did not share the Idealist faith from the beginning, and partly to the practical dilemma which Idealist theory encountered. As the Idealist synthesis of educational diversity and equality of status for different types of school proved untenable in practice, its previous followers tended to favour a more radical scheme in pursuit of socio-economic equality.

But this does not mean that the Idealist vision of education reform was unfounded. In fact, as we have seen, Idealist critiques of a uniform system of education were pertinent and cogent. The defeat of the Idealist programme of education was ultimately rooted in its inability to react to a reality that was not consonant with its philosophical synthesis—either the relation between diversity and equality, or that between self-realisation and the common good, was not always reciprocal. In theory, Idealists could argue that—as this chapter’s opening quotation suggested—equality of opportunity was in harmony with a certain type of education which was aimed to cultivate leadership. But, in reality, the situation tended to be a zero-sum game: either the selective educational system reinforced social distinctions, or the extension of the principle of equality eventually delegitimised education for leadership.

## Conclusion.

The educational and social changes of the half-century since the birth of the Association are a well-worn common-place. Has their effect been to make [the] traditional functions [of the WEA] obsolete, or impracticable, or both? ... My answer ... is an unqualified negative.

— Tawney, 1953.<sup>1</sup>

### The WEA in the Welfare State, 1945-49.

The end of the Second World War marked another watershed in the history of the WEA. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, as it had done in 1918, the WEA celebrated its limited but remarkable success in education reform campaign and keenly anticipated that the wartime solidarity and passions for understanding current affairs would transfigure the movement into an ever-growing national institution.<sup>2</sup> An auspicious omen was Labour's landslide victory in the 1945 general election—after which four former/current members of WEA Central Councils were appointed to ministerial posts, with over seventy MPs being WEA officials, past or present students and tutors.<sup>3</sup> It was not entirely an exaggeration for the *Manchester Guardian* to acclaim the WEA as 'the Labour Party's real "University"'.<sup>4</sup> A wave of optimism thus prevailed among both veteran and young WEA activists. Surprised by the election result, Zimmern told Mansbridge that the British people demonstrated 'supreme—almost uncanny—wisdom in throwing personal considerations overboard and determining to turn over a new leaf, as they did in 1906. It is an England largely moulded by the WEA'.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Richard Crossman ascribed Labour's victory to 'a new intelligentsia'

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'The Moral of It All', *Highway*, 44, Apr 1953, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'Presidential Address – delivered to the National Conference of the WEA on Nov 18<sup>th</sup> 1944', *Highway*, 36, Jan 1945, p. 50; *WEA Annual Report*, 1945, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1945, pp. 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Apr 1946.

<sup>5</sup> A. E. Zimmern to Albert Mansbridge, July 29<sup>th</sup> 1945, Mansbridge Papers, Add MS 65258, fols. 106-8.

among the working classes, the rise of which owed great debts to the WEA's campaign in secondary and adult education.<sup>6</sup>

The achievement of the WEA secured a special place for adult education in the emerging 'welfare state', a term coined by its first president, William Temple.<sup>7</sup> The 1944 Education Act sanctioned the voluntary principle of adult education that was elaborated by the *1919 Report*, while burdening the local educational authorities with the responsibility of formulating plans for local adult education in co-operation with universities and voluntary bodies.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, in 1946, the Ministry of Education (established in 1944) issued the Further Education Grant Regulations which extended the scope of grants to sponsor discussion groups and courses 'of a less formal character'. To the WEA's satisfaction, the regulations also permitted grants for the appointment of full-time organising tutors by not only universities but also approved voluntary bodies, a move which the WEA had requested in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the eagerly-awaited 'enormous advance in the provision of adult education' and 'flow of new students and members from the Armed Forces' proved ephemeral.<sup>10</sup> After rising to a maximum of 45,320 in 1946-47, the number of WEA members declined steadily each year to 34,628 in 1951-52.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the WEA student numbers saw a continuing fall after reaching a record peak of 111,351 in 1948-49. It is also noticeable that the growth of student numbers throughout the 1940s largely concentrated on short classes. As Table 8.1 shows, in 1948-49, while the number of the tutorial classes recovered to the pre-war standard at 14,700, the figure for the short classes doubled, at 96,651. Consequently, the trend towards the disproportional increase in WEA short classes, which began from the mid-1920s, was greatly accelerated in the 1940s when tutorial classes merely accounted for 10-13% of total WEA classes. By the late 1940s, it had been clear that, as Robert Peers observed, short classes did not create 'the demand for more serious studies'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. H. S. Crossman, 'The Labour Government and the WEA', *Highway*, 37, Oct 1945, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> William Temple, *Christianity and the State* (London, 1928), pp. 169-70 cited in Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Clay, 'Presidential Address', *Highway*, 39, Nov 1947, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1945, pp. 15-6; Peers, *Adult Education*, p. 80.

