

Class-struggle adult education for the 21st century



A Post-16 Educator occasional publication

**Why we need it and
how we can move
towards it**

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Colin Waugh is the author of the pamphlet '*Plebs': The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education*', published as a *Post-16 Educator* occasional publication in 2009. The present publication is written by him in personal capacity as a contribution to discussion within the Independent Working-Class Education Network (IWCE) of its proposed manifesto.

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1. Introduction

In 2009 PSE published the pamphlet '*Plebs*': *The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education*. Our aim was to mark the centenary of the 1909 'strike' by students at Ruskin College in Oxford. However, we found that a lot more people were interested than we had expected. The Independent Working-Class Education Network (IWCEN) was started in 2010. Since then,

it has held meetings in many places and sent speakers to many others. It now has a mailing list of several hundred people who want to rebuild the tradition of independent working-class education that the Ruskin strikers started.

So what, was the Ruskin 'strike' about, what was the Plebs League that the strikers set up, and why are people interested in this now?

2. What was the Plebs League?

With the decline of the Chartist movement after 1848, a group of ruling-class Christian socialists developed the idea that adult education could be used to create a compliant layer within the working class and thereby counteract any re-emergence of working-class self-assertion.

One product of this approach was the university extension movement. During the 1870s Cambridge, Oxford and London Universities all developed extension networks. They sent lecturers across the country to give talks on topics of general interest, often to large audiences. Some working-class groups - for example Northumberland miners in the 1880s - did attend these lectures. But by 1900 it was clear that working-class people, especially union activists, were rejecting extension, and hence that it was not likely to fulfil the intention of developing a compliant layer.

At the same time it was also clear that socialist ideas were gaining support amongst working-class activists. (This was a period when some workers would go without food to buy a second-hand book, and risk the sack by reading it at work.)

In 1899, inspired by the ideas of the former Oxford University professor and art critic John Ruskin, two socialists from the United States, Walter Vrooman and Charles Beard, tried to create a movement for working-class adult education in England. They set up 'Ruskin halls' in working-class centres, along with an arrangement for correspondence tuition, and local discussion groups linked to it, plus the residential Ruskin Hall

(later College) that was in Oxford but not part of the university. Much of the funding for this was provided by Amne Vrooman, Walter's wife.

They appointed as principal of Ruskin Hall a fairly high profile socialist, Dennis Hird, a Social Democratic Federation member and also a former Anglican priest whose pamphlet *Jesus the Socialist* had reputedly sold 70,000 copies.

The college started with students from a variety of backgrounds, but soon working-class activists sponsored by their union branches came to form the majority. In 1902, Vrooman and Beard returned to the US, and from that point the college had to search for other sources of funding.

In the late 1890s, Albert Mansbridge offered the extension movement a solution to the problem of recruiting and holding working-class students. Mansbridge was himself a working-class product of the extension - and of the Cooperative - movement. He was also an ardent convert to Anglo-Catholicism, who enjoyed mingling with the bishops and upper-class tutors who dominated the body which administered the Oxford University extension lecture scheme, the Oxford Extension Delegacy.

Mansbridge's idea was that, instead of one-off public lectures to large audiences, the extension movement should provide tutorial classes for small groups, focused on social, political and economic topics. These classes would provide structured courses and offer a route for selected working-class students to progress to Oxford University itself, where they would work towards a special diploma in economics. Mansbridge believed that

this arrangement would produce a layer of union activists and working-class politicians with a belief in the possibility of harmony between the working and employing classes. The Oxford Extension Delegacy eagerly embraced this idea. One of its adherents, Sir Robert Morant, the chief civil servant at the Board of Education, wrote into the 1902 Education Act a clause authorising local authorities to fund tutorial classes. In 1903 Mansbridge founded the organisation which shortly afterwards would become the Workers' Education Association, and again, the Oxford Extension Delegacy backed this at once.

In parallel with this, a group of young, upper class, Christian socialist Oxford tutors aligned themselves with the approach advocated by Mansbridge. Among these tutors were William Temple, later archbishop of Canterbury, and the historian R. H. Tawney. They formed a semi-secret organisation, the 'Catiline Club', which aimed to convince more reactionary sections of the establishment that tutorial classes were the way forward. A rising level of industrial militancy in the early 1900s made this solution increasingly attractive to those in power. The WEA/Extension project needed an institution that would act as a point of transition between the tutorial classes and Oxford University, and Ruskin College was earmarked for this role.

Along with a rapid growth of working-class self-organisation, new forms of rank and file unionism and socialism from below were beginning to appear, including, especially, movements for industrial (as opposed to craft) unionism. The Liberal government that came to power in 1906 gave a number of union leaders jobs supervising its welfare reforms. This provoked criticism amongst rank and file activists, which was further strengthened by dissatisfaction with the performance of the 37 MPs who in 1906 had been for the first time elected under the banner of the Labour Party. In this situation, ideas put forward by the US academic Daniel De Leon became influential. The Socialist Labour Party group in Scotland published *Two Pages from Roman History*, a reprint of two talks given by De Leon in 1902. In the first of these, he drew a parallel as follows: in Rome, after the plebs - the poor and working people - 'seceded' from the city in 494 BC, the ruling class created 'tribunes of the people', who were supposed to represent the plebs, but in practice betrayed them. De Leon argued that union officials were doing the same for workers of his day.

Another factor affecting the spread of socialist ideas amongst workers in England and Wales at this time was the character of the main universities.

As one consequence of the 1789, 1830 and 1848 revolutions, universities on the continent tended to produce a layer of educated people who were prepared to commit themselves to involvement in the revolutionary wing of the working-class movement. In England, however, the main universities, and in particular Oxford, reflected the compromise between the bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy reached in the aftermath of the Civil War. As a consequence, these universities were dominated by the need to produce clergymen, civil servants and colonial administrators, and the small number of their tutors or students who sympathised with socialism tended to lean towards its Christian rather than its class struggle form. One result of this was that working-class activists in Britain were under more pressure than their continental counterparts to do their thinking in isolation from people who had received a high level of conventional education, and in particular to read socialist texts for themselves. (We should also bear in mind also that many texts that would today be regarded as essential had not yet been translated into English.)

In 1907 the leadership of the TUC finally gave in to rank and file pressure, and appealed to the whole movement to provide financial support to Ruskin College, thereby creating the prospect that Ruskin might have a secure future as a labour college. This alerted the WEA/Extension alliance to the need to incorporate the institution into their project before it was too late. At the WEA annual conference in August 1907, held, as previously, in Oxford during the Oxford Extension Delegacy's annual meeting, a prominent WEA activist, the Portsmouth shipyard worker and Labour councillor J. MacTavish, made a strong speech in favour of tutorial classes. The Delegacy then set up a working party with the WEA to prepare a report on Oxford and working-class education. This report was written by Mansbridge and MacTavish for the WEA, and Catiline club members for the university. It recommended that tutorial classes be established throughout the country, and that these should in turn select working-class students to enter Oxford University. It also made detailed proposals about syllabuses, about teaching methods and about how extension tutors could handle Marxist ideas that students might introduce from the floor. Finally, it endorsed the idea that Ruskin should become the entry point for tutorial students progressing to Oxford.

