Developing the Politics of the Trade Union Movement: Popular Workers' Education in South Yorkshire, UK, 1955 to 1985

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Abstract

Drawing on evidence from research interviews, workers' memoirs, oral histories, and a range of secondary sources, the development of popular workers' education is traced over a thirty year period, 1955 to 1985, and is rooted in the proletarian culture of South Yorkshire, UK. The period is seen as an historical conjuncture of Left social movements (trade unions, the Communist and Labour parties, tenants' movements, movements of working-class women, and emerging autonomous black movements) in a context of trade union militancy and New Left politics. The Sheffield University extramural department, the South Yorkshire Workers' Educational Association (WEA), and the public intellectuals they employ as tutors and organizers are embedded in the politics and actions of the labor movement in the region, some becoming Labour MPs. They develop distinctive programs of trade union day release courses and labor movement organizations (Institute for Workers' Control, Conference of Socialist Economists, Society for the Study of Labour History). Workers involved in the process of popular workers' education become organic intellectuals having key roles in local and national politics, in the steel and miners' strikes of the 1980s, and in the formation of Northern College. The article draws on the language and insights of Raymond Williams and Antonio Gramsci through the lens of social movement theory and the praxis of popular education.

> Founding these organisations—industrial Day Release classes, an Industrial Tutors Society, an Institute for Workers Control, and Northern College—might just be seen as making space where one could talk and write together with agreeable comrades, and forget that the aim was to help them to lay the foundations for building a better society for working people. It was never for me a top-downward exercise, but always an attempt to support the building of solidarity and cooperative activity from below. —Michael Barratt Brown[1]

> "So I come back to this question about teaching and learning, which is a form of politics by other means." —George Shire[2]

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Introduction

This article is based on a range of interviews, memoirs, oral history, academic secondary sources, and my own lived experience of researching, teaching, and political activity in a significant part of the historical conjuncture I set out here to describe and analyze. I choose to use language and a frame of analysis that is informed by the ideas of Raymond Williams, Antonio Gramsci, social movement theory, and the praxis of "popular" workers' education.[3] I trace the origins of the workers' education movements of the 1970s and 1980s in South Yorkshire through brief biographies of the public intellectuals who came to dominate the praxis of the Sheffield University extramural department and the South Yorkshire district of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).[4] The historical conjuncture that is central here meant the coming together of a prolonged period of rank-and-file union militancy with the emergence of New Left political movements, journals, clubs, and discussion groups. This conjuncture was to produce a range of academic and "really useful" knowledge in labor history and labor economics. Crucially, it also produced a whole generation of intellectuals, from both inside and outside the working class, who were to become central to developments in the trade unions and the politics of the 1970s and 1980s. The article offers an analysis of left movements engaging in the grassroots politics of knowledge, involving intellectual activity that was both theoretical and practical.[5]

A Note on Methodologies and Approaches

Researching and writing about the history of the labor movement in Britain in the postwar period has come to demand a personal declaration from historians about their standpoints and research methodologies. As parties and movements have developed and fallen by the wayside, so have frames of historical interpretation. The fundamental modernization and revisions of social democratic politics by Tony Blair and his allies in the 1990s produced not only a new language of centrist politics but also a rereading and reimagining of Labour Party history and the social history of Britain.[6] As John McIlroy has succinctly argued, "New Labour rejected its own history and the idea of a labour movement."[7] Labor historians like Stedman-Jones, Vernon, and Joyce argued in the 1970s and 1980s that even in the nineteenth century most workers "had seen themselves as consumers rather than as labourers" and questioned notions of class and class struggle.[8] Sidney Pollard pointed out, "Any attack on the concept of class would question the very foundations of labor history. For if there was never such a thing as a working class, who or what could be encompassed under 'labor'?"[9]

My own historical frame of analysis is based on research informed by the work of Raymond Williams and his notions of "structure of feeling," struggle and learning, and the dialectics of organizing and learning. Williams was himself an extramural tutor at Oxford University and at WEA for fifteen years before becoming a professor at Cambridge. He was also part of WEA

summer schools held in Cambridge to recruit tutor organizers for the association well into the 1970s. In addition, Williams was one of the left academics who joined the founding advisory board for Northern College in Barnsley in South Yorkshire in 1979.[10]

Williams argued that social actors and activists draw not only on history but also a "structure of feeling," the lived experience and culture of a particular historical moment within which they work. Williams argued that "the culture which [the working class] has produced, and which it is important to recognise, is the collective democratic institution, whether in the trade unions, the co-operative movement, or a political party."[11] A returning theme in Williams' work was that "[t]he struggle to learn, to describe, to understand, to educate, is a central and necessary part of our humanity."[12] As far as workers' education was concerned, this struggle to learn is fundamentally the means by which workers understand and alter their worlds and challenge common-sense views of the world.

Williams was echoing a theme in labor history from nineteenth-century social movements like the Chartists, where workers linked education to "really useful knowledge" for social change. As a letter in the *Poor Man's Guardian* in 1834 argued: "A man may be amused and instructed by scientific literature but the language which describes his wrongs clings to his mind with an unparalleled pertinacity." Or more bluntly "What we want to be informed about is—how to get out of our present troubles."[13]

This frame of historical analysis appears also in the contemporary insight of historians like Dai Smith who speak of workers' histories and ideologies being embedded in "societies of purpose," within which it is "not nostalgic or historical wish fulfilment to work … to retrieve and take forward the values, of what was worthwhile in past lives that particularly speak to us, connect with us."[14] I will argue that South Yorkshire between the late 1950s and 1980s was just such a society of purpose. This was evident in interviews with current Sheffield activists I conducted between 2009 and 2011.[15] It is evident in the secondary sources I have consulted—biographies, autobiographies, oral history archives, and academic commentaries on the period.

