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### **New Ventures in Adult Education in Early Twentieth-Century Britain: Pastoral Government and the Pedagogical State**

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## **New Ventures in Adult Education in Early Twentieth-Century Britain: Pastoral Government and the Pedagogical State**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the political rationalities and discursive practices that epitomised the liberal adult education movement that begins to emerge in the socio-cultural milieu of early twentieth-century Britain. Taking as its keywords ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’, and its key practices as the dispassionate concern for truth and open debate, the paper will argue that modern adult education was less concerned with the dissemination of knowledge than it was with endowing adult learners with new capacities for self-regulation so that they might better fulfil their civic responsibilities. This was particularly so following the long-awaited arrival of universal adult suffrage in 1918, whence adult learners were increasingly subjected to a series of self-governing, ethical obligations that are best characterised as ‘civil prudence’. The paper also argues that adult education became a discreet form of surveillance. Following Foucault and his analysis of the development of pastoral techniques of government in Christianity, we can see the mobilisation of modern adult educationalists as being in some way analogous to the ancient Hebraic conceptions of pastoral power modelled on the shepherd-flock relation. Understood thus, modern adult education can be seen to function as a political technology that sought to facilitate governance from a distance.

### **Keywords**

Adult education, civil prudence, culture, educated citizenship, government, liberalism, pastorship, surveillance

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## **New Ventures in Adult Education in Early Twentieth-Century Britain: Pastoral Government and the Pedagogical State**

The history of adult education is one that can be traced back to the eighteenth century since when there have been constant efforts to realise an educational apparatus suitable for instructing adult men and women—in particular working-class adults—in matters deemed to be educational. The bulk of early adult education was undertaken by voluntary movements and religious bodies (e.g. Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, the Adult School movement, The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, the Mechanics' Institutes, among others). This changes, however, in 1851, when the state makes available for the first time public funding for Adult Evening Schools. Though the object of the evening schools was to assist elementary education, and whilst state aid was still minimal, the Committee of Council on Education's decision to aid evening schools was a significant watershed.

From here on the deployment of an adult education apparatus was to be more closely aligned with the art of liberal government, both in the narrowest and broadest sense of the term. In the narrowest sense, modern adult education was increasingly governmentalised, that is to say, elaborated, rationalised and centralised under the auspices of state approved agencies. In the broadest sense, the emergence of modern adult education formed part a complex machinery of government located in the whole social body. Thus a new rationale for adult education begins to emerge in the early twentieth century. It was developed in certain directions and subjected to very specific discursive practices: adult learners were increasingly objectified, classified, individualised and trained in the art of self-governance. Not so they might become self-determining however, but so that they might regulate their own conduct and act upon the possibilities of action of other working-class adults. Concomitant with this was the emergence of a new pedagogical apparatus. Whereas the teaching of adults in the nineteenth-century had been heterogeneous and unsystematic, modern adult education was characterised by a homogeneity of teaching standards and methods.

Undoubtedly the most significant development in the emergence of liberal adult education was the establishment of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in 1903. Its objectives were expressed with some clarity.

It is the object of [the WEA] to supply a platform on which those engaged in manual labour may meet those engaged in the profession of teaching to discuss the problems of education, and more particularly those problems which concern the workers. It has no policy to push, except the policy of making the best education available to all ... Culture cannot be imposed upon any section of the community from above: it must spring from the experience won by men in their daily lives, and must reflect their own struggles, aspirations and disappointments

*(The Highway, October 1908).*

The organisation immediately sought co-operation with other educational agencies, not least the University Extension Movement (founded by a University of Cambridge Syndicate in 1873) and the Board of Education. In so doing it soon became a state approved 'Responsible Body' and was therefore eligible for public funding provided it continued to fulfil certain criteria stipulated by the Board of Education Regulations for Further Education. The main criterion was that appointed Responsible Bodies provide a non-vocational education with an emphasis on objectivity and standards. Thus students were divided into a hierarchy of different types of classes and courses: terminal courses, one-year classes, university tutorial classes and university extension courses (see HMSO, 1927: 4-10; Mansbridge, 1913: 136-41; Peers, 1934: 94-107). Of the different types of classes and courses, the three year tutorial class

represented the pinnacle of achievement, since they were required to ‘approximate in quality to a University Honours standard’ (Peers, 1934: 101).

The initiative for the tutorial class system was provided by a conference convened by the WEA and the University of Oxford in the summer of 1907. The specific purpose of the conference was to consider ‘what Oxford could do for working people’ (Stocks, 1953: 40-1). The conference proceedings were published as a report, *Oxford and Working Class Education* (reprinted in Harrop, 1987: 79-269). What the report reveals was that much of the impetus for modern adult education came from a sense of change in the political presence of the working classes and the dangers which might follow their estrangement from the middle classes.

The demand that the universities shall serve all classes derives much additional significance from changes which are taking place in the constitution of English society and in the distribution of political power. The most conspicuous symptoms of such changes to which we refer have been the growth of Labour Representation in the House of Commons and on the Municipal bodies, the great increase in the membership of political associations which claim to express the ideals of at least a considerable section of the working classes, the increasing interest taken by trade unions, which till recent years were purely industrial organisations, in political action, and the growing demand for a widening in the sphere of social organisation ... [Further] the increasing complexity of industrial organisation, and the growing tendency of different classes to live in different quarters of the same town ... is making it increasingly difficult for the various sections of the community to appreciate each other’s circumstances or aspirations. In modern life there is much which tends to the separation of classes, and little which brings them together. For this reason it seems important that the leaders of every class should have an opportunity of obtaining a wide outlook on the historical development and economic condition of the whole English community, such as is given by a University education<sup>1</sup>

(quoted in Harrop, 1987: 142-43).

