

# IWCEN manifesto: readers' input welcomed!

**T**he Independent Working-Class Education Network (IWCEN) was set up following interest in the *Post-16 Educator* occasional publication '*Plebs: The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education*', which we produced in 2009 to mark the centenary of the 'strike' by students at Ruskin College in 1909, which led to the Plebs League and the National Council of Labour Colleges.

Over the last three years or so the IWCEN has held reasonably well-attended meetings in several cities and has supplied speakers to others. Through doing this it has built up a mailing list of several hundred people with an interest in attempting to rebuild the tradition of IWCE in a modern context.

In an effort to draw those involved into a more coherent but still open, democratic and informal grouping, the IWCEN has over the last year been trying to put together a manifesto which would express the thinking on IWCE shared by people on the mailing list, and which could also be used to seek support from others.

Both an early version of the main topics that this manifesto aims to address and some of the comments sent in response have been printed in previous issues of *PSE* (issues 73 and 74).

An attempt is now being made to prepare a draft of the manifesto based on these comments, and also on other sources such as articles written and talks given by people

involved, as well as points made in discussion at the meetings.

At present the idea is that this draft should be structured in three broad sections. The first section would identify features of the current situation that make it necessary to rebuild IWCE (ie it would notionally be prefixed by the words 'This Network notes that . . .'). The second section would set out the underlying assumptions behind the attempt to do this (ie it would notionally be prefixed by the words 'This Network believes that . . .'). And the third section would say what actions the Network is taking and intends to take (ie it would notionally be prefixed by the words 'This Network will work to . . .').

We print on page 23 a summarised version of activities this third section could include - as they have been suggested up to now. We will be consulting on this draft at future IWCEN meetings and via the website:

<http://iwceducation.co.uk>.

The next IWCEN meeting is at the Swarthmore Centre in Leeds on 1st November. For full details of this and/or to join the IWCEN mailing list, please contact us on:

[iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk)

**PSE readers can also take part in this discussion by sending comments, criticisms, proposals etc to the Network at [iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk)**

**The IWCE Network will work to:**

**Research and make available** to activists **a truthful history of working-class collective self-education**,

- developing within this an analysis of TU education from 1964 till now.

**Develop** in conjunction with practical organisation **a way of thinking** which:

- takes account of earlier IWCE-type initiatives,
- recognises the extent to which knowledge is socially constructed,
- replaces orthodox definitions of education with a valid definition of our own,
- seeks to formulate an adequate conception of the possible relations between traditional intellectuals and workers, and
- takes account of insights generated within popular education movements.

Basing ourselves on the same principles as the Ruskin strikers and Plebs League, redefine IWCE for the present day and **build a modern-day IWCE movement** which embraces as many of the Plebs League/NCLC's functions as we can.

Seek to **draw people from the working class** as it has been in the UK and the globalised working class now being formed everywhere **into a process of reciprocal and mutual education** with one another.

**Devise teaching and learning strategies** and specimen materials which

- integrate the three IWCE themes of 'industrial history', Marxist economics and 'philosophy' with one another and
- take account of approaches pioneered by Lev Vygotsky and co-workers.

**Draw together people with a commitment to IWCE into a stable, democratic grouping** which both

- organises its own events and
- reaches out to union branches, trades councils, working-class political organisations and community groups and single issue campaigns to provide speakers and/or hold joint events on IWCE-related themes.

**Develop**, in dialogue with trade union educators, ideas and resources which offer, as **an alternative to mainstream TU education**, an approach which is centred on labour and trade union history and Marxist analysis of capitalism, and which also arises from and feeds back into issues faced everyday by workplace activists, including those of union democracy and independence from the employer.

- Seek to make such an approach a dimension of union organising both in the mainstream movement and with the unorganised.

**Relate to mainstream further and higher education** by:

- putting forward a coherent critique of mainstream FHE provision.
- defending access by working-class people to scientific, technological and technical knowledge, understanding and skill.
- linking the effort to rebuild IWCE to the collective self-organisation of lecturers who try to provide valid education against the grain of FHE, including by encouraging their involvement, under workers' control, in IWCE initiatives.

Seek to **develop a positive relationship with the WEA** by contributing to community-based initiatives within it.