Labor History Revived as a History of Social Movements?

The study of workers' history in the UK has recently been given a new life by the upsurge of social, political, and contentious social movements.[16] Since the crash of 2008 and the Arab Spring of 2011, one of the main chroniclers of these movements, Paul Mason, has argued for a return to serious discussion of workers' history.[17] Mason argues that the history of the organized working class "needs to be rediscovered," not so that activists and working people can "relive it" or piously "learn lessons" from it, but because

> [t]hey need to know, quite simply, that what they are doing has been done before, where it can lead and what patterns of revolt, reaction and reform look like when

> you view them over decades. Above all they need to know that the movement was once a vital force: a counter culture in which people lived their lives, and the main source of education for men and women condemned to live short, bleak lives and dream of impossible futures.[18]

I have recently argued for labor history and the history of popular workers' adult education to be seen as the history of a network of interlocking left social movements—trade unions, tenant organizations, women's groups, and political parties or groupings (in particular the Labour and Communist parties) located in a particular time and space.[19] Analyzing labor history using this frame of social movement theory is central to the arguments below. Certainly those involved used a labor "movement" lens to reflect on the period under discussion here. Michael Rustin, writing in 1989, noted that in the New Left of the 1950s and 1960s:

> The concept "movement" was adopted in order to differentiate this new political practice from that of conventional bureaucratic political parties, whether of the orthodox Communist or Labour varieties. The idea was that a movement was fluid, open, participatory and inclusive, closely in touch with living communities in ways which parties had mostly ceased to be.[20]

Those involved in workers' education in trade unions in recent years have also used the lens to shed light on the "knowledge production" of popular workers' education, "learning from the ground up" and the process of "teaching defiance," based on the "activist wisdom" of trade unionists.[21]

South Yorkshire: A Distinctive Political Economy for Popular Workers' Education[22]

Huw Beynon, looking back at the end of the 1990s, observed that the experience of workers in Yorkshire and many parts of the North of England in the postwar period was the equivalent of living and working in a Central or Eastern European state.[23] The national state owned the main industries of the region (steel and coal), all the utilities (water, energy, telecommunications, railways, and bus services). The national state had, of course, also established a free and comprehensive national health service in 1948 and free schools and university education. The local state owned around fifty percent of housing across the region and more than eighty percent in some coalfield villages and towns. Avner Offer has argued that British working-class communities of manual workers like those of South Yorkshire experienced a distinctive "proletarian" culture from the 1890s through to the 1950s:

> Manual workers made up a group with its own distinctive lifestyle and culture [and] … formed a majority in their towns, but these communities lived apart from the main currents of national culture, politics, and middle-class society,

> marginalized, unknown, misunderstood, despised by outsiders and elites … . Working-class society contained the full range of ability, and a pool of able men (mostly men) provided capable leadership for their own class, in trade unions, local politics, and all the way up to Parliament and government.[24]

It was this local proletarian culture that acted as the context and lifeblood for independent working-class trade union and social movement initiatives. It is arguable that the influence of this proletarian culture structured workers' histories in areas like South Yorkshire through to the 1980s and beyond. As Stuart Macintyre points out, "It seems that this independent working class consciousness emerged with particular strength and clarity in those areas where distinct working class communities existed and were united in a few large-scale industries."[25]

In the immediate postwar period, this proletarian culture produced not only political leaders, but also—with the election of a Labour government—a more confident working-class counter culture. It was specifically a labor movement culture, which invested heavily in educational capital both for the movement and for the production of Gramsci's "organic intellectuals." For example, Nina Fishman has pointed out that between 1945 and 1960:

> Unions also organised a wide range of activities to cater for their members' leisure time interests. These included cycling speed trials, amateur athletics competitions, swimming meetings and amateur boxing events. Other unions were often invited to send their members to compete, (and) … accounts of these sporting occasions appeared in union journals.[26]

Moreover, direct political mobilization of working-class voters from 1945 in Yorkshire produced a "solid Labour" network of local councils with turnout even for small local authorities reaching eighty-five percent. In Barnsley one local council ward recorded an 82.6 percent poll.[27]

In South Yorkshire in the 1950s there was "full" employment, which seemed to have at last eradicated the scourge of mass unemployment. Younger workers rejoined trade unions, and trade union militancy returned. In the Yorkshire coalfields in 1955 a strike that started at Armthorpe colliery near Doncaster demonstrated the emerging rank-and-file restiveness at the local level—and for the first time witnessed the use of "flying pickets" to spread the strike into adjoining coalfields.[28] In March 1957, national strikes in shipbuilding and engineering produced what the *Observer* newspaper described as "the most serious crisis since 1926 in industrial relations."[29] In the early 1960s, as Selina Todd points out, "many ordinary people felt that they were yet to experience the affluence that [Conservative Party Prime Minister Harold] Macmillan described as … long hours on a never-ending assembly line, a lino-floored council house, a rented television, a three-piece suite paid for by hire purchase." It was better than the 1930s, perhaps, "but they relied on two parents working, long hours of overtime, debt, saving and sacrifice."[30]