The report was insistent, however, that educated workpeople remain in the class in which they are born and in so doing raise its level from within. ‘To those who do this their education will be a means, not only of developing their own powers of enjoyment, but of enabling them to exercise an influence for good in the social life of their factory and town’ (quoted in Harrop, 1987: 176). What the report articulated was a governmental rationality whose *raison d’être* was to train useful workpeople so that they might penetrate working-class communities and disseminate hegemonic cultural practices through their exemplary conduct. In short, adult learners became agents with which to regulate the conduct of others:

If a class is formed under the control of members of the working-class societies, its influence filters through a hundred different channels, and may leaven a whole town. Every member of it is a missionary of education in a continually expanding field, and spreads habits of criticism and reflection among his fellows in a way that is impossible if education is organised from above

(quoted in Harrop, 1987: 152).

Hence the emphasis the WEA placed upon co-operation between tutors and students. Rather than the tutors deciding what the students should study, syllabuses were decided by both tutors and students. Also, classes were organised by autonomous districts and local branches. As the WEAs founder, Albert Mansbridge, put it:

Everywhere pointed to the fact that educational supply, even if devised by excellent and devoted people, was almost entirely useless unless there was co-operation with

those who were to be attracted to use it ... The initiative must lie with the students. They must say how, why, what, or when they wish to study

(Mansbridge, 1920: xviii).

In other words, modern adult education was less concerned with the dissemination of knowledge than it was with endowing individuals with new capacities for self-development and self-regulation. 'Tutorial classes are less than nothing if they concern themselves merely with the acquisition or dissemination of knowledge. They are in reality concerned with the complete development of those who compose them' (Mansbridge, 1913: 8-9).<sup>2</sup> The development of 'character', understood as something bound up with 'the vitality and efficiency of the social organism' (Roberts, 2004: 178), was particularly important for the formation of liberal adult subjects. If Britain was to prosper as a democratic nation-state, its public would have to internalise new social habits modelled on the 'active exercise of freedom' and 'the government of the will' (Joyce, 2003: 118).<sup>3</sup> Hence the WEAs precept for teaching adults 'how to think and not what to think'.

### **Adult Educationalists as 'Good Shepherds'**

One crucial –though perhaps less obvious- characteristic of the tutorial class was its facilitation of the hierarchical observation of working-class communities (cf. Foucault, 1991: 170-77). The part the tutor played in this was of paramount importance. Robert Peers, the first university Professor in Adult Education, provides us with what is undoubtedly one of the most lucid expositions from this period of the kind of observational methods that were to be utilised and it is worth quoting at length:

The modern tendency in all forms of education is to stress the necessity of developing the individual as an individual ... The centre of gravity is placed in the living, active pupil rather than in the subject taught, and this attitude clearly implies that the teacher must seek to know his individual pupils as closely as he knows the subjects he professes to teach ... the tutor should set about getting to know his students as intimately as possible – the details of their occupations, their interests and hobbies, the political and religious opinions which form the background of their thinking, their home conditions, their ambitions ... Once the tutor has grasped the special meaning which the movement has for his students, he will realise that his responsibilities are by no means confined to the weekly meeting of the class ... If the subject of study is to have any real meaning, it must be built into the personal background of the student and brought into relation to the experience which has shaped and is shaping his life. Thus it is important that the tutor should learn, by informal contacts, to appreciate the temperament and the relevant circumstances of each student

(Peers, 1934: 119 & 157).

The tutor was not only a means of disseminating exemplary knowledge and good conduct; they were also instrumental as a means of effecting discreet surveillance.<sup>4</sup> It was imperative that the tutor know as much about his students as was possible, that is to render them knowable. Hence some adult educationalists started to live in close proximity to their students; and those that did not were encouraged to take an active interest and participate in the communities in which they taught. Students, in turn, were encouraged to reveal to their tutors and one another their experiences and consciousness. In so doing it was possible for government to have a more accurate understanding of the mass of adult learners and their multiplicity of individual elements and social relations. And whilst there were limits to this technique inasmuch meeting places were varied and often *ad hoc*, what was striking about the

surveillance apparatus peculiar to modern adult education was its attempts to penetrate the private cultural spheres of the home and entire communities.

Though surveillance was undoubtedly one of the more salient features of modern adult education, it was not an end in itself. Following Foucault (2002: 298-311) and his analysis of the development of pastoral techniques of government in Christianity, we can see the mobilisation of modern adult educationalists as being in some way analogous to the ancient Hebraic conceptions of pastoral power modelled on the 'shepherd-flock' relation (cf. Dean, 1999: 73-83).<sup>5</sup> Just as the pastoral relationship in Christianity is between God, the pastor and the pastorate, one can trace a similar 'shepherd-flock' relationship in the provision of adult education in early twentieth-century Britain. Particularly important was the responsibility of the tutor to devote his time and energy to knowing each of his tutees particular needs and activities; like the 'good shepherd' tutors were responsible for guiding and caring for their flock of learners, to improve the lives of each and every one of them, in order to ensure their salvation.

In short, modern adult education was inextricably entwined with the history of Christian morality and pedagogy, in the sense that adult learners were subjects of pastorship, albeit of a secular kind. The crucial difference between earlier forms of pastoral government and that operationalised by the various functionaries of modern adult education was that citizenship was the principal disciplinary objective driving pastoral guidance in the early twentieth century. Hence the intertwining of civic duty with the idea of religious salvation, requiring adult learners to renounce any cultural practices that detract from the realisation of a political rationality best characterised as 'civil prudence' (see Dean, 1999: 84-8), a kind of political Stoicism that require its subjects adhere to self-mastery, meditation, obedience and abstinence. In other words, the flock voluntarily comply with the shepherd's will, and in doing so, they pledge their obedience and not to stray from the path of righteousness.

### **Revolting Students**

Of course, the reality of adult education was more agonistic. Diametrically opposed to so-called co-operative adult education was the movement for Independent Working-Class Education, which emerged with the founding of Ruskin College in 1899. The aim of the college was, in the words of one of its founders, Mrs Walter Vrooman, to 'take men who have been merely condemning our institutions and to teach them, instead, to transform these institutions so that in place of talking against the world they will begin methodically and scientifically to possess the world' (cited in Mansbridge, 1920: 7-8; Peers, 1934: 36). What this involved, in fact, were endless attempts to 'sandpaper' the rougher characteristics of the students, proposals for closer links with the University of Oxford and interference with academic policy<sup>6</sup>.

