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"A Link Between Labour and Learning": The Workers Educational Association in Ontario, 1917-1951

Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster

ON 23 FEBRUARY 1926 some 20 men and women, members of the Discussion Club of the Workers Educational Association (WEA) of Hamilton, Ontario, met together to debate the subject Titles in Canada. Not surprisingly, it proved difficult to get a lively debate going on this topic because the idea of titles found so little favour among the Club's working-class members. The secretary commented wryly, "it would have been nice to have a few titled persons in our class to hear the opposite view."[1]

His comment was a criticism of class privilege; yet, it also reflected the enthusiasm of working-class members of the WEA for getting at the truth and fairly considering all sides of an issue. As such, it indicated something of the essence of the WEA in Ontario. Here were working-class people meeting together in their own organization, expressing and perhaps reinforcing their class consciousness, but determined to see a subject from all perspectives. The working-class leaders of the WEA throughout the organization's history in Ontario had always insisted on an unbiased search for truth. To this end, they relied on university faculty to direct this quest, even while attacking the university itself for class bias.

This paper will trace the history of the Workers Educational Association in Ontario from its founding in 1918 until its disintegration in the 1950s.[2] Little scholarly attention has been paid to this voluntary association whose

[1] Minute Book and Journal of the Discussion Club of the Workers Educational Association of Hamilton, 23 February 1926, Records of the Workers Educational Association (henceforth: WEA), Series B I, Drummond Wren's Numerical Files (henceforth: Wren Files), box 2 (Ontario Archives) (henceforth: OA).

[2] Although the WEA in Ontario began to disintegrate in the 1950s, it continues to function in 1982 as a small Toronto-based organization.

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main purpose was to organize inexpensive, non-credit night classes in cultural subjects taught by university professors for the working class. Existing studies of the WEA in Canada have not been thoroughly researched and the WEA-sponsored histories tend to be uncritical.[3] On the other hand, both J.A. Blyth and Netto Kefentse treat the WEA as a failure and over-emphasize its weaknesses and problems.[4]

In fact the WEA enjoyed considerable success despite its many problems. Begun partly as an experiment in social control by the province's educational élite, the WEA soon became a workers' organization, largely controlled by some of its working-class members. It offered many liberal arts courses for workers, and later, after the tremendous growth of industrial unionism in the late 1930s and 1940s, the WEA developed an innovative labour education program. Although the Association was continually threatened by the University of Toronto administration, the chief cause of the WEA's decline in the early 1950s came from within the labour movement. Certain labour leaders, using Cold War tactics, launched attacks on the WEA because they opposed a labour educational institution which they could not control. Despite the WEA's eventual demise, however, the Association left its mark on the labour movement. The WEA's pathbreaking efforts in labour education and research served as useful models for future trade-union educational programmes.

The Canadian WEA was an offshoot of the British Workers Educational Association, which was founded in 1903 by Albert Mansbridge, a clerical worker who served as a lay teacher in the Anglican Church Sunday Schools and was active in the co-operative movement. It was meant to provide "a link between labour and learning" by making higher education available to working people. Mansbridge's vision of workers' education was largely shaped by his Christianity. "The aim of education," he wrote, "is the right ordering of human life which brings body and mind into unity with the spiritual and so makes the fullest of worship possible." The founder was also moved by a strong belief that the working class must be better educated in order for democracy to function properly. As Mansbridge put it, workers "need education for citizenship, without which the political and economic power they wield is a danger to society, to themselves."[5]

Mansbridge understood that a workers' educational movement would

[3] Workers Educational Association, *Golden Jubilee, 1903-1953* (Toronto 1953); Workers Educational Association, *History of the Workers Educational Association, Diamond Anniversary, 1917-77* (Toronto 1977).

[4] J.A. Blyth, *A Foundling at Varsity: A History of the Division of University Extension, University of Toronto* (Toronto 1976); Netto Kefentse, "The Universities and Labour Education in Ontario: A Study into the Politics of Co-operation between Unions and Universities," M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975.

[5] Albert Mansbridge, *The Kingdom of the Mind* (London 1944), 69; Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Adult Education* (London 1935), 58.

succeed only if the workers themselves controlled the organization, delineating and fulfilling their own educational needs. Not only did workers serve on the executives of branch associations, but the self-governing tutorials, taught by university professors, permitted a considerable degree of student participation. Indeed, it was these characteristics that set the WEA apart from the older university-extension movement which had relied on lectures.[6]

The British WEA enjoyed support from a number of universities, especially Oxford. In its early years it was also given the blessing of some prominent churchmen, and it was aided by the co-operative movement as well as by many trade unions. At first, prominent trade-union leaders hesitated to support the WEA, a movement so greatly influenced by professors and clergymen, but increasingly they supported it and shaped its programme. Financial assistance came from the central government, local educational authorities, the universities, and private foundations. By the end of World War I, the British WEA had become the foundation for the universities' adult education programmes, had won the confidence of key trade unionists, and boasted a total membership of a few thousand throughout the country.[7] This thriving movement proved an inspiration and a model for workers'-education enthusiasts in Ontario.

The first discussion of forming a Workers Educational Association in Canada came in December 1913 when Mansbridge stopped off in Toronto on his return trip home after visiting Australia, where he had succeeded in overseeing the founding of an Association. According to the Toronto *News*, Mansbridge suggested that recent English immigrants who had attended WEA classes in the Old Country might form the nucleus of a Canadian organization in the same way the Australian WEA had been formed.[8] That same December, a young University of Toronto history professor and prominent imperialist, Edward Kylie, published an article in the philosophically conservative periodical, the *University Magazine*, advocating the formation of a Canadian WEA.[9]

Nothing came of these suggestions, but four years later W.S. Milner, a University of Toronto Classics professor, approached the Toronto District Labour Council with the suggestion that he would hold a class modelled on the WEA for interested trade unionists. Twenty enthusiastic workers met with Milner throughout winter 1917 to discuss Aristotle's *Politics*.[10] The follow-

[6] Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain* (Liverpool 1970), 251-6.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 244-68; J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960* (Toronto 1961), 262-99.

[8] *Daily News* (Toronto), 23 December 1913, in Clippings Files, A-73-052 (University of Toronto Archives) (henceforth: UTA).

[9] Edward Kylie, "The Workers Educational Association," *University Magazine* (Toronto), December 1913.

[10] W.S. Milner, "The Workers Educational Association," *University of Toronto Monthly*, January 1922.

ing spring, steps were taken to establish a formal organization. University of Toronto President Sir Robert Falconer called a meeting of influential businessmen, public figures, and trade-union leaders. At this meeting, held on 29 April 1918 at the Technical School and chaired by Falconer, the decision was made to form an Association. During the following few weeks a committee of Toronto professors, trade unionists, and public representatives drafted and then adopted the constitution of the WEA of Toronto and District. (Under that constitution, control of the Association was vested in an annually elected Executive Council comprised of representatives from the University, the trade unions, and the public.) In the fall of 1918, 60 members registered in eight evening classes that were held at the University of Toronto, Upper Canada College, and at some large industrial plants. The most popular subjects were economics, history, and political science.[11]

Why was the WEA successfully established in 1918? In his letter to influential individuals Falconer stated that "the workingmen of this city" had asked the University "to co-operate with them" in establishing an organization similar to the British WEA.[12] These working men were probably students in Milner's class.[13] At the time there was a need for educational opportunities for working-class adults. The Mechanics Institute had long since disappeared; public libraries offered educational resources, but few classes; and the university extension programmes provided only expensive courses.[14] Working-class people, however, were not the main impetus behind the founding of the WEA in Toronto. The prime movers were members of the educational élite, and, for the most part, they were imperialists, dedicated to the cause of strengthening Empire ties.

The foremost figure in the formation of the WEA was the Principal of Upper Canada College, W.L. Grant. He was an intellectual of the imperial

[11] Workers Educational Association of Toronto, *Annual Report*, 1918-9, WEA, Series A, box 1 (OA).

[12] Falconer to S.R. Parsons, 24 April 1918, Sir Robert Falconer Papers, box 50 (UTA). The letter was sent to some other prominent figures such as H.J. Cody, C.V. Massey, and Sir John Willison, as well as to executives of such corporations as Goodyear, Dunlop Tire, Eaton's, Imperial Varnish, etc.

[13] This was Glazebrook's belief as stated in his brief to the Royal Commission on University Finances. (Ontario Royal Commission on University Finances, *Report*, App. IX, "Statement of the Workers Educational Association," presented by A.J. Glazebrook). Glazebrook's authorship of this is confirmed in Glazebrook to Grant, 7 January 1921, W.L. Grant Papers, MG 30 D 59, box 11 (Public Archives of Canada) (henceforth: PAC).

[14] On Mechanics Institutes in Ontario see Foster Vernon, "The Development of Adult Education in Ontario, 1800-1900," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1969; James Eadie, "The Napanee Mechanics Institute: the Nineteenth Century Ontario Mechanics Institutes Movement in Microcosm, *Ontario History*, 68 (1976); and Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal 1979), 49-52.

school who took a keen interest in social reform.[15] When Grant held the Beit Chair in Colonial History at Oxford from 1906 to 1910, he came into contact with Mansbridge, who kindled in Grant an interest in workers' education. In England Grant served at Ruskin, Oxford's workingmen's college. When he returned to Canada, he set about establishing a WEA in Toronto.[16] Grant's prestige and strong commitment to workers' education made him the most valuable patron of the WEA during its first dozen years, and he gained the deep respect of the Association's working-class leaders, who admired his insistence that the university must not be an ivory tower, but "militant."[17]

Closely associated with Grant was Arthur J. Glazebrook, an exchange broker in Toronto. As a key figure in the imperialists' Round Table movement in Canada, Glazebrook shared many of Grant's views on Empire. He supported the WEA as a public member of the executive, appealed to the Ontario government for funding, and served as a tutor. Glazebrook also sought to reach out to other groups in society through the Bankers Educational Association, an organization he established to provide lectures to bank employees, and through his unsuccessful plan to begin a CPR university for the highly mobile population of railway employees.[18]

Of less importance were two friends of Grant and Glazebrook: W.S. Milner, the first WEA tutor, and Sir Robert Falconer, the President of the University of Toronto. Milner, a senior member of the Classics department at Toronto, was a devout Methodist and a firm believer in the need for stronger Empire bonds. He frequently gave public lectures on cultural topics: his WEA work was another way to reach out to the public.[19] Falconer had always shown an interest in adult education, and, despite his Liberal politics, he moved into the Round Table group during World War I.[20] Falconer was not the initiator of the WEA at Toronto, but he greatly facilitated the university's participation in the project and willingly served as Honorary President of the Association after retiring as President of the University.

[15] Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power* (Toronto 1970), 196-7.

[16] Grant to Mansbridge, 30 August 1934, Grant Papers, box 11 (PAC).