<sup>10</sup> *WEA Annual Report*, 1952, p. 12-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Peers, 'What Is New in Adult Education?', *Highway*, 38, Feb 1947, p. 88.

Table 8.1 Statistics of Students in WEA Tutorial Classes and Short Classes in England, Wales and Scotland, 1937-52<sup>13</sup>

	Tutorial classes		Short classes		Total
1937-38	14,237	23%	46,795	77%	61,032
1942-43	7,124	10%	65,826	90%	72,950
1945-46	10,729	11%	88,000	89%	98,729
1948-49	14,700	13%	96,651	87%	111,351
1951-52	12,925	13%	83,307	87%	96,232

Likewise, other changes to the Idealist character of the WEA, originally prompted by the professionalisation of the movement during the interwar period (described in the second part of this thesis), became more established features of the movement after 1945. Not only did the percentage of students in tutorial classes drop, but there also was a fall in the proportion of manual worker students, from one third in the 1930s to one fifth in the late 1940s, and a diminution in classes in economics and social history, from about 25% in 1931-32 to just above 10% in 1947-48.<sup>14</sup> In addition, a survey made by the 1953 Ministry of Education Committee on adult education showed that the number of full-time tutors employed by universities and the WEA rose sharply in the post-war years, from 42 in 1943 to 252 in 1953.<sup>15</sup>

The post-war years also saw the demise of the WEA's 'old guard'. Tawney stepped down as President in 1945. Though remaining Vice-president until 1950, he was increasingly alienated from the WEA, claiming that in the complexities of its post-war policy he was 'out of [his] depth', though it was probably an excuse for his dissatisfaction with the new trends.<sup>16</sup> Similar attitudes were adopted by Cole and Lindsay. Cole still pledged support for voluntary adult education but no longer held any WEA national position after 1939. Lindsay was more agnostic about the future of the WEA and transferred his attention to

<sup>13</sup> *WEA Annual Reports*, 1938, 1946, 1949, 1952. 'Tutorial Classes' includes Advanced Tutorial Classes, Three-year Tutorial Classes, and Preparatory Tutorial Classes; 'Short Classes' includes One-year Classes, Terminal Classes, Short Term Classes, and Extension Courses.

<sup>14</sup> S. G. Raybould, 'The WEA: The Next Phase', WEA Pamphlet, 1949, pp. 1-18. For historians' debate on the effectiveness of the distinction between manual and non-manual workers in twentieth-century Britain, see e.g. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, pp. 98-104; Jon Lawrence, 'Review Article: The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 25:2 (2000), pp. 307-18.

<sup>15</sup> The number of full-time tutors in 1933 was 21. M. D. Stephens (ed.), *The Ashby Report* (Nottingham, 1991[1954]), p. 61; Eric Ashby, *The Pathology of Adult Education* (Belfast, 1955), p. 16 n. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Tawney, 'The Moral of It All', p. 242.

the project of setting up a university in the Potteries, which was realised in 1949 when the University College of North Staffordshire (later, the University of Keele) was established, with Lindsay as its first principal.<sup>17</sup> Temple died in 1944, but his growing disillusionment with the WEA had been obvious for some time.<sup>18</sup> Just a year before his death, Temple launched a campaign to form a department within the Board of Education to organise a state-driven system of adult education, a proposal which was severely criticised by the WEA (and Tawney) for threatening voluntarism in adult education.<sup>19</sup> As to the autodidact veterans, G. H. Thompson and E. S. Cartwright, seminal organisers respectively in Leeds and Oxford, both retired in 1945, while T. W. Price's long service in WEA central office ended in 1941 before his death in 1945. Finally, Mansbridge retired in 1945, though his focus had long shifted towards other adult education organisations, such as the BIAE and the Seafarers' Education Service, both of which he helped to found in the interwar years.<sup>20</sup>

All these changes brought the WEA into a period of confusion and 'orgies of introspection [which were] neither intermittent nor effective'.<sup>21</sup> The controversies over the future of the WEA surrounded questions about its connections to the labour movement on the one hand, and to the university on the other. First, as Labour rose to power, people questioned whether the original social purpose of the WEA—to empower the labour movement for 'social and industrial emancipation'—was irrelevant to the needs of the post-war society.<sup>22</sup> In establishing itself as an organ of the welfare state, should not the WEA embrace all the citizens? Second, given the expansion of less demanding adult classes, it was also questioned whether the WEA should insist on the alleged 'university standards' of its classes.

