

Working Class Adult Education in Yorkshire 1918 – 1939

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of History

December 2017

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Professor Richard Whiting and Professor Malcolm Chase for their patience, encouragement and calm guidance over the course of my PhD research. Richard Whiting's observations, comments and suggestions have always brought clarity to my thoughts and arguments. His unruffled, measured, incisive and constructive approach kept me on track for the duration. Malcolm Chase's recommended readings throughout added quality and depth to the final thesis. My navigation of the seas of historical research had the potential to be stormy. With the supervision I received, the outlook was generally clear and the going good.

For his good humour, kindness, encouragement and unwavering support, my thanks to Peter, always.

Abstract

This thesis considers the place of workers' adult education in the world of the British labour movement, and what impact it may have had on worker-students as citizens. It concentrates on three voluntary working class adult education organisations – the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), The National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), and the Co-operative. The WEA delivered an impartial, non-sectarian, non-political programme of education in the liberal arts and humanities with the support of universities and Local Education Authorities. The NCLC promoted a programme of Marxist education, and accepted support only from working class organisations, predominantly trade unions. The Co-operative wished to develop 'Co-operative character' through education as a means to building a 'Co-operative Commonwealth.'

This thesis explores the extent to which each organisation made an impact in Yorkshire between the wars. It does this in a variety of ways; by analysing the diversity of thought on socialism and democracy in the intellectual world of the labour movement during the inter-war era; presenting a historiographical context of workers' adult education in Yorkshire from the nineteenth to the twentieth century; evaluating the Co-operative's success at establishing a Co-operative Commonwealth through education; exploring the relationship between the trades councils of Yorkshire and the three adult education organisations; researching the biographies of municipal public students known to have been worker-students; analysing the value of workers' adult education from the perspective of the regional press; and studying the lived experience of workers' adult education from the perspective of worker-students, tutors and administrators.

The resounding theme that emerges by the end of the thesis is how working class adult education was connected consistently with democracy – that workers' adult education, whatever form it took, supported a democratic model of active participatory citizenship based on idealism, as well as ethical and moral interpretations of social democracy.

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Abbreviations

- ABF** – *Arbetarnas bildnings förbund*
- AEU** – Amalgamated Engineers Union
- ASLEF** – Associated Society of Locomotive Steam Enginemen and Firemen
- ASRS** – Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants
- ASSET** – Association of Supervisory Staffs Executives and Technicians
- AUBTW** – Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers
- BIAE** – British Institute of Adult Education
- BNO** – British Newspapers Online Archive
- BTC** – Bradford Trades Council
- CLC** – Central Labour College
- CPGB** – Communist Party of Great Britain
- HTC** – Halifax Trades Council
- ILP** – Independent Labour Party
- IWCE** – Independent Working Class Education
- LEA** – Local Education Authority
- LO** – *Landssekretariatet*
- LRC** – Labour Representative Committee
- LSE** – London School of Economics
- LTC** – Leeds Trades Council
- LFH & LSL** – Leeds Family History and Local Studies Library
- NCA** – National Co-operative Archive
- NCLC** – National Council of Labour Colleges
- NUDAW** – National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
- NUR** – National Union of Railwaymen
- PLP** – Parliamentary Labour Party
- SAP** – *Socialdemokratiska arbetarpartiet*
- SDF** – Social Democratic Federation
- SLP** – Socialist Labour Party
- SLSL** – Sheffield Local Studies Library
- STC** – Sheffield Federation Trades and Labour Council
- SWMF** – South Wales Miners Federation
- TGWU** – Transport and General Workers Union
- TUC** – Trade Union Congress
- ULA** – University of Leeds Archive

ULL – University of Leeds Library

USSC –University of Sheffield Special Collections

WEA – Workers’ Educational Association

WETUC – Workers Education Trade Union Committee

WYAS – West Yorkshire Archive Services

YA & LSL – York Archive & Local Studies Library

YMA – Yorkshire Miners Association

YFTC – Yorkshire Federated Trades and District Councils

Newspaper Abbreviations

***DT** – Driffield Times,*

***HDM** –Hull Daily Mail*

***LEP** – Lancashire Evening Post*

***LM** – Leeds Mercury*

***LWC** – Leeds Weekly Citizen*

***QoS** –Quality of Sheffield*

***STDI** –The Sheffield Telegraph and Daily Independent*

***SDI** – The Sheffield Daily Independent*

***ST** – The Sheffield Telegraph*

***YPLI** – Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*

***YP** – Yorkshire Post*

***YEP** – Yorkshire Evening Post*

***YEPr** –Yorkshire Evening Press*

***YG** – Yorkshire Gazette*

***YGH** –Yorkshire Gazette and Herald*

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore the significance of workers' adult education in Yorkshire between the two World Wars, in a political and intellectual framework that focuses on how workers' adult education supported active democratic participation. This introduction places the topic of workers' adult education in its historical context, explains why it was significant to the labour movement, and considers the legacy of working class adult education from the perspective of second-generation labour movement activists. It will also outline the forthcoming thesis chapters, explain the rationale for basing this work in Yorkshire and identify the type of education upon which the thesis focuses.

The Elementary Education Act 1880 made primary education in England and Wales compulsory to the age of ten. The 'Fisher Act' (the Education Act 1918) raised the school leaving age in England and Wales to fourteen.¹ However, even by the inter-war period, it remained extremely difficult for working class people to acquire any education beyond the age of fourteen because of a lack of wealth, time, and opportunity. With the extension of the voting franchise in 1918 and again in 1928, it became apparent to labour movement leaders and intellectuals that workers' adult education was a way of providing voters with the knowledge they needed to make informed democratic political decisions. As a consequence, the working class adult education movement, in tandem with the labour movement, gained momentum.

The main idea underpinning this thesis is that workers' adult education was vital to supporting democracy in Britain during the inter-war period. Working class adult education was widely idealised as a means of creating 'labour movement citizens' who shared a sophisticated understanding of social democracy. Through reliable workers' adult education, citizens would learn how to participate actively and democratically in local and national government. It was these 'adult students as citizens' – the product of a sound system of workers' adult education – who would, according to the ideals of the labour movement, transform the political landscape in favour of the working class.

This thesis will focus on three voluntary working class adult education organisations: the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), founded by Albert

¹ H. A. L Fisher was vice-chancellor of the University of Sheffield from 1912 to 1916. He became Minister for Education in 1916 and introduced reforms manifested in the Education Act 1918. For an account and analysis of Fisher's life see Harry Judge, 'H. A. L. Fisher: Scholar and Minister', *Oxford Review of Education*, 32, 1 (February, 2006), pp. 5–21.

Mansbridge in 1903; the labour colleges, collectively known as the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), established in 1906 by members of the Plebs League; and the Co-operative Union. The WEA delivered its programme of education by working with universities, and it accepted state funding from the Local Education Authorities (LEAs). The labour colleges and NCLC ran a Marxist programme of education, and rejected all forms of state intervention, accepting funding only from organisations they defined as working class, namely trade unions. The Co-operative Union self-funded its education programme, and delivered a mixed curriculum of technical, vocational and Owenite education. Crucially, central government played no part in founding or running these working class, voluntary, organic, educational organisations.

It is significant that many post-1918 Labour Party politicians had a background in workers' adult education. 'In 1945, fourteen members of the Attlee government were tutors, former tutors or members of the WEA executive and fifty-six MPs were either WEA tutors or former students.'² Among them were Arthur Greenwood, Tom Williams, Hugh Gaitskell, Hugh Dalton, Clement Attlee, and Richard Crossman. Other MPs, including Jack Lawson and Aneurin Bevan, had attended Ruskin College and the Central Labour College (CLC), the flagship labour college. This generation of Labour Party politicians were influenced and befriended by the previous generation of labour movement activists – R. H. Tawney, G. D. H. Cole, Harold Laski, and the Webbs – all involved to a greater or lesser extent in workers' adult education.³

In order to contextualise the debate about the value of workers' adult education to democracy, it is useful to consider its legacy from the perspective of labour movement activists of the post-1945 era. Before 1945, most Labour Party politicians had working class backgrounds, and had not attended university. By contrast, Gaitskell, Dalton, Crossman and Attlee represented a new type of Labour Party member. They all came from relatively wealthy backgrounds and had all attended university, Brian Brivati describing Gaitskell as 'a socialist who was made and not born.'⁴ They chose, despite their class backgrounds, to support the Labour Party because of their ideological commitment to socialism. The later views of Crossman and Gaitskell about the WEA help evaluate the legacy of the inter-war experiment of workers' adult education for democracy.

² <http://www.wea-essexoutreach.supanet.com/About_the_WEA/early_days.htm> (Accessed 07 December 2016).

³ The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <www.oxforddnb.com> (ODNB) provides biographies for most of the people referred to in this thesis.

⁴ Brian Brivati, *Hugh Gaitskell* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1996), p. 24; 'Hugh Gaitskell', *ODNB*, (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

Richard Crossman MP, cabinet minister and one-time tutor for the WEA, expressed great disillusionment with the WEA's aims to build a participatory social democratic state:⁵

I've always worked on the assumption that you can make democracy work by education and communication: by enabling people to be not formal voters but active participants, settling their own fortunes, taking part in collective decisions. But in this country people don't want to take part in collective decisions. In the W.E.A we failed completely [...] to get anything approaching mass participation [...] What we now have is mass-indifference and mass alienation [...] I have spent my whole life trying to give people a chance to narrow that gap through education.

In the same entry, Crossman reflected on a conversation he had with his close friend George Hodgkinson about the value of adult education:⁶

But the thing which we two care about most – the creation of a living social democracy – is the one thing which has not come with affluence and mass-education and television. Instead of civilised participation we're getting violence and riot [...] I can't help wondering if the whole of my life has been lived in vain and if that is not the reason why I'm so glad to have given up adult education and journalism and taken on a spell as a professional politician – a member of the ruling establishment [...] Is it hypocrisy to say this? No, because I've abandoned the aims in which I believed in the W.E.A and I now accept that the settled and just management of society by a progressive oligarchy is probably the best we can hope for.⁷

Gaitskell had a less despondent view of his experience of workers' adult education. At Cole's suggestion, Gaitskell took up a teaching post for the WEA in Nottingham. Of his experience in the WEA, Gaitskell said:

Having heard Douglas [Cole] talk about the WEA I had sometimes wondered if I could do this sort of job but thought it probably beyond me. Yet there I was being offered a start at once [...] It was my experiences there – especially in the coal fields – which were to turn me later towards active politics.⁸

Gaitskell's time as a WEA tutor brought him into contact with intelligent working class people – mainly miners – and helped clarify his political outlook, which supported state intervention as a way of building a fairer economy and society. In his support for state intervention on behalf of the individual, he was perhaps more in tune than was Crossman with the mass of the working class electorate.

⁵ Duncan Bythell, 'Richard Crossman', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

⁶ George Hodgkinson (1893-1986) left school at the age of thirteen and became an engineer. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (his union) nominated him for a scholarship at Ruskin College where he studied economics. Hodgkinson, in 1923, became the full time Labour Party agent in Coventry, a post he held for thirty-five years. He and Richard Crossman, MP for Coventry were good friends. Richard Temple, 'George Edward Hodgkinson' in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Joyce M Bellamy, John Saville (eds) Assisted by David E Martin, Vol. X (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 95-100; Temple, 'George Hodgkinson', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

⁷ Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister 1966 - 1968, Vol. 2* (London: Hamish Hamilton & Jonathan Cape, 1976), pp. 779-780.

⁸ Hugh Gaitskell quoted by Philip M Williamson in *Hugh Gaitskell. A Political Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1979), p. 22.

Crossman's disillusionment with the WEA suggests that he may not have gauged accurately the level of support for his model of participatory social democracy amongst working class people. What it also shows is that when he was involved with the WEA, he understood and shared their vision of a social democracy supported by well-educated, working class labour movement citizens. Crossman's disillusionment is significant because he, like many others, committed himself to the project of education for democracy to create a vital and engaged, democratically-minded mass electorate. That this did not come to pass explains his disillusionment. The aim of this thesis is to investigate the aspirations and ideals of working class adult education during the inter-war period, when it *was* a vital and organic movement, and perceived as a way to enact political social democratic change in support of working class people.

Post-war intellectuals also contributed to the debate about the political significance of workers' adult education. Chief among them were E. P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, Asa Briggs and Richard Hoggart.⁹ During their careers, all of them worked in adult education as tutors. Williams, in 1961, discussing why tutors should interact with their students as equals, had this to say on the topic:

I've often defined my own social purpose as the creation of an educated and participating democracy. The WEA taught me much, in defining these terms. It has always stood for the principle that ordinary people should be highly educated, as an end justifying itself and not simply as means to power. Equally it has always stood for the principle that society is a method of common and general participation, and it exemplifies this in its own work.

Williams outlined the contemporary relevance of the WEA in the 1960s, a time when education at all levels was becoming much more accessible:

The WEA [...] stands for an educated democracy, not for a newly mobile and more varied elite. Its historic mission is as urgent and central today as it was in the 1900s, because its basic challenge stands out much more clearly, and is no longer propped up by simple missionary feelings, that the fortunate should help the unfortunate, or by simple class feelings, that the odd pearl should be picked out of the swineheap.¹⁰

His analysis of the purpose of the WEA corresponded with Crossman's idea that workers' adult education had the potential to shape a living social democracy. But, Williams also presented the idea that education was an important end in itself. He implied that education was *the* great equaliser that would cancel out the importance of

⁹ John Rule, 'Edward Palmer Thompson', *ODNB*; H. C. G. Matthew, 'Raymond Williams', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, 'An Open Letter to WEA Tutors' (1961), p. 2. <<http://weaeducation.typepad.co.uk/files/raymond-williams-an-open-letter-to-wea-tutors-1.pdf>> (Downloaded 09 October 2017).

wealth and social status because, felt Williams, a society that valued education over wealth and class would be one well on its way to becoming a social democratic society.

E. P. Thompson shared Williams' attitude to adult education. Thompson worked as a tutor for the WEA in West Yorkshire for seventeen years under the auspices of the extra-mural department of the University of Leeds run by S. G. Raybould. He chose adult education 'because it offered the Morris-like possibility of 'making socialists' at the same time as it opened into new avenues of learning for himself.'¹¹ Thompson's contact with worker-students gave him a different perspective of their lives that contributed to his great work *The Making of the English Working Class*.¹² Indeed, Thompson dedicated the book to WEA students Dorothy and Joseph Greenald, a working class married couple, and close friends of his.¹³

Richard Hoggart identified that there remained a need for adult education, despite the expansion of the education system.¹⁴ However, despite his support of adult education, Hoggart's seminal work *The Uses of Literacy* reflected Crossman's verdict that the WEA had failed in its mission to educate for democracy. Mass media and popular culture had superseded traditional working class culture, to obliterate the true value and necessity of workers' adult education. Hoggart expressed his idea elegantly:

The economic barriers to knowledge have been largely removed, but there is still a struggle – to ignore the myriad voices of the trivial and synthetic sirens [...] At the centre of [the WEA's] work it must offer a kind of discipline to its students, one which is sharply opposed to the trivialisation, the fragmentation and the opinionation encouraged by popular providers. The possibility of speaking to the condition of the much larger numbers of people who are not intellectually inclined is not within the province of the WEA as it is at present organised.¹⁵

Asa Briggs, in 1958, distinguished between what he termed 'quiz knowledge' proliferated by mass culture and 'education in controversial issues [...] which depends not on competition but on co-operation.' This was the sort of education that the WEA provided and, in Briggs' view, remained important as a means of cultivating a sense of social solidarity and civic responsibility. Briggs went so far as to say that if mass media

¹¹ Bryan D Palmer, *EP Thompson, Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 65.

¹² E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, New York, Toronto: Penguin, 1968).

¹³ David Goodway, 'Dorothy Greenald, Obituary', *The Guardian* (15 April 2002) <<http://www.theguardian.com>> (Accessed 22 November 2017); Rule, 'Edward Palmer Thompson'.

¹⁴ Richard Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning (Life and times, Vol. II: 1940-59)* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990), p. 95.

¹⁵ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 262.

were the only option for adult education, and if the WEA and adult education as a movement did not exist, it would be a ‘matter of urgency to get one started.’¹⁶

Here we see a desire amongst post-war Labour Party politicians and intellectuals to move away from a model of representative democracy towards a more self-aware participatory social-democratic model. Workers’ adult education was to have played a significant role in this project but, in light of the vast expansion of the education system, mass media and popular culture since 1945, the social democratic purpose of workers’ adult education was diluted. This then is how the legacy of workers’ adult education was perceived by the post-1945 generation of labour movement intellectuals and politicians.

This thesis will examine the role of workers’ adult education in the development of the democracy and the growth of the labour movement at a time when there was a vital and organic movement to do so. It will focus on Yorkshire because, as Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds have shown, the labour movement was well established ‘in the politics of the West Yorkshire regions’ between the wars, and indeed both refer to West Yorkshire as a ‘Labour Heartland.’¹⁷ They show that the Labour Party increased their municipal seats in West Yorkshire from 85 in 1913 to 157 in 1929. Laybourn and Reynolds argue, using evidence from municipal elections, that the Labour Party replaced the Liberal Party to become the leading political party in West Yorkshire.¹⁸ Other researchers such as Helen Mathers, Michael Meadowcroft and Brenda Powell also provide evidence of the growth of the labour movement prior to and following the First World War in their municipal studies of Leeds and Sheffield.¹⁹ Up to 1929, the Labour Party in Yorkshire appeared to be gaining representation on municipal councils, although during the period of the second Labour Government (1929 to 1932) it lost some of these municipal gains. Sam Davies and Bob Morley have presented evidence to support this trend in their statistical analysis of Labour’s performance in municipal

¹⁶ Asa Briggs, *Adult Education and Mass Culture*, The William F Harvey Memorial Lecture, Nottingham University (08 March 1958), pp. 19–24. On the theme of what constitutes education see Jonathan Rée, ‘Socialism and the Educated Working Class’, pp. 211–218 in *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880–1914*, ed. By Carl Levy (London, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987).

¹⁷ Keith Laybourn and Jack Reynolds, *Labour Heartland. A History of the Labour Party in West Yorkshire during the Inter War Years 1918 – 1939* (Bradford, Bradford University Press, 1987), p. xi.

¹⁸ Laybourn and Reynolds, *Labour Heartland*, pp. 57–62.

¹⁹ Helen E. Mathers, ‘Sheffield Municipal Politics 1893-1926. Parties, Personalities and the Rise of Labour’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 1979); Michael Meadowcroft, ‘Transition in Leeds City Government 1903 – 1926: An Examination of the Effects Upon Policy, Representation and Operation of the Transition from a Conservative-Liberal Monopoly to a Council Dominated by Conservative and Labour’ (Unpublished M. Phil Thesis, University of Bradford, 1978); Brenda M. Powell, ‘A Study of the Change in Social Origins, Political Affiliations and Length of Service of Members of the Leeds City Council 1888-1953’, (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Leeds, 1958)

elections in Yorkshire between 1929 and 1932. Their work implies that, although the Labour Party had replaced the Liberal Party as the second political party in Yorkshire, it had yet to transform Yorkshire into a true labour stronghold.²⁰

Laybourn and Reynolds also argue that ‘the demographic and economic trends favoured the growth of the Labour Party’ in Yorkshire.²¹ Bernard Barker recognised these trends and, in his study of the success of the Labour Party in Yorkshire, pointed out that ‘the social background of Yorkshire MPs and prominent activists was not unlike that of the Parliamentary Labour Party after 1922.’²² In tandem with the expansion and success of the Labour Party came an expansion of workers’ adult education in Yorkshire.

Although other studies have addressed the impact of workers’ adult education on the labour movement in different regions during the inter-war era, none have dealt with Yorkshire specifically.²³ This thesis will add to the historical record in this area. It is for these reasons that this thesis takes Yorkshire as its example of a large region undergoing a political, economic and social transition during the inter-war years that pre-disposed it to a broader experience of active social democracy than before the First World War. Workers’ adult education supported this transition. Though many examples of workers’ adult education and its impact will be drawn from Yorkshire, the thesis will also convey, for the purposes of context, a national view of the world of workers’ adult education and the labour movement.

Workers’ adult education during the inter-war period came in many different forms, and it is important to acknowledge them as well as to clarify the type of adult education that this thesis focuses on. Individual co-operative societies, for example, offered courses and classes on singing, the theatre and play-writing. Such courses and activities were valued by their local communities, and served in many cases to unify the

²⁰ Sam Davies and Bob Morley, ‘The Reactions of Municipal Voters in Yorkshire to the Second Labour Government, 1929 – 32’, in *Labour’s Grass Roots: Essays on the Activities of Local Labour Parties and Members, 1918–45*, ed. by Matthew Worley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); For an analysis of the Labour Party’s electoral performance in the coalfields, including those of Yorkshire between the Wars see Duncan Tanner, ‘The Labour Party and Electoral Politics in the Coalfields’, in *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1919 – 1947* ed. by Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and David Howell (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

²¹ Laybourn and Reynolds, *Labour Heartland*, p. 5.

²² Bernard Barker, ‘The Politics of Propaganda’. ‘A Study in the Theory of Educational Socialism and its Role in the Development of a National Labour Party in London and the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1914–1924’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 1972), p.vi.

²³ Ruth Frow, ‘Independent Working Class Education, with Special reference to South Lancashire’ (Unpublished M. Ed Thesis, University of Manchester, 1968); Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers. Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906–1940* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993); Margaret Cohen, ‘The Labour College Movement Between the Wars: National and North–West Developments’, in *The Search for Enlightenment: The Working Class and Adult Education in the Twentieth Century* ed. by Brian Simon (Leicester: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).

community. Also, as will be seen in Chapter Three, the Co-operative Union offered vocational courses in technical subjects and business management, using education as a means by which students might improve their work prospects. Another interesting aspect of workers' adult education was how the tutors approached teaching particular subjects. Alexander Hutton's work gives particular insight into how and why tutors of the WEA taught the industrial revolution to their students.²⁴ Hutton's research highlights the cultural relevance to contemporary society of particular topics – such as the Industrial Revolution – that were taught by adult educationalists. Students also valued education highly as an end in itself, an escape from ordinary life and a means to self-improvement.

Women's education for citizenship became the focus of organisations such as the Women's Institute, the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds and the Mothers Union following the Franchise Acts of 1918 and 1928. Caitríona Beaumont's research in this area provides rich and detailed information on how these organisations worked to support women from different class backgrounds in their daily and political lives.²⁵ At the same time as providing education for citizenship, these and other women's organisations provided popular cookery and dress-making classes to which women students enthusiastically subscribed. Beaumont's work in this area is comprehensive, and this thesis will not repeat her work with regard to women's adult education during the inter-war period.

While this thesis acknowledges the importance and value of the broader variety of different types of cultural and political education offered by voluntary working class adult education organisations at this time, this thesis does, however, focus only on the significance of workers' adult education as a way of supporting and encouraging active democratic citizenship and participation in public service, as was disseminated by the WEA, the NCLC and the Co-operative. It was the liberal arts and humanities and economics that were identified as the key subjects that connected worker-students' lives to the political sphere. For this reason, this thesis concentrates on these subjects, and how worker-students may have transferred to their political lives what they learned in adult education classes on these specific subjects.

²⁴ Alexander Hutton, 'Culture and Society in Conceptions of the Industrial Revolution in Britain 1930–1965', Unpublished PhD Thesis, (University of Cambridge, 2015).

²⁵ Caitríona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens. Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 48-62.

Chapter One will continue the introduction by situating the thesis topic, with an analysis of the historiography of workers' adult education and of the intellectual life of the labour movement. Chapter Two explores the evolution of workers' adult education from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, using a framework of continuity and change with reference to Yorkshire. Chapter Three examines the role of the Co-operative, the WEA and the NCLC in shaping the ideological element of workers' adult education.

Unfortunately it has not been possible fully to locate the Co-operative as a voluntary working class educational organisation in Yorkshire because of a lack of relevant sources. In particular, it was not possible to find sources generated by individual societies in Yorkshire that gave useful information about the type of education they valued, and whether or not it complied with the recommendations of the central education committee of the Co-operative Union. Therefore the Co-operative has been dealt with largely as a national organisation whose rhetoric on education guided individual societies.

Also, as a working class organisation, the Co-operative had a dual purpose – commercial and educational – that compromised its ability fully to realise its educational ambitions. As a consequence it existed on the periphery rather than at the centre of the working class adult education movement in Britain. The WEA and the NCLC were completely dedicated, to the exclusion of all else, to the dissemination of workers' education, and therefore displaced the Co-operative as twentieth century working class adult education organisation. The Co-operative, as a nineteenth and twentieth century organisation, failed to assert itself in this new more politicised culture of workers' education. For this reason the Co-operative is dealt with as a separate, albeit still important, working class organisation whose ethos and relationship with the WEA and NCLC supported, rather than defined, the working class adult education movement of the inter-war period.

Chapter Four focuses on the activities of the labour colleges sponsored by trades councils in Yorkshire. Chapter Five, Parts I and II set out and then analyse the biographies and activities of notable public servants in Yorkshire, all of whom were former WEA students. Chapter Six, Parts I and II evaluate the social, political and economic relevance of workers' adult education by analysing local and regional newspaper reports. Finally, Chapter Seven presents and analyses the lived experience of workers' adult education from the perspective of worker-students, women, tutors, organisers, and educationalists, using in particular, and for the first time, the unique

perspective of contemporaneous student reflections, as contained in the handwritten log books from WEA classes of the time. The Conclusion draws together the central argument of the thesis: that workers' adult education in Yorkshire was a profound and democratising experience on several levels for all those involved in it.

The implication of this argument is that workers' education in Britain during the inter-war period was important as a way of supporting and consolidating the practice of democracy in local as well as national government. In addition, a foundation in workers' education made it easier for working class men and women to play a more constructive part in the evolving democratic process, making the demographic profile of city councils much more diverse and representative of the electorate than before the First World War, something made especially significant in the context of the 1918 and 1928 Franchise Acts that gave working class men and women the vote.

The major implication of this thesis, then, is to identify and emphasise the role of liberal arts, humanities and economics adult education, not just in providing an evening pastime for the working classes, but in educating workers for active democratic citizenship and public service in Britain. At a volatile time, when democracies across Europe were in very real danger of turning into tyrannies, it might be no exaggeration to say that workers' adult education was perceived as having the potential to safeguard the integrity of British democracy.

CHAPTER ONE

The Intellectual life of the Labour Movement and Workers' Adult Education

The WEA, the NCLC and the Co-operative each delivered workers' adult education in order to promote their respective visions of society, as well as to empower the working class. Each organisation had different, sometimes conflicting, ideas about the political and social purpose of workers' adult education. The ideas held by each organisation's respective educationalists' ideas closely corresponded to prevailing interpretations of Marxist, socialist and social democratic theories that existed between the wars. By understanding these different interpretations, we may gain a clearer insight of the political and social impact of workers' adult education during the inter-war era.

This chapter places the phenomenon of workers' adult education in a historiographical framework of the intellectual life of the labour movement, with four main analyses of the historiography; The first considers Ross McKibbin's analysis of why there was no Marxism in Britain. The second, expanding McKibbin's analysis, presents two different perspectives of the intellectual life of the labour movement as interpreted by Stuart Macintyre and Mark Bevir.¹ The third analysis considers the concept of social democracy, and how it was applied during the inter-war period. The fourth analysis presents the historiography of workers' adult education between the wars in relation to the intellectual world of the labour movement, the key historians who have explored this relationship being Roger Fieldhouse, Jonathan Rose and Lawrence Goldman. The ideas introduced in this chapter will be expanded upon in the wider thesis.

Why was there no Marxism in Britain?

There is no better place to start than with Ross McKibbin's question: why was there no Marxism in Britain? He proposes that in Britain 'there was no environment from which a revolutionary working class could emerge.'² By his analysis, Marxism in Britain was limited because class divisions, though firmly embedded in society, did not prevent working class people from pursuing their own social, political and economic interests. McKibbin states that 'the working classes inherited an ideology of rights which was both permissive and restraining.' This is the key to his overarching argument – that the

¹ Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science. Marxism in Britain 1917-1933* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980); Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2011).

² Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class. Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 39.

working classes possessed time-honoured rights enshrined in the British Constitution that made them equal in principle, if not in practice, to their middle- and upper-class counterparts. McKibbin argues that such an arrangement

allowed the vigorous pursuit of working-class interests within the economy while confining the working class to ceremonial and conventional institutions whose ideological pre-eminence was based upon fairness and adherence to the rules.³

The idea of fair play, together with respect of, and faith in, the rule of law, as well as in state institutions of Parliament and the Monarchy permeated British society at all levels. In consequence British society was far more cohesive and united than its continental counterparts. McKibbin's main point here is that unless a sizeable portion of the industrial working class chose to reject the existing social and political institutions, as well as committing to 'the unity of 'economics and 'politics', Marxism could not flourish. By contrast, on the Continent and in Russia, workers' rights were severely compromised and their livelihoods dictated by the economics and politics of a wealthier class. McKibbin's conclusion is that 'the Labour Party was not free to choose between Marxism and reformism, but only between varieties of reformism,' and it is these 'varieties of reformism' that form the subject of this thesis.⁴

The intellectual life of the labour movement

If there was no Marxism in Britain, what then was there? Macintyre and Bevir present interesting answers to this question. Macintyre's intellectual history of the British labour movement focuses on two ideologies – Marxism and 'Labour Socialism'. He gives each ideology specific characteristics that juxtapose each other, and then analyses how they were applied in the British context.

³ McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, p. 38.

⁴ McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, pp. 38–41.

TABLE 1

Stuart Macintyre's definitions of Labour Socialism and Marxism⁵

LABOUR SOCIALISM	MARXISM
Ethical	Scientific
Empirical	Systematic
Constructive	Critical
Idealist/ Educationalist	Materialist
Corporate	Oppositional
Reformist	Revolutionary

The general analysis presented in *A Proletarian Science* gives the impression that Marxism in Britain did not flourish because it failed to grasp and hold the imagination of the mass of the working class. Macintyre's main argument for the failure of British Marxism is

that prior to 1917 Marxism in this country was preached by bands of enthusiasts who were largely isolated from the great mass of the British working class, and that this was manifested above all in the absence of a viable political strategy.

A moment when this state of affairs could have changed was when British Marxists, inspired by the Russian Revolution in 1917, as well as by domestic events

re-constructed their Marxism so that a distinct type of working-class Marxist came to enjoy a relationship with the rest of his class that was no longer an external one and in some instances can be regarded as organic.⁶

Macintyre uses evidence of the emergence of 'Little Moscows' such as Mardy in South Wales or the Vale of Leven in Dumbartonshire, Scotland, to show how Marxism became, in these places, an organic element of working class communities. His analysis of the phenomenon of Little Moscows is strongest and most cogent when he observes:

The crucial achievement of the Communists in Mardy was to situate their Marxist ethos within this close-knit, communal tradition. Unlike the majority of British Marxists, they did not represent a minority sub-culture at odds with the majority; they were affirmative rather than oppositional, appropriating the sense of community, rejecting or by-passing some of its forms but reproducing others, and always maintaining the underlying sense of community and solidarity.⁷

⁵ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 49.

⁶ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 236.

⁷ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 41.

On the whole, though, Macintyre concludes that Marxism failed to be assimilated into British culture and tradition as lived by the majority and, in consequence, became a marginal ideology.

Macintyre makes an interesting distinction between ‘Labourism’ and Labour Socialism.⁸ Labourism clung to ‘that earlier set of customs, habits and attitudes [...] that strongly influenced the lives and thought-processes of the British working class.’ Here he acknowledges the traditions of the British Labour Movement, invoking phrases such as ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work’ and ‘The labourer is worthy of his hire’ to describe traditional attitudes of the industrial working class. But Macintyre dismisses these slogans that aimed to improve the lives of working class people of the Victorian era as ‘glosses’ and spin, made by Trade Union leaders such as George Howell ‘to tell a non-working-class audience what it wanted to hear and only secondly to influence the workers themselves.’ This was Labourism, whereas, ‘the purpose of Labour Socialism [...] was to lift the working class up from its lowly preoccupation with wages and conditions, and to endow it with a sense of social purpose.’⁹

Macintyre perhaps overstates this distinction in the context of British worker-employer relationships during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Workers may have had more control over their employment than is generally acknowledged. Employers expected hard work and long hours from their employees but, conversely, workers expected their employers to treat and pay them fairly. The idea of fair play played a significant role in this unwritten contract between worker and employer. Fair play depended upon elements of mutual trust and morality whereby, if worker and employer respected the rules and tradition of fair play, each would do what was right by the other. The idea of fair play, understood and shared by all sections of British society, is significant because its application was important to socialists and non-socialists alike, well before the emergence of the New Unionism and re-invigoration of Marxist and social democratic ideology in the 1880s.

Macintyre takes his analysis of Labour Socialism further, identifying it as a socialist ideology based on progress and historical determinism. MacDonald’s Labour Party existed to enlighten the working class as to their rights to the means of production, and how to tilt the social balance of power in their favour. Sidney Webb’s theory of ‘the inevitability of gradualism’ would prevail, and the socialist state would eventually be

⁸ For further discussion of ‘Labourism’ see John Saville, *The Labour Movement in Britain* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp. 16-22; Stephen Yeo, ‘Notes on Three Socialisms – Collectivism, Statism and Associationism – Mainly in Late-Nineteenth- and Early – Twentieth – Century Britain’, in *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914*.

⁹ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 55.

established through a process of political evolution and working class education. However, MacDonald's Labour Party never renounced its commitment to democracy, parliamentarianism, constitutionalism and ethical capitalism. In all these arenas, the Labour Party of the 1920s and 1930s showed a profound commitment and attachment to firmly established British traditions.

Another aspect of Macintyre's work focuses on the role of education in disseminating class-consciousness amongst working class people to prepare them for a socialist way of life. Education was a central element of the programmes of all British socialist groups. Macintyre states that 'education remained a powerful catalyst of the proletarian consciousness and worker-students continued to discover that 'Knowledge is Power'.¹⁰ Here, the long-standing British tradition and culture of working class adult education, auto-didacticism and self-help that flourished in the nineteenth century emerges as an influential factor in the British socialist project of the twentieth century.

The key assumption made by many Marxists and socialists was that education would teach working class people how to think about, and how to live, their lives, in accordance with socialist principles. It further assumed that working class people, if educated about the benefits and superiority of socialist ideology over the evils of capitalism, could not fail to embrace socialism as a way of life. The science of Marxism supported this approach. If this process of ideological education worked, so the assumption continued, then it was logical that the majority of working class people would become socialists. Education about socialism would change the prevailing paternalistic and individualistic capitalist culture to one that empowered working class people. Socialism as an ideology would thus gain the political support of the critical mass of the proletariat. The educated proletariat would challenge the hegemony of the state by establishing a new working class culture that would revolutionise the state. This was the general idea behind the Marxist approach to providing socialist education for the working class.

The question to ask is: did it work? More specifically, was there a significant shift in class-consciousness as a consequence of political education of this sort? Did education really help instil a sense of socialism in the mass of working class people? Is it reasonable to assume that the promise of socialism offered a glimpse of a superior way of life to the working class? What was the working class person's perception of 'education for socialism'?

¹⁰ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 70.

In answer to these questions, Macintyre analyses the phenomenon of working class auto-didacticism in relation to specific individuals, as well as in relation to the emergence of Marxist voluntary education organisations such as the Plebs, the labour colleges and the NCLC. These organisations rejected all forms of state funding and disseminated what they called Independent Working Class Education (IWCE) to working class adult students.

Frank Parkin's theory of political deviance in relation to voting behaviour is relevant when thinking about workers' education as provided by the labour colleges.¹¹ Parkin speculated that working class people often fell in with the dominant political environment in which they found themselves living. As a consequence of such immersion, they voted according to the prevailing consensus, be it conservative, liberal or socialist. The Plebs and their fellow travellers recognised that, without alternatives, working class people would forever be tied into the class interests of others. Though the Plebs were a marginal group, their views on alternatives to state and evolutionary socialism were important, because they wished to construct a new social, economic and political culture based solely on working class interests. Their interpretation of socialism was thus revolutionary. Unlike the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), the Plebs were committed to achieving a mass change in class-consciousness as a prerequisite for such a revolution. This position implied a desire for non-violent change, but was highly idealistic, and ultimately failed. Nonetheless they represented what could have been an interesting alternative to other less radical forms of socialism.

Macintyre, when discussing auto-didacticism presents individual worker-intellectual case studies. One such individual, Harry Quelch, 'had come to London in the 1870s as a shop-boy and was later a factory worker and warehouse packer.'¹² With an incredible thirst for knowledge, Quelch succeeded in teaching himself French so that he could read Marx's *Das Kapital*, available at the time only in French. Quelch also taught himself German and Latin. He went on to become secretary of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF). Like other worker-intellectuals, Quelch had an awkward relationship with his unschooled fellow workers. Through his efforts to become educated, he fundamentally changed himself and created a great distance between his thinking and that of his comrades. Many of his short stories, written for the SDF,

¹¹ Frank Parkin, 'Working-Class Conservatives: A Theory of Political Deviance', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 18 (1968), p. 289.

¹² Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 71. Harry Quelch (1813-1913) was the brother of Lorenzo (Len) Edward Quelch, a trade union organiser, Labour councillor and alderman. John S Partington, 'QUELCH, Lorenzo ('Len') (1862-1937)' in *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, ed. by Keith Gildart and David Howell XIII (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 319-334.

featured the sensible, aspirational, decent socialist being taken advantage of by his ne'er-do-well fellow workers.¹³ By lampooning non-intellectual workers, Quelch displayed a paradoxical disdain for them as equals. An inverse, unhealthy, deconstructive snobbery manifested itself in this situation, and it would serve to limit the educational aims of Marxists and socialists. A lack of respect between different working class groups, exhibited here as the self-educated working class person, contemptuous of their uneducated comrades and vice versa, was as damaging to the socialist project as was the outright opposition of capitalist employers.

This phenomenon shows how the British working class as a whole were *not* a straightforward homogenous group that could be easily moulded or altered to fit the specifications and characteristics of an ideology such as Marxism. A one-size socialism or Marxism was never going to fit all elements of the British working class. This was where evangelical Marxists and socialists came undone in their thinking on how education could bring about a mass change in political culture.

On the topic of adult education, Macintyre asserts that 'the mission of the WEA was to break down the isolation of working-class students and integrate them in a national culture.'¹⁴ This line of thinking proposes that the state used the WEA as a quasi-government organisation to limit the Marxist radicalisation of adult worker students. Macintyre's argument does not take into account the agency of individual worker students, who had the power and capacity to choose for themselves what sort of education they wanted. This will be investigated more fully in later chapters.

Marxism, in its various twentieth century interpretations – Bolshevism, Leninism and Stalinism – failed to make a significant long-lasting impact on British society during the inter-war period. But, the nineteenth century ideologies of socialism and social democracy associated to Marxism did. The next section will analyse Bevir's work on the significance of traditions and dilemmas in the historiography of British Socialism.

Where Macintyre presents clear definitions of socialism, and analyses how each was manifested, Bevir chooses instead to 'narrate the history of socialism in terms of a diverse cluster of ideas and the traditions and dilemmas from which they emerged.' In his view, clear-cut definitions of what socialism was are not helpful when trying to understand the history of socialism in a non-teleological way. Bevir argues that

¹³ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 71.

¹⁴ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 91.

Socialism has no necessary core [...] socialism is a fluid set of beliefs and practices that people are constantly making and remaking and in which no one idea or action has a fixed or necessary place. Historians can define socialism only by tracing how it develops over time as its exponents inherit, debate, and modify beliefs and practices before passing them on to others.

By taking this more flexible approach, Bevir gives himself the freedom to explore the intellectual world of British socialists by ‘recovering the meanings of socialism for people who thought of themselves as socialists’ in the late nineteenth century. Bevir’s approach is valuable to this thesis because ‘it allows historians to pay greater attention to the varied ways in which past socialists defined themselves’, and, ‘Instead of imposing a particular concept of socialism back on the past, historians might concentrate on recovering various meanings, feelings, and ways of life that people have attached to socialism’.¹⁵

Bevir’s central argument is that socialist ideology in real life was not a rigid, static set of beliefs but rather ‘diverse and fluid phenomena that included a vast range of beliefs, feelings and activities.’ He highlights in particular how ‘Socialists made plural socialisms by drawing on inherited traditions to respond imaginatively to cultural, social, and political, dilemmas.’ The historian’s task, given this theoretical framework, is to understand the intellectual world of the British labour movement by ‘recovering the diversity of this movement – the different meanings it had for the people who were part of it.’¹⁶

He concentrates on the different strands of socialist thought that existed prior to the formation of the Labour Party, and focuses on the SDF, the Fabians and the ethical socialists of the 1880s and 1890s. In doing so, Bevir incorporates the three main ideological elements of British socialism – Marxism, social democracy and Christianity – into his analysis of the diversity of British socialism. His aim is to show which aspects of each strand of socialism were integrated into the Labour Party’s political vision, and which were rejected. Bevir highlights the importance of the agency of individuals in the historical context. He argues that

historians need [...] a theory that takes agency seriously while not reducing it to the pure experience of an independent social reality. The key idea here is that individuals are situated agents; they are agents who can act innovatively for reasons of their own, but their agency is situated in that they are necessarily influenced by social inheritances.¹⁷

¹⁵ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, pp. 12–14.

¹⁶ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 11.

His approach to a new historiography is to situate people in their historical contexts in order to fully appreciate *their* understanding of socialism. This idea is based on understanding the historical context and the ways in which individuals and communities responded to their ‘social ecology’. Such an approach allows the historian to account for the diversity in thought across a broad ideological spectrum. Key to this approach is to take full account of the significance of tradition in British society. Bevir uses the concept of tradition ‘to capture the social context as it affects the individual subject’.¹⁸

In his view

People necessarily encounter the world against the background of an inherited set of beliefs and meanings. Individuals construct their experiences and reach their beliefs influenced by inherited traditions.¹⁹

Bevir goes on to give a description of what tradition is: ‘Tradition is the background to all human activity. Tradition appears throughout social life, embedded in actions, practices and social movements just as much as within texts.’²⁰ In essence, by understanding tradition in the historical context, the historian can come to an understanding about why local individuals held a certain set of ideological beliefs. Tradition serves to explain their mind-sets and outlooks.

But what is it that *changes* an individual’s outlook? As Bevir makes clear, it is important to understand that traditions are not fixed or rigid codes. They change and alter, depending on the social, political and economic context. Bevir uses the concept of ‘dilemma’ to explain why traditions change and are adapted by individuals to work in new contexts. He proposes that ‘a dilemma arises for individuals or groups whenever they adopt a new idea or action and so have to accommodate it in their existing beliefs and practices.’²¹ Bevir identifies two major dilemmas that Victorian society faced in the latter part of the nineteenth century – ‘the collapse of classical economics and the crisis of faith’ – that pre-empted the emergence of British socialism:

British socialism emerged largely in response to these dilemmas. The crisis of faith led people to break with evangelicalism and to adopt ethical positivism and immanentist theologies that inspired moral emphases on humanitarianism and fellowship. The collapse of classical economics led people to explore new policy instruments and utopian visions.²²

Bevir presents an exciting intellectual world where different interpretations of socialism were introduced as viable alternatives to conservatism and liberalism. He

¹⁸ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 11.

¹⁹ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 12.

²⁰ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 12.

²¹ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 12.

²² Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, pp. 16–17.

explains how, through a complex process of diverse ideological responses by Marxists, Fabians and ethical socialists to political, economic and social dilemmas, political space was created for the formation of the SDF, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Labour Party. A new tradition was thus established – the social democratic political tradition. It is this newly established socialist-oriented political tradition at the start of the twentieth century that my thesis will re-examine in the context of workers’ adult education during the inter-war period. In connection with Bevir’s ideas, José Harris’s work on idealistic philosophy as the foundation of British socialism is also relevant to this thesis, and will be explored fully in Chapter Six.²³

How did the challenges and dilemmas of the 1920s and 30s alter the shape and form of socialism and social democracy in Britain? What was the relationship between workers’ adult education and the social democratic political tradition? These questions will be answered in subsequent chapters.

The concept of social democracy

The next section will consider the relationship between socialism and democracy. The idea of democracy twinned with socialism arises frequently in the historiography of the intellectual life of the inter-war labour movement. Primary sources detailing the philosophy of workers’ adult education also frequently cite the significance of democracy to the working class adult education movement. Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock analyse the emergence of democratic ideas and the British labour movement, showing that ‘before 1918 the trade union and socialist movements were, in Britain [...] major arenas [...] for arguments about democracy.’²⁴ They suggest that this was because ‘democratisation – of existing working-class and socialist organisations as well as of the political processes of the state – was, for many decades, central for most socialist and many trade union activists.’²⁵ During the inter-war period, organisations such as the WEA and the Co-operative, and to an extent the NCLC, continued to campaign for greater democratisation. Robert Blatchford (1851–1943)²⁶, founder of the *Clarion* and author of *Merrie England*, is an example of an ardent socialist who campaigned for greater democracy to support socialism:

²³ José Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State 1870 -1940: An Intellectual Framework for British Social Policy, *Past and Present*, 135 (May, 1992), pp. 116–141; ‘Platonism, Positivism and Progressivism: Aspects of British Sociological Thought in the Early Twentieth Century’, in *Citizenship and Community. Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865–1931*, ed. by Eugenio F. Biagini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁴ Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 3.

²⁵ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, p. 3.

²⁶ R. C. K. Ensor, ‘Robert Peel Glanville Blatchford’, *ODNB* (Downloaded 15 December 2017)

unless our English Socialists are sound and sane upon the question of true Democratic Government, the whole Socialist movement will be endangered and perhaps ruined by a few ambitious men.²⁷

Central to the need for democracy was the idea that working class people had to take responsibility for themselves and learn to self-govern by electing public servants who would be accountable to them to execute their wishes. Otherwise, as Blatchford declared, ‘Socialism without Democracy would be a state of abominable tyranny.’²⁸

Bullock and Barrow highlight the tension between achieving democracy as well as achieving socialism. How could both democracy and socialism be achieved? Barrow and Bullock identify two approaches. Firstly, there was the Fabian route, which they call the ‘legislativist’ approach. Here, elected socialist ‘experts’ would take the initiative in government and legislate for socialism. The legislativist approach ‘sought to achieve socially beneficial legislation not only for its own sake but also to promote or facilitate a radical change in consciousness.’²⁹ The Fabian approach to achieving socialism was based on weak representative democracy, the idea being to permeate government with experts, those who knew better, and trust that they would legislate wisely. Once the legislation was in place, the electorate would follow suit and embrace the process of becoming socialist.

The other approach to becoming socialist via democracy was the ‘educationist’ approach, which was much more complex and inclusive. This approach relied on a strong form of democracy that prioritised ‘making socialists’ by using education to ensure that voters took responsibility for their political decisions. Democratic educationists believed that

‘people’ would only really learn by being allowed to make their own ‘mistakes’ [...] [and that] this could only happen to the extent that they were really able to exercise free choice. This depended on having the ‘strongest’ forms of democracy.³⁰

Barrow and Bullock, quoting Fred Knee from an article entitled ‘Democracy v Demagoguery’ in the SDF journal *Justice*, isolate the key concept that supported democracy for socialisation: ‘We are doubtful of getting socialism except by and through democracy, and as no other but a democratic basis for socialism would be a lasting one, our duty is clear.’³¹

²⁷ Robert Blatchford, *Clarion* (28 July 1894), quoted by Barrow and Bullock in *Democratic Ideas*, p. 47.

²⁸ Blatchford, *Clarion* (03 November 1884), quoted by Barrow and Bullock in *Democratic Ideas*, p. 48.

²⁹ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, p. 295.

³⁰ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, p. 295.

Fred Knee in ‘Democracy v Demagoguery’, *Justice*, (17 July 1897) quoted by Barrow and Bullock, in *Democratic Ideas*, p. 298.³¹

Here, the importance of democracy for socialism is highlighted. It turns on its head the idea that democracy, as a political philosophy, is the basis of capitalism. Instead democracy, as understood by these sections of the labour movement in the early part of the twentieth century, could equally be the basis of socialism. The theme of ‘education for democracy’ appears over and over again in the literature about workers’ adult education during the inter-war period. It is perhaps a reflection of the democratic ideas held by the British labour movement prior to the First World War that Barrow and Bullock identify.

Although the movement of democracy for socialism faded during the inter-war period, aspects of it remained in the general discourse about achieving a socialist state. G. D. H. Cole (a lifelong supporter of the WEA) presented yet another way of using democracy to achieve socialism with his analysis of the democratic nature and function of associations.³² Cole questioned the supremacy and wisdom of the state as the ultimate arbiter of society, as, in his view, the state was only one amongst many associations that represented and carried out the desires and will of society.³³ Further, he argued that the idea of the state is based on ‘Force and Law’ and coercion. For Cole, the end did not justify the means, coercion. Force and law were not viable substitutes for the ‘will’ of society as conceived by Rousseau’s *Social Contract*. Cole supported the idea that ‘every approach to democracy makes the legitimate foundation of Society on the will of its members more manifest.’³⁴ Using the historical framework of the guild system, Cole emphasised the importance of three types of essential association to democracy – ‘political, vocational and appetitive’. In his view

each deals with a vital aspect of Social organisation, with an ‘interest’ vital to the mass of the members of the community, and each is based upon a deep-rooted and vital instinct of association.³⁵

For Cole, associations gave people belonging to them opportunities to participate actively in the democratic process. Instead of relying on representative democracy, whereby the will of the electorate was delegated to remote political figures, associative democracy would ‘combine representation with constant counsel from the constituents, and thus make it possible to abandon the theory of delegation without imperilling democratic control.’ Cole referred to this system as ‘functional democracy’.³⁶ His criticism of representative democracy was that once an individual cast his or her vote

³² Marc Stears, ‘G. D. H Cole’, *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

³³ G. D. H Cole, *Social Theory* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1920), p. 81.

³⁴ Cole, *Social Theory*, p. 8.

³⁵ Cole, *Social Theory*, p. 76.

³⁶ Cole, *Social Theory*, pp. 108–111.

there was ‘nothing left to do except to let other people govern him’.³⁷ Functional democracy, by contrast, opened up a political space for ordinary people to participate in democratic processes within their associations that impacted on their lives directly. Cole’s vision of functional democracy was to move away from the idea of ‘one man, one vote’ and move towards the idea of ‘one man, as many votes as interests, but only one vote in relation to each interest.’³⁸ Instead of seeing this system of democratic voting as an administrative nightmare, Cole argued that functional democracy was ‘far more democratic than it would be if everybody voted without interest or knowledge as they tend to do in parliamentary elections.’³⁹ Ideally, functional democracy via associations would develop a majority of keen voters but, in the absence of that ideal, ‘few and keen voters [were] the next best thing.’⁴⁰ Education was key to Cole’s project of functional democracy via associations.

Though Cole supported guild socialism as opposed to state socialism during the 1920s, Neil Riddell argues, that following the failure of the second Labour Government, Cole adapted his vision of functional democracy to suit a more collectivist system. Riddell makes a strong case for Cole’s shift from the ‘pluralism of guild socialism’ to state socialism through his analysis of Cole’s *The Next Ten Years* (1929).⁴¹ However, this thesis explores through workers’ adult education, the different manifestations that socialism took during the inter-war period. For this reason it remains important to be aware of Cole’s early ideas on guild socialism and functional democracy.

So far we have re-constructed the intellectual world of the labour movement during the inter-war era from several different historical ideological perspectives.⁴² The next sections will present a brief historiographical analysis of the place of workers’ adult education in that world.

³⁷ Cole, *Social Theory*, p. 114.

³⁸ Cole, *Social Theory*, pp. 114-115.

³⁹ Cole, *Social Theory*, p. 116

⁴⁰ Cole, *Social Theory*, p. 116.

⁴¹ Neil Riddell, ‘The Age of Cole? G. D. H. Cole and the British Labour Movement 1929-1933’, *The Historical Journal*, 30, 4 (December, 1995) p. 956; G. D. H. Cole, *The Next Ten Years in Economic and Social Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1929).

⁴² For other works on Marxism, socialism, social democracy, democracy and the labour movement please see Yeo, ‘Notes on Three Socialisms’; Stanley Pierson, *Marxism and the Origins of British Socialism. The Struggle for a New Consciousness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973); Stefan Berger, ‘Democracy and Social Democracy’, *European History Quarterly*, 32, 1 (2002) pp. 13-37; Noel, Thompson, ‘Hobson and the Fabians: Two Roads to Socialism in the 1920s’, *History of Political Economy*, 26 (1994), pp. 203–20; Duncan Tanner, ‘The Development of British Socialism, 1900-1918’, *Parliamentary History*, 16, 1 (February, 1997) pp. 28–66; José Harris, ‘Labour’s Political and Social Thought’, pp. 8–45 in *Labour’s First Century*, ed. by Duncan Tanner, Pat Thane and Nick Tiratsoo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); William Howard Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, Vol. 2* (London: Methuen, 1983).

The historiography of workers' adult education (1918-1939)

Roger Fieldhouse has extensively researched the history of workers' adult education in Britain.⁴³ He asks how the ideology of impartiality in education, exalted by Albert Mansbridge, contrasted 'with what actually took place in WEA and university extra-mural classes?'⁴⁴ This is an important question closely allied to the central theme of this thesis, namely whether workers' adult education as delivered by organisations such as the WEA contributed to the development of British socialism. Fieldhouse's research supports Stuart Macintyre's argument that the WEA neutralised the political beliefs of some students and subtly encouraged them to conform to the existing political tradition rather than revolutionise it.⁴⁵ Like Macintyre, he argues that the WEA won the approval of the Liberal government because they, the WEA, were 'a moderate political influence on the emerging working class and Labour Movement.'⁴⁶ Central to Fieldhouse's argument is that, because the WEA was part-funded by LEAs, the state exerted subtle pressure to restrict politically radical elements in the WEA, and that the WEA diverted 'the British working class and Labour movement from the allures of socialist thinking'.⁴⁷ But, in making these arguments, Fieldhouse also identifies the central contradiction of a liberal education system:

The dialectical process of liberal education must permit all arguments and ideas to be expressed and the best and most powerful to triumph. This means that it is always possible for an ideological unorthodox perspective to challenge the status quo, raise the political consciousness of the students, win the argument, and equip and encourage people to pursue a social purpose very different from the one favoured by the educational providers. It is this Socratic approach – dialectic rather than indoctrinating – that will bring ideological change.⁴⁸

Fieldhouse observed that, 'with its close affinity to the mainstream British liberal tradition, the adult education movement shared this central contradiction.'⁴⁹ Here the state nurtured a tradition of liberal education and also paradoxically cultivated a learning environment where there was space for new ideas to emerge and take hold of

⁴³ A selection of Fieldhouse's work includes: Roger Fieldhouse, 'The Ideology of English Responsible Body Adult Education 1925 – 1950' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leeds, 1984); *A History of Modern British Adult Education* (Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, 1996); 'The Ideology of Responsible Body of Adult Education Teaching, 1925–1950', *Studies in Adult Education*, 15 (1983), pp. 11–35; 'Voluntaryism and the State in Adult Education: the WEA and the 1925 TUC Education Scheme', *History of Education*, 10, 1 (1981), pp. 45–63; 'Conformity and Contradiction in English Responsible Body Adult Education, 1925 – 1950', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 17 (1985, October), pp. 121–34.

⁴⁴ Fieldhouse, 'The Ideology of Responsible Body of Adult Education Teaching', p. 11.

⁴⁵ Stuart Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, pp. 89–90.

⁴⁶ Fieldhouse, *A History of Modern British Adult Education*, p. 169.

⁴⁷ Roger Fieldhouse, *Adult Education History: Why rake up the past*, Sixteenth Albert Mansbridge Memorial Lecture (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1996), p. 2.

⁴⁸ Fieldhouse, 'Conformity and Contradiction in English Responsible Body Adult Education', p. 131.

⁴⁹ Fieldhouse, 'Conformity and Contradiction in English Responsible Body Adult Education', p. 132.

the national consciousness. This aspect of Fieldhouse's thought will be explored more fully throughout the thesis.

What is missing from Fieldhouse and Macintyre's analysis of the relationship between British socialism and the working class adult education movement, is the agency and free will of the participants. Lawrence Goldman and Jonathan Rose study this aspect of workers' adult education.

Goldman, opposing Fieldhouse, argues that worker-students aspired to Oxbridge education and – independently – chose the political reformism of the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) over more radical socialist options.⁵⁰ (Other historians who study workers' adult education follow similar lines of enquiry and argument to either Fieldhouse or Goldman.⁵¹)

Jonathan Rose and Sheila Rowbotham are primarily concerned with why working class people sought education, and how it then influenced them.⁵² Where Fieldhouse focuses on 'discerning the intentions of educational officials and WEA tutors' – the 'controllers' of education – Rose chooses to focus on the students themselves to ascertain what their intellectual aspirations were. Rose's questions are different from Fieldhouse's. Instead of asking how closely the WEA's teaching methods and curriculum corresponded with Mansbridge's ideology of impartiality and non-sectarianism in education, Rose asks

who were the students? Why did they enrol? What were their intellectual goals? What cultural equipment did they bring to the classroom? What went on inside the classroom? Most importantly, how if at all, did the WEA and Ruskin College change the lives and minds of its students?⁵³

This different set of questions, an approach focusing on the consumer rather than the provider, opens up a new field of historical study, one that this thesis will pursue.

⁵⁰ Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Working Class Education Since 1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁵¹ Brian Simon, (ed) *The Search for Enlightenment*; Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, 3rd edn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992); J. C. F Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790 – 1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961); Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*; Kevin Manton, *Socialism and Education in Britain 1883 – 1902* (London: Routledge, 2001); Sylvia Harrop (ed) *Oxford and Working Class Education* (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1987); John Lowe, *Adult Education in England and Wales* (London: Michael Joseph, 1970); Jonathan Rée, *Proletarian Philosophers: Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain 1900 – 1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Harold Silver, *Education as History* (London, New York: Meuthen & Co Ltd, 1983); Harold Silver, 'Higher Education and Social Change: Purpose in Pursuit?', *History of Education*, 36 (2007), pp. 535–50.

⁵² Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001); Sheila Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country': Responses of Working Class Students to the University Extension Movement – 1873 – 1910', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 62–95.

⁵³ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, p. 256.

Rose concludes about the WEA's social, cultural and political contribution to British society that 'at the grass-roots level, the WEA created an articulate and obstreperous working-class intelligentsia.'⁵⁴ It is this aspect of the history of working class adult education – the development of a robust, energised working class intelligentsia – that this thesis will investigate.

Recently historians have expressed renewed interest in the history of workers' education. Jenny Jansson's research explores why Sweden's 'reformist labour movement became strong, unified and influential' whereas Britain's remained fragmented and uncoordinated. The main problem she identifies is that 'different ideological factions ended up in conflict with each other [...] making labour weak.'⁵⁵ She concludes that 'the circumstances of worker's [*sic*] education in Britain did not favour its use by labour leaders as an instrument for class formation.'⁵⁶ Jansson's arguments about the failure of the British labour movement to become 'strong, unified and influential' in connection with how labour movement organisations controlled the dissemination of workers' education, resonate with arguments made by Rodney Barker. His views give more specific insights into the attitude of the British Labour Party towards the value of education and why it failed to develop a more socialist curriculum.

Barker's first argument is that the Labour Party never had any intention of revolutionising the education curriculum in form or content. Rather, he argues:

The chief desire which emerged in the Party's approach to education was not for the destruction of an old order, nor for the massive utilisation of unofficial, voluntary agencies to counter the effects of teaching within that order, but for the broader dissemination of a tradition which by and large, was accepted, admired and envied. The aim was fairer shares, not a new society.⁵⁷

Barker's second argument takes account of the cross-party consensus that existed between the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Parties – that the value of education lay in fostering democratic citizenship amongst the electorate. Quoting Ramsay MacDonald, Barker states the consensual argument for education: 'Democracy can be made efficient only by the education of the individual citizen in civic virtues.' Barker provides evidence that Conservative Party politicians held the same view of the value of education for democratic citizenship as their Labour Party counterparts.⁵⁸ However, despite cross-party support for an education curriculum that nurtured good democratic

⁵⁴ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, p. 276.

⁵⁵ Jenny Jansson, 'Class Formation in Sweden and Britain: Educating Workers', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 90, Fall (2016), p. 52.

⁵⁶ Jansson, 'Class Formation in Sweden and Britain: Educating Workers', p. 61.

⁵⁷ Ramsay MacDonald quoted by Rodney Barker in 'The Labour Party and Education for Socialism', *International Review of Social History*, Part 1 (1969), p. 25.

⁵⁸ Barker, 'The Labour Party and Education', pp. 26–28.

citizenship, Labour Party educational policy did little to infuse the curriculum with socialist values. This task was taken up by voluntary working class adult education organisations such as the Plebs League, the NCLC and the labour colleges, none of which was strongly supported by either the Labour Party or the Trade Union Congress (TUC).

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and analysed the various forms of British Marxism and social democracy that existed before and during the inter-war period. The idea of democracy for socialism emerges strongly as a way in which labour movement leaders and thinkers envisaged the development of British socialism. Workers' adult education was a significant element of this phenomenon.

Fieldhouse, Macintyre, Goldman, Rose, and Rowbotham present histories of workers' adult education that give us insights into the major historiographical debates about the topic. Their research closely relates workers' adult education to different aspects of British socialism. All agree that such education contributed to a greater consciousness amongst working class people about their political power. Where they differ is to what extent that political consciousness served to support different forms of social democracy. Barker's and Janssen's work explores the presence (or not) of a political and industrial will to disseminate social democratic reformist values and ideology to the wider (including working class) electorate through various education channels.

This thesis will take a flexible view of how socialism and democracy intertwine as ideologies. It will argue that working class people, empowered by their experience of education – whatever type of education it was – became more politically active in their local communities. It will further argue that changing class consciousness and attitudes did not need to be supported by the state, but could be an organic intellectual process supported by voluntary organisations – in this case the WEA and the labour colleges. British workers' adult education may not have been revolutionary, but it was certainly used to working class advantage by creating an 'articulate, obstreperous working-class intelligentsia'.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, p. 276.

CHAPTER TWO

Workers' Adult Education in the 19th and 20th Century: Continuity and Change.

Introduction

One of the most interesting aspects of the history of working class adult education in Britain is the question of how radical a movement it was. What were the similarities and differences between nineteenth century working class adult education organisations and their twentieth century counterparts? How, and why, did the tradition of workers' adult education change? This chapter places the phenomenon of workers' adult education in its historical context in Yorkshire. It will focus on the transformation of the working class adult education movement from a self-improving auto-didactic tradition during the nineteenth century into a more politically organised and oriented one in the twentieth. I argue that the emergence and expansion of the WEA and the NCLC was the culmination of this transformation. Both organisations were, in their different ways, staunch supporters of the political aims of the wider labour movement in Britain during the inter-war period.

To understand the process of transformation, I will explore the themes of continuity and change in relation to workers' adult education in three sections. The first section will review some nineteenth century precursors of the WEA and NCLC. These organisations included the mechanics' institutes, adult schools, educational settlements, working-men's colleges, and the university extension movement (UEM). I will consider only the activities of the mechanics' institutes and university extension in relation to Yorkshire. The history of working-men's colleges, adult schools, and educational settlements has been covered comprehensively elsewhere.¹ The second section examines continuities and changes in the ideology supporting workers' adult education during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in relation to university extension. In the third section I present an analysis of the WEA and NCLC in Yorkshire, detailing their foundation, their administration, organisation and expansion across the region during

¹ J. F. C. Harrison, *A History of the Working Men's College, 1854-1954* (London, 1954); Jonathan Davies, and Mark Freeman, 'Education for Citizenship: The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Educational Settlement Movement', *History of Education*, 32 (2003), pp. 303–18; Mark Freeman, 'The Decline of the Adult School Movement Between the Wars', *History of Education*, 39, 4 (2010), pp. 481–506; Thomas Pole, *A History of the Origins and Progress of Adult Schools*, 3rd ed. (London: Woburn Press, 1968); J Wilhelm Rowntree and Henry Harry Binns, *A History of the Adult School Movement* (London: Headley Brothers, 1903); Sylvia A. Harrop, 'Adult Education and Literacy: The Importance of Post-School Education For Literacy Levels in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *History of Education*, 13, 3 (1984), pp. 191–105.

the inter-war period. The primary sources used in this chapter include annual reports of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes and of the WEA and the NCLC.²

The Mechanics' Institutes

In taking stock of the adult education network before 1900, a good starting point is Dr George Birkbeck (1776-1841), who first established the idea of the Mechanics' Institutes in 1799 when he delivered lectures in Glasgow to 'men whose situation in early life has precluded the possibility of acquiring even the smallest portion of scientific knowledge.'³ He founded the first Mechanics' Institute in Glasgow in 1823, with the aim of offering scientific knowledge to very poorly educated working class people to prepare them for industrial employment.⁴ By the end of the nineteenth century there were over '600 Institutions in England alone with a membership of over 100,000.'⁵

However, despite the expressed aim of the mechanics' institutes to serve working class people, it was in fact mainly middle class and professional men who attended their lectures and events. Harrison asserts this argument in his study of the mechanics' institutes in Yorkshire.⁶ Much of the historiography supports the view that the mechanics' institutes were in decline from the mid-nineteenth century. T. G. R. Wright concluded that 'benevolent and paternalistic middle class leaders' dominated the Bradford Mechanics' Institute.⁷ Martyn Walker, using the Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute as a case study, challenges Wright's thesis.⁸ Walker shows evidence of

² In 1929-30 the WEA Yorkshire District re-organised by becoming two districts – Yorkshire North and Yorkshire South. WEA Annual Reports for Yorkshire District (1914–1929) and Yorkshire North District (1929–1964) are held at West Yorkshire Archive Services (WYAS). Annual Reports for WEA Yorkshire South District (1929–) are held at the WEA Archive, TUC Library, London Metropolitan University. NCLC Annual Reports are held at the London School of Economics Archive (LSE). The University of Leeds Library (ULL) holds the Annual Reports of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics Institutes.

³ Norman Jepson, *The Beginnings of English University Adult Education – Policy and Problems: A Critical Study of the Early Cambridge and Oxford University Extension Lecture Movements Between 1873–1907 with Special Reference to Yorkshire* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973), p. 55. For Birkbeck's biography see Thomas Kelly, *George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1957) and Matthew Lee, 'George Birkbeck', ODNB (Downloaded 10 November 2017).

⁴ Martyn Walker, '“Earnest students anxious to acquire a practical knowledge suited to the trade of the district”: The Growth and Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement with Particular Reference to Huddersfield 1824-1890', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 46, 1 (2014), pp. 38–56. For general histories of the mechanics institutes see Walker, *The Development of the Mechanics' Institute Movement in Britain and Beyond* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Mabel P Tylecote, *Mechanics Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957); Thomas Kelly, 'The Origins of Mechanics Institutes', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 1, 1 (November, 1952), pp. 17–27.

⁵ Jepson, *The Beginnings of English University Adult Education*, p. 55; Anna Williams, *Bradford Mechanics Institutes in the Nineteenth Century* (University of York: Department of History, 2001).

⁶ Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 57–89.

⁷ T. G. R. Wright, 'Bradford Mechanics' Institute in the Nineteenth Century' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 1996), p. 182.

⁸ Walker, 'Earnest students', p. 38.

working class attendance at the Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute by providing a 'list of occupations attending Huddersfield in 1847' that 'included 58 finishers, 45 errand and factory hands, 41 weavers, 27 spinners and 14 dyers', evidence which leads Walker to argue that specific mechanics' institutes, such as Huddersfield, located in industrial centres, did indeed serve the interests of working class men.⁹

Wright and Walker highlight the failings as well as the successes of the Yorkshire mechanics' institutes in this endeavour. What is most relevant to this thesis about the mechanics' institutes is the rationale underpinning their adult education schemes. The Annual Reports of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes give a sense of what the leaders of mechanics' institutes in Yorkshire perceived as the value of education to society at large.

The following section outlines the main themes about education that recur from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. At the 53rd meeting of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes in 1890, Sir Joseph Whitwell Pease (1828-1903), an industrialist and banker, the grandson of Edward Pease, expressed his views on the importance of workers' education from an employer's perspective.¹⁰ Pease stated that 'workpeople' had the same needs as the employers 'and that they were bound to make the most of their lives, like they [employers] themselves did.'¹¹ He also emphasised that workers had been given an 'enormous amount of political power' and that it was vital for employers to educate workers 'in those habits, thought, life and mental discipline which made them [workers] able to sympathise with their employers in times of depression in trade.' Pease acknowledged that education went in two directions, and would enable 'employers to meet them [workers], in order that they might sympathise with the men.' He theorised that the solution to many social ills such as crime, poor housing, ill health and poverty lay in education, and referred to the 'welfare of the Commonwealth' as the aim of education. His final point was about class unity. In his view the purpose of the mechanics' institutes was to bring 'all classes together [...] to meet for one patriotic purpose, the trying to make the world better than they found it.'¹²

⁹ Walker, 'Earnest Students', p 43.

¹⁰ Pease's grandfather, Edward Pease and his father, also named Joseph, were highly successful industrialists and railway promoters. Charlotte Fell-Smith, 'Sir Joseph Whitwell Pease', *ODNB* (Downloaded 10 November 2017); A. F. Pollard and Charlotte Fell-Smith, 'Edward Pease', *ODNB* (Downloaded 10 November 2017).

¹¹ ULL, Report of the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Yorkshire Union of Institutes and Yorkshire Village Libraries, Scarborough, (18 June 1890), p. 47.

¹² ULL, 53rd Annual Meeting (1890), pp. 39–47.

Joshua Rowntree¹³ (1844-1915), MP and social reformer, also addressed the conference, his speech echoing themes that Pease raised. Rowntree referred to the idea of a Commonwealth in Ruskinian terms, juxtaposing wealth accumulation and the generation of happiness. So, in order to promote happiness and harmony, ‘the advantage of a good education ought to be available to the poorest, and the masses of people.’¹⁴

These views encapsulate the general attitude to education held by the leaders of the mechanics’ institutes during the nineteenth century. A general examination of the Yorkshire Union’s reports shows that employers dominated the annual meetings. Education, in their view, would nurture and support class unity and the practice of civic duty.

By 1900, at the 63rd Annual Meeting, other issues preoccupied the speakers. On ‘Educational Progress,’ Sir Swire Smith (1842–1918), comparing the British and German education systems, lamented the lack of technical education available in Britain.¹⁵ Smith was of the opinion that the great lack of a national state-supported education system led to the relegation of the country ‘to a second or third place in civilisation, just when, in other countries, the first and greatest care of the people was centred in the responsibility for their education.’¹⁶ As with Pease and Rowntree, Smith emphasised the value of education in uniting classes. He identified a shift in class culture whereby, with ‘universal education, efficient night schools, free libraries, cheap literature [...] the toiler is also becoming the thinker.’ He discussed the implications of greater leisure time for workers and suggested that an ‘intellectual levelling up’ was bringing ‘the classes together in their literary tastes, in their social, political, and patriotic movements and in their sports and pastimes.’¹⁷ Smith’s ‘intellectual levelling up’ prefigured what the WEA would later set as its own objective.

James Hastings Duncan MP (1855–1928),¹⁸ speaking at the 66th Annual Meeting (1903) alluded to the mechanics’ institutes’ approach to education in relation to the economic wealth of the nation. It seemed to Duncan that members of the mechanics’

¹³ Edward H Milligan, ‘Joshua Rowntree’, *ODNB* (Downloaded 10 November 2017).

¹⁴ ULL, *53rd Annual Meeting* (1890) p. 44. For John Ruskin’s views on political economy see John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 1985) (Original work published in 1862).

¹⁵ Smith was born in Keighley, the son of a machine maker. He became an English woollen manufacturer and was regarded as an expert in technical education. Smith was elected as the Liberal Party MP for Keighley in 1915. Ian Dewhirst, ‘Sir Swire Smith’, *ODNB* (Downloaded 10 November 2017); K. Snowden, *The Master Spinner: A Life of Sir Swire Smith* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1921).

¹⁶ ULL, Report of the 63rd Annual Meeting of the Yorkshire Union of Institutes and Yorkshire Village Libraries, Keighley & Haworth (13 June 1900), p. 30.

¹⁷ ULL, Report of the 63rd Annual Meeting (1900), p. 39.

¹⁸ James Hastings Duncan was Liberal MP for Otley division of the West Riding, Yorkshire from 1900 – 1918. Frederick Walter Scott Craig (ed) *British Parliamentary Election Results (1885-1914)* 2nd edn. (Aldershot: Parliamentary Research Service, 1989), p. 442.

institutes ‘believed that the future of their own nation amongst the other nations of the world must depend greatly upon its industrial progress.’¹⁹ Duncan, like Smith, highlighted the delay in Britain’s co-ordinating a national system of education. He pointed out that ‘while this spasmodic effort had been made, other countries had been taking the lead,’ in particular Germany, and he described with reluctant admiration how advanced Germany was in comparison to Britain in industry.²⁰

In 1904, the president of the Yorkshire Union, George Frederick Samuel Robinson, Marquess of Ripon²¹ (1827–1909), continued the theme of the changing role of the mechanics’ institutes, stating that: ‘He thought mechanics’ institutes still had a position in their educational system in connection with secondary education.’²² By this point, the annual addresses which had once aspired to change society, now merely emphasised the importance of village libraries.

The Yorkshire Union of Mechanics’ Institutes ceased to exist in 1922, having been superseded by the UEM, the WEA, the NCLC and the national education system. The mechanics’ institutes are a good example of education initiatives taken by mostly middle and upper class people to improve the level of education amongst the poor and disadvantaged at a time when very little primary or secondary education existed. The institutes were dominated by the propertied classes, and maintained a Victorian ethos of self-improvement and material aspirations. The Mechanics’ Institutes were embedded in their communities, as shown in J. Popple’s study of them in the East and North Ridings, and helped consolidate and maintain a network of education centres across Yorkshire, ostensibly for the benefit of working class people.²³

University Extension

The next section details the development of university extension. Social and economic changes brought about by the industrial revolution, accompanied by a growing humanitarian and idealistic belief that the poor had as much right as the wealthy to

¹⁹ ULL, Report of the 66th Annual Meeting of the Yorkshire Union of Institutes and Yorkshire Village Libraries, Otley (1st July 1903), p. 45.