[17] W.L. Grant, "The Education of the Workingman," *Queen' Quarterly*, 27 (December 1919), 160.

[18] H.A. Innis, "A.J. Glazebrook: Obituary," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 7 (1941), 72-4; "Reports" prepared by Glazebrook, box 11, Grant Papers (PAC); on the Round Table movement see John E. Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto 1975).

[19] C.N. Cochrane, "Head of Department Retires," *University of Toronto Monthly*, 19 (June 1929), 342-343; "William S. Milner," Biographical Files (UTA).

[20] On Falconer and the Round Table, see Glazebrook to Lord Milner, 5 June 1916 and 2 December 1918, Glazebrook Papers (PAC). On Falconer and adult education, see his "Leaders Can See Things Whole," in J.E. Kidd, *Adult Education in Canada*, (Toronto 1950), 29-31, and his "The Workers' Opportunity," *The Link* (Toronto), April 1930, copy in Wren Files, 70.1.4, WEA (OA).

R.M. MacIver was also a very important figure in the WEA, although his interest in it sprang from rather different experiences. Scottish born, MacIver was educated at Edinburgh and Oxford where he probably came into contact with the British WEA. In 1915 he was appointed to the Political Science department at Toronto; he later became head of the department and fulfilled duties at the School of Social Work. In his autobiography, *As A Tale That Is Told*, MacIver states that during World War I he served as Vice-Chairman of the Canadian War Labour Board where he was engaged in planning for the re-establishment of soldiers in civilian life.[21] This work put him in close contact with Canadian labour leaders and intensified his interest in postwar reconstruction. In 1919 he published a controversial book, *Labor in the Changing World*,[22] which analyzed the postwar scene and recommended various liberal schemes for avoiding class conflict. At the same time he took an interest in workers' education, playing an important role in getting the WEA started in Toronto. WEA students eagerly attended MacIver's economics classes. Perhaps his criticisms of existing structures and his call for reform appealed to the students. Among the Association's academic supporters, however, MacIver was an outsider because of his anti-imperialism and, as Glazebrook put it, his "English Radicalism."[23] Similarly, he was not at home at the University of Toronto. In 1927 he eagerly accepted an offer to move to Columbia University, where he was permitted to teach sociology and where he found many like-minded colleagues.

The imperialism of all these men (except MacIver) served a few important purposes. First, it gave them a common aim. It seems likely that they all believed the WEA would provide a means to spread imperial ideas among workers. In a 1918 letter to British Round Table leader Lord Milner, Glazebrook wrote:

> I have to confess that I have not been altogether "pure of heart" in working so hard for this result [getting the WEA started]. I have always had in mind that some channel must be established by which we could reach the working men of this country in a more intimate manner in reference to the Imperial problem. Nearly all the tutors who so far have been suggested for the first eight or ten groups are more or less on our side. . . .[24]

He saw the WEA, then, as a propaganda vehicle for imperialist doctrines. The academics' enthusiasm for the Empire also meant that they were closely in touch with developments in Britain. The WEA, with its associations in Britain, Australia, and Canada, was in this sense an expression of the cul-

[21] R.M. MacIver, *As A Tale That Is Told* (Chicago 1968), 44.
[22] R.M. MacIver, *Labor in the Changing World* (Toronto 1919).
[23] Glazebrook to Lord Milner, 21 May 1918, Glazebrook Papers, MG 30 A 43 (PAC). On MacIver, see also "R.M. MacIver," Biographical File, (UTA); "Workers Educational Association," Clippings File (UTA); Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto 1976), 154-5.
[24] Glazebrook to Lord Milner, 21 May 1918, Glazebrook Papers, (PAC).

tural aspect of the Empire. In addition, the academics' imperialism had led them to work together in the Round Table movement, and this experience probably made it easier for them to co-operate on the WEA project. And finally, in back of their imperialism lay many shared assumptions and a common, decidedly paternalistic, approach to workers' education.

All the educators, including MacIver, stressed that the prime purpose of workers' education was to provide education for citizenship. They wholeheartedly supported the constitution of the WEA, which stated that the Association's object was to assist members "to acquire the knowledge which is essential to intelligent and effective citizenship."[25] This was more than merely a lofty phrase, for what they meant by "education for citizenship" was instruction in "responsible" behaviour. It is crucial to recognize the context within which these men were living. The late war years and immediate postwar period saw the rise of labour militancy and radicalism on an unprecedented scale. The Russian Revolution, the Winnipeg general strike, and the One Big Union provided dramatic warnings; meanwhile, in Ontario, the increasing strike activity, the rapid growth of trade unionism, and the expansion of labour political action seemed startling to middle-class academics. Alarmed by these developments, the intellectuals behind the WEA sought to use the Association as a means to curb the spread of radicalism. W.L. Grant stated in an article publicizing the WEA: "Ideas without education are very dangerous fodder. Ideas without education mean the triumph of the half-baked; and the results of the triumph of the half-baked are manifest to the world in Russia today." His solution was for workers to become better educated: "the only weapon against the undisciplined idea is the disciplined idea."[26] MacIver stated things just as bluntly in the student newspaper, *The Varsity*: "The inherent policy of the WEA is averse to Bolshevism, the chief object being to give a University culture to the labour man."[27]

Along with their openly avowed aim of combatting radicalism, the academics claimed the WEA would further the cause of moderate, cautious reform. MacIver declared that educated labour would do a great service by breaking "the bondage of custom and complacency which rob ideals of their power."[28] Grant put it in a nutshell: "what we need is a little more constructive discontent and a little less agitation based on ignorance."[29]

The academic supporters of the Association had other aims for the WEA as well. Because of wartime events that made it appear that organized labour was becoming a "junior partner" in government, the university élite saw the WEA as a vehicle for training workers, and especially labour lead-

[25] A copy of the constitution is printed in the *Annual Report*, 1918-19.
[26] Grant, "Education of the Workingman," 160.
[27] *The Varsity* (Toronto), 2 December 1918.
[28] MacIver, *Labour in the Changing World*, 225.
[29] Grant, "Education of the Workingman," 161.

ers, for their larger role in society. Grant, for instance, believed there was a "new concordat between Capital, Labour and the State under which the working man may play his part as an owner alike in industry and in politics." But he stressed that "it must be educated Capital, educated Labour and an educated State."[30] These academics also emphasized that the WEA must provide a "liberal," "cultural," or "social" education, and not a technical one. In the Tory tradition, Glazebrook argued that the Industrial Revolution, "an unexampled triumph of human intelligence of the mechanical order," had given "birth to a political philosophy of harsh individualism and unrestricted competition" which, "like a fierce fire, burned away the older bonds that had given at least some semblance of unity to human societies." Privately, he added: "the over-emphasis on technical training leads to damnation."[31] Even MacIver, a liberal who expressed more reverence for technology and efficiency, contended that World War I had shown that "science is not enough."[32]

All the educators who supported the WEA insisted that the teaching must be done by university professors. "It is the University, after all," declared Glazebrook, "that contains the treasury of knowledge and the training in method that are required."[33] They stressed that "training in method" could develop in working-class adults a capacity for critical thinking, and, no doubt, some people did benefit in this way. Yet, they also frequently claimed that knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge were free of bias; it was simply a matter of professors unlocking the "treasury of knowledge" for working-class people. The academics' openly expressed biases, of course, belie such claims. They were conservative men, anxious to enlist supporters for the imperial cause and determined to combat radicalism. By insisting that WEA instructors be university professors, at a time when the faculty was a very carefully selected body, the academics were attempting to ensure that the WEA would not become a vehicle for attacking the fundamental power relations in society.

In order for these academics to establish a workers' educational movement in Ontario, they needed the active support of several workers who would serve to legitimize the organization so that other workers, and more particularly the leaders of the labour movement, would support the WEA. Naturally, the academics turned to the Toronto District Labour Council. This was how trade unionists came to attend the April 1918 meeting at which the decision to form the Association was made.[34] From among those in attend-

[30] *Ibid.*, 160.
[31] Glazebrook, "Statement;" Glazebrook to Lord Milner, 15 November 1922, Glazebrook Papers, (PAC).
[32] MacIver, *Labor in the Changing World*, 217-8.
[33] Glazebrook "Statement."
[34] Toronto District Labour Council minutes, April 1918, Metro Toronto Labour Council Collection, MG 28 I 44 (PAC).

ance, four trade unionists were elected to the provisional executive: James Richards of the Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, who was chosen president; James H.H. Ballantyne, a member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, who was made secretary-treasurer; James T. Gunn of the Electrical Workers Union; and William Stockdale of the Painters and Decorators.[35]

The most important trade unionists in the WEA during the early years were Richards, Ballantyne, and Alfred MacGowan. Richards had long been an activist in the Plumbers Union, the Independent Labour Party, and the Toronto District Labour Council.[36] Ballantyne was a well-known union figure who continued to serve as a competent secretary-treasurer of the WEA until he felt compelled to resign from the executive in 1921 upon his appointment as deputy minister of the recently formed Ontario Department of Labour. The position of secretary-treasurer was then filled by Alf MacGowan, an activist in the Toronto local of the International Typographical Union, who proved to be the most dynamic working-class figure in the WEA for most of the 1920s. He was a jovial, appealing Irishman well suited for the promotional work which he undertook. "Mac" and W.L. Grant established a warm friendship; together, they did much to build the Association during the 1920s.[37] It is not surprising that these trade-union activists were skilled workers, since the union movement at the time was overwhelmingly made up of craftsmen.

What was it that led some workers to become active in the Association in the early years? Several of these worker activists were British-born. A few had attended WEA classes in the Old Country, and it was natural for them to become involved in a familiar institution.[38] For some, it may have been that their experiences in Britain had made them more receptive to the invitations of the largely imperialist group of academics behind the WEA. It would be wrong, however, to place too much emphasis on the Britishness of the worker enthusiasts. After all, working-class culture in southern Ontario was significantly shaped by recent British immigrants. And there were, of course, some activists who were Canadian-born. Moreover, the labour activists, whether Canadian- or British-born, shared more than just a British orientation with the academics.

Although evidence concerning the views of workers in the WEA is spotty, available sources indicate that co-operation between the workers and academics was possible because both groups shared common ideas. First,

[35] *Annual Report*, 1918-19.

[36] Wayne Roberts, "Artisans, Aristocrats, and Handymen: Politics and Unions among Toronto Skilled Building Trades Workers, 1896-1914," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976), 105-7.

[37] For evidence of MacGowan's friendship with Grant see their correspondence in Grant Papers, box 11 (PAC).

[38] The Britishness of the WEA is discussed by Blyth in his *Foundling at Varsity*, 28-33.

academics and workers active in the WEA were, to some degree at least, critics of their society. None was a revolutionary. They believed that working people had a great need for more education and that workers with more knowledge would help to improve the existing political and social system. They were disillusioned with political democracy as it was functioning and hoped it would be improved through a workers' educational movement that increased workers' understanding of political and social issues. Worker activists shared the academics' faith that truth could be pursued in an unbiased way. And, finally, they were all agreed that a technical education was not enough, that a liberal education would broaden workers' understanding, augment their pleasures, and inspire in them higher ideals.

