

## Workers' Education in Australia and Canada: A Comparative Approach to Labour's Cultural History

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

This essay investigates the formal and informal educational pursuits of the labour movements and working-class communities of Australia and Canada. It suggests that worker education in the two countries was conducted by similar institutions, notably by branches of England's Workers Educational Association (WEA) but within very different cultural contexts. By juxtaposing these two national cases we demonstrate that labour's reliance on such community-wide institutions was mediated by the relationship between the labour movements and informal networks of working class interaction, on the one hand, and the body politic, on the other. Australia's prominent labour movement and strong tradition of public working class interaction enabled community-wide educational activities to be challenged. In Canada, by contrast, the collaborative nature of adult education and the &#x22;tools courses&#x22;; taught by unions represented a different consensus about the nature of class identity and the place of unions in national politics.

# Workers' Education in Australia and Canada: A Comparative Approach to Labour's Cultural History

Gerald Friesen and Lucy Taksa

HOW EFFECTIVE were Canadian working people, when compared with their Australian counterparts, in producing alternatives to the broader norms that can be described as the dominant cultures in the two countries? Such a general question requires some limits. This paper takes adult education and workers' education as representative examples of the cultural expression of working people in Canada and Australia. By examining the history of these specialized educational enterprises, it compares the paths taken by Canadian and Australian workers as they sought to achieve their intellectual, social, and material aspirations.

This approach to adult education and labour culture focuses on the relations between two types of formal educational enterprise, those that profess a community-wide mandate and those created within the labour movement exclusively for the development of its members. These relations were fundamentally influenced by informal collective activities within working people's communities. The nature of these informal relations distinguishes Australia's labour culture from that of Canada.

The complexity and range of cultural phenomena make the study of "labour culture" problematic. Some scholars have acknowledged that this is an elusive field, others have circumvented it by concentrating on formalized industrial and political activities and institutions.<sup>1</sup> It is empirically easier, of course, to study the

<sup>1</sup>See generally: Stuart Macintyre, "Making of the Australian Working Class: An Historiographical Survey," *Historical Studies*, 71 (1978), 248-9; J. Rickard, "Cultural History: The High and the Popular," *Australian Cultural History*, 5 (1986), 32-43. See further: Linda Smircich, "Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28 (1983), 339-58; Peter J. Frost *et al.*, *Organisational Culture* (Beverly Hills Gerald Friesen and Lucy Taksa, "Workers' Education in Australia and Canada: A Comparative Approach to Labour's Cultural History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 38 (Fall 1996)/*Labour History*, 71 (November 1996), 170-97.

latter phenomena because they offer clear divisions and quantifiable data. Certainly, by contrast, labour culture is hard to delineate. Nevertheless, this very amorphous nature provides an important field for exploring the nexus between the labour and living conditions experienced by rank-and-file workers and their families, on the one hand, and the formal labour institutions that they establish to represent themselves in industrial and political arenas, on the other. Our approach thus concentrates on both the institutional channels and the informal networks of interaction through which working-class people have communicated and reproduced their values, experiences, and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of modern Canada and Australia, a considerable body of historical literature attests to the emergence in the 19th and 20th century of an assertive workers' perspective.<sup>3</sup> Some of these workers espoused a class identity in terms familiar from the writings of Marx. Others declared that their primary identification was shaped mainly by a church or an ethnic group or language rather than an occupation or income level or neighbourhood. Regardless of such distinctions, a large proportion increasingly subscribed to a picture of the world based on "us and them," or "workers and bosses," or "the common people and the establishment." It was a perspective that helped to shape workers' activities and expressions in both countries.<sup>4</sup>

A cultural approach to the history of working people can therefore be described as a study of alternative cultures. Alternative to what? The usual response is alternative to a "dominant culture." A considerable scholarly debate surrounds

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1985); J. Zeitlin, "From Labour History to the History of Industrial Relations," *The Economic History Review*, Second Series, 40 (1987); R. Price "What's in a name? Workplace History and Rank and Filism," and J.E. Cronin, "The Rank and File and the Social History of the Working Class," *International Review of Social History*, 34 (1989); Chris Wright, "Taylorism reconsidered: The Impact of Scientific Management Within the Australian Workplace," *Labour History*, 64 (1993), 34-53.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow 1981), 13.

<sup>3</sup>Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto 1989); Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992); R. Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne 1958); Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921* (Sydney 1979); K. Buckley and T. Wheelwright, *No Paradise For Workers: Capitalism and the Common People in Australia 1788-1914* (Melbourne 1988); R.W. Connell and T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History* (Melbourne 1980); G. Davison, "Sydney and the Bush: An urban context for the Australian Legend," in P. Russell and R. White, eds., *Pastiche I: Reflections on 19th Century Australia* (Sydney 1994), 241-59; L. Taksa, "Work, Struggle and Repose: Oral History and the Exploration of Labour Culture in Australia," *Labour History*, 67 (1994).

<sup>4</sup>Patrick Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class* (Cambridge 1991) discusses these issues in the English context. See also, M. Clarke, ed., *Sources of Australian History* (Melbourne 1965), 374-84, 388-90, 401-3, 410-1, 426-31.

these labels,<sup>5</sup> though it is sufficient for the present to define our approach as cultural, and our subject as working people, without entering further into its intricacies.<sup>6</sup> Rather, by focusing on the specific cultural sphere constituted by the institutions and programmes associated with adult worker education during the 20th century, this paper shall proceed to a different question: how effective were Canadian and Australian working peoples' activities and expressions in producing alternatives to the broader country-wide norm that can be described as the dominant culture? In exploring this cultural sphere, this paper compares the extent to which Canadian and Australian working people accommodated and resisted efforts made by organizations that professed a community-wide mandate, to fulfil working-class intellectual, social, and material needs. In particular, this paper examines the relations that developed between workers and the University Extension movements and the Workers' Education Associations (WEA) in both countries.

Such relations were fundamentally influenced by the connections that existed between the labour movements and the informal collective activities of working people's communities. The nature of such connections distinguishes Australia's labour culture from that of Canada. Its greater ethnic homogeneity, coupled with the more central role of the labour movement in Australia's body politic, enabled workers either to influence the efforts of community-wide organizations or to establish competing educational institutions within the labour movement exclusively for the development of its members and their families.

## I

Australian and Canadian working peoples' informal cultures at the turn of the 20th century may have seemed relatively alike, but the superficial similarities obscure vast differences. Australia was homogeneous ethnically and not very complex in its human geography: a few great cities, a few densely-settled working-class neighbourhoods, overwhelmingly British in political institutions and assumptions (despite English-Irish differences), and unilingually English. Canada was more diverse ethnically and, though not much larger in population, its pattern of settlement was more diffuse: more small cities, wider dispersal of working peoples' communities, two predominant languages, and a large number of "third" language pockets.

The similarities might be discovered in a casual tour of working peoples' haunts in the metropolitan centres of the two countries. In Australia, a range of informal rituals, such as Eight-Hour Day, Labour Day, and May Day celebrations, political streetcorner meetings, outdoor election meetings, and regular recreational activities at sites traditionally associated with working-class people all helped to

<sup>5</sup>For an Australian example see Connell and Irving, *Class Structure*, and S. Macintyre, "Review: Connell and Irving I," *Labour History*, 40 (1981), 107-15.

<sup>6</sup>The questions might be reviewed in Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London 1992) and in Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London 1991).

sustain workers' organizations by reinforcing workplace and social networks. Open-air meetings played a particularly prominent part in this process. As Bertha Walker put it in her study of the Victorian labour activist, Percy Laidler: "Working-class organizations from the beginning of time picked out good spots for open-air meetings." "In the early days," she continued,

Melbourne's working people met to listen to soap-box orators at Studly Park's 'The Lawn'. Socialists also congregated in an open space above Merri Creek. Meetings were held at Eastern Market on Saturday nights and at the Queen's Statue on Sunday. Later, after authorities ruled the latter location out of bounds, 'the Sunday afternoon forum' shifted to the boatsheds on the south side of the Yarra River.<sup>7</sup>

There were comparable locations of outdoor activity in Canada, notably in Vancouver which was milder than the rest of the country, but also in Toronto and Montréal and dozens of smaller centres. Free speech actually became a matter of contention in Vancouver, provoking small skirmishes between worker-orators and the police. The differences with the Australian circumstance, however, were considerable. Canada's climate prevented year-round socializing of the sort that enabled Australian working people to claim public spaces as their own. As a result, Canadian workers were unable to integrate such places and such habitual patterns of association into the cultural geography of their communities. How were these ritual out-door meetings related to the organized labour movement? And what was their cultural role? By connecting individuals and labour movement organizations to specific locations habitually frequented by working people, such rituals fostered a landscape of interaction and a sense of common identity. As Walker puts it:

The Lawn, Statue and Boatsheds all had in common that Melbournians with little money, spent a free afternoon strolling around the vicinity of the parks and Yarra River, and often had a free listen to the speakers. The passing throng contributed many a recruit.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, some of those who spoke at Melbourne's Yarra Bank on Sunday afternoons went on to become prominent leaders of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), including premiers, cabinet ministers, and prime ministers. Future ALP Prime Minister John Curtin described the Bank as "the university of the working class." But the Yarra Bank was part of a wider circuit. Sunday night meetings followed at the Bijou Theatre, outside of which Jack Cain, later an ALP Premier of Victoria, gained his "spruiking," or soapbox oratory experience.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Bertha Walker, *Solidarity Forever!* (Melbourne 1972), 188-9.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, 188-9.