Up to this point, the tutorial strategy had existed only as an idea, but in January 1908 the WEA opened the first actual classes (one in Longton in Staffordshire and one in Rochdale). The Catiline Club member R. H. Tawney taught both these

classes, and workers signed up. In short, there was now some evidence that Mansbridge's approach could work in practice.

Amongst the 50 or so students, including especially mineworkers from South Wales and the Northeast and railway-workers, who were at Ruskin in 1907 was a substantial group who had their own ideas about the kind of education that working-class activists needed. They called this 'Independent Working-Class Education' (IWCE). They were flatly opposed to the WEA/Extension model as set out in *Oxford and Working-Class Education*. Instead of revering mainstream higher education as Mansbridge did, they saw this as enslaving, as 'orthodox' education which reflected the class interests of the well-off and must therefore necessarily miseducate workers. They thought that the content of adult education for workers should instead consist mainly of three elements: Marxist economics; industrial history (meaning history from which the actions of workers were not left out); and philosophy (by which they understood the capacity to reason things out for yourself, especially as developed by the German tanner Josef Dietzgen). Like Mansbridge, they favoured a participatory teaching and learning method, but their method, mirroring that developed by the SLP group in Scotland, involved the close reading and small group discussion of socialist texts, and aimed to produce activists who could hold their own in arguments against all comers, including ruling class spokespersons such as the Oxford University tutors who taught part time at Ruskin. They had already begun to use this approach amongst themselves.

Once the draft of *Oxford and Working-Class Education* had been circulated (in mid 1908), the management of Oxford University began to intervene directly in the running of Ruskin College. A key extension supporter already on the staff, H. B. Lees Smith, was moved by the governors to a more powerful position, and he then appointed two of his friends as lecturers. The executive of the college was restructured so that the authority of the principal appointed by Vrooman and Beard, the socialist Dennis Hird, was undermined. Compulsory exams were introduced, to decide which students could progress to the second year. The executive also tried to ban Hird from teaching sociology (this was at a time when sociology was not taught anywhere in the university itself). The students were banned from public speaking - a major restriction given that these were some of the most active and articulate working-class spokespersons in the country, who regularly spoke in public - for example at the Martyrs' Memorial in Oxford, where they had to

defend themselves against physical attack by university students. Lastly, because Ruskin students were challenging the newly appointed lecturers over economics teaching, and in some cases staying away from their classes, all lectures were made compulsory. Alongside these administrative changes, Ruskin students at this stage began to receive invitations to tea with Oxford tutors, and prominent figures from the university came to speak to them in the college. The most high-profile visit of this type was in October 1908, by the chancellor of Oxford and former viceroy of India, Lord Curzon. He and Dennis Hird clashed in front of the students about whether Ruskin should relate to the university or to the labour movement.

The extensionists were also lobbying in the House of Lords and putting articles into the press. In one such article, the Ruskin vice-principal Charles Sydney Buxton wrote: 'The necessary common bond is education in citizenship, and it is this which Ruskin College tries to give - conscious that it is only a new patch on an old garment, an idealist experiment in faece Romuli'. This was a posh way of saying that the Ruskin students were the dregs of British society.

The students and ex-students mobilised against the attempt by the extensionists and WEA to gain control of the college. In October 1908 they formed the League of the 'Plebs'. (This title was partly a reference to De Leon's pamphlet and partly a response to the Latin phrase in Buxton's article.) Later in the term they published a pamphlet, *The Burning Question of Education*. (This title too echoes a pamphlet by De Leon, called *The Burning Question of Trade Unionism*). In this they argued that Ruskin should have 'a more satisfactory relation to the Labour Movement'. In January 1909, they began setting up local classes in the working-class heartlands from which most of them came, especially South Wales, the North East and the North West, and in February they launched 'The Plebs' Magazine.

Early in March 1909 the Ruskin College executive demanded Hird's resignation, on the grounds that he was 'failing to maintain discipline'. This can be seen as a response to his confrontation with Lord Curzon, which had shown that he was determined to stand with the students. On 26th March, Hird told the students that he had resigned, and a meeting of all the students held later that day agreed overwhelmingly to boycott all lectures except Hird's until he was reinstated. This action - the Ruskin 'strike' - continued until 6th April, and became national headlines. Nobody could believe that a small group of workers would take on the most prestigious university in the world.

During the strike, the Ruskin governors endorsed the executive's decision to sack Hird. Opinion amongst the strikers now swung in favour of setting up a Central Labour College (CLC) outside, rather than continuing to struggle within Ruskin itself. When the executive closed Ruskin for two weeks and agreed to pay their fares to their home areas, they called off the strike and many went back to build on the local classes started in January. The carpenter George Sims, who had been secretary of Bermondsey Trades Council and whose scholarship had been withdrawn at the governors' instigation, stayed in Oxford, and between April and August 1909, 29 of the most resolute strikers, led by Sims and an ex-student, the Mardy miners' agent Noah Ablett, organised, both on the ground in Oxford, and across the union and left-wing movements nationally, for the launch of the CLC. At the first 'Plebs' annual 'meet', held on 8th August, 200 people from a range of organisations agreed to back Sims's proposals for the CLC, and this opened at the beginning of September at a site in Oxford, with 20 union-sponsored students and Hird as warden.

The aftermath of these events, briefly, was as follows. *Plebs Magazine* continued monthly publication without a break till 1970. The Central Labour College moved to London in 1911 and survived till

1929. The Plebs League became the National Council of Labour Colleges in 1921, and as such continued till 1964. It included a correspondence department and a publishing house. The high point of the local classes was probably in 1926-27, when there were 1,201 classes running across Britain, with 31,635 students.

Of course the IWCE movement did change. It became more like an organisation for training union officers. In 1964 the TUC shut it down.

From our experience of recounting these events to many audiences over the last six years, it is clear that people's interest stems from two things. First, the Ruskin College 'strike' and the Plebs League were unique. Only this once have workers themselves challenged the capitalist class in the form of an elite university like Oxford over the question of adult education, and in the process created a system of their own. They did this, moreover, at a key point in the class struggle – in the lead-up to the Great Unrest, the explosion of strikes just before World War 1, and some of them played a leading role in these strikes. In short, at that moment at least, IWCE was at the cutting edge of working-class struggle. Secondly, people sense that something like IWCE can be rebuilt now, and that things will be better if that is done.

3. Other workers' education to 1945

Although the Ruskin 'strike' and early Plebs League were historically unique, working-class activists and sympathisers here and abroad have both before and since that time set up class-struggle adult education schemes for themselves or participated actively in schemes set up by sympathisers.

Outside the UK, we can see from precursors of modern socialism like Philippe Buonarroti's 1828 book, *Babeuf's Conspiracy for Equality*, or the movement started by Auguste Blanqui in 1830, how important they thought workers' education was. Other initiatives have included the workers' education groups from which the SPD in Germany developed (1840s), the workers' circles organised by the Narodniks in Russia (1880s), the education

side of the *Bourses de Travail* in France (1890s), the SPD school in Germany where Rosa Luxemburg taught economics (1906), the Bolshevik school in Capri (1909), the initiatives by Antonio Gramsci within the Socialist Party and Communist Party in Italy (between 1918 and 1926), and in the USA the provision for education set up by Fannia M. Cohn within the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) (1918) as well as Brookwood College in New York State (1924) and labour colleges elsewhere in the US.

