

Talk on 'Learning from the radical histories of education in the UK',
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Intro.

Talking about learning from history of radical adult ed.

From 1789 French Revolution to WW1

Radical here = tackling fundamental issues

History/tradition of radical ed. back to emergence of working class (w/c)
during industrial revolution

This history one of struggle between w/c and ruling-class (r/c) adult ed.
initiatives.

1790s: Corresponding Societies

Corresponding Societies set up in Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham, Leicester,
Norwich, London etc.

Pro-democracy movement of small masters AND journeymen, eg tailors,
printers, shoemakers

Focused esp. on writings of Tom Paine.

Knew about radical ideas from 1650s through historian Catharine
Macaulay.

(Suppressed by Act of Parliament 1799; treason trials)

Taylor Francis Place described discussion method in London Correspond-
ing Society. when he joined in 1794 as follows:

'The chairman (each man was chairman in rotation), read from some book
a chapter or part of a chapter, which as many as could read the chapter at

their homes, the book passing from one to the other, had done, and at the next meeting a portion of the chapter was again read and the persons present were invited to make remarks thereon; as many as chose did so, but without rising. Then another portion was read and a second invitation was given - then the remainder was read and a third invitation was given when they who had not before spoken were expected to say something. Then there was a general discussion. No one was permitted to speak more than once during the reading. The same rule was observed in the general discussions, no one could speak a second time until everyone who chose had spoken once, then any one might speak again, and so on till the subject was exhausted . . .

Early 1800s: Free and easies

Thomas Spence: (after Gerrard Winstanley) UK's first communist/socialist

Born Newcastle

1801-1814 organised network of w/c debating clubs, coffee houses etc in central London

Called 'free and easies'

Set up to evade ban on corresponding societies.

Continued on more systematic basis after Spence died 1814

Many still active throughout 1820s

Details known mainly from police spies, treason trials of supporters etc.

1820s onwards: Mechanics' Institutes:

Background:

- industrial capitalists trying to get w/c on their side against landed class
- artisans, small masters etc trying to learn about scientific and technological developments - but also politics

Struggles as to which side would control MIs.

Two examples:

First eg: Thomas Hodgskin co-founded London MI 1823.

Middle class takeover.

Hodgskin then banned after 1825 lectures propounded labour theory of value.

1826 Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) set up by senior parliamentarians to counter ideas like Hodgskin's through the *Penny Paper*.

Second eg: Manchester MI set up 1824 by industrialists themselves.

Political discussion banned from outset.

In 1829 artisans/unionists formed breakaway Inst. in opposition to ban.

These workers mainly followers of utopian socialist Robert Owen

(Theoretical basis of Owenism largely shaped by Anna Wheeler.)

Owenite 'Halls of Science' set up across NW.

Frederick Engels in Salford and Manchester 1842-44.

In *Condition of Working Class in England*, published Germany 1845, wrote:

'That . . . the working-men appreciate solid education when they can get it unmixed with the interested cant of the bourgeoisie, the frequent lectures upon scientific, aesthetic and economic subjects prove which are delivered especially in the Socialist Institutes, and very well attended. I have often heard working-men, whose fustian jackets scarcely held together, speak upon geological, astronomical, and other subjects with more knowledge than most 'cultivated' bourgeois in Germany possess.'

Women / girls in fact dominated NW textile workforce. Engels's partner, Chartist textile worker Mary Burns, must have been a key informant. (Engels very young.)

1830s: Really Useful Knowledge (RUK) movement

Through 1832 Reform Act, industrialists won political power alongside landed/commercial r/c.

Immediately turned on w/c supporters, esp. through 1834 Poor Law Reform Act

This stimulated high levels of w/c opposition.

One form this took was rebellion against 1819 Stamp Act

Stamp Act aimed at suppressing w/c papers

Required newspapers to carry 4d stamp, thus pricing them beyond what workers could afford.

In 'War of Unstamped' (1831-36) w/c side set out to defeat Stamp Act

Tactic was to publish and sell unstamped papers in defiance of Act

Multiple prison sentences, including hundreds of w/c volunteer paper sellers.