On both questions, opinions were varied and clashed at different levels. But, in general, the post-war 'great debate', as a tutor put it, was between two camps:<sup>23</sup> Sidney Raybould,

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<sup>17</sup> For Lindsay's pessimism about the post-war WEA, see A. D. Lindsay, 'Review of S. G. Raybould, *The English Universities and Adult Education*', *Universities Quarterly*, 6:1 (Nov 1951), pp. 82-6. For Lindsay and the foundation of Keele University, see W. B. Gallie, *A New University: A.D. Lindsay and the Keele Experiment* (London, 1960).

<sup>18</sup> R. H. Tawney, a typescript of an untitled article in memory of William Temple, [n.d.], R. H. Tawney Papers, LSE, ADD/5.

<sup>19</sup> For records of Temple's campaign during the war, see William Temple Papers, vol. 22, fols. 251-350; Papers of the Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey, Nuffield College, Oxford, D5/1, 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Bernard Jennings, 'Mansbridge, Albert (1876-1952)', *ODNB*, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Ashby, *The Pathology of Adult Education*, pp. 11-2.

<sup>22</sup> WEA Statement of Policy, 1928.

<sup>23</sup> R. D. Waller, 'The Great Debate', *Adult Education*, 25:4, Autumn 1953, pp. 250-63. See also Harold Perkin, 'Review of Blyth's English University Adult Education', *American Historical Review*, 89:2 (1984), p.443; Roy

Director of the Department of Adult Education, Leeds, and WEA Vice-president, was regarded as the 'fundamentalist' who defended the WEA's attachment to workers and affirmed university tutorial classes as the primary form of WEA education.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, Peers of Nottingham and his allies continued pressing for the approach of mass adult education. They denied the need to serve the special purpose of the labour movement. Moreover, in appealing to the general public, they gave to the notion of university standards a loose interpretation and were sanguine about the growth of short adult classes. The dispute did not lead to any consensus, but what became clear was that between the two sides there was no room for Idealism.

There was nothing new in Raybould's argument, though he was by no means a 'fundamentalist' or an exponent of the traditional Idealist approach, as his critics insinuated.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the line Raybould took was actually the same that had been articulated in the 1930s by Wootton and the interwar generation of left-wing tutors who professed positivism. First, Raybould assumed the possible distinction between objective facts and subjective opinions, and thus understood that the adoption of university standards meant 'scientific, detached and impartial' teaching. Second, he insisted that the 'training in critical thinking' served the social purpose of workers' emancipation. Meanwhile, the social purpose justified a focus on social studies. Above all, in order to guarantee university standards, Raybould maintained that three-year tutorial classes which required students to do written work and systematic study could not be replaced by a succession of less demanding courses.<sup>26</sup> In short, Raybould's project was not about cultivating long-term fellowship and mutual understanding among members of the community, but about providing workers with professional training in social studies to equip them for political and social participation.

What Peers stood for was even further removed from the Idealist vision. Peers made a case that mass adult education was suitable for a social democracy that vowed to provide

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Shaw, 'Controversies' in Raybould (ed.), *Trends in English Adult Education*, pp. 192-207. J. F. C. Harrison suggests that during the 1940s, there were at least six views regarding the purpose and method of the WEA, but his classification is rather intuitive and far from clear. See Harrison, 'The WEA in the Welfare State', pp. 20-5.

<sup>24</sup> T. L. Hodgkin, 'University Standards', *TB*, Autumn 1948, pp. 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4. C.f. Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 253-4.

<sup>26</sup> S. G. Raybould, 'The Approach to WEA Teaching', WEA Pamphlet, 1947, p. 3; Raybould, 'University Standards in WEA Work', WEA Pamphlet, 1948, pp. 4, 9, 25-32; Raybould, 'The WEA: The Next Phase', pp. 30-7.