Within the UK, a history of these initiatives would need to include: discussion methods used in the London Corresponding Society (1790s), the struggle around economics teaching in the London Mechanics Institute in the 1820s centred on Tho-

mas Hodgskin; the movement for 'really useful knowledge' that followed this, in conjunction with the struggle for an unstamped press; the work of Ada Nield Chew and others in the Clarion movement (1896), the economics classes run by Jack Fitzgerald in the Social Democratic Federation in London around 1900 and then in the SPGB; the educational method used by the Socialist Labour Party group round James Connolly and George Yates in Edinburgh in the early 1900s; the discussions amongst building workers portrayed by Robert Tressell in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1911); the Central Labour College (1909-1929), the activities of Mary Bridges Adams which included the founding of the Bebel House labour college for women (1912); the classes run by

Rudolf Rocker amongst Jewish migrant workers in East London in the lead-up to the 1912 tailors' strike; the movement around John MacLean for a Scottish Labour College (1916); the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) (1921-1964) including the roles played in the Plebs League and NCLC by Winifed Horrabin, Kath Starr, Cedar Paul, Christine Millar and Ellen Wilkinson; the Communist Party's scheme in the 1930s; and, arguably, the Cairo forces parliament at the end of World War 2.

In short, between the emergence of an industrial working class in the early 1800s and World War 2, workers themselves considered class-struggle education to be a normal and natural dimension of their collective self-organisation.

4. IWCE and broader class-struggle history

If we look at the relation between workers' education and class struggle in the UK specifically, we see a pattern of development which can be summarised as follows.

The working-class struggle to democratise parliament goes back at least to the activities of the London Corresponding Society in the 1790s. In the period prior to the 1832 Reform Act, the rising industrial bourgeoisie wanted working-class support in its efforts to win from the bloc of commercial capitalists and landowning aristocrats better representation for industrial cities like Birmingham and Manchester. A group around Henry Brougham and Jeremy Bentham – the Philosophic Radicals – tried to convince sections of working-class opinion that industrialists and workers were on the same side by using the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to spread what they called 'political economy'. This was sharply different from – and much less truthful than – the classic economic analyses formulated earlier on by Adam Smith and David Ricardo. In 1832 the industrial interests sold out their working-class support by accepting constitutional changes which left workers still without representation. In the lead-up to this betrayal, and especially in the aftermath, when the

movement for the People's Charter was set up, spokespersons for the working class dismissed the SDUK's doctrines as, in William Cobbett's term 'heddekashun' and put forward what they called 'really useful knowledge' – that is, an explanation of how workers were exploited and how they could win political rights through the struggle for the Charter.

After the decisive reverse suffered by Chartism in 1848, as we have seen, a section of the ruling class, the Christian Socialists, recognising that working-class struggle would inevitably arise again, tried to forestall this by using adult education to create within the working class itself a compliant leadership who would blunt the edge of class struggle. And, as we have also seen, in the second great wave of workers' struggles, beginning in the second half of the 1880s with New Unionism, there arose self-education movements that rejected this. In particular the Plebs League characterised as 'orthodox education' what the successors of the original Christian Socialists offered, and opposed it with IWCE.

Starting towards the end of World War 2, and especially under the impact of the 1945 election result and the rise of industrial militancy that ac-

accompanied the post-war boom, the ruling class used post-compulsory education in yet a third fashion. Starting around 1960 they expanded university education and by this means picked out a layer of working-class origin young people and drew them into professional and para-professional jobs. So instead of entering skilled manual work where some of them would have become union activists, graduates from working-class backgrounds were now paid to supervise workers on behalf of the state. The changes to higher education that this required had effects all the way down through the statutory schooling system as well, especially in terms of selection at eleven. But the industrial militancy that arose in the second half of the 1950s and continued through till the mid 1980s did not generate a large scale educational or ideological dimension in opposition to this 'cream-ing-off' process. On the contrary, in 1964, organised labour did virtually nothing to oppose the move by the TUC under George Woodcock dishonestly to shut down both the Plebs League-derived National Council of Labour Colleges and the WEA-sponsored Workers Education Trade Union Committee. And when, following the 1968 *Donovan Report*, the Labour government that came to power in 1974 introduced state funding for TUC shop stewards

courses as part of an effort to bring grassroots union activity to heel, there was, again, little or no opposition.

This history shows, then, that in capitalist society one function of post-compulsory education, including adult education, is to be a class struggle instrument. It further shows that, whereas for half a century the ruling class in the UK has used state-provided higher education more and more effectively as such an instrument, over the same period, with a few, relatively limited counter-instances, the organised working-class has allowed the instrument forged by the Ruskin strikers and their successors to slip from its grasp.

The reasons for this are too complex to investigate here. Nevertheless, it's clear that over the post-World War 2 period the organised working class has come to accept – or at least to acquiesce in – the ruling class's definition of education. There is no modern day equivalent to Cobbett's concept of 'heddekashun' or the Plebs League's concept of 'orthodox education' and this in turn indicates that the labour movement and the left in general do not now possess their own positive concept of what education can and should be. Therefore we now must try to sketch out such a concept in a form that is relevant to present-day circumstances.

5. Education, training and miseducation

The word 'education' is used in at least two different senses: first to refer to an economic sector and the institutions that compose it, such as schools, colleges and universities; and secondly, to refer to a process. We are concerned here with this second sense.

One thing that follows from this is that education and what goes on in schools, colleges and universities are not necessarily the same thing. As a matter merely of factual description, some of what goes on in these institutions is education and some of it is not. For example, primary schools look after children as well as teaching them, secondary schools conduct exams as well as preparing students for them, colleges carry out testing that accredits only prior experiential learning, and universities routinely do contract research that does

not feed directly into teaching. At the same time, education can – as the Plebs League classes did – take place outside these institutions.

In thinking about education as a process, we need, first, to distinguish it from the process of learning. All education involves learning, but only some learning is education. For example, when you learn something purely by chance from experience that is not education.

Conventional definitions of education as a process usually present it as the politically neutral handing on from one generation to the next either of ethical norms or of knowledge as outstanding individuals have developed it to that point. We reject this definition as both inadequate and false.

For us, education is a planned process of teaching and learning in which all of those who take part

do so knowingly. This process involves people working with one another to produce some or all of them as bearers of an enlarged and/or enhanced capacity. This capacity, in turn, necessarily comprises the ability to apply techniques and procedures (in short, skill), the ability to call up memorised information (in short, knowledge) and the ability to use and develop concepts (in short, understanding).

To understand what education is we also need to distinguish it from training. Training is a process of instruction plus systematic practice. Its goal is that at the end those undergoing training will be able to apply specific techniques and procedures in specific spheres. In other words, the outcomes of training can be – and usually are – fully defined in advance. All education has some training as its necessary condition – that is, there is no such thing as education which does not enlarge or enhance participants' ability to apply specifiable techniques or procedures. But the outcomes of education can never be restricted to goals defined in advance. For teaching and learning to count as education there must always be the possibility that it will take a direction and/or move forward to an extent that has not been decided – or even imagined – beforehand.

