

It does seem to me, as a layman involved in the activities of the Workers' Educational Association, that, although we have seen many deviations from the paths leading to an educated society, there has never been a crisis as acute as that which now puts educationalists at the crossroads. Of course we all realise that education costs money to implement, but the dramatic changes in society brought about by increasing unemployment and uncertainty about the future have posed acute dilemmas to a wide stratum of educational establishments. All this goes without saying, nevertheless if we do not face up to the fact that a crisis exists then we are behaving like ostriches and putting our heads in the sand!

From the point of view of the Workers' Educational Association, the basic concepts developed from its 1903 beginnings remain largely unchanged, yet the pressure now put on us to be "entrepreneurial" (as recommended by the government) are ridiculous to say the least. If we accept "entrepreneurial" to be risk-taking in the broadest sense, then this organization has been nothing short of that throughout its history. As implied by the government's response to our current appeals about funding, we are expected to charge tuition fees which not only cover our costs but provide additional resources for class provision in an increasingly demanding environment. Are we to take it, then, that education is not available if profit cannot result in terms of cash! We have always put provision as the top priority, cash as secondary.

The profitability of enterprise seems to have blinkered the present government. Surely the best investment any civilised society can make is in the provision of an educated citizen. This postponement of responsibility by the "establishment" will not lessen the problems of the country, for are we not accepting as fact reduced numbers in employment and coddling people with leisure facilities? "Keep them amused and we will have no troubles," seems to be the attitude! We say "leisure" should be so broadened that adult education becomes an accepted part of it and will thus lend it dignity. We are aware of many needs in adult education and would earnestly wish to involve ourselves in them. For example, appreciating that uneducated people younger people in the dole queues are not desirable, the W.E.A. would like to do something positive in this direction. We have always been in the forefront of innovation to meet needs and remedy deficiencies in education but the seas are high and we cannot act like Canutes in stemming the tides.

Many professional educationalists and others attribute the economic problems this country faces to a lack of adequate technical and vocational emphasis in educational provision. The argument is put by some that our society would be in a position to afford the funding of non-vocational education if this had been done. This is a highly debatable viewpoint because it implies that the government cannot afford to meet the demands for non-vocational education! I take the view that management of the existing revenue that is extracted from the wealth creators of society has not been, and is not, fully efficient. We can all cite extravagant misuse and misdirection of our money (as squeezed from every available source) by the "establishment", which has actually led to, in some degree, a sense of frustration by both employees and employers alike. Getting back to the levels of emphasis on vocational training, I would say that whilst every form of education that increases a man's worth is desirable, it would be wrong to assume that technical merit and expertise could, or would, be panaceas for all the problems that beset us. It is attitudes and actions which utilize the skills and resources we have and these emanate from the whole sphere of the educational spectrum.

The more educated a people, the greater the chances to develop a more caring government. Education does seem to have created an imbalance. By this I mean that common sense, compassion, and tolerance are concepts swept aside in the struggle for short term gains and self-preservation, as obviously certain attitudes arise from the education we have or have not received. How does adult education then improve this situation? It is commonly supposed that specialised education leading to formal qualifications equips one to have a rational outlook and yet many grave mistakes are made by educated leaders because of the weaknesses, not the strengths of specialisation! Now the "God" of hope is called the "specialist", whether he is a scientist, a doctor, or an economist; whatever, he has been made to conform to the expectations of the establishment.

Although we cite the leaders of society as specialists they are not the only ones. We can lay the charge at the door of the Trade Union leader, the Shop Steward, or the rank and file worker. I am not vilifying the "specialist" but defending an educational provision which broadens man's vision. If you doubt that this is so, then do examine the amazing range of subjects taught at W.E.A. classes to practically every category of worker, male and female! Surely bringing dissimilar minds into contact and ideas into discussion must mould better citizens! For instance, why should we not encourage an interest in philosophy or psychology on an equal basis with other subjects as being just as important to the man in the street as car maintenance or keep fit courses?

Another comment I wish to make is on books. It is highly laudable that in this country we have a free

public library service, but one of the difficulties that students experience is that of reading without learning. Without ownership of books, educational attainments are acquired very often by short term recall, as opposed to thorough understanding. I believe that the way we read books, constantly refer to them, seek full interpretation and extract the essence available can be improved by ownership. Books have become so expensive (even paperbacks) that borrowing on a short-term basis is forced on many students. This impermanency tends to lessen the opportunities of real learning. Not the staff of life perhaps - nevertheless it is unthinkable that we should neglect so obvious a need as that which exists for the easy ownership of good literature. I do not subscribe to the view that education depends on the price one pays; it has no price, and mercenary motives must be avoided in every possible sphere. Advancement in life is usually measured by education but leadership and initiative also bring the wrong people to the front. It is the blend of all three aspects which seem to me to be the best formula for a better society. Books can help one to question the quality of life and leadership so that we do not blindly accept the views of any one authority on the basis that, as an educated person, he or she is to be trusted as having the answers to current dilemmas. Sharing views with others, examining the sources of learning, and debate and questions on an informal basis are all adopted as the best approach to an informed opinion, as provided by W.E.A. courses.

I have not mentioned the media, and to do so briefly is perhaps unwise. However, I will refer to the use of television as a source of learning. We are aware of the contribution made by the Open University schemes, but such schemes demand an understanding family environment, and many find it difficult in crowded home conditions to exercise the concentration necessary. Perhaps our schools which in many cases are under-utilised at certain times, and I include rural areas most especially, could be venues of learning with the right equipment, i.e. televisions and ancillary facilities, so that a wider stratum of participation could be brought about not only for Open University students but for others who do not wish such a deep commitment but would like some participation in the levels which could be made available. Tutors are now placed on such a scale of fees that they must be used wisely and fully to enable courses to function at a reasonable and affordable cost to would-be students. I therefore suggest that in some instances we could improve viability by adopting this form of 'teach-in' as a supplement to tutorial methods.

This brief survey of education, as it has reference to my own views, ought perhaps to relate some of the dilemmas faced by my colleagues in the W.E.A. with reference to organization. The size of this movement is statistically phenomenal because of the economies made by a great dependence on voluntary workers. Branches extend throughout the British Isles in villages, towns, and cities, and the skeletal structure of administration and organization is deeply reinforced by committees which arrange classes and even enrol students. A National Executive Committee including a few paid officials and representatives of various districts has to cope with pressures from the rank and file membership, various organizations associated with the movement and governmental policies. This leads occasionally to some degree of frustration in the implementation of decisions. Much of this frustration could be removed with resources provided by adequate funding, i.e. a modest improvement in staffing and communication. What is posed with this problem is the dilemma of professionalism and the autonomy sought by it and the sometimes different views of the lay membership. It may be seen from this, however, that the problem is one which is kept in perspective. A balance is achieved, which at the moment is in reasonable equilibrium. The danger is the erosion of freedom of action posed by the pressures put on the W.E.A. to conform to and work with precepts adopted by others. The Association wants to hold its own reins and fix the pace and direction it is to go, ever bearing in mind the original concepts of its founder, Albert Mansbridge, that labour and learning should have an alliance through continuous provision of liberal education.