²⁰ ULL, Report of the 66th Annual Meeting (1903), pp. 45–46.

²¹ George Robinson was the son of Prime Minister Frederick John Robinson (1st Viscount Goderich). George became a Christian Socialist and political radical. He wrote *The Duty of the Age* which sought to ‘reconcile Christianity to democracy and socialism.’ With F. D. Maurice he helped found the Working Men’s College in 1854. He supported the college financially and also gave occasional lectures. Robinson was a lifelong supporter of the Mechanics’ Institutes as well as the educational activities of the Co-operative. Anthony F Denholm, ‘George Frederick Samuel Robinson’, *ODNB* (Downloaded 10 November 2017).

²² ULL, Report of the 67th Annual Meeting of the Yorkshire Union of Institutes and Yorkshire Village Libraries, Harrogate (13th July 1904), pp. 52–53.

²³ James Popple, *The Mechanics’ Institutes of the East and North Riding and of York, 1837 – 1887* (c.1960).

university education, fostered the emergence of university extension. Under the Royal Commissions, established in 1850 to reform universities, universities changed their way of working to deliver the educational demands of a modern industrialised democratic society.²⁴ Norman Jepson identified the UEM as an integral part of this process.²⁵ William Sewell (1804-1874), James Stuart (1843-1913) and Frederick Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1821-1902) campaigned to extend university education to the general population.²⁶ (Incidentally Temple's son, William Temple, also went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury and was President of the WEA from 1908 to 1924.²⁷)

Another significant factor that contributed to the emergence of university extension lectures as an alternative source of adult education was the feminist movement. Women, even by comparison with working class men, had negligible access to either secondary or university education. Indeed, it was not until the early twentieth century that women were accepted as students in universities, and often then only in exceptional circumstances. University extension was supported by women campaigners including Emily Davies (1830–1921) (founder of Girton College, Cambridge) and Anne J. Clough (1820–1892) (Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge and founder member and secretary (1870–1876) of the North of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women, established in 1867) as a means of expanding opportunities for women to receive further education.²⁸ Emily Davies's brother was Llewelyn Davies, a disciple of F. D. Maurice and an early member of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, an organisation that supported several feminist campaigns during the nineteenth century. Llewelyn's daughter, Margaret Llewelyn Davies, Emily's niece, who had attended Girton College, Cambridge, from 1881 to 1883, was secretary general of the Co-operative Women's Guild from 1883 to 1922. Unlike Clough, Emily

²⁴ Jepson, *Beginnings of English University Adult Education*, p. 15. For the history of the University of Oxford and university extension see Goldman, *Dons and Workers*; For a general history of the UEM see Bernard Jennings, *The University Extension Movement in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Hull: Department of Adult Education, University of Hull, 1992) and *New Lamps for Old? University Adult Education in Retrospect and Prospect* (Hull: University of Hull, 04 November 1975).

²⁵ Jepson, *Beginnings of English University Adult Education*, pp. 1-21.

²⁶ Sewell was a clergyman and author and one of first advocates for university extension. He wrote a paper 'Suggestions for the Extension of the University' (1850) to the vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford suggesting that a federation of local professors should be established to give 'instruction under the direct authority of Oxford and Cambridge'. S. A. Skinner, 'William Sewell', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017); James Stuart, an educational reformer, was also an advocate for women's suffrage. H. C. G. Matthew, 'James Stuart', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017); See James Stuart, *Reminiscences* (London: Cassell, 1912) for details of his role in founding the UEM. Frederick Temple was well known for his work on social and educational reform. Mark D. Chapman, 'Frederick Temple', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

²⁷ Adrian Hastings, 'William Temple', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

²⁸ Gillian Sutherland, 'Anne J Clough', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017); Also see Gillian Sutherland, *Faith, Duty and Power of Mind. The Cloughs and Their Circle (1820–1960)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Davies believed that women should take the same curriculum and exams as men at the University of Cambridge.²⁹

The very first informal extension lectures that James Stuart delivered in 1867 were to audiences of women in Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield and Leeds at the request of the North of England Council for Promoting Higher Education of Women.³⁰ In this respect the feminist movement played an important part in helping establish a system of university extension schemes throughout the country.

Although university extension schemes were ostensibly for the benefit of working class people, more often than not they failed to reach that audience. University extension was, it seemed, a convenient and practical way for the middle class to enhance their education, and the contentious question of who in fact benefited most from university extension remained part of the contemporary, as well as historical, debate about the educational value of the peripatetic university. Matthew Arnold (poet, school inspector and social critic) was among many who believed that it was the middle class rather than the working class who were most in need of better secondary and university education.³¹

In opposition to arguments for greater education for the middle class, James Stuart and R. G. Moulton believed strongly that, were the middle class to take advantage of university extension schemes, the purpose of such schemes would be distorted. They argued that university extension was based on the principle that a system of higher education should be classless. For them, the breakdown of the class system could be achieved by establishing a system of education whereby the wealthy and poor received education from the same source – the universities.³² In the early twentieth century, the WEA and NCLC set out to resolve the issue by focusing on working class rather than middle class students, a development that Stuart and Moulton had, as a matter of principle, tried to avoid.

Jepson analyses how the UEM, administrated by the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge, performed in this regard in the north of England. His

²⁹ Sara Delamont, 'Emily Davies', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017); Mary Stott, 'Margaret Llewelyn Davies', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017). See also Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch, *Practical Visionaries: Women's Education and Social Progress 1790–1930* (Harlow: Longman, 2000); For Davies view on higher education for women see Emily Davies, *The Higher Education of Women* (London, New York: A. Strahan, 1866).

³⁰ William H. Draper, *University Extension. A Survey of Fifty Years 1873 – 1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 9. For an account of the North of England council see Peter Gordon and David Dougham, *Dictionary of British Women's Organisations 1825–1960* (London: Woburn Press, 2001), p. 115.

³¹ Jepson, *Beginnings of English University Adult Education*, p. 24; Stefan Collini, 'Matthew Arnold' *ODNB* (Downloaded 10 November 2017).

³² Jepson, *Beginnings of English University Adult Education*, p. 24.

argument focuses on the lack of working class students who took advantage of university extension in West Yorkshire. Jepson reports that ‘between 1885 and 1902 there were six Yorkshire towns in which co-operative societies undertook responsibility for Oxford University Lectures,’ these being Barnsley, Doncaster, Hebden Bridge, Rotherham, Shipley, and Sowerby Bridge.’ Courses at these centres ‘arranged by a specially appointed Extension committee could lay claim to being strictly working class.’ Other centres such as Halifax, Ilkley, and Bradford also attracted working class men, but these were still fewer in number than their middle class fellow students. Jepson presents evidence that ‘at Keighley in 1890 “few working men attended though every effort had been made to secure their attendance”’ and ‘at Skipton in 1898 “the audience consisted of representatives of the well-to-do manufacturing classes.”’ A course at Cleckheaton in 1890 was reported as being well attended, but the audience was ‘representative rather of the middle class, than of working men for whose benefit the lectures had been largely organised.’ Jepson concluded his analysis by identifying that only six out of twenty-five Yorkshire university extension centres run by the University of Oxford were working class ‘in the sense that the majority of the audience was composed of artisans’. Jepson also highlighted that all the working class-dominated centres were short-lived.³³

The dominant question of Jepson’s thesis is why it was that university extension failed to reach a larger working class audience. His final analysis is relevant to this present thesis; he concludes that the factor that was most important to recruiting working class students to university extension classes

was that, however desirable it might be to avoid class distinction, under the conditions then prevailing the working classes would not be attracted in any considerable numbers unless the responsibility for recruitment was placed in the hands of working men themselves. Furthermore, experience suggested that in the interests of stability a working class organisation was required whose primary concern was not commercial or industrial but educational.³⁴

Jepson identified that, in contrast to the UEM, the WEA was eminently well suited to the task of recruiting working class students to university extension education. The WEA’s approach to recruiting working class students and organising courses and classes in co-operation with universities marked a distinct shift in attitude by facilitating access to workers’ adult education. The key change that occurred with the emergence of the WEA was that, in theory at least, working class people took ownership and control

³³ Norman Jepson, ‘A Critical analysis of the Origin and Development of the Oxford and Cambridge University Extension Movement Between 1873 and 1902, With Special Reference to the West Riding of Yorkshire’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leeds, 1955), pp. 192-193.

³⁴ Jepson, PhD Thesis, p. 499.

of the means – university extension – of delivering higher education to working class people.

Jepson's thesis shows the overall failure of the UEM to reach a working class audience in the late nineteenth century. In saying this, it should be noted that university extension schemes continued to operate successfully with working class participation well into the twentieth century in Yorkshire, an example of how the movement, at least in part, continued as part of the day-to-day work carried out by universities on an extra-mural basis.³⁵ It also shows that universities remained committed to the project of university extension in order to provide access to higher education and knowledge to socially and economically disadvantaged worker-students.

University extension joint committees functioned to organise university extension schemes, and it is important now to explain their origins. Before 1903, university extension committees excluded working class representatives. Following the Oxford conference on working class adult education in 1903, the principle of co-operation and co-ordination between the universities, the co-operatives and the trade unions to disseminate higher education to working class people was established.³⁶ At the 1907 Oxford and Working Class Education Conference, the working relationship between the WEA and the universities was formalised.³⁷ Here, the idea of a joint university extension and WEA committee was put into practice. The presence of WEA representatives on the committees meant that they were integrated into the university administration, and were able to exert equal power with their university extension counterparts in deciding what education to deliver, and how best to deliver it, via university extension, to worker-students.

In summary, a diverse range of adult education institutions formed a loose and ad hoc network across the country during the nineteenth century. The existence of this network showed evidence of an interest in adult education that flourished in different sections of society. However, despite the demand for, and the availability of, adult education, it remained difficult for working class people to access it. Three important characteristics of the nineteenth century network of adult education emerge: firstly, adult education was accepted as part of the general culture and continued to flourish

³⁵ Evidence of the continuation of university extension courses nationwide can be found in University of Leeds Archive (ULA), *Universities Extra-Mural Consultative Committee Annual Reports of University Extension Courses* from 1925–26 to 1940–41. LUA/DEP/076/1/46.

³⁶ First Session of The Higher Education of Working Men being the Official Report of the Joint Conference between Co-operators, Trade Unionists and University Authorities, held at Oxford on Saturday, 22 August 1903.

³⁷ Oxford and Working Class Education Report, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909) in Oxford and Working-Class Education, p. 164.

well into the twentieth century; secondly, despite the availability of workers' adult education in one form or another, more often than not it failed to reach worker-students in a well-organised way; thirdly, it was the failure of the university extension schemes to become the dominant provider of specifically workers' adult education that gave rise to the emergence of the WEA and NCLC.

The WEA

The following sections detail the emergence of the WEA and NCLC as working class organisations concerned primarily with providing adult education to working class people. Albert Mansbridge and his wife Frances founded the WEA in 1903.³⁸ Its original name – The Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men and Women – changed to the Workers' Educational Association in 1905.³⁹ Mansbridge's vision was to make university higher education in the arts and humanities realistically accessible to working class people. He aimed to realise that vision through the joint committees for university extension, and through tutorial classes, as described previously. The concept of equality of opportunity in education was the foundation of all the WEA's educational activities.

A general overview of the WEA administration will make clear how and why it became successful. The WEA had a three-level bureaucratic administration: a central headquarters based in London; district offices located in major cities and towns; and local branches situated in small towns and villages. Worker-students were the focus of all parts of the WEA administration. (See Appendix 1 for a schematic diagram of the organisation of the WEA in Yorkshire.⁴⁰)

All three levels of the administration communicated with each other about student demands. Branch organisers consulted students about the topics about which they wished to have classes and lectures, and then made annual applications to the district

³⁸ Bernard Jennings, *Albert Mansbridge. The Life and Work of the Founder of the WEA* (Leeds: University of Leeds With the WEA, 2002); 'The WEA – The Foundation and the Founder' in Stephen K. Roberts (ed.) *A Ministry of Enthusiasm. Centenary Essays on the Workers' Educational Association*

(London: Pluto Press, 2003); 'Albert Mansbridge', *ODNB* (Downloaded 09 June 2017)

For Mansbridge's own writings on adult education see Albert Mansbridge, *The Making of an Educationalist* (London, 1929); *The Kingdom of the Mind: Essays and Addresses 1903-1937 of Albert Mansbridge* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1944).

³⁹ T. W. Price, *The Story of the WEA From 1903 – 1924* (London: 1924), p. 16. For other histories of the WEA see Mary Stocks, *The Workers' Educational Association: The First Fifty Years* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1953) and Jennings, 'Knowledge is Power: A Short History of the Workers' Educational Association 1903–1978', *Newland Papers*, 1 (Department of Adult Education: University of Hull, 1979); For an account of the WEA's relationship with the TUC see Alan Cornfield, *Epoch in Workers' Education: A History of the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee* (London: WEA, 1969).

⁴⁰ ULL, Workers' Educational Association, Diagram [Shewing the Structure of the W.E.A as Viewed from the Yorkshire District](#) (Leeds : WEA, 1931) (Appendix 1).

organisers reflecting their students' requests. District organisers consulted with the joint committees about the feasibility and practicality of providing classes according to the students' requests. If the classes could be delivered, and were supported by enough interest in the locality to sustain them over time, the joint committees accepted responsibility for acquiring funds and tutors. Funding of WEA education usually came from a combination of sources, including LEAs, charities, trade unions, subscription fees, and university funds. The central administration provided a constitution and code of practice to which all WEA districts and branches adhered, and also lobbied widely in support of furthering the cause of workers' adult education provision.

The whole WEA administration operated on the basis of committee work at all levels. The education that WEA committee members received in the art of administration and democracy is not often raised in the historiography. Yet, it is likely to have been significant in giving working class committee members in particular the confidence to take a democratic voluntary working class enterprise forward, and to make it a success, in a political and social culture dominated by conservatism and liberalism.

The WEA in Yorkshire

Until 1914, the WEA in Yorkshire had operated as part of the North-Western District, administered from Manchester. Between 1906 and 1914 the University of Leeds and the University of Sheffield formed Joint Committees with the WEA that established WEA classes in Yorkshire.⁴¹ George Thompson (1878–1953), who was appointed district organiser for Yorkshire in 1913, represented the working class element of the WEA in Yorkshire. He was from Halifax, a carpenter by profession, who 'had only an elementary education' and was a former WEA student of economics in a class taught by Henry Clay (1883–1954).⁴² In June 1914, the Yorkshire District was launched, with its central offices in Leeds, and Thompson as its secretary, a post he held for 31 years until 1945 (apart from a break from 1923 to 1929 when he lived in New Zealand). Thompson

⁴¹ Colleges founded at Leeds in 1874 and Sheffield in 1897 subsequently became universities. David R Jones, *The Origins of Civic Universities. Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 1. For a history of the University of Leeds see *The University of Leeds Review, Centenary Volume 1874–1974*, 17, 2 (1974).

⁴² W. E. Styler, *Yorkshire and Yorkshire North* (Yorkshire: WEA, 1956), pp. 7–8. Henry Clay was an economist and worked for the WEA in Yorkshire from 1909 to 1917. His experiences of the WEA led him to write *Economics: An Introduction for the General Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1916) which was highly successful. John Jewkes and Sylvia Jewkes, 'Sir Henry Clay', *ODNB* (Downloaded 11 November 2017).

was vital to shaping the working class aspirations of the WEA in Yorkshire.⁴³ In particular, he placed great emphasis on the need for working class people to benefit from workers' adult education socially and politically.⁴⁴ Thompson believed that WEA students had a responsibility to carry out social and political work in the interests of working class people. Tom Steele notes that Thompson understood the aims of the WEA as being to cultivate 'an existing working-class leadership capable of exercising popular government.'⁴⁵ Evidence of a strong working relationship between the WEA and the University of Leeds is contained in the University Extension Lectures and Tutorial Class Reports that detail the organisation of classes and courses in the region.⁴⁶

Another notable personality involved in the administration was Arthur Greenwood MP, born and brought up in Leeds, the son of an artisan painter and decorator. Greenwood had benefited from higher education, having graduated from Yorkshire College.⁴⁷ Chairman of the Yorkshire District, and a great supporter of the WEA, Greenwood was later to become deputy leader of the Labour Party.

To get a better idea of the size of the WEA Yorkshire District and how it was administered, the next section will explain the boundaries of the district from 1920 to 1939.

The Yorkshire District

The Yorkshire District, one of the largest WEA districts, extended from Cleethorpes on the North Lincolnshire coast as far south as Chesterfield, but excluded Middlesbrough and Teesside. Three sectional councils representing the eastern, southern and western areas were each 'responsible for the branch and class organisation in its area'⁴⁸ A further development in the organisation of the WEA Yorkshire District occurred in 1928 with the founding of the University College of Hull.⁴⁹ To demonstrate its commitment to extra-mural education, Hull instituted the first Department of Adult

⁴³ For details of Thompson's administration of the WEA in Yorkshire see Harrison, *Learning and Living*, pp. 289–299. For a history of the WEA in Leeds See Harrison, *Workers Education in Leeds: A History of the Leeds Branch of the Workers' Educational Association, 1907–1957* (Leeds: Workers' Educational Association, Leeds Branch, 1957).

⁴⁴ George H. Thompson, *The Field of Study For WEA Classes* (London: WEA, 1938).

⁴⁵ Tom Steele, 'From Class Consciousness to Cultural Studies: The WEA in West Yorkshire', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 19, 2 (October, 1987), p. 112.

⁴⁶ ULA, University Extension Classes and Tutorial Classes Reports 1932/33–1935/36. LUA/DEP/076/1/46.

⁴⁷ Styler, *Yorkshire and Yorkshire North*, p. 8. Richard C. Whiting, 'Arthur Greenwood', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017)

⁴⁸ Styler, *Yorkshire and Yorkshire North*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ See T. W. Bamford, *The University of Hull. The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 268–269.

Education in Britain. Harrison argues that Hull's extra-mural department aimed to assert itself over the WEA as the primary adult education provider in the region.⁵⁰

Further re-organisation occurred in 1929, when the area represented by the south sectional council became the Yorkshire South District. The Hull Joint Committee replaced the University of Sheffield Joint Committee as the second representative of the Yorkshire South District. Yorkshire South was a smaller district than Yorkshire North, and focused mainly on Sheffield and areas of Derbyshire and Lincolnshire. In the 1929 re-organisation, Yorkshire North District gained the Cleveland area and Middlesbrough, both formerly under the administration of the North Eastern WEA District.⁵¹

The following sections outline the expansion of the WEA in Yorkshire using the Yorkshire District, Yorkshire (North) and Yorkshire District (South) annual statistical reports. Table Two below shows the expansion of the WEA in terms of the numbers of tutorial classes and tutorial students in Yorkshire District (1918-1929). Table 3 shows the same expansion across the whole district –Yorkshire District North and South (1930 to 1939). Appendix 2 shows detailed statistics of the number of classes, branches, students (male and female) and occupations of students. Table Four places the statistics for WEA activity in Yorkshire in perspective with a summary of the national statistics, while Appendix 3 gives full details of the national statistics between the wars.

TABLE 2⁵²

WEA Expansion: Yorkshire District (1918 to 1929)

	1918	1929
<i>No. classes</i>	37 ⁵³	104 ⁵⁴
<i>No. tutorial class students</i>	725 ⁵⁵	1,626 ⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Bamford, *University of Hull*, pp. 268–269; Harrison, *Learning and Living*, p. 293.

⁵¹ Styler, Yorkshire and Yorkshire North, p. 21.

⁵² These statistics represent only tutorial class students. The total number of students attending WEA short courses and lecture series overall was far higher than the figures presented here.

⁵³ Leeds, WYAS, *WEA Yorkshire District 4th Annual Report* (1918), p. 7. WYL669/1/1.

⁵⁴ WYAS, *WEA Yorkshire District 15th Annual Report* (1929), p. 3. WYL669/1/1.

⁵⁵ WYAS, *4th Annual Report* (1918), p. 7. WYL669/1/1.

⁵⁶ WYAS, *15th Annual Report* (1929), p. 3. WYL669/1/1.

TABLE 3⁵⁷**WEA Expansion: Yorkshire District North and South (1930 to 1939)**

	1930	1939
<i>No. classes</i>	99	195
<i>No. tutorial class students</i>	1,825	2,909

TABLE 4

WEA Nationwide Expansion: All Classes and Students (1919 to 1939)⁵⁸

	1919-1920	1938-1939
<i>Total No. of classes⁵⁹</i>	557	3,000
<i>Total No. of students</i>	12,438	53,884

It is evident from these statistics that, despite economic depression, the WEA expanded across the Yorkshire region during the 1920s and 1930s, embedding itself in towns, cities and villages across Yorkshire in order to make workers' adult education accessible to as many worker-students as possible. The WEA in co-operation with the Yorkshire Miners' Welfare Committee also ran a Miners' Lectures Scheme.⁶⁰

Given the evident expansion of the WEA, it is relevant now to consider the WEA's political function, with particular reference to Helen McCarthy's work. McCarthy focuses on 'the role of voluntary associations in constituting modern democratic societies'. She argues that 'these organisations [...] played an important role in anchoring British politics ideologically in the centre-ground', thus preventing political extremism. The WEA, as a non-partisan, non-sectarian, democratic, voluntary association, forms part of the network of voluntary associations that McCarthy identifies in her work. McCarthy argues that, following the extension of the franchise in 1918, political parties in the 1920s and 1930s faced 'the challenge of integrating and socialising a mass citizenry.' But, political parties were not alone in seeking to engage

⁵⁷ The figures in Table 3 have been calculated by adding the number of tutorial classes in Yorkshire North and South District for 1930 and 1939. The same method was used to calculate the number of tutorial students in Yorkshire North and South. See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of these figures by district.

⁵⁸ Appendix 3, *Workers' Education in Great Britain. A Record of Educational Service to Democracy Since 1918* (London: Workers' Educational Association, 1943), p. 31.

⁵⁹ Classes included tutorial, preparatory, university extension, one-year, terminal and short terminal classes. *Workers' Education in Great Britain*, p. 31.

⁶⁰ For details of the Miners' Scheme lectures see ULL, WEA Yorkshire District Miners' Lecture Scheme Committee, *List of Lectures and Subjects, 1917-28 and Report of Miners Lectures Scheme 1926-27* (Leeds: WEA, Yorkshire District, 1928).

with the electorate. Other non-partisan secular organisations emerged, ‘strongly invested in a discourse of active citizenship, and committed to creating and defending a space within associational life which was free of partisan or sectarian conflict.’⁶¹ As part of the associational life of inter-war Britain, the WEA supported democratic participation by using an educational model of teaching that promoted independent thought, and decision-making based on sound evidence.

Where we can particularly see an example of political and associational life converging is in the Labour Party’s rural campaign, and in the WEA’s interest in extending adult education provision to rural regions.⁶² The WEA’s educational activities in rural Yorkshire took place in parallel with the Labour Party’s rural campaign. Though unlikely to have been the dominant element of rural civic culture, the WEA is likely to have played a significant role in raising the profile of the Labour Party in rural regions. Despite its non-partisan, non-sectarian character, it nonetheless marketed itself as a working class association that subscribed to labour movement values. This phenomenon will be re-examined in greater detail in Chapter Six.

The inter-war annual reports reveal another aspect of the WEA that was of great importance to the administration: district and branch membership. Ideally the WEA aimed to develop a large subscription-paying membership at district and branch level. Subscription membership would enable the WEA to be financially independent, rather than reliant on funding from state bodies such as LEAs to deliver its educational programme. The research of Stephen Yeo and Simon Green into the financial viability and integrity of voluntary organisations supports the theory that without an independent unadulterated ‘no strings’ source of funds, such bodies were subject to negative change whereby their *raison d’être* could be undermined and corrupted.⁶³ The ideal of building subscription funding to a level that negated the need for state funding was never accomplished by the WEA despite great efforts to encourage students and others to become paying members. The Sixth Annual Report (1920) of the WEA Yorkshire District was robust about avoiding complacency especially with regard to working class membership:

It is not enough to establish one or more successful classes which are then allowed to run their course without any further attempt to interest other workers. The first duty of the Association is to maintain the pioneer spirit, the last thing it ought to do

⁶¹ Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’ *The Historical Journal*, 50, 4 (2007), pp. 892–893.

⁶² Clare Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside. The Politics of Rural Britain 1918 – 1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶³ Simon Green, *Religion in the Age of Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

is to allow itself to crystallise into groups of self-centred, self-satisfied students and tutors.⁶⁴

A campaign undertaken in 1925 had ‘the object of increasing the membership of the Yorkshire District to 1,000.’⁶⁵ The reason for this initiative was the expansion of the WEA in Yorkshire, which had significantly increased the workload for the district administration. It became ‘essential that the individual membership should increase proportionately with our increased responsibilities and additional financial commitments’.⁶⁶ In fact, the Yorkshire District’s much-vaunted 1,000 membership target was never achieved during the inter-war years, to the continual disappointment of the WEA administration.

The NCLC

The history of the founding and development of the NCLC has been written about extensively.⁶⁷ In brief, the origins of the NCLC can be traced to a dispute that arose in 1906 at Ruskin College, Oxford, between trade unionist students and the college’s authorities. The students, who formed the Plebs League, went on strike, in a failed attempt to reach an agreement with Ruskin College about redressing the perceived lack of Marxism included on the college’s curriculum. The Plebs seceded from Ruskin College and set up their own educational institution, which they named the Central Labour College (CLC). They also produced the monthly *Plebs* magazine, and it was the Plebs who coined the phrase ‘Independent Working Class Education’, or IWCE as it became known. Importantly, the CLC distinguished itself from the WEA by rejecting all forms of state funding and subsidies, as well as university support, in its mission to provide Marxist teaching for working class students. In 1921, the NCLC a federation of labour colleges, was established, with the CLC as its flagship model.⁶⁸ In 1926 the

⁶⁴ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District Sixth Annual Report (1920), p. 1. WYL669/1/1.

⁶⁵ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District Eleventh Annual Report (1925), p. 3. WYL669/1/1.

⁶⁶ WYAS, *Eleventh Annual Report* (1925), p. 3. WYL669/1/1.

⁶⁷ John Atkins, *Neither Crumbs Nor Condescension. The Central Labour College 1909 – 1915* (Aberdeen: WEA, 1981); William W. Craik, *The Central Labour College 1909-1929: A Chapter in the History of Adult Working Class Education* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964); J. P. M. Millar, *The Labour College Movement* (London: NCLC Publishing Society Ltd, 1979); Colin Waugh, ‘Plebs’ The Lost Legacy of Independent Working Class Education’, *Post-16 Educator* (January, 2009); For histories of the origin and development of Ruskin College see Valerie Quinney, ‘Workers’ Education: A Confrontation at Ruskin College’, *American Journal of Education*, 92 (1983), pp. 52–78; Paul Yorke, *Education and the Working Class: Ruskin College 1899–1909* (Oxford: Ruskin College, 1977); For a biography of Noah Ablett, one of the founders of the Plebs League see Robert Turnbull, ‘Climbing Mount Sinai. Noah Ablett 1883-1935’, *Socialist History Society Occasional Publication*, 40, (April, 2017).

⁶⁸ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, pp. 27–33.

NCLC took over publication of the *Plebs* magazine from the Plebs. The CLC re-located from Oxford to London where, due to a funding crisis, it dissolved in 1929.⁶⁹

The questions of financial independence and representation of the working class were the two major bones of contention between the WEA and NCLC throughout this period. The NCLC only accepted funding from approved working class sources, mainly, trade union subscriptions. By rejecting any government-related funding, and teaching a curriculum heavily based on Marxism, the NCLC maintained its integrity and independence in a way that the WEA never could or wanted to. Crucially, the NCLC was supported by two major trade unions, the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), without whose backing the NCLC would not have survived. Only the district organisers were paid. Otherwise most of the class and tutorial work was unpaid.⁷⁰ Organisers were selected on the basis of their knowledge of Marxian economics and also their service to the labour movement, many of them having received their education and training from the CLC.⁷¹ This support for the NCLC shows quite significantly that a significant minority of working class people had a Marxist vision and approach to achieving socialism in Britain, and sought to do so in part through workers' adult education.

As to the administration of the NCLC, it operated as a loose federation of labour colleges, under a unified constitution. A central administration dealt with tasks such as publishing *Plebs*, collecting statistics and subscriptions, allocating funds to each division, and lobbying for trade union and working class support. At a divisional level, local labour college committees in conjunction with trade councils dealt with the day-to-day running of classes. From a reading of the NCLC's annual reports (1921–1939), the NCLC does not appear to have operated as multi-tiered a bureaucracy as the WEA.⁷² Fewer committees are referred to in the sources, and most of these are at a national executive level, rather than a divisional or branch level. The annual reports of the NCLC outline the national status of the NCLC, rather than detailing the workings of each division. They appear to have been mostly written by J. P. M. Millar (1893–1989), the NCLC's long-time General Secretary (1923–1964), who maintained a controlling hand in most aspects of the organisation. Millar, a Scot, who paid his way through

⁶⁹ For a detailed account of the CLC's foundation and demise see John McIlroy, 'Two Tales about Crisis and Corruption at the Central Labour College', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 72, 1 (April, 2007), pp. 69–93; Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, pp. 44–45.

⁷⁰ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, p. 174.

⁷¹ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, p. 174.

⁷² London School of Economics Archive (LSE), Annual, Executive and Executive Sub-Committee Meetings of the NCLC (1921–1939). NCLC/ 1-15, Vols. 1-15.

classes at the CLC, was a conscientious objector during the First World War. He was imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs and Wakefield Prison during the War, where he sold copies of *Plebs*. His role as General Secretary of the NCLC steered the organisation away from radical left wing IWCE for the rank and file towards trade union education for the labour leadership. Millar's ambition was to transform the NCLC into the educational arm of the TUC, but he failed in this regard because of the NCLC's dogmatic rejection of state funding. Millar held strong anti-communist views and became a staunch supporter of the Labour Party. He gave unconditional support to the Second World War.⁷³ Millar was an excellent, if controlling, organiser and administrator of the NCLC. His work for the NCLC during the inter-war period helped recruit many worker-students to the labour colleges. Despite Millar's efforts, the NCLC remained a political and adult educational organisation on the outskirts of mainstream society. Its position as a marginal but significant organisation is reflected in the sources.

The NCLC in Yorkshire

Of the twelve divisions that constituted the NCLC nationwide, Yorkshire was 'Division Seven'. Fred Shaw (1881-1951) was the organiser for the NCLC in Yorkshire for 22 years. He was born in Lindley, Huddersfield, and committed his life to socialism, his obituary describing him as a 'British Socialist Agitator'.⁷⁴ He was branch secretary of the Huddersfield No. 2 branch of the AEU, a post that he held from 1912 to his death. Shaw was President of the Huddersfield Trades Council from 1917 to 1930, and also served as President of the Engineering and Allied Trades Federation (1917-1929). Shaw was one of the founder members of the CPGB, but resigned from it in 1923, and later became a member of the Labour Party.⁷⁵ Shaw was deeply involved in the NCLC as a tutor, and in 1934 taught nine classes held in Leeds, Huddersfield, Dewsbury, Halifax, and York.⁷⁶

Data about the expansion of the NCLC in Yorkshire has been taken from the NCLC Division Seven records (1923–1934).⁷⁷ Information about the number of classes, colleges and students in Yorkshire is patchy because of the non-standardised collection of data by the Division. Therefore, where possible, key statistics have been presented

⁷³ John McIlroy, 'Obituary. J. P. M. Millar', *Labour History Review*, 55, 1 (Spring, 1990), pp. 4–6; Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, pp. 45–49.

⁷⁴ Calderdale, WYAS, W. M. E. Lawn, *Fred Shaw In Memorium 1951*, n.p. (This memorial to Shaw is signed by Clement Attlee); John Saville, 'Fred Shaw', *DNLB*, IV, pp. 156–160. TU 64/32.

⁷⁵ WYAS, Fred Shaw In Memorium 1951, TU 64/32.

⁷⁶ University of York Library, 'NCLC Division 7 Class Arrangements January – March 1934', Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the National Council Labour Colleges Division no. 7, Microfilm, np. (NCLC Division 7 Records). See Appendix 4

⁷⁷ NCLC Division 7 Records.

here to give a general idea of how many labour colleges and classes operated in Yorkshire between the wars. In 1926, at the height of the NCLC's influence, twenty-one labour colleges existed in Yorkshire. (The impact of the 1926 General Strike, and the economic and social unrest that preceded it, was instrumental in prompting greater interest in Marxism and socialist ideology as political creeds among the industrial working class.)⁷⁸ The labour colleges were located in Leeds, Huddersfield, Slaithwaite, Brighouse, Doncaster, Barnsley, Bradford, Keighley, Halifax, Dewsbury, Wakefield, Normanton, Elland, Hebden Bridge, Todmorden, Heptonstall, Otley, York, Sheffield, Hull, and Selby.⁷⁹ As can be seen, the NCLC tended to locate classes and colleges in heavily-industrialised areas rather than in rural areas, and indeed, the NCLC reports make no mention of the rural working class at all. The number of labour colleges in the region remained below thirty during the inter-war period. Table 5 gives a clearer idea of how many NCLC classes, colleges and students there were in Yorkshire from 1926 to 1930. It also gives the number of local organisations that were affiliated to the NCLC in Yorkshire. Table 6 gives a summary of the number of colleges and classes in operation in Division Seven in 1934. For comparison purposes, Table 7 gives the national statistics for the NCLC for 1939. The NCLC ceased to exist in 1964, when the TUC took over its educational activities. Millar deeply regretted this development because in his view the TUC dismantled the NCLC's educational system to the detriment of the labour movement.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ For a general history of the 1926 General Strike see Keith Laybourn, *The General Strike of 1926* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). For first hand accounts of the General Strike in Yorkshire see Bill Carr, 'From the Yorkshire Coalfield' and D. A. Wilson, 'From Bradford', in *The General Strike, 1926* ed. by Jeffrey Skelley (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976).

⁷⁹ NCLC Division 7 Records, 'Minutes of Half Yearly Meeting. Classes and Tutors for October-December 1926 Term' (04 September 1926) p. 119.

⁸⁰ J. P. M. Millar, 'The National Council of Labour Colleges and the Labour Party', Letter to the Editor, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 15, 1 (1986), p. 14.

TABLE 5

Summary of NCLC Yorkshire Division 7 Activity (1926-1930)⁸¹

	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
<i>No. of colleges</i>	Information Unavailable	Information Unavailable	24⁸²	19	18
<i>No. of classes</i>	69	109	111	72	80?⁸³
<i>No. of students</i>	1142	2290	1664	1335	1361?
<i>No. of Local affiliations</i>	Information Unavailable	71	56	45	Information Unavailable

TABLE 6

NCLC Yorkshire Division 7: Class Arrangements, January–March 1934⁸⁴

	1934
<i>No. of colleges</i>	15
<i>No. of students</i>	30

TABLE 7

NCLC National Educational Statistics for 1939⁸⁵

	1939
<i>No. of classes</i>	860
<i>No. of students</i>	15,611
<i>No. of Day and Weekend Schools</i>	260
<i>No. of students</i>	14,317
<i>No. of branch lectures</i>	1,902
<i>No. of students</i>	—
<i>No of postal students</i>	12,338

⁸¹ NCLC Division 7 Records, 'Divisional Annual Meeting' (3 March 1930), pp. 257–258.

⁸² NCLC Division 7 Records, 'Minutes of Divisional Council Meeting', (27 April 1929), p. 222.

⁸³ The question marks against these figures appear in the primary source – fn. 79.

⁸⁴ Division 7 Records, 'NCLC Division 7 Class Arrangements January – March 1934', n.p. See Appendix 3 for full details of class arrangements including venues, subjects and tutors.

⁸⁵ 'NCLC Educational Statistics from 1938 To 1963' in Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, p. 267.

[Modified by P Kumbhat]

Although the figures for student numbers appear high in Table 5, the reports of individual colleges in Division Seven imply that the number of enrolled students did not match the number of students who attended classes. For example in the individual labour college reports for 1930, Barnsley Labour College reported that it had 168 enrolled students for three classes but only an average attendance of 48. Dewsbury Labour College had 49 students enrolled for two classes with an average attendance of 36, while Doncaster Labour College reported 34 enrolled students with an average attendance of 20.⁸⁶ These figures show the mismatch between enrolled students and actual attendances and should be kept in mind when considering any NCLC statistics.

In 1939, the total number of NCLC students nationwide, including postal students, was 42,266 (Table 7). In the same year the total number of WEA students nationwide was 53,884 (Table 4). The statistics make clear that the WEA had greater class numbers and students than the NCLC, but it is interesting to see that large numbers of students enrolled on NCLC correspondence courses. (J. P. M. Millar's wife, Christine Millar, ran the correspondence course department of the NCLC.) By 1963 the number of NCLC postal students was 21,212 while the number of NCLC class students was 11,032.⁸⁷ Millar was always keen to emphasise the success of the NCLC postal courses, and was convinced that they enabled worker-students to 'broaden their knowledge and improve their skills'.⁸⁸ However, Margaret Cohen challenges Millar's assessment of the correspondence courses and argues that the cost of the courses 'according to local activists starved the local colleges of funds and prevented them from developing appropriate IWCE initiatives to meet the changing circumstances in their areas'.⁸⁹

The subjects taught in NCLC classes included economic geography, Esperanto, the science of understanding, the history of British socialism, social theory, industrial history, imperialism and modern problems.⁹⁰ Classes in Yorkshire tended to take place in a variety of labour movement venues. These included trades halls, Labour Party rooms, Co-operative society halls, mechanics institutes and miners' institutions.⁹¹ The fact that these organisations made their premises available for NCLC classes shows that labour colleges in Yorkshire were supported by local labour movement organisations.

⁸⁶ NCLC Division 7 Records, 'Divisional Annual Meeting. College Reports' (3 May 1930), pp. 259-261.

⁸⁷ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, p. 267.

⁸⁸ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, pp. 214-227.

⁸⁹ Margaret Cohen, 'The Labour College Movement Between the Wars', in *The Search for Enlightenment*, p. 118.

⁹⁰ See Appendix 4.

⁹¹ See Appendix 4.

Overall Tables 5 and 6 show the decline of the NCLC in Yorkshire from 1927 onwards. However despite the anomalous enrolment and attendance figures, and though the NCLC in Yorkshire always remained smaller in scope and size than the WEA, during the mid-1920s it did have a considerable number of enrolled students and classes in operation, despite its perpetual lack of funds and resources. This indicates that a significant minority of industrial worker-students in Yorkshire were at the very least interested in the NCLC as a Marxist organisation.

At national level, a feature of the NCLC annual reports was how membership was reported in each division. They reflect a strong focus on individual trade union subscription to NCLC education schemes. If a trade union subscribed to the NCLC, the total membership of that trade union was then counted as members of the NCLC. For example, the 1925 report stated that in the Yorkshire Division 152 branches of the Amalgamated Engineers Union (AEU) (an NCLC-subscribing trade union) operated in the region, with a total membership of 41,630. In addition to the membership of other subscribing trade unions – the Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers (AUBTW), National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (NUDAW), the Sheet Metal Workers, the Plasterers, the Furnishing Union, Associated Society Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLE&F), the Tailors and the Textile Union – a grand total membership of 118,596 subscribed to NCLC schemes.⁹² While the NCLC in this way did lay claim to a huge reservoir of untapped potential in trade union membership who might take advantage of IWCE, from the student numbers in Table 5 representing Division 7, the reality was that there was in fact very little actual take-up of NCLC education from that quarter.

Conclusion

This chapter gives an overview and analysis of the nineteenth century workers' adult education network, and charts the emergence of the WEA and NCLC in the twentieth century. It establishes the long tradition of workers' adult education that existed in Britain before 1900. Of these, adult education organisations such as the working-men's clubs and the mechanics' institutes shared similar aims: to provide working class people with more opportunities to gain a better education. The university extension schemes, established from 1873 onwards, attempted to bring order to the delivery of adult education to working class people. University extension succeeded in this aim to a degree, although the education they offered remained more accessible to, and therefore

⁹² LSE, The General Secretary's Report to the NCLC Meeting 09 and 10 May 1925, pp. 1–4. NCLC/1/Vol. 1.

more accessed by, middle rather than working class people, a problem identified by the founders of the WEA and NCLC.

The WEA and NCLC became the most successful workers' adult educational organisations of their era, but could not have done so without the support of the universities and trade unions respectively. Nor could they have expanded as they did without the support of already-established older voluntary adult educational institutions. This is of great importance. Workers' adult educational organisations formed a cultural and structural network through which workers' education could thrive in the twentieth century. The NCLC with the WEA was part of the voluntary associational culture of inter-war Britain, and represented working class interests in education. As a political and partisan organisation, the NCLC and labour colleges formed an alternative workers' adult educational forum for worker students.

This chapter has identified several important themes of twentieth century workers' adult education that the rest of the thesis will explore and analyse in subsequent chapters. They are: the associational significance of the WEA and NCLC during the inter-war period; the type of education that each organisation disseminated – partial and impartial; the social and political purpose of workers' adult education as perceived by educationalists in the WEA and the NCLC; the public service work of WEA and NCLC students; and the experience of workers' adult education by students. Careful analysis of each of these areas will explore the extent to which workers' adult education promoted a shift towards social democracy.

CHAPTER THREE

Learning Together? The Co-operative, The Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges

The Co-operative stands out as a firmly-established, nineteenth century seminal working class adult education organisation that sought to transform its members by disseminating education about the ideals of co-operation. It had its own utopian vision of how social and economic life could be organised, based on Owenism and Christian socialism.¹ This vision aspired to create a Co-operative Commonwealth. Here we will investigate the significance of the Co-operative in the world of workers' adult education during the inter-war period.

G. D. H. Cole, with his interest in functional democracy, recognised the Co-operative as a working class democratic organisation that existed independently of the state and represented the interests of working class people. He observed that 'in 1844 in Great Britain, Socialism and Co-operation meant not two different things, but a single Gospel.'² His point was that socialism, for Owenite Socialists, did *not* involve nationalisation of the means of production. Rather, 'the form of common ownership to which they looked forward to was essentially local [...]'³ However, while recognising the potential of co-operative democracy, Cole also recognised its limitations, namely that it was 'a democracy qualified by the failure of more than a small minority of the membership to play any part even in electing its representatives.'⁴ Cole also astutely observed that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century a new generation of co-operators had emerged, one that supported the Co-operative not because it subscribed to Owenite ideology or Christian socialism, but because of its commercial attributes – access to unadulterated products, fair prices and dividends.⁵ Cole lamented

¹ Robert Owen, *A New View of Society and Other Writings* (London: Dent, 1927); For biographies of Robert Owen see G. D. H. Cole, *Robert Owen* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1925); Frank Podmore, *Robert Owen: A Biography* (1968); Gregory Claeys, 'Robert Owen', *ODNB* (Downloaded 11 November 2017); Ian Donnachie, *Robert Owen. Owen of New Lanark and New Harmony* (East Linton, East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000); For Owen's legacy see Noel Thompson and Chris Williams (eds.) *Robert Owen and his Legacy* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011). On Owen's philosophy of education see Harold Silver, 'Introduction' in *Robert Owen on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) and Francis J. O'Hagan, 'Robert Owen and Education', in *Robert Owen and his Legacy*. For an overview of Christian Socialism see Edward Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

² Cole, *The British Co-operative Movement* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1951), p. 28.

³ Cole, *The British Co-operative Movement*, p. 29.

⁴ Cole, *The British Co-operative Movement*, p. 22.

⁵ Cole, *The British Co-operative Movement*, p. 31.

the loss of the ‘spirit’ of co-operation for the socialisation of the Co-operative.⁶ Co-operative education was perceived by leading educationalists in the organisation to be a way of establishing a ‘Co-operative Commonwealth’ and regaining the ‘spirit of co-operation’ that Cole refers to.

This chapter will analyse and evaluate the educational activities of the Co-operative. Three aspects of co-operative education will be dealt with. The first will explore what educationalists meant by the ‘Co-operative Commonwealth’, including what part education had in establishing it. The second will analyse how successful the Co-operative was in delivering its ideal of education. Did co-operative educational activities raise a general ‘co-operative consciousness’? The third aspect will analyse and evaluate the working relationships that existed between the Co-operative Union, the WEA and the NCLC, including how and why they worked together. By taking account of these different aspects of Co-operative education, we will gain greater insight into how workers’ adult education evolved in the twentieth century.

Primary sources used to support the findings of this research include the Annual Co-operative Congress Central Education Committee reports and articles from *The Co-operative Educator*. Where the sources allow, reference will be made to Yorkshire.

Historiography of Co-operation

Much has been taken for granted about the history of Co-operation, despite it being an integral part of the labour movement. Peter Gurney notes that, following the First World War, ‘histories of the Co-operative movement were written largely by activists and tended to be bland and celebratory.’⁷ More recently historians have taken a renewed interest in the phenomenon of British Co-operation. Nicole Robertson explores the world and ethos of Co-operation from political, social and economic Co-operative perspectives.⁸ Keith Vernon and Tom Woodin focus specifically on the educational

⁶ Cole, *The British Co-operative Movement*, p. 73.

⁷ Peter Gurney, *Co-operative Culture and the Politics of Consumption in England, 1870-1930*, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996). The inter-war histories that Gurney refers to include Catherine Webb, *The Woman with the Basket* (Manchester: The Co-operative Wholesale Society, 1927); Fred Hall and W. H. Watkins, *Co-operation: A Survey of the History, Principles and Organisation of the Co-operative Movement in Great Britain and Ireland* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1937) and T. W. Mercer, *Towards the Co-operative Commonwealth* (Manchester: Co-operative Union 1937). More recent histories include Jean Gaffin and David Thomas, *Caring and Sharing: The Centenary History of the Co-operative Women’s Guild* (Manchester: Co-operative Union, 1983) and Johnston Birchall, *Co-op: The People’s Business* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

⁸ Nicole Robertson, *The Co-operative Movement and Communities in Britain, 1914-1960: Minding Their Own Business* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

activities of the Co-operative.⁹The historiography on Co-operative education will be referred to throughout the text.

Ideology of Co-operation and Co-operative Education

The heart of Co-operative ideology and education is best encapsulated by referring to the inaugural address of Rev. Geoffrey Ramsay to 1,900 Co-operators at the 52nd Annual Co-operative Congress in 1920. At this conference, the will to create a Co-operative Commonwealth was raised:

we are for the first time assembled in Congress for what is officially declared to be “the establishment of a Co-operative Commonwealth”. This clear definition of our purpose was proposed by the General Co-operative Survey Committee, and approved by the special Congress held at Blackpool [...] you will be asked to alter the rules of the Co-operative Union in such a way that this definite statement shall stand first and foremost among the objects of our co-operative movement. It is the interpretation of our existence.¹⁰

Ramsay drew attention to the great expansion of the Co-operative’s trading interests, and identified the need for ‘greater strength and unity that can only come from the recognition of a common purpose’.¹¹ He recognised that with commercial expansion came greater specialisation and a risk for the Co-operative as a movement to become isolated from its roots. The main problem with such massive and successful expansion was that the ideals of Co-operation would be subsumed by profit-making and individualistic capitalism, something that Ramsay identified as a corruption of the Co-operative ideal:

There is a great deal of so-called co-operation which is inspired not by any moral purpose but by financial interest and expediency. The object of such co-operation is not the establishment of a co-operative commonwealth but the reconstruction of private capitalism. The purpose of co-operation is as important as the principle of co-operation.¹²

To avoid isolation and disunity, Ramsay advocated unity amongst Co-operators in the interests of a common inspirational vision. He emphasised that co-operators

⁹ Keith Vernon, ‘Co-operative Education and the State, c. 1895-1935’, *Forum*, 55, 2 (2013), pp. 293–307; ‘History, Citizenship and Co-operative Education, c. 1895-1930’ in *Mainstreaming Co-operation. An Alternative for the Twenty-First Century?* ed. by Anthony Webster, Linda Shaw and Rachael Vorberg-Rugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); ‘Values and Vocation: Education and the Co-operative Workforce, 1918-39’ in *The Hidden Alternative* ed. by Anthony Webster, Alyson Brown, David Stewart, John K Walton and Linda Shaw (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Tom Woodin, ‘Co-operative Education in Britain During the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Context, Identity and Learning’ in *The Hidden Alternative*.

¹⁰ National Co-operative Archive (NCA), Holyoake House, Manchester, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1920), p. 50. UNI Co-operative Union Records.

¹¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 50. UNI.

¹² NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), pp. 50-51. UNI.

dare not allow the material success of co-operative trade [...] to overshadow the deeper purpose of our movement. It must not be an end in itself but a means to a greater end.¹³

That greatest triumph for Co-operation in Ramsay's view was 'Trustification' – the means of creating wealth to create more wealth. Ramsay proposed that trustification 'may mean fewer rich men but they will be richer; it may mean fewer masters but they will have greater mastery.'¹⁴ He proposed an alternative to 'the existing individualistic capitalistic system of society [...] driving the world towards revolution'. That alternative was 'the organisation of a Co-operative Commonwealth making possible the physical, mental and moral well-being of the whole community'.¹⁵ Ramsay's address also delivered a scathing critique of capitalism and judged the zeitgeist of the time to be that

everywhere men and women are demanding that some greater, nobler, worthier purpose shall be served by their expenditure of physical and mental energy. They are no longer content that their exertions shall create nothing but a super-rich class, and unless they are convinced of the fruits of their labour serve some greater purpose, the cry for 'more production' will fall on deaf ears.¹⁶

His enthusiasm and rationale for society to reject capitalism and embrace the idea of a Co-operative Commonwealth resonated with the language of Christian socialism. For example, he declared that

The private ownership of land insults our intelligence, contradicts our conscience, and denies our faith in the beneficence and goodness of God. We simply cannot tolerate the continuance of private property in those natural resources that are necessary to communal life. The organisation of a co-operative commonwealth will for ever be impossible if we allow the means of life to be owned and controlled by the privileged few.¹⁷

In light of the devastation wrought upon European society by the First World War, Ramsay made a case for co-operation being 'necessary to the progress of true civilisation.' He promoted the Co-operative alternative by outlining the failures of capitalism:

We are being told that the new world must be constructed by private enterprise and unrestrained competition. These forces may construct a new world for capitalism, militarism, and war; they will never establish a new world for democracy, co-operation and peace. The "law of the jungle" can never create a world fit for free men to live in.

¹³ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 50. UNI.

¹⁴ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 51. UNI.

¹⁵ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 51. UNI.

¹⁶ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 53. UNI.

¹⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 53. UNI.

Ramsay defined Co-operation as the antithesis of individualistic capitalism and competition. In his words, Co-operation

recognises that each individual member of society is but a part of a greater whole; that there is a fundamental relationship between man and man, nation and nation, and that the true measure of a man is not the individual, but humanity. Co-operation thus declares the principle of “each for all and all for each”.

He reiterated that the purpose of Co-operation ‘is to make wealth – the wealth of life, physical, mental, and spiritual – the common property of all’.¹⁸ This statement, of the many made by Ramsay, best summarises the potential of a Co-operative Commonwealth.

But how was such a society to be achieved? Ramsay believed that success in Co-operative education was integral to the success of the notional Co-operative Commonwealth. However, he observed that the apathy demonstrated by the collective membership made the task of disseminating education in anticipation of building the Co-operative Commonwealth difficult:

One of the dangers inherent in collectivism is that it weakens the sense of individual responsibility. The individual co-operator too often transfers his responsibility to his society, and the society in turn transfers it to the national movement. The business meetings of our societies are frequently attended by less than two per cent of the members, and often the majority of those present are employees [...] Collectivism is not a super-personal power relieving the individual of his responsibilities. It is rather the endowing of the individual with greater responsibilities and greater tasks.¹⁹

To this end, Ramsay outlined his vision of the purpose of the Co-operative’s education policy to ‘try to re-discover and re-value the individual co-operator’.²⁰ This aspect of Co-operation is of particular interest to this thesis – the creation through education of individual co-operators who would act collectively to build a Co-operative Commonwealth. Ramsay expanded on his ideas about the tasks of co-operative educators. It was their duty

to form a co-operative character and to form an ideal of co-operative conduct. This task of re-discovering the individual co-operator must commission every district and educational association and every educational committee and guild with a greater inspiration of the necessity, the importance and value of their work.²¹

Ramsay viewed the need for education and knowledge as being essential to the development of the Co-operative Commonwealth, and stated that ‘the right to live is

¹⁸ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), pp. 54-57. UNI.

¹⁹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), pp. 57-58. UNI.

²⁰ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 58. UNI.

²¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 58. UNI.

inseparable from the principle of equality of educational opportunity for every child.’

He emphasised that

a system which makes education the privilege of a few restricts the growth of knowledge, just as a system of private property in land limits the material well being of the people. Every step which opens wider the opportunity for all to gain knowledge is, therefore, a step towards the co-operative commonwealth.²²

He also identified the establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth as being synonymous with the political aims of the Labour Party and trade unions, thus connecting the Co-operative cause directly with the Labour Movement as a whole:

The Co-operative Commonwealth is not something outside ourselves, ready-made and waiting for us to march into it; it is within ourselves, and we have to bring it out of ourselves rather than wait for it to be brought to us. That is why our cry everywhere is and always must be: Educate! Educate! Educate! [...] A Co-operative Commonwealth is the ultimate political objective of the Labour Party, and also the ultimate industrial objective of the trade unions.²³

Ramsay’s address was received with ‘tremendous applause’ and a standing ovation.²⁴ Several elements of Co-operation as an ideology raised by his address are worth commenting on. The Co-operative as a working class organisation is intriguing because it had twin ambitions that co-existed. One ambition was to generate and distribute wealth to the majority, on the basis of a collective ethical capitalist economic model. The second ambition was to educate members to be socially conscious and generous with their material wealth. To achieve a harmonious balance between these ambitions in reality, all members of the Co-operative had to subscribe to, and practise, the same ideology. Essentially, the whole Co-operative membership had to share a collective consciousness and develop a Co-operative character. In this respect, the Co-operative was similar to the Plebs League and the NCLC, organisations that also endeavoured to raise working class consciousness through education, albeit, in their cases, about Marxism.

Peter Gurney identifies some overarching characteristics of Co-operative education that are important to consider in relation to the ideology of a Co-operative Commonwealth. In his work on the transformative nature of Co-operative education, Gurney identifies four democratic pillars of Co-operative philosophy – equality, accessibility, independence and social education – that supported the development of the Co-operative education system.²⁵ He observed that the Co-operative, from its

²² NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 60. UNI.

²³ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), pp. 61-62. UNI.

²⁴ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 65. UNI.

²⁵ Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, pp. 36-42.

origins, had a firmly collectivist utopian vision of society that came to be at odds with the new model of state socialism that emerged before and between the wars.²⁶ The project of creating a Co-operative Commonwealth through education based on these principles was not straightforward. Gurney argues that, although the Co-operative had a distinct working class identity and that many co-operators ‘argued for “Knowledge” in the broad sense’, they also ‘rejected partisan understandings’.²⁷ This meant that Co-operators accepted other forms of education, and formed alliances with their middle class counterparts through initiatives such as university extension.²⁸ Such alliances, though generally positive, may have meant that Co-operators did not maintain a single-minded focus on developing Co-operative character through their own form of education.

The core purpose of Co-operative education was to teach people the value of social capital, and how they as individuals could make a significant difference in material, moral, and spiritual terms to their fellow man through commerce and right living. How the Co-operative balanced profit-making with the Co-operative ideal of eliminating all want and poverty through the generation of wealth, challenged their education system. This issue can be seen repeatedly in the annual reports of the Co-operative’s Central Education Committee, and will be explored subsequently.

Co-operative Education – Organisation and Administration

A succinct overview of the Co-operative education administrations is given by the Central Education Committee of the Co-operative Union, in a statement submitted to the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge Universities in 1921:

The Co-operative Union is a federation of Co-operative Societies in the United Kingdom.²⁹ These Societies, together have 4,000,000 members, drawn almost wholly from the artisan class; and most of them have a special education committee, and organise a variety of educational work, including classes, weekend schools, lectures, &c. They also make grant scholarships for purposes of higher education, and in various other ways assist educational work both locally and nationally. These societies allocate about £120,000 annually for educational purposes.³⁰

The statement outlined the duties and responsibilities held by the Central Education Committee, including: arranging and organising classes and summer schools; devising syllabuses; and administering various scholarships and grants issued by the

²⁶ Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, p. 44.

²⁷ Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, p. 55.

²⁸ Gurney, *Co-operative Culture*, p. 55.

²⁹ NCA, The Co-operative Union consisted of 1,322 societies, with a total membership of 4,479,209 in 1920 according to a report submitted to the Adult Education Committee of the Board of Education in November 1921, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1921), pp. 200–204. UNI.

³⁰ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1921), p. 77. UNI.

Co-operative Union. The report calculated that: ‘There are 25,000 students participating in the educational scheme organised by the Central Education Committee.’ It also clarified the type and purpose of Co-operative education delivered to members:

The objects of co-operative education, as outlined in the programme issued by the Central Education Committee are stated as being “primarily, the formation of co-operative character and opinion by teaching the history, principles and theory of the movement, with Economics and Industrial and Constitutional History in as far as they have a bearing on co-operation; and secondarily, though not necessarily of less import, the training of men and women to take part in industrial and social reforms and civic life generally.” The full and complete education of the citizen as a preparation for civic life, is, therefore, visualised in the programme of studies issued by the Central Education Committee.³¹

This overview of Co-operative education and its purpose corresponded closely with that given by Ramsay in his address.

Geographically, Co-operative societies were grouped into eight sections – Irish, Scottish, Midland, Northern, North-Western, Southern, South-Western and Western. Each section was divided into districts, there being a total of sixty-two districts in the United Kingdom in 1922. Each section elected a committee, and held about four conferences annually where local and national Co-operative interests were discussed. The Central Board comprised all the sectional board committee members, while the Central Educational Committee consisted of sectional committee members appointed by the Central Board whose duty was to carry out the educational work of the Co-operative. Some members of the Central Education Committee were co-opted from other organisations such as the Women’s Co-operative Guilds and the WEA.

Funds for the Central Education Committee were drawn from the annual subscription fees of the Co-operative membership paid to the Co-operative Union. The standard rate of subscription was 2d for each member. No more than 20 per cent of the total subscriptions paid to the Co-operative Union could be allocated to the Central Education Committee. In 1920, the expenditure of the Central Education Committee came to £5,779. The Central Education Committee’s work was, in the main, administrative and advisory, and it had ‘no control over the educational associations, the educational committees of the local societies, or the women’s and men’s guilds’.³²

At a more local, regional level, the sectional educational associations comprised educational committees of local societies, there being one sectional education association for each of the eight sections of the United Kingdom. Their work was to organise quarterly conferences and weekend schools, as well as to encourage local

³¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1921), p. 77. UNI.

³² NCA, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1922), p. 201. UNI.

societies to increase and expand their educational activities. Funds for the associations came from the annual subscriptions of members of the associations.

Finally, local education committees operated in conjunction with the management committees of local societies. Local committees received their funding from the profits made by their individual societies. Often the funding would come in the form of a grant that ranged from ½ per cent to 2½ per cent of the profits. The Co-operative Union and Central Education Committee recommended that local educational associations fund themselves on grants based on the membership of a society. Grants made using this system came to between around 5d. to 3s. per member per year.³³

The educational work carried out by local educational committees tended to vary from society to society, depending on the enthusiasm of the committee, the membership and the local situation. The main responsibility of local educational committees was to organise classes for junior and adult Co-operators in subjects on the Co-operative Union Educational Syllabus, as well as organising public lectures in social, literary and scientific subjects. They also arranged weekend schools, social evenings and propaganda meetings. Some of them ran libraries, as well as publishing their own magazines, or contributing local news to national Co-operative publications.³⁴

It is interesting to note that the Co-operative had a distinct advantage over the WEA and the NCLC in achieving the task of providing workers' education, because it had access to significantly larger funds than either of those other organisations. A possible allocation of up to 20% of the subscription rates paid to the Co-operative Union annually from over four million members (membership in 1922) for education purposes was no mean figure. Indeed, in 1929, the Central Education Committee estimated that the British Co-operative movement generated almost £200,000,000 of capital of which £200,000 was allocated to educational activities.³⁵ This figure – £200,000 – was far more than either the WEA or NCLC could dream of acquiring. The twinning of Co-operative commercialism and Co-operative education was therefore in theory a practical and sensible system. It meant that the Co-operative could fund its type of education independently, without recourse to LEA or charitable funding. Nonetheless, the Co-operative faced challenges in providing and disseminating education to its members.

³³ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1922), p. 204. UNI.

³⁴ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1922), p. 204. UNI.

³⁵ NCA, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1929), p. 403. UNI.

Challenges

A major theme that emerged in every Annual Co-operative Congress report was the Central Education Committee's dismay at the poor participation of Co-operative membership in education. For example, in 1924, the Central Education Committee expressed

profound regret that many societies do not even as yet, recognise how much of the real success of the movement depends on the promulgation of co-operative principles and ideals [...] we again implore societies [...] to renew and intensify efforts to spread a knowledge of the history and principles of this – our – movement – the greatest and most hopeful attempt that British democracy has ever made to work out its own salvation [...] none other can do for us a fraction of what we can do for ourselves.³⁶

William Rae, long-time chairman (1902-1936) of the Central Educational Committee, expounded on the above theme when delivering his address to the Education Congress. He lamented that Co-operative education was not flourishing: 'We continue to plant the seeds of education in the co-operative garden but the flowers have not grown.'³⁷ He criticised Co-operative societies that cited lack of money during economic depression as an excuse for not having education programmes. Rae elucidated the *raison d'être* of Co-operative education by outlining the differences between a Co-operative economy and a traditional political economy:

The ordinary school of political economy is based on the idea of getting on, of getting money and becoming wealthy, but co-operative economics is based on fairplay and brotherhood and consideration. Co-operative economics is thinking in terms of common interest, and differs [...] from the political economy with which the community has been doped for so long [...] There are hundreds and hundreds of co-operative employees simply picking up their training as chickens pick up rice after the big cocks and hens have done the scratching. He who helped the people to think did more for them than he who gave them parks and statues. Help your employees think and there is no limit to co-operative development.³⁸

The 1925 Congress report repeated the message that co-operative societies at a local level were not doing enough to promote the principles of co-operation through education and propaganda:

The committee [...] deeply regret that so many do not recognise the value [...] of propaganda of an inspirational character [...] Therefore the appeal of the Central Education Committee to all to spread the study of ideals, believing strongly, that therein lies true wisdom. Societies can only be secure when a large proportion of their membership is co-operative [...] The soul of the movement is its strength.³⁹

³⁶ NCA, Annual Co-operative Congress Report, (1924), p. 56. UNI.

³⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report*, (1924), p. 381. UNI.

³⁸ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report*, (1924), pp. 381-382. UNI.

³⁹ NCA, Annual Co-operative Congress Report, (1925), p. 6. UNI.

In 1926 the Central Education Committee concluded their report with another appeal for members to avail themselves of the educational opportunities provided by their societies. Disharmony between the educational and commercial wings of the Co-operative was evident:

There are apprentices and salesmen by the thousand, students are counted in hundreds [...] There are hundreds of men and women who are devoting much time to the spread of co-operative trade; if we could enlist some of this endeavour in the cause of efficiency and co-operative ethics we should soon see a Movement Reborn. Therefore the Central Education Committee make their most earnest appeal again and yet again.⁴⁰

Rae also expressed disappointment at the lack of enthusiasm amongst the membership for Co-operative education in economics, as well as in other subjects:

We have so far few students in economics [...] Industrial questions would not be so acute and so terrible if we knew more about true economics, and yet we have to-day only about one hundred co-operative members studying economics [...] We are very sorry that your response to our appeal for greater enthusiasm and interest in our work has been so feeble. It is true that the Co-operative Movement is big, but its soul is becoming smaller.⁴¹

One of the problems that the Co-operative had in relation to take-up of formal Co-operative education by adults was the perception widely held by many members that Co-operative education in social subjects was duplicated by the state, as well as by organisations such as the WEA and the NCLC. The Central Education Committee acknowledged this situation in many of their reports. For example, in 1930 the Committee stated that ‘classes for adults in social subjects show the least development, largely due to the attention paid to classes in these subjects by other organisations.’⁴² The Committee made further comment about the lack of adult students in the Co-operative movement in the same report: ‘Whilst wishing well to allied organisations engaged in this work we would express our regret that societies do not more actively develop classes in social subjects in conjunction with the Co-operative Union.’⁴³ Such an overlap meant that the Co-operative, despite its educational ethic and resources, failed to reach a larger number of worker-students.

Vernon shows the impact of the expansion of state education on the Co-operative to good effect; a special education committee reviewed the provision of education to its members by circulating a general inquiry to all local Co-operative societies. Of the 402

⁴⁰ NCA, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1926), p. 66. UNI.

⁴¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report*, (1926), p. 41. UNI.

⁴² NCA, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1930), p. 30. UNI.

⁴³ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report*, (1930), p. 33. UNI.

responses received back by the committee, '133 admitted having no educational fund.'⁴⁴ The committee followed up the inquiry with visits to some local societies, and found that, because local authorities had expanded their provision of technical education and public libraries, 'local societies were increasingly passing over their educational functions.'⁴⁵

Several points raised by delegates attending annual congresses explain in part why there was such poor take up of Co-operative education by members. As one delegate, Mr F. Langmead of Barnsley, argued,

it is hardly fair that I, as a co-operator, should pay for educational facilities when as a tax payer and rate payer I have to pay for the facilities provided by the educational authorities [...] I suggest that we should leave non-vocational and cultural subjects alone, and not spend £10,000 in attempting to duplicate the system of education already in existence under the auspices of the local educational authorities.⁴⁶

Another delegate, Mr W. Hood, presented a counter-argument to Mr Langmead's view:

I take exception to the remarks that we are duplicating the educational work done by the State. The text books, for instance, provided by the State are wrong. They are not laid down by the class of people we represent. The economics taught at the universities are not the same as those taught by the co-operative college. We can send our men to the universities but they do not get the kind of education we require.⁴⁷

Such opposing views exemplify the differences in opinion amongst Co-operators about the value of education; while some Co-operators valued Co-operative education because it was designed exclusively for them, others subscribed to it only for its technical and vocational value. The two lines of argument that emerge in this exchange show that a degree of class awareness existed amongst the membership. It is open to debate as to how engaged members were about the value of Co-operative education from a perspective of class. Tom Woodin argues that 'the very success of the movement led to a tension between self-help and structure that became embedded within the Co-operative educational project.'⁴⁸ In a similar vein to Gurney, Woodin notes that, as the commercial, social and political activities of the Co-operative expanded, it was necessary for Co-operators to engage with the other social institutions that held different

⁴⁴ Vernon, 'Co-operative Education and the State', p. 296.

⁴⁵ Vernon, 'Co-operative Education and the State', p. 296.

⁴⁶ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1926), p. 32. UNI.

⁴⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1926), p. 32. UNI.

⁴⁸ Woodin, 'Co-operative Education in Britain', p. 91.

perspectives. In doing so, ‘the co-operative message could in the long term, become subdued.’⁴⁹

In 1932, the issue of adult education was raised again in an Annual Report. Professor Frederick Hall, Principal of the Co-operative College, proposed that: ‘Our programme for adults must emphasise the four basic subjects – Industrial History, Economics, Co-operation, and Citizenship.’ He emphasised that ‘though cultural and other subjects will be considered we must not overlook the fact that we are a social movement.’⁵⁰ Hall also drew attention to the role that the Co-operative political party could take in the social and political life of the country. Vernon credits the Co-operative for their work in providing formal classes on a range of subjects with an emphasis on history and citizenship. He notes that, from the late 1890s, the Co-operative Union and Central Education Committee were worried about the state of Co-operative education. Money earmarked for education was often used to subsidise social occasions rather than used for serious study.⁵¹ Lillian Dawson, identifying this as a problem in 1923, noted that some Co-operative societies used their funds to ‘provide entertainments, such as teas and whist drives.’⁵²

The Central Education Committee launched an educational campaign to return to the core values of the Co-operative, to which end it went to great effort to ‘establish citizenship as central to co-operative studies.’⁵³ Courses, aimed at all age groups, from juniors to adults, were structured to outline the history of Co-operation. Vernon found that Co-operative history courses were distinct from those provided by the state because they were ‘about modern urban industrial times, active and participatory citizenship and the agency of working people to make their own history.’⁵⁴ He concludes that the numbers of students who took classes in the history of Co-operation, though small, was significant and that such education gave Co-operators a greater sense of Co-operation as a reformist working class movement, and ‘equipped them for the challenges of their times both within co-operation and for its wider role in society’.⁵⁵ Vernon’s findings show how the Co-operative functioned in an alternative world of labour by disseminating Co-operative philosophy via Co-operative history and citizenship classes to its membership.

⁴⁹ Woodin, ‘Co-operative Education in Britain’, p. 91.

⁵⁰ NCA, Annual Co-operative Congress Report, (1932), p. 490. UNI.

⁵¹ Vernon, ‘History, Citizenship and Co-operative Education’, p. 70.

⁵² Lillian A. Dawson, *Co-operative Education*, Fabian Tract No. 205 (London: The Fabian Society, March 1923), p. 9.

⁵³ Vernon, ‘History, Citizenship and Co-operative Education’, p. 73.

⁵⁴ Vernon, ‘History, Citizenship and Co-operative Education’, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Vernon, ‘History, Citizenship and Co-operative Education’, p. 87.

At the 1931 Congress, Mr S. V. Miles drew attention to other flaws in the Co-operative education system and administration, including the lack of full-time educational secretaries (recognised as a fundamental problem in previous years), which was identified as a hindrance to the efficiency and efficacy of many educational associations:

The Central Education Committee is a kind of Cinderella [...] We should have more permanent educational secretaries in the Movement [...] Not only do we want more full-time education secretaries, but we also want more education committees. I am a member of a management committee, and no management committee in these days can afford to spend time on educational affairs [...] We need an educational crusade to rouse our members from the apathy that prevails [...] We shall never get the Co-operative Commonwealth until our six million members are not merely members, but co-operators in every sense of the word.⁵⁶

William Rae agreed with Miles's comments, yet also stated that he 'did not see why every management committee should not also be an education committee'.⁵⁷

Perhaps, if more local, sectional and regional Co-operative management committees had synchronised their commercial and educational roles, the idea of a Co-operative Commonwealth would have made more sense to the entire membership. The division between the Co-operative's commerciality and its educational activity limited its scope to be a viable alternative to the established capitalist model of commerce. Dawson, in her analysis of why co-operative education was not more effective, observed that, coupled with a general lack of interest in education amongst the membership, some societies did not make any profits to invest in education. She also noted that each society had its own individualistic outlook. It was this tendency to look inwards that meant that societies

overlapped in their trading and educational activities, with the result that competition instead of stimulating interest has had the effect of producing a number of small societies, too feeble to do any real constructive work, and too selfish to federate under one Central Body which could direct the education for the district.⁵⁸

In Dawson's Fabian view, the way to improve the provision and delivery of Co-operative education was to create a tighter system whereby the Central Education Committee co-ordinated the educational activities, specifically in the field of co-operative ideology and citizenship.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1931), p. 429. UNI.

⁵⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1931), p. 430. UNI.

⁵⁸ Dawson, *Co-operative Education*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Dawson, *Co-operative Education*, pp. 9–14.

Co-operative Education – Statistics 1918 - 1939

The following statistics set out the number of Co-operators – junior and adult – who took Co-operative classes during the 1920s and 1930s, beginning with the numbers of Co-operative classes and students that operated from 1918 to 1939.⁶⁰

TABLE 8
Co-operative Education – National Statistics (1918 to 1939)

Year	Junior & Intermediate		Adult: Social subjects		Adult: Technical		Total no. of	
	No. classes	No. students	No. classes	No. students	No. classes	No. students	classes	students
1918-19*	494	17,947	70	1,691	*56	*1,201	*620	*20,839
1923-24	463	16,551	75	1,869	313	4,235	851	22,655
1925-26	615	20,823	108	2,852	353	6,975	1,076	30,650
1926-27	567	21,523	109	2,659	412	8,695	1,088	32,877
1927-28	607	22,339	129	3,516	485	9,073	1,221	34,928
1928-29	790	30,884	156	4,412	555	11,026	1,501	46,322
1929-30	791	31,823	181	5,348	634	13,597	1,606	50,768
1930-31	892	29,530	218	5,972	772	16,126	1,882	51,628
1931-32	856	29,795	243	6,843	882	16,498	1,981	53,136
1932-33	987	33,645	228	5,826	813	16,145	2,028	55,616
1933-34	1,041	33,744	211	4,011	831	15,743	2,083	53,498
1934-35	867	28,681	298	7,606	846	16,172	2,011	52,459
1935-36	898	27,785	245	4,730	1,013	18,757	2,156	51,281
1936-37	922	26,718	299	6,039	1,227	22,939	2,448	55,686
1937-38	1,200	35,000	335	6,757	1,338	23,871	2,873	65,628
1938-39 **	1,280	39,217	345	6,789	1,350	23,529	2,975	69,535

* War years affecting enrolments in employees' classes

** Not complete statistics

⁶⁰ NCA, Annual Co-operative Congress Report (1939), p. 75. UNI.

TABLE 9

Range of Subjects Taught in Co-operative Education Classes⁶¹
(modified from original)

Section	Subject
I. Co-operation	History and Principles of Co-operation, Junior Grade History and Principles of Co-operation, Intermediate Grade History and Principles of Co-operation, Senior grade Honours Diploma Course Economics of Co-operation, Part I and II Co-operation and Social Problems Co-operation in Denmark Co-operation in Agriculture International Co-operation Adult Co-operation Consumers Co-operation
II. History	Industrial History Economic and Industrial History of the 19th Century Constitutional History Reform Movements of the 19th Century
III. Economics	General Economics Special Course for Secretaries and Managers Money, Prices, and Banking History of the Principles of Taxation Public Finance Economic and Social Problems The Organisation of Industry and Commerce Economics of Business Organisation The Welfare of the Group Social Economics
IV. Citizenship	Citizenship Local Government Central Government Political Theory
V. Sociology and Ethics	Sociology Modern Social Institutions and Association
VI. Education	History and Organisation of Co-operative Education Training Courses for Educational Secretaries Psychology
VII. Propaganda and Public Speaking	Public Speaking
VIII. Pioneer Courses in Social Subjects	Citizenship Economics
IX. Technical Subjects	Junior Employees' Preparatory Course English Arithmetic

⁶¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1939) Appendix, n.p. UNI.