Some of the aims of the workers differed from the academics' goals but did not clash with them. Many working people who attended WEA classes were very keen to gain an education which had been denied them in their youth. The great majority of working-class people at the time had been forced to leave school and earn wages at least by the age of fourteen. A university education was regarded as a privilege of the wealthy. Alf MacGowan, a man who had been unable to go far in school, showed his strong thirst for knowledge when he wrote Grant in 1919:

> During our talks last winter you said you would like to get a few chaps together from summer study of economics or some such subject. It has never left my mind. I am still thirsting after knowledge.... Education — Education — is ever uppermost in my mind....[39]

Naturally, Grant was delighted with MacGowan's enthusiasm.

Some working people saw workers' education as a contribution to both personal growth and the development of the labour movement. In a student essay published in the Toronto labour paper, the *Industrial Banner*, a WEA member stated:

> Anything done to educate and develop the mind is never lost to the individual or the community as a whole.... We need education to help increase our interest in the product of our labour. By increasing our intellectual powers, we give a broader, more intelligent outlook on life.[40]

A liberal education for workers was also seen by some labour people as an antidote to mechanization's bad effects on the intellectual and emotional health of workers. In a statement in 1923 the Toronto District Labour Council called for changes in the educational system so that workers in mechanized trades could "retain their mental discipline and their status as reasoning beings."[41] The Council acknowledged that the WEA was partly satisfying the needs of such workers.

[39] MacGowan to Grant, 27 May 1919, Grant Papers, box 11 (PAC).
[40] *The Industrial Banner* (Toronto), 9 April 1920.
[41] "Memo to the University Committee," Toronto District Labour Council Minutes, 15 February 1923, Metro Toronto Labour Council Collection (PAC).

Significantly, however, some of the aims of the workers differed substantially from those of the academics. While both groups talked about the Association's contribution to democracy, workers emphasized the need for social justice and attacked the limits of education in a class society. They stressed the need for equal access to publicly supported educational facilities. MacGowan claimed: "Workers suffer most today from the obstacles which restrict [university education] to a limited class." Therefore, he continued, workers must "assert the right of the whole people to have access to the best that the educational system of the country can offer," and "democratize education."[42] Workers criticized the class bias of the university and organs of public opinion. MacGowan argued that since public opinion was moulded by a daily press "biased against labour," workers "should be taught to do their own thinking."[43] Another labour man, who was a member of the journalism class in Hamilton in 1928, wrote that "workers must develop their own point of view, drag to light aspects of history — the history, for example, of the life of the people — which have hitherto been far too much neglected." He set an important task for the WEA:

> The WEA must clear away much economic rubbish and build up a science of economics, the subject of which is man, not money — human welfare, not material wealth. It must in fact, re-write and re-interpret political and economic science in the light of its own experience and its own conceptions of social expediency.[44]

Some labour activists in the WEA believed workers' education had a social and collective purpose. Unfortunately, the written records of the WEA provide few examples, since the Association was ever cautious, determined to maintain broad support from the university, the government, and the public. In the mid-1930s, one working-class member, who had been active in the WEA since the mid-1920s, emphatically stated:

> Education is not for the maintenance of the "status quo." While there are injustices and inequalities in society, there is a dynamic purpose in Workers Education. The sufferer will naturally be discontented in his lot, and the duty of education is not to stifle this discontent while the cause still exists, but to replace irrational condemnation by constructive criticism and to enable working men and women to refashion society according to their ideals.[45]

For some WEA members, socialist ideology was also a reason for their participation. Although the WEA was "non-partisan," some of its prominent leaders were socialists. Implicit in their support of workers' education was

[42] Alfred MacGowan, "The Workers Educational Association of Ontario: What It Is, Does and Needs," Canadian *Congress Journal* (Ottawa), February 1926, 6.
[43] *Ibid.*, 13.
[44] J. O'Hanley, "WEA," in *WEA Reporter* (Toronto), 29 March 1928 (copy in Wren Files, box 1 [OA]).
[45] George Sangster, "Editorial," *The Link*, October-November 1936 (copy in Wren Files, box 1 [OA]).

the belief that a thorough, scientific study of society would inevitably lead one to a socialist solution.

Thus, common language, such as "education for citizenship," masked some very significant differences between the aims of the educationalists and those of the labour activists. The class differences of the two groups do much to explain the divergent meanings behind their words. On the one hand, the educationalists saw the WEA as, in part, an experiment in social control.[46] They sought to use their positions as academics and intellectuals to maintain existing power relations in society. On the other hand, the labour activists hoped to further the cause of labour and to help redress the imbalance of power in society. These fundamental differences existed within the Association from the start. As time progressed, these underlying tensions surfaced.

DURING THE WEA's first decade, supporters of the Association were rather disappointed with its progress. They felt there was too little support from the public, the university administration, and labour leaders. Inadequate support meant that the WEA was frequently troubled with financial problems.

Until 1922, the WEA was largely financed by a grant from the University of Toronto Board of Governors, which covered the costs of the tutors' honoraria.[47] Members of the WEA executive did not regard this as a satisfactory arrangement, preferring that the Ontario government allot funds for the Association's work. In 1921 the Ontario Royal Commission on University Finances recommended that "sufficient support" be given to the WEA.[48] In

[46] There are obvious parallels between the WEA and Frontier College with regards to workers' education and social control. Frontier College, established by Alfred Fitzpatrick in 1902 in northern Ontario as the Reading Camp Association, provided "good" reading materials and basic education for workers in construction, mining, and bush camps. Frontier College leaders, during the first 30 years, shared with the academics of the WEA a concern for combatting radicalism by teaching "correct" values. However, Frontier College dealt more with the "foreign" population, teaching "staunch Canadianism" and a respect for British institutions. Because of Frontier College's structure and the fact that the students were mostly transients, its students had less opportunity to influence the direction of the institution than WEA students. This is not to say, however, that individual students, some of whom were radicals, did not take advantage of the educational services of Frontier College. See Alfred Fitzpatrick, *The University in Overalls: A Plea for Part-Time Study* (University of Toronto 1923); Eric Wilfred Robinson, "The History of Frontier College," M.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1960; and *Frontier College Papers*, MG 28 I 124 (PAC).

[47] WEA minutes, January 1919, 22 March 1922, WEA (OA). In 1919 the Board of Governors granted $1,000, each tutor receiving $125; by 1922 the grant had risen to $1,500, and each tutor received $200. Tutors' honoraria remained within the range of $100-$200 until the 1950s, although the grants increased as more tutors were hired and expenses rose.

[48] Royal Commission on University Finances, *Report*, 23.

Drummond Wren, WEA general secretary, addressing labour students during the 1940s. (Photo from the Workers Education Association Collection, Ontario Archives.)

1923, after many appeals, the Farmer-Labour government of E.C. Drury, conscious of its need for labour support, allocated $1,500 for the WEA, but held in trust by the University of Toronto and administered by the Department of Extension. This was the first in a long series of annual grants.[49]

Tuition fees and money raised by the Association were used to pay for office and promotional expenses. Administrative costs were also covered by donations from other institutions. Classroom space was provided by the University of Toronto, Upper Canada College, and public libraries. In 1921 the Massey Foundation donated $500 for a WEA library. The Toronto District Labour Council, thanks to the urgings of Jimmy Simpson and a few other socialists on the Council, gave $100 annually throughout most of the 1920s, and local unions such as the Typographers, Carpenters, Machinists, Brick-

[49] WEA minutes, 28 February 1923, WEA (OA). The amount of the grant was determined by an informal method. The Director of University Extension would suggest an amount to the University President who would suggest this to the government. This informality was typical of university funding at the time.

layers, Iron Moulders, Plumbers, and Electrical Workers gave token donations of $10 each.[50]

WEA members were justifiably disappointed with the extent of union support for the Association. In part, the problem was that the WEA, as a new organization, had to prove itself of benefit to existing labour bodies — any new organization would have had difficulties enlisting support during the 1920s because the labour movement was very weak. After 1920, union membership in Ontario declined by 25 per cent; labour leaders became extremely cautious, refusing to attempt any new approaches.[51] The labour movement lacked the financial resources and the determination to aid the WEA, despite resolutions of support in principle passed at annual conventions of the Trades and Labour Congress.[52] Union support was also made difficult because the international unions sent money to American headquarters for educational services. Supporting the WEA, therefore, raised embarrassing questions about the imbalance of Canadian dues sent abroad and the few services provided for Canadian locals.[53] Furthermore, many trade unionists were deeply suspicious of the WEA's connection with the university. W.L. Grant once noted: "the class consciousness of the working man [is] intense enough to make him very suspicious of any movement not controlled by himself. We have distinct difficulties here in getting them to come even under the nominal control of the University."[54]

The WEA also found it difficult to persuade many unorganized workers, the great majority of the Ontario workforce during the 1920s, to join the Association. Undoubtedly the unorganized tended to share the unionists' suspicions of education and social mores imposed from above. Moreover, because the WEA appealed for members through trade unions, and personal contact was the chief means of recruitment, most unorganized workers remained beyond the reach of the Association. Furthermore, the liberal educational offerings of the WEA, and its overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic membership, offered few attractions for many Ontario workers. For example, an Italian-speaking labourer, toiling long hours on a construction site, very likely had no interest whatsoever in a class called Empire Relations!

[50] *Annual Reports*, 1919-29.

[51] Ian Radforth, "Organized Labour in Ontario During the 1920s," M.A. research paper, York University, 1976.

[52] Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, Convention *Proceedings*, 1925, 153-4 and 1928, 152.

[53] WEA minutes, 18 December 1923, 10 January 1929, WEA (OA); Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, Executive Council Minutes, 30 November 1923, Canadian Labour Congress Collection, MG 28 I 103, (PAC); Trades and Labour Congress of Canada Convention *Proceedings*, 1925, 106 and 1928, 152.

[54] Grant to J. Gustave White, 8 March 1921, Grant Papers, (PAC). Toronto labour activist Jimmie Simpson had questioned the University's involvement in the WEA at one of the first WEA meetings in 1918. (Toronto *Daily Star*, 8 June 1918.)

Another problem facing the Association was how to broaden its influence beyond the Toronto-Hamilton area. More than 80 per cent of the membership in the mid-1920s came from Toronto and Hamilton.[55] Since there was never a mass demand for workers' education, the establishment of a new association required a few dedicated working people who saw workers' education as a top priority and some willing instructors. Many smaller centres lacked leaders or instructors. Nevertheless, during the 1920s associations were formed at Ottawa, Kingston, Brantford, Galt, London, and Windsor, although some of these survived for only a year or two.

