

studied now. Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole* (1933) was a novel and was also made into a play, drawing British audiences' attention to the poverty caused by unemployment, as later plays like *Look Back in Anger* and *Cathy Come Home* would later highlight such issues of deprivation.

Performing arts

Plays performed become theatre. One performance that inspired and excited me was Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Brecht developed what he called Epic Theatre, using techniques that remind the audience that the play is a representation of reality and not reality itself. He wanted audiences to adopt a critical perspective, to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be inspired to go out and try to change the world. Again, this is encouraging audiences to think for themselves, but to think critically. This is vitally important for IWCE.

Engaging with – and possibly working with – contemporary theatre groups who show plays with social and political themes is important for IWCE. Clean Break Theatre, according to their website, 'produce ground-breaking and award-winning plays which dramatise women's experience of, and relationship to, crime and punishment'. And Banner Theatre describes itself as: 'creating dynamic, thought-provoking, issue-led productions based on people's real-life experiences and in support of disenfranchised sections of society'.

Street theatre can have an impact in conjunction with protest – it's visually striking and memorable. Some years ago in Berwick upon Tweed the Justice Not War group wanted to include some street theatre in our demonstrations, but we were lacking talent and confidence. However, in a Guantanamo Bay protest, we managed to create a tableau with one member of the group dressed in orange as a prisoner in a cage-like structure, and others as soldiers. This attracted attention and featured in the local paper, whereas a letter to the paper would probably not have been published.

Dance is also effective and can involve local communities. One example of a dance company performing political pieces is DV8 Physical Theatre, an independent collective of dancers, some with disabilities. And there is a regional, Arts Council-funded initiative in the north east, The Cultural Spring: one of its projects, 'Rush', involves Southpaw Dance Company who are looking at protesting through dance. They 'want to replace the adrenalin rush of anti-social behaviour with the exhilaration of mastering new skills and doing something creative and expressive'.

Visual arts

Painting: the Ashington Group is a great example of 'unprofessional' painters. A number of pitmen in Ashington, Northumberland, began meeting as an art appreciation group and in 1934 invited Harry Lyon, a member of the WEA, to start a class, and this became a class on how to draw and paint. The men were soon producing paintings about their lives in the mining community. Their works are housed at the Woodhorn Colliery Museum in Ashington, a wonderful museum to visit.

Mural art can have great political impact. Diego Rivera was an artist in the public art movement the 'Mexican Mural Renaissance'. The revolution that began in 1910 inspired his work, which also drew on the October Revolution. Trotsky said of Rivera's work: 'Do you want to know what revolutionary art is like? Look at the frescoes of Rivera . . . You have before you, not simply a 'painting', an object of passive aesthetic contemplation, but a living part of the class struggle. And it is at the same time a masterpiece!'

Music and song are powerful ways of communicating the working-class experience and political passions. Traditional folk and protest songs, rock 'n' roll, punk and classical music have all illustrated histories of working-class people and have been an important feature of political expression. Communal singing and music-making express solidarity of purpose and lift the spirits.

Media arts (including film and television) are accessible to more and more people as a means of expression, with Youtube films reaching huge audiences. But specifically political films are often ignored by the mainstream. The Amber Collective, a film and photography group, is based at the Side Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne. They have been producing short films (mainly documentaries but also dramas) for decades. Their impressive work should be shown by any organisation trying to revive working-class education.

So the kind of arts that are crucial for an independent working-class education are those that instruct us about the lives of working people, but also address our feelings, develop our ideas and our thinking, and inspire our creativity.

*Author of '*Left for the Rising Sun, Right for Swan Hunter*'. *The Plebs League in the North East of England 1908-1926* (Five Leaves Publications, Nottingham, 2014) ISBN 978 19 10170076

Central Labour College

Hugh Workman revisits Will Craik's 1964 study.

W. W. Craik, *Central Labour College. A Chapter in the History of Adult Working-Class Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1964

This book was written by William Craik, a railway guard who got kicked out of Ruskin College, Oxford and was then the principal of the Central Labour College (CLC) in the early 1920s.