Section	Subject
	Business Methods Advanced Business Methods Employees' Introductory Course Arithmetic (Advanced) Geography Bookkeeping
X. Technical Subjects	<u>Managerial Courses</u> Part I – Apprentices' Course Part II – Salesmen's Course Part III – Branch Manager and Assistant Departmental Managers' Course – General and Branch Organisation Law Relating to Commodities Organisation of Commodities Markets Co-operative Law and Administration Part IV – Departmental Managers' Course – Departmental Organisation Business Statistics and Statistical Methods Commercial Law Part V – General Managers' Course Management, Organisation and Administration Co-operative Statistics Law Relating to Trade and Industry Ticket Writing Window Display Co-operative Book-keeping Co-operative Accountancy Co-operative Secretaryship – Intermediate Course – Secretarial Practice Co-operative Accounts Commercial Law Co-operative Law and Administration Final Course:– Office Organisation and Administration Advanced Co-operative Accounts Co-operative Finance Co-operative Statistics and Statistical Methods Advanced Commercial Law Course for Committee Members
XII. Pioneer Courses in Technical Subjects	Salesmanship

As Table 8 shows, there was a steady rise in student – junior, intermediate, and adult – enrolment in classes. The junior classes were by far the most popular, while the classes for adults in social subjects were least popular, with a total of 345 classes and an enrolment of 6,789 students in 1939. By 1939, the Co-operative had a total of 69,535

students – junior, intermediate and adult. The 1939 co-operative membership was around six million, so only 1.15% of its total membership was involved in education. Of that only 0.11% of the adult membership took part in co-operative adult education classes. This places the extent and take-up of Co-operative education in perspective. As seen above, the Central Education Committee was well aware of the lack of interest and participation in the education it tried to provide. In comparison the WEA and NCLC reached a far wider adult population than the Co-operative, despite their considerable lack of resources. This situation is made all the more curious because the Co-operative preceded the WEA and NCLC as a nineteenth *and* a twentieth century working class adult education provider that was an accepted and embedded part of working class culture nationwide.

Table 9 displays the wide range of subjects taught by the Co-operative. A combination of technical, vocational and humanities topics were covered by the curriculum. What is striking is the range of technical and commercial education available to employees. The Co-operative appears to have exercised strength and expertise in this sphere, making it interesting and attractive to co-operators who wished to get ahead. It was in the vanguard of providing business education to people, and this was one of its unique selling points as an educational organisation.

Vernon's research provides more information about the technical education that the Co-operative provided. He notes that although the Education Act 1918 failed in many respects to deliver wide-reaching educational reform, it did provide for day continuation schools 'whereby 14- to 16-year-olds in work could receive further education during work time'.⁶² In addition, the Act allowed educational organisations other than LEAs to run continuation schools. The Co-operative took advantage of this power to provide technical and vocational training to Co-operative students. Employees who enrolled on Co-operative technical courses received a full and thorough education, which was examined rigorously. The failure rate was high. In 1921-22 'out of 2,753 candidates for technical examinations, 1,020 were unsuccessful.' In 1928-29 there were '3,040 failures out of 7,426'. Vernon raises the question of whether the achievements of the Co-operative's technical education scheme were 'distinctively co-operative in nature?' His view is that although the Co-operative was competing with other businesses, it remained 'conscious of its traditional commitment to education, and embraced the responsibility to expand it.'⁶³ He also notes that 'all the technical training was to be

⁶² Vernon, 'Values and Vocations', p. 41.

⁶³ Vernon, 'Values and Vocations', pp. 52-53.

couched in a co-operative framework.’ This meant that ‘no potential salesman or manager could scale the educational ladder without a thorough grounding in the history of the principles of the movement.’⁶⁴ Vernon’s research ultimately shows that the Co-operative, in theory, had the potential to achieve a working balance between its commercial and ideological outlooks.

So far, the chapter has expanded on the remit, organisation and performance of Co-operative education. In summary, Co-operative education was conceived and designed to educate co-operators to be part of the Co-operative Commonwealth – an Owenite ethical, socially responsible society. However, the expansion of state education provision, as well as the emergence of the WEA and the NCLC, led to the duplication of Co-operative education. This led many Co-operators to seek education from the state, or from voluntary organisations such as the WEA and the NCLC, rather than the Co-operative. What is most striking is how the Co-operative, as a well-established and respected working class organisation appeared to have difficulty distinguishing itself as a social, economic and political alternative that sought to improve the quality of life for the majority of working class people in Britain.

The Co-operative – working with the WEA and NCLC

The next sections will investigate the relationships between the WEA, the NCLC and the Co-operative in relation to the provision of education to adult Co-operators. The Co-operative and the WEA enjoyed a convivial and complementary relationship. Albert Mansbridge, in his early working life, was a clerk at the tea department of the Co-operative Wholesale Society. He attended the 1898 and 1899 Annual Co-operative Congress and unsuccessfully introduced his idea of an alliance between the Co-operative and University Extension, in order to make classes in social subjects more accessible to working class adults. By 1903, Mansbridge’s vision of how education in the liberal arts could be delivered more effectively had matured, and he founded the WEA. Key to his vision was an educational administration that consisted of joint committees of trade unionists, Co-operators and University Extensionists, who would assist local education committees to set up and deliver classes in the humanities. The key difference between the WEA and the Co-operative was that the WEA did not set out explicitly to educate working class people about Co-operative ideology or how to achieve a Co-operative Commonwealth. WEA education was always firmly focused on making education in the liberal arts, as delivered by university extension, accessible to

⁶⁴ Vernon, ‘Values and Vocations’, pp. 52–53.

working class people who were interested in it. By recommending WEA classes to its members, the Co-operative also accepted the value of this type of higher education. Nor did the Co-operative Executive seem concerned that the WEA was partially funded by the LEAs.

The Co-operative was always represented on WEA committees at a national and regional level, and vice versa, and WEA representatives often addressed the Co-operative Congress. In 1925, A. D. Lindsay (1879–1952)⁶⁵, the Master of Balliol (1924–1949) and a longstanding leader of the WEA, addressed the 1925 Co-operative Educational Conference, and (as paraphrased in the report) highlighted one of the on-going challenges that existed in the practice of joint working between the WEA and the Co-operative:

the two movements did not know enough of what each was doing, and each was in some ways wasting opportunities by overlapping. They want to stop that. It might be said the Co-operative Movement had its own educational organisation [...] What had the WEA to offer it? The answer was that there was much educational work which the Co-operative Movement did for itself and must do for itself, but that it must gain by coming into closer contact with the WEA, which was assisting more and more in the collective or co-operative thinking of the whole working-class movement.⁶⁶

Lindsay supported the Co-operative education ideal and was not suggesting that the WEA take over Co-operative education, but that rather

it would make a great difference to the men and women thinking about the problems of Co-operation if they had also taken part in a wider educational movement, taken their share in discussions not directly related to Co-operation, and learned to know something about other social problems and other sides of life as they appeared to people who were not co-operators. They [The Co-operative] needed to have their special job, but to have a light shed on it from other sides.⁶⁷

In response to Lindsay's address, Professor Hall (also paraphrased) called for delegates to support the 'request of the Co-operative Union, which was asking societies to become affiliated to the WEA and was also asking the WEA to give Co-operative societies local representation on the branch organisations of the WEA.'⁶⁸ Hall's rationale for the Co-operative to have a closer relationship with the WEA was to promote the exercise of democracy and better-educated voting:

⁶⁵ Lindsay, R. H. Tawney and William Temple had known each other as undergraduates at Oxford and remained friends throughout their lives. All were active in the adult education movement. Gary McCulloch, 'Alexander Dunlop Lindsay', *ODNB* (Downloaded 11 November 2017).

⁶⁶ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 334. UNI.

⁶⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 335. UNI.

⁶⁸ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 335. UNI.

The great need to-day was the education of the democracy. It was of little use the mass of the people possessing votes which enabled them to control their social affairs unless they had intelligence sufficient to use those votes wisely.

In the same address he emphasised the true purpose of education that fitted perfectly with co-operative ideology:

Education was, however, concerned with much more than making the voters of the country intelligent in their political activities. It was concerned with bringing more into the daily life of the people, and co-operators could join with all persons whose desire it was to make the lives of people fuller, brighter, and better.⁶⁹

But Hall also emphasised the need for Co-operators not to become complacent about Co-operative education by affiliating to the WEA and paying a subscription. Instead Co-operators needed to be vigilant and mindful about their special work in ‘the application of Co-operative principles in industry and social life’.⁷⁰ These exchanges show the WEA and the Co-operative endeavouring to work together and to learn from each other in a highly constructive manner. It also shows the Co-operative to be a somewhat insular organisation that could have benefited from a greater recognition of the wider world of non-Co-operators who were interested in the same ideals as itself, albeit from different perspectives.

In a discussion following the two addresses where delegates voiced their views, one Bradford delegate said that ‘In Bradford, the Co-operative society and the WEA had run similar classes; but by a co-ordination of effort that difficulty would be overcome.’⁷¹ However, controversially, another delegate from Runcorn and Widnes declared that:

they had ousted the WEA from Runcorn because they believed its teaching had the bias of middle-class education, and they wanted working-class education. They now secured their teaching from the National Labour College, and were better satisfied.⁷²

This anti-WEA view is rarely seen in the Annual Congress Reports yet it does occasionally emerge, revealing a small minority of Co-operators who wished for the Co-operative to be a more radical organisation. Lindsay responded to this criticism very diplomatically, saying that: ‘the National Labour College had a job of its own to do’ and that often people did better when taught from a political perspective, and that those people would benefit most from the type of political education that the NCLC offered. However, he added that

⁶⁹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 335. UNI.

⁷⁰ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 335. UNI.

⁷¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 336. UNI.

⁷² NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 336. UNI.

they would not make the advance they needed to do in order to solve the problem with which they were faced, unless they got beyond that stage. Sooner or later they needed the education that was critical, and the way to cure bias was to get all the biases they could and rub them together.⁷³

Tension can be detected in other exchanges about the NCLC and the Co-operative. In the discussion of the 1937 education report, a delegate, Mr J. Hull, drew attention to the lack of reference to the NCLC. He remarked ‘I have been listening intently to the remarks that have been passed with reference to education but the speaker never made any reference to the National Council of Labour Colleges’. He went on to criticize the WEA for being state-funded and asked:

How are you to achieve unity and working-class ideas in the Co-operative Movement when you have a Government that is prepared to give State grants towards an educational movement to try to educate people not on the working class side, but in what is known as orthodox education to bring about capitalist democracy?... It ought to be understood that the WEA never intends to give you the full facts and figures with reference to the class struggle. The National Council of Labour Colleges tutors are prepared to lecture for their bare travelling expenses, a basis upon which no WEA tutors are prepared to lecture.⁷⁴

During the 1939 Congress, another delegate, Mr G. Burgess of Stockport, raised the issue of how the NCLC had been neglected by the Co-operative:

One question that has been omitted by speakers on this educational report is that of adult education. In this country it is very unfortunate that there are two sections of adult educationists – the WEA and the NCLC [...] The NCLC has been more or less ignored by the Co-operative Movement [...] The National Council of Labour Colleges is the largest non-State aided education organisation in the world. It does not get one penny piece from any municipality or any State organisation, the funds coming from trade unions and the Co-operative Movement. The NCLC is on a class-conscious basis. I ask you to realize how very necessary it is to inculcate a class-conscious policy into the working classes. NCLC training would bring a man to think accurately and be a real co-operator. I am speaking for a million or two of people. I am appealing to you now to go to your societies and see if they can take a square deal – like the railways by asking the National Educational Council to take a more tolerant view.⁷⁵

Mr H. Willcock (Kirkconnel) in 1938 made another reference to the NCLC, again in relation to WEA funding. Like Mr Hull above, he suggested that the Co-operative should work with the NCLC because the NCLC rejected state funding:

I want to suggest [...] that if our educational body desires to work in conjunction with any other educational body, it should work in conjunction with the National Council of Labour Colleges.⁷⁶

⁷³ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 336. UNI.

⁷⁴ NCA, *Annual Co-operative Congress Report* (1937), p. 458. UNI.

⁷⁵ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 481. UNI.

⁷⁶ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1938), p. 535. UNI.

No response was given to either Hull or Burgess's comments, perhaps implying that the Co-operative Central Education Committee was disinclined to enter into a debate about the NCLC. At no point in the reports did the Co-operative discourage its members from availing themselves of education provided by the NCLC, yet nor did it actively recommend it. Instead, the Co-operative took a non-interventionist approach and seemed to tolerate the NCLC. Occasionally the Congress Reports show evidence of on-going negotiations between the Co-operative and other educational organisations such as the WEA and NCLC. Professor Hall, in the 1925 report, alluded to a committee that comprised representatives from the WEA, the NCLC, Ruskin College, and the Co-operative, who were trying to co-ordinate their work.⁷⁷

It is helpful to get an idea of the WEA's contribution to the education of Co-operators. The Co-operative officially recognised the WEA in 1932. The WEA gives the example of an inquiry carried out by the WEA Yorkshire District North that illustrates the extent to which members of Co-operatives subscribed to WEA classes: 'Out of returns received from 102 [WEA] classes with approximately 1,600 students it was found that more than 50% of the students were members of co-operative societies.'⁷⁸ If this was the case for most districts in England and Wales, then the WEA catered for a significant proportion of Co-operators, consolidating the working relationship between the WEA and the Co-operative. By 1933, the two organisations had ratified agreements with each other to improve how they worked together. Agreements were made for Co-operative societies to pay the class fees of Co-operative members attending WEA classes, and for reciprocal affiliation between Co-operative and WEA education committees at district and branch level. Also recommended was the formation of Standing Joint Committees that would include Co-operative and WEA representatives. The roles of these committees were: (1) to organise joint educational schemes between the WEA and the District and Sectional Educational Association, as well as local societies; (2) to organise joint weekend and one-day schools between the WEA and the Co-operative; (3) to negotiate the use of WEA teachers; (4) to deal with literature; and (5) to deal with affiliations of Guilds to branches.⁷⁹

Several articles published by *The Co-operative Educator* about the success of the WEA demonstrate a healthy working relationship between the two organisations. In 1934, the WEA's annual report was summarised in *The Co-operative Educator* stating that:

⁷⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 336. UNI.

⁷⁸ NCA, *The Co-operative Educator*, XX, 1 (January, 1936), p. 22.

⁷⁹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1933), pp. 79-81. UNI.

The annual report of the WEA again records a steady increase in the number of classes and students. Since 1929-30 the number of grant earning classes has risen from 2,128 to 2,612, and the total number of students of all types from 48,101 to 58,545.⁸⁰

Such statistics give a good indication both of the size of the WEA as a national organisation, and also of its ability to attract adult students, both of which far outstripped those of the Co-operative. As mentioned in the same publication, many WEA students were members of Co-operative societies.

In 1933 the Co-operative Union officially recognised the NCLC as a legitimate working class adult education provider for its membership. Labour Colleges offered classes to members of co-operative societies for free, or at reduced fees. Labour Colleges also benefited from the relationship because they were able to use Co-operative halls for free.⁸¹ A sub-committee of the Educational Executive assessed the representations made by the NCLC, and concluded in a report to the Executive that:

The Educational Executive has had under consideration the request from the National Council of Labour Colleges that it should recognize the Council and its work. In giving consideration to this request the Executive has had before it copies of correspondence, lessons, text books, outlines of lessons and letters from co-operative societies, in co-operation with which the National Council of Labour Colleges has organised classes and weekend schools. After considering this evidence the Executive is of opinion that the NCLC is worthy of recognition by the Co-operative Movement⁸²

This development was encouraging for the NCLC, which had lobbied consistently for such recognition. It should be noted that between 1918 and 1939, not once was a representative from the NCLC invited to address the Co-operative Congress, whereas major WEA personalities such as R. H. Tawney, Alfred Zimmern (1879–1957)⁸³ and Dr J. H. B. Masterman (the Bishop of Plymouth)⁸⁴ all gave keynote speeches at Co-operative Educational Conferences (in 1930, 1931 and 1929 respectively), again showing the strong connection between the WEA and the Co-operative.

Nonetheless, the NCLC had some support from the more radical, less conformist wing of the Co-operative and, in the view of the Educational Executive, deserved explicit recognition for this. This situation corresponded to that of the NCLC, the WEA and the TUC. The TUC, like the Co-operative, recognised the WEA and the NCLC as

⁸⁰ NCA, *The Co-operative Educator*, XVIII, 1 (January, 1934), p. 3.

⁸¹ Cohen, 'Labour College Movement Between the Wars', pp. 115–116.

⁸² NCA, Annual Co-operative Congress Report (1933), p. 82. UNI.

⁸³ Alfred Zimmern, internationalist, was involved in working class education from 1907. He was an inspector for the board of Education from 1912 to 1915. D. J. Markwell, 'Sir Alfred Eckhard Zimmern', *ODNB* (Downloaded 11 November 2017).

⁸⁴ John Howard Bertram Masterman (1867–1933) was also a well-known author of political and religious books.

legitimate providers of workers' adult education, and recommended both organisations to their membership. It was up to individual trade unions to choose which one to affiliate to. Often, trade unions would affiliate to both the WEA and the NCLC. The Co-operative Union Executive operated in a similar way to the TUC in this regard, giving individual societies the freedom to choose with which organisation they wished to affiliate.

Co-operative Education in Yorkshire and the North of England

The next section will focus on co-operative education in Yorkshire and Northern England, to show how it contributed to the working class adult education movement at a regional level. Most of the information in this section comes from the reports of the Educational Associations of the Northern, North-Eastern and North-Western sections outlined in the Co-operative Congress reports. Unfortunately the reports give minimal detail about the educational activities undertaken by the Sectional Education Associations.

In the main the Regional Co-operative Education Associations arranged conferences and classes for their members. For example, the Northern Sectional Educational Association in 1920 reported that four conferences took place during 1919 with William Rae delivering a lecture at one of them entitled "What Co-operation stands for in the social, Industrial and Political Life of the People". Another conference was arranged jointly with the WEA to discuss the Education Act 1918.⁸⁵ In 1925, the North Eastern Educational Committees Association reported that a quarterly conference was held at York on 20 September 1924 run by the York Educational Committee and attended by ninety delegates. (The report stated that the 90 attending delegates represented 90% of the membership) A Mr Holt gave an address entitled 'The task before us' where he argued that 'Socialism, trade-unionism, and the co-operative movement should unite, and the closer unity will mean rapid progress, and that the three forces would make a perfect social order'.⁸⁶ Mr Holt's views were thought to be too radical by some of the delegates. Other conferences during 1924 were held at Hull and Bradford. At Hull, Mr H. Winter gave a lecture on "The Fundamentals of Co-operation", focusing on the ethical responsibilities of consumers and how education could improve society:

As consumers we did not fully realise our power for a still larger measure of freedom. The ethics of production for use had a far-reaching effect upon the lives,

⁸⁵ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1920), p. 340. UNI.

⁸⁶ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 182. UNI.

welfare and happiness of the consumers and producers. Education, developed on proper lines, would bring beauty, happiness and goodness; if not on proper lines, would produce misery, poverty and ugliness.⁸⁷

Mr Winter's belief in the power of education echoed Reverend Ramsay's, and seems indicative of the attitudes held by the Sectional Educational Associations.

The sectional associations also helped support wider educational projects, such as in 1925 when the University of Leeds appealed for financial support to extend its buildings. A conference took place on 24 October 1925 to generate interest in the appeal, and was attended by around 400 delegates, many of them members of Co-operative societies in the region. William Rae presided over the conference, while J. B. Baillie (1872–1940), the Vice Chancellor of the University, delivered an address entitled "The Place of the University in the Life of the Community".⁸⁸ Altogether the Co-operative donated £687 18s to the University, a very large figure given the generally depressed economy.⁸⁹

The Northern Educational Committees Association, part of the Co-operative organisation, also undertook research into educational activities in the region. For example, they sent out a questionnaire to evaluate the extent and range of educational activities to all 122 societies in the section, half of who returned their questionnaires. The returned responses showed that twenty-four societies did not carry out any educational activities at all. Fourteen societies did not have education committees but did carry out propaganda lectures and other educational activities. Twenty-four societies had education committees, and two general committees incorporated educational work in their remit.⁹⁰ The association concluded from the questionnaire results that, although Co-operative education had been brought within reach of the majority of Co-operators in the section, much work remained to be done to bolster enthusiasm for educational activities.⁹¹

The North-Eastern Section Educational Committees Association had success in maintaining its programme of conferences over the years. They also consistently ran quarterly conferences throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1932 they were able to report that their membership consisted of thirty-five Education Committees, twenty-eight Women's Guilds, three Men's Guilds and three Mixed Guilds.⁹²

⁸⁷ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1925), p. 182. UNI.

⁸⁸ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1926), p. 173. UNI; John Smurthwaite, 'Sir James Black Baillie', *ODNB* (Downloaded 22 November 2017).

⁸⁹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1926), p. 185. UNI.

⁹⁰ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1932), p. 196. UNI.

⁹¹ NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1932), p. 196. UNI.

⁹² NCA, *Co-op Congress Report* (1932), p. 214. UNI.

The sources above give an outline of Co-operative educational activities in the Northern regions. The Sectional Education Committees were active in organising interesting conferences and speakers for Co-operative members, while the local education committees were less consistent in their educational activities.

Conclusion

As a working class organisation, the Co-operative had its own unique identity embedded in Owenite philosophy and Christian socialism, exercising what Cole refers to as functional democracy. Despite its historical significance and status as a working class organisation, the Co-operative faced challenges in the twentieth century that placed it under pressure to renew its identity. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Co-operative Congress reports show that there was a strong interest amongst educationalists in developing Co-operative character and regaining the spirit of Co-operation through education. Co-operative education reached many Co-operators at a junior level, but not so many adults. In this regard the WEA and, to a lesser extent, the NCLC made an important contribution to the Co-operative education project.

The disharmony between the commercial and education wings of the Co-operative made it a less efficient working class adult education organisation. It could not concentrate on all elements at once – profit-making, running businesses, political campaigns and education. The Co-operative, the WEA, and the NCLC worked together to a greater or lesser extent to provide education as desired by adult Co-operators, with the general aim of creating a Co-operative Commonwealth. However, such a Commonwealth remained elusive, perhaps because the idea of it did not inspire the majority, and was confined to a minority of enthusiastic educationists.

CHAPTER FOUR

Trades Councils and Labour Colleges in Yorkshire

Peter Ackers and Alastair J. Reid refer to alternatives to state socialism as ‘other worlds of labour’.¹ They argue that approaches to labour history ‘based on an assumption that the trend of twentieth century history was necessarily towards some form of state socialism’ overlook the activities of trade unions, the Co-operative, local government and other non-governmental labour movement associations in shaping the world of British labour.² Ackers and Reid’s aim is to challenge ‘the prevalent state-socialist reading of core labour institutions [...] and to suggest credible alternative historical readings’.³ This pluralist approach gives space to explore the history and contribution of marginal labour movement groups at a local and regional level. The ‘other world of labour’ that this chapter will explore is that of the trades councils and labour colleges in Yorkshire between the wars.

While keeping the idea of other worlds of labour in mind, it is relevant to re-visit McCarthy and Bevir’s ideas which inform much of this chapter. McCarthy’s work focuses on impartial, non-sectarian voluntary organisations that, in her view, anchored ‘British politics ideologically in the centre-ground’, thus preventing political extremism.⁴ The WEA fits McCarthy’s definition of an impartial voluntary association supporting British democracy. However, in the field of workers’ adult education, other voluntary associations that were not politically impartial – the Plebs, the NCLC and the labour colleges – operated as a counterbalance to the WEA. Here I will modify McCarthy’s thesis, and focus on the role of the labour colleges – voluntary organisations associated with the labour movement – in their promotion and encouragement of more radical forms of political participation amongst the working class electorate.

Bevir draws our attention to the existence of alternative forms of socialism, and to how diverse the British labour movement was in this regard. There was no single, overarching intellectual tradition of British socialism, but rather a medley of socialistic ideas that formed a fluid, theoretical framework within which workers’ adult education existed. Bevir’s approach studies the intellectual world of the British labour movement

¹ Peter Ackers and Alastair Reid (eds.) *Alternatives to State Socialism: Other Worlds of Labour in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

² Ackers and Reid, *Alternatives to State Socialism*, p. 7.

³ Ackers and Reid, *Alternatives to State Socialism*, p. 8.

⁴ McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics’, p. 893.

by ‘recovering the diversity of this movement – the different meanings it had for the people who were part of it’⁵. The ideologies that underpinned the workers’ adult education phenomenon of the inter-war era emerged from the intellectual socialist traditions that Bevir considers in his research.

A combination of the approaches of Bevir, Ackers, Reid, and McCarthy will be applied to the topic of this chapter – the world of trades councils and labour colleges in Yorkshire. The chapter will analyse the educational activities of the labour colleges in conjunction with their support network of trades councils and trade unions, with a particular focus on the activities of the trades councils of Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, and Halifax. These trades councils have been chosen because primary sources, in the form of trades council reports, exist for them. In addition the chapter will establish the status of the labour colleges as British Marxist educational organisations, and show how they challenged the dominance of the Co-operative and the WEA in the field of voluntary workers’ adult education in Yorkshire.

This chapter is in three parts. The first part analyses the origins and roles of trades councils in Yorkshire, with a focus on workers’ education. Bradford Trades Council (BTC) will be used to illustrate in detail the activities of the trades councils, with reference also made to Leeds Trades Council (LTC) and Sheffield Trades Council (STC). The second part, using Sheffield Labour College as a case study, takes account of the work of, and the challenges faced by, labour colleges. The third part considers the relationship between the labour colleges and the trades councils, using Halifax Trades Council (HTC) as an example of how the labour colleges and trades councils were politically and intellectually in tune with each other.

The Trades Councils – Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield

Trades councils were first established in the 1850s as local bodies that had power to conciliate and arbitrate disputes between employers and employees.⁶ G. D. H. Cole, a supporter of trades councils in the project of municipal socialism – the ownership and administration of key public services including water and gas services by the local authority – noted that they emerged at a time when industrial workers had no other political or industrial bodies to represent their interests in employment disputes.⁷ Their

⁵ Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism*, p. 14.

⁶ For a history of the early trades councils see Cicely Richards, *A History of Trades Councils From 1860–1875 with an introduction by G. D. H Cole* (London: Labour Research Department, 1920).

⁷ Cole ‘Introduction’ in *A History of Trades Councils*, pp. 4–5; On the pioneering role of Joseph Chamberlain in reforming municipal services see Jules Gehrke, ‘A Radical Endeavour: Joseph Chamberlain and the Emergence of Municipal Socialism in Birmingham’, *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 75, 1 (January, 2016), pp. 23–57; For an overview of the evolution of

key characteristic was that they were based in a particular geographical locality, something that a House of Commons committee on conciliation administration noted that many witnesses favoured. Alan Clinton notes that the trades councils did not succeed in constructing conciliation machinery in the period following their emergence because of resistance from employers. However they had a revival in function with the advent of the New Unionism, and by the 1890s almost every trades council in Britain ‘was involved in attempts to set up local conciliation machinery.’⁸ However, the trades councils still failed to establish themselves as local bodies capable of arbitrating in trade union disputes about pay and work conditions. Clinton identifies that the reason for this was that ‘trade councils could not bind their members in any way; they had no financial or other sanctions with which to force settlements on their constituents.’⁹

Despite their failings in the arena of worker-employer arbitration and conciliation, Alan Clinton’s work on trades councils in Britain showed them to be local, organic working class structures, embedded in their immediate communities.¹⁰ Trades councils represented trade unions at a local level, and fought for better work conditions on their behalf. They had a keen sense of the problems the local working class community had to deal with, especially with regard to unemployment. Trades councils supported the devolution of industrial and political matters to municipalities, and were well placed to supersede city councils, although this did not happen. Clinton argues that the dominance and might of the TUC succeeded, without great opposition, in confining and controlling trades council activity after 1926.¹¹ Nonetheless, until then, trades councils stand out as having been organic, independent, working class structures whose committees and membership consisted of local working class people keen to take part in the industrial and political life of their towns. A study of trades councils is important to this thesis

municipal socialism from the 19th to 20th century see W. Hamish Fraser, ‘From Civic Gospel to Municipal Socialism’ in *Cities, Class and Communication* ed. by Derek Fraser (London; New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990); For the Fabian understanding of municipal socialism see Sidney Webb, *Socialism in England*, 2nd ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1893), pp. 98–117. For an inter-war analysis of the origins and development of municipal governance see *A Century of Municipal Progress 1835–1935*, Harold J. Laski, Ivor Jennings and William A. Robson (eds.) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1935); For case studies of municipal government in Leeds and Bradford see *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City*, Derek Fraser (ed.) (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982).

⁸ Alan Clinton, *The Trade Union Rank and File. Trade Councils in Britain, 1900–40* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 8–9.

⁹ Clinton, *Trade Councils in Britain*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Clinton, *Trade Councils in Britain*; For histories of specific trades councils see Mary Ashraf, *Bradford Trades Council 1872-1972* (Bradford Trades Council, Bradford, 1972); John Mendelson, William Owen, Sidney Pollard and Vernon M. Thomas, *The Sheffield Trades and Labour Council 1858-1958* (Sheffield Trades and Labour Council: Sheffield, 1958); *Huddersfield & District Associated Trades & Industrial Council: 1885-1935: jubilee souvenir, and programme of pageant demonstration: held in Greenhead Park, Huddersfield, Saturday, June 22nd, 1935*, Nineteenth Century Collections online (Accessed 26 May 2017).

¹¹ Clinton, *A History of Trades Councils*, p. 166.

because, unlike local and regional trade unions, they open a window on the everyday local economic, social and political matters that trade union members faced during the inter-war period.

The trades councils reports for Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, and Halifax from 1918 to 1939 tell a narrative of persistent, unrelenting, high unemployment across Yorkshire, crisis points being the miners' strike of 1920-21 and the 1926 General Strike.¹² The trades councils highlight other concerns such as the provision of primary and secondary education and health care to their local communities. As with the WEA, the NCLC, and the Co-operative Union, trades councils were committed to finding ways to improve the lives of ordinary working class people in their municipalities, part of which included workers' adult education. The annual reports and addresses reported in the Bradford and District Trades and Labour Council yearbooks from 1917 to 1939 contain evidence of what the BTC identified as the important industrial and political issues of the day.¹³ An overview of the general themes that recur in the BTC reports place the purpose of the trades councils in context in relation to workers' adult education.

In 1917, the First World War dominated the economy, and much of the work of trades councils was geared towards alleviating the economic impact of the conflict on the industrial working class. The 45th annual report (1917) decried the continuation of the war: 'we deeply deplore that the war is still in progress. The enormous loss of human life continues as though there was no end to supplies.'¹⁴ The 1917 report also gave details of new trade union branches that had affiliated to the BTC: the National Union of General Workers, the Amalgamated Post Office Stores and Engineering Association, and the re-affiliation of the Plasterers. The affiliation of these unions brought the membership of the trades council to over 30,000, 'an increase of four thousand members'.¹⁵ By 1920, the BTC had expanded to represent over 60,000 trade unionists.¹⁶ This rise in membership is consistent with a more widespread upsurge in interest in trades councils, as local municipal-based organisations that would support trade union members at a time of high industrial pressure due to the war effort.

¹² For details of the activities of trades councils during the 1926 General Strike see Emile Burns, *The General Strike May 1926: Trades Councils in Action* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1926); For a general history of the 1921 miners strike see Robin Page Arnott, *The Miners: Years of Struggle. A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1953), pp. 279–331; For an analysis of the labourist politics of the Yorkshire Mine Workers' Association see Andrew Taylor, 'The Politics of Laborism in the Yorkshire Coalfield, 1926–1945' in *Miners, Unions and Politics 1919–1947*, ed. by Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and David Howell (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

¹³ Bradford, WYAS, Bradford and District Trade and Labour Council Year Books (1918 – 1939), (Bradford Trade Council Reports). 66D83/7/5-7.

¹⁴ WYAS, Bradford Trade Council (BTC) 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 4. 66D83/7/5-7.

¹⁵ WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 5. 66D83/7/5-7.

¹⁶ WYAS, BTC 48th Annual Report (1920), p. 5. 66D83/7/5-7.

A further important concern for the BTC was what was going to happen after the First World War. A sub-committee specifically tasked with the question of “Labour Problems after the War” shows the Council taking a long view of industrial life and wishing to find solutions to inevitable post-war economic problems, predominantly unemployment. It also supported the proposals of the War Emergency Workers’ National Committee.¹⁷ More than any other issue, it was unemployment that preoccupied the BTC, which estimated that there were more than 20,000 unemployed people in Bradford during Christmas 1917 ‘with nothing but starvation staring them in the face’.¹⁸ The BTC placed Bradford in the national context when it stated that ‘at Christmas time there were well over ONE MILLION unemployed in the country, which means that not less than FOUR MILLIONS of people were suffering as a result of unemployment.’¹⁹ As the BTC saw it, the Government had failed to plan for or mitigate the problem of unemployment. In response to this failure, the BTC campaigned for a change in government at the next General Election.²⁰ They recognised that the problem of unemployment was complex, and required state intervention at a national and international level to address it:

The Unemployment problem has many sides. Public work cannot do more than absorb a small percentage of the unemployed. Industries from which the unemployed have been driven must be revived, and the way to do that is to restore the economic life of the countries we have ruined, and which were formerly customers for the productions of our factories and workshops.²¹

In connection with domestic concerns such as unemployment, the BTC supported various international matters. They were in favour of withdrawing troops from Russia to alleviate the Russian famine.²² In the BTC’s view the embargo on trade between Britain and Russia added to the problems of unemployment. Here the BTC made direct connections between the state of the British economy and the global political and economic situation, an attitude demonstrating the BTC’s affinity to the plight of workers not just in Britain but worldwide.

¹⁷ The Labour Party, the TUC, the Co-operative and other labour movement affiliated organisations such as the Fabian Society founded the War Emergency Workers National Committee when the First World War broke out. The Committee’s main aim was to defend and protect the interests of working people. For an overview of the Committee see R. Harrison, ‘The War Emergency Workers National Committee 1914–1920 in *Essays in Labour History 1886-1923* ed. by Asa Briggs and John Saville (London: Macmillan, 1971).

¹⁸ WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

¹⁹ WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

²⁰ WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 9. 66D83/7/5-7.

²¹ WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 9. 66D83/7/5-7.

²² WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

Another strand of the BTC's international outlook was its support for the political campaigns of India and Ireland for self-government:

It is a most regrettable fact that, although the British nation is supposed to be fighting for the rights of small nations, the Mother of Parliaments persistently refuses to grant justice to India and Ireland, notwithstanding that it is the wish of the two peoples to take a hand in the government of their respective countries.²³

The BTC's interest in international issues shows that the BTC, though primarily concerned with local issues, applied the idea of self-determination to wider contexts, a theme that recurs in all the trades councils' reports for Leeds, Sheffield, and Halifax, and unites the trade councils as local bodies agitating for greater political and economic control of local industrial and political issues on behalf of their working class membership.

Another pressing problem that the BTC highlighted was the food supply, with butter queues becoming a source of anxiety for the population, and the BTC advocating greater state intervention to combat profiteering in the food supply:

The queue evil is probably the greatest scandal brought about by the terrible Armageddon [...] It has brought the women and children practically into the firing line of the soulless and avaricious profiteers [...] The chief cause for all this suffering and hardship of the wives and dependents of our Sailors and Soldiers, is due to the lack of foresight and initiative on the part of the National Food controller [...] If the Government had taken full control of the Food Supply in the same manner as they have done other monopolies, this terrible evil would have been very much minimised, if not altogether averted.²⁴

The idea of nationalisation emerges repeatedly in the reports, in relation to the public ownership of industry. Frederick Jowett MP (1864–1944) contributed a lengthy address (one of many over the years) in the 1917 BTC yearbook.²⁵ He identified several problems that the workers would face once the war ended. Jowett was concerned that the cost of the war would fall on the workers through high taxation. In Jowett's opinion, capitalists favoured taxation, as this would 'avoid conscription of wealth and the socialisation of industry'.²⁶ Jowett's use of the phrase 'conscription of wealth' is particularly powerful in the historical context. It turns on its head the idea of national conscription, which had taken a heavy toll on the young male population of Britain in a war that had come about because of capitalist and imperial interests. The idea that

²³ WYAS, *BTC 45th Annual Report* (1917), p. 5. 66D83/7/5-7.

²⁴ WYAS, *BTC 45th Annual Report* (1917), p. 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

²⁵ Frederick Jowett MP, a native of Bradford, was one of the founding members of the ILP. He was MP for Bradford West from 1906 to 1918. Thereafter he represented Bradford East. Jowett was committed to parliamentary reform as means of establishing socialism. He was also a supporter of municipal socialism. His book *The Socialist and the City* (London: George Allen, 1907) outlines his understanding of municipal socialism. J. A. Jowitt, 'Frederick William Jowett', *ODNB* (Downloaded 23 November 2017).

²⁶ WYAS, *45th Annual BTC Report* (1917), p. 25. 66D83/7/5-7.

wealth and capital could be conscripted to salvage the nation after the war as a kind of reparation by the wealthy to the working class, who had lost and suffered so much in the conflict, must have struck a chord with Jowett's readership and the BTC. In the rest of his address Jowett promoted nationalisation of industry as the way forward, advocating that with

workshop control in the hands of the workers, on the one side, and with State ownership of the plant and machinery, as in the case of the present State munition works and small arms factories, on the other side; a near approach to the ideal of democratically controlled State-owned industry will have been achieved'.²⁷

Here the idea of nationalisation of the economy emerges strongly, showing how committed the BTC was to the social democratic control of industry. The theme of nationalisation continued in the 1918 BTC annual report where J. R. Clynes²⁸ proposed that:

Land, mines, railways, waterways, and other such possessions should be the possessions of the nation, worked and used for the benefit of all and not for mere private advantage [...] In the stages of the struggle the great trade unions will have a more and more important role to play, and their work will be the better because of the educative and inspirational service which the great Trades and Labour councils have performed.²⁹

The annual reports of the BTC provide information about the 'Labour representation on public bodies' in their municipality. In 1918, the annual report listed five aldermen, fourteen councillors, eleven magistrates, three board of guardian members and the mayor of Bradford, Joseph Hayhurst JP, all of whom were considered by the BTC to be supporters of the labour movement.³⁰ Several members of the BTC belonged to local government bodies, highlighting points of connection between it and the municipal government. The dual membership phenomenon shows some BTC members' political aspirations hoping to influence and exert political power in the interests of their membership from within local government.

The reports also gave the local results of municipal and general elections, focusing on the growing strength of the labour vote in different wards. In the run up to the 1923 General Election, a BTC circular to 'ALL TRADE UNIONISTS' on November 27 1923 attests to the BTC's commitment to both the Labour Party and the Co-operative:

²⁷ WYAS, BTC 45th Annual Report (1917), p. 29. 66D83/7/5-7.

²⁸ J. R. Clynes (1869–1949) was one of the founder members of the Labour Representative Committee and the Parliamentary Labour Party. He was a trade unionist and also served as President of the Oldham Trades Council in 1892. He was secretary of that trades council from 1894 to 1912. J. S. Middleton, 'John Robert Clynes', *ODNB* (Downloaded 23 November 2017).

²⁹ WYAS, BTC 46th Annual Report (1918), p. 18. 66D83/7/5-7.

³⁰ WYAS, BTC 46th Annual Report (1918), p. 59. 66D83/7/5-7.

The whole of the Labour and Co-operative Candidates are standing for a new social order which will enable the workers' breakfast table to be freed from indirect and direct taxes [...] The Labour Party stands for a new social order which will place the financial burden of the War Debt on the shoulders of the people best able to bear it³¹

However, by 1928, the BTC had ceased its affiliation to the Labour Party because of the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act 1927, which outlawed secondary action and any strike undertaken to pressure the government into complying with demands made by trade unions. In addition, the Act compelled civil service unions to sever their affiliation to the TUC, and set up an 'opt in' rather than an 'opt out' system whereby individual trade union members had to 'choose to pay a political levy to their trade union.' The outcome of the Trades Dispute Act was to weaken the Labour Party financially as well as reduce its trade union membership from '3,352,347 to 2,025,139 between 1926 and 1928'.³² BTC opposed the Act's limitation on trade union strike action and took its decision to disaffiliate reluctantly, stating that after legal consultation it had decided that 'severance would have to take place if our affiliated societies were to be protected from attack.'³³ The BTC anticipated that until the Act was repealed, it would refrain from overt political expression.³⁴

Throughout the 1930s, the BTC continued to act on behalf of its membership to establish connections with the municipal government. The 1938 Annual Report listed the number of labour members of municipal bodies as five aldermen, fifteen councillors and sixteen magistrates, showing that the BTC had succeeded to a considerable extent in representing the industrial working class in local government.³⁵

With regards to education, the same annual report records the BTC receiving addresses on 'Co-operation' by I. Holmes and on 'Corporation Finance' by Alderman W. Leach.³⁶ The minutes of the BTC in September 1922 referred to a letter from the WEA 'suggesting a lecture by Dr Stewart of Leeds University' to which the BTC agreed.³⁷ The BTC organised an education conference on 14 October 1922 attended by 120 delegates from trade unions, Co-operative societies, Bradford Labour Party, the ILP and the United Irish League.³⁸ The 1922 BTC Annual Report described the conference as representing 96,000 citizens of Bradford, showing the further growth of the BTC and

³¹ WYAS, 'TO ALL TRADE UNIONISTS', Bradford Trade Council Circular, (27 November 1923), n.p. 56D80/1/10.

³² Matthew Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate. A History of the British Labour Party Between the Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 112–113.

³³ WYAS, BTC *56th Annual Report* (1928), p. 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

³⁴ WYAS, BTC *56th Annual Report* (1928), p. 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

³⁵ WYAS, BTC *66th Annual Report* (1938), p. 27. 66D83/7/5-7.

³⁶ WYAS, BTC *66th Annual Report* (1938), p. 7. 66D83/7/5-7.

³⁷ WYAS, BTC Minutes (14 September 1922), n.p. 56D80/1/10.

³⁸ WYAS, BTC Minutes (14 September 1922), n.p. 56D80/1/10.

Labour bodies.³⁹ It is unclear from the report how this figure of 96,000 was calculated. The BTC's minutes of September 1923 refer directly to an IWCE conference that took place on 23 September 1923. BTC appointed two delegates to attend the conference.⁴⁰ Further attention was given to education in the 1923 Annual Report, where the BTC received educational addresses on 'Proportional representation', 'The Ruskin Fellowship', 'Labour Hospitals', 'Education' and 'Esperanto'.⁴¹ The report included an article written by Jowett, who urged for further mobilisation of the trade unionist vote. Jowett's address actively encouraged trade union members to educate themselves in whatever way possible so that they could make the right voting choice when the General Election arrived:

Educate, agitate, organise. Mobilise the Trade Unionist vote. Get the list of Trade Unionists in every ward and in every parliamentary division. Talk to your workmates and to your neighbours about what the Labour government is doing and trying to do. Talk about the Daily Herald, The Pioneer and the New Leader. Read these papers yourselves and talk about what is being said in them of things important to working folk. Talk of the amazing growth of the Party. Steep yourself in its thought and share in its work.⁴²

In 1924, BTC members attended conferences on nationalisation of the mines, on homeland development, and on the future of trades councils.⁴³ The report concluded by making a strong case for complete trade union organisation and the importance of unity amongst the rank and file to achieve a socialist state. The BTC quoted from a manifesto signed by trade union leaders, encouraging the rank and file to participate in trade union activities:

the foundation of trade Unionism is organisation. Its method is collective bargaining. Its object is the control of industry by the workers in the interests of the workers. Education can do much to help all three, and the want of it much to hinder

The report adds:

Trade unionism stands not merely for an improvement of the conditions of the workers within the limits of the existing system, but for the creation of a new and more just social and industrial order. If we are to achieve our objective the impetus must come from the rank and file of the movement. We can have the new social order when the workers are one hundred per cent organised.⁴⁴

³⁹ WYAS, BTC *50th Annual Report* (1922), p. 5. 66D83/7/5-7.

⁴⁰ WYAS, BTC Minutes (20 September 1923), n.p. 56D80/1/10.

⁴¹ WYAS, BTC *50th Annual Report* (1922), p. 4. 66D83/7/5-7.

⁴² WYAS, BTC *51st Annual Report* (1923), p. 18. 66D83/7/5-7.

⁴³ WYAS, BTC *51st Annual Report* (1923), p. 2. 66D83/7/5-7.

⁴⁴ WYAS, BTC *52nd Annual Report* (1924), p. 6. 66D83/7/5-7.

Other educational work undertaken by the BTC included a speaker from the NCLC addressing the BTC about the ‘aims and objects of the NCLC Movement’.⁴⁵ Fred Shaw (1881–1951), divisional organiser for the NCLC in Yorkshire, delivered an address about the educational options and facilities that the NCLC could offer. In this way, the BTC supported the NCLC and its ambitions to disseminate IWCE. But the BTC also received an address from J. K. Nichol about the work of the WEA, described ‘as an organisation for teaching its students the value of education in such subjects as economics, history and other social questions’.⁴⁶ The BTC also had a lecture on the birth, development, and purpose of the Co-operative Party by Jack Bailey organiser of the Bradford Co-operative Party.⁴⁷

On the above evidence, the BTC was interested in all forms of working class adult education. By inviting speakers from the WEA, the NCLC, and the Co-operative, it seems to be acknowledging the value and distinctiveness of the type of adult education that each organisation was offering to trade union members.

Not all trade councils held the same views on adult education. Leeds Trades Council (LTC) is an interesting case to consider with regard to its relationship with the WEA and the Leeds Labour College. One specific event gives a sense of the tension that could emerge in the world of trade councils about workers’ adult education.

LTC had been affiliated to the WEA and seemed content with that arrangement. However, in 1923, the executive committee of LTC received a letter from Leeds Labour College requesting the Council to receive a deputation from the College.⁴⁸ The LTC committee responded ‘that no good purpose will be served by receiving a deputation, as we already affiliate with the WEA.’⁴⁹ The matter arose again at an LTC meeting in November 1923 when the LTC moved to refer the decision not to receive a deputation from the Leeds Labour College back to the executive committee. Alderman Foster supported the motion ‘and said that there must have been a misunderstanding’ though what this could have been is not clarified in the minutes.⁵⁰ At the executive meeting on 27 December 1923, the matter about receiving a deputation from the Labour College was discussed at length. The decision made by the executive committee was again to reject the deputation, as made clear in the minutes from December 1923:

⁴⁵ WYAS, Bradford District and Trades Committee, Executive Committee Meeting (11 November 1926), n.p. 66D83/5/11

⁴⁶ WYAS, BTC 55th *Annual Report* (1927), p. 7.

⁴⁷ WYAS, BTC 55th *Annual Report* (1927), p. 5.

⁴⁸ Leeds WYAS, Leeds Trade Council (LTC) Records (1882 – 1955), Leeds Trades Council Executive Committee Meeting Minutes (20 November 1923), p. 505. WYL576/4.

⁴⁹ WYAS, LTC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes (20 November 1923), p. 505. WYL576/4.

⁵⁰ WYAS, LTC Council Meeting Minutes (28 November 1923), p. 506. WYL576/4.

All points were given due consideration but it was the opinion of all that this was an attempt to injure the influence of the WEA. We were affiliated to this body and it was unanimously agreed that we reaffirm our previous decision viz “ that no good purposes will be served by receiving such deputation as we are already affiliated to the Workers’ Educational Association.”⁵¹

We can see that the executive committee was unambiguous about rejecting affiliation to the Labour College. Mistrust is also implied in their attitude towards the Labour College when they refer to the College’s attempt to ‘injure the WEA’. Here, we see evidence of a trade council loyal to the WEA and – unlike other trades councils, for example Bradford – was not prepared to recommend other voluntary adult education organisations to their members. The LTC’s intransigence may also show it to be less radical than its counterparts in the world of trades councils in Yorkshire. Their decision not to affiliate to the Leeds Labour College highlights a difference in attitudes between similar labour movement organisations – trades councils – about different associations also within the labour movement.

However, this was not the end of the matter. At what presumably was the next LTC meeting in January 1924, ‘Mr Robinson raised the position of the Leeds Labour College and said that the Executive had decided to leave it to the Council.’ Two members of the Council recommended that ‘the deputation should be heard’.⁵² There are no records between the two meetings that indicated when or why this decision was made, despite the previous decision of the executive committee not to have anything to do with the Labour College. Harold Clay, a well-known tutor in the WEA, as well as president of the LTC outlined the differences between the Labour College and the WEA, and raised a more thoughtful debate about the educational activities of the two organisations. He stated that ‘the WEA and the Labour College differ fundamentally. One believed in broad principled education in all phases, the other believed in Education on Propaganda lines.’⁵³ Despite this fundamental difference, Clay believed that the two organisations were ‘not in conflict and he supported the idea of the deputation being received’.⁵⁴ In the end, ‘it was agreed that the deputation be received and heard after the President had [struck] out of order an amendment by Com[rade] Dobbs that we affiliate without them being heard’⁵⁵ and a deputation from the Leeds Labour College was scheduled for 30 January.⁵⁶

⁵¹ WYAS, LTC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes (27 December 1923), p. 510. WYL576/4.

⁵² WYAS, LTC Committee Meeting Minutes (2 January 1924), p. 510. WYL576/4.

⁵³ WYAS, LTC Committee Meeting Minutes, (2 January 1924), p. 511. WYL576/4.

⁵⁴ WYAS, LTC Committee Meeting Minutes, (2 January 1924), p. 511. WYL576/4.

⁵⁵ WYAS, LTC Committee Meeting Minutes, (2 January 1924), p. 511. WYL576/4.

⁵⁶ WYAS, LTC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 20 January (1924), p. 512. WYL576/4.

The *Leeds Daily Citizen* reporting on the 60th Annual Report of LTC clarified the LTC's position: 'The cause of education was advanced by the Council's association with the Workers' Educational Association, the Leeds Labour College and the Labour Research Department.'⁵⁷ From this point onwards the WEA and Leeds Labour College were always mentioned in the annual reports of LTC as affiliated bodies. Representatives from LTC were nominated to sit on the joint committees of both organisations.

Here, again, we see the trades councils taking workers' adult education as a serious and necessary project. It also shows that the trades councils made clear distinctions between the WEA and NCLC and that, at least in the case of the LTC, those differences were initially problematic. However, as seen from the evidence above, different factions in LTC were able to debate carefully the pros and cons of affiliating to the Leeds Labour College, the LTC ultimately reconciling and assimilating the differences by subscribing to both.

The Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council (STC) was an amalgamation of the political Sheffield Trades and Labour Council and the Industrial Sheffield Federated Trades Council. The amalgamation in 1919–20 aimed to unify the trade union movement in Sheffield by avoiding an overlap of industrial and political activities.⁵⁸ Following unification, the STC consisted of two executive committees, one political and one industrial.

As with the BTC, the concerns of the STC focused on the problems accentuated by the First World War – unemployment, industrial disputes, provision of education, housing, and representation on municipal bodies. To detail all the work of the STC here would repeat much of the previous section dealing with Bradford. Here, the focus will instead be on other areas that clarify the ideological position of STC. In the opening statement of their first annual report in 1921, the STC president Gertrude Wilkinson wrote:

The Sheffield Federated Trades and Labour Council stands for constitutional methods of change, but it is essential that all affiliated members should redouble their propaganda work through their trade union branches and political sections, so that when the General Election comes we shall be able to rid ourselves of the men who are only prepared to legislate in the interests of the Owing class, and in their place put men and women with ideals who will legislate to throw off the strangle

⁵⁷WYAS, *Sixtieth Annual Report of Leeds Trades Council (1924)* in *Leeds Daily Citizen* Newspaper Clipping in Minute Book of Leeds Trades Council, p. 517. WYL576/4.

⁵⁸ Sheffield Local Studies Library (SLSL), Sheffield Federated Trades Council (STC) Annual Reports, *STC Annual Report for year ending 31 December (1919)*, p. 8.

hold of High Finance and establish a co-operative Commonwealth in which wealth will be produced and distributed for the good of all.⁵⁹

The 'Co-operative Commonwealth' mentioned here corresponds to that of the Co-operative Union seen in Chapter Three. In the 1925 STC Annual Report, the new president E. G. Rowlinson, again alluded to the Co-operative Commonwealth, with reference to presenting a united Labour front:

A strong pull together with both the Industrial and Political Hands on the rope, thereby demonstrating that one section knows what the other is doing, and which way he is pulling, will bring our movement steadily but surely over the poverty line to the Establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth.⁶⁰

In 1938, the then STC president C. S. Darvil referred to the Commonwealth idea, but now in the context of another looming World War:

If Socialism means anything at all it means a living struggle to rally to our support increasing masses of the people for the final onslaught upon reaction and injustice and for the setting up of the Socialist Commonwealth based upon equity and sanity.⁶¹

The use of such similar phrases and language shows two different organisations of the labour movement, trade councils and the Co-operative, sharing a vision of a fairer more egalitarian state. In 1921, STC estimated that, with an affiliation of 200 trade union branches and political organisations, it represented a membership of over 60,000.⁶² The STC, like the BTC, devoted a large proportion of its annual reports to the political composition of the City Council, with a view to increasing the number of Labour members. As with the BTC, STC listed the Labour and Co-operative representatives on public bodies, including not just Parliament and the City Council, but also overseers, and magistrates. Other such public bodies listed here included the joint hospitals council, the local employment committee and the adult education committee. The aim of the political executive of the STC was a Labour-controlled City Council:

If there is to be a really effective Labour Party in the City Council it must have the encouragement and support of the Trade Unions and the whole of the Labour Movement. If Labour really believes that it is desirable to have such a Party it must be prepared to find the means whereby the best men and women can be elected, and make provision for such maintenance as is required irrespective of the particular unions to which they belong.⁶³

To disseminate news about the work of the STC, the *Sheffield Forward* (the STC's newspaper) was re-organised in 1922 with its editor as Ernest Green (who later became

⁵⁹ SLSL, STC Annual Report for year ending April (1921), p. 3.

⁶⁰ SLSL, STC Annual Report for year ending 31 December (1925), p. 9.

⁶¹ SLSL, STC *Annual Report* (1938-39), p. 8.

⁶² SLSL, STC *Annual Report* (1921), p. 4.

⁶³ SLSL, STC *Annual Report* (1921), p. 12.

a leading administrator of the WEA in the Yorkshire District).⁶⁴ By 1938 the number of Labour representatives on public bodies had grown significantly to fourteen aldermen and forty councillors.⁶⁵ As with the BTC, members of the STC were often also members of Sheffield's municipal bodies, showing the effectiveness of the STC at galvanising support for socialism and the labour movement in the wider political arena.

Though adult education is not directly referred to in the STC Annual Reports, the STC had a close relationship with the Sheffield Labour College. Joseph Madin, a member of the Amalgamated Union of Engineers, was the key organiser of the Sheffield Labour College. He was also for some years a member of the industrial executive committee of the STC. Madin's presence on both organisations represented a strong connection between the STC and the College, although this evidently did not prevent the STC from advertising WEA courses at the back of their reports.⁶⁶ The 1918 STC Annual Report made a point of reporting its educational activities as including classes and courses provided by the WEA 'of which Mr W. Kean is president and Mrs Holmshaw [wife of Councillor Robert Holmshaw who was also secretary of the Sheffield Federated Trades Council] is teacher and lecturer (voluntary), and with which Association the Council is officially connected'.⁶⁷ This shows that the STC had a longstanding relationship with the WEA and, like the BTC, affiliated to both the WEA and NCLC.

Direct references to the WEA and the NCLC were made in the minutes of the meetings of the executive committee of the Yorkshire Federated Trades and District Councils (YFTC) – An umbrella body that co-ordinated and monitored the activities of individual trade councils in Yorkshire. At the half-yearly meeting (1924) of the YFTC, a resolution was carried

that this federation officially endorses the policy of the Working class Educational movement and calls upon all Trades Councils affiliated, in their respective districts to urge upon all members the necessity of attending classes and lectures.⁶⁸

Such a resolution made sense at this particular time, because from 1924 to 1925 the TUC attempted to set in place an adult education scheme for their members that would

⁶⁴ SLSL, STC Third Annual Report for year ending April (1923), p. 5.

⁶⁵ SLSL, *STC Annual Report* (1938-39), p. 37.

Mathers, 'Sheffield Municipal Politics 1893-1926.' Mathers provides a detailed analysis of the change in political composition of Sheffield City Council from Conservative to Labour.

⁶⁶ SLSL, *STC Annual Reports* for (1923) p. 40; (1928) back page; (1930-1935), back page.

⁶⁷ SLSL, *STC Annual Report* (1919), p. 7.

⁶⁸ Bradford, WYAS, Yorkshire Federated Trades Councils (YFTC) Half Yearly Meeting (19 July 1924), n.p. 66D83/5/1-2.

use the WEA and NCLC as education providers.⁶⁹ Ideological differences and lack of funds caused the scheme ultimately to fail, but the TUC continued to recommend the WEA and the NCLC to their members as legitimate providers of adult education. The YFTC supported the idea of a TUC led educational scheme and at a meeting held on 09 July 1927 resolved:

That this meeting of the YFTC urges upon the Trades Union Congress the necessity of developing a more extensive scheme of educational facilities through the auspices of the TUC, the WEA and the NCLC.⁷⁰

The topic of a formal TUC adult education scheme was raised again in 1932 at the half-yearly meeting of the YFTC, when the Spen Valley Trades Council proposed a motion that was carried:

That this Federation requests the TUC General Council again to consult with the WEA and the NCLC with a view to promoting an attractive scheme of class work on industrial subjects calculated to appeal to young trade union members; and recommends that on the formulation of the scheme, an intensive general trade union effort should be made to popularise such scheme and to secure young trade unionists as class students.⁷¹

Jenny Jansson's work presents a nuanced understanding of why the TUC education scheme failed, despite support for it amongst working class organisations. One of Jansson's observations about workers' education in Britain during the inter-war period is that it was 'split into different bodies [the WEA, the NCLC, the Fabians and the Labour Research Department] with different ideological aims that opposed each other'.⁷² Although the TUC supported all the different bodies, it did not control them, something Jansson identifies as the key difference between the British and Swedish workers' education movements.

The Swedish equivalent of the WEA – the *Arbetarnas bildningsförbund* (ABF) established in 1912 – never associated itself with the universities as the WEA had done in Britain. This gave the ABF an unambiguous working class identity to begin with. Although the ABF was state-funded, it operated independently from the government.⁷³ Unlike in Britain, the industrial and the political arms of the labour movement in Sweden were unified to a degree that allowed them to co-operate and co-ordinate the dissemination of workers' education through the ABF, in accordance with an agreed

⁶⁹ For details of the failure of the TUC education scheme of 1925–26 see John Holford, *Union Education in Britain. A TUC Activity* (Nottingham: Department of Adult Education, University of Nottingham, 1994)

⁷⁰ WYAS, YFTC, Half Yearly Meeting (21 July 1927), n.p. 66D83/5/1-2.

⁷¹ WYAS, YFTC, Half Yearly Meeting (27 June 1932), n.p. 56D80/1/11.

⁷² Jansson, 'Class Formation in Sweden and Britain', p. 60.

⁷³ Jansson, 'Class Formation in Sweden and Britain', p. 61.

social democratic curriculum. This meant that the ABF, unlike the WEA or NCLC, came directly under the control of a unified trade union confederation – the *Landssekretariatet* (LO) – and a unified Social Democratic Party, the *Socialdemokratiska arbetarpartiet* SAP (founded in 1889).⁷⁴ Janssen makes an important point about how workers' education was valued by the SAP and LO in a way it was not in Britain:

The efforts to seize control over the ABF also testify to how important workers' education was to the LO and the SAP, which had launched a concerted campaign to win its members and the workforce more generally, over to its reformist approach to social reform.⁷⁵

The LO and the SAP co-operated with each other to foster a collective social democratic consciousness. Taking control of the ABF was part of that strategy. This may have led to a homogenous, rather than a heterogeneous, socialist collective consciousness but, nonetheless, according to Janssen, it served to create a cohesive social democratic-minded working class in Sweden.

This tactical and political mobilisation of workers' education to promote social democratic reformism was something that did not happen in Britain, and it adds weight to the idea that the political and industrial arms of the British labour movement were not a unified political force. Although this lack of unity led to many interpretations of socialism, it also led to a failure amongst social democratic political and industrial organisations to develop and co-ordinate workers' education in support of a unified national social democratic ideology and policy.

Sheffield Labour College

We will now consider the significance and relevance of the labour colleges in Yorkshire, using the Sheffield Labour College as a case study. A prospectus of the Sheffield Labour College gives a clear overview of the object of the College, namely to equip 'organised workers with the knowledge necessary for the carrying out of their industrial and political tasks'.⁷⁶ The prospectus goes on to explain how education in the social sciences would 'teach the organised workers those sciences which disclose the

⁷⁴ For an analysis of SAP see Sheri Berman, 'Sweden's Political Development and the Programmatic Beliefs of the SAP', and 'Sweden's Path to Democracy' in *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Inter-War Europe* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁷⁵ Jansson, 'Class Formation in Sweden and Britain: Educating Workers', p. 63.

⁷⁶ University of Sheffield Special Collections (USSC), Joseph Madin Papers (JM), *The Labour College*, Sheffield Labour College Prospectus (n.d), p. 1. JM/1/6.

Madin was a founding member of Sheffield Labour College established in 1919. He was the chief organiser of the College and delivered lectures and classes from 1918 to 1934 in Sheffield and the surrounding region. He was also a member of the AEU.

processes by means of which social structures arise and function'.⁷⁷ Students would thus be provided with 'the knowledge of those ways and means to be adopted by the labour movement for the accomplishment of its historical task'.⁷⁸ The 'historical task' mentioned is a reference to the Marxist project of raising class-consciousness, and thus empowering the working class through education. Subjects that the Sheffield Labour College taught included economic geography, industrial history, economics, history of the modern working class movement, and the science of understanding. The prospectus stated that a Sheffield Labour College education aimed to enable students to 'use their knowledge in the effort to raise the status of organised labour as a whole, instead of using the knowledge to lift themselves out of the ranks of the working class'.⁷⁹

The Sheffield Labour College explained how it would achieve its objects by teaching using a 'scientific *method*. The scientific method is free from preconceptions. It applies itself objectively.'⁸⁰ To further vindicate the scientific method, the Labour College referred to the current economy and organisation of society stating that it had resulted in a 'cleavage of classes with two distinct economic functions' and that 'the conflicting interest expressing itself in a struggle between organized workers and owners of capital' had set back the advance of social science.⁸¹ The prospectus argued that:

The economic interests of the capitalists dominate their intellectual outlook and, because of their control of educational institutions, have dominated the intellectual outlook of society as a whole. On the other hand the workers have no real interest in a continuance of the present social system. They suffer from it. They have had to organise against it. Therefore they realise the need for understanding the social order. Following upon a recognition of the facts of experience, working-class education must be *independent* of all conventional institutions of education in order to be impartial in the scientific sense of the word, to be independent its organisation must take a *partisan* form.⁸²

As evidenced here, the language that the Sheffield Labour College used was direct and unambiguous about the type and purpose of education it aimed to provide. The Sheffield Labour College asserted itself as a sectarian and overtly political organisation, emphasising this as a strength, not a weakness. The Sheffield Labour College prospectus declared that it operated 'on the same principles as the industrial and political organisations of the working class movement' and that it sought to develop

⁷⁷ USSC, *The Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), p. 1. JM/1/6.

⁷⁸ USSC, *The Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), p. 1. JM/1/6.

⁷⁹ USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), p. 1. JM/1/6.

⁸⁰ USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), p. 2. JM/1/6.

⁸¹ USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), p. 2. JM/1/6.

⁸² USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), pp. 2–3. JM/1/6.

education, with exclusive financial support from working class organisations.⁸³ The Sheffield Labour College's approach was typical of the labour colleges in general.⁸⁴

The contrast between how the NCLC, the labour colleges (the example here being the Sheffield Labour College), and the WEA presented themselves to potential working class students was clearly defined. The WEA, though completely at the service of working class students, was a determinedly impartial, non-sectarian educational organisation that delivered a classical education in the liberal arts in conjunction with universities. As seen in Chapter Two, the WEA was well established in Yorkshire, enjoying both great support from students and funding from LEAs, universities and educational charities. As a counterbalance to the dominating presence of the WEA, the region's labour colleges made themselves utterly distinct from the WEA and the Co-operative by strongly advocating what they referred to as 'IWCE' for working class students. They developed their own distinct working class 'scientific' method of teaching social sciences. In this regard, the labour colleges were attempting to be modern, innovative and attractive to those working class students who wished to create and fight for a distinct working class culture that owed nothing to the existing political order. The terms of affiliation that the Sheffield Labour College operated welcomed all 'Trades Unions, Friendly Societies, Workers' Committees, Working Men's Clubs, Labour Parties, Trades Councils, Socialist Organisations, Industrial Unions and Co-operative Guilds'.⁸⁵

A sample of the lectures on industrial history given by the Sheffield Labour College in partnership with Doncaster Trades Council included: Revolutions, Slavery, The Commercial Revolution, The Industrial Revolution, The French Revolution, The Chartist Revolution, and The Russian Revolution. Economic classes included: Biological Evolution, Sociological Theories, Materialist Conception of Values, Use Value, Labour Theory of Value, and Three Stages of Capitalism. All subjects were taught using a Marxist approach, and focused on educating working class students about their position in society and the means for them to take political control.⁸⁶

The Sheffield Labour College classes for the 1920-21 session took place mainly in Sheffield, Doncaster, and Rotherham. According to the syllabus, twenty-eight classes – Industrial History, Revolutionary Periods in History, Economic History, Russian Revolution, Economics, Science of Understanding, and Revolutionary Periods of

⁸³ USSC, *Labour College Prospectus* (n.d), p. 3. JM/1/6.

⁸⁴ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, pp. 51–52.

⁸⁵ USSC, *Labour College Prospectus* (n.d), p. 4. JM/1/6.

⁸⁶ USSC, *Labour College Prospectus* (n.d), pp. 4–7. JM/1/6.

History – took place in the South Yorkshire Region.⁸⁷ Sixteen classes were held in Sheffield, four in Rotherham, two in Chesterfield, two in Doncaster, two in Wath-on-Deane, one in Mexborough, and one in Bentley.⁸⁸ In all, sixty-seven working class organisations were affiliated to the Sheffield Labour College including the Yorkshire Miners' Association (YMA), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), Sheffield ILP, the National Federation of Women Workers (Sheffield Branch), the AEU, the ASE, the Women's Labour Party, the Trades and Labour Council (Sheffield, Doncaster and Chesterfield) and the Sheffield Communist Group.⁸⁹ A telling note in the Sheffield Labour College prospectus about the affiliated organisations reiterated its financial provenance: 'All financial assistance derived from working-class organisations only.'⁹⁰

The existence of the labour colleges shows that there was another small but vibrant element in the world of working class adult education in Yorkshire that actively tried to build socialism by raising class-consciousness through education. However, Sheffield Labour College experienced significant interference from the revolutionary and Bolshevik CPGB. The Russian Revolution and the founding of the CPGB in 1920 marked the beginning of a short but significant era in the world of IWCE. Andy Miles has explored the tension between the NCLC and the CPGB in providing workers' education. His research identifies the key difference between IWCE in Britain as conceived of by the Plebs League, and the educational policy of the CPGB. The Plebs aimed to use IWCE provided by the NCLC to develop proletarian culture to a level whereby class-consciousness would evolve naturally. The CPGB under the auspices of the Communist International aimed to use the labour college system to disseminate dogmatic political education from above. Miles clarifies the CPGB's position on education policy:

The move towards developing a specific Party policy on education was consolidated by the 'Resolutions on the Education question', adopted by the fourth congress of the [Communist] International (1922). The resolutions made Communist policy on education clear. Educational activity [...] should be the responsibility of the fighters of the Party and not the unattached fringe of the revolution. Where revolutionary education was being carried out by organisations outside the Party, the goal of bringing educational activity under Party auspices was to be achieved by systematic activity of the Communists inside these organisations. All Party members involved in these educational institutions were to follow Party directions, their principal task at all times being to 'agitate'.⁹¹

⁸⁷ USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), pp. 8–9. JM/1/6.

⁸⁸ USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), pp. 8–9. JM/1/6.

⁸⁹ USSC, *Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), pp. 14–15. JM/1/6

⁹⁰ USSC, *Sheffield Labour College* Prospectus (n.d), p. 15. JM/1/6.

⁹¹ Andy Miles, 'Workers' Education: The Communist Party and the Plebs League in the 1920s', *History Workshop*, 18 (Autumn, 1984), p. 107.

To this end the CPGB attempted to infiltrate and direct the labour colleges ('the unattached fringe') towards a non-British Marxism that did not respect the temperament or outlook either of indigenous worker-students, or of IWCE administrators involved in the labour colleges. The CPGB applied a 'know better' approach to how the labour colleges operated in their localities – the opposite of Macintyre's examples of the 'little Moscows' – where Marxism was assimilated into, rather than imposed upon, workers' lives.⁹² The CPGB attempted to supersede the NCLC by establishing the Marx House School and Marx Memorial Library in 1933.⁹³ However it ultimately failed to provide a 'credible alternative to the labour college classes'.⁹⁴ Intellectual members of the Plebs League – Winifred Horrabin (1887–1971) and Frank Horrabin (1884–1962), Mark Starr (1894–1985), Raymond Postgate, socialist, writer and editor (1896–1971), J T Walton Newbold (1888–1943) and Ellen Wilkinson (1891–1941) – all members of the CPGB at its foundation, left the Party later on in the 1920s because they disagreed with the CPGB's Bolshevik policies.⁹⁵ They took with them 'the Plebs League and the whole of the labour college movement which might have been a valuable ancillary in [CPGB] Party propaganda.'⁹⁶ The exodus of intellectuals from the CPGB points to a dissatisfaction in their ranks with CPGB methods and ideology. In this area McIlroy explores the 'Stalinisation' of British Communism which led to a blunting of the homespun intellectual vigour of the CPGB.⁹⁷ In his capacity as General Secretary of the

⁹² For an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of 'Little Moscows' see Stuart Macintyre, *Little Moscows. Communism and Working-class Militancy in Inter-War Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

⁹³ Tom Steele and Richard Taylor, 'Marxism and Adult Education in Britain', *Policy Futures in Education*, 2, 3-4 (2004), p. 583; Cohen, 'Revolutionary Education Revisited: The Communist Challenge to the Labour Colleges, 1933–1945', in *The Search for Enlightenment; Pushpa Kumbhat, 'Independent Working Class Education (IWCE) and the Inter-War Political Left 1918–1935'* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Leeds, 2014), pp. 49–52.

⁹⁴ Miles, 'Workers' Education', p. 110.

⁹⁵ For biographies of the Horrabin's see Margaret Cole, 'Frank Horrabin' and Amanda L. Capern, 'Winifred Horrabin', *ODNB* (Downloaded 21 June and 09 June 2017 respectively). The Horrabin's were loyal supporters of the labour college movement. Frank lectured for the CLC and in 1914 became the editor of *Plebs* magazine. Winifred was the honorary secretary of the Plebs League and set up the CLC's Women's League in 1913 to support education for women workers. They both made regular contributions to *Plebs* magazine. For an account of Ellen Wilkinson's life see Brian Harrison 'Ellen Wilkinson' *ODNB* (Downloaded 08 November 2017). Wilkinson and Frank Horrabin had an affair while Frank Horrabin was married to Winifred. Ellen was also briefly engaged to J. T. Walton Newbold who introduced her to Marxism. Wilkinson served as MP for Middlesbrough and Jarrow. Mark Starr was a former miner from South Wales who became a tutor for the NCLC. He was married to Kathleen Horrabin, Frank Horrabin's sister. Starr also contributed to *Plebs* magazine and wrote *A Worker Looks at History* (1917) that became a standard text book for NCLC classes. Richard Lewis, 'Mark Starr', *ODNB* (Downloaded 08 December 2017); For a biography of Raymond Postgate see J. M. Bellamy, 'Raymond William Postgate', *ODNB* (Downloaded 08 December 2017); J. T. Walton Newbold won the Motherwell constituency in 1922 General Election and became the first communist MP elected in Britain. For his biography see Robert Duncan, 'John Turner Walton Newbold', *ODNB* (Downloaded 08 December 2017).

⁹⁶ Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party. A Historical Profile* (London: 1958), p. 22.

⁹⁷ John McIlroy, 'The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinisation of British Communism 1928–1933', *Past and Present*, 192 (August, 2006), pp. 187–230.

NCLC, J. P. M. Millar, a staunch anti-communist, refuted suggestions that the NCLC was part of the CPGB. He stated in a *Plebs* editorial (1922): ‘we are not, we never have been, and we do not intend to be allied to any one *section* of the working-class movement.’⁹⁸ (Walter Citrine, the General Secretary of the TUC from 1926 to 1946 also held anti-communist views and campaigned against communist infiltration of trade unions.⁹⁹) To underline the NCLC’s not being a communist organisation, Millar, who became editor of the *Plebs* journal in 1927, removed the *Plebs* slogan ‘I can promise to be candid but not impartial’ because opponents of the NCLC ‘cited it as evidence of dogmatic beliefs and because many workers did not understand its significance.’¹⁰⁰ This then was the state of affairs between the NCLC and the CPGB at a national level. But how did that relationship play out at a more regional level?