This growing political dissatisfaction and trade union militancy intertwined with developments in workers' education and produced a particular conjuncture, resulting in the emergence of initiatives and institutions that were to structure the popular workers' adult education culture in South Yorkshire through to the 1980s. Nick Howard, who joined the Sheffield extramural department in 1964, describes this backdrop to the period in Sheffield:

> A factual history of the period 1951 to 1993 would record the scale and frequency of these struggles. They started in the 1950s and 1960s with a large number of small strikes led mainly by Communist Party dominated shop stewards' committees. As the employers counter-attacked, vital strikes took place, two to three weeks long, to protect the stewards' organisations at Millspaugh's and at Shardlow's (engineering works) in 1965 and 1966. Then came the massive local and national miners' strikes of 1969 and 1972–1974 which used flying pickets, followed by longer strikes and mass pickets against the sackings of … union convenors at Footprint and Presto lighter tool factories. Widespread factory occupations in the heavy forging and engineering sectors in the mid-1970s reached a peak in the massive rally in Norfolk Park, at which Tony Benn, the minister for industry, supported the workers' sit-in at the River Don Steelworks. These are only the most significant events in an entire period of struggle.[31]

In 1954, the Yorkshire Coalfield had more stoppages than the rest of the country and the highest number in the postwar period.[32] Sheffield extramural industrial day release courses for miners started in Derbyshire in 1953, Yorkshire in 1954–1955 and in Sheffield, Rotherham, and Scunthorpe for steelworkers in the early 1960s.

A process began that in Gramscian terms involved the education of working-class organic intellectuals and the winning over of as many traditional intellectuals in the universities to the cause as possible. It also saw the creation of working-class intellectuals actively participating in practical life, helping to create a counter hegemony that would undermine existing social relations. Classes and courses produced politicized shop stewards, full-time trade union officers, councillors, and MPs over a very long period of time. As late as 2010, Derek Simpson, the joint leader of Britain's largest union, UNITE, had his origins in the engineering industry of Sheffield. Social movements, particularly "contentious" social movements, have historically been linked to workers' education and "learning," which have been embedded in struggle.[33] In workers' social movements, or "left social movements," "education" was seen as a transformative—even revolutionary—process to be built into an organization.

British McCarthyism, Communism, and the Old New Left

Most of the first generation of the public intellectuals who developed workers' education in South Yorkshire after 1945 shared a history of brief or extended membership of the Communist Party. As they sought academic posts after

war service they faced prejudice in the universities. Many of them deliberately sought out jobs related to their own experience of workers' education, others found a more tolerant atmosphere in universities that already had, or had recently, founded extramural departments after 1945.

In the trades unions, bans on Communists started in 1948. The annual meeting of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) instigated a "TUC led anti-communist campaign which issued the 'Warning to Trade Unionists' in October 1948 and urged the unions to take energetic steps 'to stop Communist activity.'"[34] The largest union, the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), banned Communists from holding office from 1949 to 1968. In unions like the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), which were dominant in South Yorkshire, Communists had influence, if not numbers, at the shop steward and rank-and-file level, and there were no official bans, but a great deal of personal prejudice. The NUM actually had Communist national general secretaries in the period in Arthur Homer, Will Paynter, and ex-Communist Laurence Daly. At the Durham Miners' Gala, separate platforms were erected when Clement Attlee, the Labour Party leader, and Arthur Homer were the guest speakers.[35]

After 1956, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the Hungarian revolution, as the Communists in the network of tutors and public intellectuals involved with workers' education left the party, they actively sought to build a New Left politics within the labor movement but outside the Communist Party. As Edward Thompson put it, "The New Left must not stand aside from the labour movement, and from its immediate preoccupations and struggles… . [We] will, as a matter of course be active members of the Labour Party and trade union movement."[36] Michael Kenny argues that this commitment came from their "experience of adult education tutoring."[37] In fact, this misses the point that workers' education was for the network of former Communist academics in Yorkshire, and particularly around Sheffield, an essential dimension of their politics. As Michael Rustin pointed out in 1989, the New Left, through its workers, education programs, and organizations—like the Institute for Workers Control (IWC)—left a strong legacy and had a powerful impact on quite a few trade union leaders.[38]

Many of the academics in Sheffield and other Yorkshire extramural departments shared a Marxist perspective on their fields of research and teaching. It is arguable that they were responsible for the invention of the academic disciplines of labor history and industrial or labor economics in the period. As a social movement, their "knowledge production" had a profound impact on traditional academic disciplines. Sidney Pollard, looking back in 1990 to his appointment to Sheffield University in 1950, observed that "real labour history (what is nowadays sometimes called 'history from below') had not been done at all up till then."[39] Siegfried Pollack, as he was then called, had escaped from Vienna on the Children's Transport at the age of 13. He studied at the London School of Economics (LSE) alongside fellow refugee Ralph Miliband, where he briefly joined the Communist Party. He volunteered for the British Army in 1943,

when he changed his name. His studies at LSE and his future interests were influenced by his tutor, H. L. Beales, who had worked extensively with the WEA in the 1930s.[40]

Pollard was a prime mover in 1960 for the formation of the Society for the Study of Labour History (SSLH). The society was founded at a Sheffield meeting chaired by the historian Asa Briggs. Royden Harrison, also a labor historian, was, for many years, an editor of its bulletin, which became the *Labour History Journal*. In 1965, Harrison transferred from the extramural department to become a reader in politics at Sheffield, and in 1970 he was appointed professor and director of the center for the study of social history at Warwick University, stepping into the shoes of his friend E. P. Thompson. John Halstead, another member of the extramural staff and a tutor on the day release classes, was involved from the start in the SSLH and remains as an editor of the journal.