Despite the limited enthusiasm of labour leaders and workers in general, in less than a decade WEA membership had grown to over 800. The core of the WEA was its trade-union membership, but there were many non-unionists, such as clerks, stenographers, sales persons, and even some business and professional people who took WEA classes. Although personal contact proved the most effective method of recruitment, appeals were made in the daily press, through unions, the "welfare officers" of some large industrial plants, public libraries, and at public events such as the Canadian National Exhibition. In Toronto, attempts were made to involve more workers by holding classes in suburban residential areas, such as the Scarborough Bluffs and Earlscourt. Efforts were also made to diversify the curriculum by offering classes in such subjects as Co-operation, Trade-Union Law, and there was one class in a technical subject, Metallurgy.[56]

A significant proportion of those attending classes were women. In Toronto, female membership ranged from 25 to 50 per cent in 1927-28; and in Hamilton, over 75 per cent. Female students tended to prefer courses in English Literature, Composition, and Psychology, whereas men preferred Economics, Public Speaking, and Current Events. Special courses in Hygiene and Household Economics were offered for women. Some of these female students were in the workforce, but many were housewives. One of the WEA's attractions for housewives was described by a female member of the journalism class in Toronto who wrote a fictional account about two middle-aged women discussing their desire for education. They found that their children were growing up, going on in school, and leaving their mothers "behind." "Oh, mother, you're a back number!" was a comment too frequently heard. The solution to their problem was, of course, to attend WEA classes.[57] Some of the women who became involved in the WEA learned about labour matters, and friendships formed may have helped, in however small a way, to build working-class solidarity. For most women members, the WEA at least provided an opportunity to get out of the house and meet with, and learn from, others.

[55] University of Toronto, *Annual Report*, 1925-6, 69.

[56] WEA minutes and *Annual Reports*, 1920-28, WEA (OA).

[57] Constance Lea, "Keeping Pace with the Children," *WEA Bulletin* (Toronto), Programme Edition, 1928-9, (copy in Wren Files, box 43 (OA)).

The core of the WEA programme was the tutorial class. At an evening class the professor usually spoke for the first hour and then the students discussed the topic during the second hour. Often, lively debates would ensue. "I remember last year," recalled a middle-aged man registering for a class in 1925, "a speaker who would insist on talking about gardening every time he got on the floor. Just as likely he would be followed by a disciple of Lenine [sic] who would make some Conservative hot under the collar. . . ."[58]

In addition to tutorial classes the WEA offered other programmes. Journalism students produced their own newspaper, which then served as a promotional vehicle for the WEA. Public debates and nature study walks were popular events. Coffee socials, Hart House theatre nights, and Island picnics fostered a sense of community among members. An article in the journalism class's newspaper of 1924 described a class banquet at the Inglenook Tea Rooms. It gives an indication of what these social activities were like:

> After dinner, when the guests had arranged themselves around the open fireplace in the spacious dining room, Mr. A. Key started the programme with a song, "Son of Mine" which he sang to his own accompaniment. Mr. Rossie [an editorial writer at *The Globe*], then gave an interesting and illuminating address on editorial writing, after which he answered questions put to him on the subject. Mr. Alfred MacGowan, the Secretary of the Workers Educational Association, was persuaded to sing a very popular old Irish Folk Song, which he sang with much feeling. This was followed by a short, interesting address by Mr. James Cunningham, President of the Workers Educational Association.[59]

Here were people spending their leisure time very much in the tradition of nineteenth-century artisans.

The diversification of the WEA's offerings, the Association's fairly rapid growth, and the leadership provided by class-conscious labour men combined to antagonize some members of the University. Both Milner and Glazebrook left the WEA in the early 1920s. Although the reasons for Glazebrook's departure are not clear, Milner withdrew because he feared the labour element within the WEA had become too radical. In a letter to Grant in 1921, Milner deplored the declining influence of academics in the Association and objected to a course in Marxist economics (not taught by a University professor, but by a trade unionist, James Ballantyne) and two courses in trade-union law that, he said, "form no part of our ideal." He lamented that labour was "more anxious for power than for culture" and

[58] *Daily Star* (Toronto), 3 October 1925. Although left-wingers attended some WEA classes, the Communist Party of Canada took only a brief interest in the WEA in spring 1923 when two Toronto Communists, Annie Buller and William Moriarty, became active in the WEA for a few weeks. There is no record indicating they were unwelcome; they seem to have soon lost interest. The Communist Party was more interested in establishing its own Marxist educationals and in gaining influence within the unions and Labour Party.

[59] "Social and Personal," *Queen City Gazette* (Toronto), 11 February 1924, (copy in Wren Files, box 43 [OA]).

A Summer Ramble nature study group in Toronto in the mid-1920s. (Photo from Canadian Congress Journal, *5:2 (February 1926), 12.)*

that "the spiritual force of the movement is on the ebb."[60] Not long after the WEA's formation, then, the labour element within it had begun to take the Association in a direction which some of the paternalistic academics opposed.

The most serious threat to the WEA came not from the academics, but from the University of Toronto administration. In 1927 the WEA was attacked by the head of Toronto's Department of Extension, W.J. Dunlop. This crisis proved to be turning point for the Association. In 1920, Dunlop, a native Ontarian, was appointed Director of the new Department of Extension after having taught school for many years and then lecturing at the Faculty of Education at Toronto. The ambitious Dunlop soon proved himself an asset to the University by greatly increasing the Extension Department's enrollment and overseeing the expansion of the Extension movement in Ontario.[61] Dunlop came into direct contact with the WEA because the government grant was administered by his Department. Although he was sometimes helpful, Dunlop's sympathies were not with the WEA. He "deplored the existence of class consciousness in this country"[62] and was unsympathe-

[60] Milner to Grant, 13 October 1921, Grant Papers, box 11 (PAC).

[61] Total enrollment in the Department of Extension increased from 167 in 1919-20 to 2,746 in 1926-27, according to University of Toronto *Annual Reports* for those years. Dunlop served as Director of Extension until 1952 when he was appointed Minister of Education, a post he held until retiring at age 78 in 1959.

[62] W.J. Dunlop, "Class Consciousness as a Factor in Adult Education," National Conference of Canadian Universities, *Proceedings*, 1929, Appendix L, 84.

tic to the idea of adult education provided especially for workers. However, he reluctantly co-operated because he thought the WEA could be useful in recruiting trade unionists for university classes. Perhaps, too, President Falconer's enthusiasm for the WEA encouraged the politically astute Dunlop to be somewhat co-operative.

In any case, the crisis in 1927 erupted because Dunlop was determined to reduce the size and influence of the WEA. He correctly saw that by 1926-27 many people who were not trade unionists, and some who were professionals and businessmen, were taking the cheap WEA classes rather than the more costly Extension courses. Dunlop argued that these people were defeating the purpose of the WEA. It is also clear that he was a bureaucrat determined to protect and expand his sphere of influence. At the WEA general meeting in 1927, he made numerous proposals, the most important of which was a plan to limit WEA membership to trade unionists and those in occupations where there were unions. Some WEA members agreed with Dunlop in so far as they disapproved of clerical workers and professionals who were "just using the WEA as a means of getting ahead" with no regard for the social aims of the Association.[63] However, the membership recognized the devastating impact Dunlop's proposals would have on enrollments, resented his interference in WEA affairs, and rejected his ideal of classless adult education. Furthermore, the WEAers pointed out that in Britain the WEA had always defined "worker" in the broadest sense, not limiting membership to blue-collar workers. At the annual meeting there was strong opposition to Dunlop's proposals, but, because the University of Toronto held the purse strings, the Association agreed to Dunlop's changes.[64]

More trouble arose in fall 1927, when advertisements for the Extension Department's programme appeared to limit further the scope of the Association. The ads seemed to indicate that Dunlop had unilaterally merged the Department of Extension's tutorial classes with the WEA and that the WEA was primarily designed for "the ambitious working man" wishing to get ahead.[65] An enraged MacGowan resigned as WEA general secretary, condemning Dunlop for his dictatorial methods, and refusing, he said, to become a Canadian "John Burns."[66] Sharp criticisms from the Toronto District Labour Council and Tom Moore, the President of the TLC, helped assure that the WEA would continue its "separate" existence. Nevertheless, the Association had lost a crucial battle with the Department of Extension, lost a devoted working-class leader, and membership in the Toronto Association plummetted from over 400 to just 135.[67] The WEA had to rebuild from

[63] WEA minutes, 18 March 1927, WEA (OA).
[64] *Ibid.*
[65] Copy of circular in Grant Papers, box 11 (PAC).
[66] MacGowan to Grant, 12 August 1927, Grant Papers, box 11 (PAC).
[67] In 1925-26 the WEA of Toronto and District had an enrollment of 435, by 1927-28 enrollment had dropped to 135. Districts outside Toronto were not affected by

a smaller pool of potential students and, before long, in a very different environment as the worst depression in history descended on the province.

THE WEA EXECUTIVE feared that the Depression would cause "harmful effects . . . on our registration."[68] In fact, WEA membership grew substantially in the early 1930s. In 1929-30 there were only 230 members in two district associations. By 1933-34, membership had increased to 1,513, and there were 15 districts. Growth continued throughout the decade. By 1937-38 membership had reached 2,194 in 29 districts from Halifax to Vancouver.[69]

This growth was due to several developments. The Depression gave the WEA a new context, while new academic supporters and a revitalized leadership enabled it to launch a very successful membership drive. During the Depression the public seemed more receptive to the idea of workers' education. As a WEA executive member later recalled, "working people were seeking an understanding of their difficulties and the possibility of a solution."[70] The WEA provided an opportunity for study and debate. People flocked to classes on Economics, Current Events, Labour Problems, Composition, and Public Speaking. In addition, many unemployed were attracted to WEA classes and special programmes designed for them. Many of the jobless had both the incentive to examine their plight and the leisure time in which to study.

The WEA became more attractive as the nature of support from the faculty changed. Most of the academics who had been active in the Association during the 1920s had retired from the University by the early 1930s. The faculty members who taught during the Depression were much less concerned about the imperial issue and had more diverse interests. Many instructors were primarily interested in supplementing their incomes and had little interest in workers' education. However, several who became especially active in the WEA were left-liberals and social democrats. Some of the members of the League for Social Reconstruction, the so-called "brain trust" of the CCF, taught WEA classes just as their British Fabian counterparts had done. Jarvis McCurdy and Harry Cassidy, for instance, were quite

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Dunlop's new policy. (*Annual Reports*, 1925-26 and 1927-28, WEA [OA]).

[68] WEA minutes, annual meeting 1931-32, WEA (OA).

[69] *Annual Reports*, 1934-35 and 1937-38. In that year the Ontario centres were: Brantford, Fergus, Guelph, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener, London, Oshawa, Peterborough, Preston, St. Catharines, Sault Ste. Marie, Stratford, Toronto and suburbs, Windsor and Woodstock. There were study circles in Fort William, Galt, Sudbury, and Timmins. (*Annual Report*, 1937-38.)