<sup>9</sup> Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, 188-9, 39. Frank Anstey (Cabinet Minister); Jack Cain (Premier, Victoria); J.H. Scullin (Prime Minister); Senators Russell, Rae, Cameron, M. Blackburn (M.H.R.), and Curtin (Prime Minister).

Sydney's equivalent of the Bank, the Domain, was depicted as the "meeting place of the poor ... the parliament of the bottom dog."<sup>10</sup> Like their Victorian counterparts, working people regularly listened to speakers on the Domain on Sunday afternoons as part of a stroll taking in the adjacent Botanical Gardens, city, and harbour. Mary Lamm recalled that her first date with her seaman-boyfriend was at the Domain. It was an outing that continued after marriage and the birth of her son; after all, she asked rhetorically, "where else would you go in Sydney on a Sunday?"<sup>11</sup>

This ritual activity in Australia was not limited to these locations nor to Sydney and Melbourne. It also occurred in other cities, such as Brisbane, as well as in smaller urban centres. In the east coast town of Kiama, for instance, quarry workers and their families met at the obelisk in the main square. In other industrial towns in New South Wales (NSW), such as Wollongong, Newcastle, Broken Hill, and Maitland workers held outdoor meetings on prominent street corners or in major parks.<sup>12</sup> Canadian working people simply did not experience this clear-cut possession of physical space in the community. Their meetings were seasonal, usually in late spring through early autumn (May through September), and the spaces were shared with numerous other organizations, religious and secular, that had equally sound reasons to propagandize or celebrate in a public venue.

Australia's outdoor-meetings assisted in sustaining a distinct labour identity because those who attended them often also mixed at work, union or political party meetings, indoor public political lectures, union offices or trades halls, union picnics, and cafes, pubs, churches, barber shops, the rare radical bookshops, or even in the street in front of their homes. At all of these locations and during all of these activities, workers' education was promoted both consciously and unconsciously, among women as well as men, by soapbox orators just as much as by chance conversations.<sup>13</sup> More formally, knowledge and ideas were spread through the

<sup>10</sup> *Australian Worker* (AW), 15 March 1917.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Katzman, "Under the Cloak of a Spurious Patriotism: Anti-Bolshevism in Eastern Australia and the 1921 mass demonstration in Sydney," unpublished Honours Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1976, 95; Audrey Johnson, *Bread and Roses: A Personal History of Three Militant Women and Their Friends, 1902-1988* (Sydney 1988), 6-7, 9, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Bread and Roses*, 6-19; Graeme Osborne, "Tom Mann: His Australian Experience, 1902-1910," unpublished PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1972, 94-6, 99-102, 105, 112-8; W.A. Bailey, *Blue Haven: Centenary History of Kiama Municipality* (Kiama 1976), 66. For specific examples see: *Daily Telegraph* (DT), 16, 20, 23 August, 8, 11 September 1917; *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), 16, 17, 20, 27 September 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, 39-40, 42-5, 151-2, 188-90; Johnson, *Bread and Roses*, 6-7, 19; W.J. Brown, *The Communist Movement and Australia: An historical outline — 1890s to 1980s* (Haymarket 1986), 17, 96, 109, 111-2; J. Lindsay, *Life Rarely Tells* (Harmondsworth 1982), 245-6, 257, 259, 265, 275, 333-5; Lucy Taksa, "Spreading the Word: the Literature of Labour and Working-Class Culture," in J. Shields, ed., *All Our Labours: Oral Histories of Working Life in Twentieth Century Sydney* (Sydney 1992), 64-85; Osborne, "Tom Mann," 117, 127, 147, 155.

publication, circulation, or general support of newspapers produced by trade unions and political parties associated with labour. In some cases, too, public political meetings provided the basis for socio-political/educational organizations such as the Social Questions Committee, which later became the Victorian Socialist Party.<sup>14</sup>

None of the informal experiences in Australia, aside from the control of particular public places, would have been unfamiliar to Canadian workers. They, too, had their pubs, clubs, and union or party meetings. It could not be said, however, that their activities imprinted the notion of a "workers' collectivity" upon the broader public discourse. The "limited identities" — social orders smaller than empire or country — that preoccupied Canadians included categories for farm or rural dwellers, French-speaking people, each of "the regions" (Maritimes, Prairies, British Columbia, southern Ontario, Québec), major religions, and major political parties. "Worker" was indeed an identity but, in a continent that could not escape the myths of "frontier" and "the new start," it implied a too-rigid notion of social structure to constitute a leading element in the dominant culture. Comparatively, working people in Canada had to wage an uphill battle to establish the notion of class interests.

Involvement in these ritualized activities in Australia was intertwined with notions of belonging to the working class and an empathy with labour's cause in both the industrial and political arenas.<sup>15</sup> One militant communist woman commented that working-class people were politicized and educated by speaking on soap boxes in the streets in front of their homes, on street corners, and at union meetings. Her sentiments were echoed by many others.<sup>16</sup> Such testimony demonstrates that Australian working people consciously positioned themselves "within a network of class relations,"<sup>17</sup> that potentially, at least, transcended neighbourhood, craft, and religious loyalties.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Walker, *Solidarity Forever!*, 40-2, 148-9; Alistair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia* (Stanford 1969), 36, 65, 80; Brown, *The Communist Movement*, 110-3; Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading 1890-1930* (Melbourne 1992), 144-53; H.J. Gibbney, *Labor in Print: a guide to the people who created a labor press in Australia between 1850-1939* (Canberra 1975); W.G. Spence, *Australia's Awakening: Thirty Years in the Life of an Australian Agitator* (Sydney 1909), 199, 447, 549-57; Osborne, "Tom Mann," 112, 118.

<sup>15</sup>New South Wales Bicentennial Oral History Project (BOHP), interviews with John Mongan, 19 March 1987, Keith McClelland, 7 September 1987, Alice Doyle, 25 May 1987, Edna Ryan, 19 October 1987.

<sup>16</sup>Johnson, *Bread and Roses*, 2, 7-9; BOHP, interview with Edna Ryan, 19 October 1987. See further: Taksa, "Spreading the Word," 81.

<sup>17</sup>Ian Watson, "Class Memory: An Alternative Approach to Class Identity," paper presented at the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History National Conference, Newcastle, 24-27 June 1993.

<sup>18</sup>See for example, interview with Stan Jones cited in Lucy Taksa, "Toil, Struggle and Repose."

Certainly, during times of social, political, and industrial crisis in Australia, such as the strikes of the 1890s, the conscription referenda of 1916 and 1917, the general strike of 1917, the timber and waterfront strikes of the late 1920s, and the Menzies government's efforts to suppress the Communist Party in 1950, working-class people presented a united front during demonstrations at places like the Domain and the Yarra Bank.<sup>19</sup> Such rituals publicly reinforced an overarching labour identity; an identity that co-existed with a diverse and sometimes conflicting range of political, craft, gender, and religious loyalties and affiliations.

In Australia, too, national forums facilitated the expression of worker perspectives. Among these the most important were the formation of the ALP during the 1890s, the advent of the compulsory conciliation and arbitration system in industrial relations after the turn of the century, and later, during the 1920s, the gradual introduction of compulsory voting in party politics.<sup>20</sup> These innovations ensured that Australian working-class interests in crucial areas of public and economic life were tied to stable, longlasting institutions in which workers could themselves participate. The country-wide forums legitimated the collective public labour rituals described above, and so sustained a separate working-class identity in Australia. Both the formal and informal dimensions of labour culture reinforced social connections among workers and permitted trade unions, labour councils, and Labor Party branches to resist and at various times to compete with the institutions of adult education.

In Canada, by contrast, the country-wide industrial relations system remained largely unregulated until the 1940s, the electoral system was based on a voluntary franchise (many workers did not vote and, thus were not integrated into the political system), and the party system did not include a stable, widely-supported, national labour-socialist party until the founding of the labour-farmer Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in the 1930s. Even more striking, perhaps, is that while Canadian working peoples' informal rituals created the same sense of a local workers' community, they did not establish the country-wide class loyalties that developed in Australia. Instead, in the decades between the 1880s and the 1930s, Canadians identified themselves more often than not in relation to limited local identities of place and ethnic group and to international or extra-Canadian centres of identity, or both. Thus, imperial, religious, linguistic, and craft empires, the centres of which might be situated in London, or Rome, or Lvov, or Washington,

<sup>19</sup>Brown, *The Communist Movement*, 17, 96, 109, 112, 199-200; Davidson, *The Communist Party*, 81; L. Taksa, "'Defence Not Defiance': Social protest and the NSW General Strike of 1917," *Labour History*, 60 (1991), 16-33; *SMH*, 28 March 1929, 19 August 1929; *DT*, 4 January 1929; *AW*, 23 January 1929.