The CPGB and the NCLC in Yorkshire

Evidence of the CPGB wishing to infiltrate and manipulate Sheffield Labour College to its own ends can be found in letters written by CPGB personnel about Sheffield Labour College. A letter (04 February 1921) from Joe Royle (a member of the CPGB, as well as a lecturer and member of Sheffield Labour College) raises the possibility of the CPGB taking over Sheffield Labour College:¹⁰¹

The Labour College machinery was specifically designed to leave the actual direction of affairs in the hands of the advanced elements. Therefore of necessity those elements must be united and consciously dominating the College. This condition was largely operating when the SLP [Socialist Labour Party] was a potent force. Now with the decline of the SLP the movement lacks cohesion and consequently the few in control find the job too big for them and the rot sets in [...] The obvious remedy which I suggest is that we [put] the Communist Party into position as the guiding and directing force behind the College. It has a membership approximating one hundred and although some of these are backward, they are on the whole enthusiastic and reliable.¹⁰²

Royle goes on to write:

⁹⁸ Quoted by Millar in *The Labour College Movement*, p. 82.

⁹⁹ Walter M Citrine, *Democracy or Disruption: An Examination of Communist Influences in the Trade Unions* (London, TUC, 1926); For Citrine’s biography see Tom Buchanan, ‘Walter McLennan Citrine’, *ODNB* (Downloaded 08 December 2017)

¹⁰⁰ Millar, *The Labour College Movement*, p. 82.

¹⁰¹ The letter does not make clear to whom Royle is writing.

¹⁰² USSC, ‘The Labour College’, Correspondence Papers, Notes and Press Cuttings (1918-1921), Letter from Joe Royle (member of the CPGB and Sheffield Labour College) (04 February 1921) JM/1/1.

The Socialist Labour Party (SLP), formed in 1903, was a splinter group of the SDF. It, with the British Socialist Party and other Marxist organisations formed the CPGB in 1920. See James Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Volume 1: Formation and the Early Years, 1919 –1924* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), pp. 17–20; For the SLP’s revolutionary programme based on industrial unions control of administrative machinery see *The Socialist Labour Party: Its Aims and Methods* (Edinburgh, Socialist Labour Party, 1908).

Isolation and sectarianism stultifies activity and hampers the work of the College. I consider they will be acting wisely in falling into line with us in the Communist Party. We shall certainly be pleased to welcome them into our ranks especially now that the SLP as an organisation is now practically defunct.¹⁰³

Royle ends his letter reiterating his view that the Sheffield Labour College should be under the control of the CPGB:

I consider that it will be to the interest of the college and more particularly the Revolutionary movement if the old elements are reunited in the ranks of the Communist Party, then the College can receive the necessary stimulus and enthusiasm so central to its growth.¹⁰⁴

In a letter written in 1921, B. Rollings complains at length to his colleague Joe Madin about the infringement of the CPGB on the administration of the Labour college:

I was absolutely disgusted at the general executive meeting yesterday. It appears to me the Communist gang have captured control of the College. They have a big majority on [the] Sub EC [Executive Committee] they will follow the Royles and you Bradshaw etc will be well snowed under. My indignation reached boiling point when preference was given to an undignified windbag like L Royle to the hardworking, enthusiastic, Moore. L Royle has only been to about six EC meetings, when he first came he had no credentials and admitted he had come for their Joe [...] If his last performances are anything to go by he will soon assume the dictatorship of the College.¹⁰⁵

These letters highlight the tension that existed between Sheffield Labour College and the CPGB, and mirror the tension that existed between the two organisations at a national level. The Plebs and NCLC had a different conception of Marxism from that of the CPGB, tending towards a British version of Marxism, aiming to raise class-consciousness first and foremost through education in a drive to alter the industrial proletariat's outlook. Chushichi Tsuzuki, in his analysis of the tension between the CPGB and the NCLC, terms the Plebian conception of Marxism as Anglo-Marxism. He argues that Anglo-Marxism adapted Marxism to the 'mundane British world of utilitarianism and evolutionism'.¹⁰⁶ It was this flexibility in adapting Marxism to the British context that allowed Plebs, including Ellen Wilkinson, Aneurin Bevan and Arthur Woodburn, to become Labour Party politicians while at the same time maintaining their left-wing ideologies. The CPGB, with its didactic and metaphysical

¹⁰³ USSC, 'The Labour College', Letter from Joe Royle (04 February 1921) JM/1/1.

¹⁰⁴ USSC, 'The Labour College', Letter from Joe Royle (04 February 1921) JM/1/1.

¹⁰⁵ USSC, 'The Labour College', Letter from B Rollings to Joe Madin (22 May 1921) JM/1/1.

It is not clear who Joe and L Royle were. From the correspondence and sources they were likely to have been related and were active as lecturers and members of the Executive Committee of Sheffield Labour College and as well as members of the CPGB.

¹⁰⁶ Chushichi Tsuzuki, 'Anglo-Marxism and Working-Class Education', in *The working Class in Modern British History. Essays in Honour of Henry Pelling*, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 199.

interpretation of Marxism, failed to make sense to the rank and file of the labour college movement and for that reason did not succeed in attracting worker-students to its political programme.

To discover how attractive Sheffield Labour College was to working class organisations in the region, it is useful to look at the correspondence between the College, local trade unions and trade councils.

Various letters requesting lectures and speakers attest to interest shown in Sheffield Labour College by other working class organisations such as the Co-operative Women's Guild, the National Co-operative Men's Guild and the Gleadless Road Co-operative Comrades Circle.¹⁰⁷ The Typographical Society also expressed interest in the work of the Sheffield Labour College, as did the Woodseats Labour Party, the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers and the AEU College.¹⁰⁸

Enrolment cards of students attending classes run by Sheffield Labour College from 1925 to 1927 further attest to working class interest in the college.¹⁰⁹ The enrolment cards were designed to provide information about each student's name, address, occupation, trade union and class. Unfortunately, many of the cards are incomplete, making it impossible to collect comprehensive information about each student. The number of male and female students enrolled was 463 in total. All of the male students had manual occupations, such as blacksmith, railwayman, file-forgers, or wire-drawer. All belonged to an affiliated trade union, the major ones being the AEU, the NUR, and the YMA. The female students tended to belong to the Labour Party, and often gave their occupation as 'married woman' or 'housewife'. Several male and female students belonged to the CPGB and the ILP, as well as to a trade union. Little detail on attendance at Sheffield Labour College classes is available, but it can be inferred from the enrolment cards that Sheffield Labour College succeeded in attracting a reasonable number of working class students, and the fact that several students belonged to more than one left-wing organisation indicates the type of student interested in the Labour College outlook.

¹⁰⁷USSC, 'Labour College Correspondence' (1), Letter from E Hogg (Hon. Sec of Brightside & Carbroke, Longley Branch of the Co-operative Women's Guild) to Sheffield Labour College (29 January 1936) JM 19/1; USSC, (1), Letter from L Knight of the National Co-operative Men's Guild, Fawcett Street Branch to the Sheffield Labour College (12 August 1936) JM 19/1; USSC, 'Labour College Correspondence' (2), Letter from H Whitehead of the Gleadless Road Co-operative Comrades Circle to Joe Madin (16 August 1937) JM 19/1.

¹⁰⁸USSC, (2) Letter from Woodseats Labour Party to Sheffield Labour College (02 September 1936), Letter From the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers to Sheffield Labour College (18 September 1937), Letter from the AEU to Sheffield Labour College (01 September 1937) JM 19/1.

¹⁰⁹USSC, Alphabetical index of students enrolled in Sheffield Labour College Classes 1925–1927. JM 87P/21/1.

In summary, the successful existence of Sheffield Labour College proves that a form of British Marxist education flourished in Yorkshire. The College attempted to disseminate, through unorthodox and politically-directed education, a specifically working class outlook. The idea of a distinct working class perspective and culture lay at the heart of the activities of the NCLC and the labour colleges. The next section will present evidence of how students and staff of the labour colleges made use of their IWCE.

Halifax Trades Council (HTC) and the Labour Colleges

HTC was another West Yorkshire trades council that affiliated to the NCLC. A survey of the *Monthly Bulletin* of the HTC from 1930 to 1931 serves to give a more detailed idea of the HTC's interest in working class adult education. Speakers were invited to monthly meetings to address the HTC on a range of different topics, including: The Fundamental Principles of the Labour Movement; The Industrial Diseases of Silicosis and Anthracosis; and Some Aspects of the Mental Deficiency Problem.¹¹⁰ The *Monthly Bulletin* recorded the addresses in full, three of which, delivered by staff and students of labour colleges in Yorkshire, will be presented and analysed in the next section.

The October 1931 *Monthly Bulletin* reported an address delivered by J. T. Ashurst, a member of the Leeds Labour College, on 'the need for INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS EDUCATION.'¹¹¹ Ashurst identified the working class as those who were 'compelled to sell its only source of wealth, its labour activity, in order to get the means to live.'¹¹² He then presented an anti-capitalist, Marxist-based class analysis to explain the need for IWCE: 'The interests of the exploited worker are opposed to the interests of the exploiting capitalists.'¹¹³ He proposed that educated workers

would realise as their consciousness grew that, just as in their industrial organisation they are distinctly opposed to their masters' organisation, so is the mental outlook; it is necessary to create the machinery of investigation to supply them with the means to combat the activities of their opponents. This is justified in the continuance and work of the Independent Working Class Education Movement.¹¹⁴

Another element of Ashurst's address focused on how the ruling class used the powers of the state and government to further their own capitalist interests. Ashurst stated that the ultimate political and economic goal of the working class struggle was to construct 'a new system of society' whereby 'the socialisation of production and social

¹¹⁰ Calderdale, WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin of the Halifax Federated Trades and Industrial Council*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 1. TU:64/11/5; *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 6, November (1930), p. 1. TU:64/11/9.

¹¹¹ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10 (October, 1931), p. 1. TU:64/11/17.

¹¹² WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10 (October, 1931), p. 1. TU:64/11/17.

¹¹³ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10 (October, 1931), p. 1. TU:64/11/17.

¹¹⁴ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10 (October, 1931), p. 2. TU:64/11/17.

ownership [would] solve the problems of the working class'.¹¹⁵ IWCE was the key to enabling working class people as a unified class 'to achieve the conquest of political supremacy'.¹¹⁶ Ashurst ended his address by emphasising the critical need for IWCE:

can anyone amongst the working class allow their mental consciousness to be governed, trained and directed in the interests and viewpoint of the capitalist interests? Surely not. Only by developing our consciousness in relation to our economic class needs and political requirements can we change the system.¹¹⁷

Ashurst's address to the HTC gives a good sense of the political bias of the labour colleges, and shows the intellectual understanding that staff of the Labour Colleges had of the connection between education, class-consciousness and socialism.

Two other addresses, one given by Mr A. Hall, a student of the Halifax Labour College, on the 'Fundamental Principles of the Labour Movement' and another by Fred Shaw, on 'The Workers and the World Economic Crisis', provide an understanding of how labour college people perceived their world.¹¹⁸ Hall's address in particular gives a strong indication of what was taught in labour college classes, and how students applied that knowledge and disseminated it to their peers.

Hall's address was an economic Marxist analysis of production, profits and wealth distribution in relation to the emergence of the labour movement. In Hall's analysis, whoever owned and controlled the means of production 'automatically take the major portion, while those who create the wealth receive just sufficient in the forms of wages to reproduce their power to labour.'¹¹⁹ This process split society into two opposing classes – the propertied or capitalist class and those without property – the working class. In Hall's view, the profit or surplus value of production led to a conflict of interest between each class. Capitalists were motivated to increase their profits at the expense of workers who 'continually struggle to maintain and increase their wages'.¹²⁰ In order to change the class dynamic, Hall politicised his address by arguing that 'political society is based on property. The Parliamentary machine reflects the economic needs of a class. Its function is to legalise the economic needs of that class, not classes.'¹²¹ However, in Hall's opinion Parliament was not going to support the working class in their struggle to become emancipated: 'Why? Because the emancipation of the working class lies in Socialism, and the first [...] practical step towards Socialism is to

¹¹⁵ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10, (October, 1931), p. 2. TU:64/11/17.

¹¹⁶ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10, (October, 1931), p. 2. TU:64/11/17.

¹¹⁷ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 10, (October, 1931), p. 2. TU:64/11/17.

¹¹⁸ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930); TU:64/11/5, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931). TU:64/11/15.

¹¹⁹ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 1. TU:64/11/5.

¹²⁰ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 1. TU:64/11/5.

¹²¹ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 2. TU:64/11/5.

obtain the means of wealth production.’ Hall was critical of the Labour Party, identifying that its error was to attempt ‘to serve two classes’ and ‘to show the governors how to govern’. He emphasised the importance of working class people having a sound understanding of the correct theory underpinning ‘the economic basis of the society under which we live’. Only then would the working class be able to achieve the political and economic power to free themselves from capitalism:

the task of consciously establishing the new economy falls to our class – the working class. It must become a ruling class before it can abolish class rule. It must constitute a political organisation in order to clear away the political and juridical obstacles to the organisation of its economic power.¹²²

Hall proposed that industrial action and unionism would be the practical means for the working class to achieve political power.¹²³

The discussion that took place following Hall’s speech gives valuable insight into how the members of the HTC perceived the work of the Halifax Labour College. One delegate criticised Hall’s proposal that the Trade Union Act should be repealed, and called for Hall to state more clearly ‘some definite form of industrial organisation whereby the workers could strengthen their power in the struggle.’ Hall responded tersely that the delegate had misinterpreted parts of his address:

he was not going to waste time outlining wordy schemes devoid of all economic reality. Under our present economic system any attempt to use the political machine on behalf of the working class precipitates a social revolution. The workers as a class must understand the social forces at work and organise to take control.¹²⁴

A Mr Hanson, thanked Hall for his address and complimented the labour colleges ‘on educating the workers, and judging by the clever young lecturers we had had at the Trades Council, it was doing its work well.’¹²⁵ Hall, in his reply, gave all credit to the Halifax Labour College and said ‘that the thanks were really due to those tutors of the Halifax Labour College who had spent hundreds of hours training himself and his comrades.’¹²⁶

Fred Shaw in his address to the HTC focused on how the economic crisis had reduced workers’ wages. The data Shaw presented, dense with statistics, showed that despite the economic crisis ‘Great Britain is wealthier to-day than ever.’¹²⁷ He qualified this information by explaining that the increase in wealth was because of ‘overseas

¹²² WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 2. TU:64/11/5.

¹²³ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), pp. 2–3. TU:64/11/5.

¹²⁴ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 3. TU:64/11/5.

¹²⁵ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 3. TU:64/11/5.

¹²⁶ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 4 (July, 1930), p. 3. TU:64/11/5.

¹²⁷ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931), p. 1. TU:64/11/5.

investments, banking charges, commissions for overseas loans' but that Britain's traditional primary and secondary industries were in 'decline, and cannot be worked up to their capacities'¹²⁸ Shaw informed the HTC audience that the national income in 1931 stood at £4,200,000,000 compared with £2,090,000,000 in 1921 but that 'wages had fallen by £550,000,000 per year'.¹²⁹ He argued that 'the bankers, having control of the financial situation, compel the workers to work harder and harder for less pay.'¹³⁰ Shaw's final point was to advocate that the task of the working class was to seize the means of production to rectify the economic situation in their favour. Trade unions and other labour organisations such as the trades councils were vital to this process because they could 'stir the workers into understanding these social problems'. Shaw also proposed that trades councils 'should be the co-ordinating body locally and nationally in assisting the workers to this end'.

In the discussion that followed, Shaw identified the apathy of the rank and file as a problem larger than that of the quality of leadership in the labour movement. Here he presented a Marxist analysis of the economic crisis:

The social and political forms of capitalism were breaking down [...] the very material forms of capital were collapsing, and the creative side of the working class movement must play its part in moulding the new structures.¹³¹

To illustrate his point further, Shaw used the example of Russia as a nation where 'war conditions broke down the material forms of the system.'¹³² His implication was that something similar could happen in Britain, and might open the way to a political and social revolution, one that the industrial working class needed to be educated and prepared for.

The theme that repeatedly recurs in the labour college syllabuses, propaganda and lectures is the Marxist conception of history, economics and society. The ideas of historical inevitability and materialism emerge strongly as core principles in labour college IWCE. Macintyre's definition of Marxism corresponds closely with that promoted by the labour college curriculums.¹³³ He observes that, between 1917 and 1933, the 'temper of British Marxism was [...] overwhelmingly scientific,' something that the sources studied here support.¹³⁴ Marxism was rational, scientific and predictable. The material world was real, and people's lives were dictated by their

¹²⁸ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931), p. 1. TU:64/11/5.

¹²⁹ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931), p. 2. TU:64/11/5.

¹³⁰ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931), p. 3. TU:64/11/5.

¹³¹ WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931), p. 3. TU:64/11/15.

¹³² WYAS, *Monthly Bulletin*, No. 9 (May, 1931), p. 3. TU:64/11/15.

¹³³ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 49.

¹³⁴ Macintyre, *A Proletarian Science*, p. 51.

material conditions. These could be altered and shaped to favour the working class. This was the major difference between labour socialism and Marxism. A Marxist understanding of socialism was based on science, whereas labour socialism was underpinned by an understanding of morality and ethics. These two interpretations of socialism co-existed uneasily, competing for the support of a diverse and heterogeneous working class. In the world of workers' education, the two conceptions of socialism emerged strongly, showing how diverse the British labour movement was.

Conclusion

In connection with nurturing and supporting strong and effective leadership, the trades councils of Yorkshire recognised a concurrent need for education of the rank and file. To this end, they supported the WEA, the NCLC, and the Co-operative as working class adult education organisations capable of delivering different types of education to their members. What also emerges from this study is that trades councils and the labour colleges had a good working interrelationship. There is evidence that trades councils were open to different interpretations of social democracy, including Marxism and labour socialism. The Bradford Trades Council, for example, was a trades council that supported state socialism as the way forward but, while doing so, it also supported local initiatives to improve workers' lives more locally in Bradford. The labour colleges meanwhile criticised the parliamentary route to a socialist state, placing their faith in a social revolutionary model. The world of labour of the trades councils and labour colleges, though small, gives insight into the diversity of opinion among working class bodies about how a social democratic state could be achieved, and how it should function. There was potential for a form of British Marxism to flourish in the world of trades councils, but this was limited by the lack of unity between the industrial and political arms of the labour movement, as Jansson's research suggests was typical of Britain. However, the trades councils, with their close links to the labour colleges, showed political ambition in their campaign to gain control of municipal councils. The proliferation of labour representation on municipal bodies reflects the success of the labour movement in Yorkshire, and will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: PART I

A Record of Public Service by Students: The Adult Students as Citizen

The hypothesis of the thesis – that working class adult education was a key component of the labour movement – has yet to be dealt with directly. This chapter will seek to establish a closer relationship than has been made by other historians between the significance of workers' adult education and the labour movement, specifically in terms of how social democratic ideology became more integrated into the world of British politics.

Much has been made of the role of education in forming a specific type of 'labour person'. In 1906– following the General Election, which saw twenty-nine Labour MPs elected to Parliament – W.T. Stead drew attention to these first members of the early PLP, all of whom were from working class backgrounds. He remarked

How comes it that they, who have had none of the social and educational advantages of the middle and upper classes, should nevertheless be capable of holding their own in fair field with the finest product of our universities.¹

To gain insight into their educational backgrounds, Stead wrote to fifty-one members of the PLP asking them to record which books had most influenced their social and political outlook.² Forty-five responded, citing the work of Thomas Carlyle, Henry George, John Ruskin and Robert Burns. Political radicals such as Karl Marx were barely acknowledged by Stead's sample. Stead's piece of light-hearted research into the characters of the PLP aimed to entertain his readers but, on a deeper level, it acknowledged the emergence of a new political class who, despite their economic and social disadvantages, had succeeded in entering Parliament. David Martin identifies that the working class backgrounds of members of the early PLP made the Labour Party a compelling alternative to the Liberal Party for many working class voters. He also notes that a high proportion of the PLP in 1906 worked as officials for trade unions, something that emerges in this study of public servants in local government.³

Stead's observation of the PLP remains relevant to the historiography and, following his lead, a greater attempt will be made here to answer it. Stead wished to shed a not particularly critical light on the early leaders of the PLP, a light that would

¹ W. T. Stead, 'The Labour Party and the Books that Helped Make it', *The Review of Reviews*, 33, p. 568.

² Stead, 'The Labour Party and the Books that Helped Make it', p. 568.

³ David Martin, 'The Instruments of the People?': The Parliamentary Labour Party in 1906' in *Ideology and the Labour Movement*, ed. by David E. Martin and David Rubenstein (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp. 125–146.

show them to be self-educated, meritorious, politically intelligent and, overall, forces to be reckoned with. David Howell took Stead's project much further and, in *MacDonald's Party*, succeeded in making a clear-headed and astute analysis of the ideology and working class identity of the PLP prior to the failure of the second Labour Government in 1931.⁴ Howell's analysis focused on what made the PLP different and relevant in a political culture previously dominated by Liberalism and Conservatism. To this end, he argued that the forming of the Labour Representative Committee (LRC) as an independent organisation 'was a profound statement of identity, of self-reliance by the organised working class'.⁵

This aspect of the LRC, later the PLP, was 'central to the organisational culture of MacDonald's Party'.⁶ Howell's analysis highlights the diversity of working class identities amongst members of the PLP. He considers how ideological, as well as cultural, differences were – or were not – accommodated by the political administration and structure of the evolving PLP.⁷ Howell's narrative of the PLP is complex, and shows how multifaceted the PLP, and by extension the labour movement, was in the 1920s and 1930s.

Howell focused on the MPs of the PLP during the 1920s and 1930s. However, supporting the PLP were thousands of labour movement men and women who were politically active at a local and regional level. They reflected the working class diversity of the PLP at a grass-roots level. It was they who were closest to the working class electorate on a daily basis, and they who through their public service in local government supported the main ambitions of the PLP. Who were they, and how did they come to be in positions of political authority in local government? What did they achieve?

In the spirit of Stead, this chapter will build a biographical profile of local – not national – labour movement public servants with a background in workers' adult education by providing biographical sketches of a selected sample group. Patricia Hollis has carried out similar research in her work on women in local government prior to 1914.⁸ By undertaking this research, I hope to introduce new historical biographical information about local, and particularly municipal, public servants whose

⁴ David Howell, *MacDonald's Party. Labour Identities and Crisis 1922-1931*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵ Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, p. 21.

⁶ Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, p. 21.

⁷ Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, pp. 22–53

⁸ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government 1865–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

achievements have not been fully or directly acknowledged in previous histories. The substance of this chapter is information-rich, and will be set out as two adjoining chapters – Chapter Five, Parts I and II – so that all relevant aspects of the evidence and the historiography can be presented and analysed in depth. Part I will present an analysis of *The Adult Student as Citizen* – the primary source that underpins the chapter, and where our sample is taken from. It will then present brief biographies of twenty-six public servants who were all active on the city councils of Leeds, York, or Sheffield between the wars. Each public servant is known to have attended WEA classes. Part II will then analyse their public service, their working class profile and the ideological identity of the PLP in the wider historiographical context.

The Adult Student as Citizen

The Adult Student as Citizen. A Record of Service by WEA Students Past and Present, is a pamphlet published by the WEA in 1938, and is the primary source that forms the basis of this chapter.⁹ This impressive document lists past and present WEA students as ‘adult citizens’ – people in ‘public service’, defined as urban district, rural district, parish, municipal and county councillors and aldermen, as well as, magistrates, committee members and Members of Parliament – and lists them by the 18 WEA districts that existed in 1938.

First, it is useful to note a few points about how and why the pamphlet was compiled, in order to understand its origins and purpose. R. H. Tawney, WEA president in 1938, offered an insight into why the WEA published the pamphlet, explaining: ‘the Workers’ Educational Association is asked from time to time what part its students play in public affairs.’¹⁰ To this end, the WEA collected information about past and present students engaged in public service and published it as *The Adult Student as Citizen*. Tawney qualified the information contained in *The Adult Student as Citizen* by stating that it did not ‘include the large body of service rendered by students and ex-students of the Association to the trade union, Co-operative and other working-class movements, political parties, or cultural and social organisations’.¹¹ Rather, it represented only the traceable minority of WEA students engaged in public service, because it was impossible to trace the public service trajectories of *all* WEA students. He refuted a common criticism of the WEA that ‘the educational interests which lead adult workers

⁹ *The Adult Student as Citizen. A Record of Service by WEA Students Past and Present* (WEA: London, 1938).

¹⁰ *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 1. (For an analysis of Tawney’s involvement with the WEA see Meredith Kwartin Rusoff, ‘R. H. Tawney and the WEA’ in *A Ministry of Enthusiasm*.)

¹¹ R. H. Tawney, *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 1.

to join WEA classes may weaken their desire to undertake public work.’¹² Instead, he argued that *The Adult Student as Citizen* proved the opposite: ‘that WEA students take their full share of public responsibilities.’¹³ This point underlines what was likely to have been the WEA’s true motivation behind *The Adult Student as Citizen* – to demonstrate and provide real concrete evidence of how WEA education played an important role in supporting worker-students in public service, and thus indirectly in the labour movement. It also served as a means to silence more radical critics of the WEA, chiefly the Plebs and NCLC, by demonstrating how effective the WEA had been in contributing to political reformism. Each individual investigated in this study described himself or herself as being a socialist or member of the Labour Movement. Tawney described the process and outcome of acquiring knowledge eloquently when he wrote

Naturally, students who have acquired the knowledge, the self-confidence, and the facility in expression, which study and discussion confer, are both quicker than they would otherwise have been to realise the importance of playing their part as responsible citizens, and better qualified to rise to the occasion when such responsibilities come their way.¹⁴

Tawney described the ‘dynamic’ of WEA education that manifested itself in the student body as

groups of ordinary men and women, among whose varying reasons for becoming students the desire to understand the life of society, and the possibilities of improving it, is one of the commonest, and not least powerful. A considerable proportion use the knowledge acquired in [WEA classes] to serve the cause of their fellow workers either in voluntary organisations or on public bodies.¹⁵

The final paragraph of Tawney’s preface to *The Adult Student as Citizen* draws on the WEA’s *Statement of Policy* in stating fully to the reader the wider educational aims of the WEA: ‘[the 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.’¹⁶ *The Adult Student as Citizen* was the WEA’s proof – or at least propaganda – that they were indeed achieving their vision of a fairer, more politically active, and socially responsible civil society through their form of education.

For this reason, it is important to study in detail and investigate to what extent the WEA achieved its wider social aims through students who became public servants. *The Adult Student as Citizen* provides an impressive list of public servants across the nation, but what did these individuals achieve in public office? By making a collective

¹² Tawney, *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 3.

¹³ Tawney, *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Tawney, *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Tawney, *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Tawney, *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 4.

biographical study of these individuals, we will reach a better understanding of the complex relationship between workers' adult education and political activity in the labour movement.

The list of WEA students engaged in public service presented in the pamphlet was 'confined to those WEA students, past and present, in England and Wales, who were known to be engaged, in 1938, in the various types of public work indicated'.¹⁷ The total number of positions across all WEA districts listed in the pamphlet is 2,342 while the total number of individuals was 2,174, because some individuals served on more than one body.¹⁸ An analysis of WEA students in public service across *all* districts, taken as it appears in the pamphlet, appears in Table 10 below.¹⁹

¹⁷ The Adult Student as Citizen, p. i.

¹⁸ The Adult Student as Citizen, p. 2.

¹⁹ The Adult Student as Citizen, p. 2.

TABLE 10: Analysis of students in public service

<i>Position held</i>	<i>Number</i>
Members of Parliament	15
County Councillors	127
City and Borough Councillors	356
Urban District Councillors	322
Rural District Councillors	147
Parish Councillors	538
Mayors	13
Magistrates	250
Education (co-opted Members)	79
Members of Education Sub-Committees ²⁰	90
Public Assistance Committees (Co-opted Members)	41
Members of Maternity and Child Welfare Committees	43
Members of Juvenile Employment Committees	20
School Governors and Managers	165
Hospital Governors	10
Members of Courts of Referees	68
Unemployment Assistance Boards (UAB) Advisory Committee Members	17
Other County and Borough Council Committees (co-opted members) ²¹	25
Members of Miscellaneous Committees ²²	16
TOTAL	2,342

²⁰ Included 'members of District Committees and Library Committees, as well as co-opted members of sub-committees of the Education Committee', *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 2.

²¹ Included 'members of the following committees: Assessment; Finance; Health Insurance; Tuberculosis; Agricultural and Small Holdings; Pensions; Housing; Blind Persons; Museum and Art Galleries', *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 2.

²² Included 'members of the following committees: Agricultural Wages Board; Care Committees; Women's Employment; Adult Education Advisory Committee; Welfare Committee', *The Adult Student as Citizen*, p. 2.

Approach – Limitations and Innovations

The WEA proposed that there was a definite correlation between adult education and public service in support of the labour movement. My approach is to investigate the substance supporting their hypothesis about the civic value of workers' adult education by taking account of the biographies and public service records of individuals named in *The Adult Student as Citizen*. However, there are obvious flaws and limitations to this approach and it is important to acknowledge them, as well as to emphasise the historiographical sense of using *The Adult Student as Citizen* – a unique primary source – innovatively.

Firstly, my sample group is limited to a minority of individuals who received adult education from the WEA as evidenced by *The Adult Student as Citizen*. In the absence of any other similar document it is a unique and relevant source to work from. Secondly, I do not use a comparison sample group of individuals who did *not* attend WEA classes but who did serve on public bodies. From a social science perspective this means that my research method is biased. However, the purpose of this thesis is to provide evidence that workers' adult education was a significant adjunct to supporting public servants who were politically active in the labour movement. In pursuing this purpose, the unique information that *The Adult Student as Citizen* provides cannot be ignored, and in this respect my approach is in harmony with the academic discipline of history, as opposed to the social sciences. I fully accept that there may indeed be no difference in political activism between my sample group and a corresponding peer group who did *not* have a background in working class education. There is a gap in the historiography of public service, and further research is required to pursue this line of enquiry in relation to all public servants. That being said, one of the aims of *this* thesis is to present a history of the labour movement in a new framework – that of working class adult education – that highlights the diversity of the world of the labour movement in local government. And, at the very least, *The Adult Student as Citizen* disproves the WEA's critics who said that the WEA dissuaded its students from public service.

Little research has been done to investigate the lives and work of local councillors such as those listed in *The Adult Student as Citizen*.²³ In general, the work of municipal, parish, urban and rural district councils is not well reported, even though these civic forums were where advocates of different ideologies – Socialism, Conservatism,

²³ Some local and regional studies that address this topic include Derek Fraser (ed.) *A History of Modern Leeds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980); David Thornton, *Leeds: The Story of a City* (Ayr: Fort, 2002); Charles H. Feinstein (ed.) *York 1831-1981. 150 Years of Scientific Endeavour and Social Change* (York: The Ebor Press, 1981); Meadowcroft, 'Transition in Leeds City Government'; Mathers, 'Sheffield Municipal Politics'; Powell, 'Leeds City Council'.

Liberalism – made their policies matter at a grass-roots level. Yet it did matter who, in undertaking such public duties, led parish, city and county councils, because it was these people’s political activism at a local level that served to integrate relatively new ideologies such as socialism into the policies of municipal government, making such policies acceptable or at least intelligible to the general public.²⁴

A collective biographical study of the individuals named in *The Adult Student as Citizen* will add a wealth of information to the historical record of public service. And the glue that binds these individuals is their shared background in workers’ adult education.

Table 11 below shows the number of positions in public service held by individuals in North and South Yorkshire as listed in *The Adult Student as Citizen*. It does not include all the categories used in the pamphlet, so as to highlight the main areas of public service that were occupied by WEA students. The same template and categorisation for Table 10 has been used. Table 10 figures are included for comparison between National and Yorkshire (North and South) numbers.

TABLE 11²⁵

Analysis of students in public service – North and South Yorkshire

POSITION HELD	YORKSHIRE NUMBERS	NATIONAL NUMBERS (see Table 10)
Members of Parliament	7	15
City Councillors and Aldermen (excludes county and borough councillors)	35	356
Urban District Councillors	158	322
Rural District Councillors	33	147
Parish Councillors	155	538

The total number of individuals active in public service in North and South Yorkshire listed in *The Adult Student as Citizen* is 600. But because some individuals served on several committees and/or public bodies, the total number of *positions* is 685.

²⁴ Few records of appreciation of City Councils exist in the historical record but one that stands out is a poem in praise of Leeds City Council see Gloria Yates, *A Daughter of Leeds* (Castleford: Yorkshire Arts Circus, 1997), pp. 4–5.

²⁵ Adapted by the author to represent the main public bodies on which WEA students served as public servants in Yorkshire. *The Adult Student as Citizen*, pp. 41–55.

This explains the difference between the numbers of individuals versus the number of positions represented in the document.

Of the total number of individuals listed, eighty-eight were women who served as public servants in a variety of positions, including as magistrates, councillors, or as members of maternity, child welfare committee, and public assistance boards. More often than not such women came from middle- to upper-class backgrounds rather than working-class ones. The remaining 513 individuals were men. Keeping in mind that the statistics presented in *The Adult Student as Citizen* are incomplete and do not include individuals who were active in voluntary and other Labour organisations, few conclusions can be drawn from these figures in relation to the imbalance between the sexes. However, it is not unreasonable, given the period, to infer that men had greater access to adult education than women, which may account in part for fewer women being listed as public servants. Nonetheless, the number of women recorded still demonstrates a sizeable minority of women active in public service during this period.

Another notable statistic from Table 11 is that seven Members of Parliament are listed. Table 10 (national figures) shows a total of fifteen Members of Parliament, nearly half of whom were in Yorkshire. Although impossible to draw any definite conclusions, it is reasonable to suggest that Yorkshire – a so-called ‘Labour heartland’ – had a large, politically active, and engaged working class electorate that resulted in the election of Labour Party parliamentary candidates.

Having been given a broad idea from Table 11 of how many individuals with a WEA background were involved in public service in Yorkshire and how they compare with the national numbers presented in Table 10, it is now time to find out who these individuals were.

As seen from Table 10, the majority of individuals involved in public service fell into three main categories – urban district councillors (158), parish councillors (155) and city councillors and aldermen (35). To make a biographical study of each individual listed would have taken more time and resources than I had available to me. It was also unclear if such an exhaustive study would produce interesting results that would widen the historiography. Therefore it was necessary to narrow down my closer investigation to those people who would be visible in the historical record, as well as relevant to this thesis.

I concentrated on finding biographical information about city councillors in Leeds, York, and Sheffield, as these were – and still are – among the largest urban centres in Yorkshire. My reason for selecting these individuals was because their biographies were

more likely to give a realistic reflection of the politics of the region. Also, their biographical profiles were more visible and accessible in the historical record than individuals serving on parish councils and smaller committees.

The sources I used to find preliminary information about these councillors were biographical card indexes held at local studies and family history libraries in Leeds, Sheffield, and York, as well as the British Newspapers Archive (BNO) website and on-line census, births, deaths and marriages records.²⁶ All online sources will be indicated in the footnotes. (All online sources were accessed for free in York City public library.)

WEA Adult Students as Citizens - Leeds City Councillors

Eleven Leeds City Councillors are included in this part of the study: Arthur Adamson, John Arnott MP, David Beevers, Alfred James Dobbs MP, Hugh Hamill, Francis H. O'Donnell, Bertha Quinn, Albert Tallant, Joseph Thornton, Wilfred Webster, and William 'Willie' Withey.²⁷

It was not possible to find details about which WEA classes each attended, but it is interesting to note that Francis H. O'Donnell, David Beevers, Bertha Quinn, Joseph Thornton and Wilfred Webster all served on public bodies in Leeds at the same time. In this respect they formed a cohort of labour movement public servants who shared a background in WEA education.

What follows is a biographical study of each councillor that focuses on their social and educational background, as well as their record of public service and political outlook. Much of the information presented in the biographical sketches is taken from newspaper articles and obituaries. They therefore often reflect diverse aspects of each subject's life and activity. This gives the sketches a somewhat patchy quality, but nonetheless they offer valuable insight into the lives of public servants in municipal government.

²⁶ www.britishnewspapersarchive.co.uk (BNO) is a database created by the British Library that reproduces digital copies of historical British regional and local newspapers. In the case of my research for Yorkshire it was possible to access records from 1800 to 1955. The genealogical on-line websites I accessed were www.ancestrylibrary.co.uk (Ancestry) and www.findmypast.co.uk (Findmypast). Despite the array of sources used to discover more about individuals, sometimes it was not possible to find more than basic information.

²⁷ Two other councillors – H. A. Candler and J. A. Simpson were listed in *The Adult Student as Citizen*. They have not been included here because it was not possible to find reliable and accurate information about either of them.

1) ARTHUR ADAMSON (1887 – 1965)

Arthur Adamson was born on 5 May 1887 and died on 9 July 1965 aged 78.²⁸ His estate was worth £1,758.²⁹ His father Mick Adamson was a textile mechanic. Arthur became a cabinet-maker by profession.³⁰ He married Martha Jane Ford in 1915.³¹ They had two daughters Peggy and Sally. Martha Jane pre-deceased Arthur in 1951.³²

Adamson was a member of Leeds City Council for thirty-two years, from 1932 to 1964.³³ During that period Adamson served on the Libraries and Arts Committee and, from 1936, was either chairman or deputy chairman of that committee. As a member of that committee, Adamson was involved in work to protect Temple Newsam and its special collection of art from damage caused by blasting for coal on the estate.³⁴ He also ‘upset his own party by advising the ratepayers of Halton not to pay their library service rate charge until they got a library’.³⁵ In 1955 he was elected President of the Yorkshire Federation of Museums and Art Galleries.³⁶

His obituary described him as a ‘man of contrasts’: ‘the skilled workman, the district organiser of the amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, who became chairman of Leeds Corporation’s Libraries and Arts Committee’ as well as ‘the city dweller, the man who won and held the West Hunslet Ward for Labour whose heart was in the country’.³⁷ Adamson was a keen Rambler, and was ‘secretary of the West Riding area of the Ramblers’ Association’.³⁸ The Ramblers’ Association, in tribute to Adamson’s service, set up a fund to build a bridge across the River Washburn in Timble Green in his memory.³⁹

His obituary noted that

If there was anything he liked better than walking, it was walking footpaths where authority – usually the landowner – was barring access. He embroiled himself happily in the long battle to win right of access to Barden Moor and Barden Fell.⁴⁰

²⁸ Leeds Family History & Local Studies Library (LFH&LSL), ‘Death at 77 of Ald Arthur Adamson’, *The Yorkshire Evening Post (YEP)* (09 July 1965), p. 5.

²⁹ Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations) (1858-1966, 1973-1995), Arthur Adamson, Date of Death 09 July 1965, p. 37. (Accessed 21 July 2017)

³⁰ Ancestry, 1901 Census, RG13, Piece No. 4204, Folio 84, p. 11. (Accessed 21 July 2017)

³¹ Ancestry, England & Wales Marriages Register (1837-2005), Vol. 9B, p. 1086, (Accessed 21 July 2017)

³² BNO, ‘Deaths’, *The Yorkshire Post (YP)* (07 September 1951), p. 2. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

³³ LFH&LSL, ‘Death at 77 of Ald Arthur Adamson’, *YEP*, p. 5.

³⁴ BNO, ‘Temple Newsam Tests of Blasting’, *YP* (01 April 1946), p. 6. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

³⁵ LFH&LSL, ‘Death at 77 of Ald Arthur Adamson’, *YEP*, p. 5.

³⁶ BNO, ‘County Presidency of Leeds Alderman’, *YP* (16 April 1955), p. 5. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

³⁷ LFH&LSL, ‘Death at 77 of Ald Arthur Adamson’, *YEP*, p. 5.

³⁸ LFH&LSL, ‘Death at 77 of Ald Arthur Adamson’, *YEP*, p. 5.

³⁹ LFH&LSL, ‘Memorial to the Walking Alderman’, *YEP* (01 November 1966), p. 6.

⁴⁰ LFH&LSL, ‘Death at 77 of Ald Arthur Adamson’, *YEP*, p. 5.

Arthur Adamson's record of public service indicates that he worked steadfastly towards enhancing the cultural status of Leeds. His activities as a rambler also reflect a pastime common to many WEA students. Many sources about local WEA classes refer to students organising rambles, which were very much enjoyed by students and show evidence of how local WEA students found ways to socialise outside the classroom. Rambles were a social activity that worker students could easily organise and undertake, but the freedom to ramble was also political in nature, and represented an aspect of the British outdoor movement ongoing during the inter-war period.⁴¹ The walking and talking done on rambles by WEA students exemplified the informal ways in which they extended their community and network beyond the classroom.

2) JOHN ARNOTT MP (c. 1871 – 1942)

John Arnott was born in Kincardine-on-Forth in around 1871. The 1881 census states that John's father Henry Arnott was a ferry toll collector.⁴² The 1901 census, records Henry's occupation as 'time keeper at a gas works'.⁴³ John Arnott began work aged thirteen as a blacksmith in ship-building yards, steelworks and engineering shops. In the autodidactic tradition, he studied history books at night during his apprenticeship. When he was twenty-one, Arnott joined the ILP in Middlesbrough. With the support of an ASE scholarship, Arnott spent two years at Ruskin College during his mid-thirties.

He was elected to Leeds City Council and led its Labour group from 1917 to 1920 and from 1922 to 1925. He became the third socialist Lord Mayor of Leeds in 1925. Arnott also aspired to be an MP and stood for West Leeds in the 1918 general election but was not elected. He also failed to be elected when he stood for Kingston-upon-Hull South-West in 1922, 1923, and 1924. In the 1929 general election, Arnott succeeded as Parliamentary candidate for Hull South-West, but lost his seat in 1931. He stood again in 1935 but failed to win.

In an interview by the *Yorkshire Evening Post* on his election as Lord Mayor, Arnott recounted his life story. He stated, 'My socialism is an intellectual conviction and not mere sentiment' and explained that he had 'read himself into socialism'.⁴⁴ Arnott went into detail about his early experiences of socialism through autodidacticism –

⁴¹ For a history of British outdoor movement see Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside. A History of the British Outdoor Movement* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004) (First published by Keele University Press in 1997); for an interesting case study of the Manchester Rambler's Federation that explores the social and political culture of rambling see Ben Anderson, 'A Liberal Countryside? The Manchester Ramblers' Federation and the 'Social Readjustment' of Urban Citizens 1929–1936, *Urban History*, 38, 1 (2011), pp. 84–102.

⁴² Ancestry, 1891 Census, Class RG12; Piece No. 4009; Folio No. 70; p. 42. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁴³ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13; Piece No. 4581; Folio No. 20; p. 46. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁴⁴ LFH&LSL, 'The Next Lord Mayor of Leeds', *YEP* (16 July 1925), p. 7.

When I was a youngster I used to read all the books of history I could lay my hands on, and economics grew out of history and the politics out of economics. I was always interested in politics, but I approached them first through history.⁴⁵

Arnott was influenced by Henry George, and by meeting politicians such as Keir Hardie. The reference to Henry George is reminiscent of W. T. Stead's survey of literary influences on members of the Labour Party in 1906.⁴⁶ John Arnott in this regard seems to fit the profile of the pioneering Labour Party persona – a working-class autodidact with political aspirations.

3) DAVID BEEVERS OBE (1889 – 1957)

David Beevers was born in Manchester in 1889 and died in Leeds on 15 February 1957. He had a long and illustrious career on Leeds City Council, reflected in the many admiring newspaper reports published about him on his death.⁴⁷ His early life story is one of constant work to escape severe unremitting poverty. His later life story describes a man dedicated to public service. Beevers is a near-perfect example of a WEA student struggling against extreme personal and economic adversity, who dedicated his life in public service to improving the lives of the underprivileged.

His family (Beevers was one of six siblings) moved to Leeds when Beevers was eleven. Beevers' father William Fenton Beevers was a tailor, and died when David was fourteen,⁴⁸ his mother Amelia having died when he was nine.⁴⁹ To support his family, Beevers began work at the age of eleven selling newspapers. On his father's death, two of Beevers' sisters were removed to an orphanage. Beevers himself avoided this fate and worked three jobs simultaneously, working for a grocer, as a casual railway porter and as a newspaper seller. He gained permanent employment in the Montague Burton clothing factory.⁵⁰ Beevers became a presser, but eventually rose to the position of foreman, a position he held for over thirty years.⁵¹

He became a member of the Sunday School of St Andrews and ran a mutual help class. He was struck by the class division in the school, whereby 'it had a "ragged" class

⁴⁵ LFH&LSL, 'The Next Lord Mayor of Leeds', *YEP*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Stead, 'The Labour Party and the Books that Helped Make it', pp. 568–582.

⁴⁷ LFH&LSL, 'A Great Little Man', *Yorkshire Evening News (YEN)* (15 February 1957), pp. 6-7; Ronald Stott, 'Poor Boy Became a City Leader' *YEP* (16 February 1957), p. 3; 'Alderman David Beevers', *Yorkshire Post (YP)*, (19 February 1957), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Ancestry, 1891 Census, Class, RG12, Piece 3255, Folio 3, p. 3; England & Wales Free BMD Civil Registration Death Index: (1837-1915), Vol. 9b, p. 397. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁴⁹ Ancestry, England and Wales Free BMD Civil Registration Death Index, (1837-1915), Vol. 8d, p. 206. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁵⁰ Stott, 'Poor Boy Became a City Leader', *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵¹ Stott, 'Poor Boy Became a City Leader', *YEP*, p. 3.

for down-and-out children and an ordinary class for those in more respectable attire.⁵² To Beevers, this division presented ‘another challenge to do something’.⁵³

He was a member of the Labour Party and the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. In 1927 he was elected to Leeds City Council representing Westfield Ward. He remained a member of the Council for thirty years, becoming an alderman in 1940 and Lord Mayor in 1945-46.⁵⁴

His employers at the Montague Burton clothing factory gave Beevers freedom and time from work to carry out his duties as mayor. Such was their respect for Beevers that they, and other workers at the factory, ‘subscribed to the cost of a portrait of David Beevers in his mayoral robes by Philip Naviasky, the Leeds artist,⁵⁵ a portrait that hangs today in Leeds City Hall. In 1949, Beevers became leader of the Labour Group on the Council following the death of Rev. Charles Jenkinson.⁵⁶ In 1951 he ‘was presented to the Chancellor of the University of Leeds [Professor Arnold Shimmin, CBE, himself a tutor for the WEA] and HRH the Princess Royal, for the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws’.⁵⁷

Beevers had a reputation as a solid, diligent and committed member of the Council and was described as a ‘peacemaker. But never placator.’⁵⁸ His obituary described his outlook: ‘The beliefs, the principles, the ideals which he had stood for and fought for all his life he would defend with a courage that was, if unspectacular, at any rate unshakeable.’⁵⁹ One of Beevers’ major interests and concerns was healthcare. When the National Health Act 1946 brought hospitals under state control, Beevers became

chairman of Leeds “A” Group Hospital Management Committee [...] He was also made a member of the Leeds Regional Hospital Board, the Teaching Hospital Board, the United Leeds Hospital Board and chairman of the Leeds Executive Council of the National Health Service.⁶⁰

In support of his healthcare work, employees of the Montague Burton Company Ltd donated 15,000 shillings to the Leeds General Infirmary Million Shilling Fund.⁶¹

Beevers married Hannah Garnett in 1914.⁶² On his death, he left an estate of £1,616 2s 3d.⁶³ This brief biography of the life of David Beevers OBE, WEA student,

⁵² Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵³ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ LFH&LSL, ‘Alderman David Beevers’, *Leeds Weekly Citizen (LWC)* (16 November 1951), p. 5.

⁵⁸ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Stott, ‘Poor Boy Became a City Leader’, *YEP*, p. 3.

⁶¹ BNO, ‘A Gift of 15,000 Shillings’, *YP*, (13 December 1935), p. 4. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

skilled labourer, councillor, alderman and Lord Mayor represents an idealised version of the Labour person that the WEA wished to champion as a public servant as well as an individual. Beevers' early life was harsh and exposed him to the evils of poverty, loss of parents and siblings, ill health and unemployment – an education in itself. Rather than succumb to adversity, Beevers, through sheer hard work and intelligence, changed his economic circumstances, became educated, and participated in local government to improve the welfare of the community. He was exceptional in this regard.

4) HUGH HAMILL (C. 1899-1900 – 1943)

John Hugh Hamill was born around 1899-1900 and died young following a short illness in 1943.⁶⁴ His father John Hamill was born in Ireland and his father's occupation is listed as a 'block cutter [of] oilcloth' in the 1911 census,⁶⁵ by which time the family were living in Stockport.⁶⁶ Hugh Hamill married Annie Smith in 1921.⁶⁷ Annie was the beneficiary of his estate valued at £1,255 9s 8d.⁶⁸ Hamill's obituary provides some details of his life. Before the First World War he was a wallpaper designer. He also worked as a supply officer for the ministry of Labour. During the war he was a member of the Royal Flying Corps. Post-war Hamill became a school manager for St Augustine's School, Harehills Road, Leeds.⁶⁹

Hamill served as a Labour representative on Leeds City Council from 1927 to 1943. He represented North East Ward in 1927, and was returned to Burmantofts ward in 1930. Between 1933 and 1936 he served as chairman of the Watch Committee. He also held the post of deputy chairman on this committee for many years.⁷⁰

During his time on Leeds City Council, Hamill, like many of his socialist colleagues, was critical of the Conservative drive to use private enterprise and contractors for municipal projects. He supported direct labour and an article in *The Yorkshire Post* described Hamill as the 'Socialist Voice' speaking out against economic

⁶² Ancestry, West Yorkshire, Church of England Marriages and Banns, (1813-1935) RDP62/20/11, p. 236. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁶³ Ancestry, England & Wales National Probate Record (1858-1966, 1973-1995), David Beevers, Date of Death 15 February 1957, p. 471. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁶⁴ Findmypast, 1939 Register, Hugh Hamill, RG101/3436H/016/32, Letter Code KGEA; Ancestry, England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index, (1916-2007), Vol. 9b, p. 218. (Accessed 21 July 2017)

⁶⁵ Ancestry, 1911 Census, RG14, Piece No. 21399. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁶⁶ Ancestry, 1911 Census, RG14, Piece No. 21399.

⁶⁷ Ancestry, England & Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index (1916-2005), Vol. 9b, p. 879. (Accessed 21 July 2017)

⁶⁸ Ancestry, England & Wales National Probate Calendar, (1858-1966, 1973-1995), Hugh Hamill, Date of Death 19 April 1943, p. 48. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁶⁹ BNO, 'Obituary Mr Hugh Hamill', *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury (YPLM)* (19 April 1943), p. 6. (Downloaded 01 August 2016).

⁷⁰ BNO, 'Obituary Mr Hugh Hamill', *YPLM*, p. 6.

short-cuts taken by the Conservatives on the Council.⁷¹ Direct labour administered by a municipal works department was part of the Labour Party's strategy to 'devise a distinct programme for municipal activity'.⁷²

Hamill was elected to the Leeds Safety-First Council in 1937. The council was responsible for maintaining and promoting road traffic safety, an urgent concern given the increased number of cars on roads. In 1938, *The Yorkshire Post* reported that 'nearly 2,000 people had been killed or injured in road traffic accidents.'⁷³ In a letter published in *The Yorkshire Post*, Hamill appealed to all road-users to take greater care when driving, warning motorists, cyclists and pedestrians that endangering 'the lives of others is to commit a grievous act of anti-social conduct'.⁷⁴ Hamill's work on Leeds City Council is an example of the diversity of interests amongst public servants.

5) ALFRED JAMES DOBBS MP (1882 – 1945)

Alfred Dobbs was born in 1882 in Wellingborough to George and Rosanna Dobbs of Bozeat. His father George Dobbs was a home riveter.⁷⁵ Alfred married Emily Johnson of Bozeat, Northamptonshire, in 1900.⁷⁶ Dobbs died in a car accident on 27 July 1945, the day after he was elected MP for Smethwick, making him the shortest-serving MP in history. He left an estate worth £2,615 15s 7d.⁷⁷

Dobbs was a shoe-maker, but the 1939 register records his occupation as 'trade union organiser'.⁷⁸ He moved to Leeds in 1909 and became president of the Leeds branch of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives in 1917. He was subsequently elected to the Executive Committee of the Union. Dobbs was very active in municipal politics in Leeds; he served as a Leeds City Councillor from 1923 to 1929 and as an alderman from 1929 to 1936, during which period he became a magistrate. Dobbs was leader of the Council's Labour Group from 1931 to 1936. He was a member of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party from 1936 to 1945, and chairman of the Labour Party from 1942-43.

⁷¹ BNO, 'Socialist Voice', *YP* (27 October 1932), p. 4. (Downloaded 04 August 2016).

⁷² H. Fraser, 'From Civic Gospel to Municipal Socialism', in *Cities Class and Communities*, p. 76.

⁷³ BNO, 'Leeds Road Toll', *YP* (25 October 1938), p. 5. (Downloaded 04 August 2016).

⁷⁴ BNO, 'Road Accidents', *YP* (13 June 1939), p. 6. (Downloaded 04 August 2016).

⁷⁵ Ancestry, 1891 Census, Class RG 12, Piece No. 1209, Folio No. 116, p. 18. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁷⁶ Ancestry, 1911 Census, Class RG14, Piece 26862. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁷⁷ Ancestry, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) Alfred James Dobbs, Date of Death 27 July 1945, p. 693. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

⁷⁸ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3467G/003/7, Letter Code KGQA. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

6) FRANCIS H. O'DONNELL (1893 – 1966)

Francis Hough O'Donnell, a Roman Catholic and another longstanding member of the City Council, was born in east Leeds in 1893 of Irish descent.⁷⁹ He died on 31st December 1966 aged seventy-three.⁸⁰ O'Donnell's father died when he was five. His mother, a grocer, 'worked hard to send her son to a public school, Mount St Mary's College, Derbyshire.'⁸¹ He also attended St Bede's Grammar School.⁸² O'Donnell's early education marks him out as one of the more fully-educated WEA students, having received a primary and secondary education.

By profession he was an estate agent but had worked for many years as a chartered accountant with Thomas Coombs & Son.⁸³ In 1916 he married Josephine Wilber of Leeds.⁸⁴ During the First World War he served in the 15th Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment (Leeds Pals) from 1915 to 1919.⁸⁵ In the Second World War he commanded a squadron of the Air Training Corps.⁸⁶

O'Donnell joined the Labour Party in 1919. His life in public service began in 1925 when he was elected to the Board of Guardians.⁸⁷ In 1926 he was elected to the City Council to represent Richmond Hill, and held the post of Alderman from 1933. O'Donnell served as chairman on several committees during his time on the Council. They included the Public Assistance, Town Planning and Improvements, and Yeadon Aerodrome committees, as well as on other committees such as 'Education, Highways, Parks, Finance, Markets, Watch, and Libraries and Arts Committees'.⁸⁸ He became Mayor of Leeds from 1950 to 1951. He was also a regular contributor to the *Leeds Weekly Citizen (LWC)*. The Pope appointed him a Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Gregory in 1951 in recognition of his distinguished public service.⁸⁹

O'Donnell proved himself to be an outspoken, skilled and successful municipal politician. In 1926 the Board of Guardians found itself in a tight financial position

⁷⁹ LFH&LSL, 'To be Lord Mayor Ald. FH O'Donnell', *LWC* (20 January 1950), p. 4.

⁸⁰ LFH&LSL, 'Death of Ald. FH O'Donnell', *YEP* (31 December 1966), p. 1.

⁸¹ LFH&LSL 'Death of Ald. FH O'Donnell', *YEP*, p. 1.

⁸² LFH&LSL, 'Ald. FH O'Donnell to be Next Lord Mayor of Leeds', *YP* (9 January 1950), p. 6; 'To Be Lord Mayor', *LWC* (20 January 1950), p. 4.

⁸³ LFH&LSL, 'To Be Lord Mayor', *LWC*, p. 4.

⁸⁴ LFH&LSL, 'Ald. FH O'Donnell to be Next Lord Mayor of Leeds', *YP*, p. 6.

LFH&LSL, 'To Be Lord Mayor', *LWC*, p. 4.

⁸⁵ For a history of the Leeds Pals see Laurie Milner, *Leeds Pals. A History of the 15th (Service) Battalion (1st Leeds) The Prince of Wales's Own (West Yorkshire Regiment) 1914–1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 1991).

⁸⁶ LFH&LSL, 'Ald. FH O'Donnell to be Next Lord Mayor of Leeds', *YP*, p. 6.

⁸⁷ Board of Guardians were organisations that administered poor relief in their localities from 1835 to 1930. The Local Government Act 1929 transferred the abolished the boards and transferred their responsibilities to local authorities.

⁸⁸ LFH&LSL, 'To Be Lord Mayor', *LWC*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ LFH&LSL, 'Papal Knighthood for Leeds Lord Mayor', *YP* (30 April 1951), p. 6.

because of the Coal Strike. A large proportion of their funds were spent on outdoor relief. *The Yorkshire Post* described the Board's financial position using 'epithets such as "alarming" and "staggering"'.⁹⁰ One of the *Guardians*, J. W. Whitfield, wished to put an end to granting relief to those 'people who lied and lied to get relief'.⁹¹ O'Donnell, who did not subscribe to Whitfield's view, said 'that to suggest that the people of Hunslet and Holbeck were thieves and robbers was intolerable'.⁹²

O'Donnell was criticised by the Labour Party in 1931 for having a conflict of interests because of his faith.⁹³ The problem was that Roman Catholics in the constituency of South-East Leeds had passed a vote of 'no confidence' in Mr James Milner, the socialist parliamentary candidate, because Mr Milner voted against the Scurr Amendment's position on Roman Catholic non-provided schools.⁹⁴ The Scurr Amendment, approved in the Commons in January 1931, was a way of safeguarding the educational interests of Roman Catholics and Anglicans.⁹⁵ O'Donnell associated himself twice with the 'no confidence' vote, and was asked by the Labour Party to resign, although this did not affect his position as Councillor for Richmond Hill. When interviewed about his position, O'Donnell was unapologetic, the interview recording that:

his party politics had not changed, nor were they likely to change. During his ten years of very active and intense work inside the Socialist Party, seven of which had been spent in public life on the Board of Guardians and the City Council, his energies had been devoted primarily to the poor and working class in East Leeds and Richmond Hill and those people would always have at their disposal the best of his time and energy.

In O'Donnell's opinion, as *The Yorkshire Post* reported, there was

No reason at all why a Catholic should not be a member of any of the three big political parties – as, he added, they are – but I am afraid that many members of the Socialist Party, in contradistinction to the Constitution itself, look upon the Party as a religion or a creed, any departure from which necessitates excommunication of the offender.⁹⁶

By 1936 this cloud had passed, and O'Donnell was one of the nominees for leader of Leeds Labour Party following Alfred J Dobbs's resignation from that position.

⁹⁰ BNO, 'Poor Law Relief Cost in Leeds', *YP* (23 September 1926), p. 9, (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

⁹¹ BNO, 'Poor Law Relief Cost in Leeds', *YP*, p. 9.

⁹² BNO, 'Poor Law Relief Cost in Leeds', *YP*, p. 9.

⁹³ BNO, 'Leeds Socialist Dispute', *YP* (19 November 1931), p. 10. (Downloaded 29 July 2016).

⁹⁴ This Amendment was part of Charles Trevelyan's Education Bill. It sought to raise the school leaving age to fifteen.

⁹⁵ Richard Aldrich, Dennis Dean and Peter Gordon, *Education and Policy in England in the Twentieth Century* (Woburn Press: London, 1991), p. 56.

⁹⁶ BNO, 'Leeds Socialist Dispute', *YP*, p. 10.

O'Donnell was described as having 'a high reputation for sound judgement amongst colleagues'.⁹⁷

O'Donnell continued his work on the Council as an independent socialist member. In 1932 he proposed resolutions to improve the housing stock available in Leeds, and to undertake slum clearance projects.⁹⁸ O'Donnell signed the Minority Report on slum clearance in Leeds with his Council colleagues Alderman Charles Jenkinson and Councillor Fred Barraclough.⁹⁹ As chairman of the Town Planning and Improvements Committee he called for more architectural staff to cope with the great volume of work generated by the building of houses in Leeds.¹⁰⁰ He also campaigned to improve Leeds as a city. At the annual dinner of the Leeds Federation of Building Trades Employers, O'Donnell declared that 'Leeds is not a city to be proud of [...] it is the most untidy city you can possibly come across'. He went on to say that 'Leeds was thrown up because it was a great industrial centre. It is up to us to make Leeds something that it ought to be.'¹⁰¹

O'Donnell had a nuanced view of the issue of direct labour. In his view 'the small tradesman and the small shop-keeper were gradually being driven out of business by the combines and the multiple shops.'¹⁰² O'Donnell struck a balance by saying that 'he did not favour direct labour in all circumstances or at any price but only where it could be applied with advantage to the community.' He argued that 'Leeds might with advantage have completed the Gipton housing estate by this method.'¹⁰³ O'Donnell's expression of the advantages of direct labour over private enterprise is subtle and important. His concern was to maintain steady employment for local people, thereby building a cohesive community through municipal council-led projects. By using direct and local labour, communities would maintain and sustain skilled workers who could contribute to the quality of life of that community.

O'Donnell fits the mould of a WEA student who had a very successful career as a public servant who placed social democratic policies on the municipal agenda. Unlike other WEA students, he had the advantage of a complete education, but this does not detract from his achievements. Rather it demonstrates the wide diversity that existed amongst WEA students, that in itself reflects the British labour movement.

⁹⁷ BNO, 'Leeds Labour Party Leadership' *YP* (16 October 1936), p. 7. (Downloaded 29 July 2016).

⁹⁸ BNO, 'Homes to be Let for 4s 6d a Week', *YP* (10 November 1932) p. 12. (Downloaded 29 July 2016)

⁹⁹ LFH&LSL, 'To Be Lord Mayor' *LWC* (20 January 1950), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ BNO, 'Housing', *YP* (29 March 1934), p. 7. (Downloaded 29 July 2016).

¹⁰¹ BNO, 'Improving Leeds Still Further', *YP* (15 February 1935), p. 4. (Downloaded 29 July 2016).

¹⁰² BNO, 'Direct Labour', *YP* (15 January 1937), p. 6. (Downloaded 29 July 2016).

¹⁰³ BNO, 'Direct Labour' *YP*, p. 6.

7) BRIDGET “BERTHA” QUINN (1873 – 1951)

Bertha Quinn, born into a Middlesbrough family in 1873, died aged seventy-five in Leeds on 3 April 1951. The records indicate that she was christened Bridget Quinn and that she came from a family of sisters.¹⁰⁴ Her sister Mary was listed as the head of the family in the 1881 Census.¹⁰⁵ It was not possible to trace Bertha’s parents with any accuracy. The 1911 Census listed Quinn’s occupation as tailoress.¹⁰⁶

She was a staunch Roman Catholic and ‘in 1946 the Pope conferred the Bene Merenti medal on her.’¹⁰⁷ After her death, a Requiem Mass, attended by hundreds, was held for her, celebrated by Monsignor John Dinn.¹⁰⁸ She was one of the more colourful and vocal members of Leeds City Council during the 1920s and 1930s. Francis H. O’Donnell, a Quinn’s colleague for thirty years, wrote of her that ‘During the whole of that time she was an active worker among the poor of the city.’¹⁰⁹ O’Donnell also described her ‘as a woman of fixed opinions and she expressed them fearlessly whether in support of an individual or a cause’.¹¹⁰ Quinn herself said that ‘she had been shocked into devoting her career to fighting for better things by the conditions she found in Leeds.’¹¹¹

Quinn, a militant suffragette, ‘was arrested five times and went to prison once’.¹¹² In an interview given by her while she was unwell in hospital, Quinn said of her suffragette days that ‘on one occasion I chained myself up in the House of Commons. And I’d do the same again.’¹¹³

She became the organiser for the Leeds branch of the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers and held the position for twenty-five years (1915 to 1940).¹¹⁴ She joined the Labour Party in 1918 and was a member of the City Council from 1929 to 1943. Quinn was elected Councillor for West Ward with a respectable majority of 1,977 against 1,431 votes, in a straight fight against a Conservative candidate.¹¹⁵ She resigned

¹⁰⁴ Ancestry, England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index (1916-2007) Vol. 2C, p. 79; England & Wales Civil Registration Birth Index (1873-1915) Vol. 10a, p. 64; 1881 Census, RG11, Piece No. 4847, Folio no. 27, p. 7. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁰⁵ Ancestry, 1881 Census, RG11, Piece No. 4847, Folio no. 27, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN27051 RG78PN1548B RD500 SD3 ED70 SN366. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁰⁷ BNO, ‘Miss Bertha Quinn Dies’, *YPLM* (05 April 1951), p. 6. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

¹⁰⁸ BNO, ‘Miss Bertha Quinn Dies’, *YPLM*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ BNO, ‘Miss Bertha Quinn Dies’, *YPLM*, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ BNO, ‘Miss Bertha Quinn Dies’, *YPLM*, p. 6.

¹¹¹ BNO, ‘Miss Bertha Quinn’, *YP* (09 April 1951), p. 6. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

¹¹² BNO, ‘An Old Political fighter Looks Back From a Hospital Bed’, *YPLM* (28 December 1950), p. 6. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

¹¹³ BNO, ‘An Old Political Fighter’, *YPLM*, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ BNO, ‘A Leeds Retirement’, *YP* (03 July 1940), p. 6. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

¹¹⁵ BNO, ‘Leeds West Ward’, *YP* (26 February 1929), p. 14. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

from the City Council in 1943 in protest at the dismissal of a female teacher by the Council. (The Labour Party requested her resignation from the Council in connection with this incident.¹¹⁶) She was also a very active and vocal member of the Board of Guardians until its dissolution in 1930.

The social issues and causes that Quinn championed during her long public service included poor housing, education, air pollution, corruption in the garment industry, and inadequate poor relief. She campaigned vigorously for the rate of poor relief to the unemployed to be increased, as she

contended that scale “deplorably inadequate” and moved that in future the scale should be 20s weekly for a Man and his Wife with 5s extra for each child regardless of the number of children, in addition to 6s for rent.¹¹⁷

Quinn’s rationale for her proposed increase in poor relief was that if it were ‘adopted it would help to set the wheels of industry going again’ and that ‘The workers of the county must either have work or adequate maintenance.’¹¹⁸

Quinn could be highly critical of fellow members of the Board of Guardians and gained a reputation for outspokenness and disruptive behaviour. At one meeting she criticised the Conservative members of the Board in connection with the issue of poor relief by declaring ‘oh you dirty dogs. You know you have a snatch majority, therefore your Party have come back specially from the Riviera, where they have been spending their time with the other great unemployed.’¹¹⁹ Twenty-two socialist members walked out of this meeting demonstrating the tension between the Socialists and Conservatives about poor relief provision.¹²⁰

Quinn also expressed concern about smoke pollution and how it affected working class people. In a joint letter sent to *The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury* by several women’s societies and trade unions, Quinn and others protested against the scourge of smoke pollution, and called for steps to reduce it.¹²¹ Her interest in smoke pollution may have stemmed from contemporary scientific studies on the quality of town air, including one that focused specifically on the air quality in Leeds, *Smoke a Study of Town Air*.¹²²

Quinn’s interest and activism in trying to right so many social ills set her apart from her peers. Notwithstanding her frequent outlandish statements and accusations

¹¹⁶ BNO, ‘Sequel to Dismissal of Leeds Teacher’, *YP* (24 April 1943), p. 8. (Downloaded 28 July 2016),

¹¹⁷ BNO, ‘Leeds Scale of Out Relief’, *YP*(28 June 1928), p. 12. (Downloaded 28 July 2016),

¹¹⁸ BNO, ‘Leeds Scale of Out Relief’, *YP*, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ BNO, ‘Socialist Protest at Leeds’, *YP* (24 January 1929), p.6.(Downloaded 28 July 2016),

¹²⁰ BNO, ‘Socialist Protest at Leeds’, *YP*, p. 6.

¹²¹ BNO, ‘The Smoke Nuisance’ *YP* (24 November 1913), p. 10. (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

¹²² Julius Berend Cohen, *A Study of Town Air* (London: Arnold, 1912); Stephen Cohen, *The Chimney of the World. A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2001) gives a detailed account of the problem of smoke pollution in industrialised Britain.

made against the government, the Board of Guardians, the garments industry, and others, at heart Bertha Quinn was committed to improving the lives of the deprived. All the newspaper articles studied about Quinn present her often-exaggerated views alongside the more tempered views of her socialist peers on the same issues. All the reports point to her deep and sincere concern for the less able, less well off, and vulnerable. In this respect Quinn fitted the specification of the socially responsible, morally conscious labour person that the WEA aspired to support through adult education.

8) ALBERT TALLANT (1872 – 1939)

Albert Tallant, born in 1872, died aged sixty-seven on 10 March 1939 at St James's Hospital, Leeds.¹²³ Albert's father Sam Tallant was a joiner, and Albert was a self-employed shoemaker. He had a wife Kate and a daughter Merrie.¹²⁴ Probate records show that on his death Albert left an estate worth £1,308 9s 5d to his wife.¹²⁵ In his youth, Tallant was a Sunday School worker, and a member of the Society of Friends.¹²⁶

He was a member of the Leeds Boot Trade Association, and helped found the National Federation of Boot Traders Association for which he was elected president in 1919.¹²⁷ His achievements and long service to the Association were recognised in 1936 when the Yorkshire District Council of the Association presented him with a diploma of merit in 1936.¹²⁸

Tallant's obituary in *The Yorkshire Post* indicates that he served on Leeds City Council for eighteen years. His career in public service began in 1912 at the age of forty. In 1913 Tallant was elected as a councillor to represent New Wortley Ward. He held this post for seven years, retiring from the City Council due to ill health in 1921. In 1923 he was the unsuccessful labour candidate for West Hunslett. Following the resignation of Sir Charles Wilson MP in December 1928, Tallant was elected to the Council to fill Wilson's vacant aldermanic position.¹²⁹

Albert Tallant was committed to adult education. He was a member of the Leeds branch of the WEA from its foundation and served twice as its president. He was also a member of Great Wilson Street Adult School and was president of the Leeds sub-union of Adult Schools. During his life as a public servant, Tallant spoke out on a number of

¹²³ BNO, 'Obituary', *YP* (11 March 1939), p. 16. (Downloaded 24 July 2016).

¹²⁴ Ancestry, 1901 Census, RG13, Piece No. 4193, Folio No. 5, p. 2. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹²⁵ Ancestry, England & Wales National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995). Albert Tallant, Date of Death 10 March 1939, p. 6. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹²⁶ BNO, 'Obituary', *YP*, p. 16.

¹²⁷ BNO, 'Obituary', *YP*, p. 16.

¹²⁸ BNO, *YP* (15 October 1936), p. 6. (Downloaded 24 July 2016).

¹²⁹ BNO, 'Obituary', *YP*, p. 16.

issues, ranging from teachers' salaries to housing. He criticised the examinations for scholarships for secondary schools, complaining that 'there had been some unfairness in the examination,' and he described the case of one student who 'had never been below second in her school, and he thought this example of a failure to get a scholarship was typical of hundreds of others'.¹³⁰ When challenged about his assertion, Tallant suggested that 'there has been carelessness.' He pointed out that

The Archbishop of York recently said there were so many people being examined, there were not sufficient examiners [...] There was only an increase of 20 in the scholarships compared with the previous year.¹³¹

The number of students attending examinations and those who were awarded scholarships in Leeds place Tallant's concern about examinations for scholarships in perspective. In 1930:

two thousand six hundred and four children were recommended to sit for the examinations, and [...] two thousand five hundred and twenty one sat, with the result that three hundred and thirty one scholarships were awarded.¹³²

Such figures showed that the number of scholarships available fell far below the number of students who sat for the examinations. Tallant's criticisms of the lack of opportunity in accessing secondary education reflected the limitations of the education system as it existed in the 1930s.

These brief glimpses provided by the *Yorkshire Post* into Tallant's contributions to the work of the Council indicate that he was firmly in favour of the Labour Party's wider aims – to improve access to secondary education for working class students.

9) JOSEPH THORNTON (c. 1881 - 1960)

Joseph Thornton died on 10 June 1960. His father was president of the Leeds Co-operative Society, and he was married to Enid Stacey.¹³³ Thornton was described as a pioneer of the Labour Party in Leeds and joined the City Council in 1920. He represented West Hunslet ward, and won Bramley ward in 1926. He became an alderman in 1930 and retired from the Council in 1936.¹³⁴

During his time on the Council, Thornton filled the role of either chairman or vice-chairman of the Libraries and Arts Committee. A report given by Thornton on the record of the Leeds public library provides statistics of books borrowed by library users

¹³⁰ BNO, 'Examination for Scholarships', *YP* (26 June 1930), p. 9. (Downloaded 24 July 2016).

¹³¹ BNO, 'Examination for Scholarships', *YP*, p. 9.

¹³² BNO, 'Examination for Scholarships' *YP*, p. 9.

¹³³ LFH&LSL, 'The Passing of Joe Thornton', *LWC* (10 June 1960), p. 2.

¹³⁴ LFH&LSL, 'Labour Pioneer Mr J Thornton Dies, Aged 79', *YEP* (02 June 1960), p. 9.

in Leeds from 1932 to 1934.¹³⁵ Thornton pointed out that there had been an increase of 50,606 books borrowed from 1932-33 to 1933-34. The report calculated that ‘the number of books borrowed for home reading was 3,440,958 or a daily average of 11,393.’¹³⁶ Thornton defended the high levels of lending of fiction:

It may be admitted indeed it would be folly and impossible to deny, that fiction does form the greater part of the lending libraries’ circulation. But it can also be claimed with justification that the quality of reading done by an increasing number of borrowers needs no apology.¹³⁷

We gain further insight into Thornton’s views of the significance of libraries from his comments in other reports. For example Thornton attended the 58th Annual Conference of the Library Association, held in Manchester in September 1935, where Harold Laski (1893 – 1950), political theorist and supporter of municipal socialism, gave the inaugural lecture. Thornton among others spoke on the subject of ‘The Library and the Electors’.¹³⁸ Up to a thousand delegates were expected to attend the conference, and *The Yorkshire Post* reported Thornton’s speech at the conference, including his view that ‘libraries should be the storehouse of our cultural inheritance.’¹³⁹ He also identified that the work of library employees

was to persuade their electorates that these services were essentials of any life worth living. Libraries should also be the distributing agencies by means of which their cultural inheritance was passed on to each generation and they should be vital intelligence centres of specialised knowledge.¹⁴⁰

In this way, Thornton adapted the aspirations of the WEA to how libraries as well as the classroom could be used to educate electors about ‘the scope, extent and variety of their municipal systems’.¹⁴¹ He also showed insight into how councillors on library and arts committees were perceived, stating that ‘in the past [...] a councillor without any special abilities or ‘pull’ was apt to be hidden away on the libraries committee.’ The thought process of the political leadership, he said, would be to declare such councillors ‘not quite good enough for a really important committee – give him the chairmanship of the Libraries and Arts.’ These attitudes were changing, according to Thornton, and he

¹³⁵ BNO, ‘Leeds Libraries’, *YP* (29 June 1934), p. 7. (Downloaded 04 August 2016).