'secondary education for all' and was already seeing the opening up of higher education. As the previously distant goal of equality of educational opportunity now appeared within reach, he argued that the mission of adult education no longer lay in providing tutoring in advanced studies for working people. In a more equal but changing society, 'it is absurd', noted Peers, 'to suppose that adult education can be conceived in terms of limited objectives, either in relation to certain sections of society, for example the manual workers, or in relation to particular subjects, for instance the social sciences'.<sup>27</sup> Instead, he believed that adult education must perform general but 'many-sided' functions of meeting the new social needs, such as complementing the trend towards specialisation, satisfying the educational needs of an ageing population, and encouraging 'the creative use of leisure'.<sup>28</sup>

As we can see, by connecting his idea of adult education with the realities of post-war society, Peers renovated his long-standing rejection of the 'social purpose' of the WEA. His approach resonated well with the up-and-coming generation of university tutors who tended to be less politicised. From 1947, a group of junior tutors, including Richard Hoggart, then staff tutor in literature at Hull, and J. F. C. Harrison, staff tutor at Leeds, launched relentless attacks on the WEA education's affiliation to the labour movement. They discarded the role of 'the bustling activist' in adult education, and maintained that 'the appeal to "the workers" ... blur[red] the vision of the true ends of adult education'.<sup>29</sup> As another tutor questioned,

does the WEA want to cater for the education of the community on the whole or does it not? If it does, then it should not make a class distinction by labelling itself 'workers' ... Education is the one means of ending class distinction. The WEA is not properly performing its main function if it hangs on to an out-dated prejudicial title. We want a united body of people no matter what their background, or from what walk of life working together and striving for a cultural community.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Peers, 'The Future of Adult Education', *Adult Education*, 25:2, Autumn 1952, p. 93.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>29</sup> J. F. C. Harrison, Richard Hoggart, Roy Shaw, 'What are we doing?' *TB*, Autumn 1948, pp. 10-1; J. F. C. Harrison, Richard Hoggart, Roy Shaw, '[corrs.] What are we doing?' *TB*, Spring-Summer 1949, pp. 14-5. See also Richard Hoggart, Roy Shaw, J. F. C. Harrison and Mrs. C. E. M. Reynolds, 'To What Good End', *Highway*, 40, Nov 1948, pp. 10-2; Richard Hoggart, 'What Shall the WEA Do?', *Highway*, 44, Nov 1952, pp. 46-53.

<sup>30</sup> Elaine Horst, 'WEA—Which Way? Another point of view', *Highway*, 39, Nov 1947, p. 19. Horst's view was backed by other tutors, see Helen Lowenthal, '[corrs.] WEA—Which Way', *Highway*, 39, Jan 1948, p. 57; John Sewell, 'Let's Get This Straight', *Highway*, 39, Jan 1948, p. 56.

By the same token, Peers and his allies dismissed the university standard as a mere fetish.<sup>31</sup> For Peers, the emphasis on duration of study and written work ‘ignore[d] the variety of the tasks of adult education’ in the post-war society.<sup>32</sup> Representing the growing power of extra-mural departments, Peers and his allies suggested that ‘the University [was] the body best able to guarantee the quality, objectivity and continuity of the teaching sought by mature students’, no matter what kind of courses they were in.<sup>33</sup> As W. D. Waller, Director of the Manchester Extra-mural Department, argued, the intellectual standards of adult classes would be maintained, as long as the work was done ‘by University teachers with the full knowledge and sponsorship of their University’.<sup>34</sup> Under this framework, the role of the WEA, which used to occupy a central place in the tutorial programme, was strongly reduced.

In any case, both Raybould and Peers seemed to follow the same logic in delivering adult education, that is, as G. H. Thompson put it, ‘the Educated educating the Uneducated’.<sup>35</sup> In their arguments there was no trace of the original Idealism which had assumed ‘a co-operative process to which all contributed—the students mainly from their experience and gleanings of knowledge and the tutor chiefly from his scholarship, teaching ability and power to inspire’.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, both camps disregarded the adult class’s function in ‘the linking together of thought and emotion’, emphasised by Cole in the 1930s. The Idealist aim ‘to strengthen [workers’] faith with knowledge and understanding’, restated by the WEA national programme of 1947, was actually brushed aside in the ‘great debate’ dominated by university administrators and tutors.<sup>37</sup>

The Idealist spirit in the WEA movement, with an emphasis on long-term fellowship and mutual learning between university tutors and worker-students, generally died out in the 1950s when universities replaced the WEA as a major and independent provider of adult education.<sup>38</sup> In 1957, a severe blow to the Idealist initiative and the WEA-university

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<sup>31</sup> Peers, ‘The Future of Adult Education’, pp. 93-5; Hodgkin, ‘University Standards’, pp. 3-4; Waller, ‘The Great Debate’, pp. 250-63; Maurice Bruce, ‘The Universities and Adult Education’, *Highway*, 44, Nov 1952, pp. 54-60.

<sup>32</sup> Peers, ‘What Is New in Adult Education?’, p. 88; Peers, ‘The Future of Adult Education’, pp. 93-5.

<sup>33</sup> Peers, ‘The Future of Adult Education’, p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Waller, ‘The Great Debate’, pp. 261-2.