[70] Drummon Wren, "Address to the President and Board Members of the WEA of Canada," presented 31 March 1951, 25. (Copy in "Education and Labour, Canadian Publications, 1951-71," Industrial Relations Centre Library, University of Toronto.) (Henceforth: Wren's Address 1951).

active in the Toronto Association and had sought to introduce a more leftist perspective to the academic programme. One tutor, the political scientist Lorne T. Morgan, was an ardent anti-fascist and outspoken critic of many aspects of capitalism. His writings, some of which were published by the WEA, were designed in part to raise the political consciousness of WEA students.[71] Other tutors such as Harold Logan, Bora Laskin, and H.R. Kemp were known for their sympathetic attitude toward organized labour. One professor summarized a common aim of many of his fellow academics when he stated: "Workers' education should be geared to helping the workers' movement."[72] The working-class leaders of the WEA had now found partners rather than patrons within the universities.

The leadership of the WEA was greatly strengthened in 1930 when the Association received a grant of $5,000 from the Carnegie Corporation and Drummond Wren was hired as a full-time organizer. A Scottish immigrant and World War I veteran, Wren began taking WEA courses in the early 1920s. At that time he worked for a business-press clipping service. Wren's daily reading, and his WEA classes, led him to question much about the social, economic, and political system. Although Wren was not a union member — there was no union for him to join — he became interested in the labour movement and often attended evening meetings at the Labour Temple. Because of his probing criticisms, the union officers did not always welcome Wren. In the WEA, however, his talents were recognized — he was elected general secretary following MacGowan's resignation in 1927. He initiated the request for funding from the Carnegie Corporation, and as soon as the first grant arrived he became the Association's first paid organizer. On 1 January 1930 Wren began a career with the WEA which was to span two decades.[73]

Continuity of leadership was also provided by George Sangster, a Scottish immigrant who served as a dedicated executive officer of the WEA for nearly 40 years. Sangster, who had taken a WEA course in the Old Country, was a passionate advocate of workers' education as a means of advancing the cause of the working class. Termed a "Keir Hardie socialist" by labour historian Harold Logan,[74] Sangster firmly believed that workers' education

[71] Lorne T. Morgan, *Fascism* (Toronto 1942) and his *Homo the Sap* (Toronto 1943). On Morgan's left-wing views, see Michiel Horn, "The League for Social Reconstruction: Socialism and Nationalism in Canada, 1931-45," Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1969, 232-5.

[72] WEA Toronto minutes, 4 May 1931, WEA (OA). The WEA also provided a non-partisan outlet for socialists at a time when academic freedom outside the classroom was severely limited. On academic freedom see Peter Oliver, *G. Howard Ferguson: Ontario Tory* (Toronto 1977), 242-3 and Carl Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, 80-84.

[73] Wren's Address 1951, 1-6; taped interview with Drummond Wren, 29 September 1976, Special Collections (McMaster University).

[74] Harold Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1948), 607.

must be fought for as a right of the oppressed classes and should be used as a stimulant to working-class radicalization. Sangster, an active member of the Iron Moulders Union, endeavoured to build closer ties between the unions and the WEA and to keep the Association worker-oriented. Throughout the years, he fought those who tried to change the name of the organization to something "less proletarian."[75]

The Association also benefitted from the long years of service given by Jimmie Cunningham, a patient and kindly Scot, and by two other Scottish immigrants, Bill Dunn and Jimmie Rogers. Dunn was a prominent trade unionist (a member of the Carpenters and Joiners union) who helped to build the WEA's ties with the union movement. Rogers was a committed socialist and member of the CCF. Because he was a civil servant who worked for the Post Office, Rogers felt that it was necessary to avoid partisan political work and instead sought to serve labour's cause through the WEA.[76] Because all the key WEA labour men during the 1930s (Wren, Sangster, Cunningham, Dunn, and Rogers) were Scots, Dunlop facetiously labelled them the "Scotch Brigade!"[77] Undoubtedly their common Scottish working-class background gave them certain cultural ties that made it easy for them to work together. (Of course, at other levels, the WEA was not dominated by Scots.) These leaders co-operated effectively to build the WEA, but it was Wren's imaginative and energetic work that did most to strengthen the Association.

Upon assuming his responsibilities as general secretary in 1930, Drummond Wren's major priority was to expand the WEA's membership by persuading trade-union officers to encourage their members to join. Wren and the working-class members of the WEA executive in the 1930s were committed to making the WEA an integral part of the labour movement. They continually solicited the support of union leaders and appealed directly to union members. Wren and the others visited union meetings and held open sessions at the Labour Temple in Toronto every September. Their efforts brought some encouraging results. In 1927-28, there were only 26 trade unionists in the Toronto Association. By 1931-32, the number had increased to 225, or over 40 per cent of the membership. Nevertheless, Wren believed that union officials were apathetic, suspicious of an organization they did not control, or fearful of a better-informed and more critical membership.[78]

During the Depression, the Association gave special attention to the vast numbers of unemployed. Tuition fees for WEA classes were waived for the

[75] Personal information of author, Joan Sangster; George Sangster notebook, in possession of Ed Philip, Etobicoke; Ed Philip, "A Few Perspectives on the Workers Educational Association," in WEA, *History, 1917-77*, 27.

[76] Tape of interview with James Rogers, 25 May 1972, in possession of Professor Richard Allen, McMaster University.

[77] George Sangster, "WEA Review," in WEA, *History, 1917-77*, 16.

[78] WEA minutes of annual meetings, 1928-9, 1929-30, 1930-1, WEA (OA).

A labour education class at the WEA library summer school near Port Hope during the 1940s. (Photo from the Workers Educational Association, Ontario Archives.)

jobless. Special public meetings were held at the Labour Temple on subjects that would interest unemployed workers. For instance, Harry Cassidy, who was an authority on unemployment, spoke to an overflow crowd on that subject. A.F.W. Plumptre addressed 150 people on the Gold Standard, and this led to a series of 16 Saturday classes for the jobless. After it was determined that many of the unemployed lacked basic schooling, a semi-autonomous organization, the Unemployment Educational Association, was founded in 1931. WEA members and instructors as well as Ontario College of Education students served as volunteer instructors in the "Three Rs." Wren and Arthur Lismer, the famous landscape artist and educator at the Toronto Art Gallery, collaborated in a programme to provide art classes for the jobless. Dozens of workers attended free art classes at the Art Gallery and at a Board of Education building which volunteers refurbished for that purpose.[79] These programmes were not intended to attack the root of the unemployment problem, but they did provide education and social opportunities for workers with too much leisure time on their hands.

The WEA also tried to serve Ontario's farmers. In 1931 a two-week school for 40 farmers was held using the facilities and staff of the Economics Department at Toronto. Wren realized that it would be too costly to pro-

[79] Wren's Address 1951, 19-21; *Annual Report*, 1937-8; Wren interview, (McMaster University).

vide university instructors for the vast rural areas of the province, so a system of study circles, known as "Agricola Study Clubs," was developed. The Clubs studied a series of bulletins, produced under the auspices of the WEA, to initiate discussions on such topics as the Philosophy of Co-operation, Elementary Economics, and Political Science.[80] It has been claimed that at one time there were as many as 10,000 people throughout Canada using bulletins in study clubs organized by the WEA and other organizations such as the credit union movement and the co-operative movement.[81]

During the 1930s the WEA began several innovations that combined education and recreation. In summer 1932 the first WEA summer school was held at the University Settlement camp in Muskoka. For a week, several WEA members spent their vacations studying together with some direction from the University faculty. Thereafter, summer schools were held annually. About 100 students would attend classes, many of which were given by noted authorities such as Sir Frederick Banting and Professors Jacob Finkelman, H.A. Innis, and H.R. Kemp. Other innovations included a badminton club, a choir, and a dramatic society which sometimes produced pro-labour plays. In 1937, the University of Toronto placed at the disposal of the WEA a long-unused house at 106 St. George Street, in the university area of Toronto. With the aid of many volunteers, the Association renovated the building, and the WEA Centre became a place for meetings, office work, and social events.[82] Thus, for dozens of interested members, the WEA was not only an educational organization, but also a social institution where hours of leisure time could be taken up with activities that encouraged fellowship and perhaps developed an increased awareness of working-class problems.

Wren also encouraged the formation of a WEA Women's Auxiliary. It was much like a trade-union auxiliary: the women, most of them wives of WEA enthusiasts, planned and cooked for the Association's social events and socialized among themselves. They also invited guest experts and arranged for discussions of such topics as the Union Label and Consumer Problems. In addition, they raised money to send a promising female trade-unionist to the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women in Industry at Philadelphia.

In the 1930s, the WEA grew from its Toronto and Hamilton base to become a nation-wide organization. For the first time, the WEA had the financial resources and the organizational talent, in the person of Drummond Wren, to begin a national organizing drive. Perhaps because of Depression conditions, Wren met with quite an enthusiastic response in many centres.

[80] Wren's Address 1951, 25-27. See also WEA minutes and *Annual Reports*, 1929-36, WEA (OA); University of Toronto, *Annual Report*, 1932-33, 96; Peter Sandiford, *Adult Education in Canada* (Toronto 1935), ch. 16.

[81] Wren's Address 1951, 24.

[82] A useful summary of these activities is Wren's Address 1951, 10-15. Details about these organizations can be found in WEA minutes and *Annual Reports*, 1929-39 and in Wren Files, WEA (OA).

By the end of the decade, the WEA boasted 24 district associations in Ontario and 15 in the rest of Canada. The WEA of Ontario became the WEA of Canada in 1936.

Local associations enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy and took on their own, distinct characteristics. For instance, in Brantford, George Keen, a prominent co-operative organizer, dominated the association and drew on his support from rural co-operators.[83] Each association was meant to be self-supporting and was responsible for attracting students, deciding on subjects, and arranging for additional activities. Almost all tutors were University of Toronto professors, but in areas distant from Toronto, professors from Queen's and the University of Western Ontario, as well as a few non-faculty, served as tutors. They were paid out of the government grant administered by Toronto's Department of Extension.

It is difficult to generalize about the composition of the WEA throughout the province. A sample of some 1,533 enrolled in classes across Ontario in the mid-1930s shows that about 80 per cent were men. Of these, over 70 per cent were blue-collar, and another 7 per cent called themselves "labourers." Of the males, 6.6 per cent were in white-collar occupations, 5.3 per cent were farmers, 1.9 per cent professionals, and 8.5 per cent were listed as unemployed, however, this last figure is not reliable. One-fifth of the total enrolled was female, over half homemakers. Of the women, 26.3 per cent were in white-collar occupations and 11.8 per cent were in blue-collar jobs.[84]

Despite the Association's growth, WEA leaders were convinced that much more could be done to make the Association a more vital institution. The late 1930s proved to be crucial for the WEA, just as they were for the labour movement as a whole. The union movement in Ontario was transformed during the late 1930s from a lethargic craft-based movement to a much more militant industrial-union movement. At last, 1000s of workers in the province's huge mass-production industries were organized. This rapid and dramatic expansion provided the WEA with a challenge. These new union members, including the leaders and shop stewards, needed to learn about picketting, grievance procedures, administering collective agreements, and a host of other matters. The WEA had to find ways to meet their needs.