<sup>20</sup>Buckley and Wheelwright, *No Paradise For Workers*, 197, 202, 214-8; Ross McMullin, *The Light On The Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991* (Melbourne 1991), 1, 70, 122, 139. By 1928 only the state parliaments of South and Western Australia were without compulsory voting.



played a greater role in Canadian working people's perspective than in the equivalent Australian neighbourhoods. Paradoxically, Canadian workers lived within narrower and wider boundaries — "limited identities" — that eroded only slowly during the first half of the 20th century.<sup>21</sup>

Australia's informal rituals sustained a clearer, sharper working peoples' identity than did the undeniably similar expressions in Canada. It is possible that ethnic and geographic homogeneity in the former, as opposed to greater fragmentation and dispersal in the latter, lie at the base of this significant difference. The consequences were probably evident in many spheres, but the following pages will concentrate on the institutions of adult and worker education.

## II

Between the late 19th and mid-20th century, workers' education reflected a contested terrain in both Australia and Canada. In neither country did workers passively accept the ideas of the employer class nor of those educationists who championed a consensus ideology on the employers' behalf. During the closing decades of the 19th century Australian unions of railway workers and shearers were prominent in the struggle to educate their members.<sup>22</sup> After the turn of the 20th century, the entire Australian labour movement promoted educational opportunities that directly fulfilled labour interests and needs. Again, at first glance, the Canadian story seems to be remarkably similar, both because of the presence of identical educational institutions and because workers ran into the same conflicts over the mandate of such organizations. We suggest that specific conditions, however, enabled the Australian labour movement to compete with middle-class efforts in this field in ways that did not occur in Canada.

What were these unique conditions? The Australian unionists' capacity, at various junctures, to appropriate the institutions of adult education and, at others, to directly challenge them had its origins in the way British models were modified to suit Australian circumstances. The Canadian labour movement's failure to establish equally-effective opposition was due to its dispersal and its factionalism, in part, and to the dominance of middle-class leadership in all of Canada's educational endeavours, which took many years to dislodge.

Colonial adult education was certainly influenced by the English Extension Board Movement. As early as 1886, Australian University Extension Boards began to provide lectures for workers,<sup>23</sup> but unlike English practices, Australian lectures

<sup>21</sup>Lex Heerma Van Voss, "The Labour Movement and bourgeois culture in the Netherlands, 1880-1980," unpublished paper, 1994; J.M.S. Careless, "'Limited Identities' in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 50 (1969), 1, 10.

<sup>22</sup>Greg Patmore, "A History of Industrial Relations in the NSW Railways: 1855-1929," PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 1985, 102-5; Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, 76-7.

<sup>23</sup>Derek Whitelock, *The Great Tradition: a history of adult education in Australia* (St. Lucia 1974), 35, 155-6.

were provided at workplaces on subjects that interested workers.<sup>24</sup> In Australia, moreover, the "British laissez faire attitudes to education ... could not prevail"; state government funding and administration became central to all forms of education.<sup>25</sup> This trend later enabled state Labor Governments to support the educational needs of adult workers directly through legislative measures and public funds.

The English example also inspired Canadian imitations. McGill University in Montréal introduced free evening lectures in 1890. One year later, following the English and American models, a Toronto conference framed the constitution of the Canadian Society for the Extension of University Teaching. Typically, and quite unlike its Australian counterpart, this association was run by the leaders of Canadian business as well as by universities, including Sir Donald Smith (Hudson's Bay Company, Canadian Pacific Railway, Bank of Montréal) and Edmund Walker (Bank of Commerce).<sup>26</sup> Though it might serve working people, too, the Canadian movement was implicitly aimed at more prosperous citizens. The *Montréal Star*, in its editorial on the new association, spoke of men and women drawn from "every walk of life" who would be eager to "begin to march from ignorance to knowledge," but the annual "ordinary membership" of \$5 was much too high to permit the enlistment of working families.<sup>27</sup>

While the efficacy of the Australian university extension movement has been questioned, it did nevertheless make considerable efforts to address workers' interests and to obtain support from labour movement representatives.<sup>28</sup> During the first decade of the 20th century, lectures were presented free at Sydney's Trades Hall and at the Workmen's Literary and Social Club in the south coast mining

<sup>24</sup> Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 36-7.

<sup>25</sup> Financial assistance in the form of government grants began in 1833 with the foundation of the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts and extended to country mechanics institutes established during the 1850s and 1860s, as well as the Sydney School's offshoot, the Workingman's College in 1878. But government involvement was not limited to financial matters. In both the colonies of NSW and Victoria the administration of technical education was transferred to state governments during the final decades of the century. See Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 59, 111-3, 116, 122-3, 128; and Alan Barcan, *Two Centuries of Education in New South Wales* (Sydney 1988), 135-7, 146-7, 157-8.

<sup>26</sup> *Montréal Star*, 7 November 1891.

<sup>27</sup> *Montréal Star*, 24 and 31 October 1891. Also the *First Congress of the Universities of the British Empire* (London 1912), in which the 4 July session was dedicated to the "Provision of Courses ... for Other-than-Degree Students, Including University Extension ...," 261-305. I would like to thank Professor Reg Edwards for these references.

<sup>28</sup> Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 150-73; Albert Mansbridge, *An Adventure in Working Class Education* (London 1920); David Stewart, "Pioneering the W.E.A. in Australasia — VI," *The Australian Highway*, 29 (1947), 87-8; E.M. Higgins, *David Stewart and the W.E.A.* (Sydney n.d.); Fred Alexander, "Sydney University and the W.E.A., 1913-1919," unpublished manuscript, Mitchell Library (Sydney); W.G. Walker, "Sydney University and the W.E.A. — A Reassessment," *The Australian Quarterly*, 28 (1956), 93-104.

community of Helensburgh, audiences at the latter venue being "almost entirely of working miners." Classes were, moreover, held in locations directly linked to specific workplaces, such as Railway Institutes in urban areas and also beyond them, at shearing sheds in NSW, and the goldfields of Western Australia. Extension Board members were, moreover, especially sensitive to the tendency for participation rates to be highest when the lectures were either on topics of general popular interest or specifically related to work processes. Those conducted at the Western Australian goldfields attracted hundreds of people, but as the lecturer, Professor Edgeworth David, commented in 1910:

In the lectures dealing with Geography and Travel, such as the Antarctic, Mexico, India and Savagery and Civilisation ... the interest seemed fairly general; but when one dealt with a purely scientific subject ... the audiences were small and the interest appeared to be less sustained.<sup>29</sup>

Interest in science was in fact only forthcoming when directly related to working life. For instance, lectures at the NSW Government Railway and Tramway Institute in Sydney in 1908-09 on electromagnetic induction attracted an average attendance of over 100 from the various branch staffs as well as from outside shops. By contrast, the attendance of lectures dealing with the NSW Railways and Tramways' timber needs was, according to the Extension Board Report for that year, "not so good." Likewise reports commented on the shearers' relatively high attendance of lectures dealing with agriculture as compared with veterinary science. While 72 shearers attended the former, their lack of interest in the latter subject led to the cancellation of lectures.<sup>30</sup>

Although educational experiments in far-flung areas could not logistically and financially be maintained, they do indicate an awareness that Australian workers would only be drawn to education when it was brought to them on their own terms. For instance, when lectures were shifted from Sydney's Trades Hall to the University in 1908, workers failed to attend. But after lectures were resumed at Trades Hall the following year, entirely under the management of the Labor Council, "audiences were large, sometimes as great as the hall could hold." Middle-class educators recognized the influence of formal labour movement involvement on working-class participation. After 1908 the Secretary of the Labor Council was included as an unofficial member of the Sydney University Extension Board. In 1912 the Labor Government nominated the then Labor Council Secretary, E.J. Kavanagh, as a full-fledged member of the University's Senate.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Sydney University Archives (SUA), Department of Adult Education (DAE), *Annual Report of the Sydney University Extension Board (SUEB)*, 405 (1909-10), 35.

<sup>30</sup>SUA, DAE, *Annual Report SUEB* (1908-1909), 2; *Annual Report SUEB* (1909-1910), 8.

<sup>31</sup>Alexander, "Sydney University," 6-7, 11-2, 15-20; Higgins, "David Stewart," 21; David Stewart, "In The Beginning: Pioneering the W.E.A. in Australia," *The Australian Highway*,

Most studies of Canada's adult education institutions suggest that they occupied ambiguous class locations, attempting at one and the same time to strengthen individual working people and to constrain the working class in order that its organizations, or its sense of class difference, did not threaten social stability.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Frontier College, which was designed to spread literacy among railway and timber camp workers, taught the elements of language rather than a critique of capitalism.