The CLC schooled a whole generation of the brightest workers, mainly from the mines and railways of Britain, between 1909 and 1929. It was formed by the dissident students who had been thrown out of Ruskin College following a strike (see Colin Waugh, *'Plebs': The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education* (Post-16 Educator, 2009)). The CLC was housed initially in Oxford, until the University (which effectively owned the town) kicked them out to London.

The College's main funding came from scholarships from the South Wales Miners' Federation (this was a time before a national miners' union) and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (who became the NUR in 1921). Other unions later sent members on individual scholarships. These two unions have often been characterised as syndicalist. What I would argue is that the question of whether political struggle or industrial struggle was the road to the emancipation of the working class was a relevant dichotomy within all unions at that time – and both the SWMF and the ASRS certainly gravitated towards industrial struggle. Students at the CLC would often argue over this question (Nye Bevan was apparently the last to go to bed having argued against political action into the small hours most nights during his two years there). Two events (which I won't go into in any detail about here) changed the relevance of that dichotomy: the Bolshevik seizure of political power in Russia in 1917 and the failure of the general strike in 1926.

What the railwaymen and the miners shared at that time was the view that not only was the labour

movement's mission the emancipation of the working class, but that education was the key to that emancipation. But not any kind of education, they wanted nothing to do with bourgeois education – and resisted all attempts to be drawn into university life while based in Oxford. Similarly they resisted the push for a practically based education to give workers the skills for branch office and union work – the model which eventually triumphed after 1929.

The CLC was accused by some of its detractors of wanting to teach workers what to think, but they countered that they wanted to teach workers how to think – dialectically.

They argued that as Darwin had introduced men and women as the historical products of evolution, Marx had introduced men and women as the historical products of social evolution – the self-made products of their own social activities (labour). 'In the beginning was work and that work was the very life of men and women'. All relationships between men and women are entered into in the production and reproduction of life, based on how they confront nature with their productive powers. These capitalist social relations are material social relations.

Marx fused materialism with the dialectic method of Hegel, who interpreted all movement and historical development as a coming into being and passing into another form through a conflict of opposites or contradictions (thesis-antithesis-synthesis). Capitalism was not thought of, or planned or willed by anyone. It came out of a dialectic process by which new, revolutionary forms of production (technology) confronted the old, conservative feudal order, until they had grown to such an extent that new social and economic relations became inevitable.

Marx argued that, while men and women may have learned to harness the forces of nature, they needed to learn to master the social forces they had unwittingly unleashed, which had effectively

mastered them. Teaching workers to see themselves within the context of this inter-connected universe and to master these social forces was the aim of the CLC, through an inspiring curriculum that combined, amongst other things: the History of Socialism in England (including John Lilburne and Gerard Winstanley), the Science of Understanding (Historical Materialism), Study of the Trade Unions and Law, the Industrial Revolution, Imperialism, Advanced Economics and Economic Geography.

Having effectively led labour movement education in this country for twenty years, and provided the graduates to organise and teach in regionally organised classes all over the country, the college was closed in 1929. Following the General Strike in 1926, the miners and railwaymen could not sustain their commitment, and the trade union movement felt that funding should be concentrated on the regional classes, which could in theory be more value for money by reaching more people. In Craik's opinion the result was that trade union education was effectively 'decapitated'. Without the graduates to teach the curriculum the CLC had developed, what eventually came to dominate was a skills-based education to train for branch office and union work.

There was a small minority in the 1929 Congress who raised the spectre of the trade union movement's favourite bogeyman, the Industrial Workers of the World and its supposed influence within the CLC (an ungrounded charge that was first levelled in 1909 when some Ruskin students attended an IWW meeting in Oxford). However, it's interesting to note that political criticism of the CLC's Marxian curriculum was minimal, and its detractors (who may or may not have been politically motivated) instead chose to argue solely on the grounds of thrift.

Also of note is that, of all the CLC graduates, only one – Frank Hodges – passed over to the other side in the class war, the rest living out their working lives in the service of their class.

An Independent Working-Class Education Network exists today, inspired by examples such as the Ruskin Strikers' 'Plebs League' and the CLC. They meet regularly all over the country, and can be contacted via: iwceducation@yahoo.co.uk.



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