This distinction between education and training has far-reaching implications. Where training is concerned, it may well be appropriate for the instructor to put to the class questions to which he or she already knows the desired – the 'correct' – answer. But where education is concerned, the questions put are characteristically open-ended. They are designed to pose problems about the subject matter that will enable both teacher and students, working together, to understand it better. In this second case, then, the teacher really wants to hear what the student(s) will say, because the possibility exists that he or she can learn from them. To put this another way: education and training are two ends of a continuum, and the more a given process of teaching and learning tends towards the education end of this continuum, the more it becomes a dialogue between and amongst those taking part, in which all involved can learn from and teach one another.

But in the context of class-struggle this has yet more implications. In the field of ideological – as distinct from economic and political – class struggle, there are three broad fields of activity. One of these fields is intellectual production: the generation, development, elaboration or refinement of ideas. Another is the dissemination of ideas, either as propaganda (many ideas to a few people) or agitation (a few ideas to many people), which in the latter case normally implies that the ideas disseminated

will give rise to activity. But if those who are in a position to think through the logical implications of ideas, are not required to stay in touch with what other people are experiencing, feeling, doing, saying, asking, thinking etc, and if, on the other, those who are organised primarily for activity are not guided by ideas that have been thought through, no effective movement can be built.

Therefore there must be a third sphere of ideological struggle, a sphere in which ideas and activity overlap, a sphere in which dialogue takes place between those whose role at that moment is mainly to elaborate ideas and those whose role is mainly to organise activity. The dialogic education of working-class activists – in short, IWCE – is this sphere.

Finally, when we are considering the education of workers within capitalist society, we shall see that it is not possible to understand what education properly so called is unless and until we recognise that in this social order there is also something that pretends to be education, but actually fights against it. This 'something' we can call 'education', or indoctrination, or, to borrow a term used in the 1960s by the anarchist writer Paul Goodman, 'mis-education'. (Our use of this term does not mean that we agree either with Goodman's analysis or with his proposals.)

The capitalist class has several reasons for providing all working-class children and young people for some of the time and some of them for much of the time with real education. It does this, for example, because the economy requires workers who can read, write and calculate, because it needs to pick out and train some people from working-class backgrounds to act directly on its behalf as managers, and sometimes because giving in to working-class demands for education has allowed it to defuse pressure for concessions in areas that would be more damaging to its interests. On top of this, most teachers of working-class children and young people strive to provide valid education for them, frequently in the teeth of management demands for paperwork that serve other ends altogether. But none of this alters the fact that the basic thrust of both the statutory schooling and the post-compulsory teaching and learning provided to the majority of working-class people by capitalism is to mis-educate them.

Mis-education is an ideological instrument that the capitalist class uses to try and keep working-class people under control and, more positively, to persuade them to act in its interests rather than their own.

Like education properly so called, mis-education is a process of teaching and learning that is

planned. But whereas with genuine education the teachers themselves are usually involved in deciding the content and approach, in the case of teaching and learning that is intentionally mis-educative, the planning tends to be done at an earlier stage by non-practitioners, for example policy-makers or people who work for exam boards, think-tanks and the like, and the teachers have to do their best within a mis-educative structure imposed from above.

Education properly so called tries on principle to make available to students the whole truth and nothing but the truth about the topics it's dealing with (of course at a level and to a depth that is feasible given their existing knowledge and experience). Mis-education, in contrast, sometimes tells outright lies, sometimes distorts the truth, sometimes leaves out crucial information, sometimes smuggles in false assumptions, or sometimes does all of these things at once. And so, by means that are often very subtle, it deliberately narrows students' freedom to think for themselves.

For example, education in biology will set out to teach students the true history of how Darwin developed his theory of evolution, in competition with other theories of evolution and with religious views that denied evolution altogether. It will also strive to explain Darwin's theory in a manner that will allow students to understand it. So true education aims to put students in a position where they can decide for themselves whether to accept this theory or not. But mis-education in biology will give students an incomplete account of Darwin's theory,

alongside present-day creationist views, and it will be structured in such a way as to imply that both of these are equally feasible as scientific hypotheses. So by this means miseducation puts the students in a position where it is harder than it would otherwise be for them to reject creationism.

Teaching that is structured from above to mis-educate usually includes a small amount of real education, because otherwise people would reject it straight away. For a different reason, education properly so called cannot avoid including some mis-education. This is because we live in class society, where the effects of mis-education are present in everyone from an early stage. When people resist valid education, it's often because they have accepted mis-education in the knowledge area concerned. Therefore sooner or later real education always has to challenge mis-education. And whether those participating know it or not, virtually every act of teaching and learning that takes place within capitalist society involves some form of struggle – or at least tension - between these two things. This in turn reflects the fact that here, as in other fields of ideological struggle, few if any procedures are class-neutral, and where neutrality appears to exist this is usually because the competing forces are for the moment equally strong.

However, the distinction between education properly so-called and mis-education has much more far-reaching implications than this.

6. Division of labour

Under capitalism, the extent to which large-scale problems can be solved collectively is limited both by the private accumulation that drives the system and by the fact that the dominance of capital depends on a division between intellectual and 'manual' labour. Always and everywhere, in all its forms, class society produces and reproduces a layer of people who under normal circumstances are loyal to the ruling class and who specialise, first, in appropriating from workers the insights that those workers have as a consequence of their participation in production,

secondly, in elaborating those insights so as to turn them to the advantage of that ruling class, and thirdly in intervening in workers' lives, including by mis-education, in such a way as actively to disrupt their efforts to reclaim control of the knowledge to which they themselves or their predecessors have ultimately given rise.

How did this division of labour come into being? At an early stage in the development of human society, where people were organised in groups of hunters and gatherers who all had to work together to stay alive and any surplus was soon consumed,

the capacity to reflect on insights gained from these processes must have resided in everybody other than tiny children. Many such societies, however, from a certain stage began to develop ideological practitioners such as magicians, healers, seers, soothsayers, cunning persons or shamans - in short people who are at least partly exempted from productive activity in exchange for confronting uncertainty on behalf of the group as a whole, and for organising the group's response to that uncertainty through rites of passage, as for example at birth, puberty and death. As class societies developed, either along the route of settled agriculture or nomadic pastoralism or both, some of these specialised practitioners would have attached themselves as priests to the emergent ruling class, and the activities of others must have been marginalised or suppressed altogether.

In short, there would from this point on be a section of the population permanently exempted from physical work so that they could perform intellectual functions on behalf of the ruling class. These functions would have included organising, maintaining and passing on to successors some genuine knowledge about the world, for example of the climate as it affects the production of food, but also collecting taxes, supervising compliance with the dominant religion, and, finally, refining and organising conceptual tools - in short, thinking about thinking. In the last of these cases, the raw materials from which such tools were developed must have been generated by the mass of the population at the level of routine work, and then appropriated by these functionaries, who then maintained their control over them, both by their exemption from manual labour, their preferential access to measuring instruments, manuscripts, books and maps, and their exclusive use of symbolic devices such as hieroglyphs, images, languages, scripts, calendars, legal codes and memory systems.