There were educational groups dedicated to political reform, nevertheless, that campaigned among Canada's working people. The Montréal Pleasant Sunday Afternoon Society began in the 1890s as an offshoot of various socialist groups in the working-class district of Point St. Charles. According to the Montréal *Herald*, its lectures were not "declamations of destructive socialism" but, rather, were "essentially educative," and were often presented by "reformers of the noblest character."<sup>33</sup> Winnipeg's Peoples's Forum, though organized by a Protestant clergyman, would have been described in comparable terms, though it, too, often featured socialist speakers and offered a message of social protest. Its founder, Rev. J.S. Woodsworth, later aided in the development of Montréal and Ottawa equivalents. He had several purposes in view: "To bring together all sections of the population, irrespective of race, religion, or class; ... to be of positive educational value; and ... to provide an alternative to less desirable Sunday activities." He once described the forum as a "people's church."<sup>34</sup>

While the evidence is too slight to sustain anything more than speculation, it appears that Australian working peoples' early experiences with formal educational enterprises seemed more coherent and more likely to oppose middle-class

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29 (1947), 5-7; SUA, DAE, *Annual Report SUEB* (1907-1908), 7; *Annual Report SUEB* (1908-1909), 2-3, 7-9; *Annual Report SUEB* (1909-1910), 9-10, 16-7, 19-20; *Annual Report SUEB* (1910-1911), 7; *Annual Report SUEB* (1912-1913), 5. Also see: *Labour Council of N.S.W. Minutes*, 5 April 1906 — 14 January 1909, 124. This sort of appointment was not repeated until 1941 when J.A. Ferguson, Secretary of the Australian Railways Union joined the Senate after the election of the McKell state Labor government, a government that would become acclaimed for its support of workers' education and culture.

<sup>32</sup>The agencies are discussed in Michael R. Welton, ed., *Knowledge for the People: The Struggle for Adult Learning in English-Speaking Canada, 1828-1973* (Toronto 1987); the subject is surveyed in Gerald Friesen, "Adult Education and Union Education: Aspects of English Canadian Cultural History in the Twentieth Century," *Labour/Le Travail*, 32 (1994), 163-88.

<sup>33</sup>Ian McKay, *For a Working-Class Culture in Canada: A Selection of Colin McKay's Writings on Sociology and Political Economy, 1897-1939* (St. John's 1996), xix, citing the Montréal *Herald*, 8 March 1897, 19 December 1896, 1 and 2 March 1897, 17 March 1897. In a longer review, the *Herald* suggested that the "Sunday afternoon lectures at Fraternity Hall ... are productive of much good." See *Herald*, 26 February 1897.

<sup>34</sup>Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959), 44, 70.

institutional models than their Canadian counterparts. The workers organized forums in both countries, but the dominance of inclusive, society-wide aspirations in Canada, contrasts with numerous examples of exclusively worker-run enterprises in Australia.

### III

The foundation of the WEA in Australia and Canada further illustrates the differences between these two societies. The WEA was a voluntary organization formed in England in 1903 ostensibly to extend educational opportunities to working people. In Australia its efforts were constrained by two factors: a close association between the industrial and political wings of the labour movement, and the long-established worker tradition of reliance on the state. Its centrality as an institution in the Canadian labour movement, by contrast, seemed to underline the continuing influence of middle-class perspectives in worker education and, more tellingly in the final analysis, of a desire — shared by many leaders of worker education in Canada — to steer clear of accusations that they supported class-based, oppositional institutions.

The WEA's Australian missionary, David Stewart, was an official of the Carpenters' and Joiners' Society and its representative on the NSW Labor Council's Education Committee. Stewart initially obtained the labour movement's support for an Australian WEA by forming a committee of union representatives to investigate the idea.<sup>35</sup> The Committee's Report, together with two Labor Council Conferences on the subject in 1913, formalized the labour movement's early links with the WEA: 28 organizations affiliated immediately and within a short time this figure rose to approximately 50. Included among them were the Labor Council, the Trades Hall Association, 30-odd trade unions, 4 public service organizations, 3 political labour leagues, the Feminist Club, a co-operative society, a friendly society, and 2 university associations.<sup>36</sup>

Stewart also ensured that the labour movement's political wing would give practical support to the venture by seeking assistance from A.C. Carmichael, the Minister for Public Instruction in the first NSW Labor Government. Elected in 1910, the McGowen Government proved its commitment to educational reform and the extension of education to workers by passing legislation in 1912 that granted 200 grants exempting students from university fees. A year later, it provided a grant of

<sup>35</sup>Representatives were drawn from the Furnishing Trades' Union, the Hospital and Employees' Union, and the Watchmakers' and Jewellers' Union.

<sup>36</sup>David Stewart, "Pioneering the W.E.A. in Australasia 2. The Labor Council," *The Australian Highway*, 29 (1947), 20-1; Stewart, "1. In The Beginning ...," 5; Higgins, *David Stewart*, 25.

£1000 to expedite the launching of evening tutorial classes under the auspices of a Joint Committee comprised of equal university and WEA representation.<sup>37</sup>

Such political support by the Labor Government produced a tripartite connection between the state, the university, and the labour movement. It also reinforced the Extension Board's efforts to fulfil demands made for worker education. When the Secretary of the English WEA, Alfred Mansbridge, announced a visit to Australia in 1913, the Extension Board united with its Melbourne University counterpart to organize addresses through which he could advise Australians on the formation of a local WEA and also tutorial classes. Most of the other Australian universities, except for Queensland, soon also extended invitations to Mansbridge. Melbourne University authorities quickly applied pressure to their Queensland counterparts; they touted the legislative support of workers education provided in NSW and stressed that the fairly new university in the north (established in 1910) would be spared any expense. After Queensland University acquiesced, moreover, the Registrar of Melbourne University encouraged his Queensland counterpart to make arrangements for Mansbridge to meet with Trades Hall authorities, as had been done in both Melbourne and Sydney.<sup>38</sup>

The Canadian WEA, during the first decade of its existence, was a frail reed by comparison to its Australian sibling, and not by any means so integral a part of the community of working people in which it was lodged. Its foundation, which occurred in 1918, five years after the Australian group, was not assisted by government initiative (let alone a *Labor* government initiative), but rather depended upon Toronto business leaders who sought to nurture vehicles of Imperial solidarity at the close of World War I. Their goal was to emphasize "education for citizenship," a phrase which they interpreted to mean "responsible" behaviour and "the disciplined idea." As R.M. MacIver, then a political scientist at the University of Toronto and one of the Canadian WEA's founders, told a student newspaper, "the inherent policy of the WEA is averse to Bolshevism, the chief object being to give a University culture to the labour man."<sup>39</sup> This orientation, which envisaged

<sup>37</sup>Higgins, *David Stewart*, 19-20; Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 152, 176-80, 186, 191; B. McKinlay, *The ALP: A Short History of the Australian Labor Party* (Victoria 1981), 9.

<sup>38</sup>SUA, DAE, *Annual Report SUEB* (1908-1909), 8; *Annual Report SUEB* (1912-1913), 6; University of Queensland Archives (UQA), Subject File: Workers Tutorial Classes, 1912-1939 (Old Series), correspondence between the Registrar, University of Queensland and the Registrar, University of Melbourne, 18 March 1913, 2 May 1913, 27 May 1913, 17 July 1913; miscellaneous note by Arthur L. Smith to the Registrar, University of Queensland; correspondence from A. Mansbridge to Registrar, University of Queensland, 26 July 1913, 5 August 1913; correspondence from F. Todd, Secretary of the Sydney University Extension Board to Registrar, University of Queensland, 8 August 1913.

<sup>39</sup>MacIver in *The Varsity* (Toronto), 2 December 1918, quoted in Ian Radforth and Joan Sangster "A Link Between Labour and Learning": The Workers Educational Association in Ontario, 1917-1951," *Labour/Le Travail*, 8/9 (1981-2), 47; quotations from the WEA constitution and an article by W.L. Grant, "Education of the Workingman," *Queen's Quarterly*, 27 (December 1919), are also cited in Radforth and Sangster, "A Link," 47.