It is also important to note that popular workers' education in the 1950s and 1960s was gendered—that is, dominated, as were the unions, by men. This was a reflection of the wider process whereby "the public sphere was forcefully reclaimed as a male preserve during the 1950s."[41] Jean McCrindle, who established pioneering women's studies programs at Northern College and became a leading socialist feminist in the 1970s, was an early critic of the gender blindness of miners' politics and the New Left. In 1960 she wrote a piece for *The Socialist*, the magazine of The Fife Socialist League, which argued the case, according to Kenny, "for increasing women's participation in politics, but in terms that indicate the absence of feminist ideas in the movement."[42] McCrindle later became the coordinator of the Scottish New Left clubs.

McCrindle was in Sheffield at the 1969 IWC conference where MP Audrey Wise spoke on women and workers' control. Sheila Rowbotham, who at that time was teaching for the WEA in London, was also there. "On the suggestion of one of the organisers of the Institute for Workers Control (IWC) conference, Tony Topham, we held a women's meeting there." McCrindle and Rowbotham argued for Women's Liberation as an autonomous movement in the meeting.[43] The two were to be at a Ruskin College history workshop in 1969 where the women Ruskin students, women historians, and activists, many of them in working-class adult education, demanded a separate meeting within the workshop. This was followed by the first Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) Conference at Ruskin in February 1970, which launched the WLM in Britain.

McCrindle and Rowbotham were two of the tiny number of women public intellectuals who emerged in the workers' education movement. They coedited *Dutiful Daughters: Women Speak about their Lives*, an influential text in the 1970s women's movement.[44] McCrindle was to demonstrate her mobilizing skills by organising a group of women students at Northern College in 1984 to launch the Women against Pit Closures group, which had an important role in the Miners' Strike. The group produced a large number of working-class women activists for Northern College courses in the late 1980s.

WEA branches like the Scunthorpe branch produced some of the first women students for the college. Women from the Scunthorpe WEA women's

group also actively organized within the Labour Party, won the post of Labour Party secretary, and were elected as Labour borough councillors (Dorothy Stephenson, Linda Thornton, and Chris Pearson) and a Humberside county councillor (Ronnie Wilson). The group identified with the women's liberation movement of the 1970s with women-only consciousness-raising sessions and debates on socialist feminism. Two members of this group, Dorothy Stephenson and Linda Thornton (later Linda Helen), were among the first women students to enroll in the new two-year diploma course at Northern College in the early 1980s. Linda Helen also became the first Northern College student to gain acceptance at Cambridge University.

WEA Branches and the Development of Popular Workers' Education

The generation of worker educators born in the 1920s or 1930s in effect invented the academic fields of labor economics and labor history in the UK while working for the WEA and university extramural programs. In Leeds, E. P. Thompson wrote *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) while traveling around the Luddite villages of the Spen Valley and teaching adult students in extramural classes. In Hull, John Saville and Joyce Bellamy combined labor history and Marxist economic history. But it was in Sheffield where the major concentration of this generation of academic public intellectuals became concentrated and effective. They embedded themselves in the political life of South Yorkshire in the Sheffield Trades Council or later as Labour MPs. They connected to a young generation of workers' representatives in classes, courses, discussion forums, and in organizations like the IWC. In Gramscian terms, they were working-class "organic intellectuals," who were to emerge as central actors in the strikes, politics, and community struggles of the 1970s, playing active roles in the foundation of Northern College, the Steel Strike of 1980, and the year-long Miners' Strike of 1984–1985.

Many studies of the impact of the WEA on popular worker education tend to neglect the relevance of place and localism.[45] In the steel town of Scunthorpe in the 1970s workers in the steelworks, teachers in local schools, and working-class women created both an "industrial" and a "women's" WEA branch. Charlie Framp, a bricklayer in Scunthorpe's Redbourn steelworks, was an active WEA member during the period. He recalled in his memoirs *Crimson Skies*, briefly being a member of the local Communist Party branch.[46] "To be a Communist Party member in Britain in the 1950s," he remembered, "you were a political pariah, an outcast, an untouchable, or that is what the media and particularly the popular press would have you be."[47] Though no longer a member, he was happy to be called a Communist when he successfully challenged the management in 1959 and was elected as shop steward for a hundred bricklayers although "at that time the trades unions in the industry were safely tucked into their (employers') pockets."[48] Framp's father had been steward for the bricklayers' laborers and had fought in the Spanish Civil War with the International Brigade.

The Redbourn bricklayers' and laborers' stewards were active in the late 1960s and 1970s in promoting the Sheffield University and WEA day release courses. Charlie Framp and Charlie Goddard, an ISTC (Iron and Steel Trades Confederation) bricklayers' laborer representative, were involved in the Institute for Workers Control movement and produced plans in a WEA study group for industrial democracy in the steelworks.[49] Charlie Goddard campaigned for better safety conditions in the steelworks and researched and cowrote one of the earliest trade union critiques of the Health and Safety at Work Act of 1975.[50]

The first university and WEA courses in Scunthorpe in the 1950s were the work of John Hughes at Hull University, who organized and taught economics and history courses in the area. He moved to Sheffield University as a lecturer in economics and set up the miners' day release courses with Royden Harrison and Bert Wynn of the Derbyshire Miners. In 1957 Hughes moved to Ruskin College, the trade union college at Oxford, and eventually became vice principal and later principal of the college, as well as a major figure in trade union and Labour politics. Hughes was one of a large group of mostly male socialist academics and tutors, "public intellectuals," who dominated the field of workers' education in Yorkshire universities and their extramural departments from the 1950s through to the 1980s.