¹³⁶ BNO, ‘Leeds Libraries’, *YP*, p. 7.

¹³⁷ BNO, ‘Leeds Libraries’, *YP*, p. 7.

¹³⁸ BNO, ‘Librarians in Conference’, *YP* (20 August 1935), p. 7. (Downloaded 04 August 2016); Michael Newman, ‘Harold Joseph Laski’, *ODNB*.

¹³⁹ BNO, ‘Libraries and Culture’, *YP* (12 September 1935), p. 8. (Downloaded 04 August 2016).

¹⁴⁰ BNO, ‘Libraries and Culture’ *YP*, p. 8.

¹⁴¹ BNO, ‘Libraries and Culture’ *YP*, p. 8.

‘considered that in no department of municipal organisation was the right type of public servant so important’.¹⁴² He supported his view by pointing out that

library staff came into daily contact with the electorate in a way that no other service approached. With the increased development of library activities there was more scope for ability and special aptitude than in the old days when both the electors and councillors seemed to think that all there was to work was sticking rubber stamps in library books. It was the mark of the barbarian everywhere and in all ages to destroy libraries. It was the mark of the wise to cherish them.¹⁴³

Thornton seems to have been in the vanguard of elevating libraries as places where the local electorate could become educated about municipal and civic affairs. By promoting the role of libraries in civic life, he was also promoting wider and better-educated democratic participation – something the WEA were keen to achieve through education.¹⁴⁴ He, like O’Donnell, was also a frequent contributor to the *Leeds Weekly Citizen*.

10) WILFRED WEBSTER (1892 -1960)

Wilfred Webster was born in 1892. His father Walter Webster was a tool fitter.¹⁴⁵ The 1911 Census lists Wilfred’s occupation as ‘Iron Turner’, but by the 1939 Register it is listed as ‘trade union organiser’.¹⁴⁶ He married Lillian (née Fox) in 1907.¹⁴⁷ Wilfred died in 1960¹⁴⁸ and was commemorated in an obituary written by Arthur Adamson, who described Webster as being one of ‘the group of people who in the early twenties set out to win South Leeds for Socialism’.¹⁴⁹ Webster was elected councillor for North Holbeck in 1930 with fellow socialists Tommy Jessop and Charles Jenkinson.¹⁵⁰ He was made deputy chairman of the Public Assistance Committee, and in 1933 became its Chairman. Adamson recounted how ‘it was no uncommon sight to see a queue of persons outside his home seeking his assistance with their problems.’¹⁵¹

¹⁴² BNO, ‘Libraries and Culture’ *YP*, p. 8.

¹⁴³ BNO, ‘Libraries and Culture’ *YP*, p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ For a general history of public libraries in England see Thomas Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845–1965* (London: The Library Association, 1973). In particular see pp. 49–51 for a history of Leeds Central Library, founded in 1870 and one of the four largest civic libraries in England; For an analysis of the civic value of libraries see Alistair Black, Simon Pepper and Kaye Bagshaw, *Books, Buildings and Social Engineering* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

¹⁴⁵ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4202, Folio No. 69, p. 7. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁴⁶ Ancestry, 1911 Census, RG 502, Piece No. 272; Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3484F/014/25, Letter Code KGWB. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁴⁷ Ancestry, England & Wales Marriages, (1837-2005), Vol. 9B, p. 936. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁴⁸ Ancestry, England & Wales Civil Registration Death Index, Vol. 2C, p. 27027. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁴⁹ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC* (09 December 1960), p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

Webster, an engineer, had suffered unemployment during the ‘engineering depression’ and subsequently set up his own successful window-cleaning business¹⁵² with which, Adamson speculated, he could have been extremely financially successful, but for his being too committed to the labour movement and that, instead of capitalising on his business interests, ‘in the days when there was no broken time payments gave hours of his working day to carry out his public duties.’¹⁵³ Webster served on the Cleansing Committee as Deputy Chairman, also took part in Jenkinson’s local Parliament – a forum for weekly debates. He became a JP, and took on a post as an organiser for a trade union that represented hospital staff. He joined the Association of Supervisory Staffs Executives and Technicians (ASSET) as regional secretary. Later he became the officer of the ASSET in local government business.¹⁵⁴ Lena Mordecai (secretary of the No. 2 area of the Confederation of Health Service Employees) paid tribute to him in his work on behalf of nurses, recounting that Webster ‘worked for increased Nursing Representation on the Whitley Council, and for the removal of unnecessary restrictions and better conditions for hospital workers’.¹⁵⁵

In 1946 he left his ‘safe seat in North Holbeck’. He was elected Labour councillor for Beeston, but lost his seat in 1949.¹⁵⁶

Again, Webster provides another example of a WEA student as adult citizen who took his public service duties seriously and carried them out in a variety of different roles – councillor, magistrate, and trade unionist.

11) WILLIAM “WILLIE” WITHEY (1874-1951)

Willie Withey born in Stanningley, Leeds, in 1874 was a socialist member of Leeds City Council for twenty-two years.¹⁵⁷ The 1891 Census lists his father Edward Withey’s occupation as iron moulder, while Willie’s is recorded as ‘crane-maker’s apprentice’.¹⁵⁸ He married Polly Batty in 1904.¹⁵⁹ By the 1939 Register, Withey’s occupation is recorded as ‘Parliamentary Agent’.¹⁶⁰ He resigned from the Council in 1948, and died in

¹⁵² LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

¹⁵³ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ LFH&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *LWC*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ BNO, ‘Mr. Willie Withey’, *YP* (23 May 1951), p. 2. (Downloaded 01 August 2016).

¹⁵⁸ Ancestry, 1891 Census, Class RG12, Piece No. 3674, Folio No. 149, p. 22. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁵⁹ Ancestry, England & Wales Marriages, (1836-2005), Vol. 9B, p. 717. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁶⁰ Findmypast, 1939 Register, William Withey, RG101/3456/010/1, Letter Code KGLE. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

1951.¹⁶¹ On his death he left an estate worth £559 9s 2d to his daughter Olive Crighton.¹⁶²

Withey was one of fourteen children. He was in part-time employment from the age of nine, delivering newspapers. By the time he was fourteen he began a seven-year apprenticeship in engineering and earned 4s a week in his first year, increasing to 12s a week by the seventh year of his apprenticeship. Withey was employed as an engineer from 1895 to 1924. In 1924 he was appointed as parliamentary agent for the central division of Leeds Labour Party.¹⁶³

Withey's public service was marked by longevity. He was associated with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) for 45 years, and with the Co-operative Movement for 36 years. Withey represented Westfield ward as a councillor for seven years (1926 to 1933) and served as alderman from 1933 to 1940. During his time on the Council, Withey served on several different committees – health, blind, welfare, highways, gas, local education, mental health, markets, and pensions. Withey served as Lord Mayor of Leeds from 1940 to 1941 and led a major campaign appealing for gold and silver articles to sell to raise funds for war charities, raising £1,000.¹⁶⁴

While mayor, in addition to his other duties, Withey set time aside each week to offer advice to citizens. He was reported to have seen 292 people over the first two weeks of the scheme. The problems raised included 'pensions or allowances of various kinds, the hire purchase system and furniture removal'.¹⁶⁵ Withey's initiative and actions show an energy and zest for public service that was common to all the public servants studied here. As an adult student and citizen, Withey was another prime example of a WEA student made good.

WEA Adult Students as Citizens - York City Councillors

These include William Dobbie MP, Thomas Harry Gill, John Hargreaves, Jeannie Mercer, Arthur Simpson, and Charles Frederick Sanderson.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ BNO, 'Mr Willie Withey', *YP*, p. 2.

¹⁶² Ancestry, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) Willie Withey, Date of Death 22 May 1951, p. 633. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁶³ BNO, 'Mr Willie Withey', *YP*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ BNO, 'Mr Willie Withey', *YP*, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ BNO, 'A Fruitful Year of Office', *YP* (10 October 1941), p. 6. (Downloaded 29 September 2016).

¹⁶⁶ For general history of York see Patrick Nuttgens (ed) *The History of York. From Earliest Times to the Year 2000* (Pickering, Yorkshire: Blackthorn Press, 2001); For an analysis of York City Council during the inter-war period see Rodney Hills, 'The City Council and Electoral Politics 1901 – 1971' in *York 1831 – 1981*, ed. by Charles H Feinstein (York: Ebor Press, 1981) pp. 264 – 271. Unlike Leeds and Sheffield City Council the composition of York City Council did not change significantly during the inter-war period and remained under Conservative control.

12) WILLIAM DOBBIE MP (1878 – 1950)

William Dobbie was born in Maybole, Ayrshire in 1878 to Francis Dobbie, a blacksmith, and to Agnes McCreath – who both died when William was two years old, when William and his brother James (6) were separated.¹⁶⁷ William was raised by his aunt in Glasgow, while James remained in Maybole with his maternal grandparents. His occupation was listed as ‘coach painter’ in the 1911 Census.¹⁶⁸ Dobbie married Winifred in 1897.¹⁶⁹ He worked in the railway industry and moved south to York where in 1911 he was elected to York City Council, and was made an alderman in 1920.¹⁷⁰ He fought and was wounded in the First World War. Dobbie was elected York’s first Labour Lord Mayor in 1923, serving again in 1947.¹⁷¹

He was president of the NUR in 1925, 1926, and 1927 and again in 1931, 1932, and 1933.¹⁷² Dobbie played a significant role in ‘securing the amalgamation of the Railway Workers’ Union, the Signalmen and Pointers’ Union and the old Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants when these three organisations became the NUR in 1913’.¹⁷³ Charles Frederick Sanderson, a fellow councillor, in a tribute to Dobbie, declared: ‘The railwaymen of this country in general, and of York in particular, owe him a debt of gratitude for loyal and faithful services rendered over a long period of years.’¹⁷⁴ Sanderson also stated that it was Dobbie who introduced him to ‘public life 20 years ago’.¹⁷⁵ J. D. Margach, the *Yorkshire Evening Press* political correspondent, wrote that Dobbie’s chief influence was

behind the scenes in liaison work with Transport House and in the inner counsels of the Party. He was always on the side of moderation and negotiation. He believed fervently that the trade union negotiating machine must be carefully preserved.¹⁷⁶

He stood for Parliament unsuccessfully in Clitheroe in 1929, but was successfully elected MP for Rotherham in 1933 and remained its MP until his death in 1950. He was

¹⁶⁷ Ancestry, 1871 Census, No formal reference available (Accessed 21 July 2017); Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN28432 RG78PN1627 RD517 SD3 ED8 SN43. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁶⁸ York Archive & Local Studies Library, (YA&LSL), J. D. Margach ‘Tributes to Work of Ald. Dobbie’, *Yorkshire Evening Press* (YEPr) (20 January 1950), p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Findmypast, 1911 England Census. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁷⁰ YA&LSL, Margach, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’, YEPr, p. 6.

¹⁷¹ YA&LSL, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’ YEPr, p. 6.

¹⁷² YA&LSL, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’, YEPr, p. 6.

¹⁷³ YA&LSL, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’, YEPr, p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ YA&LSL, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’ YEPr, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ YA&LSL, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’ YEPr, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ YA&LSL, ‘Tributes Ald. Dobbie’ YEPr, p. 6.

awarded the CBE in 1947.¹⁷⁷ Dobbie left an estate worth £639 18s 6d to his widow Winifred.¹⁷⁸

13) SIR THOMAS HARRY GILL MP (c. 1885-86 – 1955)

Thomas Harry Gill, born in around 1885-86, was the son of William Gill, a railway station-master. Thomas Gill's occupation was recorded in the 1901 Census as 'railway clerk, passenger department'.¹⁷⁹ He became a member of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) in 1918.¹⁸⁰ In 1909, he married Kate Julia Hobson in 1909¹⁸¹ who died in April 1926. In 1930, Gill married Leila Gladys Elliott, a well-known singer from Blackpool.¹⁸²

'He was President of the International Co-operative Alliance, MP for Blackburn from 1929-31 and a President of the Co-operative Society in 1948'¹⁸³ and served as President of the Railway Clerks' Association from 1919 to 1932.¹⁸⁴ Gill served as MP for Blackpool 1929 to 1932.¹⁸⁵ He was knighted in 1950.¹⁸⁶ Thomas Gill died in Blackpool in 1955, leaving an estate worth £39,933 15s 1d to Leila Gladys Gill and Norman Wood, a company director.¹⁸⁷

14) JOHN HARGREAVES (1876 - UNKNOWN)

John Hargreaves was a railway blacksmith. He became vice-chairman of the York Council Education Committee, as well as chairman of the Council of the WEA.¹⁸⁸ He was elected to York Council for Micklegate Ward in 1922 and Holgate Ward in 1924

¹⁷⁷ YA&LSL, 'Tributes Ald. Dobbie' *YEPr*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁸ Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) William Dobbie, Date of Death 19 January 1950, p. 853. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4581, Folio No. 5, p. 1. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Findmypast, British Trade Union Membership Registers, University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre, MSS.127/NU/OR/2/58. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁸¹ Ancestry, England & Wales Marriages (1837-2005) Vol. 9D, p. 137; Findmypast, 1911 Census RG14PN28857 RG78PN1659 RD525 SD2 ED2 SN108. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁸² Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar, (1858-1966, 1973-1995), Kate Julia Gill, Date of Death 24 April 1926, p. 443; Lancashire, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns (1754-1936), Thomas Harry Gill & Leila Gladys Elliott on 30 December 1930, p. 241. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁸³ YA&LSL, 'Sir Harry Gill Left £39,933' *Yorkshire Gazette and Herald (YGH)* (16 September 1955), p. 9.

¹⁸⁴ BNO, 'Co-op Alliance Chief Dies', *YPLM* (21 May 1955), p. 7.

¹⁸⁵ BNO, 'Co-op Official's Death at Blackpool', *Lancashire Evening Post (LEP)* (20 May 1955), p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ BNO, 'The Birthday Honours', *YPLI* (08 June 1950), p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ Ancestry, England & Wales Deaths 1837-2007, Vol. 10b, p. 470; England & Wales, National Probate Calendar, (1858-1966, 1973-1995), Sir Thomas Harry Gill, Date of Death 20 May 1955, p. 559. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁸⁸ BNO, 'Workers' Educational Association', *Driffild Times (DT)* (28 February 1925), p. 3, (Downloaded 28 July 2016).

and 1925,¹⁸⁹ being re-elected to Holgate Ward in 1928.¹⁹⁰ He became a JP in 1924. Hargreaves married Hilda, and they had one daughter Emily.¹⁹¹

Few references appear about Hargreaves on the BNO, but in other sources pertaining to the WEA he is mentioned frequently. In an address to the Driffield Branch of the WEA, Hargreaves urged them to extend their classes to the ‘agricultural class’ and encouraged members to develop a ‘missionary spirit’.¹⁹² He advised them to ‘take an interest both in the elementary and the secondary schools, and see that children were not handicapped all their lives; they could become a powerful force in the matter.’¹⁹³ During this period, the WEA were very keen to set up branches and classes in the rural regions in North and East Yorkshire. Hargreaves seems to have been taking this message to branches such as Driffield in an effort to promote the project.

15) JEANNIE (JANE) MERCER (1880 – 1969)

Jeannie Mercer (née Forrester) became in 1924 one of the first women magistrates in Great Britain.¹⁹⁴ Her father Alexander Forrester was a general dealer and fruiterer. Jeannie was born in South Shields in 1880 and moved to York following her marriage to John Noble Mercer in 1907.¹⁹⁵ She died in York in 1969.¹⁹⁶ Mercer spent her life in public service in one or another form. From 1917, she served on the Insurance Committee, predecessor to the NHS. She then served on the York Health Executive Council from its establishment in 1948 until her retirement in 1964. Combined with her time on the Health Executive Committee, Mercer amassed 47 years of public service in local health.

Mercer was a school teacher and served as secretary to the York Co-operative Society Education Committee for 45 years. She briefly represented Scarcroft Ward on York City Council.¹⁹⁷

16) CHARLES FREDERICK SANDERSON (1897 - 1953)

Charles Frederick Sanderson was born in 1897. His father Alfred Sanderson was an engine fitter.¹⁹⁸ Sanderson himself became a railway metal machinist.¹⁹⁹ He was Sheriff

¹⁸⁹ YA&LSL, ‘Micklegate Ward’, *Yorkshire Gazette (YG)* (04 November 1922), p. 3; ‘Little Change in City Council Constitution’, *YG* (07 November 1925), p. 4.

¹⁹⁰ ‘A Who’s Who of the Candidates’ *YG* (27 October 1928), p. 7.

¹⁹¹ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3905J/016/15. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁹² BNO, ‘Workers’ Educational Association’, *DT*, p. 3.

¹⁹³ BNO, ‘Workers’ Educational Association’, *DT*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ YA&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *YEPr* (05 July 1969), p. 4.

¹⁹⁵ Ancestry, 1881 Census, Class RG11, Piece No. 5015, Folio No. 36, p. 65; England & Wales Marriage Index (1538-1988), Eglington, Northumberland, England, Film. No. 1968609. (Accessed 21 July 2017)

¹⁹⁶ Ancestry, England & Wales Civil Registration Deaths Index (1916-2007) Vol. 2D, p. 1664. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁹⁷ YA&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *YEPr* (05 July 1969), p. 4.

of York four times, and a member of York City Council from 1930, becoming alderman in 1945.²⁰⁰ He was appointed a magistrate in 1934, and was also the local secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen.²⁰¹ Sanderson married Alice Louisa Riches in 1923.²⁰² At the time of his death he was ‘chairman of the Corporation Salaries Committee, vice-chairman of the Transport Committee and a member of the Watch, Fire Services, Parks and Finance committees. In addition he was a member of the Board of York Festival Society. The Minister of Fuel and Power appointed him a member of the North Eastern Area Electricity Board in 1948.’²⁰³ He left an estate worth £4,889 0s 7d to his wife.²⁰⁴

17) ARTHUR SIMPSON (1892 – 1973)

Arthur Simpson was born in York in 1892, and died in Plymouth in 1973.²⁰⁵ He attended Bedern School, York. The 1901 Census records indicate that his father, also Arthur Simpson, was a tin plate worker.²⁰⁶ Arthur Simpson was one of five siblings. His father died in 1906.²⁰⁷ His occupation in the 1911 Census is listed as grocer’s porter.²⁰⁸

He served on York City Council for nine years between the wars, and was also a well-known trade unionist. While on the Council, Simpson, with Alderman John Bowes Morrell (1875–1963), succeeded in acquiring the ‘Kirk Collection of Bygones from Pickering’ for York, which was the basis of the York Castle Museum.²⁰⁹

In 1913, Simpson had joined Rowntree’s chocolate factory. During the war he served as an officer in the West Yorkshire Regiment. Following the war he returned to Rowntree’s, and became chairman of the central works council between 1931 and 1932. In 1938 he was appointed first manager of Rowntree’s new department in Plymouth. Simpson retired in 1957. He was a Methodist and belonged to the Monk Bar and

¹⁹⁸ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3903H/005/18, Letter Code KZNS; 1901 Census, RG13, Piece No. 441, Folio No. 41, p. 27. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

¹⁹⁹ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3903H/005/18, Letter Code KZNS. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁰⁰ YA&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *YEPr* (12 August 1953), p. 3.

²⁰¹ YA&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *YEPr*, p. 3.

²⁰² Ancestry, England & Wales Marriages, Vol. 9D, p. 117. (Accessed 21 July 2017)

²⁰³ YA&LSL, ‘Obituary’, *YEPr*, p. 3.

²⁰⁴ Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) Charles Frederick Sanderson, Date of Death 11 August 1953, p. 36. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁰⁵ YA&LSL, ‘Deaths’, *YEPr*, (11 September 1973), p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4445, Folio No. 49, p. 8. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁰⁷ Ancestry, England & Wales Civil Registration Deaths Index, Vol. 9D, p. 6. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁰⁸ 1911 Census Class RG14, Piece No. 28402. (No further reference information available) (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁰⁹ YA&LSL, ‘Deaths’, *YEPr*, p. 2. John Bowes Morrell, in addition to his work in public service, (he was Lord Mayor of York twice) was an author and historian. He helped establish the University of York. The Morrell library is named after him. His books include *How York Governs Itself: Civic Government as Illustrated by the County of the City of York* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928).

Monkgate churches while resident in York.²¹⁰ He died in Plymouth on 07 September 1973 leaving an estate worth £5,239.²¹¹

WEA Adult Students as Citizens - Sheffield City Councillors

These include Albert Ballard, Henry Bingham, Peter Buchanan, Alfred Ernest Hobson, John William Holland, James Gill, Harold Slack, Alfred Thomas Wells and William Ernest Yorke.

18) ALBERT BALLARD (C. 1889 – 1969)

Albert Ballard died, aged eighty, on 7 December 1969. He was born in Glemsford, Suffolk but moved to Sheffield in his first year. His father, James Ballard was a labourer at a gas works.²¹² Albert married May Painting in 1912.²¹³ He left school at the age of thirteen to train as an engine cleaner, and became a locomotive fireman on the former Central Railway. In 1919 he left to take up the post of secretary of Sheffield Co-operative Party, a post he held until his retirement in 1954.²¹⁴ Ballard was for many years the agent to the Socialist parliamentary candidates for the Hillsborough Division of Sheffield. In addition to these posts Ballard was chairman of the Sheffield Fabian Society.²¹⁵

His public service on Sheffield City Council spanned forty years, during which time he was a member of the Education Committee, and its chairman for thirteen years, as well as an alderman for fifteen years. Ballard's education was acquired through public libraries and WEA classes. In 1959 the University of Sheffield awarded him a Doctor of Laws while in 1955 he was made CBE. In October 1968 he was made a freeman of the City of Sheffield.²¹⁶

19) JOHN HENRY BINGHAM (1880 – 1970)

Bingham was born in Lincolnshire in 1880 but moved to Sheffield when young.²¹⁷ The 1901 census records John Henry's occupation as jeweller's clerk and his father William Bingham's as a gardener.²¹⁸ John Henry Bingham married Edith Appleby in 1907, and

²¹⁰ YA&LSL, 'Deaths', *YEP*, p. 2.

²¹¹ Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995), Arthur Simpson, Date of Death 07 September 1973, p. 7902. (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

²¹² Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN27941 RG78PN1598 RD510 SD5 ED18 SN44 (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

²¹³ Findmypast, Yorkshire Marriages, PR-49-2-4, p. 114 (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

²¹⁴ Sheffield Local Studies Library (SLSL) 'Deaths', *Quality of Sheffield (QoS)* 16, 1 (Jan, 1969), p. 34.

²¹⁵ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, p. 34.

²¹⁶ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, p. 34.

²¹⁷ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4365, Folio No. 155, p. 17. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²¹⁸ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4365, Folio No. 155, p. 17. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

worked as a municipal clerk.²¹⁹ He attended Central Higher School, a school in North Wales, and Firth College in Sheffield.²²⁰ Bingham worked for Vickers Works for twenty-one years as an accountant. He had one daughter Dora Bingham.²²¹

Bingham entered Sheffield City Council in 1934 following a by-election in Attercliffe. He became an alderman in 1945, and leader of the Council in 1946, succeeding Alderman F. Thraves. During his time on the Council, Bingham served on the power board, chaired the Education Committee and was appointed a member of the Yorkshire Board of the nationalised electricity supply industry. He was also Chairman of the Parliamentary and General Purposes Committee and Deputy Chairman of the Finance Consultative Committee. Bingham, a member of the Education Association Committees, represented the Council on several external bodies that included the Court of Governors of Sheffield University and the Committee for the Post-War industrial development of Sheffield. He earned approximately £750 per annum.²²² Outside his work on public bodies, Bingham was secretary of the Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society from 1938 until his resignation in 1942.²²³

Bingham was Lord Mayor of Sheffield from 1955 to 1956. He was described as active in the Co-operative movement and ‘a socialist of the academic type’.²²⁴ His services to education were recognised by the University of Sheffield when he was awarded an honorary degree in Law. He also served as a JP. In his work in education, Bingham lectured for the WEA nationally on economics and took part in the work of the Sheffield Education Settlement. On his appointment as Lord Mayor, *The Star* described him as ‘quiet, efficient, knowledgeable, courteous, experienced.’²²⁵ John Henry Bingham died in 1970.²²⁶ He was pre-deceased by his wife Edith who died in 1961.²²⁷

²¹⁹ Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN18325 RG78PN1103 RD385 SD5 ED6 SN113. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²²⁰ Firth College had its origins in the UEM and was administered by the University of Cambridge. Mark Firth, a local steel businessman, who supported the UEM, founded the college in 1870. Arts and science subjects were taught at Firth College. The University of Sheffield was formed in 1905 following the amalgamation of Firth College with the Sheffield School of Medicine and the Sheffield Technical School. See John Roach ‘Higher Education’ in *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843 – 1993: Vol. II* ed. by Clyde Binfield et al (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 347.

²²¹ SLSL, ‘Ald. Bingham to be Next Lord Mayor’, *The Sheffield Telegraph (ST)* (02 February 1954), pp. 2-4.

²²² SLSL, ‘Alderman on Power Board’, *ST* (27 February 1948), p. 3.

²²³ SLSL, ‘Councillor Resigns From Co-op, Secretary’s Post’, *ST* (06 August 1942), p. 3.

²²⁴ SLSL, ‘Ald. Bingham to be Next Lord Mayor’, *ST*, p. 2.

²²⁵ SLSL, ‘By the Way’, *The Star* (02 February 1954), p. 3.

²²⁶ Ancestry, England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index (1916-2007) Vol. 2d, p. 134. (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

²²⁷ Ancestry, England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index (1916-2007) Vol. 2d, p. 238. (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

20) PETER BUCHANAN (C. 1891-1962)

Peter Buchanan was born in Glasgow in 1891 and moved to Sheffield in 1920.²²⁸ Buchanan's father William was a joiner.²²⁹ Peter began his working life aged fourteen as a telegraph boy and was employed by the Post Office until his retirement in 1951, rising to the rank of inspector. *The Sheffield Telegraph* reported that Buchanan attended WEA classes when he arrived in Sheffield in 1920, having tuition in economics and social science at the University of Sheffield.²³⁰ *The Quality of Sheffield* further reports that he was a tutor for the WEA in South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire.²³¹

During the First World War he was posted to France and survived the Somme.²³² He was wounded at the Battle of Arras and was mentioned in dispatches for bravery in action. His work in public office began in 1929 when he was elected labour representative of Firth Park Ward. He became an alderman in 1945 and served as Lord mayor from 1952 to 1953. During his time on the Council, Buchanan served as Chairman of the Finance Committee and the Finance Consultative Committee for twelve years. He also held the post of Chairman of the Civil Defence Committee. In all Buchanan was a member of the Council for thirty-three years. He died on 18 March 1962, leaving an estate of £230 19s to his widow Agnes Malloch Buchanan.²³³

21) ALFRED ERNEST HOBSON (1887 – 1963)

Alfred Ernest Hobson was born in Hull in 1887. He died on 15 March 1963.²³⁴ His father John Hobson was a cabinet-maker and the first president of the Hull branch of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association.²³⁵ The family moved to Sheffield in c.1896. Alfred received his education at Heeley Bank Council School and Sharrow Lane Council School respectively. He worked with his father as a cabinet-maker and married Elsie Barton in 1914.²³⁶ His occupation is listed on the 1939 Register as secretary of the Trade Council.²³⁷ During the First World War he served with the RAF in France. After the War he returned to his former employment and eventually became a department manager.

²²⁸ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, 9, 2 (March, 1962), p. 26.

²²⁹ Ancestry, 1901 Scotland Census, Parish: Glasgow Barony; ED: 4; Page: 18; Line: 13; Roll: CSSCT1901297RG13. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²³⁰ SLSL, 'Chancellor to be Next Lord Mayor', *ST* (05 February 1952), p. 2.

²³¹ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, p. 26.

²³² SLSL, 'Chancellor to be Next Lord Mayor', *ST*, p. 2.

²³³ Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) Peter Buchanan, Date of Death 18 March 1962, p. 966. (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

²³⁴ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, 10 (March, 1963), p. 38.

²³⁵ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4355, Folio No. 146, p. 25. (Accessed 21 July 2017); SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, p. 38.

²³⁶ Findmypast, Yorkshire & Derbyshire Methodist Marriages. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²³⁷ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3587D/017/14, Letter Code KKCU. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

He was elected to Sheffield City Council in 1937.²³⁸ He was ‘a member of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council from its foundation in 1920 until his retirement in 1953.’²³⁹ In addition to these public offices, he served as president of the Yorkshire Federation of Trades Councils, as well as the Sheffield branch of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association. Hobson was also a ‘member of the local Employment Exchange Committee, the Hospitals Joint Council, the Court of Governors of Sheffield University and the Court of Referees’.²⁴⁰

The Sheffield Telegraph and Daily Independent alluded to his grit and determination in elevating him to ‘the honourable position among his fellow citizens that he occupies to-day’. The paper described him as knowing ‘a lot about everything’ and having a ‘gift of imparting knowledge clearly’. He ‘applied himself assiduously to the work of the Trade Union movement’ over thirty years. The report went on to state that ‘Nothing has been too much for him to do if he thought it would promote the welfare of the working man.’²⁴¹

22) JOHN WILLIAM HOLLAND (C. 1891 – UNKNOWN)

John William Holland was born in Sheffield in 1891. His father Albert Edward Holland was a crane driver. John William Holland’s occupation in 1911 was as a labourer in an armour plate mill.²⁴² He was married to Ethel Holland.²⁴³

At aged sixty-seven (1958) he was nominated Lord Mayor of Sheffield. Like his peers, he had a long career in public service. He attended Carlisle Street Co-operative School and worked for John Brown in an armour plate rolling mill for twenty years. He rose to the rank of foreman and held this post for nine years before his retirement. Holland was also an agent for the Co-operative Insurance Society for thirty years, retiring in 1955. He was director of Brightside and Carbrook Co-operative Society for twenty-two years, retiring in 1956. Holland also served as a JP for twenty years.²⁴⁴ In addition to these positions Holland was vice-president of the Sheffield ILP from 1927 to 1930 as well as secretary of the Sheffield and Don Valley ILP and an active member of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation.²⁴⁵

²³⁸ SLSL, ‘Deaths’, *QoS*, p. 38.

²³⁹ SLSL, ‘Deaths’, *QoS*, p. 38.

²⁴⁰ SLSL, ‘Who’s Who in Sheffield’, *ST* (06 July 1939), p. 8.

²⁴¹ SLSL, ‘Who’s Who in Sheffield’, *ST*, p. 8.

²⁴² Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN27931 RG78PN1598 RD510 SD5 ED8 SN143..Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁴³ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/353H/003/11, Letter Code KILT. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁴⁴ SLSL, ‘Lord Mayor’, *ST* (11 February 1958), pp. 1–2.

²⁴⁵ BNO, ‘Mr. JW Holland to be Labour Candidate’, *The Sheffield Daily Independent* (SDI) (01 April 1927), p. 7. (Downloaded 27 June 2017).

Holland joined the Labour Party in 1910 and spoke publicly on politics. His municipal career began in 1927 when he was elected Labour councillor to Walkley Ward, becoming an alderman in 1954. Holland claimed to have fought more municipal elections than any other member of Sheffield City Council – in all, thirteen contests. He remained a member of the Education Committee for thirty years and maintained a keen interest in education throughout his life. Holland attended WEA classes for ten years at Sheffield University and studied industrial history, economics and political science. On two occasions he won scholarships to Balliol College, Oxford, although it has not been possible to find details of his attendance or studies at Balliol. He was also a member of the Sheffield Adult School.²⁴⁶

23) JAMES GILL (C. 1865 – 1950)

James Gill was born in Hoyland. He died at the age of eighty-five in 1950.²⁴⁷ The 1871 Census records his father Edmund Gill's occupation as boilermaker.²⁴⁸ James Gill was a socialist member of Sheffield City Council, representing Owlerton Ward. He retired in 1938. During his time on the Council, Gill was Chairman of the Education Committee.²⁴⁹

He was the first student to be admitted to Hoyland Council School and returned to be headmaster of that school for twenty-one years. He left Hoyland Council School to be headmaster of Wadsley Bridge School, Sheffield, a post he also held for twenty-one years.²⁵⁰ He left an estate worth £6,070 8s 9d.²⁵¹

24) HAROLD SLACK MBE (C.1893 - 1965)

Harold Slack, born in Sheffield in c.1893, died on 5 January 1965.²⁵² He received his early education in Crookesmoor Council School.²⁵³ His father Alfred Slack was a butcher's knife-hafter, as was Harold.²⁵⁴ He married Elsie (née Smith) in 1916.²⁵⁵

He took a keen interest in trade union affairs and became secretary of the National Cutlery Union. The 1939 Register records his occupation as trade union secretary.²⁵⁶

²⁴⁶ SLSL, 'Lord Mayor', *ST*, pp. 1-2.

²⁴⁷ SLSL, 'Former Member of the City Council Dies', *The Star* (02 March 1950), p. 7.

²⁴⁸ Ancestry, 1871 Census, Class RG10, Piece No. 4650, Folio No. 73, p. 30. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁴⁹ SLSL, 'Former Member of the City Council Dies', *The Star*, p. 7.

²⁵⁰ SLSL, 'Former Member of the City Council Dies', *The Star*, p. 7.

²⁵¹ Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) James Gill, Date of Death 01 March 1950, p. 591. (Accessed 17 July 2017).

²⁵² SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, 12,1 (Jan, 1965), p. 43.

²⁵³ SLSL, 'Alderman Harold Slack', *QoS*, 7, 2 (Feb, 1960), p. 39.

²⁵⁴ Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN27914 RG78PN1597 RD510 SD4 ED4 SN7. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁵⁵ Ancestry, England & Wales Civil Registration Marriage Index, (1916-2005) Vol. 9c, p. 1118. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁵⁶ Findmypast, 1939 Register, RG101/3521G/008/32, Letter Code KIGM. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

Slack remained in this position for thirty years until his retirement in 1959. He also took part in the formation of the cutlery wages council and served as a member of the cutlery working party set up by Stafford Cripps following the Second World War.²⁵⁷ Slack supported enterprises such as the Sheffield cutlery apprenticeship scheme. He was a member of the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council and represented this organisation at the Annual Conference of the WEA in Sheffield in 1936.²⁵⁸

In 1934 Slack entered Sheffield City Council as representative of Owlerton Ward. He became an alderman in 1952²⁵⁹ and served as Lord Mayor from 1960 to 1961.²⁶⁰ He was made MBE in 1956.²⁶¹ He died on 5 January 1965 and left an estate worth £2,538 to his wife.²⁶²

25) ALFRED THOMAS WELLS

Alfred Thomas Wells was born in Rotherham. He was elected to Sheffield City Council in 1928, representing St Philips Ward.²⁶³ He became an alderman in 1948.²⁶⁴ While on the Council, Wells was Chairman of the Allotment Committee and raised the profile of this Committee in the local press.

Wells was also a full-time officer for the National Union of General and Municipal Workers. He became a magistrate in 1937 and was regarded as an expert on municipal health matters. In 1951 Wells was appointed chairman of the Central Council of Health Education, a body funded by the Ministry of Health.

26) WILLIAM ERNEST YORKE (1882 - 1969)

William Ernest Yorke was born in Rotherham in 1882 and died in Sheffield in 1968.²⁶⁵ Samuel Yorke, his father, was a fish hawkker.²⁶⁶ William's occupation in the 1911 Census records is listed as 'gas tube machinist.'²⁶⁷ He married Gertrude Webster in 1908.²⁶⁸ He began his career in public service in 1926 when he was elected to Sheffield City Council. In 1927 he pioneered the first blind welfare service to be controlled by a

²⁵⁷ For the organization of the Sheffield cutlery trade see Sally Taylor, 'The Industrial Structure of the Sheffield Cutlery Trades 1870–1914' in *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843–1993*.

²⁵⁸ BNO, 'Science to Aid of Education', *SDI* (09 November 1936), p. 5. (Downloaded 27 June 2017).

²⁵⁹ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, 12,1 (Jan, 1965), p. 43.

²⁶⁰ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, p. 43.

²⁶¹ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, p. 43.

²⁶² Ancestry, England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (1858-1966, 1973-1995) Harold Slack, Date of Death 05 January 1965, p. 377. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁶³ SLSL, 'Socialists Choose New Alderman', *ST* (05 October 1948), p. 3.

²⁶⁴ SLSL, 'Socialists Choose New Alderman', *ST*, p. 3.

²⁶⁵ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4381, Folio No. 89, p. 18; England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, (1916-2007), Vol. 2d, p. 99. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁶⁶ Ancestry, 1901 Census, Class RG13, Piece No. 4381, Folio No. 89, p. 18. (Accessed 21 July, 2017).

²⁶⁷ Findmypast, 1911 Census, RG14PN27983 RG78PN1599 RD510 SD6 ED24 SN181. (Accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁶⁸ Findmypast, 1911 Census.

local authority. In 1937 he was appointed a magistrate. Yorke became an alderman in 1942 and remained in post until his retirement in 1958. He served as Lord Mayor of Sheffield from 1947-1949, and founded the Sheffield Pageant of Production (November 1948). Yorke became a member of the newly formed Sheffield Regional Hospital Board in 1948 and was the first chairman of Sheffield's first Hospital Management Committee. In addition to his public roles and offices, Yorke was a full time officer for the Gas Worker Union from 1933 to 1950. In all he gave fifty-one years of his life to public service.²⁶⁹

This completes the biographical study of public servants with a background in the WEA who served on the City Councils of Leeds, York and Sheffield. Chapter Five, Part II will analyse the information presented in this chapter.

²⁶⁹ SLSL, 'Deaths', *QoS*, 16, 1 (Jan, 1969), p. 34.

CHAPTER FIVE: PART II

A Record of Public Service: Analysis

David Martin, in a general overview of the Labour Party MPs of 1906, described them as being ‘not far from their supporters and [...] certainly closer than their political rivals to the everyday realities of working class life’.¹ This assessment of the first Labour Party MPs could also be applied to our sample of public servants. A brief summary of our sample is presented below in Tables 12, 13, and 14. Table 12 and 13 reflects our sample’s membership of labour movement organisations and positions on City Councils. Table 14 shows changes to their occupational and social status by listing where possible the occupation of each individual’s father as well as their probate records.

TABLE 12: WEA Students as Citizens sample (Leeds, Sheffield, York)

Trade Union Members	Co-op Members	Trades Council Members	ILP Members	Labour Party Members	Education Comm. Members	Fabian Society Members
15	7	3	2	4	6	1

TABLE 13: WEA Students as Citizens sample (Leeds, Sheffield, York)

Semi- & Skilled Manual Employment	Professional Employment	Mayors: Leeds	Mayors: Sheffield	Mayors: York	JPs	MPs
16	7	4	5	1	7	3

¹ David E Martin ‘Labour’s Parliamentary Pioneers of 1906’ in *Men Who made Labour*, ed. by Alan Haworth and Dianne Hayter (London, New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 20.

**TABLE 14 – WEA Students as Citizens sample (Leeds, Sheffield, York):
Occupational Status and Probate Information**

	Name	born-died	Occupation	Father's Occupation	Probate
LEEDS					
1	Albert Tallant	1872–1939	(i) Shoe Maker (ii) Trade Union Official	(i) Joiner	£1,308 9s
2	Arthur Adamson	1887–1967	(i) Cabinet Maker (ii) Trade Union Official	(i) Textile Machine Mechanic	£1,758
3	Bertha Quinn	1873–1951	(i) Tailoress (ii) Trade Union Official	No record	No record
4	Francis H O'Donnell	1893–1967	(i) Accountant	(i) Mother was a grocer	No record
5	David Beevers	1889–1957	(i) Tailor	(i) Tailor's Presser	£1,616 2d 3 d
6	Hugh Hamill	1900–1943	(i) Print Block Roller Steam Cutter, (ii) Wall Paper Designer	(i) Block Cutter Oilcloth	£1,255 9s 8d
7	Joseph Thornton	1881–1960	(i) Broker	(i) Broker	No record
8	Wilfred Webster	1892–1960	(i) Iron Turner (ii) Trade Union Official	(i) Tool Fitter	No record
9	William (Willie) Withey	1874–1951	(i) Steam Crane Makers Apprentice (ii) Parliamentary Agent	(i) Iron Moulder	£559 9s 2d
10	Alfred James Dobbs	1882–1945	(i) Shoe Maker (ii) Trade Union Official (iii) MP	(i) Home Riveter (Shoes)	£2,615 15s 7d
11	John Arnott	1871–1942	(i) Blacksmith in ship building industry (ii) Trade Union Official (iii) MP	(i) Ferry Toll Operator (ii) Time Keeper at Gas Works	No record
YORK					
1	William Dobbie	1878–1950	(i) Coach Painter (ii) MP	(i) Blacksmith	£639 18s 6d
2	Thomas Harry Gill	1885–1955	(i) Railway Clerk (ii) Trade Union Official (iii) President of International Co-operative Alliance	(i) Railway Station Master	£39,933 15s 1d
3	Arthur Simpson	1892–1973	(i) Grocer's Porter (ii) Manager at Rowntrees	(i) Tin Plate Worker	£5239
4	John Hargreaves	1877–?	(i) Blacksmith	Unknown	No record
5	Jeannie Mercer Nee Jane Forrester	1880–1960	(i) School Teacher	(i) General Dealer & Fruiterer	No record
6	Charles Frederick Sanderson	1897–1953	(i) Railway Metal Machinist (ii) Trade Union Official	(i) Engine Fitter	4,889 0s 7d

	Name	born-died	Occupation	Father's Occupation	Probate
SHEFFIELD					
1	Alfred Ernest Hobson	1887–1963	(i) Cabinet Maker (ii) Department Manager (iii) Trade Council Secretary	(i) Cabinet-maker	No record
2	Alfred Thomas Wells	No record	(i) Trade Union Official	No record	No record
3	William Ernest Yorke	1882–1969	(i) Gas tube Machinist (ii) Trade Union Official	(i) Fish Hawker	No record
4	Peter Buchanan	1890–1962	(i) Post Office Clerk (ii) Post Office Inspector	(i) Joiner	£230 19s
5	Harold Slack	1892–1965	(i) Butcher's Knife Hafter (ii) Trade Union Official	(i) Butcher's Knife Hafter	£2,538
6	John Henry Bingham	1880–1970	(i) Jeweller's Clerk (ii) Municipal Clerk	(i) Gardener	No record
7	John William Holland	1891–?	(i) Labourer in Armour Plate Mill (ii) Co-operative Agent	(i) Crane Driver	No record
8	James Gill	1865–1950	(i) School Master	(i) Boiler-maker	£6,070 8s 9d
9	Albert Ballard	1889–1969	(i) Locomotive Fireman – Railway (ii) Co-operative Party Sec)	(i) Labourer at a gas works	No record

All the individuals in the sample were involved in at least one labour movement organisation such, as a trade union or co-operative, indicating their interest in a variety of working class issues. Brenda Powell's research on Leeds City Council supports this trend amongst labour movement public servants. She found that 60% of council members who served on the Leeds City Council between 1888 and 1953 belonged to an occupational group that included political, trade union & society secretaries and agents. Powell calculated that the majority of that 60% were 'Labour Trade Union Officials' while the 'wholesale merchants' (nearly 37% of the group) were all either Conservative or Liberal.²

Another characteristic that stands out is that most of the fathers of the sample had occupations in manual labour. It is interesting to note that sixteen of the sample were employed in skilled and semi-skilled manual occupations, while seven were in professional employment. Nineteen individuals held three different jobs during their lifetimes. Ten of the sample members became mayors.

Regional studies into the rise of the Labour Party in Yorkshire undertaken by Reynolds and Laybourn, Andrew Thorpe, Mathers, and Meadowcroft agree that

² Powell, 'Leeds City Council', p. 115.

Yorkshire became a Labour heartland between the wars and beyond.³ Factors that can be attributed to the rise of Labour in Yorkshire include the demise of the Liberal Party, the impact of the Great War, the enlargement of the franchise, and a large, politically engaged industrial working class electorate. As Thorpe points out in the case of Sheffield, ‘Labour could, through incompetence in office, have alienated support and let its opponents back into power.’⁴ However, the Labour-dominated Sheffield Council avoided this scenario by performing very well in areas such as housing and education. As a result, the Labour councillors of Sheffield City Council enjoyed consistent support and loyalty from working class voters. Also, as shown in Chapter Four, in the case of Sheffield, the Sheffield Trades and Labour Council exerted a strong influence on the City Council – members of one were often also members of the other.⁵ Such connections between local government and working class organisations were significant in supporting labour movement and socialist candidates in municipal elections. The implication of the successful consolidation of Labour control of Sheffield City Council is that Labour councillors were well able to carry out their administrative, bureaucratic, and political duties and responsibilities in office. Howell, Haworth, and Hayter refer directly to the national figures of the PLP, but do not acknowledge the huge cast of public servants supporting them. The sample here provides a profile of the type of working class person who engaged in labour movement politics, and at a municipal level.

Fieldhouse’s work provides more information about WEA students and is important to refer to here. His PhD research included the results of a questionnaire he distributed to WEA students asking them ‘about their experience of classes which met before 1951’.⁶ Seventy-one former WEA students responded to Fieldhouse’s questionnaire. The questionnaire sought information pertaining to several different areas of the experience of WEA education. Information gathered about membership of trade unions, political parties and membership of other organisations and associations, as well as information giving ‘details of [...] political, civic, social or other activities taken up as a result of attending’ classes, are directly relevant to the themes of this chapter⁷.

³ Reynolds and Laybourn, *Labour Heartland*; Andrew Thorpe, ‘The Consolidation of a Labour Stronghold 1926-1952’ in *The History of the City of Sheffield 1843-1993*; Sidney Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1959); Meadowcroft, ‘Transition in Leeds City Government’; Mathers, ‘Sheffield Municipal Politics’; for more biographies of Leeds City Councillors see <<http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/localhistory.html>>

⁴ Thorpe, ‘Consolidation of a Labour Stronghold’, pp. 117–118.

⁵ Pollard, *A History of Labour in Sheffield*, p. 265.

⁶ Fieldhouse, ‘The Ideology of Adult Education’, (PhD Thesis), p. 635.

⁷ Fieldhouse, ‘The Ideology of Adult Education’, (PhD Thesis), p. 635.

Fieldhouse's sample showed that almost 'one-third of the respondents left school at the minimum school-leaving age and had no other educational qualification or experience.' He concluded that this result supports the theory that the WEA during the inter-war period served a large number of working class people who were deprived of education as children and adolescents. He is quick to qualify this finding by pointing out that his sample represented a 'relatively educationally-privileged group of people' in terms of mainstream and WEA education. When thinking about access to secondary and higher education during the inter-war period, it is worth keeping in mind that 'in the 1930s, over 70 per cent of all children left school at the minimum age of fourteen' and of those fortunate enough to 'gain secondary school places, only 15 per cent remained at school beyond fifteen years of age'.⁸ Only 5.4% of that 15% went to university in 1937.⁹ Carol Dyhouse's research into the social background of university students (excluding Oxbridge) in England before 1939 presents evidence, from a sample of 1,000 working class students, that such students succeeded in attending university with the financial and moral support of their families as well as scholarships provided by LEAs and charities.¹⁰ P. R. Sharp's work on the origins and development of LEA scholarships shows that the West Riding Technical Instruction Committee under the chairmanship of the Marquess of Ripon was instrumental in establishing an LEA scholarship system.¹¹ LEA scholarships often comprised tuition fees and maintenance grants. They enabled working class students who otherwise would not have been able, to attend university. In 1911–12, twenty-five and twenty-eight per cent of full time students at the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield respectively received LEA scholarships.¹² Table 15 gives the national figures of men and women admitted to university as new students in the UK during the inter-war period. This puts in perspective how rare it was for a person from *any* social background to attend university.

⁸ Fieldhouse, 'The Ideology of Adult Education', (PhD Thesis), p. 636.

⁹ Fieldhouse, 'The Ideology of Adult Education', (PhD Thesis), p. 636.

¹⁰ Carole Dyhouse, 'Going to University in England Between the Wars: Access and Funding', *History of Education*, 31, 1 (2002), pp. 1–14.

¹¹ P. R. Sharp, 'The Origin and Early Development of Local Education Authority Scholarships', *History of Education*, 3, 1 (1974), pp. 36–50.

¹² Sharp, 'Origin and Early Development of Local Education Authority Scholarships', p. 46.

Table 15: New students admitted to university – UK (1922–1938)¹³

	Men	Women	Total
1922/3	8,424	3,878	12,312
1930/1	10,078	3,967	14,045
1938/9	11,220	3,933	15,153

Before the First World War, the accepted education model was of a ladder that could be climbed by the most gifted. During the inter-war period, R. H. Tawney and Albert Mansbridge among others challenged that model and proposed that the education system should be a broad highway, accessible to the majority rather than the meritorious few.¹⁴ Sharp and Dyhouse's work demonstrates that it was possible for working class people to attend university during the inter-war period, but they needed considerable financial support to do so.¹⁵ It also explains why, in Fieldhouse's view, those people who attended WEA classes as adults were 'educationally privileged', as the great majority of their peers received only a primary education. Fieldhouse also observed that most of the children 'who left school at the minimum age were the children of manual workers'. Another notable finding that Fieldhouse made was that '40 per cent of the sample from working class homes (defined by the father's occupation) had gone on to some form of full-time post-school education.' Fieldhouse's analysis of this finding was that 'the WEA's appeal to the working class was to a considerable extent confined to that section that had already been 'converted' to education.'¹⁶ This finding applies to several of the public servants studied in this chapter. It supports the theory that some sort of family background interest in education was a pre-requisite for adults pursuing education.

On social mobility, Fieldhouse's sample demonstrated a high degree of change; '66 per cent of the sample members' fathers were manual workers' while 'only 16 per cent of the sample members themselves were manual workers.' Fieldhouse found

¹³ Table modified from the original to include only figures for new full time students admitted to university. Figures for students taking courses is much higher. B. R Mitchell and H. G. Jones, *Second Abstract of British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 218.

¹⁴ Sharp, 'Origin and Early Development of LEA Scholarships', p. 47 (*Highway* was the title of the WEA's monthly journal).

¹⁵ For an analysis of access to British universities see Robert Anderson, *British Universities Past and Present* (London: Hambledon, 2006); *Universities and Elites in Britain Since 1800* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

¹⁶ Fieldhouse, 'Ideology of Adult Education', (PhD Thesis), pp. 636 – 637.

that ‘one quarter of the children of manual workers had gone into manual work’ while ‘half had found white collar jobs and a quarter had gone into professional occupations.’ The biographies of public servants studied here follow this trend. Table 14, summarising the occupations of our sample, shows that nineteen individuals changed jobs up to three times during their lifetime, usually from a manual profession to a non-manual one. Fieldhouse suggests that those people who attended WEA classes were ‘moving from a working class to a bourgeois social environment.’ Less social mobility was noted in students whose fathers were white-collar workers.

Another important characteristic shared by our sample and Fieldhouse’s is political affiliation. Those with a Labour and social-democratic outlook dominated both Fieldhouse’s sample and ours. Eighty-one per cent of Fieldhouse’s sample had a Labour and social-democratic perspective, while 10 per cent described their political outlook as Marxist or Communist (with only six per cent Liberal and 3 per cent Conservative). Sixty-one per cent of Fieldhouse’s sample reported that they were members of a political party. Labour Party members accounted for 43.5 per cent, and membership of the ILP accounted for 13 per cent of the total sample.¹⁷ Again, direct parallels can be drawn between the public servants in this sample who demonstrated a high degree of political activism and commitment in their roles as councillors, aldermen and mayors, all with an allegiance to labour movement policies.

In addition to sharing the same political outlooks, our sample shared with Fieldhouse’s a similar preponderance of trade union membership. Almost our entire sample was engaged in trade union business of some kind, either as member or employee. In Fieldhouse’s sample, ‘just over half [...] were trade unionists and half of these’ held a part-time position in their union during their membership. Fieldhouse also found that, although there was no correlation between trade union membership and political party membership, there was a strong correlation between trade union membership and working class backgrounds: ‘63 per cent of those whose fathers were manual workers were members of a trade union, and 39 per cent held union office of some kind.’¹⁸

Fieldhouse’s construction of a profile of former WEA students reinforces that of the public servants researched here. All demonstrated a high level of commitment to the labour movement through their membership of political parties and trade union membership. The sample under examination here, in particular, transformed their

¹⁷ Fieldhouse, ‘Ideology of Adult Education’, (PhD Thesis), pp. 639 – 640.

¹⁸ Fieldhouse, ‘Ideology of Adult Education’, (PhD Thesis), pp. 641 – 642.

commitment into political activism by entering local government. Their major achievement was to contribute to changing the political constitutions of the city councils of Leeds, Sheffield, and York during the inter-war period. Indeed, Fieldhouse's respondents reported that they 'saw the WEA as having enabled them to take part in local government, or in some way to take a lead or make an active contribution to their community.' This aspect of Fieldhouse's study is of particular interest to this thesis. Fifteen per cent of his sample entered local government partly as a result, so they said, of attending WEA classes with 'seven per cent becoming magistrates'. (Although Fieldhouse found no connection between WEA education and becoming a magistrate.) 'Political subjects were more likely than non-political ones to encourage students to take up' municipal politics with 'men three times as likely to do so as women.'¹⁹

Overall, Fieldhouse concluded that the WEA, in combination with other influences, catalysed those with a pre-disposition for political activism to participate in local government, trade unions and civic society.²⁰ Fieldhouse also found that those without a pre-disposition for political activity in the labour movement were *not* influenced or converted to a particular political cause by the WEA.²¹ His general findings are corroborated and supported by this biographical study of public servants.

A very similar profile of 'labour movement person' has been drawn here, with our sample, compared with that of Fieldhouse's sample. Fieldhouse's point about his sample, and their trend towards upward social mobility, is an intriguing one and relevant to a discussion about what sort of labour politics WEA students, as adult citizens, adopted as public servants.

Fieldhouse's evidence from his questionnaire study dwells somewhat on his sample's inclination towards upward social mobility. His approach is single-minded, and distances WEA students from their working class peers who had no access to, nor a desire for, further education. In Fieldhouse's view, the WEA drew working class students away from a more radical and potentially revolutionary type of socialism and instead directed them towards a toothless form of it. Fieldhouse argues that successful WEA students somehow abandoned their working class heritage and embraced middle class values. Jonathan Rose takes issue with Fieldhouse's argument that the WEA's commitment to objective and impartial scholarship 'could have the effect of neutralising some students' commitments or beliefs and integrating them into the hegemonic

¹⁹ Fieldhouse, 'Ideology of Adult Education', (PhD Thesis), p. 650.

²⁰ Fieldhouse, 'Ideology of Adult Education', (PhD Thesis), pp. 650 – 652.

²¹ Fieldhouse, 'Ideology of Adult Education', (PhD Thesis), p. 649.

national culture'.²² Rose wishes to know more fully who WEA students were and what intellectual contributions they may have made to the WEA, as well as how they were, or were not, changed by adult education.²³ Rose's approach to unpicking what motivated working class students to pursue education as offered by the WEA offers a different perspective from Fieldhouse's about the impact of the WEA on the labour movement and socialist ideology. Rose states that 'the influence of the WEA can only be measured by studying those students directly, through their autobiographies, their journalism, and social surveys.'²⁴ He challenges Fieldhouse's thesis with his own 'survey of twenty-eight autobiographies written by WEA students.'²⁵ Rose also points out that Fieldhouse's 'thesis [...] is contradicted by his own research', as well as by Rose's sample group.²⁶ In Rose's assessment, 'not one of [his sample] became politically quiescent, moderate, or conservative as a result of what they learned in WEA classes.' Indeed 'seven became more militant'.²⁷ Ultimately Rose's research shows that WEA students exercised considerable agency, and were independent-minded in their pursuit of education.

Rose makes a compelling argument but, by using autobiographical sources, his sample is less objective than Fieldhouse's. It is unsurprising that Rose's sample, all former students of the WEA, who had gone to the effort of writing their autobiographies, would indeed have wished to establish their labour movement political credentials. Ultimately those who write their autobiographies write what they wish others to read. Fieldhouse, because he selected his sample using the criterion that they had been students of the WEA prior to 1951, succeeds in finding a more objective source than Rose. On the use of autobiographies as a historical source, Gary McCulloch points out that 'autobiographies cannot be regarded as 'representative' because 'their subjects constitute a relatively small and atypical group of individuals.' He also advises that it is important to keep in mind why the author chose to write and publish his or her life story, alongside all the glosses, additions and omissions that the undertaking entails.²⁸ Despite the shortcomings of autobiographies, as sources they remain relevant,

²² Fieldhouse 'The Ideology of Adult Education Teaching 1925 – 50' p. 30.

²³ Rose, 'The Workers in the Workers' Educational Association, 1903-1950', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 21, 4 (Winter, 1989), p. 591.

²⁴ Rose, 'Workers in the WEA', p. 592.

²⁵ Rose, 'Workers in the WEA', p. 598.

²⁶ Rose, 'Workers in the WEA', p. 598.

²⁷ Rose, 'Workers in the WEA', p. 598.

²⁸ Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2004), p. 121. For critiques and evaluations of autobiographies as a literary genre and historical source see Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001); John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History:*

useful and interesting to study when trying to understand the past from an individual's perspective. David Vincent, in his study of 142 nineteenth century working class autobiographies, acknowledges that the content of such works is selective but emphasises their ability to communicate an individual's understanding of the course of their life.²⁹ Vincent and Rose have used collections of autobiographies to understand how and why working class people perceived the world as they did, and to a great extent they have succeeded. Rose's point about agency is important because it sets in perspective the idealised version of the WEA as envisaged by pioneer adult educationalists such as Albert Mansbridge, R. H. Tawney and Archbishop William Temple alongside the reality of the student experience of WEA classes and culture. As Rose puts it, it is not possible to

know the mass impact of an educational programme, or a book, or any other cultural product by studying the intentions of the people who created that product, or even by analysing the product itself. We have to look directly to the student, the readers, the audience.³⁰

This thesis has made a strong move towards understanding the WEA student as an adult citizen by taking account of their biographies and their work in public service.

As the research here shows, one of the routes towards greater social mobility or at least social influence for a working class person was to become a public servant. Working class people of the inter-war period had few, if any, other routes to upward or lateral mobility available to them. In the world of the working class of the time, membership of trade unions, co-operative societies and political parties such as the ILP and Labour Party offered the means for improving one's social and economic status. If one wished to play a more substantial role in the broader community, election to municipal councils offered that opportunity. Thereafter, the individual gained access to a wider world, as well as a broader variety of social and economic opportunities. Further, on entering local government, working class people encountered a social environment that included those with Liberal and Conservative as well as Labour and Socialist political outlooks. This melting pot of people with different political perspectives, brought together to carry out the duties of local government fairly and proportionately, nurtured what Cole referred to as 'functional democracy'. The

Aims, Methods and New directions in the Study of Modern History, Revised 3rd ed (London: Longman, 2002).

²⁹ David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom. A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London: Europa Publications Ltd, 1981), pp. 3–11; For an example of how autobiographies have been used to understand the lives of coal miners see Keith Gildart, 'Mining Memories: Reading Coalfield Autobiographies', *Labour History*, 50, 2 (May, 2009), pp. 139–161.

³⁰ Rose, 'The Workers in the WEA', p. 608.

organisation of local government, with its well-established administrative and bureaucratic structures, was able to accommodate the arrival of a new politics – that of labour socialism and social democracy. In turn the new arrivals – socialist and labour movement councillors – were able to compromise with their Liberal and Conservative counterparts to establish socialist policies in their municipalities.

The correlation between adult education, public service and social mobility is worth exploring in more depth. I distinguish here between upward social mobility, social mobility, and occupational mobility. I use the term ‘social mobility’ to describe the phenomenon of experiencing a wider world and social environment when compared with an individual’s narrower class background. Worker-students as citizens experienced this aspect of social mobility through their work in public service. It expanded their social environment. By contrast, occupational mobility describes the phenomenon of gaining employment in a higher-paying and a possibly higher status job, with perhaps also a consequent expansion of a person’s social network. Occupational mobility describes the phenomenon of changing occupations – in this context, from a manual to a non-manual profession. The idea of upward social mobility – whereby an individual moves up from one class to another – arises in connection with both social and occupational mobility. There is evidence of both social and occupational mobility amongst my sample group, but not necessarily – or at least not always – of *upward* social mobility. Though most in my sample group changed occupations during their lifetimes, they retained very strong associations with the working class world. They did not so much ‘change class’ or ‘move up’ in the world, as become socially mobile via their work in public service, assimilating themselves into a wider social environment. It is this aspect – the ‘moving sideways, and in parallel’ – that is of interest to me in this study of the impact of adult education on the labour movement as a whole.

Why did this trajectory of social mobility manifest itself so consistently amongst working class people of the inter-war period? What political structures and ideologies supported this mode of social mobility? What was it about being part of local government that bolstered an individual’s chances for social mobility? Answers to these questions may lie in the ideology and identity of the PLP under MacDonald’s leadership.

MacDonald's Socialism

Socialism was the ideology that underpinned the policies and ambitions of MacDonald's Party. Clause Four of the 1918 Labour Party Constitution set the socialist agenda: 'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain [...] the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.' But what sort of socialism did MacDonald's Party in reality pursue, and how did it reflect itself at a municipal level? Ramsay MacDonald, the main theoretician of the PLP, was key to shaping the socialism of the PLP, which was trickled down to the policies of Labour-dominated municipalities.

Howell makes an incisive analysis of MacDonald's interpretation of socialism.³¹ MacDonald, with Philip Snowden, succeeded in shaping the early political identity of the ILP by distancing it from the SDF and Marxism.³² In relation to how socialism would develop as a governing system, MacDonald supported Sidney Webb's 'inevitability of gradualness' theory, holding that Socialism had a Darwinian nature, and would evolve slowly but surely to supersede Conservatism and Liberalism. It was to be an organic, progressive ideology and more to the point it was designed to make ethical and moral sense to all right-minded people. MacDonald used his considerable intellectual ability to establish the political identity of the Labour Party as socialist, ethical and inclusive of all classes. Key characteristics of MacDonald's interpretation of socialism, such as his antipathy to trade union sectionalism and his acceptance of the Parliamentary method, underpinned Labour Party policies during the inter-war period. Writing in the wake of the Russian Revolution in defence of Parliamentary representation and democracy, MacDonald suggested that socialists needed to consider how the Parliamentary method could be adapted to suit their needs. In MacDonald's words, 'in defending Parliamentary methods, Socialists must consider [...] how the institutions themselves can be changed so as to be adapted more and more closely to the needs of representation.'³³ Labour councillors and aldermen in local government followed this guideline, not necessarily because MacDonald advised it, but because it came naturally to them. The ease with which labour councillors 'fitted in', and worked in local government is testament not only to their own abilities but also to the soundness, stability and adaptability of traditional British democratic local government administrative structures.

³¹ Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, pp. 225–233.

³² Howell, *MacDonald's Party*, p. 226.

³³ Ramsay MacDonald, *Parliament and Democracy* (London: National Labour Press, 1920), p. vii.

MacDonald's understanding of society as being similar to the human body came to the fore in how he envisaged socialism working in a parliamentary democracy. For MacDonald, it was hopeless to split society in to a series of functions: 'The whole idea of society as a group of functions is as inadequate as that of the body as a group of organs.'³⁴ Splitting society into a group of functions would lead to chaos and anarchy and disrupt 'the social mind and conception'.³⁵ To MacDonald, society was a unified whole, greater than the sum of its parts. In order to govern and apply political social policy responsibly, it was necessary to 'start with the conception of a general unity of which functions are contributing parts, and apart from which function has no meaning'.³⁶

Education was key to supporting and nurturing this ideal of a unified organic socialist democracy. To that end, MacDonald promoted 'the education that makes independent minds, not servile and imitative ones'³⁷. People with democratic intelligence would lead the way towards an inclusive socialist state. MacDonald highlighted the significance of local government and stated that

The local government unit must be a real and a big thing, something in which the citizen can take an interest and a pride. The first organised unit of government with which the citizen comes into contact with should fulfil two conditions: it should be so important as to be held in esteem, and it should be so close up to him that he can grasp its work with his mind.

He consolidated his argument for the organic unity of society, and the relevance and the importance of local government structures, in the final sentences of *Parliament and Democracy*:

The sub-divisions of the State must, each in itself, contain in embryo that State in full, and the mind that is working in it must be the same mind throughout. Voluntary association and industry combination ought to fructify in the life of the community, but can claim no authority in the State except through the organisation of citizens.³⁸

Here, then, was MacDonald's vision of a unified and inclusive socialist state. It would work at all levels with the support of like-minded, socially-enlightened, democratically intelligent citizens who formed the electorate, as well as the elected representative body. This high-minded vision of a socialist state was the *haute couture* ideology of MacDonald's Party. How it became the ready-to-wear version of municipal socialism was in the hands of the inter-war labour movement public servants

³⁴ MacDonald, *Parliament and Democracy*, p. 28.

³⁵ MacDonald, *Parliament and Democracy*, p. 29.

³⁶ MacDonald, *Parliament and Democracy*, p. 29.

³⁷ MacDonald, *Parliament and Democracy*, p. 66.

³⁸ MacDonald, *Parliament and Democracy*, p. 75.

exemplified by those studied in Chapter Five, Part I. Local government was certainly adapted to the needs of working class people represented by Labour and socialist councillors, as MacDonald theorised. However, it was also, by its very unchanging and traditional structure, an excellent starting block for working class people elected to public office to advance their social mobility prospects. In this respect, the lead from the PLP was ambiguous. It wished to establish a strong, stable, socialist state supported by an educated and ethically responsible electorate, but it did not address the issue of opportunities for social mobility *outside* traditional routes and structures. Rather, the PLP maintained their focus on adapting pre-existing national and municipal governing structures rather than constructing specifically working class ones. Unlike more left-wing organisations such as the Plebs and NCLC, the PLP did not imagine a dramatically different world of labour, and therefore did not make efforts to revolutionise the British governing system from the outside. It is for this reason that well-educated, aspirational, working class people gravitated towards local government, in the absence of alternative viable options, to pursue their ambitions to improve their living, working, and social conditions.

Conclusion

The brief biographies given in Chapter Five, Part I, represent a small sample of WEA students as public servants on Leeds, Sheffield, and York's city councils. It is interesting to note how varied they are. They come from different social backgrounds, in a spectrum from extreme poverty to comfortable middle class affluence. Their educations – formal and informal – vary as well. Their life experiences stem from their individual environments and their observations of life in Britain in the early twentieth century. Somehow they all saw the same things – poverty, ill health, class divisions, inequality, social injustice, and a lack of employment opportunities for working class people based on their lack of access to wealth and education. What they all had in common, whatever their class or education history, was a commitment to socialism as an ideology – albeit some more than others – and a solid record of municipal, public, service-supporting, socialist principles.

The WEA in its capacity as a working class voluntary organisation, offered education in the arts and humanities to all of them. Fieldhouse's research shows that the WEA did not convert them politically. Rather the WEA nurtured the student's pre-existing socialist and labour movement attitudes and beliefs. Education as delivered by the WEA is likely to have supported them greatly in their public service work by giving

them the confidence and other tools to speak and be dynamic in traditional municipal structures such as city councils, committees, and public assistance boards. Although these WEA students may have conformed to the traditional structure of local government, they worked steadfastly within these forums to build socialism in the form that the PLP, under MacDonald's leadership, promoted.

CHAPTER SIX: PART I

Workers' Adult Education and the Press in Yorkshire

This chapter will focus on how the press in Yorkshire reported the topic of workers' adult education from 1918 to 1939. By analysing newspaper reports about the topic, we will learn to what extent the phenomenon of workers' adult education was part of the general culture, but we will also gain insight into the more controversial aspects of workers' education in Yorkshire.

Before embarking on an analysis of how workers' education was reported in Yorkshire newspapers, it is necessary to consider why they are valuable primary sources. Daniel LeMahieu, in his study on media and culture, emphasises the huge growth in national daily newspaper circulation in the 1920s and 30s in Britain. 'In 1918, national dailies sold 3.1 million copies' and by 1939 '10.6 million copies of daily newspapers sold each day.'¹ He argues that the development of print and other media had the effect of creating a common culture that could be shared by a diverse and pluralistic society.² He also argues that the cultivated elite sought to control the development of that common culture by creating a state-led media organisation – the BBC.³ James Curran gives a clear analysis of how the media can be used to produce different historical narratives – liberal, popular, feminist, libertarian, anthropological, and radical. His conclusion is that though 'each interpretation has limitations, each also contains an important element of truth.'⁴ Curran suggests that 'the best way to develop a new history of British media is to offer a general account of the development of modern British society, in which the history of the British media is inserted.'⁵ Historians who have taken this approach include Adrian Bingham, Bernard Barker, and Laura Beers who have all used newspapers as sources to explore the inter-war world. Bingham has demonstrated their value in his study on gender identity. He uses newspapers as sources in part because of their variety and diversity and explores 'a wide range of images and debates, to see how a variety of different gendered discourses interacted, interlinked and contrasted.'⁶ Beers approaches the study of newspapers from a different perspective and

¹ Daniel L. LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy: Mass Communication and the cultivated Mind in Britain Between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) p. 12.

² LeMahieu, *A Culture for Democracy*, p. 333.

³ LeMahieu, *A Culture For Democracy*, pp. 103–177.

⁴ James Curran, 'Media and the Making of British Society c. 1700–2000', *Media History*, 8, 2 (2002), pp. 135–154.

⁵ Curran, 'Media and the Making of British Society', p. 137.

⁶ Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 6–7.

argues that in the 1920s and 30s the ‘mass media played an important role in bringing Labour’s policies to the attention of voters outside of the party’s core constituencies’.⁷ Using a similar approach, this thesis seeks to understand the place of workers’ adult education in popular and political culture in Yorkshire between the wars. This author is not aware of any other substantial regional studies that use newspaper sources in this way on this topic, so this study will contribute new data to the historical record.

During the inter-war period, newspapers were widely accessible to all sections of the population. They provided daily information to a wide section of the population in the way that social media and television do today. The regional newspapers that will be studied here include *The Hull Daily Mail (HDM)*, *The Yorkshire Post (YP)*, *The Leeds Mercury (LM)*, *The Sheffield Daily Independent (SDI)* and *The Driffield Times (DT)*.⁸ *The Yorkshire Post* in 1920 had a circulation of approximately 45,000 while the *Leeds Mercury* had a circulation of 70,000 in 1922. In 1939, *The Leeds Mercury* amalgamated with *The Yorkshire Post*.⁹

A thirty-two part questionnaire study produced by the Royal Commission on the Press in 1947 gives insight into what The Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Co. Ltd, publishers of *The Yorkshire Post* and *The Yorkshire Evening Post*, and the Leeds Labour Publishing Society Ltd, publishers of the *Leeds Weekly Citizen*, perceived as their role and function.¹⁰ Though not in the time-frame of this study, it gives an insight into why and how these publishers, one conservative and one socialist, chose to report on particular topics that could be extrapolated to apply to the inter-war era. On the matter of what the function of the press consisted of (the questionnaire’s Question 2), the Leeds Labour Publishing Society, Kenneth Muir (editor of the *LWC*) stated that it was to ‘give the news uncensored, with honest comment’ and also that the editor of a socialist newspaper need not be in ‘agreement with every decision made by a Labour

⁷ Laura Beers, ‘Education of Manipulation? Labour Democracy, and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (January, 2009), pp. 129–152. For an appraisal and evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of using newspaper and other media as historical sources see also Bingham ‘Media Products as Historical Artefacts’ and Kevin Williams ‘Doing Media History: The Mass Media, Historical analysis and the 1930s’, in *The Routledge Companion to British Media History* ed. by Martin Conboy and John Steel with Scott Eldridge (London; New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁸ These newspapers were chosen because complete runs of them were available on the BNO for the period. They are also representative of the whole of Yorkshire.

⁹ A. P. Wadsworth, *Newspaper Circulations 1800–1954* (Manchester: Manchester Statistical Society, 9th March 1955) p. 34. For a brief but succinct history of the provincial press see Rachel Matthews, ‘The Provincial Press in England’ in *The Routledge Companion to British Media History*. For a history of *The Yorkshire Post* see Mildred A Gibb and Frank Beckwith, *The Yorkshire Post: Two Centuries* (The Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper Co. Ltd, 1954). *The Yorkshire Post* was founded in 1754 under the title of *The Leeds Intelligencer*. It became *The Yorkshire Post* in 1866.

¹⁰ Royal Commission on the Press, Replies to Questionnaire (N. C. 1) Addressed to Publishers of Newspapers and Periodicals (London: HMSO, 1947).

Party conference'.¹¹ In response to the questionnaire's Question 8 – 'Should a paper be a mouth-piece of a particular set of opinions or should it present several points of view on a given topic?' – Muir responded that he tended to express the policies of the Labour Party in leading articles even if he did not agree with them, but that he also encouraged 'the expression of different points of views in other columns.'¹² The Yorkshire Conservative Newspaper group responded to Question 2 (function of the press) by stating that

the main functions of the ordinary newspaper with a political character are to give news, to discuss it in the light of political principles, to guide public opinion and to facilitate industry and commerce by publishing advertisements.¹³

Their response to Question 8 was that 'a paper should present several points of view without attempting to hide that it stands for a certain cause.' The responses to these two key questions about the agency and independence of the Press show that the editors and publishers perceived that their role was to convey newsworthy information to the public in a direct, open manner that took account of other views, even if the newspaper itself maintained a conservative or socialist bias.

This chapter sets out to analyse how the press perceived workers' adult education; did it have a political bias as far as the newspapers were concerned?; and how accurately and reliably can we evaluate public opinion about workers' adult education from newspaper sources?