Jane Carlile and Eliza Sharples prominent in this movement.

Struggle over control of media but also over media content.

Hence growth of Really Useful Knowledge movement within unstamped movement.

RUK defined as 'knowledge of how to get out of our present troubles'.

1840s: Chartism

Mass w/c-based movement aimed at radical reform of electoral system

(Dorothy Thompson radically altered our understanding of Chartism.)

Main upsurge 1839-41

People's Charter drawn up 1838

Tension from outset between 'knowledge/moral force Chartism' and 'physical force' Chartism

Physical force side carried RUK movement forward into Chartist movement.

Did so via Chartist papers, especially *Northern Star*

Weekly, started 1837, continued till 1852, edited by Feargus O'Connor.

50,000 circulation in 1839.

From-below contributions encouraged

Northern Star and other Chartist papers read aloud and discussed all over country.

Chartism weaker after 1841, but papers continued as radical ed. influence into 1850s

Eg first English translation of *Communist Manifesto*, by Helen Macfarlane, serialised in Chartist *Red Republican* paper 1850.

1850s: Christian Socialism

Chartism as mass movement revived briefly in 1848, stimulated by revolutions across Europe

Army brought out to quell Chartist mass meeting on Kennington Common / petition to parliament 10 April 1848

Chartist leadership in fact backed off

But that evening, first Xtian Socialist group founded.

Anglican clergy and wealthy lawyers.

Main thinker F. D. Maurice

Project: to prevent further Chartist revivals by building compliant layer from section of w/c activists

One tactic for this: intervene in workers' education.

Targeted on Owenite artisans from knowledge / moral force wing of Chartism

By 1854, main 'threat' of Chartism over, but growth of workers' discussion clubs

To counter this, Maurice founded London Workingmen's College.

Aim was to offer selected workers chance to participate in pretend Oxbridge college run by people from real Oxbridge colleges.

Maurice Xtian Socialist group as such disbanded soon after, but LWMC decisive step that dominated r/c approach to radical ed. till WW2.

1850-80: clubs

Chartist and socialist ideas sustained through 1850s-70s by workers' discussion clubs.

At least 130 in London alone.

Gave rise (1875) to Manhood Suffrage League (MSL)

Also in 2nd half of 1870s, spread of Marxist ideas in clubs

1876 Social and Political Education League (SPEL) founded by Rev. Henry Solly

Aimed to influence workers' clubs along Xtian Socialist lines by providing speakers who would counter socialist ideas

But 1880 MSL effectively took over SPEL and supplied workers' clubs all over London with radical speakers.

1880s

Post 1870 Ed. Act growth of literacy - hence growth by 1880 of literate w/c activists, including autodidacts reading up on socialist ideas.

Democratic Federation (DF) based on clubs, founded by wealthy eccentric Marxist Henry Hyndman 1880

1883 US socialist Henry George speaking tour in UK

Widespread interest in George's ideas among w/c activists

Xtian Socialist Oxford tutor Arnold Toynbee embarked on national speaking tour aimed at countering influence of George's ideas on w/c groups

18/1/83 at hall in central London Toynbee came up against audience of discussion club members

Outcome: had breakdown and died (aged 30) March 1883.

Samuel Barnett, Oxford-connected vicar in East End organised Toynbee Hall settlement 1884 in Whitechapel on lines similar to LWMC.

(Oxford products live temporarily in w/c area and get involved in good causes.)

Within this, Barnett pioneered tutorial class adult ed. model

(Group of workers commit themselves to prolonged systematic study, eg of economics, under Oxbridge tutor.)

1885: Xtian Socialist tutors founded Oxford Extension Delegacy

(One-off lectures aimed at people across country without access to HE)

1889 Christian Social Union (CSU) (ie revived version of Maurice group) founded in Oxford by upper class Xtian Socialist Anglican, Canon Charles Gore.

SDF

DF re-launched as Social Democratic Federation (SDF) 1884

ie first UK Marxist party.

Led in autocratic fashion by Hyndman and group round him.