Not surprisingly, the college's early history was marked by much student dissent (see Jennings, 1977: 6). Two of the more significant events to arise from this malcontent were the setting up of the 'Plebs League' in 1908 and the infamous student strike of 1909. Several of the students were expelled and, subsequently, formed the Central Labour College in August 1909, later renamed the National Council of Labour Colleges in January 1922. Unlike co-operative adult education providers, the Labour Colleges were, in the words of one of the dissident Ruskin students, W. W. Craik (1964: 86), committed to 'knowledge for action' rather than 'knowledge for its own sake'. In other words, the Labour Colleges properly championed independent working-class education, whilst state approved adult education associations offered its students a liberal education. Furthermore, the Labour Colleges never sought recognition from the Board of Education, relying instead on the Trades Union Congress for their funding. Hence their constitutional object was: 'To further the interests of independent working class education as a partisan effort to improve the position of Labour in

the present and to aid in the abolition of wage-slavery'. And their method was to offer assistance 'in the formation of classes in social sciences', and 'such classes [were] to be maintained and controlled, wherever possible, by Trade Unions, Trade Councils, or other working class organisations'. Nor were the Labour Colleges afraid of engaging in polemic through their monthly left-wing newspaper, *Plebs*, which endlessly attacked liberal adult education as a ruling class stratagem. For example, an editorial published in October 1929 suggested that,

... the British governing class has never lacked representatives who appreciate how vital it is to control the education of the workers. As the demand for education grew in the working-class ranks, the governing class has not hesitated to spend large sums of money ... to inculcate in the minds of the workers the social theories necessary to ensure the continuance of the present order of society. It is true that with its growth, the working-class movement becomes more and more sceptical of the governing-class's direct methods of education. With an adaptation that does it credit, the governing class, however, has surmounted this difficulty for the time being by retiring into background and, by means of grants and through its trained educationalists from the universities, has maintained control over the education provided by bodies that have the appearance of being purely working-class ... With a class cunning that is difficult to beat, the governing-class has not made the mistake of keeping too tight a reign on such educational bodies ...

The capacity for state approved adult education to effect governance from a distance is not in doubt. However, the manner in which the Labour Colleges sought to efface co-operative adult education was misplaced. Though the likes of the WEA were funded by the state this does not mean they were first and foremost an ideological state apparatus. It was not just a straight forward case of who pays the piper calls the tune. More than this, adult education's *raison d'être* was not social control, but rather as a means for forming an adult working-class population with useful habits. It existed as a discipline rather than as an ideology. It was also an apparatus for regulating the relations between the different social classes of the nation's populace as a whole (cf. Jones & Williamson, 1979). Understood thus, the deployment of adult education was not so much an attempt to contain and regulate the emerging power of the labour movement, but rather an effect of a whole economy of cultural and educational technologies whose rationality was to ensure the well-being and prosperity of the populace as a whole. Its source of power was founded upon a new solidarity and universal relation between educated and uneducated.

## **Post-War Reconstruction**

During and after the First World War there was a pronounced proliferation in discourses which postulated that advancements in the provision of adult education and, more particularly, 'educative-recreation', were necessary pre-conditions for effecting social, political and economic reform. Of the many enquiries that were specially concerned with post-war reconstruction, I have chosen to concentrate on two in particular: (i) a sociological survey conducted in Sheffield entitled, *The Equipment of the Workers*; (ii) and the *1919 Report* of the Adult Education sub-committee for the Ministry of Reconstruction.

### **The Equipment of the Worker**

One of the most significant attempts to document the cultural milieu of the working-classes in the early twentieth century was a survey conducted in Sheffield in 1916 (Freeman, 1919). The survey was organised by Arnold Freeman, social reformer and founder of the Sheffield Educational Settlement. The survey was designed 'to cover all those individuals referred to by the rich as 'the workers', 'the toilers', 'the masses', 'the common people', 'the lower classes',

‘the poor’, ‘the proletariat’, ‘Labour’, and ‘they’ and ‘them’ (ibid.: 34). Based on data from interviewees asked about their educational and political ideas, uses of leisure, musical tastes, aesthetic feelings, social and religious activities, and reading habits, the working classes were divided into three categories: 20 to 26 percent were considered intellectually ‘well-equipped’, 67 to 73 percent were ‘inadequately-equipped’, whilst 5 to 8 percent were deemed to be ‘mal-equipped’.<sup>7</sup> So-called ‘well-equipped’ workers were considered to

consist of men and women who have been awakened to the seriousness and the splendor of existence. They are active individuals; they can cope with life; they desire fine things; they live for noble ends. Mingling in them variously, according to their individualities, are intellectuals, aesthetic and moral elements that give them a positive spiritual value to the community

(Freeman, 1919: 4).

Indeed, some of the interviewees were judged to be well-equipped on grounds of them being respectable and morally righteous, not because of their intellect necessarily. ‘Inadequately equipped’ workers, on the other hand, were defined as

men and women whose distinguishing characteristic is that they are asleep ... the mass of them let shameful slumber thrall them; they muddle through life; they are spiritually inert; they desire to rest and be left alone; they do not live for ends beyond immediate satisfactions; they are emphatically not ‘bad’ people ... but at present their value to the community is economic rather than spiritual, that of beasts of burden rather than that of free human beings

(Freeman, 1919: 6).

The least desirable of the working-classes were those that constituted the ‘mal-equipped’. They were deemed to read ‘nothing of any value’; be possessed by ‘root-desires’ which were ‘contemptible’; and seek recreational pleasure through the likes of ‘Football, Picture Palace, Music Hall and Public-Houses’ (Freeman, 1919: 49). Moreover, ‘their existence (so long as their defects remain uncured) is a positive evil for the community’; they were the ‘rotters’, the ‘wastrels’, the ‘Yaboos’ (ibid: 60).