<sup>35</sup> G. H. Thompson, ‘Progress and Aims in Adult Education’, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> ‘The Future in Adult Education: A Programme—adopted by the Annual Conference of the WEA, 1947’, WEA Pamphlet, 1947, p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Harrison, ‘The WEA in the Welfare State’, pp. 18-9.

alliance came when the WEA, under universities' pressure, agreed to dissolve the Central Joint Advisory Committee on Tutorial Classes—an icon of the reciprocal intellectual enrichment between scholars and workers. From then on, the co-ordination of tutorial classes at the national level was transferred to the University Council for Adult Education (UCAE), controlled by extra-mural departments.<sup>39</sup> As a WEA student put it bluntly, the association became 'an appendage of the universities' and was made 'a dumping ground for the surplus intelligentsia of the universities'.<sup>40</sup> In this way, university adult education, observed Eric Ashby, who chaired the above-mentioned 1953 committee, was becoming 'a social service like national insurance, "laid on" by the university in a spirit of efficient paternalism'.<sup>41</sup>

Now, it is true that in the 1950s attempts were made to revive the 'social purpose' of adult education, especially by the 'New Left' intellectuals who at that time were emerging from extra-mural departments, such as Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson. Their communitarian concerns, appreciation of cordial relationship with worker-students, and critiques of the alleged 'objectivity' of university teaching were certainly indebted to the Idealist tradition. However, having been influenced by Marxism, they did not share Oxford Idealists' metaphysical assumptions and faith in the common good.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the New Left can certainly not count as a direct heir to Idealism. It amounts to an irony, then, that in this case Oxford Idealism carried weight with followers of Marxism, an ideology that once divided the WEA and the labour movement and brought the WEA to adopt the value-neutral language in the 1920s.

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<sup>39</sup> 'Arrangements for consultation with universities at the national level', [1957], WEA Archive, CJAC/3/5. The UEMCC was rebranded itself as the UCAE in 1945.

<sup>40</sup> 'An Old Student', 'The Future of the WEA', *Highway*, 38, May 1947, p. 155.

<sup>41</sup> Ashby, *The Pathology of Adult Education*, p. 18. For the disassociation between the WEA and the universities in the 1950s and 1960s, see S. G. Raybould, *University Extramural Education in England, 1945-62* (London, 1964), ch. 3.

<sup>42</sup> For the New Left and the Oxford tradition, see Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 264-98; Tome Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies: Adult Education, Cultural Politics and the English Question* (London, 1997); Alexandre Campsie, 'Mass-Observation, Left Intellectuals and the Politics of Everyday Life', *English Historical Review*, 131:548 (2016), pp. 118-21; Stuart Middleton, 'The Concept of "Experience" and the Making of the English Working Class, 1924-1963', *Modern Intellectual History*, 13:1 (2016), pp. 179-208. For Williams' thought on university adult education, see John McIlroy and Sallie Westwood (eds.), *Border Country: Raymond Williams in Adult Education* (Leicester, 1993). On affinities between Thompson's and Tawney's thought, see Rogan, *The Moral Economists*, pp. 167-74.

## **The limitations and legacy of Oxford Idealism.**

This thesis has tried to demonstrate that the rise and fall of the WEA and the Oxford Idealist tradition was significantly associated with the paradoxical combination of Idealist and professional aims that were ingrained in its original project to unite labour and scholarship. Contrary to Harold Perkin's interpretation that Idealists were bearers of professionalism, this study uses the case of the WEA to show that Oxford Idealists embraced a social ideal clearly different from the professional one. The Idealists cast the WEA in the role of forging cross-class fellowship and cultivating moral and intelligent citizenship, whereas the supporters of professionalism used the extramural movement as a leverage to professionalise universities and institutionalise scientific studies.

The marriage of Idealism and professionalism gave rise to the WEA tutorial class. Yet, from the very beginning of the WEA movement, there had existed tensions between the two social ideals. These gradually limited the reception of the tutorial programme among the labour movement, neutralised the moral and social purpose of WEA teaching, undermined the voluntary character of the movement, and led to the expansion of 'purposeless' WEA classes. This contributed to the sapping of the Idealist faith in the moral and intellectual potential of common people, a faith which, as Tawney put it, was 'the secret of [the] Movement's vigour'.<sup>43</sup>

It is true that the waxing and waning of a social movement is always interconnected with a range of social conditions. The gap between the WEA and the workers was certainly widened by the post-war transformations, notably, the expansion of secondary and higher education, together with a series of universal social services provided by the state, which improved social mobility, eroded the solidarity of working-class communities and the vitality of the labour movement. However, there is no ground to assume that these factors were decisive.