"raising" working people from a lower to a higher cultural plane, remained a matter of debate in the Canadian WEA throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

By contrast, the initially high profile of trade unionists in NSW's WEA and also in the Joint Committee governing tutorial classes seemed to presage an equal partnership between labour and university.<sup>40</sup> Against the backdrop of the NSW Labor Government's 1912 legislation, the University of Sydney finally obtained the resources to fulfil the NSW Labor Council's continuing demand for lectures on economics and industrial history; a demand that the Extension Board had hitherto been unable to meet. The fact that the first tutorial class launched in NSW, in early 1914, on industrial history was composed "chiefly of industrial workers," gave the impression that the new arrangements would be predisposed to serving workers' own espoused interests. Similar developments occurred in Queensland following interchanges between the Registrar of that state's University and the Trades Hall in Brisbane during 1913. Subsequently, Queensland's first tutorial classes, also established in 1914, dealt with history and economics. And in 1916 these were expanded to include industrial history and elementary economics.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the labour movement's initial response was overwhelmingly positive. Participation figures show that the percentage of manual workers was high in the year 1914-15.<sup>42</sup>

In Australia, the industrial labour movement was initially drawn into a close association with the WEA partly because it promised to dispense what we might loosely refer to as trade union training — that is, information designed to fulfil the specific practical needs of trade union officials for their dealings with the industrial relations system. A course in industrial law was launched in Sydney to help

<sup>40</sup>When a Committee was formed to advise the Queensland University's Senate on Workers' Tutorial Classes, under the auspices of the University and the WEA, the labour movement was represented by Mr. McCorker from the Typographical Union. See UQA, Subject File: Workers Tutorial Classes, 1912-1939 (Old Series), correspondence from the University of Queensland Registrar to President of the Board of Faculties, 28 March 1916.

<sup>41</sup>SUA, DAE, *Annual Report SUEB* (1908-1909), 8; *Annual Report SUEB* (1912-1913), 7; UQA, Subject File: Workers Tutorial Classes, 1912-1939, correspondence between Registrar, Queensland University and Trades Hall, Brisbane, 22 September 1913, 15 December 1913.

<sup>42</sup>In Sydney these included 45 trade union officials, 15 miners, 10 carpenters, 6 plasterers, 4 boot operatives, 37 from engineering and mechanical industries, and 7 shop assistants, as well as 40 teachers, 46 involved with clerical occupations, and 36 with household duties. See Alexander, "Sydney University," 20-2; SUA, DAE, *Annual Report SUEB* (1912-1913), 7. Further details see: SUA, *Annual Report of Joint Committee of Tutorial Classes* (1917). In Queensland, early worker participants included the Secretary of Trades Hall, two union secretaries, two labourers, a coal worker, house painter, warehouse employee, compositor, school teacher, timber classer, waterside worker, hairdresser, hotel keeper and a female bootfitter, among other unspecified occupations. Details concerning the establishment of the WEA in Queensland are contained in: UQA, Subject File: Courses — Workers Tutorial Classes, 1913-1939 (Old Series), List of Workers with Occupations and Ages wishing to attend WEA Extension Board Classes, 1913.

unionists with the highly legalistic conciliation and arbitration system and one was also considered in Queensland in 1917.<sup>43</sup>

Workers were also drawn to classes because efforts were made to address them directly. In 1915, the Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes in Sydney adopted a policy to cater "for students at their places of occupation." It therefore established regular classes and study circles at the railway and tramway workshops, at the Cockatoo Island dockyard, the WD and HO Wills factory, and the Commonwealth Bank in 1915-16. In addition, the Joint Committee employed Marjorie Chave Collison to recruit women workers employed in the city. She reported great employee interest and employer support at factories operated by David Jones, Reckitts, Lever Brothers, and Arnotts.<sup>44</sup> In some cases too, study circles were successfully launched because of the active support of prominent ALP politicians; W.A. Holman, it was later recalled, had inspired numerous members of the ALP in NSW to attend classes in the pre-war period. In this context too, study circles were launched in various industrial towns throughout NSW such as Bathurst and later Broken Hill.

The early success of the WEA was not to be maintained. Indeed, just as its initial strength demonstrated the greater cultural solidarity of the Australian working people in comparison with their Canadian counterparts, so the emergence of greater Australian worker resistance to the WEA's middle-class orientation illustrated their cultural autonomy. The story of Australian worker resistance to the WEA began quite soon after its foundation. The Bathurst classes, for instance, were curtailed when industrial and political strife escalated after 1915. Likewise classes in Broken Hill diminished in the early 1920s. Efforts to establish classes for women workers also ground to a halt after a number of male academics at the University of Sydney refused to support the continued employment of Chave Collison who was described as "a pestilential feminist." The circumstances were not "opportune" for continued "organizing work specifically among women through the salaried officers of the Department [of Tutorial Classes]," opined the Joint Committee's executive.<sup>45</sup> These developments merely reflected more deep-seated differences between workers and their representatives, on the one hand, and middle-class educators, on the other.

The seeds of struggle that would eventually cut the formal connections between WEA missionaries and labour movement activists were rooted in the

<sup>43</sup>WEA of NSW, *Second Annual Report* (1915) and *Third Annual Report* (1916). Both reports courtesy of Mitchell Library, Sydney. See also, Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 193; UQA, S22, Volume of Minutes of Meetings of the Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes, 28 June 1917.

<sup>44</sup>SUA, Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes, *Annual Report* (1917), 4; SUA, Marjorie Chave Collison — Personnel File, No.405, Group 4, Series 6, Item 1.

<sup>45</sup>SUA, No. 405, Group 6, Series 4, Item 1, Minutes of the First Conference between the Joint Committee and Tutorial Class Secretaries, 9 January 1921, 6-7.



competing meanings these two groups attached to the organization's aims. For despite the claim made in the WEA's first annual report that it had been launched to become "truly representative of working-class opinion on educational questions," the organization failed to represent the labour movement's members. Indeed, the large numbers of Australian unionists who initially joined the WEA as corporate members began to question the organization's rhetoric when its generally middle-class individual members began to promote the WEA as a "common meeting ground to all." Such consensus ideology was, in fact, enshrined when the principle of non-partisanship became a central tenet of the WEA's constitution.<sup>46</sup>

The constitutional amendment simply highlighted the fundamental difference in values and aspirations of the Association's missionaries and its labour movement members. As the evangelical Stewart admitted, the labour movement's involvement in workers' education was linked with its struggle "to effect some form of social change" that might improve the workers' lot.<sup>47</sup> It was precisely this spirit that had animated the educational efforts of the speakers and economics classes provided by the Victorian Socialist Party after its formation in 1905. Initially such classes were run fortnightly by Tom Mann, but within a short time he obtained assistance from such ALP notables as John Curtin. Indeed, Curtin later emphasized the importance of these classes in his own training. By 1908 the classes were held weekly at the Party's headquarters, "grandiosely known as the Socialist Institute" which also offered a reading room and an information bureau. Those Party members who engaged in such activities were not simply interested in self-improvement "but also in the rejuvenation of western civilisation." According to Osborne, for them socialism involved "an awareness of the forces operating in the world and the understanding that would enable them to be controlled."<sup>48</sup>

The formation of the Australian WEA did little to subvert this ethos. Indeed, unions and the political parties of labour and the left vigorously upheld such labour movement principles as the closed shop and preference to unionists, when the WEA began insisting on its policy of non-partisanship. Non-union members of the Association were refused access to such labour movement resources as the library at Sydney's Trades Hall and some labour organizations began to disaffiliate from the WEA.<sup>49</sup> Industrial and political struggles exacerbated these developments. When many of the prominent adult educators associated with the universities and the WEA

<sup>46</sup>WEA, *First Annual Report* (1914), 3. Report courtesy of Mitchell Library, Sydney; Stewart, "Pioneering ... Labor Council," 21. See also Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 179-80. Leading members, such as Peter Board, Meredith Atkinson, Professor Irvine, Justice Heydon, and A.B. Piddington were all bastions of the progressive new middle class. See WEA, *Annual Reports*, 1914 onward.

<sup>47</sup>Stewart, "Pioneering ... VI," 87.

<sup>48</sup>Osborne, "Tom Mann," 121-5.

<sup>49</sup>WEA, *First Annual Report* (1914), 12-3; Higgins, *David Stewart*, 34; Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character* (Melbourne 1978), 59.

gave public support for conscription in 1916 and opposed labour's cause during the NSW General Strike of 1917, conflict erupted. Unions either disaffiliated from the WEA or else continued opposition to affiliation developed within those which did not.<sup>50</sup> The rift between the industrial labour movement and the WEA was never entirely healed. The large number of workers and union officials that had initially flocked to it diminished after 1917. From an initial figure of 45, the NSW trade union officials enrolled in classes decreased to 22 in 1916/1917 and to 3 in 1923.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, the Australian labour movement directly challenged the WEA and the University Extension Board by establishing its own labour colleges. These initiatives, in Victoria in 1917 and NSW in 1919, were entirely associated with the industrial wing of the movement and the more radical political labour parties. Despite the internal dissension mainly among male socialist intellectuals, which affected these shortlived ventures, they did represent a class-inspired challenge to consensus-oriented adult educational bodies. In 1918, at a conference on "The Working Class and Education," William Earsman, the Secretary of the Victorian College, stressed that the WEA's claim of impartiality was "dangerous to the working classes." Other speakers, moreover, declared that the Victorian Labor College "was a recognition of the necessity of workers to organize in the educational as they had done in the industrial and political fields."<sup>52</sup>

During the late 1920s this gauntlet was taken up by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). In 1926 under the leadership of Jack Kavanagh, who had returned from Canada the previous year, the Party introduced Trade Union Educational Leagues along the lines developed by the Communist Party of the United States. Their aim was to educate "an unlimited number of sincere fighters for the working class" to the idea of "class struggle." The Leagues, together with other innovations, such as "training classes in Marxism," were unsuccessful. Like the CPA itself during this period, they had little contact with Australian workers. Nevertheless, the aim "to spread knowledge of the class struggle and the collective interests of the working class among unionists," continued to inform the Party and its front

<sup>50</sup>Higgins, *David Stewart*, 36-40; David Stewart, "Pioneering The W.E.A. in Australasia — iv. The Conscription Issue," *The Australian Highway*, 29 (1947), 59-60; Alexander, "Sydney University," 23-7; Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 185.