Drummond Wren saw very clearly the opportunities which the growth of industrial unionism offered the Association. In *The Link*, the house organ of the WEA, the general secretary warned: "To survive in Canada as a vital force in the community, we shall be forced to do as others have done, climb

[83] On the WEA's contact with the co-operative movement see Ian MacPherson, *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-45* (Toronto 1979), 112, 182.

[84] This was an unscientific sampling of surviving membership lists found in Wren Files, boxes 1-6, WEA (OA).

off our high horse and walk with the crowd."[85] He urged the Association to provide more courses of practical benefit to trade unionists.

In 1937 the WEA renewed its efforts to attract trade-union support by offering to develop educational services in consultation with union leaders. Two large, long-established industrial unions, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the United Mine Workers of America, responded to the WEA's invitations. At the same time, two of the new, rapidly expanding CIO unions, the United Auto Workers and the United Rubber Workers, began to use WEA services. Special programmes were designed to give instruction in trade-union issues and leadership training. Plans were also laid to permit greater participation of union affiliates on the executive of the WEA.[86] It appeared that the WEA was on its way to becoming an important part of the new labour movement.

Trade unions also benefitted from the legal information services provided under the auspices of the WEA. In 1935, the Industrial Law Research Council (ILRC), a WEA committee of professors, lawyers, and trade unionists, was formed under the chairmanship of W.P.M. Kennedy, dean of the Faculty of Law at Toronto. The ILRC grew out of the work of Toronto law professors F.C. Auld and Jacob Finkelman, who had prepared bulletins entitled *Trade Unions and the Law* for the WEA. The Council held seminars on legal issues and prepared dozens of pamphlets researched by legal experts. It also served as a think-tank and pressure group for law reform. The lawyers worked on a voluntary basis, although expenses were covered by trade-union assessments and through the sale of publications. The Council was especially helpful for the smaller unions that could not afford lawyers. It also drew the attention of unions to the need for specific changes in labour law and provided them with arguments for reforms. Moreover, the sophisticated research methods provided a model for research work within the larger unions and the national congresses.[87]

At the same time as the WEA was developing services of practical benefit to unions, it was experimenting with ways to reach a wider audience. A few large companies permitted the WEA to provide classes for their employees. However, progress was slow because managers tended to be suspicious of the Association, fearing its commitment to labour might endanger management's control of employees.[88] Much more successful were WEA experiments in the use of visual aids, films, and radio to reach 1000s of people who would never have attended classes. At the time, the WEA was a pioneer in

[85] *The Link* (Toronto), 3 (1937).

[86] *Annual Report*, 1937-38; WEA Canada minutes, 24 April 1937, 18 December 1937, WEA (OA).

[87] F.C. Auld and Jacob Finkelman, *Trade Unions and the Law* (Toronto 1933); *Annual Report*, 1934-35; Canadian *Congress Journal* (Ottawa), 14 (June 1935) 11-12; Jacob Finkelman Papers (PAC).

[88] WEA Canada minutes, 27 February 1937 and 24 April 1937, WEA (OA).

this field. Slides, film strips, and films had been scarcely used in education and were not readily available. The WEA, therefore, purchased several projectors and established a film library which was widely used by unions and other organizations. Because there were few Canadian films and film strips available, the WEA, with the aid of a special Carnegie grant, began commissioning film strips on such topics as Canadian Labour History, Canadian Social History, Parliamentary Procedure, and The Distribution of Wealth.[89] Similarly, the WEA began using the radio to teach workers and farmers. By 1937 the WEA was broadcasting weekly on the CBC national network. Wren even convinced a few unions to install radios in their halls so that members could assemble for programmes and then discuss them. As a result of these activities the Association increased its public profile. Moreover, these early experiments awakened the labour movement to the educational possibilities of the new media and provided models for the use of labour education departments.[90]

In the late 1930s, then, the WEA had undergone an important transformation, becoming much larger, developing services for unions and experimenting with new media. Not surprisingly, as the WEA broadened out and gained a prominent image as a pro-labour institution, its relations with the University of Toronto administration came into question. William Dunlop at Extension was alarmed by the WEA's transformation and became even more determined to assert control over the WEA. He had the support of University President H.J. Cody, who was a personal friend of Dunlop.[91] Wren, on the other hand, was equally determined to increase the WEA's independence while still maintaining its tie with the University.

A major blow-up came in 1937 when the WEA decided to try to increase its autonomy by proposing to the Minister of Education that the Ontario government provide a direct grant to the Association. (The WEA was still receiving its government funding, as well as the Carnegie grants, via the Department of Extension.) Dunlop was incensed by the request, believing his power would be reduced if direct grants were made. He called Wren to his office and told him that if the WEA wanted to reduce Extension's authority, the Association should withdraw entirely from the University at once, no matter whether the government agreed to grant funds. A heated argument ensued. Dunlop objected to the WEA's pro-labour stand and criticized some of its services for farmers and unions. Dunlop even demanded that he be permitted to open all the Association's mail. And finally, according to

[89] Wren's Address 1951, 16-18; *Annual Report*, 1937-38; Wren interview, (McMaster University).

[90] Wren's Address 1951, 16-18; *Annual Report*, 1937-38; Sandiford, *Adult Education in Canada*, ch. 4, 4-6; "WEA Radio Forum," *Adult Learning* 4 (November 1939) 23-4.

[91] On Dunlop's friendship with Cody, see Blyth, *A Foundling at Varsity*, 61-2.

Wren, Dunlop charged that Wren and the officers of the WEA were Communists.[92]

Wren answered all these charges, insisting that the WEA needed more autonomy from the University and that its many activities were justified. Naturally, he denied the Red slur, but this was not the last time Wren would have to answer such an accusation. His dedication to furthering the cause of labour, his fiercely independent stand in politics, and his willingness at times to co-operate with Communists left him open to criticisms from anti-Communists. Wren, however, was never a Communist party member nor did he follow any party's line. Throughout his life he has remained independent in politics, and during his many years with the WEA he fought to maintain its independence.

In 1937 Wren and Dunlop's differences were papered over by a special investigating committee.[93] Before long, however, the difficulties reappeared. In 1939, when the University's budget was cut by 10 per cent, Dunlop used this as a pretext for slashing the WEA's grant from $8000 to $2000, a cut of 75 per cent. Naturally, the WEA protested vehemently, but to no avail.[94]

DESPITE CONTINUING TENSIONS between the WEA and the Department of Extension, the Workers Educational Association had reason to greet the 1940s with optimism. With 24 Associations in Ontario, a strong Toronto centre, and a federal grant to expand in the rest of Canada,[95] the WEA had a firm base on which to build. During World War II, the Association further diversified its educational offerings and solidified its contacts with organized labour. As it turned out, the WEA peaked in terms of size and influence during the war period. Throughout the 1940s, however, the WEA's problems were greatly increasing so that, by the end of the decade, it was apparent that the Association was being very seriously undermined.

Wartime conditions offered unprecedented opportunities for the WEA. Unions, and especially the industrial unions, were making great strides at a time when the labour supply was tight and employers and governments were committed to fulfilling enormous production demands. The increased size,

[92] WEA Canada minutes, 27 February 1937 and 24 April 1937, WEA (OA); Wren memo, n.d., Wren Files, 70.1.1 and Dunlop to Dunn, 11 March 1937, Wren files, WEA (OA).

[93] WEA Canada minutes, 24 April 1937, WEA (OA).

[94] Minutes of ? and appendix, 11 November 1939, Wren Files, 70.1.3, WEA (OA).

[95] During the 1937-38 session, the federal Minister of Labour, Norman Rogers, granted the WEA $5,000 for the support of its work among young adults throughout Canada. (*Annual Report*, 1937-38). Rogers had been a supporter and WEA tutor in Kingston before joining the government. (Wren's Address 1951, 32-3.) The WEA failed to establish firmly Associations outside Ontario, partly because of funding problems. Since education was a provincial responsibility, it was difficult to get federal funds, and arrangements had to be negotiated with each province. (See George Sangster, "WEA Review," 16.)

prosperity, and confidence of the union movement meant labour educational facilities were very much needed. At the same time, some government officials came to realize that the WEA could play a useful role in mobilizing labour for the war effort.[96]

During the war, the WEA increased its involvement in radio and film. In 1941 the CBC agreed to a new format for a Saturday-evening radio series, the *National Labour Forum*, with WEA members as the main scriptwriters and participants. This radio programme was a source of pride for Wren and the Association, especially since the often estranged TLC and Canadian Congress of Labour would co-operate and speak together on the broadcasts. Here, said Wren, was an example of how the WEA, a neutral educational body, could work to unify and strengthen the labour movement. Unfortunately, co-operation continued for less than two years because the government, and in particular C.D. Howe, Minister of Munitions and Supply, insisted on restrictions that were too confining for the WEA. After several disputes, the WEA, fearing an anti-labour bias in one of the broadcasts, withdrew its support.[97]

The WEA's commitment to visual education continued as well. In co-operation with the National Film Board, the WEA made films and projectors available to trade unions and other groups. The Association also consulted with the NFB on documentary films on labour issues for the *Canada Carries On* series. Support from the CBC and the NFB was especially forthcoming because these WEA activities were regarded as aiding the war effort. The Association directly addressed the needs of wartime shift workers with a programme combining recreation and visual education: educational shorts were shown with popular feature films at midnight for the benefit of people working a three-to-eleven shift.[98]

The WEA's research department expanded considerably in the early 1940s. Unionists needed information about the many new regulations and acts affecting labour, so, with the aid of a Carnegie grant, a full-time researcher was hired by the Association. The services of the research department were in great demand because wartime labour legislation made conciliation procedures very complicated. The WEA provided information and knowledgeable people to represent labour on the conciliation boards and to present labour's case before the boards. George Burt, a former Canadian

[96] W.R. Young, "Academics and Social Scientists *versus* the Press: the Policies of the Bureau of Public Information and the Wartime Information Board, 1939-1945," CHA, *Historical Papers*, 1978, 217-240.

[97] Wren's Address 1951, 16-18; box 209, Canadian Labour Congress Collection, (PAC) contains extensive correspondence regarding the *Labour Forum;* Young, "Academics and Social Scientists," and Ron Faris, *The Passionate Educators* (Toronto 1975) both show that these kinds of controversies were not unusual.

[98] Wren's Address 1951, 19-21; National Film Board of Canada, *Annual Report*, 1945-6, 16; WEA Canada minutes, 7 November 1948.