The Scunthorpe branch was also involved in the 1970s when the South Yorkshire WEA began to develop courses with science activists from the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science (BSSRS). There was a Science for People Work Hazards Group in Sheffield that developed links with WEA branches in Scunthorpe and Sheffield. Seb Schmoller, a Cambridge-educated scientist worked with the developing WEA and TUC health and safety day release courses and wrote WEA resource pamphlets.[51] The *Hazards Group Bulletin* which was published by the national Hazards group from 1976 became a standard resource for information for trade unionists.

The safety rep courses were not simply "training," but also science education for workers. Simon Pickvance, a member of the Sheffield Hazards Group and a WEA tutor, set up the Sheffield Occupational Health Project, which offered advice in GP's surgeries and became one of the few links with immigrant workers in South Yorkshire.

> Simon and his co-workers didn't leave it there. Meetings were called in pubs and clubs adjacent to problematic workplaces. Health screening sessions were arranged. Mosques and community centres were turned into makeshift clinics, run in conjunction with local Pakistani, Yemeni and Afro-Caribbean groups, uncovering an expected but previously unquantified or officially addressed racial inequality in occupational health.[52]

In Scunthorpe, WEA activists from the health and safety courses were also involved with the community relations council in major and successful legal challenges to stop the British Steel Corporation's (BSC) attempt to prevent Asian

and Somali workers from being employed by requiring demanding language tests. The BSC claimed wrongly that these were necessary for health and safety reasons.

Throughout the 1970s all the elements of the local labor movement came together at monthly Trades Council meetings with the Labour Party (including councillors), the trade unions, the WEA, and Co-op Party representatives. The Trades Council regularly discussed the educational programs of the WEA/TUC shop stewards and safety reps program; the extramural and trade union day release programs of Sheffield and Hull Universities; and the Co-op women's guild programs. Councillors appeared as trade union representatives; the WEA tutor organizer was a senior councillor. Outside the Trades Council left-wing delegates and other groups came together in SLAG (Scunthorpe Left Action Group). Charlie Framp described it as

> [a] loosely organised body of rank-and-file steelworks trade unionists in the town, many of whom had been involved in our campaign for industrial democracy. They came from every trade union in steel and shared a common dissatisfaction with the trade union set up in their industry … especially now it was publicly owned.[53]

The local WEA branch included former Communist head teacher Reg Neale, now active in the Labour Party. Other local head teachers and teachers in the Labour Party created the first WEA English classes for Pakistani, Bengali, Sikh, and Somali male workers in the steelworks and home-based teaching for Asian women. WEA members were active in antiracist campaigning in the Community Relations Council (CRC), which was supported by the Labour council and local trade unions. The WEA tutor organizer was a Labour councillor throughout the 1970s and served as chair of the CRC.

There were campaigns and activity underneath an apparent conservative right-wing Labour ascendancy on the Council and in the unions. Students from the steel day release courses like Stan Sheridan and Ted Hardaker of ISTC became councillors and full-time officers of the unions. Stan Sheridan became an important Scunthorpe leader for the national Steel Strike in 1980.[54] Jim Pearson of the electricians' union (ETU), who had been a militant shop steward and was "blacklisted" on construction sites for two years, was active in the WEA. He organized day release courses for the highly organized shop stewards on the new Anchor steelworks site (at the time the largest construction site in Europe), and later became a councillor and mayor of Scunthorpe.

Beyond the Unions—The Tenants' Movement and Popular Workers' Education

If the world of workers' education is best viewed as a series of interlocking social movements, then we need to consider left social movements beyond the trade unions, the WEA industrial work, and networks of organic intellectuals. Todd argues, "The strikes [of the 1960s and 1970s] testified to a new assertiveness

which spread beyond male, skilled workers—the traditional constituency of the trade unions—to young and women workers, recent migrants and unskilled wage–earners."[55] In the UK, after the First World War, local councils began to build and manage housing subsidized from the national government. Council tenants had therefore always been "unique citizens"—their landlords had been their political representatives, and their activities had thus always been "political." This central fact had produced a deep interest by politicians in the political mobilization of tenant organization. By 1981 forty-seven percent of the housing stock in Sheffield was owned by the city council, and this was a similar feature of the housing markets throughout South Yorkshire. In Rotherham, by 1962 the Council had built 10,000 houses, an average of 300 a year. In 1962 the *Rotherham Advertiser* said that "locally the view was that housing was a social service."[56] Before the late 1950s council tenants were rarely mobilized around rent issues. In Rotherham there were no council house rent increases from 1945 until 1953.

The Conservative government's 1957 Rent Act led to the decontrolling of rents in the private sector and increasing rents in the council sector. Tenants responded to the threat of higher rents by working through unions, the trades' councils and the Communist Party. In 1953 BISAKTA (later the ISTC), the largest steel union, sent a petition against rent increases to Rotherham council. Labour councils faced with heavy rent rises turned to introducing rent rebates—in effect a "means test" for tenants. When Sheffield decided to introduce rent rebates in 1967, this triggered a response from tenants in the form of a mass tenants' movement and tenants' candidates in council elections in Sheffield and Rotherham. Many tenants' leaders and association members came to the tenants' committees from previous activity in the trades and labor council in Sheffield and from well-organized engineering factories like Ambrose Shardlow's.[57] During the May elections of 1967 a mass meeting of tenants at Sheffield City Hall attracted one thousand people and the Sheffield Federation of Tenants was launched.