<sup>51</sup>Ann Turner, "William Paisley Earsman," in Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Serle, eds., *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8, (Melbourne 1981), 403; Anon., "Moses Baritz: His Role in a change in Socialist Direction," *Recorder*, February 1993, 4-5; Higgins, *David Stewart*, 38; David Stewart, "Pioneering the W.E.A. in Western Australia — V. Labour College Versus W.E.A.," *The Australian Highway*, 29 (1947), 69-70; Alexander, "Sydney University," 22; SUA, Joint Committee For Tutorial Classes, *Annual Report* (1917), 11; SUA, Joint Committee For Tutorial Classes, "Analysis of Students' Occupations," in *Annual Report* (1923).

<sup>52</sup>SUA, DAE, Correspondence — General, 1917-1918, 73/45, Group 5, Series 2, Item 1, undated newspaper clipping attached to correspondence between D.B. Copland to F.A. Bland, 16 March 1918.

organizations. Of particular significance in this regard was the Militant Minority Movement. Created by Kavanagh in 1928, the Movement successfully spread among workers and unions, notably the Miners' Federation, the Waterside Workers' Federation, and the Australian Railways Union. By 1931, the Movement gained control over the latter union's newly formed Educational and Organisational Committee. Also during the early 1930s, the Party's regular newspapers, *Workers' Weekly*, *Workers' Voice*, and *Red Star*, reached a combined circulation of almost 30,000, while the newspapers of its front organizations reached around "60,000 people each week in New South Wales alone."<sup>53</sup>

Despite such aims and activities, the industrial labour movement was unable to maintain workers' education on a firm basis on its own. As a result, efforts were repeatedly made by the Labor Council of NSW to resume relations with the WEA. Reaffiliation was, however, repeatedly followed by disaffiliation because the essential ideological and social differences between these institutions were irreconcilable.<sup>54</sup>

The Canadian WEA would have recognized this story of worker opposition because it, too, was subject to criticism, especially from the fledgling Communist Party of Canada (CPC). The great difference between the two country's experiences with the WEA during the inter-war decades, however, was the relatively greater stability and even growth of the Canadian organization. Lodged at the University of Toronto throughout these years, and subject to the meddlesome interference of the prickly and formidable representative of middle-class education, W.J. Dunlop, the Canadian WEA remained the central organization of English-speaking workers' education. Thus, rather than contest the inevitable ideological disputes from outside the university, as did their Australian colleagues, Canadian workers waged these battles from within.

The Canadian WEA grew steadily, to the point that it was affiliated with 24 branches in Ontario and 15 in the rest of Canada by the end of the 1930s. Workers assumed control of the courses, appointed the teachers, and administered the daily operations of the agency through the very able Drummond Wren, a Scottish immigrant and war veteran who had previously worked for a press clipping service, and George Sangster, a member of the Iron Moulders' Union and also a Scottish immigrant.<sup>55</sup> The WEA leaders fought off the interventions of Dunlop, who had stated bluntly that he "deplored the existence of class consciousness in this country" and once charged that the WEA's worker leaders were Communists.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Davidson, *The Communist Party*, 37-8, 56-8, 65.

<sup>54</sup>Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 195.

<sup>55</sup>Radforth and Sangster, "Labour and Learning," 60-1.

<sup>56</sup>Radforth and Sangster, "Labour and Learning," 57-8, 66-7, 69-71; Dunlop's statement from "Class Consciousness as a Factor in Adult Education," National Conference of Canadian Universities, *Proceedings*, 1929, Appendix L, 84.

The workers' educational leaders produced, in the WEA, one of the great successes of the Canadian labour movement in the inter-war years yet the destruction of this creation, a distinctive worker-run educational institution, was one of its greatest losses. Wren, who led the organization from 1930 until his more or less forced departure in 1951, subscribed to a philosophy that maintained the institution on a militant, independent, and "non-political" course. He liked to quote R.H. Tawney, who, in a contribution to Wren's WEA magazine, *The Link*, wrote that "the education of the workers must never be something superimposed on them by we intellectuals, but must arise out of the needs and desires of the workers themselves."<sup>57</sup> Wren's ideal was a course offered at the "university standard" (the English WEA formula), a tutor selected by the WEA, and a subject chosen by the group according to democratic practices. Tutors were expected to teach "objectively," and would be selected because of their "sympathies with workers in their desire for knowledge." Wren added later:

Naturally it was assumed that no tutor would teach any one philosophy irrespective of what his subject might be, but that he would present all sides of a subject and permit his class to arrive at their own conclusions. In this manner, we were able to teach how to apply critical judgment to the issues of the day. That is sound education.<sup>58</sup>

Canada's WEA became a working peoples' institution in the 1930s, despite its university connections, and grew during World War II. By 1945, it seemed poised to launch a country-wide, worker-run, educational movement, but its development was too extensive, its enemies in the business world and government too numerous. Instead, it fell prey to business-led opposition and to the internal divisions that plagued the Canadian and North American labour movements in the early stages of the Cold War. The competition between two giant labour organizations in Canada (affiliated with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organization), each of which was prepared to sacrifice the WEA in the struggle to control the education of thousands of new members, caused Wren's resignation and the downfall of the WEA. Inevitably, the contest was waged over who was the "best non-Communist" in the Cold War, but the roots of the conflict cannot be separated from the language in which it was waged.<sup>59</sup> Because it was the single

<sup>57</sup>Cited in Wren "Address to the President and Board Members of the WEA of Canada," 31 March 1951. A copy of the address can be found in "Education and Labour, Canadian Publications 1951-71," located in the University of Toronto Industrial Relations Centre Library. Thanks to Ian Radforth for this document.

<sup>58</sup>Wren, "Address," 7, 50.

<sup>59</sup>Radforth and Sangster, "Labour and Learning"; Gerald Friesen "Adult Education"; Wren himself blamed the American influence in the Canadian labour movement: "Unfortunately in Canada there is being superimposed on labour the philosophy of business unionism as practised in the United States, with its 'business managers' and directors, and we are losing, in the labour movement, that social philosophy prevailing in the labour movement in Britain with its social outlook and democratic control." See Wren, "Address."

most influential institution in Canadian labour education, the demise of the WEA was a devastating blow to the broader "social message" that was conveyed in its programs.

By contrast, in Australia the WEA only obtained labour movement support when it specifically promoted workers' interests. Moreover, it was never the exclusive repository of labour support for formal educational activities. During the late 1930s the WEA acknowledged that it needed to become a more effective "instrument of working-class education." To this end, it recommended the creation of a Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee.<sup>60</sup> But again its efforts failed; during the early 1940s a number of unions disaffiliated from the Association over its tutors' negative representations of the Soviet Union. Despite a ban on the CPA and its newspapers during this time communists continued to spread their views through the press of front organizations and trade unions as well as public meetings in the Sydney Domain. Regardless of its illegality, circulation of the *Communist Review* tripled and that of the *Tribune* doubled. Simultaneously, other workers organizations successfully challenged the adult education movement. There was a Labor College in Newcastle and the ALP set up the Henry Lawson College.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the Labor prime minister, J.B. Chifley, refused to assist the progress of liberal adult education after World War II.<sup>62</sup>

The difference between the Australian and Canadian WEA experiences lay in the degree of worker autonomy achieved by the Australians. Their greater ethnic and cultural homogeneity enabled them to institutionalize a distinction between workers education and adult education. Organizations such as the WEA belonged in the latter category in Australia and, thus, were disqualified in the minds of many adherents of the labour movement as expressions of, or institutions serving the working people. By contrast, in Canada the ambivalent relationship between worker and middle-class educational goals continued through the 1940s and beyond. The WEA never clearly resolved its conflicts with Canada's universities, never concluded whether the non-partisan ideal was appropriate for the educational institutions that it sought to develop, and never found a secure funding base — whether in government, university, or labour movement — to sustain itself. Thus, the community-wide adult education movement, as opposed to the workers' institution, was able to win widespread acceptance among Canadians of all social backgrounds.

<sup>60</sup>Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 195.