First, a general increase in educational opportunities did not necessarily entail a reduction of the demands for WEA classes. For example, Raybould and many WEA leaders expected that '[i]mproved secondary education ... [meant] that a much greater proportion ... of working-class children [would] be interested in and able to profit by adult

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<sup>43</sup> R. H. Tawney, 'A Message from Our President', *Highway*, 34, Nov 1941, p. 5.

classes of an advanced standard'.<sup>44</sup> It was sensible for the WEA to anticipate that education in childhood and adolescence could be an antidote to 'adult apathy toward education'.<sup>45</sup> At any rate, the expansion of formal education did not make the WEA redundant, for what the latter vowed to offer was not something that was provided by university and school education. The Idealist approach to promoting cross-class fellowship, empowering the labour movement, and encouraging voluntary participation was not what formal education could provide, for the latter could not but aim at preparing students for a career.<sup>46</sup> It is on this ground that Tawney regarded as 'unrealistic claptrap' the notion that the tutorial programme was doomed because all its potential students had gone to secondary school and university.<sup>47</sup> If the WEA had served its original purposes, the association by no means lost its *raison d'être* when formal educational provision was greatly extended.<sup>48</sup> That is to say, the construction of an 'educational highway' and the provision of adult education were not so much contradictory as complementary. For this reason the present thesis disagrees with the view that the WEA's campaign was 'self-liquidating'.<sup>49</sup>

Second, there may be an element of truth in Harrison's argument that welfare economics, informed by the Fabian/individualistic interpretation of equality of opportunity, partly undermined the strength of the labour movement and working-class communities, which were the backbone of the WEA.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, as we have seen in the third part of this thesis, the prevalence of the argument for social mobility as the aim of national education was itself an outcome of the defeat of the Idealist project. The inability of the Idealist project to respond to practical demands reinforced the tendency of WEA policymakers to regard public education as a way to promote social mobility, rather than as a means to buttress the solidarity of working-class communities. In this sense, the

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<sup>44</sup> Raybould, 'University Standards in WEA Work', pp. 29-32. See also Peers, 'What Is New in Adult Education?', p. 87.

<sup>45</sup> 'Adult Education After the War', WEA Pamphlet, 1942, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'The Tutor and the Working Class Movement', pp. 6-7.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Ashby, *The Pathology of Adult Education*, p. 20. See also Tawney, 'The Moral of It All', p. 243.

<sup>48</sup> Dryden Brook, 'Where are We Going?' *Highway*, 31, Nov 1938, pp. 14-5.

<sup>49</sup> For the arguments that the WEA was defeated by its own success, see Goldman, *Dons and Workers*, pp. 248-66, 318-26, and Shaw, 'Controversies', p. 212.

<sup>50</sup> Harrison, 'The WEA in the Welfare State', pp. 11-2; Peter Ackers & Alastair J. Reid (eds.), *Alternatives to State-Socialism in Britain* (London, 2016), pp. 17-8. It is worth noting that the thesis of the 'traditional' mutualistic working-class communities rapidly declining under the welfare state has recently been questioned, see e.g. Selina Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (London, 2015).

universal but centralised welfare provision and its impact on working-class communities were as much a consequence as a cause of the demise of the Idealist faith.

Fundamentally, this study suggests that the waning of the WEA's original functions was due to its failure to devise a practical method to tackle the problems of modern society that Oxford Idealists had identified.<sup>51</sup> In particular, the co-operative method did not fulfil its promise to reclaim a common purpose by ameliorating class tensions and complementing the specialisation of modern life. Consequently, the WEA's mission to forge a bond between the labour movement and university ended in failure. On the side of labour, the ambiguity of the Idealist theory towards social classes proved a mixed blessing. In the early days of the WEA, the language of reciprocity between the individual and the collective justified class consciousness in an educated democracy, because class identity motivated workers to participate in public life. But the Idealists' equivocal attitudes toward the relationship between social classes and the national community was fatal. The lack of clarity over whether the ideal community was a classless society or a society of different classes with which individuals felt solidarity led to prolonged disputes about whether the WEA should be a universal provider or maintain its special dedication to the labour movement. The fact that both exponents and antagonists of mass adult education quoted words of Mansbridge and Tawney in support of their divergent positions illustrates how counterproductive the Idealists' ambivalent stance was.<sup>52</sup>

The ambiguous notion of a mutuality between self-realisation and the common good anticipated the controversies over mass adult education also in another sense. Namely, if everyone's improvement contributed to the pursuit of the common good, a comprehensive programme to educate people with different levels of attainment seemed justified. But, as we have seen in above Chapter Five, G. H. Thompson and Tawney brought home that the reciprocity between self-improvement and social service was more likely to happen when the programme concentrated on 'the socially effective' and the intellectually talented students. In other words, a subtler reading of the Idealist faith in mutuality could lead to an endorsement of an elitist or selective approach to adult education. For the talented few were the key to mobilising local communities and their members. However, if

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<sup>51</sup> See also Asa Briggs, 'Six-four Years of the WEA', *Workers Education*, 1 (1987), pp. 8-11.