These questions will be answered in the context of the following six themes that emerge from an extensive analysis of contemporary press reports:

(1) Education for democracy

This is a persistent theme that is reported throughout the 1920s and 1930s. During the 1920s, education initiatives were reported as being key to building democracy, as part of a highly idealistic effort to prevent another war. However, during the 1930s the emphasis changed, with education becoming seen as a way of preserving democracy, and protecting Britain against the threat of fascism;

(2) Rural development and regeneration

The press reported on the government initiative to prevent rural decline in the aftermath of the War, with adult education identified as one way of regenerating

¹¹ Royal Commission on the Press Questionnaire, p. 120.

¹² Royal Commission on the Press Questionnaire, p. 120.

¹³ Royal Commission on the Press Questionnaire, p. 208.

rural society. The WEA participated fully in this project by extending their classes into remote parts of Yorkshire;

(3) Access to education and inequality of opportunities

Reports regularly highlighted the severe lack of educational opportunities for working class children over the age of fourteen. In particular, the debate about raising the school-leaving age to fifteen caused great controversy during the 1930s;

(4) Unemployment and leisure time

Due to increased mechanisation of industry, unskilled workers were faced with the threat of rationalisation and unemployment. This raised concerns about what unemployed people would do with their so-called leisure time;

(5) Local issues and political bias

Newspapers were quick to report on local disagreements about funding WEA projects, but overall these were few and far between. The question of the political bias of the WEA also arose in reports;

(6) Lack of reporting about the NCLC and Labour Colleges

The analysis undertaken shows a marked absence of reports about the NCLC and Labour Colleges, whereas the WEA appears regularly in press reports.

It is important to explain briefly the method used to identify newspaper reports about adult education in Yorkshire from 1918 to 1939. A physical search of microfilm or hard copies of all issues of these newspapers between 1918 and 1939 was not possible because of time and labour constraints. However, it was possible to undertake a search of all the above named newspapers by using the BNO. Key words and phrases including 'Workers' Educational Association', 'Labour Colleges', 'National Council of Labour Colleges', 'Independent Working Class Education' and 'Adult Education' were entered separately into the archive engine search facility. The search was limited to the Yorkshire and Humber region between the years 1918 and 1939, and produced approximately 300 newspaper reports that contained a combination of the search terms. It was not an exhaustive search, and there are bound to be numerous other reports about adult education that were not produced by my search terms. However, the content of the samples produced for this research contain enough in-depth analysis to provide a wide and compelling view of press coverage of workers' education in Yorkshire.

As with Chapter Five, this section dealing with press coverage will be presented in two parts. Chapter Six, Part One will review the newspaper reports in depth, and present a brief analysis of each theme. For clarity, each theme will be presented by decade, to highlight the differences and similarities between the newspaper reports in a chronological framework. The most relevant reports will be those which best exemplify what these newspapers seemed to have perceived as important to include in their coverage of each of the themes identified. Chapter Six, Part Two will analyse the reportage in greater depth by locating the themes in the wider historiography.

Education for Democracy – 1920s

The Yorkshire Post, *The Hull Daily Mail* and *The Daily Independent* (Sheffield) tend to agree on the theme of education for democracy. In a letter from Frederick Holmes, secretary of the Hull branch of the WEA to the editor of *The Daily Mail* to advertise a WEA conference, Holmes emphasised the non-political and non-vocational nature of WEA classes. He expressed the need for adult education generally: ‘Adult education has been neglected in the past and teaching on humane lines is urgent and necessary.’¹⁴ Holmes was a member of the AEU, and the Central Hull Divisional Labour Party, as well as the Hull Trades and Labour Council. He organised classes and study circles for the WEA, as well as tutoring in economic history and economic theory.

Another report, one that considered the nature of ‘Brotherhood’, gives some insight into the ideals and principles underpinning Holmes’s assertion of the need for “more humane” teaching. “Brotherhood in civic life” was the topic of a conference in Hull held in January 1924. The concept of Brotherhood was described as a movement ‘which has become active all over the country, with the object of creating a mutual understanding between the different sections of the people.’¹⁵ One delegate gave a definition of “Civic Brotherhood” as ‘a sense of responsibility on the part of every citizen for the welfare of the city as a whole’.¹⁶ The point of the Brotherhood Conference was to promote universal brotherhood, peace and greater citizenship:

it is obvious that if the world wants peace it must think peace and talk peace. If it wants a recognition of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity it must think and talk in terms of Universal Brotherhood.¹⁷

¹⁴ Frederick Holmes, ‘Letter to Editor’, *HDM* (04 February 1920), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁵ BNO, ‘Brotherhood Throughout the Universe’, *HDM*, (29 January 1924), p. 7. (Downloaded 24 October 2016). The Brotherhood Movement emerged during the Victorian era as a means to attract non-religious people to church. During the Edwardian era it became a Christian socialist adjunct to the labour movement.

¹⁶ BNO, ‘Brotherhood Throughout the Universe’ *HDM*, p. 7.

¹⁷ BNO, ‘Brotherhood Throughout the Universe’ *HDM*, p. 7.

On the same topic, another delegate identified that the spirit of brotherhood existed in the WEA and the UEM:

it is the spirit of true brotherhood which inspires the work of bodies such as the University Extension Society, the Workers' Educational Association, the Adult School Union, and the many and various institutes up and down the country.¹⁸

These articles give a sense that the War's destructive impact on society could not be overstressed by contemporaries, and that a much more humanitarian philosophy had to be adopted to avoid further conflict. Education was seen, however idealistically, as a viable way to reconstruct and regenerate a civil society containing harmony and mutual respect between all classes.

In connection with the concept of brotherhood, another report in *The Daily Mail* outlined the nature of an 'Ideal Education'. At a meeting of the WEA in Hull, attended by A. D. Lindsay (the Master of Balliol: 1924-1949), J. M. Mactavish¹⁹, Ben Turner MP and Frederick Holmes, discussion took place about the ideal system of education. The image of a broad, inclusive highway was used to describe a system of education that led seamlessly from primary school to university. Lindsay described 'real education' as 'the capacity to think co-operatively, for it was certainly possible to introduce into the social and commercial life of the nation more of a common mind'²⁰. Again, *The Daily Mail* chose to report the need for co-operation through education as important for society as a whole. Examining which aspects of adult education *The Daily Mail* chose to report, gives us a sense of the initiatives in adult education that were interesting to the paper: harmony and co-operation in society, and also the inclusion of working class people in an educational system that gave them the means to think intelligently.

Another article entitled 'Spreading Education' reported on an address given by Mr J. W. Muir (1874–1925) – ex-Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions, and national organiser for the WEA in Hull.²¹ Muir advocated in favour of a continuous system of education that 'should not stop at the secondary school, or even university.'²² Muir was making the case for what we now call 'lifelong learning'. He went on to identify the problem that working class people faced in becoming educated:

¹⁸ BNO, 'Brotherhood Throughout the Universe' *HDM*, p. 7.

¹⁹ James M. Mactavish was a Portsmouth shipwright and also the general secretary of the WEA. He was instrumental in establishing the principle of co-operation between the WEA and the universities in providing workers' education. Jennings, 'The Foundation and the Founder', pp. 18–19.

²⁰ BNO, 'The Ideal Education', *HDM*, (02 September 1924), p. 6. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

²¹ Muir in his early life was the editor of *The Socialist* the Marxist SLP's newspaper. He was also one of the leaders of the Clyde Workers' Committee which caused great disruption to the production of arms during the First World War. Later in life Muir became a guild socialist under the influence John Wheatley and G. D. H. Cole. Iain McClean, 'John William Muir', *ODNB* (Accessed 14 December 2017).

²² BNO, 'Spreading Education', *HDM*, (28 November 1925), p. 3. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

Working men and women... had stopped thinking because they had no formal education since they left the elementary school. Their minds were not alert and they were not trained to think, and not qualified to tackle problems that faced them from time to time. The need for widespread understanding and education was greater today than ever. It was democracy that had got to decide what direction civilisation was going to take.²³

The theme of education and democracy emerged again in a report of an address entitled “Education and Democracy” given to the Hull Branch of the WEA by Arthur Eustace Morgan (1886–1972), Principal of University College Hull. Morgan, a well known tutor in the WEA, spoke of the function of education as not only ‘a process of “putting in” but [of] bringing out and cultivating.’²⁴ Morgan made several connections between education and the state of society:

What was it that made the present division of classes in this country? Economic conditions were one of the most potent factors; but another was that a man felt embittered when he saw opportunities coming to others who had less capacity than he. Our modern system of education had gone far, but not far enough. What would make for harmony and tranquillity in Society than a system by which that deprivation were got rid of?²⁵

In terms of education and democracy, Morgan’s view that ‘education was not [...] widely enough provided to justify us in asserting that we were in any sense democratic’.²⁶ He did, however, acknowledge that society was moving towards an improved system of democratic education.

In a comment piece about Hull University College, *The Daily Mail* continued to explore the entwined themes of education, democracy, and citizenship. The article considered the importance of citizenship in connection with education by quoting Albert Mansbridge –

There is no institution in national life which can free itself from the responsibilities of training for citizenship those who come under its influence. The problem is common to all institutions [...] It is primarily the problem of all schools and places of education.²⁷

The report observed that universities were ideal places for students to learn about democracy because they represented the ‘world in miniature’. Such a world was ‘ideally democratic’ and where democratic citizenship could be best developed.²⁸ The report identified that the significance of a liberal education such as was offered by a university was that

²³ BNO, ‘Spreading Education’, *HDM*, p. 3.

²⁴ BNO, ‘Function of Education’, *HDM*, (18 September 1926) p. 1 (Downloaded 12 October 2016).

²⁵ BNO, ‘Function of Education’, *HDM*, p. 1.

²⁶ BNO, ‘Education’s Real Aim’, *HDM*, (05 February 1927), p. 4. (Downloaded 12 October 2016)

²⁷ BNO, ‘Hull University College’, *HDM* (02 November 1928), p. 8. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

²⁸ BNO, ‘Hull University College’, *HDM*, p. 8.

if people are to do their duty intelligently as citizens of a state, it is essential that they learn how to participate in the government, local and national, which their work will support. This, then, the University can teach them, not only by precept but by practice within itself.²⁹

The idea of the university as society in microcosm is interesting, and shows how the *HDM* engaged with the idea that higher education was valuable and necessary for a civil society.

The Yorkshire Post, which also reported extensively on education for democracy during the 1920s, chose a different emphasis. Several of its reports focus on the findings and recommendations of the Report of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction (Reconstruction Committee).³⁰ R. Ward (President of the Sheffield District WEA) supported the report of the Reconstruction Committee at a conference held at Sheffield University. *The Yorkshire Post* paraphrased his address as saying: ‘a well-informed public, an educated democracy, was the only foundation upon which reconstruction was possible.’³¹ H. H. Goodyear of the WEA branch at Huddersfield reiterated this message, stating that ‘the control of education must not be left entirely in the hands of authority. The students must be consulted. The question of control was fundamental’.³² Such a sentiment reflected the philosophy of the WEA, which was to be as inclusive as possible, and to tailor their courses to their students’ wishes as much as possible. *The Yorkshire Post* also paraphrased the contribution of Mr A. N. Shimmin (an economics lecturer at the University of Leeds and a longstanding WEA tutor):

He wanted the community to make progress, and not to head towards revolution. Within the next ten or fifteen years Labour would have taken to itself the doctrine to be educated, self-reliant, tolerant; or it would have split apart from all educational processes for something with more driving force in it at the moment, but with considerably less stability.³³

Three different but compatible views of adult education, democracy, and reconstruction emerge in this short, succinct report. The first supported the idea that democracy is based on sound education. The second view considered who controlled adult education. Here the emergence of the working class as a political force was recognised. Shimmin proposed the third view – that education, used wisely by the Labour movement, would prevent revolution. All three views fitted in with the traditions of pre-Great War Britain, but diverged by acknowledging that working class

²⁹ BNO, ‘Hull University College’, *HDM*, p. 8.

³⁰ *The 1919 Report; the final and interim reports of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1918-1919* reprinted with introductory essays by Harold Wiltshire, John Taylor and Bernard Jennings (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1980).

³¹ BNO, ‘News of the North’, *YP* (26 January 1920), p. 9. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

³² BNO, ‘News of the North’, *YP*, p. 9.

³³ BNO, ‘News of the North’, *YP*, p. 9.

people had a right to control the organisation, delivery and dissemination of adult education in post-Great War Britain. In this respect, adult education was to make a fundamental difference to society and empower working class people, while politically avoiding revolution.

A further *Yorkshire Post* article reported three conferences held simultaneously in Doncaster, Hull, and Leeds on 07 February 1920 to consider the implications of the report of the Reconstruction Committee. One hundred and thirty three delegates from trade unions, trade councils, education committees, adult schools and other organisations attended the Leeds conference over which Harold Clay, University of Leeds lecturer and WEA tutor, presided. F. Rogers, vice-chairman of the Yorkshire District WEA, spoke on the purpose of adult education which, in his view ‘should be a means of discipline for life itself, and not merely an instrument for securing a means of livelihood’.³⁴ Rogers saw that the way forward for providing adult education would require co-operation between voluntary bodies such as the WEA, the universities, and the LEAs.

The recommendations for improving the provision of adult education were wholeheartedly supported at this conference. Such conferences reported by the press showed an awareness that education, and specifically adult education, was topical in a society that provided education only up to the age of fourteen. It also showed an awareness of the great economic and financial difficulties that working class people had to overcome to acquire a liberal arts education at a university. Workers’ adult education provided by voluntary organisations was their only practical option if they wished to further their education as adults. The fact that Prime Minister Lloyd George’s reconstruction project included an adult education committee is highly relevant in this regard.

The theme of who controlled the reconstruction effort in adult education continues in a report on the National Council of Social Service Conference, Oxford, the topic of which was ‘the scope of voluntary effort in education.’ J. A. Legge, Director of Education for Liverpool stated that

in accordance with the essentially British principle of self-government, we had no desire to allow ourselves in the great work of reconstruction, to be dominated

³⁴ BNO, *YP*, ‘The Importance of Adult Education’ (09 February 1920), p. 8. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

entirely by officials or official agencies. What was needed was an educated laity which could play its part in controlling the official machine.³⁵

A. L. Smith (Master of Balliol, 1916-1924) explored the idea of teaching character, and suggested that ‘the attempt to teach it directly sometimes defeated its own object, and at its best produced prigs where it did not produce rebels.’³⁶ Smith for his part preferred rebels. He further observed that the British educational system was at a turning point whereby the near-total reliance on voluntary effort for services was moving towards an expectation that the state would provide for all the needs of society. In his view ‘the strength of England had always been its voluntary effort but it was one-sided, and we wanted the organised conscience of the community – what we called the State – as well.’³⁷

These reports highlight the changing perception following the War that the state could and should take a greater responsibility for providing education, as well as other forms of welfare. At the same time, the voluntary sector was recognised for its dynamism and independence. Voluntary organisations had the freedom to shape themselves independently and to respond to their clients sensitively. Without voluntary organisations the state would have near-total control. Whoever held power exerted control to the detriment or advantage of different sections of the electorate. Organisations such as the WEA had the interests of working class people at heart and wished to work with the state to give worker-students the best that British education had to offer.

Many of these reports focus on the issue of political control over workers’ adult education. In an article entitled ‘The Education of the Worker. Problems of the New Age’, *The Yorkshire Post*’s special correspondent reported on the meetings of the School of Industrial Managers at Balliol College. A. L. Smith’s main observation was that ‘without industrial democracy, political democracy is a fraud, and without education, industrial democracy will be a fraud also’.³⁸ He was critical of the trend towards specialisation in education to the detriment of developing a more holistic education. Ultimately Smith called for democracy to be strengthened through education, with his position, as the *Yorkshire Post* reported, being that:

If we don’t make better citizens our political institutions will break down under the workers’ refusal to be made mere cogs in a machine, and then perhaps we may have

³⁵ BNO, ‘Voluntary and State Effort in Social Service’, *YP* (09 April 1920), p. 11 (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

³⁶ BNO, ‘Voluntary and State Effort in Social Service’, *YP*, p. 11.

³⁷ BNO, ‘Voluntary and State Effort in Social Service’, *YP*, p. 11.

³⁸ BNO, ‘Education of the Workers’, *YP* (19 April 1920), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

to face the possibility, which he hesitated to put into words, of a civil war in our midst.³⁹

The report reflects the overriding concern of the time: war remained paramount in public consciousness, and all political and social reform was geared towards preventing further conflict. Educationalists, labour movement leaders and some industrialists perceived adult education as central to the effort to assert and maintain peace. In each of these reports, the point is repeatedly made that the true value of adult education was its potential to reinforce democracy as a political creed.

A report on the Summer School organised by the Northern Educational Settlements Association (1920) offers another useful insight. The task of the Summer School was to ‘consider the possibilities of developing the adult education movement’ in relation to the report of the Reconstruction Committee. Ramsay MacDonald himself spoke, and discussed the topic with respect to the Labour movement. MacDonald viewed the place of adult education differently to others. In his view it was not possible to ‘build any fabric upon loose and shifting sands. The mind of the working classes, the mind of the middle classes of England to-day, is nothing but loose and shifting sands.’⁴⁰ He defined adult education as ‘consisting in solving the problem of how to make one’s body, mind, and soul work in harmony, and with the most complete efficiency.’ Interestingly MacDonald thought ‘it was necessary to awaken a sense of tradition’.⁴¹ He acknowledged that such a notion might seem ‘heretical coming from him but he did not believe there could be any progressive movement without a sense of tradition’.⁴² Even though only sound-bites of MacDonald’s address are reported, they are intriguing and thought-provoking. He goes to the heart of the debate: adult education had to have a foundation, and that foundation was tradition. Without tradition, society would always be unstable. The fact that MacDonald spoke of the working and middle classes as part of a greater whole significantly shows that he had a collective vision of traditional British values binding classes together. (MacDonald’s thinking on socialism has been explored in Chapter Five, Part two)

Cannon William Temple (later Archbishop of Canterbury) at the WEA National Conference (1920) explained that the WEA ‘stood for the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity in educational matters’.⁴³ Speaking at the same conference,

³⁹ BNO, ‘Education of the Workers’, *YP*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ BNO, ‘Adult Education’, *YP* (22 June 1920), p. 4. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁴¹ BNO, ‘Adult Education’, *YP*, p. 4.

⁴² BNO, ‘Adult Education’, *YP*, p. 4.

⁴³ BNO, ‘Equality of Opportunity in Education’, *YP* (23 October 1920), p. 13. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

Fred Bramley (1874–1925), a member of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, advocated free adult education.⁴⁴ Bramley’s address, highly political in tone, called for higher wages for workers to have a better standard of life, holding that the working class ‘were not going to allow the commercial increase in the national wealth to take place on the dwarfed minds, and starved souls, and stunted bodies of the working classes’.⁴⁵

Following on from this convention, Viscount Haldane gave a Sunday Lecture in York on ‘Education and Democracy’. Haldane based his lecture around the general social unrest – strikes, workers disputes and Bolshevism – that dominated the headlines. Again, the message that all would be well ‘if the democracy were educated’ was conveyed, but with a twist. Haldane observed that ‘the real difficulty was that democracy itself was in a condition that provoked violent reaction within itself.’⁴⁶ In Haldane’s view, a more reflective society was what was needed to achieve stability. Haldane saw it as a ‘national misfortune that working class people were ‘so barred out’ of a better education compared to their wealthier neighbours’. To this end Haldane proposed that adult education as delivered by the WEA was the optimum way of bringing the university to the masses.⁴⁷

By 1921, the campaign to improve and expand adult education in accordance with the report of the Reconstruction Committee suffered a serious setback. The Education Act 1918, that would have applied many of the changes recommended by educationalists, was compromised. As reported by *The Yorkshire Post* ‘the application of the Education Act 1918 and, in particular, of those sections of the Act which relate to continued education should be indefinitely postponed.’⁴⁸ This marked the beginning of the end of the high hopes held by progressive educationalists for radical changes to the mainstream education system, as well as the start of the decline of the voluntary adult education organisations.

The Yorkshire Post continued to report on adult education in connection with democracy throughout the 1920s. For example, Sir John Simon MP, giving an address on ‘The Pursuit of Knowledge’ at a WEA meeting in Cleckheaton is reported as saying

⁴⁴ Bramley, born in Yorkshire, was President of the WEA when he died. Patrick Renshaw, ‘Fred Bramley’, *ODNB* (Accessed 14 December 2017).

⁴⁵ BNO, ‘Equality of Opportunity in Education’, *YP*, p. 13.

⁴⁶ BNO, ‘Lord Haldane on Democracy’, *YP*, (08 November 1920), p. 9. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁴⁷ BNO, ‘Lord Haldane on Democracy’, *YP*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ BNO, ‘Postponement of Continued Education’, *YP* (08 February 1921), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

that ‘the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of the mind were not all the occupations of childhood, but the concern of all our life.’⁴⁹

Another address, this time by Arthur Henderson MP to the WEA at Burnley, focused on the value of adult education.⁵⁰ Henderson ‘suggested that the Government of the country, whatever its political complexion, would be infinitely more effective if it were placed in office by an educated electorate’.⁵¹ The Bishop of Wakefield, president of the Wakefield branch of the WEA, at a conference celebrating the ‘coming-of-age’ of the WEA, discussed the converse of Henderson’s speech – the dangers of an uneducated democracy. Other speakers at the conference included the Bishop of Manchester, Dr Temple and Professor Baillie, vice-chancellor of the University of Leeds. The Bishop of Wakefield identified that

the WEA [...] believed the best educated man made the best workers in any work of life [...] and it did not value education chiefly for its vocational quality, but because it made a man a better citizen. An uneducated democracy was a rush to ruin.⁵²

Education For Democracy – 1930s

As the 1930s began, however, a subtle change took place in how the Yorkshire newspapers reported the value of education for democracy.

The theme of education and democracy was often reported in tandem with citizenship, an aspect of reportage that took on greater significance as the 1930s progressed. Arnold S. Rowntree (chairman of the directors of *The Sheffield Daily Independent*) in an editorial entitled ‘Education and Democracy’ wrote that ‘Knowledge must be within the reach of all.’⁵³ For Rowntree it was vital that

if government in this country is to continue to be based upon public opinion, pains should be taken to place the resources of knowledge and wisdom within reach of every man and every woman. The problem, that is to say, revolves itself into an educational one. If we are to refashion the social order on just and enduring lines, we must educate ourselves in the difficult problems of citizenship and human relationship.⁵⁴

Arthur Greenwood speaking at the WEA’s 1936 National Conference in Sheffield affirmed the need for a greater sense of citizenship:

In these days citizenship takes on a greater seriousness. Under dictatorship there is not citizenship. The maintenance of democratic liberty is bound up with effective

⁴⁹ BNO, ‘Pursuit of Knowledge’, *YP* (19 September 1923), p. 8. (Downloaded 03 October 2016)

⁵⁰ Chris Wrigley, ‘Arthur Henderson’, *ODNB* (Accessed 14 December 2017).

⁵¹ BNO, ‘An Educated Democracy’, *YP* (17 October 1924), p. 5. (Downloaded 04 October 2016).

⁵² BNO, ‘The Moral Elements in Culture’, *YP* (10 November 1924), p. 8. (Downloaded 04 October 2016).

⁵³ BNO, ‘Education and Democracy’, *The Sheffield Daily Independent (SDI)* (27 October 1930), p. 6. (Downloaded 14 July 2017).

⁵⁴ BNO, ‘Education and Democracy’, *SDI*, p. 6.

citizenship [...] The whole basis of our democratic structure in the last resort depends upon the standard of citizenship in this and other democratic countries.⁵⁵

As the decade progressed, the language of educationalists became more urgent in tone and content. The idea of building a peaceful and harmonious Europe was fast becoming irrelevant in debates about education and democracy. References to the threat of ‘dictatorship’ and ‘tyranny’ became more frequent, with education promoted as a defence against them. At the same (1936) conference, R. H. Tawney gave a presidential address that reflected on the nature of democracy as an ideology that, to succeed, had to be embraced by society. In Tawney’s own words:

Whatever conclusions may be drawn from the history of the last decade one surely is indisputable. It is that democracy is an unstable political system as long as it remains a political system, and nothing more, instead of being, in addition, a form of society and a manner of life.⁵⁶

The Yorkshire Post, reporting this Conference, gave a comprehensive account of Tawney’s address, allowing us to understand Tawney’s conclusion that democracy was an unstable system. He stressed that every political system was ‘maintained by opinion and by opinion is overthrown.’⁵⁷ In his view it was ‘human minds and wills’ that would preserve and maintain a particular political system. Tawney continued: ‘A bad system with a high degree of vitality will always defeat a better system without it. The source and the only permanent source of vitality is conviction.’⁵⁸ At the close of his address, Tawney connected the future of democracy with education by referring to his invention – ‘Henry Dubb’ – an ordinary English everyman, whose moral decency and intelligence was key to keeping British democracy vital:

The future of democracy depends, in the last resort on the condition of the muddled soul of Henry Dubb [...] But Henry [...] must be given a chance, and especially the little Henrys whose characters are still plastic. It is our business as a Workers’ Educational Association to that end that they have it in the matter of education.⁵⁹

The message delivered by the Conference was that ‘such authority would mean the end, for the time being at any rate, of both real education and of educational bodies, like the WEA, which believe in full expression of opinion.’⁶⁰

Another interesting aspect reported about the Sheffield WEA was the forming of a mock parliament by its members.⁶¹ Here, the WEA attempted to put theory into practice

⁵⁵ BNO, ‘Plea for Keen Sense of Citizenship’, *SDI*, (07 November 1936), p. 9. (Downloaded 17 July 2017).

⁵⁶ BNO, ‘Science to Aid of Education’, *SDI* (09 November 1936), p. 5. (Downloaded 07 August 2017)

⁵⁷ BNO, ‘Democracy on the Defensive’, *YP* (09 November 1936), p. 7. (Downloaded 20 July 2017)

⁵⁸ BNO, ‘Democracy on the Defensive’, *YP*, p. 7.

⁵⁹ BNO, ‘Democracy on the Defensive’ *YP*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ BNO, ‘Science to Aid of Education’, *SDI*, p. 5.

and conduct its own local experiment into how Parliament worked. The proceedings of the Sheffield “Parliament” were reported, the paper deeming that ‘the general debate was interesting and of good quality.’⁶²

Rural Adult Education in Yorkshire – 1920s

Rural adult education became topical in 1920, following the publication of the Reconstruction Committee’s report. A scheme to disseminate adult education across largely rural East Yorkshire was supported and promoted by *The Daily Mail*:

The scheme that has just been incepted is worthy of the support of every progressive man and woman. Several agencies are co-operating with the Northern Education Association, including the Leeds University Joint committee for Tutorial Classes and the East Riding Education Authority will also give its co-operation.⁶³

Two full-time tutors were appointed to give short courses in subjects such as ‘general and industrial history, history of agriculture, social history illustrated by the literature of the period, economics, literature, and English composition’.⁶⁴ *The Daily Mail* identified that the need for such education was to enable workers to develop the ‘ability to come to just conclusions – before taking precipitate action in industrial disputes’.⁶⁵ Such a view reflected a preoccupation with the prevalence of strikes and industrial unrest at the time.

Another report, at the end of the decade, celebrated the adult education department of the recently opened Hull University College.⁶⁶ The report pointed out that the work of the adult education department often went unnoticed because it took place in remote and inaccessible areas of East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire. It also identified that many working people in urban and agricultural areas, because of their economic circumstances, were unable to acquire a full education. In *The Daily Mail*’s words ‘The Department of Adult education exists particularly to extend the facilities of a University College to those who are unable to leave their homes or their work.’⁶⁷ The work of the WEA and University Extension was acknowledged by the report as significant and important to the region and the idea was for the work to continue in co-operation with the new University College. Also, the advantages of adult education classes run by the University College were identified as being ‘open to all’ and a space where all students

⁶¹ BNO, ‘Mock Parliament’, *SDI* (15 January 1938), p. 4 (Downloaded 14 June 2017)

⁶² BNO, ‘Mock Parliament’, *SDI*, p. 4.

⁶³ BNO, ‘More Light for ER (East Yorkshire)’ *HDM* (27 August 1920), p. 4. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁶⁴ BNO, ‘More Light for ER’, *HDM*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ BNO, ‘More Light for ER’, *HDM*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ BNO, ‘Hull University College’, *HDM* (12 October 1928), p. 12. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁶⁷ BNO, ‘Hull University College’, *HDM*, p. 12.

could contribute their views freely. This particular aspect was seen as a benefit to those ‘men and women who already know something of the more serious side of life’.⁶⁸

The Yorkshire Post also reported on the rural education scheme. George Thompson, secretary to Yorkshire District WEA, in a letter published in *The Yorkshire Post*, advertised the scheme, describing it as ‘being promoted for the provision of liberal and re-creative educational facilities in towns and villages in the eastern part of Yorkshire’.⁶⁹ The Board of Education had not granted the scheme any funds, so the Cassel Education Trust contributed £500 per annum for three years. The WEA Yorkshire District, the Leeds University Joint Committee and the East Riding Education Authority administered the money.⁷⁰

The reason for greater interest in rural adult education was outlined in a *Yorkshire Post* report in 1922. Here the phenomenon of rural education was explained as a consequence of a Government initiative and legislation. The Agriculture and Fisheries Act of 1919 which established County Agricultural Committees ‘placed upon such bodies the obligation of making inquiries with a view to formulating schemes for the development of rural industries and social life in rural places’.⁷¹ A particular emphasis was placed on recreation. A problem identified by the National Council of Social Service was that

One of the causes of the present decadence of rural life is that for generations British village life has been based on the remnants of the feudal system. Landowners, squires and clergy often devoted their lives to the service of their people, and in many villages there exist long traditions of friendship and loyalty between the classes which are of the greatest value. As a whole however the system has suppressed initiative on the part of the majority. The tendency has been, on the one hand, to give the village what has been considered good for it, and on the other, to turn to someone else for help.⁷²

The task of the Rural Development Sub-Committee was to find a solution to the malaise evident in post-War rural society. That solution as *The Yorkshire Post* put it was to ‘find means to enable country men and women to help themselves, and to bring together all classes in co-operation for the common good’.⁷³ The committee (which was

⁶⁸ BNO, ‘Hull University College’, *HDM*, p. 12.

⁶⁹ BNO, ‘Adult Education in Rural Yorkshire’, *YP* (28 August 1920), p. 9. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁷⁰ BNO, ‘Educational Scheme for Rural Yorkshire’, *YP* (08 September 1920), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁷¹ BNO, ‘Improving Rural Life’, *YP* (18 September 1922), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016)

⁷² BNO, ‘Improving Rural Life’, *YP*, p. 5.

⁷³ BNO, ‘Improving Rural Life’, *YP*, p. 5.

not funded) was under pressure to co-ordinate organisations and find funds to support rural generation locally.⁷⁴

In accord with the aims and vision of the North Riding Rural Development Sub-Committee, the WEA put great effort into organising the educational side of the rural regeneration project. Local organisations at ‘East Ayton, Hackness, Seamer, Kirbymoorside, Hovingham, Crakehall, Great Smeaton, Manfield, Barton, Harome, Nawton, and Pockley’ took advantage of non-agricultural lectures.⁷⁵ Six of these villages had populations of less than three hundred.

Reviewing a report, ‘The Educational Possibilities of Village Clubs’, published by the Committee of the Department of Adult Education, University College Nottingham, *The Yorkshire Post* noted the obstacles faced by the efforts of voluntary adult education organisations such as the WEA, the YMCA and the Women’s Institute to disseminate adult education. The report outlined the main problem:

The proportion to the whole population of adolescents and adults who desire education is small [...] The standard of living is detrimental to intellectual and social activity; while lack of leisure, and the distance between cottages makes it difficult to get workers together in the evening.⁷⁶

The report outlined the success of the WEA and sister organisations in delivering lectures on a range of subjects such as travel, literature, citizenship and local history despite ‘poverty so dire that the County Federation of Women’s Institutes “are not in a position to pay fees in addition to travelling expenses to lecturers from a distance”’.⁷⁷ The main limitation to increasing the provision of adult education in rural areas was cost but, in addition, classes tended ‘to become select groups’ with little opportunity to meet outside the class, thus losing the all-important local connection. Ideally a community centre ‘would combine the educational activities of a WEA class or classes and the social activities of a village club’.⁷⁸ The infrastructure, in the form of village clubs and institutes controlled by local independent groups, already existed but required funding support from the LEAs to establish and maintain a culture of adult education in rural areas. Ultimately the report recommended that LEAs support community centres and co-operate with voluntary organisations such as the WEA to create education councils in each locale that would work towards establishing continuity in adult

⁷⁴ BNO, ‘Improving Rural Life’, *YP*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ BNO, ‘Village Lecture Schemes’, *YP* (28 December 1922), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

⁷⁶ BNO, ‘The Educational Field’, *YP* (28 June 1923), p. 5. (Downloaded 14 October 2016).

⁷⁷ BNO, ‘The Educational Field’, *YP*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ BNO, ‘The Educational Field’, *YP*, p. 5.

education programmes in rural areas. This blend of voluntary effort with state support was very much the accepted model of the time.

A year on, the scheme was extended and the programme of lectures expanded.⁷⁹ Lectures were subsidised by the Village Club Association, making them affordable to local people. There was even access to ‘a travelling cinema outfit and concert parties, as well as the Arts League of Service for dramatic performances’.⁸⁰

Rural Adult Education in Yorkshire – 1930s

By the mid-1930s, the rural education scheme was well established. At the 1932 WEA Conference in Hull, attended by four hundred students from the East Riding and North-East Lindsay, Arthur Greenwood outlined the success of the WEA in the region. He stated that the

work of the Association had grown amazingly in the East Riding, but it was an area that remained largely untilled [...] He saw no reason why every village in the Riding should not have its group of people working on questions in which they had common interest.⁸¹

The Yorkshire Post had observed that, in 1920, the only two WEA centres in East Yorkshire were York and Middlesbrough. By 1935, as a result of the rural education project undertaken by the WEA, 75 classes were operating in the North Riding, ‘including Middlesbrough; 41 in the East Riding including Hull and York; and 16 in North Lincolnshire, including Grimsby – a total of 132 classes.’⁸² A very similar report appeared in *The Hull Daily Mail* entitled ‘15 Years of Pioneer Endeavour.’⁸³

Adult education was an important initiative in re-invigorating rural society in such a large and rural county as Yorkshire. The themes of newspaper reports revolved around returning rural communities to what was perceived as their natural state where communities existed in a state of harmony and co-operation. The war had damaged and rent apart communities, both urban and rural, and the emphasis placed on regenerating rural society perhaps indicated a longing for simpler and happier times where there was order, albeit hierarchical, best exemplified by life in an English rural village. The romantic idea of a safe retreat to the English rural idyll had been compromised by the impact of the war whereby rural communities were decimated socially and economically. Where was that traditional sense of England and could it be regained in a new form? The rural adult education experiment reflected a larger project – that of

⁷⁹ BNO, ‘Rural Life and Industry’, *YP* (19 July 1923) p. 11 (Downloaded 14 October 2016).

⁸⁰ BNO, ‘Rural Life and Industry’, *YP*, p. 11.

⁸¹ BNO, ‘Man and Machine’, *YP* (07 March 1932), p. 7. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

⁸² BNO, ‘Facilities for Education’, *YP* (05 April 1935), p. 2. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

⁸³ BNO, ‘Education for the Workers’, *HDM* (05 April 1935), p. 10. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

democratising rural communities to enable them to adapt to new social and economic circumstances, whereby all members of the community had an equal status. Newspapers, ever conscious of social change, reported rural adult education in the context of flux and instability, juxtaposed against life in the distant and supposedly stable pre-war past.

Access to Education and Inequality of Opportunity – 1930s

Though access to education was an ongoing concern throughout the 1920s, it became more of a focus during the 1930s because of cuts to the education budget and the reports of the Hadow Committee. Organisations such as the WEA were at the forefront of protests against economising on education, as well as campaigning to raise the school leaving age to fifteen. The WEA in particular made themselves heard on these issues and held several large public demonstrations in Yorkshire to raise public awareness of the state of secondary education. The press reported these events comprehensively.

For example, at the annual meeting of the Sheffield WEA, the chairman of the Sheffield branch of the WEA, ‘passed a resolution urging on the Government the importance of immediate action with regard to the Bill for raising the school leaving age’.⁸⁴ The York WEA opposed ‘the proposal to curtail the number of free places in secondary schools and to impose a means test on parents’, and passed a resolution stating that ‘the suggested means test will inflict very great hardship upon large numbers of parents, exclude many deserving scholars from the schools, and diminish the numbers of those receiving secondary education.’⁸⁵ In a countywide protest against cuts to the education budget, the Yorkshire District North WEA organised a series of conferences at Hull, Middlesbrough, Halifax, Bradford, Leeds, Wakefield, Barnsley, and Goole in 1932.⁸⁶ Amongst the speakers at the various conferences were R. H. Tawney, Dr Temple, Arthur Creech Jones⁸⁷ MP (A. C. Jones), and Harold Clay – all of them deeply committed educationalists in the WEA. A ‘resolution of protest against economies in educational services’ was passed at the conferences⁸⁸ which asserted that the ‘the needs for the provision of a national system of public education available for all persons capable of profiting thereby is not lessened by the special

⁸⁴ BNO, ‘Workers’ Education’, *SDI* (03 March 1930), p.4. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

⁸⁵ BNO, ‘Parents’ Means Test’, *Leeds Mercury (LM)* (17 October 1932), p.7. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

⁸⁶ Leeds, *The Yorkshire Post Offices, Yorkshire Post Cuttings Archive, YP*, (05 December 1932), n.p.

⁸⁷ BNO, Creech Jones was deeply committed to the project of adult education and served as Governor of Ruskin College from 1923 to 1954, vice president of the WEA and vice chairman of the British Institute Adult Education. Patricia M Pugh, ‘Arthur Creech Jones’, *ODNB* (Accessed 14 December 2017)

⁸⁸ *YP Cuttings, YP* (05 December 1932), n.p.

circumstances prevailing on our time.’⁸⁹ At the 1932 Annual Conference of the WEA in York, the Archbishop of York Dr Temple, gave an address emphasising the ‘need for equal opportunity’.⁹⁰ Speaking on justice and equality of opportunity Temple stated that it was that lack of equality of opportunity that was ‘by far the greatest and deepest injustice of modern life’.⁹¹

Arthur Greenwood, like Temple, speaking on the impact of education cuts and raising the school leaving age in 1934, emphasised the need for equality in education opportunities:

It may be that it is not a very large number of children who have been debarred from access to the secondary schools [...] But the very fact that in the fourth decade of the Twentieth century it should be possible for anybody to dare to bang the door of a secondary school in the face of a single child proves to mind that the people of this country have not yet realised the significance and the importance of secondary education as the very foundation of democracy in this country.⁹²

In 1934, the General Secretary to the WEA, A. S. Firth, wrote to the Sheffield Daily Independent protesting against the Government’s education cuts set out in ‘Circular 1331’, which halted many of the school-building schemes recommended by the Hadow Committee and launched by the Labour Government in 1929.⁹³

The seriousness of the concern about cuts to the education budget was acknowledged at a political level. In 1931, at the beginning of the economic crisis, to allay fears about the impact of education cuts, Ramsay MacDonald attempted to reassure the WEA by writing to the organising secretary of the WEA. MacDonald expressed regret at having to impose cuts on the education budget but, he emphasised, due to the extreme nature of the financial emergency, education savings had to be made. He tried to rescue the situation by assuring the WEA that the ‘education system – and not least the work for adults, with which your Association is specially and most honourably connected – shall come to no real harm’.⁹⁴ However, MacDonald’s attempts to allay the fears of the education community failed and, by 1935, four years into the education cuts A. C. Jones at the WEA conference in Birmingham is reported to have ‘declared that during the past four years [...] our educational system has been

⁸⁹*YP* Cuttings, *YP* (05 December 1932), n.p.

⁹⁰ BNO, ‘Educational Ideals’, *YP* (21 March 1932), p. 5. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

⁹¹ BNO, ‘Educational Ideals’, *YP*, p. 5.

⁹² BNO, ‘Wakefield MP Attacks School Economics’, *LM* (25 June 1934), p. 3. (Downloaded 20 June 2017).

⁹³ BNO, ‘Time for Forward Move in Education’ *SDI*, (19 July 1933), p. 6 (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

⁹⁴ BNO, ‘New Development in Education’, *YP* (26 September 1931), p. 9. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

“tragically starved”⁹⁵ R. H. Tawney at the same Conference reported that 54,569 students were enrolled in the WEA, showing the increasing relevance of education provider bodies such as the WEA in an economic environment with increasingly limited access to education.

The anxiety about education economies in the 1930s was shared by several other organisations. At a 1936 demonstration held at Central Hall, Westminster, the Association of Education Committees, the National Union of Teachers, the Educational Institute of Scotland, the School Age Council and the WEA gathered to protest against the Education Bill exemptions.⁹⁶ The resolution passed at this demonstration stated that

the Education Bill will be ineffective for its main purpose unless it provides for the raising of the school leaving age, without exemptions, to fifteen years, and further, that due provision should be made for the payment of maintenance allowances recognised from grant purposes to enable necessitous children to remain at school to that higher age.⁹⁷

At this meeting H. B. Lees-Smith MP⁹⁸, President of the Board of Education in the 1929 Labour Government, said that ‘the Bill was really an anti-climax and a great educational mistake was about to be committed.’⁹⁹

This collection of articles in the Yorkshire press reflects the preoccupations and concerns of adult as well as other campaigners for adult, and other, education. The 1870, 1902, and 1918 Education Acts improved access to education for all, as well as raising the general standard of education, but the straitened economic climate of the 1930s placed all those improvements in jeopardy. Pro-education campaigners were deeply aware of the difficulties in maintaining and developing a strong education system, and were at pains to raise awareness about the damage that education budget cuts could inflict on a fragile service. The tone of the press reporting in this area is supportive to the pro-educationalists, reflecting the concerns of the general readership about the future of their children in a world where education was increasingly a pre-requisite to gaining employment, yet where access to it appeared to be shrinking.

What is most striking about the reports is their frequency, and how they placed developments in education provision in Yorkshire in the national context. All the

⁹⁵ BNO, ‘Conference Criticism at Birmingham’, *YP* (16 December 1935), p. 7. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

⁹⁶ BNO, ‘Education Bill Exemption’, *YP* (02 March 1936), p. 3. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

⁹⁷ BNO, ‘Education Bill Exemption’, *YP*, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Lees-Smith (1878–1941) served as vice principal of Ruskin College during the Ruskin Student Strike. As a progressive liberal his ideas about education did not chime with the Ruskin College student strikers in 1909. For more details of Lee-Smith’s role in the strike see Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, pp. 59 – 60. Lees-Smith replaced Charles Trevelyan as President of the Board of Education in 1931. Andrew Thorpe, ‘Bertrand Hastings Lees-Smith’, *ODNB* (Accessed 14 December 2017).

⁹⁹ BNO, ‘Education Bill Exemption’, *YP*, p. 3.

newspapers studied appear to have supported the opposition of the WEA and of other educational organisations to limiting secondary education provision as a result of the depressed economy. Also frequently voiced in the press was the idea that gaining a secondary education should not be dictated by wealth. Here, the Labour Party's principle of equality in opportunity is raised repeatedly. At the heart of the reports is a basic message of injustice: the education cuts the government proposed would not affect the wealthy, but rather the poor and less well off. This was a situation that educationalists had been campaigning to alter over many years. In this regard, WEA supporters in Yorkshire had much to publicise and, with the support of local newspapers, achieved considerable success.

Leisure Time and Unemployment – 1930s

Another source of anxiety amongst the adult education community was the impact of high unemployment on working class people during the early 1930s. This concern manifested itself in various newspaper reports throughout the period which place the problem of unemployment coupled with increased leisure time in context.

Temple, speaking at the 1932 Annual Conference of the WEA in York, observed the irony of unemployment and leisure time when he asked his audience to 'reflect upon the strange fact that they had a situation now which was called leisure when a man had a little money, but was called unemployment when he had none'.¹⁰⁰ This neatly encapsulated the issue. The British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) at their Annual Conference in Oxford in 1932 considered the 'problem of preventing the demoralisation of the unemployed'.¹⁰¹ An example of one of the questions raised in relation to the growing problem of unemployment was 'How shall we help them to keep their faith in the social system and maintain their powers of work and service to society?'.¹⁰² A. S. Firth placed the issue of unemployment and leisure in context in his address to the conference:

Unless something is done with increasing unemployment we stand in grave danger of our young men and women swinging right over to a revolutionary outlook on life. People long out of a job find it difficult to mix with their fellows on equal terms. They are conscious of their impoverishment; they are sensitive to their position; and criticisms from their more fortunate fellow citizens tend to promote in them feelings, in some degree at least, hostile to society. The unemployed should be treated with respect as unfortunate citizens, not as ne'er do wells.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ BNO, 'Educational Ideals', *YP* (21 March 1932), p. 5. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

¹⁰¹ BNO, 'Help the Workers', *LM* (21 September 1931), p. 3. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

¹⁰² BNO, 'Help the Workers', *LM*, p. 3.

¹⁰³ BNO, 'Demoralisation of the Workless', *YP* (21 September 1931), p. 7. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

Firth's vision was for adult education to support the unemployed and to provide them with 'a means of escape for the individual from his present experience and environment'.¹⁰⁴

Other leading members of the WEA in Yorkshire also voiced their concerns about the plight of the unemployed. Arthur Greenwood speaking on the subject of "Education and Leisure" at the 25th North of England Conference in Nottingham in 1932 predicted that in the 'next quarter of a century our industrial leaders would be able to show how mankind could live a reasonable, happy and prosperous life with a working day of perhaps four hours'.¹⁰⁵ Greenwood was concerned that the unemployed would use their leisure time unwisely by 'propping up a public-house'. In his view it was crucial that people with leisure time 'should have some way of using it which would be of personal advantage to themselves'.¹⁰⁶ This was where the WEA came in, offering education that would support people in making the most of their leisure time. A. Barratt Brown, Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford, addressing a Yorkshire North District WEA rally suggested that 'education for leisure should take precedence over education for work, because it is in leisure that an increasing number of people spend the most significant and fruitful moments of the lives'.¹⁰⁷ Arnold Shimmin, speaking in 1935 on the problem of unemployment for the state and the citizen, posed a question about the impact of unemployment: 'Has the spread of unemployment brought us to the position in which the state is to be regarded as the authority directly responsible for dealing with it?'¹⁰⁸ He suggested that giving the state complete power to solve the problem of unemployment would lead to tyranny. He used the example of Germany to illustrate his point:

If a state undertakes to guard against any risk of citizenship, it is rather a terrifying thought that the price is to be blind obedience to the state [...] It is being pressed here, and put into force in Germany where pistols have been used to punctuate the sentences that dictate the law.¹⁰⁹

G. D. H. Cole expressed a sombre view of an increasingly mechanised economy in relation to unemployment and greater leisure time. Cole predicted that rationalisation 'would throw a large number of men out of work', and that 'changed conditions caused by rationalisation would force the trade unions to change their methods'.¹¹⁰ The biggest change would be that fewer skilled workers would take the place of unskilled workers

¹⁰⁴ BNO, 'Demoralisation of the Workless', *YP*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ BNO, 'Use of Leisure', *YP* (08 January 1932), p. 3. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

¹⁰⁶ BNO, 'Use of Leisure', *YP*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ BNO, 'Leisure Time is Most Important', *HDM* (09 March 1936) p. 7. (Downloaded 07 June 2017).

¹⁰⁸ BNO, 'The Citizen and the State', *YP* (09 July 1934), p. 9. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

¹⁰⁹ BNO, 'The Citizen and the State', *YP*, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ BNO, 'Economist on the Effect of Rationalisation', *LM* (10 March 1930), p. 3. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

and craftsmen. Instead of fighting for wage increases, trade unions would have to focus on improving working conditions. Cole declared that ‘the only way in which the workers could ensure they would be best treated under rationalisation was to control its progress by means of political action. That meant a permanent Socialist Government.’¹¹¹

As shown here, the Yorkshire press reported the problem of unemployment and increased leisure time in an educational, as well as economic, framework and context. Many of the reports allude to the growing dictatorship in Germany, caused in part by mass unemployment, political instability and a failing economy. The British adult education movement watched the development of authoritarian states in continental Europe and drew parallels with the potential for such a state to grow in Britain. Newspaper reports focused on this aspect of the debate about unemployment and leisure in connection with the world of workers’ adult education in Britain.

Local Issues in Adult Education 1920s and 1930s – Political Bias

The press reports that have been studied show little evidence of any major controversy surrounding the WEA. However, as with any organisation, there were occasional problems. I will outline three incidents that will give insight into opposition to the WEA.

In 1920 opposition to the WEA occurred at a meeting of the Leeds Education Committee of the Leeds Municipal Council ‘over the question of appointing delegates to a conference of the Workers’ Educational Association’ due to take place in Leeds to discuss the report of the Reconstruction Committee. The Higher Education Sub-Committee reported that they would not be sending a delegate to the conference. Councillor D. B. Foster ‘moved that the minute be referred back’ as ‘he considered that the committee ought to be in close touch with a voluntary organisation like the Workers’ Educational Association, which was doing so much for adult education.’¹¹² The sub-committee decided not to send a representative to the conference because as stated by Alderman W. H. Clarke, ‘the Workers’ Educational Association was becoming an organisation of one political party’.¹¹³ Clarke pointed out that ‘The two chief speakers will be Mr Harold Clay and the Rev D. Stewart who are principally known for their activities on behalf of the Labour Party.’¹¹⁴ Clarke said that he ‘used to

¹¹¹ BNO, ‘Economist on the Effect of Rationalisation’, *LM*, p. 3.

¹¹² BNO, ‘Leeds Education Committee and the WEA’, *YP* (29 January 1920), p. 5. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹¹³ BNO, ‘Leeds Education Committee and the WEA’, *YP*, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ BNO, ‘Leeds Education Committee and the WEA’, *YP*, p. 5.

subscribe to the Workers' Educational Association but it took such a course that I withdrew my subscription'. Foster's amendment was rejected and the minutes carried.

In another example, the secretary of the Yorkshire Conservative Teacher's Circle, who had 'referred to the WEA as having a political bias' led Albert Tallant, in his letter to *The Yorkshire Post*, to offer reassurance to

the Conservative teachers that the WEA could not obtain Board of Education and local Education Committee grants if it taught subjects from any political standpoint. The classes are all subject to inspection by the Board and the local education authority.¹¹⁵

These reports highlighted the difference of opinion among Leeds City Council members about the political nature of the WEA. The WEA always claimed to be non-political and non-sectarian, and they certainly were less overtly so than the NCLC. Even so, the WEA was perceived by many to be closely connected to the Labour Party.

Another controversy reported on at length was the demand by Colonel P. Saltmarshe, a member of East Riding County Council, that WEA lecturers and lecture subjects be vetted and approved by the East Riding County Council. Saltmarshe perceived that one of the East Riding WEA lecturers was delivering education with a political bias in his classes, rather than complying with WEA rules to be non-political and non-sectarian. This came at a time when the WEA were embarking on their programme to increase the provision of rural education in Yorkshire. In a letter to *The Yorkshire Post*, which had quoted him inaccurately in a previous report, Saltmarshe tried to set the record straight:

What I did say was that "while the central body was quite honest and approved of by the Government, I had a strong reasons for suspecting that the East Riding Branch was not free from political bias and was not sufficiently controlled."¹¹⁶

Saltmarshe's resolution 'insisted "that the lecturers as well as the subject of the lectures should be decided on by the joint committee proposed"¹¹⁷. The controversy continued into 1924 where the 'Question of Socialist Propaganda' came up at the East Riding County Council quarterly meeting.¹¹⁸ At this meeting, with Lord Delamore in the chair, Saltmarshe managed to suspend the standing order and presented an amendment whereby

the grant be given on condition that the Workers' Educational Association consent to the appointment of the lecturers being decided upon by a committee of four

¹¹⁵ BNO, 'Disarmament', *YP* (22 February 1933), p. 2. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

¹¹⁶ BNO, 'Adult Education', *YP* (05 November 1923), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹¹⁷ BNO, 'Adult Education', *YP*, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ BNO, 'Question of Socialist Propaganda', *YP* (02 February 1924), p. 7. (Downloaded 14 October 2016).

members of the Workers' [Educational] Association and four members of the East Riding County Council." He said he wanted joint control over the system of adult education carried on by the Worker's [*sic*] Educational Association.¹¹⁹

The clerk Mr Bickersteth and Alderman Burton supported Saltmarshe's amendment but Archdeacon Lambert opposed it, pointing out that the Council only gave the WEA £100, one third of the expenses of the Association, and therefore questioned if it was fair to have complete control of the lectures. Saltmarshe contended that they only wanted joint control. Lambert made a strong case in favour of giving the WEA an unconditional grant. In his view, having spoken to many WEA students in the area

he was convinced that there was no single representative member on the Council – apart from the Aldermen who were not in touch with their constituents – who would dare go to his constituents and back his opinion as to whether these lectures should be continued.¹²⁰

Lambert also made the point that the East Riding County Council had tried, 'at considerable expense to the ratepayers, and without much success, 'to give lectures and classes all over the Riding'. However 'the Workers' Educational Association had succeeded where the council had failed.'¹²¹

Another councillor John Byass, in support of Saltmarshe, thought that the Council 'should know where they stood with regard to the lecturers, and, at any rate, have some control over them'.¹²² Alderman Cheverton Brown, seconding the resolution, supported the Saltmarshe case to have greater control over lecturers and lecture subjects:

The reason lay in the fact that the Council was determined to keep a sharp eye on any propaganda of Socialism, and if public money were spent on these lectures they as public representatives, ought to have some control over them. He was told that at these lectures there were subtle attempts at Socialist propaganda of an objectionable character, and, if this were true, the Council should not approve it. Propaganda of that character was deplorable, and it should be subject to supervision [...] They desired the lectures to be helpful in developing the people on proper lines.

Saltmarshe's 'resolution was defeated by thirty-two votes to thirty-one'.¹²³ The opposition to the WEA was on the grounds that some members of the East Riding County Council believed that by giving the WEA total control over adult education, that they would be indirectly supporting socialism. This was unacceptable to them and the evidence above gives a sense of the strength of feeling on both sides of the debate.

¹¹⁹ BNO, 'Question of Socialist Propaganda', *YP*, p. 7.

¹²⁰ BNO, 'Question of Socialist Propaganda', *YP*, p. 7.

¹²¹ BNO, 'Question of Socialist Propaganda', *YP*, p. 7.

¹²² BNO, 'Question of Socialist Propaganda', *YP*, p. 7.

¹²³ BNO, 'Question of Socialist Propaganda', *YP*, p. 7.

In an unusual report in *The Hull Daily Mail*, a Conservative perspective was presented on the place of the WEA in the socialist movement. T. N. Graham, Secretary of the Bonar Law Memorial Trust in Hull, addressed ‘the Hull and District Women’s Conservative and Union’s Club on the subject of “The Individual in politics”’.¹²⁴ Graham observed that

The work of educating people in Socialism had not been left to the few, but taken up as a mass attack. In many parts of the country the Socialist Party had virtually secured control of the Co-operative Movement, and the WEA which was set up in this country to extend University Education to the working people.¹²⁵

In Graham’s view this had happened because of complacency on the part of the Conservatives. He advocated for education on the ‘fundamentals of government and of Conservative policy’ to counter the success of socialist education.¹²⁶ Graham too, was arguing the case for an educated democracy except from a Conservative perspective.

On the whole, despite the above isolated flare-ups, the reporting of confrontation, controversy and conflict surrounding the WEA is minimal. This lack of evidence of reported controversy would seem to indicate that adult education as provided by the WEA was, by and large, accepted by the local press as a positive and much-needed adjunct to State education.

The above section presented the more controversial reports made by the local and regional press about the WEA. However, the press also reported the successes and impact of the WEA. Several reports draw attention to the success of working class aspirants who had improved themselves through adult education. If the WEA played a part in their success, the reports always mention it. The stories of several miners, mainly in the Sheffield area, were reported over the years including, notably, a coalminer, Leonard O’Donnell, who ‘While working at the Yorkshire Main Colliery, Edlington, three years ago [...] won an Oxford and Cambridge Board of Extramural Studies Scholarship at Cambridge’.¹²⁷ He was a prominent member of the Edlington branch of the WEA. Another miner, M. Bushby, ‘the Hatfield Main miners’ delegate to ‘the Yorkshire Mineworkers’ Association’ was ‘awarded a senior scholarship offered by the WEA to members of bona-fide trade unions to attend the international Labour Office Summer School at Geneva in July.’ Bushby was also a member of Thorne Rural

¹²⁴ BNO, ‘The Individual’s Part in Present Day Politics’, *HDM* (07 May 1936), p. 13. (Downloaded 07 June 2017).

¹²⁵ BNO, ‘The Individual’s Part in Present Day Politics’, *HDM*, p. 13.

¹²⁶ BNO, ‘The Individual’s Part in Present Day Politics’, *HDM*, p. 13.

¹²⁷ BNO, ‘Former Miner’s Success’, *YP* (03 August 1935), p. 12. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

Council and one-time chairman of Stainforth Parish Council.¹²⁸ Albert Dowdell, a miner at Mainsforth Colliery took ‘the degree of BA and 1st class honours at Oxford University.’ Dowdell was a student of the WEA and ‘with the help of the Club and Institute Union he was able to proceed to Ruskin College to begin his studies.’ He travelled the two hundred miles to Oxford by bicycle.¹²⁹ George Welch, a coal miner at the Elsecar Main Colliery and a member of the WEA ‘won an award of the University Exhibition offered by the West Riding County Council for 1933-34’.¹³⁰

Other success stories involving non-miners were those of Albert Johnson and L. J. Edwards. Albert Johnson, a village cobbler from Barton-on-Humber and also a student of the WEA, succeeded in gaining a Bachelors of Science with first class honours. Johnson became a tutor of the WEA for North Lincolnshire and taught a class in Woralby. Johnson’s talents as a tutor were observed by none other than John Maynard Keynes, economist and Bursar of King’s College, Cambridge, who attended Johnson’s class while on official business for the College, which owned farms in the village.¹³¹ Another report entitled ‘Working Class Aspirant’ recounted the career of L. J. Edwards, who was appointed secretary of the Union of Post Engineers at the age of thirty-three. Edwards was described as a ‘product of Mirfield College and Leeds University, one time Leeds City Councillor, WEA tutor in Yorkshire and until his present appointment Secretary for Adult Education in the University of Liverpool’.¹³² The report went on to establish his working class aspirations:

At Leeds he was chairman of the Students’ Labour Society, and for his degree he wrote a thesis on trade unionism in the wool textile industry, a piece of work which brought him into contact with Sir Ben Turner. His first WEA class in Leeds was made up entirely of postal workers.¹³³

These reports, in addition to the many mentions made of the WEA in the biographies and obituaries of the public servants detailed in Chapter Five, indicate that the local and regional press had a healthy awareness of the WEA as an important educational organisation. From the way in which these stories are reported, it is clear that the Yorkshire press consistently made connections between workers’ adult education, working class aspirations, and public service. An element of ‘giving back’ to the community is always highlighted by the reports. Here, then, was proof as far as the press were concerned of the value of adult education to working class aspirants.

¹²⁸ BNO, ‘Distinction for Miners’ Delegate’, *LM* (30 May 1939), p. 3. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹²⁹ BNO, ‘Miner BA’, *SDI* (01 August 1931), p. 7. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹³⁰ BNO, ‘Collier for University’, *SDI* (08 March 1934), p. 9. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹³¹ BNO, ‘From Cobbler to Bachelor of Science’, *SDI* (18 April 1936), p. 8. (Downloaded 14 June 2017).

¹³² BNO, ‘Working Class Aspirant’, *YP* (26 November 1937), p. 8. (Downloaded 20 July 2017).

¹³³ BNO, ‘Working Class Aspirant’, *YP*, p. 8.

Other reports about the WEA further advertise its success. The Sheffield WEA was described as the ‘most active in the land [...] according to the annual report of the Yorkshire district (South) of the WEA.’ This was based on the observation that in Sheffield there were ‘more classes in proportion to the population in the district than in any other part of Great Britain.’¹³⁴ The state of the WEA in Sheffield was also reported, using the WEA’s own statistics. In 1933, *The Sheffield Daily Independent* noted from the half-yearly meeting of the Sheffield WEA that ‘branch membership was 220 and the student membership was 420’.¹³⁵ Another report outlined the success of the Swinton University Tutorial class which had been operating for ten years. Here the secretary D. L. Franks said that ‘many successful scholarships are claimed by the class. A scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford, was won by Herbert Atkinson in 1931, when he was a fireman on a railway engine.’¹³⁶ Atkinson was awarded a BA in English (third class) in 1934.¹³⁷ Overall these reports show how well established the WEA was in Yorkshire, and how it formed a significant part of adult education network in the region.

Reporting of the National Council of Labour Colleges

So far, we have seen how local and regional newspapers reported the WEA. It is now time to get a sense of how the Labour Colleges were perceived by newspapers.

The Labour Colleges and NCLC, affiliated to the Plebs League, always presented themselves as political, sectarian, and biased. They were determined to promote and provide a new type of education that owned nothing to state. To that end, the Labour Colleges only accepted donations from bona fide labour movement organisations such as trade unions. The reports about the NCLC are always much more colourful and controversial than the reports about the WEA. The NCLC were also never shy about campaigning for political goals. *The Hull Daily Mail*, for example, published a letter from the Hull Branch of the Plebs League calling for the release of fifty-three political prisoners (six of them British-born subjects) serving sentences of up to twenty years in the USA. The prisoners in question were conscientious objectors to the war.¹³⁸ The postscript to the letter is perhaps the most interesting aspect, as it asks: ‘We would greatly appreciate publicity for this letter.’¹³⁹ The fact that *The Hull Daily Mail*

¹³⁴ BNO, ‘Sheffield WEA Lead’, *SDI* (22 August 1931), p. 9. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹³⁵ BNO, ‘WEA Pay Tribute to Sheffield University’, *SDI* (13 October 1933), p. 7. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹³⁶ BNO, ‘Power for Good’, *SDI* (08 October 10 1935), p. 11. (Downloaded 13 June 2017).

¹³⁷ *Balliol College Register*, 2nd & 3rd Editions (1854-1950), p. 315. <<http://www.archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk>> (Accessed 20 September 2017).

¹³⁸ BNO, Hull Branch Plebs League, *HDM* (29 March 1923), p. 7. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹³⁹ BNO, Hull Branch Plebs League, *HDM*, p. 7.

complied with their request indicated that the paper had a degree of sympathy with the Plebs and the Labour Colleges.

In a report of the conference of the Tailors' and Garment Workers' Union, *The Hull Daily Mail* reported that, amongst other business, the 'conference resolved to provide independent working-class education for members by and through claims put in operation in conjunction with the National Council of Labour Colleges'.¹⁴⁰ At the 1927 Annual Conference of the Distributive and Allied Workers Union, *The Yorkshire Post* reported that: 'Strong opposition was made to a motion of the Bolton Co-operative Branch favouring an education scheme in conjunction with the Workers' Educational Trade Union Congress.'¹⁴¹ Mr A. Hodgetts of the Executive Committee objected, saying that 'the resolution was an attempt which some members of the Trades Union Congress General Council were making to mix that which would not mix. Independent working class education could not mix with a State-aided workers educational association.'¹⁴²

The Labour Colleges specifically campaigned for more opportunities for women to access education, and this was reported in newspapers of the time. George Hicks¹⁴³, in a presidential address at the annual meeting of the NCLC, placed the issue of women's education in these terms: 'instead of caves, we have small rooms where women are shut in between four walls for the major portion of their lives.'¹⁴⁴ He went on to describe women as inward-looking and apathetic in relation to their political outlook because of their conditions. This, Hicks said, was changing because of the 'industrialisation of women'. Another factor that contributed to this change was 'the entry of women into politics'. The report gives the impression that Hicks identified women as being an important political group who had the potential to contribute to the Labour cause. To this end Hicks saw that there 'was an immense field of activity in training women to become propagandists, trade union organisers and active in politics and co-operation.'¹⁴⁵

Here, then, is an example of how the NCLC regarded education, specifically IWCE, as a strategic tool in making labour men and women fit for political purpose. It also shows the NCLC's strong tendency always to politicise education rather than

¹⁴⁰ BNO, 'Tailors and Garments Workers', *YP* (13 June 1924), p. 9. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁴¹ BNO, 'Leeds Grievance', *YP* (19 April 1927), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁴² BNO, 'Leeds Grievance', *YP*, p. 5.

¹⁴³ Hicks was General Secretary of the AUBTW. Eric De Normann, 'George (Ernest) Hicks', *ODNB*. (Accessed 14 December 2017).

¹⁴⁴ BNO, 'Women's Education', *YP* (29 July 1929), p. 14. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁴⁵ BNO, 'Women's Education', *YP*, p. 14.

appreciate the more humane and civilising aspects of it. Such reports illuminate the differences between the NCLC's and WEA's philosophies on education. The language used by the WEA and NCLC to describe and communicate the function of adult education also differs; the NCLC clearly state their political goals, whereas the WEA emphasise the value of a traditional liberal arts education in terms of democracy and citizenship rather than revolution.

A further report makes the NCLC's political aims clear by the headline: 'REBELS AGAINST CLASS DOMINATION',¹⁴⁶ the *Yorkshire Evening Post* reporting that:

The "Labour College" movement with headquarters in London, one of the objects of which is to "create rebels against class domination," has taken root in Leeds and a deputation appeared before the Leeds Trades and Labour Council to ask for the co-operation of that body.¹⁴⁷

The Council gave their 'benediction' to the deputation.¹⁴⁸ Further on in the report, a more nuanced and careful explanation is made of the type of education that the Labour College provided:

The term "Labour College," it was explained to-day does not imply a building. The "college" is simply a system of education, and the movement is a development of the educational side of trade union and Socialist endeavour. It is in many ways akin to the Workers' Educational Association, but with a more Marxian outlook.¹⁴⁹

Another area where the NCLC tended to hit the headlines was in connection with the TUC education scheme launched at the 1925 TUC Congress in Scarborough. The TUC's educational project was to control and deliver workers' adult education to its members. LEAs expected that they would receive requests for funding to support various schemes. The report outlined the conditions they placed on organisations delivering adult education that were funded by LEAs:

- 1) Courses of study assisted out of public funds had to be non-political;
- 2) Qualified teachers had to deliver the courses;
- 3) The course had to be open to all students who wished to take the course and who would benefit from it;
- 4) Each class receiving public funding 'should be open to inspection by the authority, and that the syllabus and tutor should be approved by the authority.'¹⁵⁰

The NCLC would not comply with such conditions, whereas the WEA co-operated with the LEAs. For the WEA, compliance was no hardship because they always

¹⁴⁶ BNO, 'Rebels Against Class Distinction', *YEP* (31 January 1924), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁴⁷ BNO, 'Rebels Against Class Distinction', *YEP*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁸ Details of this can be found in Chapter Four.

¹⁴⁹ BNO, 'Rebels Against Class Distinction', *YEP* (31 January 1924), p. 5.

¹⁵⁰ BNO, 'Education Grants', *HDM* (16 February 1926), p. 9. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

maintained that their form of liberal arts education was non-political, impartial and non-sectarian. As far as the WEA was concerned, this was its great strength.

In a letter to the editor of *The Yorkshire Post*, J. Barker White, a member of the Central Council of Economic Leagues, expressed irritation at the conduct of the NCLC, describing them as ‘sowers of strife’.¹⁵¹ Barker White was chiefly concerned with maintaining stability following the coal strikes and believed that the Communist Party was agitating against industrial peace. He alluded to inflammatory headlines in *The Workers’ Weekly* such as “Slave peace shall not endure”. He pointed out that ‘considering the influence of Moscow behind the Communist Party these declarations are not surprising but the Socialists are also taking part in the campaign.’¹⁵² He identified the Plebs and the Labour Colleges as ‘the Socialists’ and quoted headlines from the *Plebs* magazine that aimed to disrupt the industrial peace, such as: ‘Get ready for the fight’, and ‘any man who cried ‘peace’ where there is no peace is an enemy of the workers.’¹⁵³ In Barker White’s view, the ‘campaign against peace in industry’ meant that

certain persons, many of them holding responsible positions in the Socialist and trade union movements, are prepared to use the rank and file of the trade unions as cannon fodder in their attack on the present industrial and social system.¹⁵⁴

Barker White regarded socialists calling for further strikes in the name of workers’ rights as hypocritical and self-serving, and against the interests of working people. His view expressed a widely held attitude to industry at this time. It also highlights how the Plebs and Labour Colleges could be regarded as irresponsible.

Reference to the Labour Colleges being under Communist influence appears in another report at a 1928 conference held by the General and Municipal Workers. Here a ‘complaint of the communist influence in the National Council of Labour Colleges was made in a report on the educational work of the Union’.¹⁵⁵ Again, the report outlined the difference between the WEA and the NCLC in the education they delivered. J. R. Clynes¹⁵⁶ MP is reported as saying that ‘the Union desired education which was unfettered by class and party bias.’¹⁵⁷ Another delegate reported that the WEA was ‘non-political and non-denominational’ but that the NCLC was different because

¹⁵¹ BNO, ‘Sowers of Strife’, *YP* (09 December 1926), p. 5. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁵² BNO, ‘Sowers of Strife’ *YP*, p. 5.

¹⁵³ BNO, ‘Sowers of Strife’ *YP*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ BNO, ‘Sowers of Strife’ *YP*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ BNO, ‘Labour Colleges’, *YP* (31 May 1928), p. 5. (Downloaded 04 October 2016).

¹⁵⁶ J. S. Middleton, ‘John Robert Clynes’, *ODNB* (Accessed 14 December 2017).

¹⁵⁷ BNO, ‘Labour Colleges’ *YP*, p. 5.

it is definitely a propagandist body not confined solely to educational service, irrespective of politics. It seemed moreover to reveal a tendency towards Communist ideals, and in the main, has attracted members who support the views of the Communist Party¹⁵⁸

In conclusion, the National Executive of the General Municipal Workers Union considered that education provided by the NCLC was not ‘satisfactory and free from prejudice’ when compared with the WEA. Also the NCLC had been more hostile towards the Union recently. Although one delegate moved that an equal amount of funds be allocated to the WEA and the NCLC, the Executive decided to allocate £300 to the WEA and £100 to the NCLC.¹⁵⁹

In accord with the NCLC’s politics, its members often entered political debates, such as a “socialist versus fascist” debate held under the auspices of Leeds Trades Council Unemployment Association.¹⁶⁰ Fred Shaw, organiser of NCLC classes in Yorkshire division, presented the Socialist view, saying that ‘ultimately the Fascist movement must be identified with Capitalist interests, which it was the object of the workers to destroy.’ Mr L. G. Waterman of the National Union of Fascists presented the fascist view and refuted Shaw’s argument. He agreed that ‘it was a danger to Democracy, but he claimed that it could be only a benefit to the common people [...] He believed that Nationalism was a biological necessity.’¹⁶¹ Again, this report highlights how the political nature of the NCLC made it more prepared to enter public political debates.

Conclusion

The sections above give a review of what the Yorkshire press reported about adult education from 1918 to 1939. Some themes were reported in greater depth than others, but what is interesting about the reporting is how the themes – democracy and citizenship, unemployment and leisure, rural regeneration, political bias and revolution – were all firmly connected with adult education. Part Two will give an analysis of why this was so, in the historiographical and intellectual context of the inter-war period.

¹⁵⁸ BNO, ‘Labour Colleges’ *YP*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ BNO, ‘Labour Colleges’, *YP*, p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ BNO, ‘Red Shirt or Black’, *YP* (27 June 1934), p. 4. (Downloaded 03 October 2016).

¹⁶¹ BNO, ‘Red Shirt or Black’, *YP*, p. 4.

CHAPTER SIX, PART II

Adult Education in Yorkshire – The Intellectual and Historiographical Context

The previous chapter showed that workers' adult education was considered a public concern, and therefore important enough for the media to report on. I will now consider why the press chose to report on the specific themes identified in the previous chapter. What made these particular themes and topics newsworthy? This chapter will place the phenomenon of workers' adult education in a historical and intellectual framework. Each theme raised in Chapter Six, Part I will be analysed separately.

Education for Democracy: an Idealistic Project?

José Harris asks why Victorian social welfare provision largely based on philanthropy and voluntarism 'evolved into the most "rational" and bureaucratic of modern welfare states?'¹ Her question is important in establishing why state socialism became the accepted model for providing welfare in Britain. Though not directly related to workers' adult education, it can help us understand why the press reported education as a democratising influence. Harris's answer proposes that idealistic philosophy imbued social scientists, political theorists, and economists with a sense of how an optimal social welfare system should operate along democratic, civic, and moral lines.

Harris recognises that material and structural changes such as the emergence of a global economy, unemployment, the attrition of paternalism, poor funding of local government, and demographic change all combined to move Britain towards a welfare system that was controlled and financed by central government. The same structural changes were occurring in many other industrial countries, but many of these 'retained, or even moved towards, a much more localised, pluralistic, and self-governing element in the management of social welfare.'²

Harris focuses on the role of ideology, in particular idealism, in changing the social welfare system in Britain. Harris wishes to impress on us that 'ideas were one among many variables [...] that were an important part of the wider culture of social reform, and that [...] they assist in the imaginative reconstruction of policy-makers' values, intentions, and goals.'³ Many of the ideas that supported workers' adult education were

¹ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State' p. 117.

² Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 117.

³ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 118. For a comprehensive history of idealism and its impact of British educational theory see Peter Gordon and John White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers: The Influence of Idealism on British Educational Thought and Practice* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

firmly based on idealistic principles. As such the idealistic school of thought succeeded in permeating the national consciousness and made an almost subliminal impact on what the press reported. But what was idealism and why did it emerge as a leading social philosophy of the inter-war era?