<sup>61</sup>Davidson, *The Communist Party*, 56-60, 65, 81-2; Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 196-7, 205; Brown, *The Communist Movement*, 111-2.

<sup>62</sup>Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 265.

## IV

The two countries continued along parallel paths between 1945 and 1970. Both were affected by the global economic and strategic calculations that accompanied the Cold War and by the emergence of television as a powerful cultural force. Also both undertook experiments in adult education that were intended to meet the changing educational needs of their people in an era of communications increasingly dominated by "the media."

Worker resistance to prevailing economic conditions had been strong in both countries during the later 1930s and the years of World War II. This activism was reinforced by significant numbers of worker cultural productions. In both countries during the 1930s, workers' theatre troupes played before appreciative audiences and workers' newspapers attracted considerable readerships. In part because it was founded upon ethnic cultural expression that was no longer as forceful in the decades after 1945, in part because of the development of different cultural patterns in the broader community, this activity faded in Canada after the war. The impact of the spy show trials associated with the Soviet Embassy's Igor Gouzenko should not be underestimated as a factor in the development of Canadian sensitivity to alternative "socialist" education. By contrast, worker cultural activity was regenerated in Australia by the revival of working-class folk music. In the 1940s, the Musician's Union and Actors' Equity encouraged interest in the arts among their members and members of the ALP. In addition, May Day Committees organized art exhibitions in different parts of the country and conducted poetry, short story, and novel competitions. By the 1950s the Waterside Workers' Federation had its own film unit.<sup>63</sup>

In fact, during the Cold War union cultural activities in Australia expanded against the backdrop of a concerted political attack on the Communist Party's legality by the conservative Liberal Prime Minister. Robert Menzies launched his assault in 1950-51, creating a McCarthy-style "spy hysteria" atmosphere around a Royal Commission enquiring into the defection of the Soviet diplomat, V.M. Petrov. This was a period "in which art and politics were closely inter-twined." A mural project begun in 1953 by the Waterside Workers' Art Group, to represent the history of wharf labour in the union's offices, provides a good case in point. As one of this group's members explained the initiative:

<sup>63</sup>Ros Bower, ed., "The Arts at the Workplace," *Caper*, 5 (1980), 1; Sandy Kirby, *Artists and Unions: A Critical Tradition — Report on the Art and Working Life Program* (Sydney 1992), 10-1; Debra Mills, "All those in favour," *Industrial Issues and Cultural Tools, Papers and Proceedings of the 2nd National Art and Working Life Conference*, October 1990 (Sydney 1991), 5; Andrew Reeves, *A Tapestry of Australia: The Sydney Wharfies Mural* (Sydney 1992), 9-10.

We decided to put our history on the walls because in our day-to-day activities, our wage cases and everything else, we always needed a record. We used that as a sort of dictionary ... for education at job delegate meetings.

This type of cultural effort not only provided a source of collective experience and memory, but also extended union involvement "beyond regulated hours of work into the realm of recreation and relaxation."<sup>64</sup> Sydney waterside workers also united art and struggle by staging a mock "Petrov Commission Christmas Party" outside of the court in a central Sydney square.<sup>65</sup> Such activities successfully competed with the institutions of the Australian adult education movement during the 1950s.

The Canadian Association of Adult Education (CAAE) represented Canada's most important agency in the field from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s. Though it had been an aggressively anti-capitalist movement in the late 1930s and through World War II, the CAAE was redirected during the Cold War years into a path of mild reformism. The transition was attributable to Canadian middle-class idealism as well as to the oppositional forces mustered by defensive capitalists and anti-Communist propagandists. A continuing committee of the CAAE, the Joint Planning Commission, coordinated the adult education activities of an extraordinary range of Canadian service and interest groups between 1946 and 1963. At an annual conference, this body selected not only a single theme for the coming year's activities in adult education — for thousands of local groups drawn from all types of associations — but it arranged for speakers, documentary resources, and audiovisual materials to sustain them. The Commission, despite its influence and its centralizing effect, was driven not by overt class or economic or religious interests but by a belief in "citizenship" education. One might conclude, in the absence of closer scrutiny, that the diversity of interests in the Canadian community permitted only this lowest common denominator to prevail in public education. But, put in a more positive form, the community-wide agenda would have been described by its defenders as a farseeing initiative to create a united, tolerant, enlightened citizenry.<sup>66</sup>

The decades after World War II also brought substantial change to the Canadian labour movement. Organized labour in Canada finally achieved institutional security during the 1940s and 1950s as a result of federal and provincial enactments that, for the first time in the country's history, set out a stable legal procedure for

<sup>64</sup>Reeves, *Tapestry*, 6-8, 12.

<sup>65</sup>Brown, *The Communist Movement*, 199-206.

<sup>66</sup>Gordon Selman, "The Canadian Association for Adult Education in the Corbett Years: A Re-Evaluation," (Vancouver 1981); J.R. Kidd, *Learning and Society* (Toronto 1961); Michael Welton "'On the Eve of a Great Mass Movement': Reflections on the Origins of the CAAE," in Frank Cassidy and Ron Faris, eds., *Choosing Our Future: Adult Education and Public Policy in Canada* (Toronto 1987).

union recognition and compulsory collective bargaining.<sup>67</sup> A new generation of union leaders had to learn new grievance and bargaining arrangements in a relatively brief period. Thus, while the broader adult education movement was consolidating its "citizenship" approach to social organization, Canadian unions joined their American counterparts in developing tools courses that would introduce the immediate responsibilities of a local union leader.

Workers' educational institutions in Canada between the late 1940s and the mid-1970s moved away from the confrontational approach that had been developing during World War II. They became, like the larger labour movement, partners with capital and the state in an era of remarkable prosperity. The change was evident in the language of instruction. Whereas a 1947 union textbook defended the use of the strike in polarized terms borrowed from the literature on class conflict, the course materials of the late 1960s and early 1970s celebrated union members' gains and discussed retirement plans and youth alienation. The "Home Study Course (Basic)" of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen and General Workers explained that the main purpose of unions was to improve wages and working conditions but added — tentatively, it would seem — that they would also "promote social and economic improvements for the benefit of society. (These are political objectives which led trade unions, in cooperation with other groups, to form a political party, the New Democratic Party [NDP], in 1961.)"<sup>68</sup> Labour hopes for an alliance with the state surfaced, as well, in the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) brief to the Massey Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences in 1950. The brief emphasized not class conflict but social harmony in defending its request for government funding of labour education. Unions faced a great task involving the "assimilation" of thousands of workers into the system of democratic self-government, it reported, and would have to teach officers about labour law and contract observance, as well as instruct all of their members in their "responsibilities to the community." Much of this educational activity would be conducted by universities, the CCL brief suggested, but "recognized and legitimate Labour organizations" should have the right "to be consulted on such vital matters as course content, instructors, texts, and other pertinent subjects."<sup>69</sup> This language was a far cry from the contestational approach in Australia at this time.

<sup>67</sup> See Bray and Rouillard essay in this volume.

<sup>68</sup> National Archives of Canada (NAC), Lincoln Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 14, "CBRT&GW — Home Study Course (Basic)," Harry Jacks, Director of Education Department; see also Lincoln Bishop Papers, Box 3, File 18, "Course III: History and Function of Trade Unions in Canada," January 1947, in which lesson four is entitled "The Strike."

<sup>69</sup> "Congress Presents Views on Workers' Education," *Canadian Unionist*, 24, 1 (January 1950), 9-11, 15. A further development in this line occurred in 1956, when a national conference was convened on labour-university relations. Gordon Cushing, executive vice-president of the Canadian Labour Congress, and Max Swerdlow, Director of Education for the Congress, explained that they sought to "create loyal, active members and citizens" and



Between the mid-1940s and 1970, the Australian and Canadian labour movements encountered quite different expressions of the adult education movement. In Australia, no national adult education policy developed. The WEA was caught in the middle of the traditional struggle for control between the state and federal governments. When post-war federal governments proved unsympathetic to extending their support for this type of education, state governments pursued their own approaches. In Queensland, Tasmania, and Victoria this led to the extinction of the WEA. Although the Association continued to flourish in NSW and South Australia, in both states its relations with University Extension Departments broke down. Again, formal contact with the labour movement only occurred when focus was given to unionists' practical needs.

In 1946, for instance, the newly appointed WEA Educational Field Officer in NSW responded to a request from the Australian Railways Union by devoting himself exclusively to isolated railway maintenance gangs. During the next 2 years he visited 51 gangs, devised special correspondence courses, and ensured that book boxes were sent out regularly to 24 gangs. But his activity was not sustained mainly because of inadequate resources. Following his resignation, the position was left vacant. Yet, he was not alone in attempting to establish links with the labour movement. In 1947, the WEA overcame all odds to fulfil a request made by the Tamworth Trades Union Council in NSW for lectures on trades unionism. The effort was soon reciprocated because by 1948 the NSW Labor Council together with the unions which had disaffiliated over representations of the Soviet Union had rejoined the WEA in defiance of the CPA. In the next few years a WEA Trade Union Educational Committee and a Trade Union Research Group were formed; as a result, there were conferences on trade union issues and the Labor Council offered scholarships for the WEA's Trade Union School between 1952 and 1956.