Not surprisingly, it was the mal-equipped who were of particular concern and the main object for cultural reform. However, for Freeman, ‘the fundamental solution’ lay not in social reform *per se* but in a program of educative-recreation designed to inoculate any undesirable subjectivities. That is to say, education and the ‘proper’ uses of leisure were increasingly brought to bear upon one another to form a disciplinary regime whose primary function was the cultural penetration of the working-class populace. Again, the central preoccupation was not so much with training the mind as it was with disciplining the body in certain conducts of behaviour and cultural habits.

Finally, the survey was characteristic of many early twentieth-century sociological investigations which were concerned with the collection of statistical data that enabled the classification of human subjects, particularly the measurement of deviancy. Freeman was less concerned with revealing working-class social conditions than he was with creating a hierarchy of disciplined subjectivities.

### **1919 Report**

The 1919 report of the Adult Education sub-committee of the Ministry for Reconstruction had more diffuse concerns. Its terms of reference were: ‘to consider the provision for, and possibilities of, Adult Education (other than technical or vocational) in Great Britain, and to make recommendations’ (HMSO, 1919: 1). Though the Committee published four reports, it



is the recommendations of the *Final Report* that are especially interesting, not least because it reiterated many of the liberal governmental rationalities already outlined in the above, viz. practices of self-governance and educated citizenship.

We need to think out educational methods and possibilities from the new point of view, that of the adult learning to be a citizen. All this can only be effected by giving him a share of responsibility for his own education, a choice of the subjects which he is to study, and of the teacher who is to help him in his study. He must co-operate actively with that teacher and with his own fellow-workers

(HMSO, 1919: 4).

The report outlined an economy of political and social relations with transparent objectives (e.g. the economic recovery of the nation, the proper use of the responsibilities by millions of new voters, and rational uses of leisure) all of which were aimed at training the adult working-class population in the art of government. Moreover, we yet again see the reproduction of a discourse aimed at fostering an educated citizenship, community and nationhood: 'the goal of all education must be citizenship – that is, the rights and duties of each individual as a member of the community; and the whole process must be the development of the individual in his relation to the community' (HMSO, 1919: 4). Note how the self is constructed through the same hierarchy of collective identities. And then, when we might have had politics or economics or philosophy as the best route to citizenship, what we actually get as the binding agent of this enterprise is education in the form of the Arts, arguably, a very peculiar and English view of what constitutes civilisation, the national heritage and the educated citizen.

[Education] must draw its materials from the natural impulses of common-life, including its labour and its recreations ... The natural bridge between the discipline of the mind and practical activities is to be found in the Arts, which unite thought with emotion and action

(HMSO, 1919: 86).

The report thus expands the definition of education so as to include less formal educational activities such as 'the activities of musical societies, the meetings of mutual improvement societies...' (HMSO, 1919: 34). That is to say, the report adopts an elastic interpretation of education and in so doing attempts to make recreation and education concomitant with one another. Indeed, Harold Wiltshire (1980: 15) has suggested that the Report can be understood according to four priorities of meaning which can be imagined as arrangement of concentric circles: (1) at the centre is 'civic education' (e.g. history and the social sciences); (2) around this a wider circle of general 'cognitive education' (e.g. languages and the natural sciences); (3) around these an even wider circle of 'expressive education' (e.g. arts and crafts); (4) finally, around them all is an outer circle of 'educative-recreation' (e.g. theatres, libraries, recreational and social activities generally). In other words, earlier models of adult education based on vocational training were likely to be less influential than those associated with modern adult education with an apparently liberal emphases on arts and culture.

The way in which educative-recreation is 'put into discourse' accords well with Foucault's carceral archipelago thesis (1991: 293-308) inasmuch it was essential that any formal distinction between education (in the strictest sense) vis-à-vis the uses of leisure be blurred if the carceral continuum was to reach into the everyday practices of the adult working-class population. Arguably, the emergence of so-called rational recreation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented the very limits of social governance. That is to say, the synthesis of educative-recreation represented the furthest removed of the concentric circles at this point in time. It was the governmental technology *par excellence*. What was essentially a disciplinary apparatus was made to appear as a virtuous and neutral public service on the one hand, and a pleasurable recreation on the other.

## Learning over the Air

What I have so far attempted to demonstrate is the ‘bureaucratic-pastoral’ character of modern adult education in early twentieth-century Britain. Assuming this proposition to be still tenable I would now like to turn my attention to what was probably the most salient attempt whereby modern adult education sought to domesticate educated-citizenship, viz. in and through the emergence of public service broadcasting —under the aegis of the BBC—and its deployment as an apparatus of educative-recreation during the inter-war period.

A major activity of the BBC from its inception was educational broadcasting. Indeed, the first word given as a central purpose for broadcasting was ‘education’. Even as a private company, the BBC had been enjoined to broadcast ‘educational matter’ (HMSO, 1923a: 4). Both the Sykes and the Crawford parliamentary committees of inquiry confirmed that broadcasting was of great ‘educative value’ providing high standards were maintained (HMSO, 1923b & 1925). Broadcasting’s educative potential was further underlined by John Reith —the first Director-General of the BBC— who made his own sharp distinction between the permanent benefits of educational broadcasting and the ephemeral satisfactions of entertainment.<sup>8</sup>

... it was early realised that there were very great educational possibilities in broadcasting ... Entertainment, pure and simple, quickly grows tame; dissatisfaction and boredom result. If hours are to be occupied agreeably, it would be a sad reflection on human intelligence if it were contended that entertainment, in the accepted sense of the term, was the only means for doing so

(Reith, 1924: 147).

As well as general educative programmes, the BBC inaugurated specific educational broadcasts both for children and adults. Of these, the BBC regarded adult education to be especially crucial to the post-war reconstruction effort, particularly in terms of creating an educated democracy. Hence the first systematic provision for broadcast adult education started in October 1924, shortly after educational broadcasting had been established as an administrative department in July 1924. The appointment of its first Director, J. C. Stobart, seconded from His Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education, was reported on the front page on the *Radio Times* (13 June 1924) under the heading ‘A Broadcasting University’.<sup>9</sup> The peculiarity and significance of a civil servant being loaned to what was still then a business organisation did not go unnoticed and was ‘taken as evidence of the Government’s realisation of the national importance of broadcasting’.