The campaigning by tenants' associations also demonstrated the effectiveness of working-class women in the organizations. Peter Baldock, a local community worker at the time argued:

> The movement was in its origins … a movement of women. Men may have taken it over to a large extent, but the origin remained important…. In Sheffield at least, tenants' associations were successful as militant organizations precisely to the extent that women secured and maintained positions of power in them.[58]

If rent rebates and rent increases had already angered tenants' organizations, the Conservative government's Housing Finance Bill in 1972 sparked off a national campaign against the rent increases it was to force on local councils. In June 1972, 233 delegates from 87 ruling Labour groups met in Sheffield and voted overwhelmingly not to implement the act. Thirty-two Labour councils held out but eventually implemented the Act between October 1972 and

January 1973. Thirteen held out to 1973, and two (Clay Cross, near Chesterfield in Derbyshire and Bedwas and Machen in Wales) never implemented the legislation. Both were small mining towns. The Clay Cross councillors (some of them Derbyshire Miners day release students) were banned from office for ten years for refusing to increase rents after the government took over the running of the council.[59]

When the Sheffield Tenants' Federation was reestablished in 1978 with council support, it became a model for the tenant "feds" nationally, financed by a small voluntary weekly levy on each council house collected by the council as part of the rent. The Sheffield Federation prioritized tenant education and skills training and was one of the first "community" organizations to have a partnership with Northern College when the college opened in 1979. It was notable that the development of federations in South Yorkshire meant the emergence of training and "popular worker education" programs with residential courses at Northern, which produced a number of Labour councillors in the South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire local authorities.[60]

"*Community*" *and Workers*' *Education*

It is clear that left social movements like the tenants' movement were important to the development of the socialist cultures of South Yorkshire. After the 1968 generation of radical students and the growing number of young, middle-class feminists entered the job market, they often chose to work in the public sector and to become involved in localized, direct-action politics, sometimes called "community action." The Labour government in 1968 set up twelve Community Development Projects (CDP) aimed simultaneously at tackling child poverty, arresting the decline of "inner city areas," and countering the effects of growing racism in these areas. Some young graduates saw "community work" as the real purpose of "social work." Others chose to work in the CDP areas and other declining working class communities for the university extramural departments or the WEA.

The Community Development Projects attracted left community workers and academics who produced radical Marxist analyses of capitalist industries and the state as responsible for the poverty and decline. Many of them were drawn to the notion of working "in and against the State."[61] Marjorie Mayo, who went on to work at Ruskin College in the 1980s and 1990s and became the first professor of community development in the UK at Goldsmith's University of London, integrated workers' education within the new "community action" frame. In 1977 she also argued that there were "specific factors in common between the growth of the present phase of the women's movement and the rise of community action in the late 1960s and early 1970s."[62]

The adult and workers' education possibilities were explored in a 1975 book, *Adult Education, Community Development and the Working Class* by Tom Lovett, a former Ruskin student, working with the WEA in Liverpool.

John Field, who was the first labor history tutor at Northern College and later a professor of adult education at Warwick, Ulster, Bradford, and Stirling universities, has described how "[f]or people like me," Lovett's work was "an extraordinary moment of illumination, lighting up the invisible ties between my everyday teaching and the wider world of civil rights, community organising, and radical social change."[63] Keith Jackson was also working in Liverpool in working-class areas at this time as deputy director of the university extramural department. In 1974 he began to develop a theoretical frame for a "strategy for working-class adult education" based firmly on the notion that

> [i]nterpreting the needs of people living in a central Liverpool area as arising not from them living in a poor community, or even from their being poor people in "a warm and living community," but as arising from their membership of the working class … and to relate education to social action in such a way that the social and cultural values which education might embody aim to help workers increase their consciousness of their class position and its consequences.[64]

Jackson had been a student at Oxford and worked for the University and the WEA before Liverpool. He was originally from Sheffield and returned in 1979 to join Michael Barratt Brown as senior tutor in the new Northern College. Jackson recognized the powerful possibilities for residential short courses for working-class women, and for organized community groups, as well as trades unions.[65] Jackson also recognized "community" as a gendered space that had been separated artificially in "common sense" from workplace and trade union workers' education.[66] Jackson recognized the crucial role working-class women were playing in community campaigns. Northern College managed to establish free child care for all its short courses, and for children living with parents on the two-year diploma course.

Jackson followed the pattern of the public intellectuals working in South Yorkshire. He became a delegate to the Trades and Labour Council in Sheffield and a major player as a key adviser to David Blunkett, then leader of the City Council, in the resistance of local authorities to the Thatcher government.[67] Jackson also negotiated innovative schemes with the city council, including a community work apprenticeship scheme, which recruited working-class activists on a training and education programme, paid them while they were training, and guaranteed employment with the city council. Another scheme guaranteed a number of days release from work for manual workers employed by the council to give them time to choose any topic or program of workers' adult education.