In this context, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Australian Workers' Union joined the WEA, while the ALP Executive, the Henry Lawson Labour College, and the Labor Council all gave their support for a WEA Labour Films Circuit. The WEA of South Australia obtained support from several South Australian unions and the ACTU for a national correspondence scheme for trade unionists. Few of these schemes were, however, longlived.<sup>70</sup> As Higgins explained:

It was ... no easier than before to get [WEA] educational activities going inside the trade unions themselves or even to get permission for regular W.E.A. reports to the Labor Council.

that, though labour must be "an equal in this enterprise," they accepted that a "practical working relationship with the universities" was essential to the future of labour education. See *Labour-University Cooperation on Education: A report on the National Conference on Labour Education sponsored by the Canadian Labour Congress and the Canadian Association for Adult Education held at Ottawa December 15th to 17th, 1956*, (N/A), 8-14.

<sup>70</sup>Whitelock, *The Great Tradition*, 264-6, 276-9, 290-2; Higgins, *David Stewart*, 91, 99-100.

Within the W.E.A. there were some who contended that the generally poor response from the trade union movement to educational proposals was due partly to a certain traditionalism and lack of imagination in the approaches, illustrated by unwillingness to offer 'practical' courses in trade union organisation, structure and functions and to open up discussion of novel ideas like 'joint consultation.'<sup>71</sup>

Such trade union traditionalism, as much as the demand for practical courses, highlights the continuing strength of a distinct labour culture in Australia. This culture was founded on the widespread acceptance of adversarial industrial relations if not also of class conflict. In Canada, by contrast, a community-wide effort undertaken by the CAAE rejected the thesis of class conflict and assumed, instead, that Canada was best served by an inclusive adult education movement. Even the institutions created by the Canadian labour movement itself were absorbed into the larger continental climate of consensus and prosperity.

## V

Whereas the early-20th-century electoral success of the ALP in NSW enabled the Australian labour movement to shape the institutions of adult education, the election of a federal Labor government in 1972 provided the basis for a direct challenge to middle-class educational institutions. In both cases Australian unions and workers were assisted by the state because of the willing co-operation of Labor Governments. Australia, as a result, developed new institutions directly to support worker education in the 1970s and 1980s. This has not been the case in Canada, where the unions themselves have struggled with the problem of communicating with their membership as well as with the wider community.

The main project in Canadian labour education to exceed the bounds of tools courses and prosperity-shaped recreational forums was the establishment of a Labour College of Canada in the early 1960s. This college should be seen as a response to the union movement's shortage of skilled leaders. As one founder explained,

such leadership must go beyond acquiring particular skills in negotiation and organisation. A Labour College, providing basic studies in the humanities and social sciences as well as specialised instruction in the theory and practice of trade unionism, does much to meet this need, especially since it was founded and is operated with the full cooperation of the universities. It opens the way to higher studies for men and women who, though intellectually competent, may not meet formal university entrance standards. For those who show particular academic ability, it could provide a bridge to a full university degree program.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Higgins, *David Stewart*, 92.

<sup>72</sup>NAC, Lincoln Bishop Papers, Box 2, File 16, "Speaker's Notes on Labour College of Canada," 5 March 1965, in CLC, *Education Manual* (N/A 1969). See discussion in Max Swerdlow, *Brother Max: Labour Organizer and Educator* (St. John's 1990), ch. 10.

The College was funded both by the labour movement and the government. Given its preoccupation with university-sanctioned approaches and the priority of training leaders for the collective bargaining system, however, the College could not pretend to offer an alternative ideological perspective on working people's place in Canadian society.

In Australia, after the election of the Whitlam ALP Government in 1972, government funds were made available for labour movement cultural activities.<sup>73</sup> This development also coincided with union efforts to formalize trade union training. The breakdown in relations between unions and adult education providers some decades earlier meant that no institutions existed to meet the unions' needs for what Clyde Cameron, Whitlam's Minister for Labour and Immigration, called a new breed of "expert" union official. The appointment of education officers by the peak councils of the industrial labour movement established the foundation for a trade union education program. In this context, the mutually supporting relationship between unions and the ALP succeeded in fulfilling the long-standing urge to develop a trade union college.

In considering how best to translate dream into reality, the Whitlam Government gave close attention to the Canadian Labor College. Clyde Cameron's advocacy of public-funding and centralized control over trade union training resulted in the passage of the *Trade Union Training Authority Act* in 1975 and the foundation of the Clyde Cameron Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) College in Albury Wodonga.<sup>74</sup> The Australian labour movement thus finally succeeded in establishing a formal means for providing and controlling education specifically directed to fulfilling workers' needs. Interestingly, the Australian version of Canada's Labour College depended heavily upon government funds but was directed exclusively by workers and perpetuated the notion of an exclusive "labour culture." Canada's Labour College relied to a lesser degree on government support but was guided by two other intellectual currents, the need for practical tools courses for leaders, and the ideal of a detached or abstract "liberal arts" philosophy in other areas of the curriculum.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup>Kirby, *Artists and Unions*, 12. The Youth Arts Festival, inaugurated by the Meat Industries Employees' Union (Victoria) in 1969 and sustained for several years, was among the first to attract financial support not only from the trade union movement but also from government.

<sup>74</sup>See *Trade Union Training Authority Act*, 1975, No. 50; *Trade Union Training Authority Amendment Act*, 1978, No. 92; Gerry Voll, "An Evaluation of the Australian Trade Union Training Authority," MA thesis, University of New South Wales, 1995, ch. 3, 4.

<sup>75</sup>The single great exception to these statements about educational activities within the Canadian labour movement was the Canadian and Catholic Confederation of Labour (renamed in 1960 the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux*). It commenced its educational activities in the 1920s by placing local chaplains in charge of study circles. This instruction concentrated on papal encyclicals and similar messages concerning Christian morality,

## VI

Labour and socialist historians, like those scholars who have studied working-class memory, have too often privileged institutions at the expense of the more amorphous social dimensions of working-class culture.<sup>76</sup> These, we suggest, helped to sustain a separate country-wide working-class identity in Australia and inspired in many workers' households a desire to learn more about workers' conditions, to belong to unions and political parties, and to read workers' papers and other literature sympathetic to labour. Indeed, the close association between labour rituals and institutions in Australia reinforced the labour movement's ability to compete with the institutions of adult education.

In Canada, these relationships promoted other identities to the detriment of a distinct labour consciousness. The emergence of oppositional educational institutions controlled by working-people and unions took place in Canada several decades later than in Australia, notably in the 1930s and 1940s rather than in the period before 1920. When the Canadian adult educational groups did coalesce in the 1950s, they offered not a class-based oppositional perspective but an inclusive, social reformist message. In the following generation, Australian workers were able to use the state to reinforce their own control of their educational institutions, whereas the more limited Canadian union education program had been thoroughly integrated into the North American vision of abundance for all.

There were considerable differences in the working peoples' cultural expressions — at least, as measured by institutionalized further education — in Australia and Canada. In Australia, first, an over-arching class identity developed in the late 19th and opening decades of the 20th century; in Canada, such a perspective did not achieve an equal degree of coherence nor did it result in equivalent institutions. Of particular note in this context was the ALP and its labour education efforts *outside* the WEA orbit. In Australia, second, "nation" as the organizing base of workers' educational and political organization staked out an effective boundary within which cultural expression could be translated into institutional action; in Canada, the country-wide political community did not command the attention of all workers. Third, in the changed cultural circumstances of the global television and

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social cooperation, and Christian unionism. After World War II, the CCCL created a more centralized and tools-oriented "Education Service," which offered a much more secular and class-oriented perspective. By the 1950s, its Workers' College relied on university-educated lay teachers and dispensed the usual courses in union organization and administration of contracts and collective bargaining. However, unlike the other Canadian unions, and like their Australian counterparts, the CCCL/CSN approach emphasized the necessity of creating a "popular workers culture" equal in value to "the traditional culture." See Simon Lapointe "Humanisme libéral et éducation à la CTCC-CSN (1948-1964)," *Bulletin du RCHTQ*, 59 (Été 1994), 17-25; we thank Jacques Rouillard for the reference and the information.

computer age, Australian workers were able to utilize the power of the state to establish worker-run, class-based institutions, whereas the Canadian labour movement had to rely on its own resources to resist the encroachments of the global capitalist agenda. Thus, in terms of class, nation, and worker relations with the state, we suggest that Australian and Canadian workers' cultures, for all the similarities they might seem to represent, differ substantially. Australian workers' consciousness of class has been sharper, their use of a bounded national "imagined community" has been greater, and their reliance on the state to achieve labour-defined goals has been more successful than has been the case for their Canadian counterparts.