For Stobart, broadcast education was as much about uplifting public tastes as it was disseminating knowledge: ‘... it was early recognised that wireless would exercise a powerful influence, for better or for worse, on the public taste. The British Broadcasting Company has aimed at making their influence raise the standards in this respect’ (*The Daily Chronicle*, 11 November 1926). Stobart also saw entertainment and education as synonymous: entertainment ought to have a rational purpose and education ought to be enjoyable. How to effect this synthesis was expanded upon by Reith, who advocated broadening the meaning of both terms.

We must try to make the word ‘education’ sound a little less formal, and perhaps somebody will some day produce a better term. Let us also, however, make the word ‘entertainment’ a little less narrow in its significance than some would have it. No one here disputes that among the function of broadcasting is to entertain; but if we were only to ‘entertain’, and if the word were to be used in its narrow sense, it would be quite impossible to fill up all the hours of transmission agreeably

(*The Listener*, 30 April 1930).

This problem of the relationship between an entertainment medium and the process of education was a dilemma specific to the BBC. No previous model or discourse but adult education had been obliged to think through whether education should be entertaining or entertainment educational. The mass nature of the wireless as a medium raised this dilemma in acute form and much of the debate around adult education in the BBC would focus upon it.

The administrative work of the education department was greatly aided by the appointment of the Central Educational Advisory Committee in August 1924. Each regional station had its own Local Educational Advisory Committee, thus ensuring the co-operation of Local Education Authorities (see Briggs, 1961: 242). Though not the BBC's first advisory body, the Central Educational Advisory Committee was one of the most influential and far-reaching. Furthermore, the BBC stressed co-operation with existing adult education agencies. To quote Reith (1924: 147), to 'bring the best of everything into the greatest number of homes' meant 'that many educative influences must be stirred'. In October 1923, Reith thus wrote to The British Institute for Adult Education, 'requesting' it 'to discuss collaboration' (cited in Robinson, 1982: 41). The response was a series of articles in the *Journal of Adult Education*, first published in 1926.

One of the more interesting articles was by J. C. Stobart, who emphasised the importance and social magnitude of wireless

as a means of communication which brings three or four million homes into a single circle of influence, [wireless] is bound to have a powerful effect ... upon the social life, the civilisation and culture of the nation. By their choice of music and drama, by their presentation of news, and selection of speakers on current topics ... the British Broadcasting Corporation are bound to act as an agency of Education in the broadest sense

(Stobart, 1927: 212).

Note the continuity and strategic significance of the discourse, not least the emphasis it places upon civilisation, culture and nation. Also in 1927 R. S. Lambert, then in charge of broadcast adult education, wrote to members of the WEA seeking to combine its 'long experience and knowledge of what is wanted educationally' with the BBC as 'an instrument of unparalleled range and power for reaching the mass of the people' (cited in Briggs, 1965: 218). Four years later the WEA journal noted that 'the BBC is doing a very important educational service, the full results of which cannot yet be seen. All concerned with adult education should remember that a new ally has suddenly come into the field' (ibid.: 220).

## **New Ventures In Adult Education**

Of the various inter-war reports directly concerned with broadcast adult education, by far the most significant was *New Ventures in Broadcasting* (1928). The report was the outcome of a joint committee of enquiry between the British Institute for Adult Education and the BBC into the educational possibilities of broadcasting, chaired by Henry Hadow, vice-chancellor of the University of Sheffield. The tone of the report was overwhelmingly optimistic. 'The educational possibilities of [wireless] are almost incalculable. Even if no single item labelled educational ever appeared in the programmes, broadcasting would still be a great educational influence' (BBC, 1928: 1). The report also considered the bureaucratic advantages afforded by wireless: it was cheap and ubiquitous. 'Unlike the lecturer, it can be everywhere at once. It is the perfect method by which to conduct what has been described as "insidious education"' (ibid.). More than this, the report recommended an expanded concept of education, one which took measure of the ordinary person's everyday commitments to their work and their family

vis-à-vis hours available for the use of leisure. It was acknowledged that a thirst for education might not be a priority for the ordinary working man.

There is ... a large body of hard-working people who feel disciplined in the evenings to do [no] more than go home, smoke a pipe, read the paper, or play a quiet game. After a day's hard work, it is natural to feel the need for amusement and recreation. They see comparatively little of their wives and families except at the end of the day, and they have no natural inclination to set out again after the evening meal to a lecture or class

(BBC, 1928: 26).

Among the report's main recommendations were: (1) the establishing of wireless listening groups; (2) the setting up of a Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education comprised of representatives from important national bodies concerned with adult education and Area Councils representing local educational interests; (3) and the launching of a weekly educational broadcasting journal to supplement the aids-to-study pamphlets (BBC, 1928: 69 & 75-79; Briggs, 1965: 219; Robinson, 1982: 45). The report also recommended that broadcast adult education should supplement not displace existing adult education agencies. The objective was thus one of co-operation and mutual goal-sharing.

The Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education was formally brought into existence in November 1928. Its membership was wide-ranging and representative of the various adult learning agencies.<sup>10</sup> The Council based its policy on its belief 'in the unique and decisive influence of wireless on the future of civilisation' (WAC R14/124). Two key objectives were identified. First, it aimed 'at inducing among listeners a high standard of intellectual curiosity, of critical ability and of tolerance to all views held and expressed with a sincerity and a regard for truth'. This required 'a respect, even a reverence for truth in all its aspects and a desire for knowledge unfettered by dogmas of any kind'. Second came 'the more particular and tangible objective': to educate listeners in 'an appreciation of the forces of transformation and change in the world about them', especially 'the developments of science, the enlargement of knowledge and the evolution of social custom and practices'.