All forms of class society have operated some version of this division, but all have also, necessarily, operated another division: between those who have the power to take strategic decisions and those who in normal times have no alternative but to execute those decisions. The relation between these two kinds of division alters both from one form of class society to another and within the history of any one such form. At every stage, however, 'the division of material and mental labour' at best restricts - and for much of the time suppresses - the opportunities for routine workers to think about - and still more to attempt to solve - strategic societal problems. Along with this process of intellectual appropriation, the division between

intellectual and manual labour also actively disrupts - for example by mis-education - the ability of those who do routine work to think through fully the logical implications of their own insights, thereby preventing them from developing those insights into transferable generalisations that can change how production - and with it the social order more generally - is organised. This happens not only because those engaged in material production are excluded from decision-making processes, but also because the maintenance of this division, including by educational systems, pushes workers who do develop an oppositional perspective into adopting forms of fatalism when they think about big issues. In industrial capitalist society, for example, it has in the past encouraged, even amongst workers who are class-struggle activists, an assumption that capitalism will inevitably collapse of itself and be succeeded by socialism, while amongst the broader population, including workers, it has encouraged a complementary fatalism - namely the assumption that capitalism is rooted in human nature, and hence is the only feasible form of social organisation.

In the 1820s and 1830s, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge tried to miseducate sections of working-class activists and potential activists by getting them to accept 'political economy' - that is, the precursor of what is now orthodox pro-capitalist economics. Similarly, in the lead-up to the period of industrial struggle preceding World War 1, latter day Christian Socialists organising through the so-called Workers' Educational Association and the Oxford University Extension Delegacy produced the report *Oxford and Working-Class Education*, sections of which offered lecturers tips on how to counter Marxist ideas put forward by working-class students in adult education discussions.

Mis-education, then, reinforces the division of labour referred to earlier on, but, whether those involved intend this or not, education, to the extent that it is properly so called, contributes to reversing it.

7. Working-class independence today

We use the words 'working-class' here to describe the whole population of working age who have to work for somebody else in order to live, regardless of the class they were born into, and regardless of whether the work they do is mainly manual or mainly mental. We include their dependent children, partners or family members looking after children, acting as carers etc, as well as workers who have retired plus people who are on benefits because there's no work for them. And we don't exclude people who on paper are sole traders unless they own so much in the way of plant or work premises that they really are a small business. We include 'knowledge workers' and people who do 'middle class' jobs, but we exclude people whose 'earnings' are so large that they're really a share of profits (for example some city traders).

We understand that occasionally people can belong to several classes at once, and that they can move backwards and forward between classes. In a world perspective, we understand that in rural areas of many countries there are people who are partly wage earners, either on other people's land or as artisans or home-workers, partly small proprietors working land which they themselves own (which may or may not be loaded down with debt), and partly even landlords (because they rent out part of their own land) or employers (they pay someone to help them). But this complexity makes concepts like working-class more, not less, necessary as tools for understanding the world.

In the phrase IWCE, 'working-class education' in essence means education 'of working-class adults, by working-class adults, for working-class adults', with the proviso that IWCE is in the first instance aimed not at every working-class person, but primarily at those who are activists or close to becoming activists. It aims, then, to educate a thin layer of workers, but to do so in such a way that they will become the educators, and the tutor educators, of others.

Secondly, because the ruling class has always restricted key areas of knowledge to its own members or its direct agents, there could at one time

have been no IWCE without the support of people who had been educated to a high level by the mainstream system, and who at that time would not have been working-class, except occasionally by origin. But now the mainstream higher education system is creating within itself, including in the most elite universities, a proletarianised layer of highly educated people. This layer contains PhD and post-doctoral students who may or may not be from working-class origins and who are employed, often on zero hours contracts, to do hourly-paid teaching. It also includes basic grade lecturers, especially women, retained on temporary contracts for years on end, shut out from doing their own research, and classed as 'teaching only' staff. In the end we will be able to rebuild IWCE only if we can find amongst this 'academic proletariat' the minority who will be prepared to bring knowledge which is locked up in elite universities into IWCE classes. In this sense, then, IWCE would be education *by* working-class people.

Thirdly, IWCE is *for* working-class people, because that is implicit in the idea of 'independence' (workers decide for themselves what teaching and learning would be in the interests of workers).

When we talk about a form of working-class education being independent, we don't mean that the people who are involved in it have already broken free from the influence of other classes, because we don't think this is possible in present day society. Rather, we mean that they are trying thus to break free, and also, that they have succeeded at least to the extent that working-class activists themselves willingly pay for the education that is provided, either as individuals out of their own pockets (including by legacies), or collectively, for example out of union subscriptions following a democratic decision in a branch. So the powers-that-be can't shut them down merely by cutting off the funding.

To sum up, then, by 'independent working-class education' we mean teaching and learning that aims to make available the whole truth and nothing but the truth in areas of knowledge, understanding and skill that are relevant to class-struggle activity.

This will be provided by a group of workers who possess the necessary knowledge, either through life-experience or higher education or both. They will provide it to a group of other workers who are actual or potential union or community activists. The interaction between these two groups of people will be such that each teaches and learns

from the other. This will take place in circumstances which are not under the financial control of other classes and in which ideas which reflect the ideological influence of those other classes can be systematically identified and challenged.

Why then is it crucial that at this time we try to rebuild IWCE?

8. Why rebuild IWCE?

The division of labour that we discussed earlier has a still more damaging effect, as follows. There are no grounds for thinking that capitalism can permanently solve the problems which the human species faces, for example starvation, disease, bloodshed and ecological devastation. Its 'solutions' are at best temporary, both because it has reached a point where its own growth inescapably amplifies these problems, and because long-term solutions to problems of this order can arise only if the problem-solving potential possessed collectively by what Antonio Gramsci called 'the instrumental classes', and amongst them by the working class – that is, by people who have no alternative but to live by doing in return for a wage work usually classed as basic-grade and routine – is realised. The 'instrumental classes' possess this potential because human-beings come to understand the world primarily through working in and on it, and as a result the roots of the insights that make human progress possible lie overwhelmingly amongst the vast majority whose lives are spent doing such work, and/or their direct dependents. But the division of labour intrinsic to class society means that, except at a day-to-day level authorised by the ruling class in the short term interests of production, the problem-solving capacity which workers possess is chained up within them.

In other words, the continued existence of capitalism is itself a problem that only the working-class can 'solve' – by superseding this social order with a better one and thereby clearing the ground in order that they can tackle the still greater problems that exist. So either working-class people will organise amongst themselves an educational movement that starts to reverse the monopolisation by the ruling class and its direct agents of the means of intellectual production or, no matter how

many temporary 'solutions' are created, the problems which the human species faces will remain unsolved.

Global developments over the last 25 years, including in post-compulsory education, provide more specific evidence as to why this is the case.

In discussion since 2009, and in particular in the lead-up to this manifesto, people with an interest in IWCE have emphasised that many aspects of education for working-class people provided by or funded through the state are deteriorating.