Communities of Resistance, Black Workers, and Popular Workers' Education

John McIlroy argues that the "old axis of the unions, Labour Party and Communist Party" simply could not deal with the explosion of radicalism in the late 1960s.[68] Part of this explosion was the emergence of autonomous

black and Asian people's trade union actions and movements in what Sivanandan defined as "communities of resistance."[69] The failure of trade unions to support high-profile strikes by Asian workers in the mills of Preston and the hosiery industry of Leicester opened up a divide "between the organised white labour movement and the organised independent struggle of an Asian workforce from which there was no return."[70]

This divide was particularly noteworthy in the case of the Communist Party, which could potentially draw on recruits from the West Indies with direct experience of communism and trade unionism, and on workers in the Indian Workers Association, which had been founded in the 1930s in England with Communist support. Trevor Carter, for example, a Communist activist from Guyana, arrived ready to engage with workers' education. "Having identified education as the key to change," he wrote, the "first three things most of us did as soon as we arrived were one, find the Labour Exchange, two, find a room and three, look for the nearest institute to register for evening classes."[71] Carter later left the Party frustrated with the attitudes toward black workers he found there.

The real problem was the "White Left's pervasive need to 'integrate' the Black class struggle under their organisational/political domination."[72] The irony in the situation was that migration and settlement had meant that migrant workers

> had undergone a profound process of proletarianization on their arrival to Britain. Seventy-one per cent of agricultural labourers and peasant farmers had been transformed into an industrial working class centred on manufacturing industry …. [T]hose who had worked as white collar employees prior to migration seventy-two per cent of whom had found themselves forced into manufacturing industry.[73]

But there is little evidence of trade unions or popular workers' education connecting with African Caribbean workers in Doncaster and Sheffield, with Asian workers from the Punjab and Pakistan in Rotherham and Sheffield, or Yemeni workers in Sheffield (some of whom had family histories in Sheffield dating back to the 1930s). There were changes in the early 1970s, however, when Chilean refugees were welcomed and housed in Sheffield and Rotherham by subcommittees of the trade councils. In Rotherham, the trade council

> was able to rescue and to house twelve refugee families …. Several Chileans joined the subcommittee and became involved in a host of Trades Council initiatives … developing a far ranging cultural programme. Rotherham Trades Council in the early seventies also elected Peter Dauphine the first black president of any trades council in Britain.[74]

There is also some evidence of autonomous workers' education movements. These took the form of self-organized parallel initiatives of "compensatory" supplementary schools and adult schools. Carmen Franklin describes the racism and violence of Sheffield life encountered by African Caribbean workers in the 1950s: "The solution … was to meet in each other's homes for friendship and support, and soon the West Indian Community Association (WICA) was formed." WICA responded to the apparent "failure" of black children in Sheffield schools and racism encountered in youth clubs by taking over "two small huts" for classes taught by "those who came to Britain from Africa or the Caribbean in the 1960s to attend higher education courses."[75]

The Asian Youth Movement (AYM) had emerged in Southall in London in 1977 as a community defence organization.[76] In 1980 and 1981 there were riots in various parts of England notably Brixton (London), St Pauls (Bristol), and Chapeltown (Leeds) in 1982 a branch of the AYM was set up in Sheffield. The Sheffield AYM organized against police harassment and deportations to support people being prosecuted for self-defense. It was never simply an "Asian" group, with Asians, Afro-Caribbean, and white skinheads marching with the AYM banner on demonstrations.

Direct action was linked to what the AYM called "cultural resistance" in the production of newsletters, performance poetry carnivals, and music events. In 1983 the first issue of the Sheffield AYM newsletter *Kala Mazdoor*, with its cover slogan, "come what may we are here to stay," was published. The AYM and its organization had an emphasis on self- and collective education, which was about seeking "really useful knowledge." In the first issue of its newsletter, an article from a member of the AYM described a visit to a black book fair:

> Like most black youth I felt the need to become politically aware and to re-educate myself. At school education was of little interest to me but now I wanted to learn what interested me … at the book fair I found endless number of books which enriched my thoughts and ideas, books which related to the history of Black people and the reality of racial oppression. From the book fair the Asian Youth Movement purchased many books … with a view to setting up an Asian Youth Movement library in Sheffield.[77]

The workers' education movements had been slow to respond to demands from black and Asian workers. But by the early 1980s this was beginning to change with WICA establishing the Sheffield and District African Caribbean Association (SADACCA) in a refurbished Sheffield landmark building in 1983. Black access courses linked to local colleges and Northern College followed. Black students were recruited for the community work apprenticeship scheme and became youth workers. Keith Jackson established a number of black studies short courses at Northern College and a Cambridge-educated Marxist tutor Shubi Ishemo from Tanzania came to the college.

Michael Barratt Brown, Archetypal Public Intellectual in Workers' Education

There is not space to review in detail the lives and activities of all the individuals involved in or affected by workers' education efforts in Yorkshire after the war. But doing so for one such individual can serve as a partial conclusion to this essay. A more conventional set of concluding reflections will then follow.

Michael Barratt Brown was at the center of many of the networks that produced the pattern of popular workers' education in the immediate postwar period. Like many others he was connected to the Marxist intellectual climate of the 1920s and 1930s. His father was principal at Ruskin College and a Quaker. Barratt Brown was brought up in an elite world of politicians and philosophers in Oxford and attended at Oxford University. With the outbreak of the war, he first joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit but decided to work with the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in support of Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. After the war he joined the Communist Party and became a teacher in technical schools and a tutor for the WEA and Cambridge University in Essex towns and villages. He was able to build up a range of contacts and political friendships—in the universities, in the Communist Party Historians' Group, and with Cambridge Marxist economists like Maurice Dobb. In his informal autobiography, *Seekers*, he emphasizes the influence of Raymond Williams. He remembers being "overwhelmed" on reading Williams' *Culture and Society* and also being struck by the notion that "culture was ordinary."[78] Like many of his contemporaries, Barratt Brown left the Communist Party in 1956 and joined the editorial board of the *New Reasoner*, and also *Universities and Left Review*. When *New Left Review* (NLR) was founded, Barratt Brown was again on the editorial board. He was also active in the New Left Clubs established by the NLR.