Here we see the general goals of culture, civilisation, and democracy being translated into educational principles: the reverence for 'truth' (as opposed to 'dogma') and the understanding of 'science', 'knowledge' and 'custom'. Note the neutrality of the discourse: not a single truth we can tell them but a respect for truth; not a subservience to the natural order but an understanding of scientific and social change. It verges on advocacy of a kind of sociology but one clearly oriented to a dispassionate understanding which might well produce an urge to reform but not to revolution.

Finally, the report saw broadcast adult education as a means of extending the outreach of the adult education movement:

The adult education movement, vigorous as it is, touches as yet only a small proportion of the population. Broadcasting, which is the latest agency to place itself at the disposal of this movement, can fill many of the existing gaps; it can widen the field from which students are drawn, by its power to reach and stimulate a large public; it can provide a means of education for those beyond the reach of other agencies; it can put listeners in touch with the leaders of thought and the chief experts in many subjects ...

(BBC, 1928: 87).

Notwithstanding the odd criticism,<sup>11</sup> the report was well-received by both the national and regional press. There was overwhelming approval for the report's insistence on further

developing educational broadcasting (see WAC, Newspaper Cuttings: Education, 1926-28). One of the more salient points of agreement was regarding the report's suggestion that the next census ought to ascertain how families spend their evening's leisure, a subject the BBC was itself to investigate. There was also a great deal of support for the report's advocacy for a more elastic conception of education so as to encourage educative-recreation.

### **Wireless Listening Groups**

Though always a minority, the main focus of broadcast adult education was the organisation and development of wireless listening groups (see WAC, A/261; Williams, 1941).<sup>12</sup> The first listening groups started in the spring of 1927. By the winter 1931-2 there were 922 registered listening groups following a regular series of twelve talks (BBC, 1932; Briggs, 1965: 220; Robinson, 1982: 46 & 54). The stated object of listening groups was to develop 'the capacity to listen to other people's ideas even when they are unpalatable, and to follow up by discussion and calm analysis' (*The Listener*, 23 January 1929). Each group had a designated leader whose role was to 'guide and shape the discussion and know sufficient about the subject to take a lead with confidence'. A Board of Education inquiry (HMSO, 1933a: 9) considered group leaders to be 'the keystone of the listening group'. Peers (1934: 86) thought that the person chosen as leader should not only 'be competent to guide the discussion' but also 'have the ability to restrain his own and others' garrulity' (see also Williams, 1941: 240-43). Group leaders were not necessarily required to have specialist knowledge but should be 'educated' and 'respectable' persons from business and the professions.

Like WEA tutors, wireless group leaders were deployed as pastoral pedagogues. Just as the tutorial class system was concerned with effecting disciplinary practices of self-regulation and surveillance, the principal *raison d'être* for listening groups was to inculcate listeners in self-regulatory practices that were concurrent with the art of governance, that is rational discussion, tolerance, restraint and impartiality. It was important that the popular masses be taught how to think for themselves and how to imitate exemplary conduct. Understood thus, listening groups were as much to do with contact between conduct and conduct as they were with contact between mind and mind. Many of the committees of inquiry into the educative potentialities of broadcasting affirm this. The Hadow Report (BBC, 1928: 26), for example, was of the opinion that adult education generally 'can do much to secure the balance between reason and emotion which makes sound decisions possible'. Similarly, a Board of Education inquiry (HMSO, 1933a: 30) into Wireless Listening Groups thought that 'the value of real discussion lies in being able to take a particular topic out of a partisan or highly controversial atmosphere into an atmosphere, detached, disinterested and scholarly'. The report goes on to state that 'insofar as the Listening Groups can help build up this dispassionate and critical outlook, they are performing a useful service for the community; but this can only be done if the members are willing to undergo the discipline which real discussion entails' (*ibid.*). Yet again we can see the recurrence of a discursive practice that seeks to de-politicise the discussion of social issues likely to cause conflict of public opinion. Such differences were to be suppressed in the interests of the community at large, the nation.

A further characteristic of broadcast adult education was the way in which the listening public was constituted according to a hierarchy of listening subjectivities. By the 1930s the BBC began to differentiate between the casual and the serious listener. A. C. Cameron, then Secretary of the Central Committee for Group Listening, described those listeners that did not wish to commit to being members of approved adult education agencies as 'the Second XI of adult education' (*The Highway*, November 1937). A special supplement published in *The Listener* (18 September 1935) aimed to encourage critical listeners who might 'form their own opinions about the subjects and views which they hear propounded in wireless talks' since 'broadcasting can only be good provided listeners will do their part'. Similarly, the Hadow Report stressed the effort required of the committed listener.

In the first place, he [sic] must realise that he can scarcely expect to get the greatest amount of enjoyment from the programmes unless he is willing to choose the items that appeal to him, and reserve the time to listen to them. Few people in search of recreation or enjoyment go to the theatre, concert, cinema or lecture hall without finding out first what they are likely to see or hear ... the serious listener will find that he will get most from his set if he studies programmes beforehand and plans his other engagements accordingly

(BBC, 1928: 69).

What one can discern from the above is that there was an order of discourse in which the serious listener was deemed to be culturally superior and something the casual listener should therefore aspire to. Casual listeners, that is listeners who lay outside the scope of discussion groups, presented a special difficulty inasmuch as their cultural habits and comportment were unknowable. Consequently, they were not as easily subjectable to techniques of individualisation and normalisation. This was problematic from a governmentality point of view since it presented an affront to the order of proper conduct necessary for ensuring social solidarity and civility. Converting casual listeners into serious listeners was thus crucial to the construction of an informed and ordered listening public, as the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education Executive Committee recognised:

The welfare of our nation depends upon a rapid increase in the number of those who were ready to think for themselves and ready to exercise individual judgement, ready to enter into a real relationship pooling their own mental resources with others in order that all together, as each gained some glimpse of the whole variety of truth, they might shape their policy as a people with reference to the whole of it

(WAC R14/120/4).