<sup>52</sup> For exponents of the universal approach quoting Mansbridge and Tawney, see e.g. Harrison, Hoggart and Shaw, 'What are we doing?' *TB*, Autumn 1948, pp. 8-10. For the antagonists of the universal approach quoting Mansbridge and Tawney, see e.g. Raybould, 'The WEA: The Next Phase', pp. xi-xiii.

the WEA failed to attract the working-class elites, it would not be able to mobilise labour communities and organisations, while also risking diluting the movement through the increase of less motivated students in basic and short courses.

A separate dilemma, also arising from the belief in the mutuality between diversity in human potential and the common good, was reflected in the WEA's campaign for education reform. A varied system of secondary education, which fit the Idealist assumption of the diversity of human potential, could in practice intensify inequality and social distinctions. This dilemma drove the WEA policymakers of the 1930s and 1940s away from the emphasis on educational differentiation toward backing the Common and Multilateral School which was largely based on the idea of social mobility. It is an irony that the WEA's campaign for education reform resulted in calls for the abolition of the public/boarding school, which had been seen by the Idealists as providing the ideal type of education and deserving to be made accessible to every citizen.

The WEA's collaboration with both universities and the state also had unintended, if not unfortunate, consequences. It is true that from 1908 the alliance provided the WEA with qualified tutors and necessary funds, while helping experts in nascent social studies to acquire professional status in academia. Nonetheless, the Idealists underestimated the extent to which the professionalism introduced by the alliance could undermine the democratic and voluntary spirit of the movement. As state bureaucrats and university tutors strove to forge a tutorial programme in the image of what would have been expected from a professional university, workers' control over their classes was weakened by the appointment of tenured tutors, and at the same time the professional teaching with an emphasis on impartiality and detachment failed to offer workers a motivational training in active citizenship. Likewise, a well-designed but divided programme of study encouraged the growth of short classes without clear social purpose, and drove grassroots activists away. The practice of the WEA shows that the Idealist argument, made in the *1919 Report*, that voluntarism in adult education could be reinforced by the support of state and university was delusive. The influence of professional power deviated the Idealist movement from its original purpose, that is, to 'cure the evil of specialisation', to shorten

the gap between academic specialism and ‘the general life of the community’, and, above all, to encourage the pursuit of a common purpose.<sup>53</sup>

It is here that this study of the WEA reveals a more intricate road to ‘professional society’ than the one described by Harold Perkin. It is true that in hindsight, the efforts of WEA Idealists paved the way for the professionalisation of British higher/adult education and national education in general: They jointly launched the campaign to simultaneously democratise and professionalise universities; they demanded state/university funding for adult classes, which also introduced professionalism to the movement; and their calls for equality of educational opportunity were increasingly understood as justifications for ‘selection by merits’ in national education. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the Idealists’ dreamland was not a professional society. Therefore, Perkin’s account of the rise of professional society must be considered simplistic. It is unjust to regard all who preached the gospel of disinterested service to the common good as prophets of professionalism. In working toward achieving a better society, Green, Toynbee, Mansbridge, Tawney, Temple, Lindsay, and Cole all pinned their hopes not so much on detached experts as on participatory citizenship. They were critics of professionalism but came to be its reluctant contributors.

This thesis has tried to demonstrate that it was this unintended contribution to professionalisation that in the end stifled the Idealist spirit. Of course, as Harris and Grimley have argued, there were multiple *external* factors responsible for the decline of Idealism’s influence on British political thought, social policy, and, more generally, public life from the 1930s: Economic recession, the rise of Fascism in Europe, challenges from Marxists and linguistic positivists, and the fading away of a moral consensus all undermined the legitimacy of Idealist thinking.<sup>54</sup> But as this study shows, the *internal* weaknesses of Idealism must be considered a key factor in its decline, too. Alongside its over-optimism about cross-class fellowship and individuals’ inclination to pursue the

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<sup>53</sup> A. L. Smith, ‘The Extra-mural Work of the Universities’, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1923, ALS Papers II.E1/14ii, Balliol College Archives, pp. 2-3; A. D. Lindsay, ‘Planning the New Educational Order’ in ‘Educational Problems in War Time; a Report of Three Regional Conferences of the WEA in April and May, 1941’, WEA Pamphlet, 1941, p. 36; Tawney, *The British Labour Movement*, pp. 142-3.