In 1958 Royden Harrison, also a member of this network of socialist university intellectuals, suggested that Barratt Brown apply for an economics post at the Sheffield extramural department. There he got involved in the miners day release classes with his economist friend Ken Alexander, became interested in labor economics, and joined Harrison and Bert Wynn in researching and resourcing the rank-and-file movements in the NUM, especially the elections and disputes of 1969, 1972, and 1974.[79] This solidarity work also resulted in policy pamphlets on the coal industry, and *From Labourism to Socialism* (1972), which reflects the labor economics Barratt Brown was teaching in day release classes.

Nationally Barratt Brown remained active in the networks that produced the "old" New Left journals and clubs. Their response to the new radicalism of the student revolt and the women's liberation movement was a critique of Labourism and the Wilson Labour government, which appeared as the *May Day Manifesto* in 1968. Barratt Brown contributed to what was perhaps the last intervention of the "old" New Left, along with Williams, Edward Thompson, and Stuart Hall.[80] Stuart Hall went on to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Analysis at Birmingham University, and later the

adult-education–based Open University. Barratt Brown focused on trade union and labor economics, the IWC, and, later, fair trade.

In 1968 Barratt Brown also founded and became chair of the Society of Industrial Tutors (SIT), "a think tank preparing materials and organising conferences of tutors from universities, trade unions, the WEA, and technical colleges, all engaged in industrial studies courses."[81] In 1977 SIT had a membership of 500 tutors and had published a regular bulletin, and in the late 1970s, twelve separate trade union studies paperbacks. These included a guide to company and plant information by Barratt Brown and a guide to statistics by a colleague at the Sheffield department, Karl Hedderwick.[82] The development of SIT reflects the fact that there was a growing national program of TUC education department shop steward skills training, which reflected a narrower definition of workers popular education than the day release model. WEA districts and WEA tutor organizers worked closely with the TUC, and many of the tutors were responsible for curriculum developments, particularly in Health and Safety. SIT and Barratt Brown mobilized this WEA and TUC network and managed to influence legislation by the Labour governments of Wilson and Callaghan to give shop stewards and safety reps legal rights to time off work for training.

The national network of WEA industrial tutor organizers published in the late 1970s the Studies for Trade Unionists series of pamphlets, and in 1979 the *Trade Union Studies Journal*. The publications attempted to widen the scope of the TUC courses from a narrow focus on skills training. These developments were orchestrated by Mel Doyle, the national officer of the WEA responsible for trade union work throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Doyle retired as assistant national secretary of the WEA in 2003.

Conclusion

Popular workers' education emerges as central to left social movements—in particular historical conjunctures. This article suggests that the period from the mid-1950s to the 1980s in one part of Northern England (South Yorkshire) was just such a conjuncture. A militant labor movement based on a confident postwar working class produced workers eager for "really useful knowledge," organic intellectuals who became trade union leaders, politicians, and tutors themselves in popular workers' education.

The period also demonstrated the effective educational praxis of a generation of public intellectuals, schooled in the left wing student cultures of the 1930s in Oxford, Cambridge, and the LSE, and influenced by tutors like G. D. H. Cole or Harold Laski. Many of this generation were further radicalized by the impact of their war service, and the prejudice they faced often as members of the Communist Party through to 1956.

Newer generations of public intellectuals seized the opportunities in working in the politicized proletarian culture of South Yorkshire in the emerging institutions, organizations, and political groupings of both the "old" New

Left and the New Left of the 1970s. By the 1980s left social movement praxis culminated in the Steel Strike of 1980 and the year-long Miners' Strike of 1984. It also culminated in the emergence in 1979 of Northern College, staffed by predominantly Marxist tutors from the different generations of public intellectuals, mobilizing popular workers' education in the new social movements like the women's movement, the tenants' movement, and black workers.

There were absences in this popular workers' education period. For most of the period men dominated at all levels, and there were only a small number of black workers and black public intellectuals present. Teaching and learning owed more to the seminar and tutorial systems of the "liberal" education of Oxbridge than to the worker-generated curricula and pedagogy of the labor colleges of the early twentieth century.

Over the years from 1985 those involved in popular workers' education contested the language and pedagogies of "skills training" for trade unionists which came to challenge, and by the 1990s to dominate, in trade union "weekend schools" and colleges and in the TUC education programs. The world of marketized "lifelong learning" was soon to follow and began to extinguish popular working-class adult education.

NOTES

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21. David Bleakney and Michael Morrill, "Worker Education and Social Movement Knowledge Production: Practical Lessons and Tensions," in *Learning from the Ground Up: Global Perspectives on Social Movements and Knowledge Production*, ed. Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (New York, 2010). Michael Newman, *Teaching Defiance: Stories and Strategies for Activist Educators: a Book Written in Wartime* (San Francisco, 2006). Sarah Maddison and Sean Scalmer, *Activist Wisdom: Practical Knowledge and Creative Tension in Social Movements* (Sidney, 2006).

22. In the article South Yorkshire defines not only the strict geographical area of Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster, and Rotherham, but also the WEA and university extramural areas. The WEA South Yorkshire District was based on the coalfield areas, which included North Derbyshire, and on the steel areas within South Yorkshire in Sheffield and Rotherham, but also the steel plants in Scunthorpe in North Lincolnshire.

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