The Council was particularly anxious to curtail ‘that element in contemporary life’ whose qualities were deemed to be ‘a certain pugnacity of temper with a herd mentality’ (WAC R14/120/1). Such an unknowable mass was potentially unruly and liable to rebel. It was essential that as much as possible be known about the many facets of the listening public: its social composition, cultural habits, tastes and preferences; especially that element of the adult listening public which remained untouched by educational broadcasting. Hence listener research becomes an essential administrative feature from the late thirties onwards, whereupon R. J. E. Silvey (1977) was recruited to the BBC to establish audience research on a systematic basis. Whilst many in the BBC were sceptical about audience research, not least Reith, it soon became an indispensable diagnostic instrument for calibrating and quantifying popular opinion and ascertaining the demographics of its multifaceted audience (see Scannell & Cardiff, 1991: 234 & 375-80). Indeed, it was integral to the wider emergence and development of what Nicolas Rose (1999) has called ‘government by numbers’.

### **Educative-Leisure**

Before concluding I want to briefly consider some further examples of how leisure itself was problematised during this historical conjuncture —especially in and through the BBC— not least because it was felt by many early twentieth century social progressives that education would facilitate the proper use of leisure. For example, Ernest Barker, Principal of King’s College, London, thought that, ‘education is a necessity if men are to gain the faculty of using leisure easily, happily, and fruitfully’ (Barker, 1926: 32). More than this, he feared that,

Leisure without faculty for its use may even be a mother of mischief; men may dissipate themselves in frivolities, and worse than frivolities, because they do not know how to concentrate themselves upon better things. A society which guarantees

leisure is guaranteeing something which may be useless, and even dangerous, unless it adds, or at any rate encourages its members to add, the one thing which will enable the gift to be used – a continuous process of education

(Barker, 1926: 32).

Of the adult educational broadcasts which specially addressed the problem of leisure, probably the most interesting was *The Changing World* (see WAC, BBC Talks and Lectures, Vol. 6, September 1931 - July 1932 & R129/3/1; Briggs, 1965: 220-21; Robinson, 1982: 53-54; Williams, 1941: 181-83). The series covered six main subjects, ran for a period of six months, and was broadcast five evenings a week between 7.30pm to 8.00pm. The series was accompanied by six study-aid pamphlets, one master pamphlet (BBC, 1932) and a Board of Education publication (HMSO, 1933a).

The scope and aim of the series was to ‘provide a survey of the many changes in outward circumstance, and in the evolution of thought and of values, which have brought into being the world as it is today’. Though each series of talks differed in subject matter, all centred around three key questions, one of which concerned itself with asking the listener to reconsider their civic responsibilities in the light of certain prevailing forces of change to ‘remodel our ways of life’ and ‘the machinery of government’.

One of the talks, *The Modern State*, was introduced by J. A. Hobson in a study-to-aid pamphlet. As well as outlining the desirability of broadcasting being a public utility, Hobson also expounded the educative potentialities of broadcasting:

... if, as may hold, the time has come for applying a conscious art of Government to the ordering of public affairs, in local, national, and international spheres, the all-important question of the part which the ordinary citizen shall play in this great new enterprise will depend upon the reliability of this new instrument [i.e. broadcasting] of popular education, more than upon any other fact or force. Not merely, or mainly, as the provider of sound information, but as the chief stimulus and irritant of thought and feeling, broadcasting must come to rank as the ‘popular educator’...

(WAC, R129/3/1).

Another of the talks was *Education and Leisure*. Listeners were exhorted to form discussion groups and to consider such questions as: (1) ‘How do think leisure ought to be employed?’ (2) ‘How far is it necessary to educate people in the proper use of leisure?’ (3) ‘In what ways would education need to be altered if this were to be regarded as an essential part of it?’ (4) ‘Has the cinema in your district made any difference to the popularity of the public houses?’ (5) ‘Do people stay at home more or less than they did in 1900?’ (6) ‘Can there be a civilised community without a leisure class?’ (WAC, R129/3/1). What we see here is yet another attempt to elicit quantifiable information from a public who will then become the object of its own confessional discourse.

The accompanying study-aid pamphlet, entitled *Learning to Live*, specified how education and leisure should be harnessed towards the same goals.

We have to envisage education and leisure as forces of transformation ... we are not permitted to put education or leisure in watertight compartments. We are not concerned with education merely as education or with leisure merely as leisure. We are concerned rather with the whole nexus of our social life, and with education and leisure as forces within which are continuously at work changing and altering its character and its quality

(MacMurray, 1932: 1).

Leisure was taken to be an index of: 'the quality of our humanity' since 'leisure ... is the condition of culture, for culture is merely the expression of free human activity' (MacMurray, 1932: 38 & 25). Hence the pedagogical imperative that we 'learn to live', 'to be trained to use our freedom, and to employ our leisure to the best advantage' (ibid.: 25). Not surprisingly, the main condition for the proper use of leisure 'is the possession of a spontaneous, self-controlling, self-directing mind' (ibid.: 39). Rationality becomes the pre-eminence of the mind over emotions and the body. The idea of civilisation is one where the mind controls our baser natures. Note also the prominence of culture here and the way in which it was reinterpreted as encompassing leisure. In other words, the dilemma of the relationship between education and entertainment was inserted into a new problematic of the uses of leisure. In this way the BBC positioned itself as both provider of leisure and arbiter as to how to best use leisure. Here then, was a kind of solution to the tension between education and entertainment.

Consciousness of the leisure problem was also evident at a conference organised by the National Institute of Industrial Psychology and the British Institute for Adult Education, held at Queen Mary Hall, London, in 1937 (see WAC, R14/42/1). The purpose of the conference was 'to discuss how people might more usefully spend their leisure time', and was attended by a variety of national organisations, including the BBC, all of which were in some way concerned with cultivating educative-recreation. The conference proceedings identified the problems of leisure provision as being of increasing sociological and national importance.

Opportunities for amusement, recreation and self-improvement are rapidly multiplying, but much confusion and overlapping exists in their use. We have found a striking consensus of opinion among all the principal organisations concerned with leisure that there is a distinct need for a more exact assessment and co-ordination of the facilities available ... In order to deal successfully with the social problems arising from the increase in leisure hours, the fullest possible information must be made available to the bodies engaged in practical and educational work in connection with leisure activities.