Harris traces the emergence of idealism back to the philosophy of Plato. Late-nineteenth and early twentieth century social scientists found in Plato's thoughts a guide that enabled them to 'approach the problems of mass urban, class-based, industrial, and imperial civilisation.'⁴ Later twentieth century academics such as R. H. Crossman and Karl Popper⁵ (1902–1994) criticised idealism because it revived the negative forms of Platonism – elitist, racist, and eugenicist thought – that underpinned totalitarian states.⁶ However, Harris explains that the majority of British Platonists or idealists were 'reformers, democrats, and egalitarians, largely oblivious of 'the destructive aspects of Plato's thinking on how to live'.⁷ British idealists were attracted by Plato's focus on 'society as an organic spiritual community' and his 'vision of the ethical nature of citizenship'.⁸ Citizenship in Platonic terms was a state in which 'individual citizens found happiness and fulfilment [...] in the development of "mind" and "character" and in service to a larger whole.'⁹ British idealists also embraced Plato's idea that the state should be based on justice rather than force. These elements of Platonism emerged in the writings and speeches of educationalists in the working class adult education movement. They reflect the idealism that Harris identifies as part of the foundation of the British welfare state.

The study of Plato in relation to idealism and social reform was prevalent in universities and often had a practical, as well as theoretical, application. T. H. Green, a Christian philosopher and fellow at Balliol College, Oxford, was one of the major proponents of idealism.¹⁰ R. H. Tawney¹¹, Clement Attlee and William Beveridge were among those who adopted Green's ideas on civic idealism and the common good.¹² For Green the function of education was to develop a moral character that would support the common good. Green's understanding of the common good was non-competitive and

⁴ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 127.

⁵ A. Ryan, 'Sir Karl Raimund Popper', *ODNB* (Accessed 15 December 2017).

⁶ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 127.

⁷ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', pp. 127-128.

⁸ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 128.

⁹ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 128.

¹⁰ Harris, 'Political Thought and the Welfare State', p. 131.

¹¹ For an analysis of Tawney's Christian socialist and political thought see J. M. Winter, 'R. H. Tawney's Early Political Thought', *Past & Present*, 47 (May, 1970), pp. 71–96. Also see Goldman, *The Life of R. H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 167–197.

¹² Raymond Plant, 'T. H. Green: Citizenship, Education and the Law', *Oxford Review of Education*, 32, 1 (February, 2006), p. 24.

non-utilitarian. It comprised three properties: the first was that the ideal of the common good ‘must be good for all men’; the second was that ‘no one should gain by another’s loss’; the third was that ‘loss and gain have to be estimated on the same principle for each person in society.’¹³ Green was suspicious in general of state intervention as a means of enhancing people’s lives. For him state intervention could also have the effect of preventing a person from developing moral character independently. However, in relation to education, Green supported state intervention as a means of enabling a person through education to become the best they could be and contribute to the ideal of the common good.¹⁴

Another dimension of idealism in relation to welfare was to approach the problem of poverty differently. Rather than accept the inevitable existence of poverty, these idealists believed that the state, if given the power, could eradicate the root causes of poverty, those being ‘ill-health, low wages, malnutrition and unemployment’.¹⁵

Harris’s research indicates that ‘the idealist frame of reference became even more powerful and all-encompassing in the period *after* the First World War’¹⁶:

The cultural hegemony of idealism was established on many levels. It was apparent in popular as well as in academic studies, and, it was found not merely in abstract treatises on political thought, but in statistical and descriptive studies of concrete and social problems, whose subject-matter and methodology appeared on their face to be quite the reverse of idealist.¹⁷

The ethical and moral dimensions of idealism are key to understanding its application to welfare services. Idealism, with its ‘emphasis on corporate identity, individual altruism, ethical imperatives, and active citizen-participation’, made a significant impact on the education system.¹⁸ This is important to note; though Harris does not mention adult education specifically in her article, everything she observes about idealism applied to how educationalists in the working class adult education movement thought about the value and purpose of adult education during the inter-war period. As Harris points out:

Those consciously committed to idealism as an intellectual system were always a small minority; but [...] they were a potent and articulate minority whose influence extended far beyond the boundaries of professional social administration and organised social science.¹⁹

¹³ Plant, ‘T. H. Green’, p. 28.

¹⁴ Plant, ‘T. H. Green’, p. 30.

¹⁵ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, pp. 133-134.

¹⁶ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, p. 123.

¹⁷ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, pp. 123-124.

¹⁸ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, pp. 136-137.

¹⁹ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, p. 138.

Harris argues that where idealism succeeded where other ideologies failed was to ‘generate a vocabulary of social reform that transcended political parties.’²⁰ In this way it facilitated the assimilation of the principles of idealism into welfare policy controlled by the state, despite general opposition to the emergence of a centralised state.²¹ It did this by accommodating the transition of a class-stratified society to a mass democracy. Idealism also helped shape the modern political theories of the inter-war period such as the new liberalism and ethical socialism.²² Platonic ideals such as ethical and moral citizenship, as well as a duty to serve the public, were all part of a political and social model that ‘would help to reintegrate the fragmented consciousness of modern man into cohesive corporate communities’.²³ Harris acknowledges that idealism as a social philosophy had major flaws, namely that it focused far too much on building character, and far too little on improving economic and structural inequalities. Nonetheless, as an interim social philosophy, it bridged an important gap between the tradition of voluntary and philanthropic welfare and the modern welfare state.

Harris’s impressive analysis of the role of idealism in forming the modern British welfare state is highly relevant to the emergence of workers’ adult education as a democratising movement in a period of political, social and economic instability. As shown in Part One, the press reported developments in the world of workers’ adult education along idealistic lines. This was perhaps because it was an uncontentious ideology rooted in civic, moral, and ethical values that resonated across classes and politics. Not once do any of the newspaper reports used in Chapter Six, Part I mention Plato but, when we consider, as Harris has done with social welfare, what ideas underpinned the purpose of workers’ adult education, the principles of Platonic idealism emerge distinctly. Throughout the newspaper reports, references were frequently made to ‘education for democracy’, education for citizenship, education for public service, all implying a presumed understanding of idealism blended with elements of socialism, specifically equality of opportunity.

The contemporary literature generated by inter-war educationalists gives insight into how idealism was assimilated into the world of adult education. Sir William Henry Hadow²⁴, vice-chancellor of Sheffield University (1919-1930), supporter of the WEA,

²⁰ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, p. 137.

²¹ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, p. 137.

²² Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, pp. 139-140.

²³ Harris, ‘Political Thought and the Welfare State’, p. 140.

²⁴ F. H. Shera, ‘Sir William Henry Hadow’, *ODNB* (Accessed 15 December 2017).

and the leading investigator of the Hadow Reports on education²⁵ (1923-1933), wrote of ‘education in citizenship’ in a classical framework.²⁶ In doing so Hadow referred to Aristotle’s conception of the “good life”. Hadow considered the ‘nature of civic education’ in relation to the good life, and outlined three aims of education: firstly, that a person needed education for employment; secondly, that ‘because man is “naturally a citizen” his education should prepare him, in due gradations, for playing his part in the political and economic life of his country’; and thirdly, that real education should nourish a person’s spiritual and cultural appreciation.²⁷ Hadow defined civic education as ‘a province or aspect of the whole’ and referred to Aristotle’s observation that such education was wasted on the young, partly because of their inexperience.²⁸ Hadow’s aim in outlining the ancient history of education in citizenship was to demonstrate its very long historical precedent.²⁹

Hadow also advocated that civic education should be provided outside the university and school system in the form of adult education. Further, he recommended that ‘in every city of the Empire there should be an institution established for the study and investigation of civic problems.’³⁰ Such an institution would generate information about all topics that concerned citizenship, as well as encourage healthy debate on political and municipal life. Hadow envisaged this community university as providing ‘capital and labour, socialism and individualism with a neutral ground on which they could meet’ and arrive at ‘honourable’ solutions to civic problems through open, fair, and well-informed debate.³¹

As can be seen from Hadow’s analysis of education in citizenship, much of his thinking on the topic was inspired by his knowledge of the classics, an example of a middle class academic educationalist leaning heavily toward idealism and applying it to the delivery and dissemination of workers’ adult education. The press frequently reported Hadow’s educational views, and by doing so showed their shared belief in the relevance of education to developing and maintaining a civil society.

Another less esoteric but highly researched examination of the place of adult education in post-First World War society was the Report of the Adult Education

²⁵ The most well known of the reports by Hadow (1859–1937) is *The Education of the Adolescent* (London: HMSO, 1926).

²⁶ William Henry Hadow, *Citizenship*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923).

²⁷ Hadow, *Citizenship*, pp. 190-191.

²⁸ Hadow, *Citizenship*, p. 191.

²⁹ Hadow, *Citizenship*, p. 193.

³⁰ Hadow, *Citizenship*, p. 201.

³¹ Hadow, *Citizenship*, p. 203.

Committee for Reconstruction.³² The final 1919 Report and the interim reports produced by the Committee were also based on the principles of idealism. The Reconstruction Committee included educationalists from different backgrounds; the Co-operative, the Labour Colleges, the WEA, the YMCA, the Adult Schools and the trade unions. However, the primary investigators were R. H. Tawney, A. L. Smith, Arthur Greenwood, and E. S. Cartwright.³³ All four knew each other well and worked very closely on the Final Report. All shared the same ethical, moral and socialist outlook that originated in idealism.

Bernard Jennings's research on the reception of the report concluded that it bypassed the public consciousness and 'became an instant classic, without ever becoming news'.³⁴ However, the evidence in Part One shows that the WEA went to considerable lengths to publicise the Report's publication by holding a series of conferences across Yorkshire, all of which were in fact reported by the popular press. Arthur Greenwood, in an effort to make the recommendations of the final Report more accessible, summarised the findings in a booklet entitled *The Education of the Citizen*.³⁵ The need for adult education was said to arise from 'the desire for knowledge and personal development', as well as 'the desire to lay the foundations of more intelligent citizenship, and of a better social order'.³⁶ Adult education was described as distinct from primary and secondary education because

of the greater sense of responsibility of the students, the motives which lie behind their desire for education, and the peculiar contribution which they bring to their studies – a contribution which is a result of their experience.³⁷

Another recommendation supported the development of intra- as well as extra-mural education administered by the universities. Hadow writing about a community university and forum for civic debate in 1923 was perhaps acting on this recommendation for extra-mural education.³⁸

Although the 1919 Report largely vanished into obscurity, educationalists took its recommendations seriously and continued to make the case for adult education as a way of promoting democracy and citizenship. The press, certainly in Yorkshire, continued to report and publish the views of these educationalists in the spirit of idealism. In a

³² The 1919 Report.

³³ John Taylor, 'The Making of the 1919 Report', *The 1919 Report*, p. 27. For Tawney's ideas on education and socialism see R. H. Tawney, *Education: The Socialist Policy* (London: Independent Labour Party Publication Department, 1924) and Goldman, *R.H. Tawney*, pp. 119–216.

³⁴ Bernard Jennings, 'The Reception of the Report', *The 1919 Report*, p. 40.

³⁵ Arthur Greenwood, *The Education of the Citizen*, (London: WEA, 1920).

³⁶ Greenwood, *The Education of the Citizen*, p. 14.

³⁷ Greenwood, *The Education of the Citizen*, pp. 17–18.

³⁸ Greenwood, *The Education of the Citizen*, p. 37.

collection of essays published by the British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) in 1923, the views of leading educationalists were disseminated.³⁹ The idea behind the essays was to make them accessible to lay readers without a background in the intricacies of educational theory. The contributors (all members of the BIAE) included Viscount Haldane⁴⁰, political scientist and supporter of the WEA A. E. Zimmern⁴¹, Albert Mansbridge, Harold Laski and Lord Eustace Perry. It is useful to consider briefly some of their views on adult education, to show how well aligned they were on idealistic grounds.

Laski, for example in his essay ‘Knowledge as Civic Discipline’, refers directly to ancient Greece in relation to adult education. He declares that ‘the problems of the great society demand the widespread diffusion of knowledge if they are to be capable of solution.’⁴² Laski emphasised how the ancient Greek citizen actively participated in forming policy by entering into public debate. He recognised that this form of democracy could not be fully transposed onto modern society because of its huge scale that took the citizen further and further away from the democratic process.⁴³ In Laski’s view ‘the political importance of adult education’ was the forum for discussion and debate it provided, which would allow social change to take place peacefully.⁴⁴ Mansbridge, in his essay ‘Ideals as Facts’, considered that democracy was a ‘state of society in which every individual not only has the opportunity to make the best of his, or her, own individual gifts, but actually takes advantage of the opportunity’.⁴⁵ He described his vision of education as ‘idealistic’ and believed that it was important to maintain such idealism in education to keep that vision alive.

The contemporary literature generated by adult educationalists gives us insight and understanding into what motivated them to campaign for workers’ adult education. It also shows how the purpose of workers’ adult education was understood by educationalists in an idealistic intellectual framework. What this perhaps shows us is that idealism as a political and social creed accommodated all sections of the political spectrum – socialist, conservative and liberal – and gave space for general debate about

³⁹ Oliver Stanley (ed.) *The Way Out. Essays on the Meaning and Purpose of Adult Education by Members of the British Institute of Adult Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

⁴⁰ H. C. G. Matthew, ‘Richard Burden Haldane’, ODNB (Accessed 15 December 2017). Haldane was very much influenced by T. H. Green’s work. With Andrew Seth he edited *Essays in Philosophical Criticism* (London: Longmans Green, 1883) which Haldane dedicated to Green. Haldane also supported the development of civic universities.

⁴¹ D. J. Markwell, ‘Alfred Zimmern’, ODNB (Downloaded 11 November 2017)

⁴² Harold Laski, ‘Knowledge as Civic Discipline’, in *The Way Out*, pp. 50-51.

⁴³ Laski, ‘Knowledge as Civic Discipline’, p. 51.

⁴⁴ Laski, ‘Knowledge as Civic Discipline’, pp. 58-59

⁴⁵ Albert Mansbridge, ‘Ideals as Facts’, in *The Way Out*, p. 70

workers' adult education to occur across party lines. What resonates throughout is the idea that adult education could perhaps support a form of active and participatory citizenship.⁴⁶

Rural Development and Regeneration

Rural education schemes were another recommendation of the 1919 Report. What is interesting about the Rural Reconstruction Education Scheme is that it received cross-party support. What is even more intriguing, in particular about the Reconstruction Committee, is that most of the committee members were of the labour movement and saw the problems of adult education from a working class perspective. Greenwood summarised the need for adult education in the countryside thus:

The conditions of rural life and society have on the whole retarded rather than assisted the growth of educational interests in the country. *Until there is a great rural revival under the impetus of new ideals, adult education will never rise to its possibilities.* On the other hand, the growth of a new rural culture and civilisation is inextricably interwoven with, and largely dependent upon, the spread of education.⁴⁷

Newspapers, as seen previously, published explanations of the rural development scheme in the context of rural decline. As a WEA project that succeeded to a great extent, it is therefore surprising to find so little historiography on the topic.

Clare Griffiths writes mainly about the Labour Party's rural campaigns during the inter-war period, but does not directly address the work of the WEA in rural regions.⁴⁸ She mentions the WEA in passing just once, in relation to rural branches including 'folk song in their work'.⁴⁹ Griffiths also considers the role of the Ramblers' Association and the Clarion Club as part of Labour's campaign to take back the countryside, but does so without mentioning the WEA's involvement in either organisation. Rambles, for WEA students, were an opportunity for discussion and debate outside the classroom, where participants could express themselves on politics and other topics freely and informally. The omission is perplexing, because Griffiths' thesis revolves around how and why the Labour Party wished to broaden its electoral base to include rural communities. The WEA went to great efforts to establish itself in rural Yorkshire in order to make workers' adult education accessible to working class rural communities that would

⁴⁶ For an analysis of how the idea of citizenship was shaped by cultural upheavals see Brad Beaven and John Griffiths, 'Creating the Exemplary Citizen: The Changing Notion of Citizenship in Britain 1870 – 1939', *Contemporary British History*, 22, 2 (June, 2008), pp. 203–225.

⁴⁷ Greenwood, *The Education of the Citizen*, p. 50. For a contemporary sociological account of rural education see A. W. Ashby, *The Sociological Background of Adult Education in Rural Districts* (London: BIAE, 1935)

⁴⁸ Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*.

⁴⁹ Griffiths, *Labour and the Countryside*, p. 84.

otherwise have no access to any such education. These mostly agricultural workers would have formed the rural proletariat and made up a potential base of labour voters. As shown in Chapter Five, Part I, many students of the WEA went on to have careers in public service, often on rural district and parish councils but almost always as Labour Party supporters. In this way, the WEA, a working class organisation, infiltrated what was perceived to be in Labour thought at the time the Conservative stronghold of rural Britain.

Helen McCarthy's work on associational culture in Britain is of a more diffuse and flexible nature. She draws attention to the prevalence and 'soft' political power of voluntary associations in interwar Britain.⁵⁰ The WEA formed part of the rich associational culture that McCarthy discusses in her work. As such WEA rural branches provided workers with an alternative recreational, as well as educational, option that challenged the dominance of more Conservative associations.

Parkin's political theory is relevant in this context as well. He approaches the problem of why some electorates gravitated towards ideologies of Conservatism rather than of socialism, and does so from a sociological and structural perspective that chimes with McCarthy's thesis. He observes that Conservatism is the dominant ideology of British Society, using evidence of multiple-elected Conservative governments that far exceed Labour governments over time to prove his point. Why should this have been the case? Parkin speculates that Conservatism as an ideology dominated the political landscape because

manual workers do not vote Conservative *because* they are deferential, or *because* they conceive of themselves as middle class; rather they have a deferential *and* a middle class *and* a Conservative outlook when they are isolated from structural positions which provide an alternative system from that of the dominant institutional orders of society.⁵¹

His theory implies that without any working class organisations or structures to belong to it would be natural for an electoral base such as the rural working class to simply fall in with the prevailing Conservative or Liberal hegemony. Griffiths' research gives us insight into how the Labour Party organised their rural campaigns, for them new electoral territory, to bring socialist ideology and the labour movement to rural Britain. McCarthy, meanwhile, shows how voluntary organisations could do the same, albeit informally. The WEA, in accordance with Parkin's model, contributed indirectly

⁵⁰ McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics' (McCarthy's work has been addressed in Chapters Two and Four)

⁵¹ Parkin, 'Working-Class Conservatives: A Theory of Political Deviance', p. 289.

to the Labour Party project of extending its electoral base by providing alternative working class structures to rural communities for perhaps the first time in their history.

The WEA's educational activities were firmly based on the idea that working class people had as equal a right to access to education as did their wealthier counterparts. This principle was declared in all WEA literature and propaganda, and rural students attending classes would have had a clear understanding of that particular principle of the WEA. It would have been impossible to avoid. In itself this was an important political achievement on the part of the WEA, despite their self-declared non-political nature, and may have given their rural students, many of who may not have had great exposure to Labour Party propaganda, an alternative socialist and political perspective.

The news reporting of the development of rural adult education schemes in North and East Yorkshire points to an appreciation of the work of voluntary associations undertaking innovative and interesting work. As McCarthy has argued, voluntary organisations and associations formed a central element of British public life during the inter-war period, and the press seem to have taken their work seriously. Newspapers' willingness to publish reports on rural workers' adult education schemes perhaps indicates the prevalence and influence of such non-political, impartial and non-sectarian organisations such as the WEA, and reflects their place in the public imagination.

Leisure Time and Unemployment

Press interest in leisure activities linked to unemployment is set against the backdrop of the mass unemployment of the 1930s. As seen from the reports in Part One, the press regarded unemployment and leisure as interacting issues. The press publicised the views of educationalists and social reformers that education as a leisure activity would be of benefit to the unemployed. What lay behind this view and why was it reported in such depth? Andrzej Olechnowicz's work in this area gives context to the twin phenomena of leisure and unemployment.⁵²

Before analysing Olechnowicz's insights, it is necessary to give an idea of the scale of the problem of unemployment in Yorkshire during the inter-war period, which itself made the phenomenon newsworthy. Nationally, unemployment skyrocketed following the October-November 1929 Wall Street Crash to '1,537,000 in January in 1930 and, by June 1931, 2,753,000 – practically a quarter of the insured work force.'⁵³ What followed was the Great Depression that dominated the 1930s. Unemployment had existed in

⁵² Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Unemployed Workers, 'Enforced Leisure' and Education for 'The Right Use of Leisure' in Britain in the 1930s', *Labour History Review*, 70, 1 (April, 2005), pp. 27–52.

⁵³ Reynolds and Laybourn, *Labour Heartland*, p. 88.

Yorkshire during the 1920s, but the disintegration of world markets in the 1930s led to unprecedented mass unemployment in the region. For example, while ‘in 1922 about 206,000 people were employed in textiles in West Yorkshire, by 1939 this figure had been reduced to 184,000’.⁵⁴ Reynolds and Laybourn summarise the problem of unemployment in West Yorkshire: ‘in all three of the major industries in 1930 – textiles, coal mining and engineering – unemployment stood at about 28 per cent of the insured workforce.’⁵⁵ Such statistics give an idea of the seriousness of unemployment in Yorkshire and show how important it was as a news item.

In politics, the beleaguered Labour government (1929-1931) was preoccupied with finding political and industrial solutions to mass unemployment, but failed to do so. The ‘Mosley Memorandum’ presented innovative ways of alleviating the problem by proposing that the government embark on an ambitious programme of public works to create employment, raise the school leaving age, and lower the retirement age.⁵⁶ However, Mosley’s proposals were rejected, and the problem of mass unemployment remained a fixed, almost unchanging, entity for the rest of the decade. With the governments of the 1930s seemingly incapable of taking decisive and constructive action to alleviate unemployment, voluntary organisations took up the challenge of attempting in whatever way they could to assist the unemployed.

Olechnowicz analyses unemployment, education and leisure from three perspectives. The first considers the impact of unemployment on the psychological wellbeing of unemployed people. Here, the theory that the unemployed suffered from apathy was predominant, and implied that they became incapable of action in any sphere, whether revolutionary or educational. Secondly, Olechnowicz considers the speculation discussed in Part One that the mechanisation of industry would inevitably lead to unemployment, and therefore it was necessary to develop leisure activities that would encourage people to lead happy and fulfilled lives in the absence of employment opportunities. Finally, he considers the place of voluntary bodies in this scenario and examines their attitudes to the unemployed as well as ‘their relationship with the government and the attitudes of the unemployed to them.’⁵⁷ Olechnowicz makes an interesting statement about the age of mass unemployment and enforced leisure that is worth highlighting:

⁵⁴ Reynolds and Laybourn, *Labour Heartland*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Reynolds and Laybourn, *Labour Heartland*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Reynolds and Laybourn, *Labour Heartland*, p. 91.

⁵⁷ Olechnowicz, ‘Unemployed Workers, ‘Enforced Leisure’ and Education’, p. 28.

The ideological construction of a coming age of leisure reinterpreted mass unemployment not as a fundamental failing of the capitalist system, but as an inescapable transition to a way of life as rewarding as the one to which there was no return.⁵⁸

This observation implies that the state may have accepted that mass unemployment was part of the capitalist process, and was going to be a fixed issue well into the distant future. Olechnowicz suggests that a shared view was that ‘the discipline of work would be replaced by an equivalent discipline of leisure,’ with the implication that unemployed people would need to be supervised in how to best use their leisure time.⁵⁹ It is unclear why mass unemployment should have been so readily accepted by British governments of the inter-war era, and displays a strange complacency and apathy on their part when compared to the Soviet determination that all had a right to work. No ‘right to work’ was enshrined in any part of the British constitution and so was not an integral part of the culture of employment. Without an appreciation of the human as well as financial value of work to an individual, leisure activities in the sphere of education may have seemed a reasonable and socially constructive way to solve the problem of mass unemployment.

The debates about leisure and unemployment continued throughout the 1930s and hinged on the idea that ‘workers and the unemployed had to study and participate in cultural and communal affairs if they were to be responsible democratic citizens.’ This theme, linking citizenship, democracy, and unemployment, emerged consistently in the press coverage. Olechnowicz observes that phrases such as ‘the right use of leisure’ and ‘education for leisure’ were frequently used in debates on the topic. All this implies an element of distraction from the main problem, namely the plight of the unemployed. Many in the world of education and politics seemed wilfully to ignore what working class people perceived the purpose of education to be. T. S. Eliot, quoted by Olechnowicz, argued against the ‘fallacy of education for leisure’ and pointed out that ‘in the case of Britain, education for several centuries had been dominated by the idea of ‘getting on.’ Eliot’s argument importantly reflected the reality of working class life; for the majority of working class people, education was a way of improving their economic and social position and would never be a substitute for employment.

Notwithstanding such arguments, voluntary organisations such as the WEA in co-operation with government bodies such as LEAs continued to promote the idea that, as founder of the Lincoln People’s Service Club and resident WEA tutor Alice Cameron

⁵⁸ Olechnowicz, ‘Unemployed Workers, ‘Enforced Leisure’ and Education’, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Olechnowicz, ‘Unemployed Workers, ‘Enforced Leisure’ and Education’, p. 29.

put it, ‘the right use of unemployment is the key to the future of working-class civilisation.’ Various successes in this area were the WEA Ashington Group of the ‘pitmen painters’ and the Lincoln People’s Service Club as well as the ‘pitmen’s academy’ in Spennymoor Settlement in South-West Durham. All these institutions enjoyed success as havens of culture and opportunity for the unemployed. However, Olechnowicz qualifies their success by identifying the issue of a lack of funding as a reason why voluntary organisations providing adult education for the unemployed were not more successful.⁶⁰ Ultimately it was a lack of funding, as well as a lack of ideological and political commitment, that in the end limited the high idealism behind adult education for its own sake, as a leisure activity for the unemployed.

What is striking about the reporting in Part One is that it reflects widely held anxieties about how to assimilate mass unemployment into society. It also highlights the constructive and well-meaning actions of voluntary adult education organisations to counter the negative impact of unemployment on the working class. What the reports do not do is question the governments’ approach to unemployment in this regard, or speculate why workers’ adult education was accepted as a substitute for employment. This is an area for further research.

Access to Education and Equality of Opportunity

The linked issues of access to education and equality of opportunity overlap with the economies made by successive governments in the inter-war period. The Hadow Reports of 1926, 1931, and 1933 proposed that the school leaving age should be raised to fifteen. Hadow’s proposals were widely supported by working class adult education organisations but the application of his recommendations were thwarted by the ‘cutbacks in educational expenditure represented by the ‘Geddes axe’ in 1922 and the May Report of 1931’.⁶¹ As seen from the newspaper reporting in this area, the WEA and its sister organisations campaigned vigorously against educational economies, and in favour of raising the school leaving age. The Yorkshire press represented this narrative on a consistent basis.

However, the state education system being under-funded during this period is contradicted by Vincent Carpentier’s study of educational expenditure in the UK, which tells another story. There was, for example, a ‘doubling of expenditure per elementary school pupil,’ and ‘between 1923 and 1933 free places in secondary education rose

⁶⁰ Olechnowicz, ‘Unemployed Workers, ‘Enforced Leisure’ and Education’, pp. 35–39.

⁶¹ Vincent Carpentier, ‘Public Expenditure on Education and Economic Growth in the UK, 1833 – 2000’, *The History of Education*, 32, 1 (2003), pp. 1-15.

from 38% to 50% of the whole.’ In addition to these developments, general public expenditure on education increased from 6% to 9% while the percentage of public educational expenditure dedicated to higher education increased from 0.5% to 2%. This evidence of public expenditure on education, though not enormous, still represented an expansion of funding of the state education system.

Carpentier also makes the interesting observation that ‘much of this expansion was promoted by LEAs and represented a shift from taxes to rates.’⁶² He supports his point with compelling statistical information – that in 1922, central government funds made up 50% of public expenditure on education, but only 38% in 1932.⁶³ This implies that a certain amount of funding devolution occurred during the 1920s and 30s as part of the cost-cutting exercise, giving municipalities and local authorities responsibility for, *inter alia*, education services in their localities.

During the inter-war period, the WEA and the NCLC expanded their educational activities in Yorkshire. This may be due, at least in the case of the WEA, to consistent financial support from the LEAs and grant-giving bodies such as the universities, and the Cassel and Carnegie educational trusts, although the impact of this may have been dampened by the sheer levels of adversity that working class people endured during the depression. The expansion of workers’ adult education in the context of cuts to state education expenditure does not seem to have been comprehensively covered by the press.

Local Issues, Political Bias and the NCLC

The theme of political bias in workers’ adult education was much more of a concern for the NCLC than for the WEA, because the former explicitly advertised that they *were* political, sectarian, and biased. That was their unique selling point.

As the reports in Part One show, the activities and views of the NCLC were not widely reported when compared with those of the WEA. Part of this lack of reporting of the political and revolutionary nature of the NCLC may be attributed to the NCLC being, in comparison with the WEA, a very small voluntary working class adult education organisation without a significant influence on mainstream society. The NCLC throughout its existence had to struggle financially to survive, and relied solely on the patronage of trade unions. By rejecting financial assistance from the LEAs, the NCLC had the freedom to operate exactly as it wished. As such it lay largely outside

⁶² Carpentier, ‘Public Expenditure on Education 1833–2000’, pp. 11–12

⁶³ Carpentier, ‘Public Expenditure on Education 1833–2000’, p. 12.

mainstream public awareness, and correspondingly did not make a great impact on the press.

The NCLC's stated political bias in favour of revolutionising the adult education system may itself explain why the press was not more interested in them. A not-unrelated element that may have discouraged press attention was the spectre of Marxism – and, by extension, Bolshevism – that tainted it because of its perceived association with the CPGB. Had the NCLC been able to establish itself as a completely original independent British Marxist organisation, it may have been more palatable to the press. As it was, the NCLC and the Labour Colleges' association with the CPGB counted to their detriment. The reason for this perception was that many members of the Plebs and the NCLC were also members of the CPGB. While this does not conclusively prove that these members supported *all* the policies of the CPGB, it was nonetheless sufficient to attract to them the label of communists, who were generally considered beyond the pale because of their links to the Soviet Union, reflected by the Labour Party's refusal, throughout the inter-war years, to allow the CPGB to affiliate to the Party. All this did not help the NCLC's public image as a viable alternative to the WEA.

Meanwhile, the WEA and the Labour Party were regarded as much safer organisations that the press were consequently much more comfortable reporting on. The reports referred to in Part One show how insignificant were the few controversies that cropped up about political bias in the WEA in the grander scheme of things. Such reported issues were very local and were resolved within their communities rather than being escalated to higher authorities.

The press were perhaps happier to report WEA activities frequently and consistently because the WEA received funding from LEAs, recognition which gave it the status of a responsible body in the field of education, by being accountable to local government for what it taught and how it spent its grants. Notwithstanding the WEA's more secure reputation, the press had a duty to report what voluntary organisations were doing with local government funds. In addition the WEA had a strong association with the Labour Party, and this association with a national political party as well as with local government, gave the WEA a legitimacy and gravitas that the NCLC lacked and explains how the WEA, as a working class organisation, in tandem with the Labour Party, succeeded in gaining national as well as regional confidence.

As seen in previous chapters the WEA aimed to give working class people the opportunity to access adult education as delivered by the universities. Its emphasis was on equality of opportunity, and not with the substance and content of higher education.

Its attitude to education for working class people chimed perfectly with that of the Labour Party, as Rodney Barker outlines in his research.⁶⁴

Barker argues that the Labour Party's educational policy was not socialist in substance, but did endorse equal access to education and educational opportunity. As outlined in Chapter One, Barker argues that the Labour Party never had any intention of revolutionising the education curriculum in form or content.

Barker's second argument takes account of the cross-party consensus that existed between the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Parties: that the value of education lay in fostering democratic citizenship amongst the electorate. As discussed above, the consensus shared by political parties on the importance of democratic active participatory citizenship, with its foundations in widely-shared attitudes of idealism, was key to developing workers' adult education provision.

Another reason why the press may have been more at ease with the WEA than with the NCLC was the growing power of the Labour Party in Yorkshire. Bernard Barker addresses this phenomenon, analysing the 'politics of propaganda' that the Labour Party used to broaden their electoral base.⁶⁵ Barker describes how the Labour Party used propaganda to educate and win over the electorate of the West Riding to democratic socialism. He argues that the task of the Labour Party during the inter-war period was to become a mass national party that held policies with wide appeal. A revolutionary political programme was not going to get Labour elected to government, and partly for this reason the Labour Party had to adjust their policies to appeal to a broader electorate, while at the same time keeping true to their socialist and reformist principles. To gain support for their policies as set out by their manifesto 'A New Social Order,' the Labour Party needed to bring socialist education to the masses. In Barker's words:

the working classes had to be converted to Socialism, not Socialism to the needs of the masses. It was necessary, therefore for the working classes to enter politics before Labour could become a national and non-sectarian party.⁶⁶

The presence of the WEA in Yorkshire and its steady expansion during the inter-war period combined with the Labour Party's propaganda campaign for socialism and their election to government in 1924 and 1929 made them both – the WEA and the Labour Party – mainstream and highly newsworthy.

⁶⁴ Barker, 'The Labour Party and Education'.

⁶⁵ Bernard Barker, 'The Politics of Propaganda'.

⁶⁶ Bernard Barker, 'Anatomy of Reformism: The Social and Political Ideas of the Labour Leadership in Yorkshire', *International Review of Social History*, XVII (1973), p. 27.

Conclusion

The themes above, reported by the press in Yorkshire, were multi-faceted and often represented a broader view of the political, economic and social state of the nation. What the newspapers reported in the wider popular context connected workers' adult education to a series of disparate but highly relevant topics – unemployment and leisure, rural regeneration, democracy, and citizenship, and the emergence of the Labour Party as a national party. Reasons underlying the reporting of workers' adult education in the region were embedded in the prevalence of idealism, and in the emergence of labour socialism during this period. This media coverage, combined with the extension of adult education in Yorkshire and the rising dominance of the Labour Party in the region, meant that workers' adult education as disseminated by the WEA readily became part of mainstream culture, and remained increasingly more newsworthy than the version of IWCE delivered by the NCLC.

CHAPTER 7

The Experience of Adult Education

The thesis thus far has given us an understanding of the why, the where, the when, and the how of workers' adult education in Yorkshire between the wars. It has also given us an understanding of the connection between workers' adult education, citizenship, and public service. However, we have not yet gained a clear insight into the actual experience of students attending workers' adult education classes. This chapter aims to capture that experience, as well as present the experience of workers' adult education from the perspective of tutors, educationalists and, in particular, from women. By taking this approach it will be possible to make a 'three hundred and sixty degree' appraisal of the adult education experience during the inter-war era.

I will be presenting evidence from new sources, namely WEA student logbooks of tutorial classes. These have not been previously studied for this purpose. In addition, I will analyse the experience of workers' adult education from accounts given by tutors, students and organisers of the WEA and NCLC. To gain an understanding of the broader experience of worker-students in adult education, I will also present an analysis of contemporary surveys of working class adult education undertaken in Britain.

This chapter will be structured in six sections. Firstly, I present a section analysing the worker-student experience of workers' adult education in a historiographical context. It will also explain how my study of the WEA tutorial class logbooks will expand our understanding of the worker-students' experience of adult education. The second section outlines the student experience of WEA classes as expressed in WEA tutorial class logbooks by the students themselves, drawing on quotations from the logbooks that give a direct insight into what students thought of their classes. Thirdly, I draw on a major national contemporary survey of adult education – *Learn and Live* – taken from the perspective of worker-students.¹ The fourth section analyses the accounts of adult education from the perspective of students, tutors and organisers of NCLC and WEA classes. The final section outlines the experience of women in adult education. I conclude with a section that summarises the findings and analysis of the worker-student experience of workers' adult education in Yorkshire between the wars.

¹ William Emrys Williams and Archibald. E. Heath, *Learn and Live. The Consumer's View of Adult Education* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1936).

Historiography

As discussed in Chapter Five, Part II, Rose argues that in order to understand the intellectual impact of education, literature and other forms of culture, it is necessary to ‘look directly to the students, the readers, the audience’ rather than those who produce the ‘cultural product’.² Rose states that it is not right to assume that ‘what an author puts into a text – or what the scholar reads into that text – is the message the “common reader” receives’.³ He points out that it is problematic to assume that ‘one can measure the influence of teachers by researching their politics or course descriptions’.⁴ In Rose’s view, study of what educators and intellectuals wrote and taught only gives us insight into *their* intellectual world, not that of their students. Much of Rose’s argument is founded on the idea that some historians project the views of those who produced and disseminated culture onto those who absorbed it, in this case through working class adult education. Rose is most interested in discovering the viewpoint of worker-students involved in adult education. He approaches *their* history of education from *their* unique perspective.

Rose uses working class autobiographies as well as contemporary educational surveys to ascertain what it was that working class students gained from adult education as disseminated by the WEA.⁵ By taking this approach, he presents a body of work that suggests that the workers of the WEA were neither acquiescent nor radical in what they absorbed from adult education. The evidence that Rose generates about how students perceived working class adult education is important; it shows the students to be independent-minded as well as politically and ideologically autonomous. Rose’s work challenges Roger Fieldhouse’s argument (discussed in Chapter Five) that the WEA compromised worker-students by impressing upon them a model of education – impartial, apolitical, and non-sectarian – that dissipated their assumed natural affinity for revolutionary socialism. Rose finds this not to be the case; rather, he finds that these students made up their own minds about the value of the content of education, whether disseminated by the WEA or the NCLC. His research indicates that worker-students assimilated and accommodated several different political, intellectual and ideological views of the world through their experience of adult education. What they seem to have

² Rose, ‘The Workers in the Workers’ Educational Association’, p. 608.

³ Rose, ‘The Workers in the Workers’ Educational Association’, p. 608.

⁴ Rose, ‘The Workers in the Workers’ Educational Association’, p. 608.

⁵ Rose found much of his source material in David Vincent, John Burnett and David Mayall (eds.) *The Autobiography of the working class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1984-1989). This work that lists almost two thousand published and unpublished documents and memoirs from nineteenth to twentieth century Britain. The complexities of using autobiographies as primary sources have already been discussed in Chapter Five, Part I.

gained most through this process of assimilation was a greater appreciation of social democracy, and how commitment to the ideals of social democracy could expand and improve their intellectual, as well as their economic, lives.

Rose makes a strong and compelling argument in support of his approach and thesis, by focusing on autobiographical, as well as educational, sources that indicate the actual experience of worker-students in adult education. Even though Rose's sample of autobiographies can be criticised, they still serve as valuable sources to present the lived experience of individuals. When used in conjunction with other sources such as surveys and contemporary literature on education, working class autobiographies can give the human perspective of workers' education. However, it is important to take into account the perspective of the mostly middle class academics and intellectuals who were deeply committed to the WEA. Without them, the project of working class adult education would not have succeeded in the way that it did. Lawrence Goldman's work explores this area sensitively and imaginatively.⁶ He challenges the assertion made by historians such as Fieldhouse and Macintyre that, despite their best intentions as enlightened social democrats, these middle class academic intellectuals

were hopelessly compromised figures, who compromised the working-class movement in turn, and led it away from its true destiny in an educational movement that might have contributed to the construction of an authentic English socialism.⁷

Goldman argues instead that the intellectuals of the adult education movement

cannot be accused of an unconscious negative influence [...] Rather they shared and reflected the deepest intents of the worker-scholars they taught: their effects on the working class were confirmatory rather than pernicious.⁸

His aim is to understand the relationship *between* students and tutors by studying the writings and literary output of leading educationalists such as R. H. Tawney, William Temple, G. D. H. Cole, Harold Laski and T. H. Green. By taking this approach, with a view to understanding the mutual benefits of adult education to the tutor as well as to the student, Goldman avoids creating a false polarity that isolates the student from the tutor and vice-versa. In this way he enables two worldviews – that of the middle class academic intellectual and that of the worker-student – to overlap, thereby presenting a more persuasive reality of this aspect of working class adult education than that portrayed by Fieldhouse, Macintyre or even Rose.

⁶ Lawrence Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the English Working Class 1870–1945; The Case of Adult Education', *History of Education*, 29, 4 (2000), pp. 281-300; Goldman, *Dons and Workers*.

⁷ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 283.

⁸ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 283.

Workers' adult education had a subtle but important impact in exposing worker-students to a wider social circle. Worker-students would have found themselves in classes with people from different social backgrounds, with different attitudes and values to their own. The classroom represented society in microcosm and reinforced the possibility and practical reality of peaceful co-existence, as well as co-operation, between social classes. Chapter Five explored the political element of this situation by studying the biographies of former WEA students who became public servants. In a similar way to the mix of students in a WEA class, public servants on a city council had to work constructively with other public servants, who, more often than not, had very different social backgrounds and political views to their own. Goldman observes a similar dynamic at play for the intellectuals who were involved in delivering lectures and tutorial classes to worker-students. Through their peripatetic educational work, these intellectuals met 'an assortment of clerks, teachers, trade unionists and co-operators'.⁹

Goldman explores why intellectuals forged relationships with worker-students through education. In a similar vein to José Harris (discussed in Chapter Six) Goldman identifies the emergence of idealism as a major factor altering attitudes to worker-students amongst the intellectual elite. T. H. Green, believed that 'individuals could only be understood and could only realise their full potential in a collective context.'¹⁰ In the spirit of John Ruskin, idealists such as Green saw individuals in society as being 'linked together by culture, values and institutions rather than economic relationships.' As with the Co-operators inspired by Robert Owen, idealists supported the idea that a 'commonwealth of shared ideas was a more powerful agent of social solidarity than the pursuit of gain in market transactions'.¹¹

To this end, idealists perceived the state as a force for good. As Goldman puts it 'the state protected, nurtured and reformed for the collective good; it guaranteed social and cultural cohesion.' Green, his fellow idealists, and, in turn, their students, perceived that the role of education was to disseminate the 'shared values and ideas of community,' and of high idealism.¹² 'Education would sustain and bind together the members of society.' Goldman observes that the influence of idealistic thought amongst the intellectual elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century would have

⁹ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 283.

¹⁰ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 291.

¹¹ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 291.

¹² Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 291.

inspired many university graduates to interact with the working class through educational activity such as the university extension movement and the WEA.

The most compelling aspect of Goldman's argument about the impact of idealism from the top down is that there was a resounding idealism from the bottom up. When academics encountered working class students in the community, they found that there was 'an echoing idealism growing out of the institutions and experience of working-class life and the automatic solidarity that these communities had generated to protect themselves from the vicissitudes of capitalism.' This working class organic idealism, based on direct experience of real life, meant that 'values were shared, passed up from the working class as well as passed down by the intellectuals.'¹³ As seen in Chapter Six, Parts I and II, the language of idealism permeated newspaper reports on adult education throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Ideas connecting social solidarity, democratic values, public service and active citizenship were always grouped together in speeches or addresses about the value of adult education. Idealism in the first quarter of the twentieth century, as a means of uniting the working class and socially conscious intellectuals, was a powerful philosophy. Tom Hulme, like Goldman and Harris, also argues that Green's idealistic philosophy promoted citizenship in local government. He gives examples of the role of the Manchester WEA in providing civic education for responsible citizenship.¹⁴ Likewise, Richard Lewis in his thoughtful study of adult education in South Wales from 1906 to 1940 also recognises the WEA's commitment to public service as well as to the idealist values of its founders. In his view the WEA's legacy in South Wales was equal to, if not greater than, the impact of the Labour Colleges in the region.¹⁵

Goldman expands his argument that worker-students and intellectuals had more in common than one would imagine, by giving several examples from both sides to illustrate their shared attitudes to social and economic life based on idealistic principles. An important observation that Goldman makes is that 'the relationship of intellectuals and the working class owed much to the receptivity of workers to the ethical message that tutors brought with them.'¹⁶ This reflected the influence of Ruskin and Christian socialism on the elite of the working class who 'yearned for contact with ideas beyond the immediate confines of working-class life which might free them personally by

¹³ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 291.

¹⁴ Tom Hulme, 'Putting the City Back into Citizenship: Civics Education and Local Government in Britain, 1918 – 45, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 26, 1 (2015), pp. 45–47.

¹⁵ Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, pp. 243–244.

¹⁶ Goldman, 'Intellectuals and the Working Class', p. 294.

opening up the ‘higher life’ to which so many referred.’¹⁷ What Goldman succeeds in bringing out of his analysis of the relationship between intellectuals and the working class, is that worker-students were the physical embodiment of ‘the abstract virtues that intellectuals admired, and it became easy to see [worker-students], in consequence, as a collective force for social progress and moral improvement’.¹⁸ Intellectuals were thus influenced by an organic form of idealism, which assimilated social democratic ideas of the inter-war period emerging directly out of the social, political and economic experience of worker-students. The success of the working relationship between worker-students and intellectuals in the adult educational sphere reflects a more intriguing phenomenon – the intersection of the British tradition of autodidacticism and that of academic elitism. Sheila Rowbotham phrases this more elegantly when discussing the university extension movement by observing that two idealisms encountered one another. She discerns of these ‘two idealisms’ that

One came from the sense of religious crisis and search for a new philosophic basis to liberalism which troubled the late nineteenth century upper middle class intelligentsia. Another less clearly documented working-class idealism was sustained by some strands of Christian belief, co-operation, temperance and certain radical communitarianism and utopian traditions.¹⁹

Goldman, applying his theory of mutuality, sees intellectuals of this era as serving the working class, rather than imposing non-working class views upon them through adult education. His ‘evidence suggests that the lessons learnt by tutors from contact with working students had at least as much influence *on them* in forming their own mature political outlooks as they themselves had on their students.’²⁰

Rose and Goldman approach the experience of adult education from respectively a student and a teacher perspective. Their findings emphasise the importance of keeping an open mind with regard to what worker-students may or may not have learnt from workers’ adult education. Their combined work also highlights how difficult it is to discover the worker-student experience of adult education. Also the experience of education on a worker-student could have influenced and affected others not of their social and economic background.

Sheila Rowbotham presents yet another aspect of the worker-student experience that should not be overlooked – that of the dislocating effect of working class adult education.

¹⁷ Goldman, ‘Intellectuals and the Working Class’, p. 294.

¹⁸ Goldman, ‘Intellectuals and the Working Class’, p. 298.

¹⁹ Rowbotham, ‘Travellers in a Strange Country’, p. 91.

²⁰ Goldman, ‘Intellectuals and the Working Class’, p. 299.

Although Rowbotham's work concentrates on how students experienced the impact of education via the university extension movement, students of the WEA and NCLC during the inter-war period may have had similar experiences. For this reason, a brief review and analysis of her work is included here. Rowbotham investigates the purpose of the university extension movement from the perspective of worker-students. She seeks to ascertain if worker-students were 'uplifted' or 'nobbled', 'patronised' or 'enlightened' by university extension education.²¹

Rowbotham, similarly to Rose, finds that worker-students in the main were independent-minded about what they took from university extension education. Worker-students including Albert Mansbridge and Arthur Greenwood may have been flattered by the attention they received from the elite of the political and educational world but 'this did not mean that they accepted all the lecturers' ideas and were prepared to deny their own experience and values.' Rather, they 'chose their own ground and stood on it.'²²

Mansbridge and Greenwood went on to have very successful public lives. However, there was another side to the experience of adult education that Rowbotham uncovers through her study of the autobiographies and memoirs of worker-students of this time. In these sources she finds that students were uplifted by university extension education but found themselves 'travellers in a strange country', no longer of the working class nor of the middle class. It was not that they necessarily aspired to middle class status, but rather that they found themselves alienated from their friends and families by an educational culture not shared by their immediate community. Adult education could have an isolating impact on some worker-students. More often than not, adult education made no difference to their economic circumstances and they remained part of an exploited class.²³ Rowbotham concludes that

The tragedy of their situation was not that they were being nobbled, but that the ideals and culture which inspired them were tangled among the self-interest and prejudices of a class which held power over them and benefited from their labour.²⁴

Rowbotham's conclusion about the worker-student experience of university extension seems overly pessimistic, especially as the legacy of university extension, in the form of the WEA, sought to gain access for working class people to social, economic and political structures that were formerly dominated by the middle and upper

²¹ Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country', p. 63.

²² Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country', p. 91.

²³ Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country', p. 92.

²⁴ Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country', p. 92.

classes. She also points out several instances where worker-students described education as an almost religious experience that liberated their minds and enriched their inner lives.²⁵ What Rowbotham certainly succeeds in doing is to show, like Rose and Goldman, that the study of the experience of worker-students of adult education is complex and multi-faceted.

The historiography covered above shows how historians have made use of sources such as autobiographies, reminiscences, oral history accounts, and formal enquiries to gain insights into the lived experience of worker-students in adult education. I will now contribute a very different view of workers' adult education taken solely from the perspective of the worker-student, as expressed in WEA tutorial class logbooks – something not previously attempted in the historiography. The logbook entries are a direct expression of the more or less immediate experience of adult education by the worker-student, and its impact on them.

WEA Tutorial Class Log Books

The logbook sources comprise four logbooks of tutorial classes held in Royston, Todmorden, Sowerby Bridge, and York. Before explaining what the logbooks were and how they were used, it is useful to give a bit of background on the nuts and bolts of the tutorial class. The WEA's gold standard in adult education was the university tutorial class. Classes were run on a year-to-year basis, provided there was enough student interest in them, and such classes received funding mainly from LEAs. A class could run for up to three years depending on student interest, funding and tutor availability. The same tutor would take the class from year-to-year, giving continuity and consistency in the teaching. Each class had a hand-written logbook, written by each student in turn. One of the students would write up an entry in the logbook within a week of the class just taken, ready to be read out at the following class, at which the logbook would then be handed over to another student who would continue the recording process of that lesson, to be read the following week.

Logbooks exist for the Royston self-expression class (1935-1936), the Royston social and industrial history class (1936-1937), the Todmorden literature tutorial class (1924-1927) and the Sowerby Bridge literature tutorial class (1937-1940). (Incidentally the Todmorden and Sowerby Bridge classes had the same tutor – Mr G. Wilkinson.) The Royston class tutor was Mr Andrews. There is also a logbook for the York WEA

²⁵ Rowbotham, 'Travellers in a Strange Country', p. 73.

tutorial class on the history of civilisation (1923-1924) whose tutor was Mr Dainton.²⁶ To my knowledge these WEA logbooks have never been used to analyse the history of the experience of workers' adult education from the worker-student perspective. To avoid repetition, only the Royston and Todmorden class logbooks will be presented and studied here to give a general idea and sense of what WEA students took from different courses.

As sources they are not straightforward, but they give a great sense of what happened in the class and of the interaction between student and tutor. They also give first-hand accounts of what individual students thought about their classes, more or less immediately after attending them. It is this unique element that gives the historian a contemporaneous perspective of their experience. As distinct pieces of literature themselves, they are by turns entertaining, amusing, imaginative and original, and should be published in their entirety to make them more accessible. I have chosen specific extracts and quotations that are relevant as evidence to this thesis but the logbooks have the potential to be a much richer and broader seam of knowledge than my thesis has scope for.

By gaining an understanding of what WEA students actually *thought* of their classes we will get a better idea of what sort of people the WEA attracted. The questions that this section will answer are: what were WEA students learning in their tutorial classes?; what impressions did the topics being studied make on them?; what role did the tutor play in the student's experience of adult education?; how might the experience of workers' adult education in the liberal arts influence how a worker-student thought about his or her reality?; was there a socialist element to the WEA tutorial class?; and is the claim that the WEA provided political education in their classes valid?

The WEA Royston Self-Expression Class Logbook (1935-1936)

The Royston WEA branch receives special attention in the contemporary and secondary literature as an influential working-class organisation, which justifies giving some background on the branch. The first WEA class in Royston, a mining village about 13 miles north-east of Barnsley, in what during the relevant period was the West Riding

²⁶ Leeds WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Self Expression' & 'Social and Industrial History' Tutorial Class (1935 – 1937), WYL669/131; Calderdale WYAS, Logbook of WEA Sowerby Bridge Literature Tutorial Class (1937–1940), MISC: 200/7; Calderdale WYAS, WEA Logbook of Todmorden Literature/History Tutorial Class (1924–1927) MISC: 357; York City Archive, WEA York, 'History of Civilization' Tutorial Class Log Book (1923–1924), WEA/4 ACC 142:26.

of Yorkshire, was held in 1918. Writing of the branch's history in the *Yorkshire North Record* (April 1933), a Royston branch member quoted the Archbishop of York Dr Temple: 'a number of WEA students mixing freely with other people will tend to change the whole outlook of the people.'²⁷ This is what that Royston branch member believed happened in Royston.

The first class run by the WEA in Royston – social philosophy – was chosen by the students, who rejected the other subjects – literature, industrial history, and economics – proposed by the tutor.²⁸ The students comprised a group 'nearly all of whom had not been to school since they were thirteen, and whose average age would be something over thirty' and who felt that social philosophy was 'tangible, something worth getting down to'. Mr David Stewart, a WEA tutor, ran the course and followed it with a course on economics. The early students were described as 'serious and busy people, and were nearly all active in some kind of social work.' In the early days of the branch's history the students 'worked eleven days in a fortnight' and the writer observed that 'full-time work in a coal-mine is not conducive to study of an academic character.' Nonetheless, the students worked hard and the WEA's purpose 'to equip working men and women to bear responsibility in the social order' in Royston appears to have been successful.²⁹

W. E. Styler refers to the success of the Royston branch in the context of the WEA's project to prepare 'its members for public service'.³⁰ It was one of the more notable WEA branches in this regard because of the high proportion of worker-students it attracted who became involved in public service. It is worth quoting from the history of the Royston branch at length to qualify and quantify the success of the WEA in this area:

Nearly every social activity in Royston is influenced by the WEA. The County Council member was for six years a student in Mr Stewart's class. Last year out of the nine representatives on the Urban District Council, eight had been in WEA classes. This year it is seven out of nine. The four officials of the local miners' branch and three of the officials of the check-weigh fund are all students or ex-students of WEA classes. The main officials of the Carnival Fund, which last year raised £150 for charities, are WEA members. The President of the largest Working-Men's Club in the district is a WEA stalwart. Some of our students are Sunday School Teachers. Some ex-students are on the surrounding Parish Councils and others are officials in neighbouring Trade Union branches.³¹

²⁷ A Royston Branch Member, 'Branch Histories – IV Royston', The Supplement of *The Yorkshire (North) Record*, no. 41 in *The Highway*, (April, 1933), n.p.

²⁸ 'Branch histories – IV Royston', n.p.

²⁹ 'Branch histories – IV Royston', n.p.

³⁰ W. E. Styler, *Yorkshire and Yorkshire North*, p. 24.

³¹ 'Branch Histories – IV. Royston', n.p.

The evidence outlined here about the public service activities of Royston WEA students chimes with the theme of adult education for citizenship covered in Chapter Five, Parts I and II. *The Adult Student as Citizen* tells us that six former WEA students served on the Royston Urban District Council, reinforcing the idea that the WEA made an indirect but significant impact on local governance.³² The information above also clarifies the working class nature of the Royston class. We can, therefore, be reasonably confident that it was mainly worker-students who wrote the entries in the Royston self-expression class logbook.

Each student had a distinct voice and this was conveyed in his or her recording of the log. The excerpts chosen here give evidence of what aspects of the class they deemed interesting and important. Unfortunately the logbook has no page numbers so footnotes make reference to the date on which entries were recorded, with the name or initials of the student where possible. In cases where I have not been able to decipher some words I have used blank square brackets. I have made every effort to reproduce verbatim what was recorded in the logbooks. There may, therefore, be some grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors in the excerpts that appear here.

The first entry of the log gives an example of how students decided which subject they wanted to be taught. The choice was between comedies and tragedies but in the end the class overwhelmingly chose self-expression.³³ The purpose of the class seems to have been to teach students how best to express their ideas in debate and public speaking. It included several elements – use of language, construction of an argument and delivery of a speech. Each week, guided by the tutor, students worked on each element. The result was a class of much animated discussion about current affairs. One class focused on ‘the expressive nature of language’.³⁴ It is useful to recount the class here as the log-keeper recorded it because it gives a strong sense of what the aims of the class were and how it meshed with the social purpose of the WEA. The log-keeper paraphrased the tutor’s initial lecture on the importance of expression:

It is important that we should remember this aspect of language – that it is a tool [...] Working people realised what the meaning of this implied when the word tool was used. Just as they have to acquire skill in the use of chisels and picks and shovels, so the same has to be done with other tools. The more complicated the tool the more care has to be used in its adjustment and use. Language is therefore a complicated device to get things done in the community. It is a social institution, a legacy from the distant past and continually being improved so that our modern

³² *The Adult Student as Citizen*, pp. 41–49.

³³ WYAS, R. W. Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (17 September 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

³⁴ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (01 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

language places at our disposal the means of communicating our ideas [...] and aspirations to other people.³⁵

The idea that language as a tool was similar to the tools a manual worker would use indicates how the log-keeper made sense of what language was for. By making language akin to a device, its use and purpose was more easily understood in terms of communication. Further, language was described as an art, and one that ‘all mankind had to use’. It was:

our duty to acquire skill in the power to re-create in the minds of others the same emotion and ideas we experienced. This demands the development of the mental powers of the speakers as well as the power of delivery.³⁶

The expression of language was explicitly linked to the social purpose of the WEA:

we may all become the centres of groups of discussion in our daily circles. In this way we begin the task of helping to mould public opinion. Instead of being one of a number we feel ourselves as a power of influence, and in this way we fulfil the social purpose of the WEA handing to others some of the knowledge we have gained in our studies with its guidance.³⁷

The final section of this entry was a discussion about ‘the position of the League of Nations as a result of the Abyssinian crisis’. The general feeling expressed by the class on the crisis was ‘a lack of faith in the League’ and the idea that if something decisive was not done, then ‘the only policy was a reversion to the old “Balance of Power”’.³⁸

Another class focused on how to plan a speech by using nine units of oratory: ‘1) Exordium (why); 2) Definition (how); 3) Cause (when); 4) Effect (what); 5) Operation (where); 6) Comparisons (what); 7) Contrasts (results); 8) Summary; 9) Conclusion.’³⁹

The students then composed speeches for and against the ‘scholarship system’ using the guidelines. During this session the class answered more set questions about the League of Nations. The log entry on the outcome of this part of the class shows how debate could spring up in a class:

some very perverse students started to question the authenticity of the answers, both from a moral, and ethical point of view, however we got through with a very interesting and debating session.⁴⁰

The students were then given questions to answer about democracy for the following session that involved developing a view on the topic and defending it. As can

³⁵ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (01 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

³⁶ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (01 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

³⁷ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (01 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

³⁸ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (01 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

³⁹ WYAS, C. M. L., Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (08 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁴⁰ WYAS, C. M. L., Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (08 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

be seen the emphasis on robust debate in class was a significant feature. Each session ended, time allowing, with a debate on a topic set by either the students or the tutor. This aspect of open debate is bound to have given students the confidence to express themselves sensibly and articulately in different public forums outside the classroom.

The next session was about the debate procedure. The main advice given by the tutor on how to express oneself in debate was to ‘state your proposition and always let your last word be persuasive.’⁴¹ The class decided to debate the case for ‘Economic Sanctions’. A subsequent session explored the necessity of forming ideas in the first place and learning how to express them. This class produced much reflection and thought on the nature of ideas and is very useful to consider here. Mr Andrews is reported in the logbook as having given detailed advice of how to acquire ideas and organise them into language:

To concentrate on analysis or the critical part of writing cramps the flow of ideas, so full flow must be given to the getting of ideas, which can be put down as they occur and when the possibility of gaining new thought is exhausted then comes the task of putting your material in order according to flow. Finally the polishing up of language will give expressiveness to the material.⁴²

Such advice indicates how a WEA class of this sort was conducted and what students took from the tutor. The excerpt also shows how carefully the log-keepers kept their attention on the topic at hand. Logbook entries were read out at class from week to week so it may have been a matter of pride on the part of the log-keeper to produce a coherent account that would reflect well on them. Certainly, we can be confident that the log-keepers were alert throughout the entire class to make such detailed and observant recordings.

Later in the same class, the log-keeper recorded that one of the students, Mr Clapham, gave a paper on ‘A Comparison in Mechanisation’. Clapham’s paper gives insight into how he was thinking about the topic. He

compared the results of the use of mechanical means of production by [...] ‘Cadbury’s’ with that employed in the mining industry. His thesis was, that the former’s motive of harnessing all branches of the industry was for the welfare of all from the worker to the consumer was worthy enough but the profit motive of the mine owners was dangerous.

In the hands of Cadbury’s mechanisation was a blessing; in the colliery owners hands – a curse. Mr Clapham’s theories were backed by both facts and figures, which even after keen questioning, proved his point to a very fair degree.⁴³

⁴¹ WYAS, G. A. Tracey, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (15 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁴² WYAS, A. T. Wells, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (22 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁴³ WYAS, A. T. Wells, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (22 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

Here the topic chosen here reflected the lives and interests of the worker-students attending the class and highlighted their approach to industrial issues. The final part of this class was a discussion on ‘freedom of will’, again showing how diverse class discussion could be.

Another class session returned to the theme of ideas. Here the tutor seemed keen to impress upon the class the importance of thinking. As recorded by the log-keeper:

We were there, the tutor said to bring our ideas out to the best advantage, of all concerned, teaching leads to thought, when we think, we create ideas.

To be of value these must have depth, of meaning, Not skimming the surface, Reading, Observation, experience, brings out ideas, etc, And it also helps us to use our imagination, to Meditate and reason why, is it, or why is it not.

Imagination can be likened to a jig-saw puzzle of one’s life.⁴⁴

This log-keeper seemed particularly thoughtful about the work at hand and took to heart some quotations of famous writers the tutor read out. The quotations, chosen were:

Never resist Temptation, Prove all things, Hold Fast, to that which is good [...]

Democracy substitutes election, by the incompetent many for the selection by the corrupt few.

Liberty means responsibility, that is why most men dread it.

In another session the log-keeper recorded his appreciation of John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* when extracts were read out in class:

John Stuart Mills book on Liberty, whose reading is so convincing, in its exposition of the truth, so that it seems to enter into oneself or become a part of oneself.

From this reading the class discussed the meaning of liberty, freedom of expression and why we might hold certain attitudes depending on our political allegiance. The log-keeper went on to expound on these topics, concluding that democracy was a way of preventing dictatorship. His entry is quoted here at length to give the full sense of his understanding of the topic.

The subject was on the art of debate, in which he [John Stuart Mill] put forward his view that we are mainly influenced in our thoughts by the particular sect or party we belong to.

a passage of literature was read, in which it was shewn to us , how the free expression of opinion, can give the right and the wrong the benefit of their opinions.

By way of contrast, Mussolinis assumption of power, which has led him to think of himself, as infallible was proved. May I add that the majority of the people of Italy, think in the same way.

⁴⁴ WYAS, W. Hussey, Royston WEA Logbook, ‘Self Expression’ (29 October 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

It was proved that Democracy, is the check to infallibility, and that freedom of speech, enables us to voice our opinions in debate, and experience, in which we alone can assure the truth.

The danger was again stressed, in trying to mould our thoughts, along the lines of sect or party, which is static mindedness, the remedy for mans mistake is by discussion and experience and not by experience alone.

Reliance can only be placed on it, when it has been sifted and proved by argument.⁴⁵

This extract, though a little lengthy, shows how WEA students formed their thoughts and opinions from open debate in class. It also gives a different, more immediate perspective on how this log-keeper connected John Stuart Mill's thinking on liberty to Mussolini's accession to power. It shows how aware students of this class were of contemporary current affairs, and the part that they could play as citizens in the democratic process. The log-keeper places great emphasis on experience *and* debate as the means to form a rational, democratic state. This way of approaching social, economic and political issues of the day fitted into the WEA way of imparting education for citizenship that was impartial, un-sectarian and non-political.

The last log entry for the self-expression course was on the topic of a 'lack of education'. Here Mr Andrews summarised the themes of the course in a lecture. He outlined the importance of the education of children by proposing that children learnt good and bad examples of living from their parents. Andrews juxtaposed two types of mind-set – the 'mechanised mind' and the 'politician's mind' – arguing that neither was conducive to harmony or friendship. The following extract shows how the log-keeper (James E. Clapham) made sense of the lecture. It is quoted at length to give a full and faithful account of how Clapham paraphrased the lecture:

An interesting point was now developed shewing [sic] two conflicting forces at work, namely the mechanised mind and the politician.

The mechanised force being at work in the creation of profits, whilst the politician was acting policeman in the way of subservient acquiescence on the part of civilisation.

his fallacy was further pursued when it was admitted that industry was constantly seeking the co-operation of the Government to help them solve the many problems, that are now facing them, and the pendulum of decrepit and derelict thought leads us to imprisonment and bondage, because fear is the bar to freedom which these people whose heritage is security, refuse civilisation the choice of educational advantage which would loosen their bonds. The nessesity[sic] of education was stressed because the child mind must be developed to think independently, and national instincts of which history books have been so fond of creating, would disappear [sic] and truth would be taught instead of fostering to pride and nationality, which prevents unity between nations, which is so vital to day [...]

⁴⁵ WYAS, James E. Clapham, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Self Expression' (26 November 1935), n.p. WYL669/131.

Imagination and warmth are the twins of the teachers attitude towards the child instead of regimentation and pattern moulding of to day, in which children are taught to do as they are told, but are unable to think for themselves, the existence of education to day is to get rich in the community in which he belongs.

It was here pointed out that Jesus Christ was a revolutionary against the peoples idea of God in that age, which seems quite true to state that progress is only achieved by people who are of that order. True education gives scope for development instead of static teaching, operating in various countries which creates national bias, when in later years we learn the truth, we get a shock, as all kinds of lies are thrown about on purpose to blind us, and to foster national pride, and to be on the winning side.

The search for truth is the quest of both tutor and student and to foster friendships has been the aim of the WEA class, as the teacher is an explorer as well as the student.

Education is a means to thinking which leads one on to the spirit of mental adventure.⁴⁶

Though expressed clumsily in sections, this extract reflects the log-keeper's valiant attempt to keep up with the tutor's energetic argument for 'true education.' It also reflects a looming concern of the period – the rise of nationalism.

The self-expression course was followed, in September 1936, by a course on social and industrial history, which Mr Andrews also taught. The first log-entry tells us that a class secretary and librarian were nominated and appointed while Mr Andrews, when introducing the log, 'reemphasised the essential values of this book'.⁴⁷ One student 'moved a resolution to the effect in future we do not have a log book'. He objected to keeping the log because 'his time was taken up with other things and gardening'. The log-keeper, unimpressed, stated that:

could you imagine a WEA class member making a preference to any garden implement for a pen unless he be an enthusiastic gardener and I don't think that applies in this case.⁴⁸

The log-keeper moved to amend the resolution to keep a logbook, and the class voted thirteen to seven in support of the amendment. Such accounts give a sense of the different debates, large and small, that cropped up in WEA classes and how they were democratically resolved. The course itself was structured chronologically and thematically to teach students about the development of economic society from the Palaeolithic to contemporary times. Many of the log entries recount historical and statistical information from the tutor's lectures, much of it providing context and background about how past societies were structured. The gist of the lectures was to

⁴⁶ WYAS, James E. Clapham, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Self Expression' (24 April 1936), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁴⁷ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Social and Industrial History' (21 September 1936), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁴⁸ WYAS, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Social and Industrial History' (21 September 1936), n.p. WYL669/131.

show how human life evolved from being a patriarchal society to an industrial one. Many of the log-entries make very detailed accounts of the classes, and give a clear impression of how the course was structured, as well as summarising the information contained in each lecture.

A couple of log entries are worth mentioning here to give a sense of the course themes and topics. One entry gave a very lucid account of a class that dealt with the history of the coal mining industry from 1700 to the present day.⁴⁹ Another went into great detail about the history of the Poor Law.⁵⁰ A long and detailed entry focused on the topic of wages and prices. This class covered a wide range of topics that seemed to blend into each other as the class progressed. It is worth recounting because it gives insight into the log-keeper's independent thought processes about the topics covered. The log-keeper R. E. June recorded that, because of past wars, the National Debt, and the rise in the price of wheat during the nineteenth century

the Landlord demanded his pound of flesh and increased the rents of the workers. Thus, the burden of the war was passed on to the people least able to bear it, the working class.

June went on to make a critique of Defoe's *Tours Through England*:

So Defoe's pretty picture of his tour around Halifax proves to be merely a mirage. The lusty fellows some at dye vats, some at the looms, women and children, carding or spinning all employed youngest to oldest, every house occupied and not a beggar to be seen, this was all more apparent than real for a great many of them were little removed from beggars.

June then presented his own view of the plight of the working class and it is in this section that his independent thought and voice emerges. The extract is quoted at length to convey the full sense of June's opinion:

I do not think that the reason for their condition was due to inferiority in mental outlook, neither do I think it was due to lack of education as compared with us, for all our schools of thought and education facilities, the average worker to day does not avail himself of it. Why is this, partly because the capitalist sidetracks him by providing him with an institute or a Sports Club, to interest him in his spare time, anything to take his mind off the real issue. Others seek solace in the Pubs or Clubs from the drudgery of the days work, sweepstakes give him a million to one chance of getting out of the rut. I believe in education given from the working class point of view as a means to the emancipation of the working class is of some value but I want that emancipation in our time, not in ten million years, this is only approximately. That is the time we have to wait till we educate the majority of the working class. The only way in which we shall bring emancipation is through enforcing it upon him. What hope have we of combating the capitalist press when

⁴⁹ WYAS, R. Jones, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Social and Industrial History' (01 February 1937), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁵⁰ WYAS, O. Dyson, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Social and Industrial History' (11 January 1937), n.p. WYL669/131.

even to day we have not a single working class paper with any circulation worth talking about. Thus it will be seen I am a believer in Dictatorship as some of you already know but not Fascism.

Incidentally, George Thompson, the WEA Yorkshire North District organising secretary visited this class and gave a brief lecture on industrial history. June's final section records the ending stages of the class and his appreciation of the log:

Answers to questions were then taken and some interesting discussion took place some of which I have tried to criticise in this log + comments. Questions were then given for next week and the class closed as I expect I shall have to and just as I was getting into my stride but all good things come to an end.⁵¹

June's log entry shows us that WEA students, some more than others, took the task of log-keeper very seriously. June expressed his opinions about workers' adult education in a forthright manner, highlighting one of the issues that tended to challenge the more politically-minded students – how to galvanise their working class brethren into political action. Interestingly, June's use of the phrase 'education for emancipation' (a favoured slogan of the Plebs and title of a NCLC 1932 publication⁵²) implies that he was sympathetic to the Labour College approach to education, as well as that of the WEA.

On this theme, a letter signed by ten students of a WEA class in Barnsley published by *The Yorkshire Record* indicates the tension that existed between the WEA and supporters of IWCE.⁵³ The Barnsley students were protesting against what they perceived as criticism of IWCE made by the WEA in the November 1926 issue of *The Yorkshire Record* – 'Should Education Be Biased?'⁵⁴ The students wrote as follows:

We [...] wish to protest against much of the matter in the November issue of the 'Yorkshire Record.' One of these statements is that those who are out for Independent Working-class Education are 'a small but noisy group of enthusiasts' and another is 'The Communists do not count.'

May we point out that a good many of WEA Classes are made up almost entirely of those 'noisy enthusiasts' and the 'People who do not count', and such articles in your official organ neither convince these students of the wisdom of attending WEA Classes or of the unbiased character of the general run of WEA education.⁵⁵

The response to the letter was a robust rejection of the students' view which pointed out that the students had misquoted the article by 'substituting the word

⁵¹ WYAS, R. E June, Royston WEA Logbook, 'Social and Industrial History' (08 February 1937), n.p. WYL669/131.

⁵² National Council of Labour Colleges, *Education for Emancipation* (London: NCLC, 1932).

⁵³ 'A Protest', *The Yorkshire Record*, No. 6 (December, 1926), n.p.

⁵⁴ 'Should Education Be Biased?', *The Yorkshire Record*, No. 5 (November, 1926), n.p. (Supplement to *The Highway*, November 1926).

⁵⁵ 'A Protest', *The Yorkshire Record*, No. 6 (December, 1926), n.p. (Supplement to *The Highway*, December, 1926).

‘People’ for ‘Communists.’⁵⁶ A study of the original article shows no recording of the sentence ‘The Communists do not count,’ nor is there any mention of the word ‘communists’. In general terms this was a minor event. But, what it does indicate, irrespective of the ideological disagreements between the WEA and the NCLC, is that students with an affinity for IWCE and the NCLC still attended WEA classes. This implies that worker-students took knowledge from both organisations and shaped it independently to inform their own political views. June, for example, is very clear when he states that he supported dictatorship to guide and direct workers towards the right education and course of political action, but he distinguished it from fascism. Overall, the Royston WEA logbooks in self-expression and social and industrial history present evidence of a class of worker-students learning to think independently about their economic, social, and political world.

The WEA Todmorden Literature Class Logbook (1924-1927)

The WEA Todmorden class logbook gives a different insight into the responses of log-keepers to the study of a liberal arts subject – literature.

The tone and emphasis of the Todmorden literature class logbook was somewhat less serious in nature compared to the Royston logbook. For example, one student H. Rekstrew wrote the log as if he were a sailor on board a ship whose captain was the tutor:

We left port in fair weather last Thursday at 7.15 PM and the captain called the roll. Several sailors had been left ashore it was found, but those aboard were a goodly crew and were proved later well able to work the ship. The first watch was an easy one, the skipper reading to us “Oenone” and “The Death of Oenone” by Tennyson.⁵⁷

Rekstrew ended the log with this entry.

In closing the log I cannot help thinking that mad Ahab had one sane moment of his life when he caused the log to be thrown overboard well knowing that its line was too unsound to hold it.⁵⁸

Another student commenced the log with a poem bemoaning his task as log-keeper.⁵⁹ Both these entries show how significant a part of class was the log, and that how students chose to write it was completely up to them, so long as they conveyed their interpretation of the class taught. These particular entries, though atypical of the

⁵⁶ ‘A Protest’, *The Yorkshire Record*, No. 6 (December, 1926), n.p. (Supplement to *The Highway*, December 1926).

⁵⁷ Calderdale WYAS, H. Rekstrew, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (09 February 1925), p. 69. MISC: 357.

⁵⁸ WYAS, H. Rekstrew, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (09 February 1925), p. 73. MISC: 357.