But historians generally agreed that club spirit carried on as from-below w/ c base of SDF, despite Hyndman, for next 35 years.

1884, group including Eleanor Marx and William Morris broke away to form Socialist League (SL)

Morris emphasis on 'making socialists';

Did this through free speech fights, street corner oratory, talks, articles etc

Created tradition of non-demagogic, plain language persuasion that outlived SL (disbanded 1890) and Morris's death (1896)

This tradition reinforced underlying autodidact and mutual ed. trad amongst SDF rank and file and beyond.

1900s: SLP

1899 in France prominent socialist (Alexandre Millerand) became minister in bourgeois govt

Provoked international dispute amongst socialist parties

SDF leadership supported Millerand.

This triggered left breakaways from SDF.

Especially (June 1903) Glasgow-based Socialist Labour Party (SLP)

SLP heavily influenced by thrust towards industrial (as distinct from trade or general) unions.

Prominent figure was engineer / university lab technician George Yates.

Yates's educational method described by participant as follows:

[On Sundays] 'We had two and a half hours' tuition; reading out aloud; questions and answers to last week's lessons; short discussions and examination of home-work: after which tea was made and for another hour we talked freely on all manner of political and educational subjects. An hour's respite and we would repair to Buchanan Street, corner of Argyle Street, or to Glasgow Green, to hold forth on socialist propaganda to large audiences who collected there every Sunday night.'

And in more detail re tuition:

'Each student was given a series of definitions of terms used by Marx. These had to be studied, memorised and discussed thoroughly, for perhaps the first four weeks. The student would study Wage Labour and Capital at home. At the class we would read it over paragraph by paragraph, round the class. This practice aimed at helping the students to speak fluently and grammatically. At the following class meeting questions would be put and answered, and the points raised thoroughly understood by everyone, the results of each lesson being summarised by the leader. This method was applied in the same way to industrial history. Later on, simple lessons on historical materialism and formal logic were added. So that, after six months of this, every worker who went through the entire session came out a potential tutor for other classes.'

Ruskin strike background

By late 1890s clear to Oxford Delegacy that Extension not holding workers.

Hence not producing desired compliant layer.

Albert Mansbridge, co-op clerk, Toynbee Hall product and protege of Gore

Convinced Delegacy that Barnett's tutorial method was solution.

Supported by Delegacy and Board of Education, Mansbridge founded WEA 1903 (as lobbying group not provider).

Plebs League / Central Labour College (CLC)

Ruskin College an independent institution for workers in Oxford founded in 1899 by 3 well-off US socialists

(Funded by legacy inherited by one of these, Amne Vrooman.)

By mid 1900s, effectively college for TU activists, especially S. Wales and Durham mineworkers, railway-workers, and textile workers from NW.

Rising tide of w/c struggle, including industrial unionist activity, especially from 1906

'Need' for compliant layer stronger than ever.

From summer 1907, Xtian Socialists / Extension Delegacy / WEA set about organising national tutorial class system leading to selected workers doing Oxford Univ. diploma in economics.

Began taking control of Ruskin College as Oxford base for this.

Students resisted.

Inspired by industrial unionist ideas and SLP teaching and learning model.

Organised own classes both at Ruskin and in S. Wales, NW, NE etc.

Founded Plebs League 1908

Dennis Hird, principal, supported students.

Hird sacked March 1909.

All 54 students struck in protest.

Most active students left and founded rival CLC August 1909.

Plebs League/CLC had:

- critique of mainstream ('orthodox ed'),

(Saw this as enslaving; view similar to Bob Marley, quoting Marcus Garvey,

'Emancipate yourselves from all mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds.'

- content model (Industrial History, Economics, Logic),

- national network of classes, correspondence courses, *Plebs* magazine, publishing house

Promoted nationally by Mary Bridges Adams, sustained by Winifred Horrabin

Attempt to form women's college in premises supplied by Daisy Warwick.

(By mid 1920s, as National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), had 30,000 students nationally.)

Role also of Kath Starr, Ethel Carnie Holdsworth, Christine Millar, Ellen Wilkinson)

Conclusion

Question: what does this history imply for now?