<sup>54</sup> Jose Harris, ‘Political Thought and the State’, in S. J. D. Green and R. C. Whiting (eds.), *The Boundaries of the State in Modern Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 20-4; Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*, pp. 209-22.

common good, the Idealist project was particularly flawed by its paradoxical affinity with professionalism.

The unintended consequences of Idealism's affinity with professionalism are finally also visible with regard to the founding of the welfare state. On the one hand, as Harris and Bevir have shown, the welfare state greatly owed its intellectual origin to Idealism.<sup>55</sup> But on the other hand, the Idealists, as Grimley points out, tended to look askance at the professional mechanism of the welfare state when its contours became clearer in the 1940s.<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, the pursuit of Idealism increased the dependence of voluntary bodies like the WEA on the state and legitimised a welfare state in defence of the common good. However, with its emphasis on 'entitlements rather than duties, and material rather than moral progress', the welfare state represented a bitter defeat of Idealists who envisioned ethical and participatory citizenship as the fundamental antidote to the acquisitive and fragmented society.<sup>57</sup>

All in all, and despite the various shortcomings of the Idealist project, it should be acknowledged that the Idealist social theory deserves more credit than professional historians and philosophers have been willing to give. WEA Idealists formulated a unique project to ameliorate the modern social ills associated with class stratification and specialisation by promoting liberal adult education and constructing diverse but equal types of state schooling. Impractical as the project might have been in the 1940s, to the modern observer it yields insights about democratic society. The 'positive liberty' approach to democracy, with an emphasis on common participation and responsible citizenship, points a way to find meaning in a disenchanted world.<sup>58</sup> The twin principles of liberal learning and social service show the possibility of reconciling the individual with the collective. The proposal for different kinds of secondary schools with equal status was a well-meaning attempt to strike a balance between freedom and equality in the education

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<sup>55</sup> Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', pp. 116-41; Mark Bevir, 'Sidney Webb: Utilitarianism, Positivism, and Social Democracy', *Journal of Modern History*, 74:2 (2002), pp. 217-52.

<sup>56</sup> Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214-6. On the contrast between active/moral citizenship and passive/material citizenship, see e.g. Michael Freeden, 'Civil Society and the Good Citizen: Competing Conceptions of Citizenship in Twentieth-century Britain' in Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History*, pp. 275-91; Jose Harris, "'Contract" and "Citizenship"' in David Marquand and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *The Ideas that Shaped Post-war Britain* (London, 1996), pp. 122-38; Eugenia Low, 'The Concept of Citizenship in Twentieth-Century Britain: Analysing Contexts of Development' in Peter Catterall et al. (eds.), *Reforming the Constitution: Debates in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 2000), pp. 177-200.

<sup>58</sup> G. D. H. Cole, 'Democracy in the Twentieth Century', p. 5.

system. Above all, the Idealist vision reminds us of the values that are played down in an individualistic and professional society, such as solidarity, participation, mutual help, and the moral purpose of human society.<sup>59</sup> A crucial legacy of Idealism was the insight that these collectivist values are ingrained in and desired by humanity. In many ways, twenty-first-century societies are still living in the shadow of the loss of a common purpose. It is in this sense that Idealists and their practical efforts remain relevant to us.

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<sup>59</sup> For laments for the decline of the moral and participatory ideal of citizenship in the second half of the twentieth century, see e.g. David Marquand, *Decline of the Public: The Hollowing-Out of Citizenship* (Cambridge, 2004), esp. pp. 68-71; Jeremy Nuttall, 'Labour Revisionism and Qualities of Mind and Character', *English Historical Review*, 120:487 (2005), pp. 667-94. For the decline of Idealism as an overture for the rise of neo-liberalism in British social policy, see Jose Harris, 'Citizenship in Britain and Europe: Some Missing Links in T. H. Marshall's Theory', *ZeS-Arbeitspapier*, No. 02/2010, 2010, pp. 16-22, <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/43703> [accessed Mar 30 2015]; Ben Jackson, 'Richard Titmuss versus the IEA: The Transition from Idealism to Neo-Liberalism in British Social Policy', in Lawrence Goldman and Stephen Jones (eds.), *Welfare and Social Policy in Britain since 1870: Essays in Honour of Jose Harris* (Oxford, 2019).

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