They have pointed out, for example, that the education system today is failing to equip working people with knowledge and skills for political participation and social change, that education is increasingly centralised and educators subjected to bureaucratic control, that the purpose of education is reduced to an individual's business decision to invest in higher future income, and that many working-class children feel alienated from contemporary schooling.

They have noted how curricular changes have reinforced this shift: how at all levels knowledge has been fragmented by modularisation; how school and FE curricula are being narrowed; how the Government's history curriculum for schools is concentrated on content/facts at the expense of developing young people's capacity for broader understanding; how modern and labour history are being marginalised within both schools and universities; how the status of HE courses in fields like Media Studies, Sociology and Psychology in HE has been lowered; how arts education has been eroded and marginalised, as if it is not essential to learning, and how if this is provided in schools, working-class arts tend to be neglected.

Post-compulsory public provision has, in the view of IWCEN supporters, deteriorated especially far. Opportunities for people to rejoin education

have been greatly reduced. Working people, including migrant workers, are increasingly excluded by fees, lower incomes and long or irregular working hours. Part-time provision is primarily aimed at skills and employability. Studying the humanities, sciences and social sciences is restricted to extremely costly full-time degree programmes. Universities have mostly stopped their external part-time provision in these subject areas.

Moreover, WEA and trade union provision has equally declined. The WEA's work now takes place almost entirely with either charitable or public funding and in the latter case at least is required to promote 'employability'. Working-class people often have little access or exposure to the arts. TUC and individual union education programmes have become dominated by a 'skill-based' agenda and a bureaucratic emphasis on 'training'.

All these things are happening against a background of wider ideological conflict, characterised by the development of globalised mass media empires, the proliferation of fundamentalism, fascism and superstition, and, in countries like the UK, the pressure on key sections of workers to embrace a small-business mentality. But is it purely chance that the instances of deterioration noted above have come together at the present time, or do they signify some broader and deeper change?

Nearly all the changes cited reflect a shift away from the arrangements for public education that were put in place in the UK from the close of World War 2. Under these arrangements, schooling for the majority of the population was organised, of course within limits, as a public service. But now those in power are moving towards a system that increasingly treats education as something which ordinary people or their families must buy if they want to receive it, with only a minimal public service left in place to discipline those excluded from aspiring to this. This move is accompanied by three other factors. First, work processes have been restructured in ways which push people towards getting higher and higher paper qualifications. Secondly, more and more aspects of institutions which appear to be publicly-provided are in fact being privatised. Thirdly, the Government is openly handing over significant parts of the system for exploitation by for-profit providers.

These changes in turn stem from the intensified ruling class assault on working people that began in the second half of the 1970s and reached a climax in the Thatcher government's defeat of the NUM in 1985. The overall strategy implemented by Thatcher on behalf of dominant sections of the capitalist class centred on the 'de-industrialisation' of the economy – that is, the export of industrial

capital to low wage economies ruled by repressive regimes overseas, the restructuring of the industrial production that remained so as quantitatively to expel labour from it and qualitatively to re-organise it, both in terms of technological innovation and in terms of the higher qualifications demanded from the minority of workers retained within it. This strategy also involved the attempted – and partly successful – recreation of a petty bourgeoisie which provides services to finance capital (for example self-employed plumbers maintaining oligarchs' houses in the South East) and a large pool of workers who must alternate between casualised, low-skilled work and shrinking welfare benefits.

The successful imposition of this strategy has made it possible for the ruling class in the UK and its direct agents to dismantle and/or erode both public services and the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy. This can happen because, basically, there are no longer within the UK economy large blocks of securely employed and unionised industrial workers in a position to disrupt profit-making at the point of production, and hence the wealthy and powerful are no longer under the pressure which existed hitherto to blunt the edge of class struggle by providing relatively good public services.

One direct consequence of the 'de-industrialisation' strategy pursued by the ruling class in countries like the UK has been a series of changes in higher education across the world, driven mainly by a tighter and tighter integration between private capital, scientific research and a form of technological change which accelerates the building of human capacities into plant, especially, but not only, through information technology.

In the UK these changes have led to decisions by governments over the last few years to concentrate research funding even more than hitherto on elite institutions in order that these can compete in a global market for fee-paying HE students. This in turn has produced a situation in which many of the former polytechnics given university status in 1993 are being pressed into providing a form of semi-privatised, largely 'vocational' education. In short, it is pushing them back towards the FE sector from which they began to separate themselves in the 1960s. Some of the formerly more prestigious universities are also being pushed downwards, but others are competing successfully as global 'brands', and are being subsidised to do so by taxes taken from the wages of the working people who are increasingly shut out from them by tuition fees and living expenses. Combined with the globalisation of the labour force, such changes are producing a worldwide two-tier further and higher

education system. One tier is educating members of the ruling class itself and creaming off a thin layer of people from other classes to become its direct agents or even, in some cases, to join its ranks. The other tier is increasingly offering to the less well-off the appearance – but for many not the reality – of a vocational higher education. So in villages across much of the developing world, people who are being driven by the capitalisation of agriculture (the so-called ‘Green Revolution’) deeper and deeper into poverty – and ultimately off the land altogether – are clubbing together to send family members into higher education, including in the UK, because they believe this will provide a route out of destitution via a good job.

In short, there is emerging, both in countries like the UK and US and in countries like India or Brazil a layer of people from less well-off backgrounds who are increasingly under pressure to pursue vocational qualifications to degree level, in many cases supporting themselves by working long hours in casualised employment. They, and often their extended families, hope that through this study, which is frequently prolonged by the resitting of modules, they will gain entry to a global workforce of IT technicians and admin. staff. Some of them will do so, but many will not. Capitalism, then, is less and less able to guarantee the jobs and lifestyles to which such education purports to lead. And the more it fails to do so, the more likely it is, as with the sale of indulgences by the church in medieval Europe, that people will rebel.

In this situation, there will be two possibilities. Either socialists who organise in support of valid post-compulsory education across the world will succeed in winning backing for our ideas amongst higher education students from poor backgrounds and their families, or we will not. In the first case, there is a chance that opposition to the delusory and exploitative nature of what is on offer to the majority of such students will take a pro-democratic form, opening up the possibility of alliances between them and industrial workers in production zones in China, South East Asia, Bangladesh, India, Mexico and Brazil. But in the second case this opposition will default to a right-wing direction – that is, to the kind of fundamentalist religious, political and cultural movements that are already apparent.

In short, we need to ensure that the IWCE movement that we in countries like the UK try to build both indicts the HE system and is attractive to and habitable by potential activists amongst the students/casual workers identified above.

However, the strategy of de-industrialisation pursued under Thatcher and her successors in the

UK has also brought about another situation which requires that we rebuild an IWCE movement, namely that in unions unelected officials, in the Labour Party political advisors, and across the whole field people who lead left groups have come to exercise much greater power over what the majority can do than they once did. This has happened mainly because the number of industrial workers who take an active part in union activity, Labour politics and community campaigns has been sharply reduced.

A healthy, growing IWCE movement would change this situation in three ways. First, instead of having to be trained in skills like public speaking, conducting meetings, drafting motions, writing publicity and the like through mainstream union routes or not at all, new activists arising from below in workplaces would have another avenue – and a different set of ideological assumptions – through which they could acquire these capacities. Secondly, community campaigners considering whether to become Labour councillors would have access to advice and education other than that organised by the Labour Party bureaucracy. And thirdly, instead of having to choose between joining a left group or doing a formal qualification, people seeking knowledge about working-class history or socialist thought would have another option.