Director of the United Auto Workers, has recently recalled that in this regard the WEA "gave yeoman service to the labour movement."[99] Many large unions benefitted from Wren's expertise by hiring him to represent them on conciliation boards.

In the public arena, the WEA became known for its Labour Institutes — public conferences or forums which usually discussed current or proposed labour legislation and regulations. For instance, one large Institute held in Toronto examined several issues including Union Security, prices and Wages, and Wartime Orders-in-Council Affecting Unions. It was attended by almost 300, who heard addresses given by top leaders of both Congresses, labour experts, and WEA members.

Night classes, the basis of the WEA, were of course continued, although a reduction in the amount of the government grant made it very difficult to maintain Ontario-wide participation. Greater emphasis was placed on courses relating to labour problems and on trade-union leadership training. Shop-stewards courses, for example, were frequently given to meet the needs arising from the rapid pace of unionization.

Such training was often part of the WEA's summer-school offerings. In 1942, the Association acquired an old art college in Port Hope as a permanent summer school. Renovated by voluntary labour, the school opened in summer 1942 offering special weekend and week-long courses to introduce working people to sociology, economics, and trade-union ideas. It also became a centre for holding Institutes on major issues and for training courses run by some unions for their members.

The WEA ideal continued to encompass working-class leisure as well as education. An advertising circular for the WEA summer school correctly labelled it "a learning holiday for working people." In Toronto, the WEA Centre provided a congenial atmosphere for building friendships and solidarity among the ever-growing membership. It was continually busy with committee meetings, meet-the-tutor nights, Sunday discussions, and Friday fireside forums.

The WEA and the University of Toronto administration experienced further conflicts during the war period despite the efforts of the new University-WEA Committee and, especially, Harold Innis to ease the situation. The committee's strong support for the Association resulted in a slight

[99] George Burt, "Greetings from an Old Friend," in WEA, *History, 1917-77*, 7. During the war years Wren became Education Director of the UAW in Ontario while continuing as general secretary of the WEA, now on a part-time basis. His position enabled him to establish a relationship between the UAW and the WEA that approached his ideal. Not only did the UAW rely on the WEA's research facilities, but it encouraged members to attend general WEA classes, hired the WEA to present special courses for Auto Workers and their leaders, and made extensive use of WEA educational materials and the summer school. (See Burt, *Greetings*, 7-8; Drummond Wren interviewed by Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster, 27 August 1980.)

increase in the 1941 provincial grant. The next year, however, the WEA suddenly found itself entirely cut out of the University's budget estimates. With an abrupt telephone call on 3 June 1942 the Extension Department informed the WEA typist that she was no longer on the payroll.

Members of the WEA executive were outraged. They believed the cut had been instigated by Dunlop, whose antipathy to the WEA was very apparent. This time, however, Dunlop's move was probably triggered by pressure from industry. H.R. Kemp, at that time with the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, confidentially informed Innis that "a number of industrialists are very annoyed" with the material published by the WEA.[100] Kemp believed Dunlop had been made aware of their views, and they had encouraged him to cut the WEA's grant. To an extent, Dunlop was responding as an official of an institution always sensitive to the opinions of prominent businessmen. However, Dunlop needed little encouragement: relations between him and the WEA were bound to snap at some point.

At a special meeting of the WEA executive, Sangster persuaded the officers to mount a public campaign in the media to expose how "workers' rights" had been "taken away."[101] Throughout the campaign the Association enjoyed the support and confidential coaching in political tactics of no less an academic figure than H.A. Innis.[102] On 31 July 1942 the Toronto *Daily Star* published an article on "labour's lockout from education" along with an editorial strongly praising the work of the WEA. Politicians, educators, and unions sent the Premier dozens of letters protesting the University's action. Seemingly, the publicity paid off. Premier Mitch Hepburn, on the recommendation of his Minister of Education, who stood with Wren, Innis, and the WEA against Dunlop and President Cody, not only restored the grant, but, for the first time, paid it directly to the WEA. The Association had finally won an important degree of autonomy from the University.

In the following years, a University-WEA committee, made up of tutors and members of the WEA executive, continued to plan the Association's programme. However, by the war's end, it was clear the WEA had asserted its independence and allied itself more closely with labour. This had always been the WEA's goal, but in the context of the postwar years, the Association now faced dangerous obstacles to its survival. For the Canadian labour movement, those years saw the consolidation of the industrial unions. It was also the time when Communists were expelled from union offices in the atmosphere of the Cold War. The WEA was to have enormous difficulties meeting the new challenges.

[100] Kemp to Innis, 29 July 1942, H.A. Innis Papers (UTA).

[101] WEA Canada minutes, 7 July 1942, WEA (OA).

[102] Wren to Syd Robinson, 20 July 1942 enclosing copy of letter ("to be destroyed") Wren files 70.1.4 WEA (OA). Innis' involvement, although not necessarily political, is interesting in the light of his reputation for being such a detached scholar. (See Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, ch. 4).

The 1945 Ford Windsor strike presented just such a problem. When the United Auto Workers asked the WEA to raise funds and petition the federal and provincial governments to withdraw police from the Ford plant, the Association replied that such action was "contrary to policy." But Wren tried to persuade the WEA National Board to sponsor "an Institute of a fact-finding and educational nature." The Board, however, rejected Wren's proposal, fearing that any public action would be too controversial and threaten the WEA's much-vaunted neutrality. Therefore, the WEA's role in the strike remained behind the scenes: the Association prepared a wage case for the UAW and the union security demands of the union were taken "clause by clause and word for word" from the popular WEA booklet *Union Security*.[103]

A series of crises in the late 1940s and early 1950s proved disastrous for the Association. Financial uncertainty undermined the stability of the WEA. The grant from the provincial government that the Association expected in 1947 was not paid until April 1948; no government funds were received for the 1948-49 season; the grant arrived on time in April 1949, but nothing was obtained from the Ontario government the following year. These difficulties arose because the Association found itself attacked by influential leaders within each of the labour congresses. Their attacks were made more potent because the leaders possessed the weapon of anti-Communism in a country which was becoming increasingly embroiled in the Cold War.

When Wren learned that the provincial grant had been held up in 1948, he asked the Adult Educational Board, a creation of the Conservative government, to explain the situation. The general secretary was informed that the Board's chairman, none other than William Dunlop, had "failed to recommend continuance of the grant," apparently because of charges of Communism levelled at the WEA by some leaders of the Ontario Federation of Labour-CCL.[104] At a meeting with Department of Education officials in December 1947, Wren discovered that the Department had been told the WEA no longer enjoyed the confidence of labour. Wren was certain that these charges had been spearheaded by Charles Millard, head of the Steelworkers, who had been fed "information" by Ed Joseph, a former WEA employee, fired for incompetence. Millard was influential in both the CCL and the CCF, and he was an adamant, almost fanatical, Cold Warrior. His consistent endeavours to purge the labour movement of all Communists have been well documented.[105]

Naturally, Wren vehemently maintained that the WEA still had labour's confidence, and so Department officials asked him to prove it. Within a few days the WEA had strong letters of support from unionists representing over

[103] WEA Canada minutes, 10 February 1946, WEA (OA). Bora Laskin prepared *Union Security* for the WEA.

[104] WEA Canada minutes, 15 February 1948, WEA (OA).

[105] *Ibid.*; Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973).

Summer students at study in the WEA library during the 1940s. (Photo from the Workers Educational Association Collection, Ontario Archives.)

80 per cent of organized labour in Ontario. This overwhelming show of confidence had been given despite a letter from the OFL-CCL to all its affiliates requesting they refrain from lending support because policy concerning the Association was under review. Apparently impressed by the deluge of supporting letters, Premier George Drew personally informed Wren that the WEA would get its $4,000 grant.[106]

About the same time, charges of communism in connection with the WEA arose elsewhere. Charles Stevenson, the Progressive Conservative MP for Durham, gained a great deal of publicity when he declared that communism was being taught at the WEA summer school in his constituency. Ed Joseph had informed Stevenson that the Labour Youth Federation, a Communist "front group," had rented the summer school.[107] Another challenge came from a group within the UAW who questioned the political orientation

[106] WEA Canada minutes, 15 February 1948 and 7 November 1948, WEA (OA). See also "Proceedings of a Meeting of the WEA, Toronto, 31 March-1 April 1951," verbatim transcript in possession of Syd Robinson of Willowdale. (Henceforth: Proceedings 1951.)

[107] WEA Canada minutes, 2 November 1947, WEA (OA).

of the WEA. After a thorough investigation, however, they withdrew their remarks and voiced full confidence in the Association.[108]

Since these allegations were a serious threat to the Association, a WEA Investigation Committee was formed to inquire into the causes of the charges. The Committee found that Wren's request for Ed Joseph's resignation on the ground of incompetence had been fully justified. It was apparent that Joseph resented his dismissal and had tried to create bad publicity. The Committee also found that certain specific charges made by the OFL-CCL regarding the WEA publication *Labour News* were partly correct. These pertained to inaccuracies in some articles (discovered by the ever vigilant CCL Research Director, Eugene Forsey) and, most seriously, an almost exact reprinting of an article from the Communist Party's *Canadian Tribune*. Consequently, the man at fault, Harold Beveridge, was dismissed for "flagrant disloyalty to his trust as a WEA officer."[109] Wren and the other leaders realized that greater care would be required to ensure that staff members did not mix politics with work. They also decided to be much more careful when renting the summer school. In the atmosphere of the Cold War the Association had to be extremely cautious. Sangster noted in 1949:

> The Cold War has brought intolerance. We could at one time discuss anything with academic impunity. This free and easy situation no longer exists. The tense world situation is reflected in the Association . . . a major cause of our financial and housing situation is the branding of the WEA with Communism.[110]

In the late 1940s, Millard and a few others were only too ready to use red scare tactics. Apparently they thought such an approach would help them gain control of the WEA so that it could be used to further their own goals, one of which was to gain support for the CCF. Certainly this is what Wren believed. "The representatives of the CCF unions," wrote Wren privately, "are not interested in stopping Communist domination (because the WEA is not CP dominated), but in taking control of another labour group."[111] Wren's personal position was especially vulnerable. During World War II, Wren had become Education Director for the UAW, and consequently he was closely associated with Canadian UAW chief George Burt. Millard, however, bitterly disagreed with Burt, especially since Burt tried to avoid allying with any political party. In a personal letter to Sangster, Wren explained that his own contact in the OFL-CCL informed him, "it boils down to Millard being after my skin because I am closely associated with Burt and the UAW."[112]

[108] Wren's Address 1951, 48.
[109] WEA Canada minutes, 7 November 1948; see also box 209, Canadian Labour Congress Collection (PAC).
[110] *Annual Report*, 1949.
[111] Wren to Sangster, 26 September 1947, Sangster Papers, in possession of Ed Philip, Etobicoke.
[112] *Ibid.*

After the 1947 crisis the WEA continued to experience many problems. The most serious crisis in the WEA's history began in summer 1950 and reached a dramatic climax at a two-day meeting of the WEA Board which began on 31 March 1951. In a lengthy report running to nearly 20,000 words,[113] Drummond Wren reviewed the history of the WEA and expressed his views on the purpose and future of the Association. The most controversial part of the report concerned the conflicts that had recently erupted that summer.