⁵⁹ WYAS, A. Sutcliffe, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (12 March 1925), p. 83. MISC: 357.

logbooks in general, serve to show how comfortable and confident some students felt that they were able to play with the task for the entertainment of their peers. A. Townsend, writing the log following Sutcliffe, makes direct reference to his predecessor's poem:

‘Mr Sutcliffe, our poet, then read the log for the previous week and, as we had hoped, led off with a few stanzas in his usual humorous vein.’⁶⁰

Both log entries by Sutcliffe and Rekstrew are very detailed, each taking up several pages. Sutcliffe and Rekstrew, give the impression, through their log recordings, of being fairly well educated, articulate and literate, perhaps not typical of worker-students in general. Once the roll had been called and the log read, the tutor read aloud essays submitted by students. Wilkinson advised the students on how to write a good essay. His points were:

I Be direct and simple in language

II Avoid too many adjectives

III Keep your ideas neat and do not overdress them

IV That is, let your yea's be yea's and your nay's not culled from Shaw's "Pygmalion [*sic*]".⁶¹

Such entries show us the inner workings of a WEA tutorial class, and the relationship between tutor and students. Townsends's entry demonstrates how Mr Wilkinson taught and how the students learned. In a reading of *Androcles and the Lion* by George Bernard Shaw, the class

decided that we had enjoyed the introduction, i.e. the first act that we had read the previous week, in fact we had enjoyed it so much that we hadn't realised it was an introduction. We had seen the characters, heard their arguments and had felt it was inevitable that the Christians should be handed over to the gladiators and the lions, and our curiosity as to the result had been aroused. We had discovered that each of the Christians represents a different type of man.⁶²

The entry moves on to analyse what the characters represented, with Androcles being described as a 'humanitarian (or an animalarian as Mr W. preferred to call him) rather than a Christian'.⁶³ The rest of the log dedicated itself to bringing the play to life, and shows that Townsend was giving the story his full and complete attention. His account makes the play live even for the reader who does not know the play:

We noted continually moments of suspense when hope alternated with fear.

⁶⁰ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 87. MISC: 357.

⁶¹ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (12 March 1925), p. 85. MISC: 357.

⁶² WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 88. MISC: 357.

⁶³ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 88. MISC: 357.

We saw Ferrovius fearing that he might fight when he got into the arena, and Lavinia, knowing that he expresses his real self through fighting, hoping that he would fight. We saw Androcles certain that he would run away but hoping that he wouldn't. We were not quite as anxious about Spintho, but we were glad when he got what he deserved.⁶⁴

The play was thought-provoking leading Townsend to write: 'the play leaves us wondering about what happened to Androcles and the rest, but wondering still more about the ideas suggested.'⁶⁵ The class decided that they had enjoyed the play and found it by turns suspenseful and exciting. There had also been 'the drama of ideas, the conflict of ideas'. The 'innumerable' questions Townsend set down in the log at the end of the class were:

What is religion?
 Which was the real Christian?
 Were any of them Christians?
 What is the gist of the argument between the Captain and Lavinia?
 What was the Emperor's creed?
 Why do people persecute?⁶⁶

The students were 'exhorted to go home and think and come to the next class prepared to talk'.⁶⁷ The next class continued to explore the themes of the play in more detail. This log is not as full of the flourishes as the previous ones, but it does tackle big and difficult questions. For example, Mr Wilkinson asked the class what they thought the theme of the play was. The class easily identified that religion was the theme, but had more difficulty defining what religion was, when asked:

The next question What do we mean by religion did not meet with a ready response. Only one or two students attempted to answer. One suggested that "it was one's attitude to life" another "the attempt of the human mind to put itself in touch with its environment".⁶⁸

Mr Wilkinson then gave the class a lecture on religion as dealt with by Shaw in the play. He explained religion in a child-to-adult framework. The log-keeper's understanding of what the lecture conveyed was that children accepted what they were told and had a 'blind faith in things and people they were used to'.⁶⁹ However, once they grew older, they started to develop their ability to think independently and 'ask why and reason things out for themselves. This is the beginning of religion; to form our

⁶⁴ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 89. MISC: 357.

⁶⁵ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 90. MISC: 357.

⁶⁶ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 91. MISC: 357.

⁶⁷ WYAS, A. Townsend, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (19 March 1925), p. 91. MISC: 357.

⁶⁸ WYAS, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (26 March 1925), p. 92. MISC: 357.

⁶⁹ WYAS, Todmorden Logbook, 'Literature' (26 March 1925), p. 92. MISC: 357.

own ideas on life and establish a creed for ourselves!’⁷⁰ Following on from this concept the log-keeper described a lack of religion occurring where

some people never learn to enquire. They accept a creed and a name because it was their father’s and they are accustomed to it. They have no clear idea of what they mean by this name and have not tried to think it out. Some become bigoted and will not admit there can be any way but theirs.⁷¹

The thrust of Mr Wilkinson’s lecture according to this log entry was to highlight Shaw’s idea that religion is irrational, and that

Christians die for a reasonless idea, they cling to a faith but do not really know the author of it. They cannot explain why they are dying except that it would be dishonour to yield merely to escape death.⁷²

The tutor, according to the log, made sure to draw the attention of the class to Shaw’s bias against Christianity and his great skill at presenting his arguments so as to persuade others who did not hold the same views:

Shaw is biased against Christianity and has such clear reasoning powers that as we read we find ourselves believing what he says against our own judgement and feelings.⁷³

Wilkinson advised the students to read other authors for different points of view. This log entry among many, many others, gives us a snapshot of what, and how, students were learning in their tutorial classes. As an example it serves to show how studying a play such as *Androcles and the Lion* addressed bigger themes and questions about how to live. The log entries reflect the thought processes of students and help us to understand the class as they experienced it. They give a clear sense that the WEA tutorial class was all about generating ideas whatever the topic, be it literature, history, or economics. If the student began to think independently then the tutorial class was a success, as shown by the log entries. It is likely that this educative process in the liberal arts, however lofty and remote in time and topic, altered the way working class students perceived their reality. Questions such as ‘What is religion?’ and the answers generated by the class are very thought-provoking. For the log-keeper to have identified that religion was the beginning of independent thought is original, imaginative, and different perhaps to anything that that student may have ever encountered in life before.

⁷⁰ WYAS, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (26 March 1925), p. 92. MISC: 357.

⁷¹ WYAS, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (26 March 1925), p. 92. MISC: 357.

⁷² WYAS, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (26 March 1925), p. 93. MISC: 357.

⁷³ WYAS, Todmorden Logbook, ‘Literature’ (26 March 1925), p. 93. MISC: 357.

Learn and Live. The Consumer's View of Adult Education⁷⁴

This section complements the above, giving a more formal perspective on what worker-students were taking from workers' adult education. In addition it provides highly relevant information given by worker-students that explains in some depth their thoughts about the value of adult education as disseminated the WEA. The source analysed here is the Adults Students Enquiry conducted by the British Institute of Adult Education (BIAE) in collaboration with the American Association for Adult Education.

William Emrys Williams,⁷⁵ secretary of the BIAE and editor of *The Highway*, and Archibald E Heath, Professor of Philosophy, University College Swansea, published the results of the enquiry as *Learn and Live. The Consumer's View of Adult Education*. The history of the enquiry arose out of the aims of the BIAE, established in 1921, one of which was to make a 'systematic enquiry into the problems and forms of adult education'.⁷⁶ The BIAE recognised the work of the WEA in expanding the provision of workers' adult education over thirty years, and judged that the time was ripe to undertake an enquiry into adult education that would 'provide a body of reliable information' to the movement in Britain as well as other nations. The purpose of the enquiry was

to collect information about the experiences, difficulties and activities of adult students in the hope of being able to bring those difficulties into clearer light and so to enable them to be faced more hopefully.⁷⁷

The enquiry was conducted as a questionnaire study, with the questionnaire having been first drafted and tested on WEA students and then altered as indicated by an analysis of the draft responses.⁷⁸ To recruit students to the study, the investigators contacted ex-students of Ruskin College (which kept good records of their ex-students). Professor Heath and Mr F Smith (Secretary of Ruskin College) 'visited groups of students in England and Wales to induce students met to act as personal canvassers to others in their regions'.⁷⁹ This meant that no student received a questionnaire out of the blue. Students who completed the questionnaire were encouraged to fill it out freely and frankly:

It was understood by all the students who contributed their experiences that they should 'nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice'; that they should, in a

⁷⁴ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*.

⁷⁵ Williams (1896–1977) was secretary to the BIAE from 1934 to 1940. He was also editor-in-chief of Penguin Books. E. M. Hutchinson, 'William Emrys Williams', *ODNB* (Downloaded 07 November 2017).

⁷⁶ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 257.

⁷⁷ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 257.

⁷⁸ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 258.

⁷⁹ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 259.

measured deliberate way, give their evidence of what adult education had done, or failed to do, for them.⁸⁰

After the initial results arrived, the investigators decided to repeat the process with 'representative sets of students from the ordinary Tutorial Class'. Professor Heath travelled extensively to England, Scotland, and Wales to 'get in touch with students differing in occupation, type of class and length of experience.' WEA secretaries, LEA officials, tutors and students who were able to connect with groups of students in their areas assisted him in this task. This part of the enquiry was enormously productive and useful. Altogether, the Ruskin and tutorial parts of the enquiry collected over 'five hundred individual dossiers' and 'So eager were students to offer evidence that many of them submitted statements beyond what was asked for in the book of questions.'⁸¹ Full anonymity was given to all the results.

The responses were analysed and published as *Learn and Live*. The authors of the enquiry noted that 'there remains a body of evidence sufficient for a companion volume, concerned more particularly with the vocational, rather than the social, mental and emotional consequences of adult education.'⁸² Sadly such a volume was not published. The whereabouts or existence of the original questionnaires is unknown at present.

To support the experiences of worker-students as expressed in the logbooks, it is now time to consider how they responded when questioned directly about why they chose to take up adult education. An analysis of *Learn and Live* will give us greater insight into this important aspect of workers' adult education between the wars. This will be done by way of presenting some of the answers given to specific questions asked by the survey.

A key question was: 'What do you consider to be the main aims or purposes of adult education?'⁸³ The investigators in their analysis pointed out that the answers to this question ranged from broad generalisations to what they termed 'a Double Emphasis'. Here, students wished for an education that would enrich their personal existence, as well as one which would improve society.⁸⁴ Another theme that emerged from the responses was a desire to develop a 'balanced personality'.⁸⁵ A sample of the

⁸⁰ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 259.

⁸¹ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 259.

⁸² Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 260.

⁸³ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, pp. 2-4.

⁸⁵ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, pp. 2-4.

shorter answers are worth setting down as they give a general sense of what students valued about adult education:

To broaden the outlook on life; life is more than a bread-and-butter existence.⁸⁶

To try and give somewhat of a uniform standard to all. To broaden the outlook of a class of people who have, because of economic conditions, had to lead cramped and narrow lives.

To enrich one's life, to make one less dependent upon externals.

The main purpose of adult education should be to give man a conception of life which he can confidently call his own.

To create a state of mind that can be at rest without a toy.

To teach men who toil that life is more than livelihood.

In my own case it has been: an escape from drab conditions: a broadening of my outlook on life: an interest for leisure time independent of my friends or outside interests: a better understanding of myself and my place in the universe: a fellowship with great minds: intercourse with people of kindred tastes.⁸⁷

These responses show that the worker-students who responded to the questionnaire were very thoughtful about their inner as well as external lives. Adult education allowed them to expand their world-view and become more cultured. The idea that adult education could offer the student a certain independence from a monotonous work life is also apparent.

Other responses about the purpose of adult education were concerned with the profound lack of education students has thus far experienced during their lifetimes. The responses show that many students felt ill-equipped to cope with the demands of their lives because they were poorly educated to begin with. Education could perhaps help them transform themselves into different kinds of citizens unconstrained by a lack of knowledge. The responses selected by the investigators highlight the aspirational element amongst adult students:

To give to men and women whose early education has been limited, an opportunity of intellectual development, which should result in a richer and fuller life for themselves, and increase their personal power.

The development of individual personality – which has been possibly arrested – and then the development of the ideal of service to the community.

I was determined to be of some service to my day and generation [...] I was not what one would call a 'bright boy'. So I set out at the age of 26 years to be equal to the 'bright boys' of my early school days, and I am now in the state when I can stand up to them and teach them many things. The adult class did it.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, pp. 4-6.

⁸⁸ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, pp. 6-7.

This last response is intriguing because it identifies the worker-student as a person with a high degree of self-knowledge and an ability to find a way of realising their ambitions – in this instance to be ‘equal to the bright boys’. It also explores the idea that getting an effective education can occur at different stages in life. Adult education was, therefore, perceived as a very important as a way of giving people a second chance to educate themselves when they were better able to meet academic challenges. In many ways adult education was perhaps much more satisfying to self-motivated students than the drudgery of conventional primary and secondary education.

Other aspects of the purpose of adult education that emerged from the study were its vocational qualities. This element was all about worker-students applying education in a practical way to their day-to-day existence. Some responses that convey this function follow:

If adult education fulfils its real function it will of necessity be closely related to the working life of the student because it will change his outlook on his work and its value to society, just as it will slowly form his national outlook on life generally. It should make him take to some serious study on the vocational side of his own daily occupation because of the realisation of its importance if he is to fill his own little niche in the world in the proper manner.

A closer knowledge of the economics of an industry in which a group of students were engaged would result in a desire for greater efficiency, as they understood more their importance as units in a great undertaking.

I being a steel-worker and a member of a Tutorial Class studying Economics, find that it is closely related to my actual working life. When I go into the office, as a trade union branch representative, to meet our employer, I find that my study of economics is of great value.⁸⁹

The questionnaire responses’ expressions of the vocational function of adult education, twinned with the more intellectual pursuit of knowledge for self-improvement, show that many students understood clearly the dual nature of education. As the investigators pointed out in their analysis, the responses from students about the purpose of adult education displayed more often than not the ‘Double Emphasis’.

The enquiry also highlighted the problems and challenges that worker-students faced. The responses presented below give a summary of the economic problems encountered and how students dealt with them

Studied after marriage; worked all day in cotton mill, 6 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We had a grocer’s shop to help aid a growing family, but I found time to study.

Money short, but I am not sure that this was a real disadvantage as perhaps being short of money made me a more careful and thoughtful man.

When my wife died I was left with three children, eldest 8 and youngest five weeks. Out of my wage there was a housekeeper to pay.

⁸⁹ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, pp. 52–53.

Working nine hours a day and your own sewing and mending to do, besides part of your housework, didn't leave much time for study.⁹⁰

In addition many adult students suffered bereavement when young and carried heavy family obligations, reflecting their socio-economic status and poverty. For example

Lost my father when sixteen and a half years of age. Afterwards had the responsibility of rearing five children and a widowed mother, I being the eldest.

Father killed in mine in May 1898, one year before the Workmen's Compensation Act came into force. I was left the bread-winner of the family until my brothers were old enough to work in the pits.

As the first-born in a home in which to get the money we needed, I was obliged to pass a 'Labour Exam'. And commence 'half-time' work at 12 years of age. Later I had more freedom.⁹¹

These brief responses convey simply and directly just how hard life was for some worker-students. Given their circumstances, it is unsurprising that some students were unable to gain even a primary school education, let alone a secondary one. The emergence of the working class adult education movement in the form of the WEA and the Labour Colleges gave these adults a second chance. Without these voluntary working class adult education organisations, many bright, intelligent, ambitious working class people would never have had the opportunity to acquire a higher education. In connection with their lack of primary and secondary education, worker-students identified the problems they encountered in classes. Often these problems concerned difficulties that they had in the art of study:

I would certainly recommend that classes might, in the first instance, be formed for instruction in the art of study. Looking back on my experience, I think I would have been spared endless labour if I had been advised on the best method of study.

Much that is good in adult education is lost because the foundation of a sound elementary education is missing. An adult class invariably finds itself faced with the fact that some of its members are out of their depth immediately the introductory lectures are completed.⁹²

These are just some of the responses from the Adult Education Enquiry questionnaire.

This chapter identifies why adult students sought education and the challenges involved. It also aims to understand the learning process and the experience of workers' adult education as conveyed by the WEA logbooks. What we can conclude is that the world of the worker-student was alive with possibilities for personal, social, and

⁹⁰ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 60.

⁹¹ Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, pp. 74–75.

⁹² Williams and Heath, *Learn and Live*, p. 201.

political improvement. Workers' adult education opened a window on a life that would otherwise have been closed to these students. The logbook entries show evidence of this, while *Learn and Live* shows evidence of the aspirations and hopes for a better internal and external life that worker-students nurtured in the face of social and economic adversity.

WEA Tutors and Organisers

I have so far focused on the worker-student experience of workers' adult education. But what of the tutor who was the centre of attention of the class? There are not many records available of tutors' experiences of their classes, but some reminiscences serve to give us an idea of what a WEA tutor's life was like.

George Gibson who taught a WEA tutorial class in industrial history and economics in Slaithwaite published some reminiscences of his teaching experiences.⁹³ All of the students attending Gibson's class were men who worked in the textile industry. The class consisted of a one-hour lecture and a one-hour discussion. Gibson noted that 'Industrial History and Economics were to them [the students] something they lived: my book knowledge seemed flimsy and unsatisfactory.'⁹⁴

In 1920 Gibson was offered a post as a University Staff tutor for the University of Leeds at a time when the WEA were expanding their classes into rural East Yorkshire. Gibson's task was to organise tutorial classes in the region with Ernest Gitsham, the WEA organising tutor for the area.⁹⁵ Gibson describes how isolated were some of the villages where he gave classes. He observed that in places like Lund, which were 'four miles from the nearest railway station and without any train service after seven in the evening travelling was a serious matter.'⁹⁶ In winter when the weather was particularly bad, Gibson would stay overnight with a class member. He reported that:

During the eleven years in the region neither the WEA nor the University of Leeds had to pay out a single penny for overnight expenses – something of a record as I stayed away from home on an average three nights weekly for the whole period.⁹⁷

Indeed Gibson's class in Hessle devised a rota to accommodate him on his class nights.⁹⁸ Gibson became close to his students and observed first hand how they lived. He 'came to be treated as a friend rather than just a tutor: they readily discussed family

⁹³ George W Gibson, 'Adult Education in East Yorkshire in the 1920's – Some Reminiscences' in *Adult Education in East Yorkshire 1875-1960*, ed. by W. E. Styler (Department of Adult Education. University of Hull: Hull, 1965).

⁹⁴ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 17.

⁹⁵ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 18.

⁹⁶ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 20.

⁹⁷ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 20.

⁹⁸ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 21.

or personal problems, and talked of their hopes for their children's future.'⁹⁹ Gibson was aware of the hardships that his students endured and found himself in a moral dilemma when offered hospitality by those who were unemployed. His students were proud and 'would have been offended had I offered money'.¹⁰⁰

Gibson's reminiscences give some insight into the close connection between student and tutor that were key to making classes memorable, interesting, and effective. But students also had their own views of tutors that are worth considering. W. E. Styler's collection of the best essays composed by students on 'The Good Tutor' for the W. Henry Brown Essay Competition provides information about what WEA students looked for in a tutor.¹⁰¹ Although they were written in 1955, we may still extrapolate from the essays elements of what made a good tutor that could be applied to what worker-students from the inter-war era might have written on the same subject. Here are some relevant excerpts that communicate what students thought about 'The Good Tutor':

I attended his classes when I was passing through a period of physical and mental weariness. His lectures invigorate me. Many times before setting out I felt too tired to go. Somehow I made the effort, and before five minutes of the lecture had passed I had forgotten my weariness. Indeed, I had forgotten myself. All that mattered was the absorbing, enfolding interest of the subject which enthralled the entire class.

All the good tutors I have known have carried the normal tutor-student relationship forward to friendship. They have so engaged the confidence of students that before either side was aware friendship had developed and real affection grown up which enriched the whole of life.

The respect and reverence of a WEA group is most readily given to the tutor who lectures with enthusiasm because his subject is dear to his heart and he is complete master of that subject.¹⁰²

These views support much of the evidence presented so far about the importance of tutors to the students. They also provide further evidence in support of Goldman's argument that worker-students took a great deal from their tutors and appreciated their efforts to introduce them to new ideas and a new way of living. Students and tutors had a special relationship in the world of workers' adult education that worked on the basis of co-operation, harmony, and mutual respect.

It is now worth considering this aspect of the experience of adult education from the perspective of WEA administrators. George Thompson, organising secretary for the

⁹⁹ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 21.

¹⁰⁰ Gibson, 'Adult education in East Yorkshire', p. 21.

¹⁰¹ W. E. Styler, (ed.), *The Good Tutor. A Student View* (London: WEA North-Western District, 1956). W. Henry Brown, a co-operator and one of the founders of the WEA in the North West gave an endowment of funds for an annual essay prize. In 1955 the subject was 'The Good Tutor', p. 5.

¹⁰² Styler, *The Good Tutor*, pp. 5-6.

WEA Yorkshire North District, was extremely aware of the working class aspect of the WEA and was keen to maintain it as an organisation for the benefit of worker-students. In his pamphlet, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, Thompson made his views clear on the importance of recruiting the right kind of tutors to the WEA. He expressed recognition of the involvement of the universities: 'I think that working-class education has gained immensely from its University contacts.' In this regard, the universities had supported the WEA by providing the means to promote 'dispassionate study in the sense of being willing to consider all the facts and give them due weight'. Thompson recognised that this had 'brought into the work of the Association something fundamentally good'.¹⁰³ However, Thompson saw the converse of this being an over-reliance on the universities for the provision of WEA tutors. The relationship between the two organisations – the WEA and the universities – placed pressure on the WEA to

make its field of study conform with University custom, practice and tradition, to accept University distinctions as to what is the appropriate dividing line between one subject and another, and to adopt University ideas as to what constitutes standards.¹⁰⁴

Thompson proposed that a tutor coming into the WEA with a university background was, despite an empathy with working-class aspirations, bound to bring 'into his work conventional University concepts'. This was inevitable as far as Thompson was concerned. But, Thompson argued, 'what is not inevitable is that the WEA should succumb to the pressure.' He argued further that 'university ideas of what is good need to be absorbed only to the extent that the WEA considers them good.'¹⁰⁵ In this area Thompson saw the appointment of tutors as key to keeping faith with the purpose of the WEA to remain an educational organisation that supported worker-students. Tutors were vital to giving a class 'the distinctiveness which keeps it together because of its value'.¹⁰⁶ Thompson was very clear-minded on the importance of tutors to the WEA as a working class enterprise. He stated that

if the Association is to serve its purpose, its tutors must give its welfare the first place in their thoughts and actions and be free from external influences which prevent them from doing this.¹⁰⁷

Thompson believed that if the WEA employed tutors who understood the WEA's purpose and who were 'entirely free to serve working-class education to the best of their

¹⁰³ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, p. 10.

ability, the problem of the field of study' would be straightforward. The main task of the tutor, apart from teaching their subject, was to

cultivate interchange of views and display a willingness to be guided by the opinions of students as to what was good for them, such, for example as were expressed at the Conferences on Economics and Politics, even if this involves methods of treatment quite contrary to accepted academic conventions.¹⁰⁸

George Thompson was confident that the purpose of the WEA would not be corrupted if academic tutors of this calibre could be recruited.¹⁰⁹ His analysis of the tutor's place in the WEA reflects an administrative system that went to some trouble to ensure that the right tutors were in post. Thompson also refuted Tawney's claim that tutors learnt as much from their students as the students did from them. (However, Tawney, E. P. Thompson and George Gibson appear to have genuinely believed that their worker-students helped them develop intellectually.) Nor did George Thompson believe that education could or should erase class boundaries. He stated that

A good deal of tosh [...] is written about education. Haldane's view, for example, that it is a bridge from one class to another is rot. We don't want our children to remove from one class to another. We want them to stay where they are.¹¹⁰

So, it is perhaps no accident that Goldman found tutors and students to be of the same intellectual mind, at least in part because regional WEA organisers such as Thompson deliberately recruited sympathetic tutors.

Jack Jones and the Liverpool Labour College

So far, this chapter has presented a range of experiences from different perspectives of mainly WEA education. Unfortunately equivalent sources such as the WEA logbooks do not exist for the labour colleges or co-operative classes.¹¹¹ It is therefore not possible to compare or contrast the three organisations from the worker-student perspective using standardised sources. However, it is possible to present the worker-student experience of labour college classes from autobiographical accounts. The following section will consider one very lucid account of labour college classes made by Jack

¹⁰⁸ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *The Field of Study for WEA Classes*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Quoted by Harrison in *Learning and Living*, p. 297. Harrison provides a clear analysis of Thompson's important administrative role in the WEA in Yorkshire. See pp. 289–299.

¹¹¹ I searched the archives of the Working Class Movement Library (Salford), the National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh), LSE Archives, London, the Co-operative Archive (Manchester) and WYAS for log books and student accounts of Co-operative and NCLC classes but did not succeed in finding any sources that provided equivalent information to that in the WEA Logbooks. I also asked Dr Keith Vernon, who has done extensive research into co-operative education, if he knew of the whereabouts of first-hand student accounts of co-operative classes. Dr Vernon was unable to help me locate any such records.

Jones.¹¹² Though Jones attended labour college classes in Liverpool rather than Yorkshire, it is reasonable to infer more generally from his account the worker-student experience of NCLC education during the inter-war period.

Jack Jones was born in Liverpool in 1913 and died in 2009.¹¹³ His account of his life and education is taken from an interview conducted in 1983.¹¹⁴ It is helpful to give a brief review of Jones's early life before considering his experience of workers' adult education.

Jones's father was a dockworker, and his grandfather had been a boilermaker involved in the trade union movement. Influenced by his grandfather's accounts of being a trade unionist, Jones 'picked up a few trade union ideas from him'.¹¹⁵ He left school at the age of fourteen, and started work at a local engineering firm. The firm shut down within a few months and Jones found work at the docks in Liverpool.¹¹⁶ Jones explained that the reason he succeeded in gaining work at the docks was because his father was a dockworker and 'it was part of the [trade union] agreement that dockers' sons should be given preference.'¹¹⁷ His family were all involved in trade unions through their work and were also active in the labour college movement. In Jones's words:

My father was a docker. One of my brothers was a seaman, a ship's engineer [...] The other two brothers, they were railwaymen, members of ASLEF (Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen). Railwaymen were very active in the labour college movement.¹¹⁸

Jones's older brothers 'took correspondence courses from the labour college' and Jones read the courses while he was going to school. He also read several influential books before he was sixteen: Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* by Lenin.¹¹⁹ These books were passed amongst workers and trade unionists and, in the case of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Jones remarked that

I must have bought half a dozen copies of that. You, lent and it didn't come back. The circulation of that book was remarkable! [...] that book was a great introduction to socialist and trade union ideas.¹²⁰

¹¹² Geoffrey Goodman, 'Jack Jones' *ODNB* (Downloaded 09 June 2016).

¹¹³ Goodman, 'Jack Jones'.

¹¹⁴ Jack Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', *History Workshop*, 18 (Autumn, 1984), pp. 92-101.

¹¹⁵ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 92.

¹¹⁶ Goodman, 'Jack Jones'.

¹¹⁷ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 95.

¹¹⁸ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 95.

¹¹⁹ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', pp. 94-95.

¹²⁰ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 95.

By the age of eighteen, Jones, with his interest in the trade union movement, was attending labour college classes in Liverpool. During this time he began to read much more and ‘even had a go at Marx’s *Capital*’. Jones found that

the first part made a big impression on me; you know, the enclosures and the revelations about factory conditions [...] otherwise the book was hard going. I ploughed through it, and found it was an exposure of capitalism. It helped me a great deal.¹²¹

Jones was unusual in the labour college he attended because of his youth. Most of the other students were middle aged ‘solid trade-union branch members’.¹²² The teacher at the Labour College was Jack Hamilton who, Jones observed, succeeded in making the study of economics accessible to worker-students who thought very pragmatically.¹²³ Hamilton, in Jones’s opinion

wasn’t a very good tutor [...] but he was a working man, and in many ways he got over because he was able to talk the language of the working man, although he wasn’t the most brilliant exponent

Jones became the honorary secretary of his local labour college. ‘The committee consisted of delegates from different unions who would decide on what classes to arrange.’¹²⁴ Classes were held in either the Trades Council offices or those of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). The Trades Council was more supportive of the labour college than the TGWU. Jones observed that Ernest Bevin ‘was very much opposed to the labour colleges’ but, because the TGWU had large premises in Liverpool, it was possible for the labour college to hold classes there for a small fee. He stressed that ‘there were no academics’ in attendance and classes were attended by ‘horny-handed men of toil [...] ordinary trade-union people’.¹²⁵ Of the economic classes, Jones had this to say:

It was a straight-forward exposition of Marxism, frankly, when it came to economics. For many of us it was a sort of opening of the mind, a stretching of the mind, discussing surplus value and all the other aspects of Marxism. I suppose it strengthened my interest both in the union and in the Labour Party, the fact that I was getting this understanding of what society was about. Such classes looked closely at industry, the structure of industry and the way labour was exploited.

Jones’s assessment of how his co-students found the class was that

¹²¹ Jones, ‘A Liverpool Socialist Education’, p. 95.

¹²² Jones, ‘A Liverpool Socialist Education’, p. 96.

¹²³ Jones, ‘A Liverpool Socialist Education’, p. 96; Ruth Frow gives some context to Hamilton’s life. He was an organizer of the short-lived Building Workers Industrial Union formed (1914–1916). He became a tutor for the Liverpool Labour College and thereafter ‘national chairman of the NCLC and secretary of Number 8 division of NCLC’. He also became a city councillor and Alderman for Liverpool. Ruth Frow, ‘The Spark of Independent Working-Class Education’ in *The Search for Enlightenment*, p. 94.

¹²⁴ Jones, ‘A Liverpool Socialist Education’, p. 96.

¹²⁵ Jones, ‘A Liverpool Socialist Education’, p. 96.

some of them had a very elementary understanding of what was going on, but it certainly meant that the minds were focused upon economic issues in a way that at least gave them an inkling, which they didn't have previously.¹²⁶

The textbooks used in the labour college class included an *Outline of Economics* written by William McLaine (1891–1960), then Assistant General of the AEU, as well as *The Outline of Economic Geography* by Frank Horrabin, and Karl Marx's *Value, Price and Profit*. Jones noted that the texts used were mostly written by working-men for working men, and had a very clear structure.¹²⁷ In a labour college class, 'the tutors would normally open up on a short exposition and then we would discuss it.' As a rule students would read from one of the texts and then the rest of class would discuss it. Jones remembered these discussions as being 'quite lively because we were all talking together like working men'.¹²⁸

Jones also gave an account of WEA classes run by the WETUC (Workers Educational Trade Union Committee) that labour college students often attended in addition to attending labour college classes. The WETUC was the industrial arm of the WEA and was supported by trade unions such as the Iron and Steel Confederation Union. Jones, even in his capacity as honorary secretary of the local labour college, attended WETUC classes. He also asked the WETUC to arrange classes in different subjects such as industrial law.¹²⁹ Jones's perception of the WETUC and labour college classes is intriguing, and important to quote here:

The difference between the labour college classes and the WETUC ones was that they [WETUC/WEA] had more university and professional people as tutors. For the rest of it they were almost the same. The subjects were of relevance to trade unionists [...] Of course the WEA approach was much wider. And we weren't bothered about that. We weren't concerned to talk about music and history and art and all that sort of thing. We wanted to talk about industrial law, the structure of trade unionism and what socialism meant, international affairs, international labour politics, international economic matters.¹³⁰

Jones's observations of the similarities between WETUC and labour college classes, as well as the fact that labour college students attended both WEA and NCLC classes, indicates that worker-students did not discriminate, as the national and regional organisers of WEA and NCLC education did, about the ideology of working class adult education. Instead worker-students attended what classes were available in their locality, irrespective of whether they were run by the WEA or the NCLC. This shows

¹²⁶ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 96.

¹²⁷ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 97.

¹²⁸ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 97.

¹²⁹ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', pp. 97–98.

¹³⁰ Jones, 'A Liverpool Socialist Education', p. 98.

workers' adult education to have been a commodity in short supply, and that worker-students perceived any education as better than none in the circumstances.

Further, Jones's point about what labour college worker-students were interested in – economics, industrial law, socialism – indicates that they had a different agenda and mind set from their WEA counterparts. If Jones is typical of a labour college student, we can infer that workers who gravitated towards the labour colleges were more rank-and-file than those who attended WEA classes. Certainly, the NCLC focused on recruiting such worker-students as opposed to non-union students. The type of worker-student who attended labour college classes, as opposed to the worker-student who attended WEA classes, reflects the diversity of the British working class during the inter-war era. It also implies that there was more to education than the liberal arts and humanities that the WEA focused on, amongst the industrial reality that many worker-students found themselves in. The NCLC, in its somewhat dogmatic and autodidactic way, was responding to this section of politically active worker-students.

Ultimately, the experience of workers' adult education disseminated by the labour colleges, like the WEA, gives a similar impression of worker-students entering a new world of possibilities, albeit a more industrial one.

Women and Adult Education

Frank Horrabin contributed many cartoons to the *Plebs* journal. His cartoons depict image after image of vigorous working class male students fighting capitalism using IWCE. The cartoons are amusing and incisive, never failing to criticise capitalism, and lionise the working man. But, viewing Horrabin's *Plebs* cartoons, one is struck by the almost complete absence of women in his depictions of IWCE-related topics. This leads to the question: where were the women worker-students in the world of workers' adult education between the Wars? This next section will try to uncover how women experienced adult education during the inter-war period.

There were some women students and teachers involved in the inter-war working class adult education movement. We know that they participated in WEA, labour college and Co-operative classes, and that they were an essential part of the administration of those organisations.¹³¹ Some women adult educationalists of the period stand out – women such as Winifred Horrabin and Margaret Llewelyn Davis, leader of the Co-operative Women's Guild. However, their collective historical voice in

¹³¹ For a critique of the masculine emphasis of workers education in relation to the 1908 Report *Oxford and Working Class Education* and the difficulties that women in the past and today have in accessing higher education see Jane L. Thompson, 'The Cost and Value of Higher Education to Working-class Women' in *Oxford and Working Class Education*.

the history of workers' adult education is difficult to hear amidst the chorus of male voices that dominated the British labour movement as a whole. This is partly because the number of women students who participated in workers' adult education as disseminated by the WEA, the Labour Colleges and the co-operatives was small in comparison with the number of male students who attended classes. Also, primary sources that provide information about women and their role in the working class adult education movement are lacking. This section makes use of the available source material on the topic to understand the experience and involvement of women in workers' adult education.

It is useful to consider how this significant minority of women developed a stronger sense of themselves as citizens through workers' adult education. Gillian Scott presents a narrative of the Co-operative Women's Guild that highlights how some women, particularly working class women, rejected their traditional domestic roles as wives and mothers.¹³² The Guild, founded in 1883, aimed to 'provide opportunities for association and learning for co-operative women'.¹³³ The aims of the Guild were fairly modest to begin with, as they wished not to become embroiled in dilemmas about women's rights. However Margaret Llewelyn Davies, the Guild's General Secretary from 1889 to 1921, developed the *raison d'être* of the Guild as a 'a sort of trade union for married women'.¹³⁴ By 1914 the Guild had found its voice, and represented about 30,000 co-operative women.¹³⁵ The Guild sought to expand the role of women in the public sphere, while at the same time supporting them in the domestic sphere. Women who subscribed to the Guild's programme saw themselves not only as housewives and mothers, but also as citizens who had a right and duty to participate as active citizens in the public sphere. In order to make an impact on the public affairs, away from home duties, the Guild's task was in part to educate women. As Scott states,

in response to this need the Guild developed practical training methods for co-operative women, but also a 'culture of affirmation' whose central message was

¹³² Gillian Scott, "'As a war-horse to the beat of drums': representations of working-class femininity in the Women's Co-operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War' in *Radical Femininity. Women's Self-Representation in the Public Sphere* ed. by Eileen Jane Yeo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 196–219; See also Scott, *Feminism and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-operative Guild 1880s to the Second World War* (London; Bristol Pa; UCL Press, 1998).

¹³³ Scott, 'As a War-horse to the beat of drums', p. 197.

¹³⁴ Margaret Llewelyn Davies quoted by Scott in 'As a war-horse to the beat of drums', p. 197. To understand the day-to-day hardships that working class women endured see Margaret Llewelyn Davies (ed) collection of autobiographies written by members of the Women's Co-operative Guild *Life As We Have Known It* by co-operative working women, Introduction by Anna Davies (London: Virago, 1977).

¹³⁵ Scott, 'As a War-horse to the beat of drums', p. 199.

that guildswomen possessed a vast but hitherto untapped capacity for public work that only needed the right organisational setting to become manifest'.¹³⁶

The Guild had a clear understanding of the lives of its members. Co-operative women were in the main working class and were not in an economic situation that allowed them to simply give up their domestic duties. Indeed, many of them identified themselves as wives, mothers and homemakers, and had no apparent wish to give those roles up. Rather, they wished to find a way to contribute to public life. To facilitate a balance between domestic and public activities 'the Guild advocated the collectivisation of domestic labour and the introduction of labour-saving technology'.¹³⁷ By using technology and 'systems' the Guild showed itself to be innovative and imaginative in opening up the public sphere to worker women. It also provided training in public speaking, with the assumption that many Guild members had no experience of it.

Citizenship was an important priority in the Guild's campaign to involve worker women in the public sphere. In 1897, Margaret Llewelyn Davies stated that the vote was 'part of the great movement for the freedom of women, which will give them their true status in society and lead to trustful and respectful comradeship between men and women'.¹³⁸ Guildswomen slowly became more numerous and prominent in public life, and by 1913 the Guild's pamphlet literature was addressing the question of where a woman's place was:

The guildswoman's answer was: "my place is in the Co-operative Movement, because I am a wage spender; my place is in my Town and county, because I am a wife and mother; my place is in my Home because I am a joint maker of the family life; and I find I cannot do my work properly in any one of these places without doing it in all".¹³⁹

A measure of the success of the Guild in involving its members in public affairs can be seen in the number of guildswomen in public service positions:

Members continued to be represented on public bodies and by March 1939 the list included two mayors, eighteen mayoresses, twenty four aldermen, twenty four county council members, two hundred and fifty five city, town, or urban district councillors, and one hundred and thirty seven magistrates.¹⁴⁰

Above is evidence of women participating in public service that reflected the WEA's aim to show the same in *The Adult Student as Citizen*. As with *The Adult Student as Citizen*, the number of women involved in public service was small but

¹³⁶ Scott, 'As a War-horse to the beat of drums', p. 201.

¹³⁷ Scott, 'As a War-horse to the beat of drums', p. 201.

¹³⁸ Scott, 'As a War-horse to the beat of drums', p. 204.

¹³⁹ *The Women's Co-operative Guild: The Education of Guildswomen* (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1913) p. 2 quoted by Scott, 'As a War-horse to the beat of drums', p. 206.

¹⁴⁰ Gaffin and Thomas, *Caring and Sharing*, p. 88.

significant. What this evidence shows is that women students of the WEA were accepted and recognised as active citizens by their work in public service.

However, their presence in the historical record of workers' adult education is slim. A report produced by the WEA's Women's Education Committee in the London District gives a succinct appraisal of the educational issues that working women faced. The report was the result of a conference, in April 1925, that the Women's Committee of the London District called to discuss 'how best the WEA could help stimulate and to meet the educational demands of women workers'.¹⁴¹ Margaret Bondfield (1873–1953), one of the first women to be elected to the TUC executive as well as becoming the first woman minister in the 1924 Labour Government, chaired the conference, and forty delegates attended it 'representing the Women's Co-operative Guilds, the Women's Sections of the Labour Party, and Trade Unions with women members in London'.¹⁴² The consensus of the conference was that 'there should be more co-operation in educational matters between women's organisations, and between these bodies and the WEA'.¹⁴³ The Women's Education Committee was set up with two representatives from the London District WEA, the Southern Co-operative Education Association and the Women's Advisory Committee, London Labour Party.¹⁴⁴ One representative each from sixteen trade unions, all with women members in London, was also on the committee. The reason put forward for why the Women's Education Committee was formed was as follows:

women workers have so far taken a much smaller part than they should in the work of the WEA, and the purpose has been throughout to bring them to a greater extent into educational activities, by helping to meet their special needs and difficulties.¹⁴⁵

These difficulties were listed as married and unmarried women having problems with attending classes regularly because of home and child care duties. Also, finding time to complete the reading and writing tasks was 'extremely hard' in the words of the report.¹⁴⁶ Another criticism that arose was that 'it is often felt that the subjects discussed at classes are outside the range of ordinary working women.' Another problem noted was that

¹⁴¹ Workers' Educational Association, *Educational Facilities for Women*, Report of a Woman's Education Committee operating in the London District (London: WEA, 1926), n.p.

¹⁴² *WEA Facilities for Women*, n.p.; For Bondfield's biography see Philip Williamson, 'Margaret Bondfield', ODNB (Downloaded 08 November 2017).

¹⁴³ *WEA Facilities for Women*, n.p.

¹⁴⁴ *WEA Facilities for Women*, n.p.

¹⁴⁵ *WEA Facilities for Women*, n.p.

¹⁴⁶ *WEA Facilities for Women*, n.p.

women are not so well organised as men, and are less used to the public discussion of questions of general interest – thus they frequently feel nervous about attending classes, and, when they do attend, take little part in discussion.¹⁴⁷

Various solutions to these problems were proposed. One solution was to disseminate propaganda to emphasise the value of education ‘to the particular needs and interests of women’. Almost one hundred addresses were given to Co-operative Guilds, Labour Women Sections and trade union branches about the WEA to female audiences. Another solution to the problems women faced in WEA classes was to hold some women-only classes where women might feel more comfortable about taking part in discussions. In these classes, the idea was to address issues and topics that would appeal to women. Also, it was proposed that classes should be held in the afternoon so as to allow women to attend them more easily.¹⁴⁸

The report is interesting because it gives an insight into the specific problems that worker women faced in the world of workers’ adult education. It implies that the organisation of classes, as well as the subjects taught by the WEA, were much more tailored to the demands and interests of working men, not women. Also, the report highlighted the gender divisions between working men and women with respect to class subjects and general ability. In order to draw more worker women into adult education, the WEA would have to start providing classes that taught female-friendly topics and accommodated the real lives of working women. Despite the implications of gender divisions in the report, the committee stated that it did not

aim at creating a division between men and women within the WEA: it believes in a common educational activity. But it also believes that, to bring women effectively into this common activity, a great deal of pioneering work must be done, of a kind which, for the time being, deliberately takes the woman’s point of view.¹⁴⁹

It was recognised by the Women’s Education Committee that women had much potential to achieve if given the right environment and conditions in adult education.

The Labour Colleges, like the Women’s Co-operative Guild and the WEA tried to include women in its education activities. Very little research has been done to assess the level of involvement of women in Labour College classes, but Valerie Yow presents an analysis of this area. Yow identified key women activists in the Labour College such as Ellen Wilkinson, Winifred Horrabin and Christine Millar (wife of J. P. M. Millar, General Secretary of the NCLC) who all worked tirelessly in the cause of IWCE. Their interest was in raising class-consciousness and empowering women to accomplish

¹⁴⁷ WEA Facilities for Women, n.p.

¹⁴⁸ WEA Facilities for Women, n.p.

¹⁴⁹ WEA Facilities for Women, n.p.

social change.¹⁵⁰ But what of ordinary working class women interested in IWCE? Yow's research found that 'women formed 17% of the trade unions and 20% of the NCLC student body'.¹⁵¹ But she identified many of the same problems that women faced in trying to access NCLC education, as did the WEA's Women's Education Committee.

Also, the NCLC faced problems in recruiting students – both men and women – that the WEA did not. The NCLC unlike the WEA recruited only working class students from working class organisations such as trade unions and Co-operatives that were affiliated to it. The WEA by contrast accepted all students – working and middle class – from the general public as well as organisations. The adherence to the principle that IWCE was exclusive to working class men and women members of worker organisations limited the pool of potential students that the NCLC could recruit.

Another problem that the NCLC had in this area was that it was perceived by mainstream labour movement organisations such as the Labour Party and the Co-operative as being a 'communist-inspired propaganda outfit'.¹⁵² Because of this, the NCLC was mistrusted by Marion Philips¹⁵³, the Chief Woman Officer for the Labour Party, as well as a supporter of the WEA, and Margaret Llewelyn Davis of the Co-operative Women's Guild. Again, this aspect of the NCLC would have warned off a lot of potential working class students in those bodies who had a much less revolutionary attitude to socialism. Over time the perception of the NCLC as a communist organ dissipated, and more local Labour Parties and co-operative societies affiliated to it.¹⁵⁴

Efforts were made by the labour colleges to include women in classes, in much the same way as the WEA had done. The NCLC worked with women's organisations, and complied with their specific demands for women-only classes, despite operating a co-educational policy. Women chose subjects that reflected their interests. Yow gives a summary of their chosen subjects taken from information in *Plebs Magazine* on Women's only classes:

Guildswomen wanted courses in economics, biology, psychology, logic, social problems and modern working-class history [...] Labour Party women requested classes in economic geography, socialism, social and economic problems and local

¹⁵⁰ Valerie Yow, 'In the classroom and not at the sink: Women in the National Council of Labour Colleges', *History of Education*, 22, 2, (2002), p. 186.

¹⁵¹ Yow, 'Women in the NCLC', p. 195.

¹⁵² Yow, 'Women in the NCLC', p. 192.

¹⁵³ Brian Harrison, 'Marion Philips', *ODNB* (Downloaded 08 November 2017).

¹⁵⁴ Yow, 'Women in the NCLC', p. 192.

government. Women trade unionists wanted classes in trade union history [...] public speaking remained an important course for all these women.¹⁵⁵

What Yow's research shows is that working class women were interested in IWCE and chose subjects to study according to their political outlook and circumstances. All the subjects listed reflect an interest in the economic and political world that women lived in during the inter-war era. By taking an interest in such subjects these working class women students were making a great attempt to improve their understanding of citizenship. Such education would certainly have enhanced their ability to make informed choices when voting in elections.

The NCLC and the Labour Colleges welcomed working class women students, and attempted to make access to classes easier for women. Ultimately, though, generalised gender discrimination of the 1920s and 1930s limited women's opportunities wholeheartedly to partake in labour college classes, despite evidence of interest in IWCE shown by women students.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to give a three hundred and sixty degree view of working class adult education from the perspectives of worker-students, tutors, educationalists, and the organisers of workers' adult education. The evidence indicates that the experience of workers' adult education was not dictated by the educationalists of the WEA or the NCLC. Rather, worker-students formed their own opinions of the value of workers' adult education.

This piece of research supports many of the findings of Rose and Goldman. In the case of Rose, by looking to the students themselves, it is possible to clarify what they took from education. In the case of Goldman, the relationship between tutors and students emerges as a positive and constructive experience where both parties benefited greatly. What ultimately emerges from the findings here is that the experience of workers' adult education had a much more subtle and nuanced impact on worker-students than previously imagined.

¹⁵⁵ Yow, 'Women in the NCLC', p. 190.

CONCLUSION

This thesis argues that worker students were politically empowered by their experience of workers' adult education and, in Rose's words, became part of an 'articulate, obstreperous working-class intelligentsia.'¹ But, what of this? What does it matter that workers' adult education contributed to the rise of the Labour Party in a region already predisposed to labour movement interests? It was only one of many factors that underpinned the success of the labour movement in Yorkshire as reflected by electoral and municipal election results. Why was workers' adult education special?

This thesis has made a strong case to establish workers' adult education as a vital element in forging and shaping a robust British social democracy that was inclusive rather than exclusive at several levels. It is this aspect of the history of workers' adult education that makes it distinct and important to study and understand. By doing so our view of the different manifestations of social democratic ideology that existed during the inter-war period has been expanded and enhanced. Fieldhouse and Macintyre present the Marxist view that the political and social value of adult education, as conceived of and disseminated by the WEA, was not radical. Worker-students of the WEA were integrated into a pre-existing system of education that served the interests of the ruling classes. The labour colleges and NCLC on the other hand rebelled against traditional modes of education. They wished to instil a new class-consciousness amongst the proletariat through IWCE and enact a revolution whereby working class values and culture would become dominant. Such a view restricts the space to consider other manifestations of socialism and democracy that could co-exist. Bevir's more flexible approach to evaluating what social democracy was, allows room to manoeuvre in a different intellectual and historical framework. It gives us the opportunity to study socialism and democracy as intertwined political ideologies from the perspective of the people at the heart of this thesis: worker-students.

The worker-students of this study inhabited what Ackers and Reid refer to as alternative worlds of labour, and show how diverse the British working class were. There was no single, overarching view amongst them of what socialism or even democracy was. Rather, there was a coalition of views and approaches to how to use local and national socio-political structures, for example city councils, in the best interests of working class people. This is where Fieldhouse and Macintyre's critique of

¹ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, p. 276

the working class education movement, and in particular the WEA's role, remain theoretical rather than realistic. They do not acknowledge fully the agency of individual worker-students in changing their socio-economic circumstances, and that of their working class counterparts through their participation in established democratic processes. Goldman's work highlights this aspect of the worker-student dynamic. Following the enlargement of the franchise, the democratic process facilitated greater working class participation in local and national politics. The WEA, more than the labour colleges, was keen to promote wise democracy as a way for worker-students to make a difference from the inside out. Ramsay MacDonald was very much in tune with this social democratic approach to politics. MacDonald's socialism was based firmly in a democracy whereby all members of all classes would co-exist harmoniously as a collective. Workers' adult education was key to uniting different worlds of labour in achieving this vision.

The worlds of labour and workers' adult education that the thesis explored were that of the Co-operative Union and co-operative societies, the trade councils and trade unions, and the city councils of Leeds, Sheffield, and York. It has shown how, why, and where workers' adult education, in one form or another, fitted into each world, and the connections that existed between them. As discussed in Chapter Two, twentieth century workers' adult education – the WEA and the labour colleges – was supported by an embedded tradition of autodidacticism, and a previous era of nineteenth century workers' education initiatives such as the Mechanics' Institutes and the University Extension Movement. The difference between the two eras was that the world of workers' adult education became more political in the twentieth century, especially in the aftermath of the First World War.

Another important characteristic of workers' adult education between the wars was its associative nature. Helen McCarthy's view on how the world of non-political associations could reinforce democracy in civil society is relevant here. The WEA and the labour colleges, whatever their political or non-political nature, provided spaces for worker students to exercise their intellectual freedom. Adult education classes were forums for discussion and debate as shown throughout the thesis. Worker-students were invited to explore a wider intellectual world that presented them with opportunities and possibilities that may otherwise have seemed unattainable. Rowbotham described such worker students as 'travellers in a strange country', who faced new and sometimes uncomfortable challenges to their way of life. Despite the dislocating impact of knowledge, worker-students were also free to make that 'strange country' their own by

becoming part of political life. This activism on the part of worker students is what the thesis has tried to bring to life.

Several different interpretations of social democracy emerged from the world of workers' adult education based on specific types of workers' adult education. Co-operative education was based on Owenism and the idea of a 'Co-operative Commonwealth'. For Co-operators invested in the project of creating a Co-operative Commonwealth, it was vital to educate the mass membership about Co-operative character and the principles of Co-operation. The idea of a collective Co-operative character was akin to the Marxist idea of class-consciousness, but was based on a moral Christian social rather than a Marxist scientific philosophy. This aspect of Co-operative education meant that it was educationally more aligned with the WEA than with the labour colleges. Even so, the Co-operative shared the approach of the labour colleges and NCLC in attempting to inspire Co-operators with the idea of a Co-operative utopia, the so-called Commonwealth. Co-operators who pursued the idea of a Co-operative Commonwealth supported the rights of workers to own their fair share of the wealth of the country. However, despite the radical potential of that idea, the vision of a Co-operative Commonwealth remained confined to the world of the Co-operative. The commercial interests of the Co-operative may have been a factor in limiting its ability to pursue a more socialist agenda based on Co-operative ideology. Thousands of Co-operative societies existed across the nation, all operating in accordance with the established economic capitalist-based model. Individual co-operators benefited financially from the Co-operative way of doing business within this model. To establish a Co-operative Commonwealth outside the Co-operative would have required significant structural economic and political changes to be established nationally. This was something that the Co-operative, as a working class organisation, did not pursue to any great extent, and is perhaps why the idea of a Co-operative Commonwealth remained an idea rather than a reality. Nonetheless the Co-operative, as a large federation of societies across the nation, had the potential to exercise, through its education programme, what G. D. H. Cole described as local functional democracy for socialisation.

Trades councils and trades unions represented another world of labour that sought access to workers' adult education from the WEA, the Co-operative and the labour colleges. Chapter Four gives an insight into how and why workers' adult education was relevant in the world of the trade councils in Yorkshire. Trades councils in Yorkshire subscribed to WEA, labour college, and Co-operative education programmes to a

greater or lesser extent. Some trades councils, such as the Leeds Trades Council, were more wary of the labour colleges than others such as the Bradford Trades Council. This shows the diversity in political outlook between trade councils, depending on their location and membership. What it also shows is that trades councils, as peripheral labour movement organisations, were active in promoting workers' adult education of different types to their members. Macintyre's definitions of Marxism and labour socialism manifest themselves in the world of trade councils more strongly than they do in the world of the Co-operative. By placing the politics of trades councils and other labour movement organisations in a framework of workers' adult education, this thesis draws attention to the diversity of political thinking on Marxism, labour socialism, and social democracy. The three ideologies could, and did, intersect as Bevir has shown. As a consequence of this intersection, healthy robust debate was generated about the pros and cons of each approach to shaping a social democratic political environment in the interests of working class people. This emerges when we see how trade councils integrated workers' adult education into their activities. What is also striking about the place of workers' adult education in the world of trades council and trade unions is the lost opportunity to create a model of workers' education that the Labour Party, in partnership with the TUC, could promote wholeheartedly to all workers. The difference outlined by Jansson between the Swedish and British case studies highlights this lost opportunity to make workers' adult education part of a mainstream national education system. However, although Jansson makes a compelling argument, the British case study shows a much more organic, diverse, and pluralistic working class adult education movement in progress during the inter-war period. Although the WEA and the NCLC were politically at odds with each other, they nonetheless had space and freedom to reach out to worker-students interested in their different approaches to workers' adult education. To their credit the Labour Party, the TUC, and the Co-operative supported, to a greater or lesser extent, diverse forms of workers' adult education in Britain between the wars. This shows that a high level of democratic freedom existed for voluntary organisations to contribute to debates about democracy, and how to strengthen different forms of it through education. Such a pluralistic acceptance of workers' adult education perhaps shows a sophisticated understanding of democracy and democratic processes on the part of the Labour Party and the TUC. The recognition that there were several pathways to social democracy also implies that the British labour movement could and did accommodate different views that made the exercise of democracy robust and healthy.

The next world of labour that the thesis explored was the world of the adult student as citizen. Chapter Five, Parts I and II, presented a biographical profile of individual public servants with backgrounds in WEA education, that focused on their life trajectories and work in public office on the city councils of Leeds, Sheffield, and York. Clear evidence of active democratic participation and political engagement on the part of worker-students in local government emerges here. Most of these individuals came from solid working class backgrounds, and had direct experience of economic and social adversity. In order to enter local government all of them had to succeed in democratic municipal elections, after which they then had to serve and represent the interests of their local communities by participating in the democratic processes of municipal government. Their background in workers' adult education helped place them on an equal footing with their Conservative and Liberal counterparts, and supported their work in this sphere. Though not the only factor contributing to their success in public life, workers' adult education played a significant role in preparing adult students for public service. Further research in this area is clearly required to construct a broader profile of all municipal public servants, whatever their political affiliation or educational background.

This thesis has shown that such public servants were deeply committed and dedicated to improving the quality of life of their constituents and wider communities. They did this through public service, and attempted to bring a labour movement character to municipal government functions through the democratic process. Again, Cole's theory on functional democracy emerges in this world of labour. The record of public service by adult worker-students demonstrates the active part they played in assimilating themselves into the tradition of local government, and adapting it to working class interests.

Another significant characteristic of municipal government was that councillors from different worlds of labour – the trade councils, the Co-operative, trade unions – found themselves working together in local government. As shown, workers' adult education was integrated on some level in each world. City councils were forums where all these different worlds of labour and different ideologies of social democracy intersected. A background in workers' adult education of one sort or another would have given such councillors common ground, even if their views on the purpose and value of education differed.

Chapter Six, Parts I and II, took a wider view of workers' adult education by placing it in the context of how and why the local and regional press reported it. These

chapters highlighted the prevailing concerns of the times: education for democracy and citizenship; rural decline and regeneration; unemployment and leisure; and political bias in workers' adult education. The press reported workers' adult education extensively, and identified it as a powerful tool that could mitigate the impact of the Great War, rural decline, and unemployment. The intellectual and historiographical analysis identified that idealistic philosophy informed and underpinned why educationalists such as Hadow and Mansbridge placed their faith in workers' adult education as a positive force for wise democracy. Idealism, as Harris has argued, shaped British social democracy in this area, and shows how British socialism was an organic ideology that assimilated different elements of social theory and philosophy. 'Education for democracy' was the dominant theme reported by the press, and shows how workers' adult education was taken seriously by adult educationalists, intellectuals, and politicians as a way of developing wise, active participation in democracy. The reports focus on workers' adult education as a way of ensuring that mass democracy did not degenerate into tyranny or demagoguery, the spectres of which seemed to threaten the stability of British society at the time.

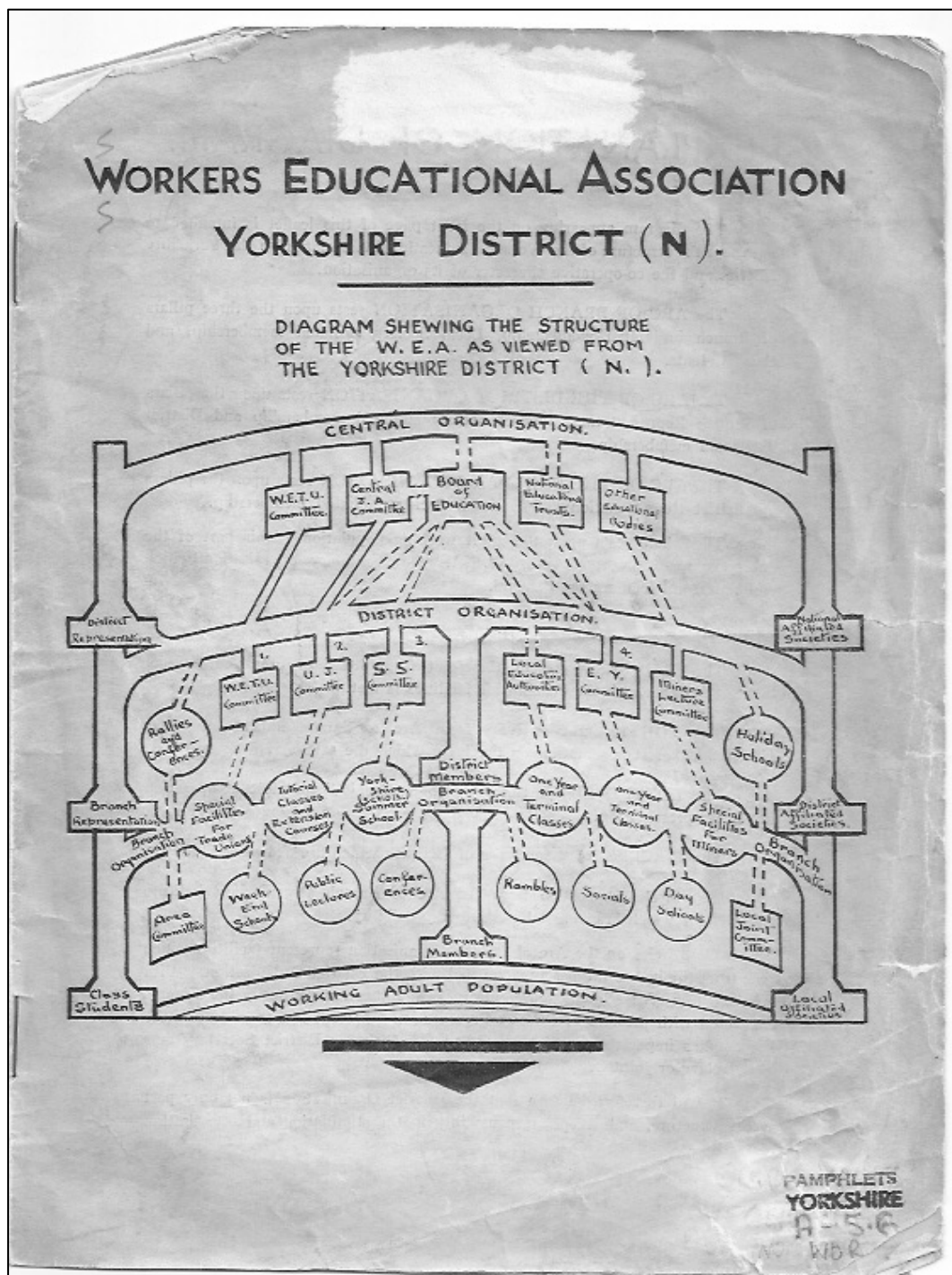
The thesis concluded with an account and analysis of the experience of workers' adult education from the perspective of worker-students, educationalists and tutors and the administrators of adult education. The WEA logbooks used as primary sources in this chapter showed the first-hand experience of students taking part in WEA classes. It showed, in as immediate a way as possible, what students took from their WEA classes, and the process of learning they engaged in. Jack Jones's account of the labour colleges in Liverpool gave a clear insight into how and why students engaged in labour college classes. His account shows that worker-students made fewer distinctions between the WEA and the labour colleges than did the administrators of these organisations, and shows how worker-students appreciated all workers' adult education on offer, no matter what ideology – whether social democratic or Marxist – it was based on. Ultimately worker-students formed their own thoughts and opinions on politics, society, and the economy, and were facilitated in doing so by several different forms of workers' adult education.

Worker-students used this knowledge gained from their adult education to support the labour movement in several different ways. Some took part in trade union work, while others became public servants and set about adapting local government and national government in the interests of the diverse working classes. At the heart of this phenomenon was the idea of education for democracy. Here, workers students excelled,

and demonstrated an independence of thought that helped to shape local and national social democracy during the inter-war years in Yorkshire.

APPENDIX ONE

Diagram showing the structure of the WEA as viewed from Yorkshire District North, followed by "Explanation"¹



¹ Workers' Education Association, Diagram shewing the WEA as viewed from the Yorkshire District (N.) (Leeds: WEA, 1931)

EXPLANATION OF DIAGRAM.

The diagram appearing on the front page of this leaflet is intended to represent the structure of the Workers' Educational Association in the Yorkshire District and the co-operative character of its organisation.

The ARC OF BRANCH ORGANISATION rests upon the three pillars of Branch individual membership, Local Society affiliated membership, and class students.

The ARC OF THE DISTRICT ORGANISATION rests upon the pillars of Branch Representation, District Society affiliated membership and District individual membership.

The ARC OF THE CENTRAL ORGANISATION rests upon the pillars of District Representation and National Society affiliated membership.

The whole rests upon the adult working population. This part of the diagram broadly represents the W.E.A. as a voluntary organisation which stimulates and focusses the demand.

The SQUARES represent the Joint Committees or other educational bodies through which the demand for facilities is met.

The CONTINUOUS LINES from Arc to Square indicate that the Association has representation on the body which the square represents.

The DOTTED LINES from Arc to Square indicate close co-operation but not representation.

The CIRCLES represent types of facilities which are available.

The Circles suspended from the Arc of Branch Organisation indicate facilities for which branches take entire responsibility.

The Circles on the Arc of Branch Organisation represent facilities which flow from the bodies intimately connected with the District Organisation. With the exception of the Square representing Local Education Authority the Squares connected with the Arc of District Organisation represent bodies on which the District has important representation and to which the District Secretary acts as Secretary or Joint Secretary.

It will therefore be seen that the District Organisation is not only part of the structure, and accepts responsibility in the stimulation and organisation

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APPENDIX 2

TABLE 16

WEA Expansion – Classes & Students: Yorkshire District North (1930–1939)

	1930-1931	1938-1939
No. of classes	51 ¹	98 ²
No. of tutorial class students	1,128 ³	1,443 ⁴

TABLE 17

WEA Expansion – Classes & Students: Yorkshire District South (1930–1939)

	1930-1931	1938-1939
No. of classes	48 ⁵	97 ⁶
No. of tutorial class students	697 ⁷	1,466 ⁸

TABLE 18

WEA Expansion – Branches: Yorkshire District (1918–1929)

	1918	1929
No. of branches	30 ⁹	64 ¹⁰

TABLE 19

WEA Expansion – Branches: Yorkshire District North and South (1929–1939)

	1929	1929
No. of branches Yorkshire North	50 ¹¹	67 ¹²
No. of branches Yorkshire South	19 ¹³	33 ¹⁴

¹ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District North 16th Annual Report (1930-31), p. 2. WYL669/1/2.

² WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District North 25th Annual Report (1938-39), p. 6. WYL669/1/3.

³ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District North 17th Annual Report (1930-31), p. 2. WYL669/1/2.

⁴ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District North 25th Annual Report (1938-39), p. 6. WYL669/1/5.

⁵ TUC, *WEA Yorkshire District South 1st Annual Report* (1930-31), p. 2. (Class number represents tutorial and preparatory classes).

⁶ TUC, *WEA Yorkshire District South 9th Annual Report* (1939), p. 4. (Class number represents tutorial, preparatory classes and extension courses).

⁷ TUC, WEA Yorkshire District South 1st Annual Report (1930-31), p. 4.

⁸ TUC, WEA Yorkshire District South 9th Annual Report (1939), p. 5.

⁹ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District Branch Directory, *4th Annual Report* (1918), pp. 8–9. WYL669/1/1

¹⁰ WYAS, WEA Yorkshire District Branch Directory, *15th Annual Report* (1929), pp. 26–28. WYL669/1/2.

¹¹ TUC, WEA Yorkshire North District Branch Directory, *16th Annual Report* (1918), pp. 30–32.

¹² WYAS, WEA Yorkshire North District 25th Annual Report (1939), p. 5. WYL669/1/3

¹³ TUC, WEA Yorkshire South District Branch Directory, *1st Annual Report* (1930).

¹⁴ TUC, WEA Yorkshire South District Branch Directory, *9th Annual Report* (1939).

Total no. branches	69	100
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TABLE 20¹⁵**WEA Yorkshire District: Male and Female Students (1928)**

	1928
No of Tutorial Class Female Students	448
No of Tutorial Class Male Students	950
Total	1,398

TABLE 21¹⁶**WEA Yorkshire District North: Male and Female Students (1939)**

	1939
No of Tutorial Class Women Students	734
No of Tutorial Class Men Students	949
Total	1,683

TABLE 22¹⁷**WEA Yorkshire Dist.: Occupational Analysis of Male & Female Students (1929)**

	1929
Manual Workers	737
Clerks & Shop Assistants	293
Foremen	42
Teachers	184
Postal Workers	48
Professions	78
Domestic & Home Duties	228
Occupations not given	16
TOTAL	1,626

¹⁵ WYAS, *WEA Yorkshire District 14th Annual Report* (1928) p. 3. WYL669 1/2. (These figures are the first official figures for male and female student numbers recorded by WEA Yorkshire District)

¹⁶ WYAS, *WEA Yorkshire District North 25th Annual Report* (1939), p. 8. WYL669/1/3.

¹⁷ WYAS, *WEA Yorkshire District North 15th Annual Report* (1929), p. 3. WYL669 1/2.

TABLE 23¹⁸

WEA Yorkshire District North: Male & Female Manual Workers by Class Subject Group (1930)

Class Subject Group	Male	Female
Group 1: Literature, Appreciation of music, Elocution and Self Expression, Appreciation of Art	258	187
Group 2: Economics, Social Philosophy, Economic & Social History, Psychology, Political Theory, Local Government, Economic Geography, Modern World Problems	750	98
Group 3: Biology and Home Nursing	65	24
TOTAL	1,073	309

TABLE 24¹⁹

WEA Yorkshire District North: Male & Female Students by Class Subject Group (1939)

Class Subject Group	Male	Female
Group 1: Literature	709	403
Group 2: Economics	111	224
Group 3: Biology	129	107
TOTAL	949	734

¹⁸ WYAS, *Yorkshire District North 16th Annual Report* (1930), pp. 3–4. WYL 6691/2. (Adapted by author).

¹⁹ WYAS, *Yorkshire District North 25th Annual Report* (1939), p. 8. WYL 669 1/3. (Adapted by author).

APPENDIX 3

NATIONAL WEA STATISTICS:
Summary of Classes and Students from 1919-20 to 1941-42¹

YEAR	TUTORIAL		PREPARATORY		UNIVERSITY EXTENSION		ONE-YEAR		TERMINAL		SHORT TERMINAL		TOTAL	
	Class	Students	Class	Students	Class	Students	Class	Students	Class	Students	Class	Students	Class	Students
1919-20	229	5320					328	7118					557	12,438
1922-23	363	7434					570	15611					933	23,045
1924-25	441	9027	109	3153			367	8347	315	8784			1232	29,311
1925-26	529	9358	78	1946			531	9464	569	10393			1707	31,161
1927-28	590	10104	82	1686			468	9585	522	9746			1683	31,590
1929-30	596	10067	71	1353	21	469	634	14899	749	13602			2128	41,365
1930-31	620	10375	87	1657	78	1444	766	17642	808	15572			2387	47,270
1931-32	649	11084	95	1915	106	2024	731	16747	852	16620	72	1683	2527	50,539
1932-33	658	11633	84	1631	128	2490	702	17017	988	19415	52	1094	2611	53,215
1933-34	652	11290	71	1432	127	2425	722	16757	965	19779	75	1626	2625	53,385
1934-35	672	11645	77	1419	140	2501	753	16817	974	19670	94	1985	2725	54,571
1935-36	724	12736	76	1456	155	3035	765	17504	1039	20297	69	1345	2857	67,023
1936-37	762	12791	73	1374	184	3685	819	17833	1090	20503	87	1437	3046	58,213
1937-38	755	11267	99	1970	215	4275	802	18977	1202	22803	57	992	3117	60,032
1938-39	779	12739	234*	4329*	202	4023	635	12166	1269	22787	58	1174	3000	53,884
1939-40	663	9848	298*	5055*	25	689	619	13007	1261	22269	179	3292	3040	53,979
1940-41	528	6905	401*	6569*	20	508	618	13241	1001	16658	277	5148	2837	48,835
1941-42	467	6541	564*	9811*	12	314	418	7251	1231	21502	412	7117	3288	58,582

¹ Workers' Educational Association, *Workers' Education in Great Britain: A record of education service to democracy since 1918* (London: WEA, 1943) p. 31.

APPENDIX 4

**National Council of Labour Colleges. Division No. 7
Class Arrangements, January to March 1934.¹**

COLLEGE	DAY & TIME	ROOMS	SUBJECT	TUTOR	COLLEGE SECRETARY
BARNESLEY	Sunday 3 PM	Trades Hall	Industrial History	Joe Madin	G. Dobby
	Monday 7.45 PM	Milton Rooms	Hist. British Socialism	W. Whitlock	A. Illingworth
BRADFORD	Alt. Tuesday 7.45 PM	Wilsden Mech. Inst.	Economics	R. Hill	
	Wednesday 7.45 PM	Building Trades Hall	Science of Reasoning	J. Backhouse	
	Wednesday 7.45 PM	Otley Co-op Hall	Finance	J Lancaster	
	Wednesday 7.45 PM	Shipleigh Lab. P. Rooms	Working class Movement	Mrs C. Hill	
	Thursday 7.45 PM	Dyer's Club, Elmroyd	Economic Geography	Harry Burden	
BATLEY	Sundays 11.45 AM	Textile Hall	Economics	Harry Burden	A. Senior
DEWSBURY	Monday 7.45 PM	Textile Hall	Social Theory	Fred Shaw	H. Martin
DONCASTER	Thursday 7.45 PM	Miners Inst.	Science of Understanding	Harry Gee	R. V. Richardson
	Thursday 7.45 PM	Trades Hall	Modern Problems	Fred Shaw	H. Lawler
HALIFAX	Sunday 11 AM	Ovenden LP Rooms	Economics	Alfred Waight	
	Monday 7.45 PM	Trades Hall	Economics	Hector Highley	H. Lord
HUDDERSFIELD	Tuesday 7.45 PM	Trades Hall	Modern Problems	Fred Shaw	A. Speight

¹ University of York Library, Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Labour Colleges Division No. 7 – Microfilm Record.

COLLEGE	DAY & TIME	ROOMS	SUBJECT	TUTOR	COLLEGE SECRETARY
HULL	Sunday 3 PM	N. U. R Club	Industrial History	W. Birkhead	H. Lightley
	Monday 3 PM	Trades Hall	Modern Problems	Fred Shaw	Mrs A. Paylor
Monday 7.45 PM	Miners' Institute	Economics	J. T. Ashurst		
	Monday 7.45 PM	Working Men's Hall	Tutorial Training	Arthur Haigh	
	Tuesday 7.45 PM	Farsley Co-op Hall	Modern Problems	Rota	
LEEDS	Alt. Wednesday 6.30 PM	Oulton, Harold Hall	Local Government	Fred Shaw	
	Wednesday 8 PM	Cross Stamford Street	Imperialism	Fred Shaw	
	Sunday 3 PM	Hawkesworth LP Rooms	Political Theory	Fred Shaw	
	Alt. Thursday 8 PM	Armley Co-op	Modern Problems	Rota	
	Sunday 2.30 PM	Rawdon ILP Rooms	Political Theory	Fred Shaw	
	Thursday 7.45 PM	Ebenezer Hall	Economics	Joe Madin	Mrs E. Clarke
	Wednesday 7.45 PM	2, Cambridge Arcade	Esperanto	Horace Clayton	A. C. Lygo
	Wednesday 7.45 PM	Wyburn Lab. P Rooms	Chairmanship	A. C. Lygo	
	Sunday 11 AM	Howard Chambers	Industrial History	A. C. Lygo	
	Monday 7.45 PM	Socialist Club	Industrial History	J. Burnett	J. E. Sykes
YORK	Sunday 6.30 PM	NUR Club	Economic Geography	Fred Shaw	Chris Hill

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