## Conclusions

What the above passage, and indeed much of this paper, clearly indicates is the extent to which educative-recreation discursive practices prevailed across a plethora of cultural institutions that were summoned to the task of the cultural governance of the adult population. Adult education was just one of many institutional attempts to intervene in the public uses of leisure in an effort to encourage recreational practices whose principal *raison d'être* was to train the adult population in the social, economic and political capacities required for an educated-citizenry. Crucial to this project was that adult education was constructed as a self-acting imperative which the popular classes voluntarily followed in pursuing the abstract rhetoric of 'educated-democracy'. Consider for example the following paragraph from the BBC publication on how to organise discussion groups and what they are for:

... if democracy is to be a real democracy, it must be an educated democracy ... Broadcasting, breaking down the barriers of space, destroying distinctions of class, placing its resources at the service of all men, whether rich or poor, can do more to ensure an educational democracy than any other single agent. Whether it does do all that it can do, depends mainly on the listener

(BBC, 1932: 39).

Similarly, an article to appear in *The Listener* (8 August 1934) reiterated: '... if we are gradually to develop a finer and nobler civilisation, our citizens must care more and know



more'. However, the discourse of educated-citizenship was as much about disciplining citizens in the art of self-government so as to have a deeper sense 'of social responsibility, of sympathy and of the willingness to help in working for a common purpose' as it was with equipping them with abstract rights and freedom. In order to secure governance from a distance it was necessary for individuals to translate the values of a higher and distant authority into their own terms, such that they provided both totalising and individualising normative standards for conduct.<sup>13</sup> It was essential that the populace both in its entirety and as individuals cared more about its civil responsibilities. This was particularly so in the early twentieth-century when governmental attempts to reconstruct a new social order and reinvigorate national efficiency greatly depended upon a useful and productive citizenry. The problem for government, however, was how to effect a technique of power that could at one and the same time wield political power over legal subjects who had certain rights of freedom and pastoral power over live individuals whose welfare must be provided for as an individual and as part of a population. Modern adult education and the corresponding practice of educated-democracy was just one cultural apparatus through which reasons of state and pastorship were realisable.

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<sup>1</sup> This sentiment was further reflected in an article published in the WEA journal, *The Highway*, in January 1909: 'Oxford has been the training ground of our rulers and governors for generations. She knows the value of exactitude, and understands the subtle qualities necessary in the arts of government. She can instruct Labour in this, and the instruction will be turned to good purpose'.

<sup>2</sup> A summary report of the proposals made by the Adult Education Committee for the Ministry of Reconstruction reiterates this broader conception of governance: 'non-vocational adult education must be conducted in an atmosphere of co-operation, and with a large measure of 'self-determination' on the part of the students. An adult class must, in other words, be a self-governing community' (Greenwood, 1920: 16).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Dewey (1917/2004) on the related virtues of 'interest' and 'discipline' in relation to democracy and education.

<sup>4</sup> This method of cultural penetration and surveillance was taken further still by the philanthropic Educational Settlement Movement. Its principal object was to reform working-class communities by living amongst the people they sought to 'help'. As the settlement's founder, Canon Barnett, put it: 'Let those of us who belong to the nation on top make direct personal contact with those belonging to the nation underneath' (cited in Albaya, 1977: 8).

<sup>5</sup> The transformation of Christian pedagogy into a secular technique of governance is more fully explored by Ian Hunter (1994 & 2001) in the historical context of popular education and the emergence of the school.

<sup>6</sup> The most notable instance of interference with academic policy was a scheme proposed in 1907 aimed at reorganising the Ruskin curriculum. Though the proposal was ultimately rejected, it is interesting to note that the central proposal was to substitute the teaching of Sociology and Evolution with Literature, Rhetoric and Temperance (see Jennings, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Rose (2001: 190) notes that the categories roughly approximate to what we might today understand to be working-class intellectuals, respectable working-class and an underclass.

<sup>8</sup> This concern was expressed by Reith even more forcibly in a speech delivered in Glasgow at a conference of Education authorities in 1926: '... the development of broadcasting ... coincides with a critical time in the history of Education. Everybody realises that this generation, and that which follows, is faced with the urgent task of creating an educated democracy on a scale, and to a degree, never before attempted' (BBC, 1927: 15).

<sup>9</sup> Stobart anticipated the possibilities of learning over the air in the form of what he envisaged to be a 'wireless university'. In a memo to Reith (WAC R14/145/1; see Briggs, 1965: 188) Stobart states that one of its main objectives 'would aim at a very broad culture, and would always have in mind the equipping of its pupils for good citizenship and cultured home life, as distinct from training for a particular profession or group of professions'. The university was of course another model (or end goal) of adult education in the WEA's close links with Oxford. Its significance was that cultivated

experts could digress for the benefit of students. This kind of expert lecture would be common in the BBC's adult education broadcasting.

<sup>10</sup> The Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education contained representatives of twenty-two national bodies, including the Board of Education, the Universities, the Local Education Authorities, County Councils, Employers' Organisations, Libraries, Trade Unions, four Area Councils, and most voluntary adult learning agencies (for a full break-down of the Council's membership see BBC, 1932: 2).

<sup>11</sup> In an effort to gauge popular and expert opinion the committee issued a questionnaire to various bodies, one of which was the Wireless League. The League's reply was published in the *Yorkshire Telegraph & Star* (17 August 1927) and stated that 'the primary function of broadcasting is to entertain' and, therefore, did not support overtly educational programmes.

<sup>12</sup> Wireless listening groups were seen by many to be a new tutorial scheme. Indeed the *Westminster Gazette* (12 October 1926) described group listening as 'Oxford and Cambridge by wireless'.

<sup>13</sup> This consensual nature of broadcast adult education was observed by the then Education Officer of the London County Council: 'The strength of this movement for education by wireless lies at the circumference, not at the centre' (BBC, 1932: 10).

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