Wren reported that at the Toronto Business Agents' School held at the Port Hope summer school in August 1950, he had had a meeting with OFL-TLC officials Russell Harvey and A.F. MacArthur, to discuss a proposal for a closer relationship between the labour movement and the WEA. Harvey had insisted that the first step required was a public statement from Wren declaring that he and the Association were opposed to communism. Wren resented the request, preferring to let his record speak for itself and voicing his opposition to singling out any one political party for condemnation. Reluctantly, however, he had prepared a statement that Harvey decided did not go far enough. It seems that this was used as evidence of Wren's lack of co-operation and communist leanings. The general secretary also alleged that Harvey had been cultivating fears within the labour movement that Wren and the WEA were pink and teaching communism. Furthermore, according to Wren, Harvey had been behind a move at the Toronto District Labour Council to reconsider support for the WEA. Bad publicity, associating the WEA with communism, had been the result.

Wren's explanation of Harvey's slurs and the opposition of a few other leaders of AFL affiliates seems plausible. He contended that the more success the WEA enjoyed in teaching trade unionists about union matters, the more some labour leaders feared the WEA and resented the Association's "interference." Russell Harvey, in Wren's analysis, was "the spearhead of a group within the labour movement who is seeking to acquire the WEA, and failing to do so, to destroy it."[114] In other words, fearing a more informed rank and file, these leaders wanted to gain control over the WEA and turn it into their own educational organization in a way not unlike the efforts of some CCL union leaders in 1947.

Russell Harvey, as a union representative on the WEA Board, attended the meeting when Wren made his report. Harvey was outraged, labelling parts of the report "nothing but mental bilge."[115] He did admit, however, that he had contributed to the Minister of Education's uncertainty about the WEA by refusing to reassure him of labour's confidence in the Association. Moreover, Harvey acknowledged that he had been attempting to see that elected officials of the union movement, "those in whom the movement has

[113] Wren's Address 1951.
[114] *Ibid.*, 43.
[115] Proceedings 1951, 3.

confidence," would "take over the Association as a means of assuring everyone that it was parallel to the trade-union movement."[116] His plan had been that "a man with prestige such as OFL President MacArthur" should head up the WEA for "an emergency period of about two years."[117]

Jimmy Rogers responded to the charges and countercharges by stating that "nothing more dastardly had ever been done against the Association than Harvey's request that the Toronto District Labour Council reconsider affiliation with the WEA. This had "plastered all over the Province the word Communism in regard to the WEA." Rogers agreed that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had decided that "the WEA had to be trimmed to suit the needs of the AFL movement," and this meant getting rid of Wren.[118] Sangster concurred, adding that the AFL leaders' failure to reassure the Minister of Education regarding the WEA had been very unfair and might have been part of a plan to let the Association accumulate a large debt so that it would be in a more "pliable condition."[119]

The final moments of the spring meeting were packed with emotion as Drummond Wren, who had been the creative and organizational force behind the WEA for more than two decades, announced his resignation from the Association. With much regret and a little bitterness, Wren told the WEA that he was resigning due to "frustration" arising from charges levelled against him that were "entirely unfounded."[120] He emphasized that he had fought militantly for an independent, responsive WEA, but some important union leaders had moved against him and his conception of the WEA, and so he had to leave. He concluded by saying he had been militant, but since certain union leaders "couldn't use the charge of militancy and aggressiveness," because it "would never have stuck in the public mind," they used the charge of communism. "So I have come to the conclusion," he continued,

> that a person in the labour movement who is militant, who is aggressive, who is going to fight every inch of the way for what the workers want, is going to be called a Communist. I think that is very regrettable. I don't think only the Communists will fight for the workers. Because I am not a Communist, and I am going to fight for them. So it is because of that that I have resigned.[121]

George Sangster listened with tears in his eyes.[122] He realized what a loss Wren's resignation would be to the Association. In the years ahead, the WEA would try many ways to adapt to the demands of the labour movement and move with the times. It would not succeed. Armed with the mighty

[116] *Ibid.*, 4.
[117] *Ibid.*, 14.
[118] *Ibid.*, 10-12.
[119] *Ibid.*, 21-2.
[120] *Ibid.*, 65.
[121] *Ibid.*, 65-6.
[122] *Ibid.*

Cold War weapon, the red slur, Russell Harvey and a few associates in the AFL unions had disposed of Wren. Their victory was hollow, for without Drummond Wren, the WEA was a prize which the labour movement no longer really wanted.

After 1951, the WEA was a mere shadow of its former self.[123] The Association failed to compete with the ever-expanding adult education programmes of the universities and a host of other institutions. "In 1917," declared Sangster in 1960, "the WEA was the forerunner in adult education . . . now, there are 52 such agencies."[124] Television, too, increased the problem of attracting students.

The WEA's greatest problem, however, was its failure to become the educational arm of the labour movement. Russell Harvey had argued that workers' education should be controlled directly by the elected members of the labour movement. It is impossible to dismiss this democratic argument. The danger, however, is that propaganda might replace education. In the absence of a vigilant membership, union leaders might resort to indoctrinating students, teaching policies and positions of benefit to the leaders, but not the rank and file. Instead of creative, critical members, such a system would tend to foster complacency and conservatism. In any case, the growth of large industrial unions in the 1940s and 1950s paved the way for the demise of the WEA. These unions had the incentive and means to create their own educational departments. Their huge memberships of workers with various skills made it necessary to cultivate union loyalty: their huge treasuries enabled them to provide educational services.[125]

There is much to admire about Wren's commitment to an autonomous educational body dedicated to teaching workers how to think critically. Such a system not only can enrich the student, but it can also create a more active and critical union membership, ever ready to review union policies. Wren's intellectual weakness was in placing too much faith in university professors, in assuming their teaching would be quite free of bias and that they, too, were deeply committed to developing the critical abilities of their students. His political weakness was his inability to secure the co-operation of labour leaders who felt threatened by the Association's autonomy and who had the financial means to provide their own educational facilities that they could control.

ALTHOUGH THE WORKERS EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION declined in importance after 1950, it had enjoyed a period of some influence on the Ontario labour scene. Originally inspired by a British model, the Association was intro-

[123] WEA minutes and *Annual Reports*, 1951-58, WEA (OA).

[124] *Annual Report*, 1960.

[125] See Canadian Labour Congress-Canadian Association of Adult Education, *Conference Report: Labour-University Co-operation on Education* (Ottawa 1956), 11, and Manitoba, Royal Commission on Adult Education, *Report* (Winnipeg 1947) 133.

duced to Ontario by an educational élite which, in the context of the radicalism and unrest of the years 1917-1920, was interested in using workers' education as a means of social control. This largely imperialist élite never saw their aims successfully fulfilled, for the Association's working-class activists proved less malleable than anticipated and resisted the academics' paternalistic control. The WEA quickly gained a degree of autonomy from the University and the middle-class intellectuals.

The working-class activists and the educational élite spoke of "education for citizenship" and shared some common assumptions about education, but their underlying political aims were fundamentally different. Social control was a primary goal for the educationalists, while social criticism was an important end for the working-class leaders. During the 1930s and early 1940s, the working-class leaders took control of the WEA's destiny, and, as their aims were emphasized more and more, the Association became a pro-labour institution, eager to aid the trade-union movement in its economic and political struggles. The WEA had become culturally integrated with the mainstream of the southern Ontario labour movement and accepted by labour leaders, although it was never captured by the trade-union bureaucracy.

Despite the WEA's consistent desire to become the educational arm of organized labour, it never wished to sever its ties with the University, partly because of the financial aid and the protection that the respectable academic community offered, and partly because the skills and "pure" knowledge of the university professors were valued by Association members. WEA leaders spoke of education as a social and political tool yet, at the same time, they often shared with many university instructors a liberal view of education as unbiased and neutral, and any contradiction between these conceptions of education was never directly confronted. Although the WEA was critical of many aspects of society, the Association never embraced a revolutionary critique or programme. This helped the WEA maintain its ties with the universities and become integrated, to an extent at least, with the educational community. Of course, the WEA's relations with the University of Toronto administration were fraught with conflict, yet the academics as well as the labour leadership and government officials accepted the WEA as a legitimate institution. Integrated yet autonomous within the labour movement, the WEA was also a surprisingly autonomous part of the provincial educational system. During the 1930s and war years, the WEA in Ontario was truly a "link between labour and learning."

All this changed during the Cold War period. Because the WEA had won financial autonomy from the University of Toronto, the Association was more vulnerable to the demands of the state and the union movement. In the Cold War situation, the provincial government proved reluctant to make annual grants to the WEA. At different times, elements within both the TLC and the CCL opposed the autonomy of the WEA and sought to gain control of

it. Their hostility and use of red scare tactics seriously undermined the Association and forced Drummond Wren to resign as general secretary in 1951. Thereafter, the Association declined to become a meager version of its former self. The Workers Educational Association had been delegitimized.

Nonetheless, during the 1930s and 1940s, the WEA had met certain needs of working-class people and organized labour. It supplied cheap adult education in which workers could feel at home and play a part in directing their education. It also provided trade unions with research and educational services before many unions had developed such facilities. The Association's pioneering efforts in the use of film and radio and in labour research served as models for the labour movement in later years. All this was accomplished partly through an alliance of working-class people with university professors and partly because the worker activists had resisted the stifling paternalism of the University.

We would like to thank Ed Philip for allowing us to use the George Sangster papers in his possession. We benefitted greatly from discussions with former WEA members Drummond Wren, Syd Robinson, and the late George Sangster, grandfather of author Joan Sangster.

The Eighteenth Conference of the International Congress of Historians of the Labor Movement (Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung — ITH) at Linz, Austria

The eighteenth conference of the International Congress of Historians of the Labor Movement will take place September 14-18, 1982 in Linz, Austria. The conference's themes are I: "Clerical, liberal, and employer-dependent labor movements until World War II with special emphasis on the trade unions;" and, II: "Lexical aids for the study of labor movement history" (history thereof as well as present stand in development and future prospects). Simultaneous translations into English and French will be provided during the conference.

Historians and specialists from Europe and Overseas are invited to attend and present papers. Registration for the conference should be in the hands of the *Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung*, Wipplingerstraße 8, A-1010 Vienna, Austria, no later than June 1, 1982. Papers to be presented must be received by the ITH by May 15, 1982, so that there is enough time to have the papers mimeographed and distributed to all participants before the beginning of the conference.