In summary, then, we believe that there is now an urgent need for working-class people everywhere to take control of their own education beyond compulsory schooling. We further believe that this can best be done by starting with the collective self-education of those who are – and those who feel prompted to become – union and/or community activists. We consider that every such activist is potentially also an educator, and that there must be a stable, democratic connection between rebuilt workers’ education and the labour movement. For all these reasons, then, we propose to organise a 21st century version of the adult education system that the Plebs League began to put in place, and which was in turn a 20th century version of the pre-1848 ‘really useful knowledge’ movement. We believe that building such a movement is a necessary condition for a successful effort by workers to break out of the maze of vicious circles in which they are currently trapped.

There are a number of issues about the teaching and learning process itself which those who want to follow this course of action must address.

9. Next steps

We need to ask ourselves: what approach to teaching and learning would attract and hold the support of serious activists?

People sometimes tend to assume that they already know everything it's necessary to know. They can be unwilling to question their existing beliefs. They frequently assume that anyone advocating workers' education is basically saying that workers are thick, and/or trying to substitute education for action. Above all, they don't want arrogant outsiders ramming ideas down their throats. And all of these attitudes can go hand in hand with an exaggerated respect for knowledge acquired through formal education.

People are right to distrust highly educated people who approach the labour movement with offers to educate the workers. Some of this distrust almost certainly stems from a recognition that the ruling class has repeatedly used mis-education, including in various leftwing disguises, as a class struggle instrument. To convince people that together we can bring valid forms of adult education into being we need, then, to think carefully about the content of the education we offer to provide.

Many of those who we seek to draw into IWCE will be working long hours in stressful jobs, sometimes for more than one employer. In many cases, the jobs they do will also expose them to pressure from service users. At the same time, they are the people to whom others in their workplaces turn when management puts pressure on them. Therefore they will often be subject to this management pressure both as workers themselves and as shop-stewards, reps and the like. Others will be active in community campaigns. Some will be both. On top of this they will frequently have children and/or dependent parents. Many will be juggling a variety of demands and pressures.

People in that kind of situation may often see education as worthwhile only if it helps them to learn techniques that will make them more effective as activists. They may see content that does not facilitate this as arbitrary and postponable, if not dispensable. For example, they may initially reject history as irrelevant to the present, and they may resist being asked to think about abstract questions.

On the other hand, if we want to base what we do on the themes which the Ruskin strikers and Plebs League believed should be central to IWCE,

our teaching strategies and materials would be focused on three areas. One of these areas would be socialist economics, where we want to help people equip themselves with concepts with which they can make sense of the economic dimension of class struggle from a workers' as opposed to a capitalist standpoint. Another would be 'industrial history' (by which the Plebs League meant history that included the actions and ideas of working-class people). Here, our emphasis needs to be on history as something that we as workers make, but also as something that we can and should 'write' - that is, investigate and publicise. And the third area would be 'philosophy'.

In this last case, the Plebs League focused especially on the writings of the 19th century German tanner Josef Dietzgen, who developed for himself a dialectical way of thinking independently of intellectuals like Hegel or Marx. But essentially they were looking for a way in which working people who hadn't gone through higher education could strengthen their capacity to think out complex issues for themselves so that they could argue against ruling-class spokespersons, both in their own heads and in speech and writing. In this area, our emphasis needs also to be on helping people develop the capacity to think through their own insights. Lastly, we need to integrate each of these themes with the others.

How, then, can we generate content which activists like those we have described will recognise as necessary and urgent but which at the same time allows us to put these themes on the agenda?

At the very least we must convince people that the process we offer them is relevant to the problems they are trying to solve - in other words, that it will be more than just a chance to have enjoyable discussions and air cherished ideas. People must go away from IWCE sessions thinking differently from how they did before, and they must want to come back because they recognise that IWCE gives them access to learning processes which strengthen their capacity to be socially and politically pro-active.

This requires, first, that we work out ways to teach techniques (for example public speaking), procedures (for example, charring) and conceptual moves (for example, testing generalisations) through the knowledge areas we aim to address. In other words we must be confident that there is a

proper balance between skills, knowledge and understanding in any teaching and learning process we organise. And, secondly, it requires that, where classes form a series, we conduct them in such a way that the focus moves steadily towards issues that students themselves put on the 'agenda'.

In discussion about the aims of IWCE, IWCEN supporters have argued that workers' education for today must help people to take an active part in discussion, debate, argument and research, to challenge dominant views, to identify unstated assumptions, to question their own assumptions, to formulate and express reasoned judgements on complex issues, to pose fundamental questions about dominant ideas, to develop and evaluate new ideas and approaches to contemporary problems, to perceive their own experience as part of the raw material of history, to engage critically with issues that they are unfamiliar with and ideas they disagree with, to investigate critically the history of working-class and socialist movements in terms both of events and ideas, and to relate past events and ideas to their historical context.

An IWCE movement that intends to meet these requirements will probably need to discuss both in advance of organising classes and regularly thereafter what kind of teaching and learning strategies would work with busy activists. Many people, including many teachers and lecturers, have not had a chance to reflect on the importance of posing open-ended questions rather than asking students to guess what they're thinking, while people from academic backgrounds without experience in adult or further education may sometimes equate teaching with lecturing or reading academic papers. Whatever happens, then, it seems likely that a revived IWCE movement will need to evolve collective methods for developing teaching strategies and materials.

Strategies are needed as well as materials, because experience suggests that materials on their own aren't useful without an overall conception of the intended direction. And in terms of materials, it is probably better to invite intending tutors to discuss materials that have been used in the past and then encourage them to improve on these, rather than to offer them ready-made materials that they're expected to use.

Busy activists who come to an IWCE class are likely to expect an element of authoritative input from tutors. They are likely to think that, since they've made the effort to attend, the tutors should possess some knowledge or expertise that would be relevant to them, and should have devised a procedure for communicating this to them. Some of them may also be anxious that what they perceive

as their own ignorance should not be exposed in the class. Subject to these provisos, however, they are likely also to want tutors to allow for relevant knowledge and/or experience that students do possess, and will expect genuinely open-ended discussion, so long as it does not leave them with a feeling of inconclusiveness.

As things stand at the moment, the IWCEN as such does not have a shared practice from which theory can be collectively developed. But once some classes are running it will be possible – and probably necessary – to hold regular workshops for tutors – in short, to develop our own form of ongoing tutor education.

One area that this tutor education would need to address is the question of dialogue. This would almost certainly involve us in thinking more systematically about the relation between socialist traditions of class-struggle workers' education and popular education traditions.

Popular education' refers to the adult education movements, often focused on literacy and/or on agricultural techniques, which have been developed over the last two centuries or so with small peasant proprietors, initially in parts of Europe, and later worldwide across agricultural zones. In much of southern Europe in the 19th century you had the development of Popular Universities, while in rural northern Europe you had Folk High Schools. In the 20th century both of these spread to North America, for example the Antigonish movement in the maritime provinces of Canada and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, which began as a labour college but later took on a crucial role in the Civil Rights struggle, especially through the literacy work of Septima Clark in the islands off the coast of South Carolina. As well as this, the ideas of Paulo Freire originate from a popular education initiative developed in the 1950s by Catholic radicals in Brazil. Within a framework derived from liberation theology, Freire's thinking includes borrowings from Marx and from existentialism.

Freire's thought has three central features: 'conscientisation' (ie the idea that, to be valid, education for oppressed adults must enable them to develop a consciousness that they are oppressed and a desire to fight back); skills training integrated with this (for example literacy training which uses words and images reflecting their oppressed situation); and dialogue (genuine engagement and inter-action between and amongst teachers and learners. However, a conception of dialogue also runs through the tradition of IWCE.

Thus it is clear both from the *Communist Manifesto* itself and from earlier and later writings that Marx and Engels thought that a necessary condi-

tion for the formation of the working-class movement as a movement consciously setting its own direction was a dialogue within it between workers and a group who were not – or at least did not start out as – industrial proletarians, and who had undergone mainstream higher education. As early as 1843, for example, Marx argued that ‘the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy; philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat’. (By philosophy here Marx meant the group of left-Hegelian philosophy students and lecturers to which both he and, by a different route, Engels belonged. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1844, Engels also maintained that a dialogue was taking place, in what was then the industrial centre of the world, between Chartists (ie industrial workers who were radical democrats and who he thought had already gone a long way towards ‘attaining independent education’) and followers of Robert Owen (that is, of a thinker who he and Marx would in 1848 characterise as a ‘critical utopian socialist’) and who were not themselves industrial workers. Four years later, he and Marx devoted a section of the *Communist Manifesto* to identifying three routes through which people from other classes, and specifically people with higher levels of mainstream education than those available to the mass of working-class people, would necessarily contribute aspects of that education to the proletarian movement in ways which would strengthen it. Then, looking back in 1892, Engels wrote that: ‘The German socialist movement had its origin in events that occurred long before 1848. It began with two independent movements. The first was a purely working class movement which derived its inspiration from the early communist agitation of the French workers. One aspect of this movement was [Wilhelm] Weitling’s utopian communism. The second was a purely intellectual movement which developed as a result of the collapse of Hegel’s philosophical system and this type of socialism was from the first dominated by Karl Marx. The *Communist Manifesto* of January 1848 represented the fusion of these two early German socialist movements’.

Properly understood, Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* was a development of this conception, centred on the proposal that, under the circumstances of illegality and violent repression that existed in Russia in 1903, a dialogue should be conducted on a sustainable basis through a newspaper which would contain, on the one hand, reports by workers on their own conditions, activities etc, and, on the other, political ‘indictments’ of all aspects of tsarist rule written by a dedicated group of intellectuals, some of them traditionally

educated people who had thrown in their lot with the workers’ movement, some working-class autodidacts.

Finally, looking back from prison in the early 1930s on the pre-revolutionary situation that existed in Italy in 1919-1920 and ended in Mussolini’s rise to power, Antonio Gramsci proposed for the Italian Communist Party a structure in which it would become ‘a philosophical movement properly so called’, and in which, through the involvement of ‘intellectuals’ who were ‘organically the intellectuals of [those] masses’, it would ‘in the process of elaborating a form of thought superior to commonsense and coherent on a scientific plane . . . never forget . . . to remain in contact with ‘the simple’ and indeed find in this contact the source of the problems which it [would] set[s] out to study and to resolve’.

As part of the self-development of IWCE tutors, sustained discussion needs to take place with people from the popular education tradition who base themselves mainly on the class-struggle – as opposed to the ethical – side of Freire’s thought. By this means it would hopefully be possible to arrive at a conception of dialogue that would underpin IWCE teaching and learning and make it coherent. As well as this, our tutor education would need to address what we have called ‘the lost legacy’ of IWCE.

The majority of the people we want to attract as ‘students’ will not know that workers have built class-struggle adult education movements in the past. So at the start they may not see this as something that they could do now. For this reason alone, then, we need to get to know this history well enough to explain it to other people.

In addition, the lack of a proper history means that the legacy of IWCE and similar initiatives is in danger of being lost altogether. But we can’t let this happen, because to build a modern-day equivalent we need to know what was right and what was wrong about earlier movements. Without this, we would have to learn what to do entirely by trial and error, and we could easily repeat mistakes made in the past.

So it seems likely IWCEN supporters will need to get involved in researching past class-struggle workers’ education movements, including the Plebs League itself. And the history they dig out needs to be truthful, because there is always a risk of bending the past in the direction that suits what you want to do in the present.

10. Conclusion

The constituency for union-based IWCE of the type provided till 1964 by the National Council of Labour Colleges – that is, the most class-conscious minority of union activists in industrial enterprises – has been deeply eroded.

In 1908-09 the Ruskin strikers and their supporters set up a movement for the collective self-education of working-class activists, drawing where necessary on the expertise of sympathisers from amongst traditional intellectuals. It did not set out to be a general 'workers' education' movement.

We have argued that a rebuilt IWCE movement now would be focused on inter-action between, on the one hand, a group comprising experienced trade unionists and basic grade workers in further and higher education, and, on the other, people who are pushed by their colleagues into becoming union reps, or by their neighbours into becoming community campaigners. We believe that such a movement would put within workers' reach an instrument which they could use to break out of the vicious circle that they face today.

However, a 21st century IWCE movement cannot take the form of a small group who are presumed already to know everything there is to know about socialist history, economics, philosophy etc, and about the methods of teaching and learning through which the education of working-class

activists should be conducted, and who then go out and educate masses of people who are presumed to lack such knowledge.

The IWCEN should definitely seize any opportunity to organise itself through cooperation with unions and to support progressive developments within the WEA. At the same time, it should continue its work through its own meetings, including day-school or weekend events on specific historical, economic or philosophical themes, and its own publications, both paper and electronic, which may well include specimen teaching materials and newsletters that update supporters about its activities and enable them to comment, raise issues for discussion and so on. It should continue to use its website and social media for this. It should arrange with other organisations such as union branches and trades councils for its supporters to speak about IWCE. It should have stalls and fringe meetings at labour movement events. And it should build up a panel of people who can conduct education sessions in a variety of contexts.

But whatever use it makes of these and other avenues, the IWCEN's fundamental aim is to involve the widest possible circle of working-class activists and intending activists in a purposeful discussion about how to organise for themselves their own education.

**To contact the Independent Working-Class Education Network,
please go to: www.iwceducation.co.uk
or email: iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk**

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For the mass of people, access to valid post compulsory education and training is more necessary now than ever. It should be theirs by right! All provision should be organised and taught by staff who are trained for and committed to it. Publicly funded provision of valid post compulsory education and training for all who require it should be a fundamental demand of the trade union movement.

Post-16 Educator seeks to persuade the labour movement as a whole of the importance of this demand. In mobilising to do so it bases itself first and foremost upon practitioners - those who are in direct, daily contact with students. It seeks the support of every practitioner, in any area of post-16 education and training, and in particular that of women, of part timers and of people outside London and the Southeast.

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