

Karl Polanyi in this challenging article asks

WHAT KIND OF ADULT EDUCATION

THERE are considerable differences of opinion on this matter. The question is not only how much but also what kind of education is necessary for a working class which is gradually transforming society into a socialist commonwealth. Since it is the mission of this class to take the lead in the great transformation, what intellectual and cultural equipment will enable it to perform that job?

Two entirely different matters are involved: education of the child and education of the adult.

The working class cannot wait until to-day's babies become the educated adults of twenty years hence. To-day's adults must re-educate themselves in order to face up to the tasks of the present—including that of the struggle for the reshaping of the education of their children.

In educating the child the only sound principle is that of one national education for all classes of the population; or, as a worker of the North of England once put it to me, an education "that parents can pass on to their children."

Education of the adult must be, on the contrary, education for the working class, or as I should feel inclined to put it—a genuine Working Class Education. How can we achieve it?

"Non-political" and "Marxist" education

Adult education in Great Britain to-day is, as everybody knows, of two kinds: "non-political" and "Marxist." I would not harshly criticise either, but neither is really satisfactory. The first is not related to the socialist mission of the

Labour at the present time. The tremendous achievement of the movement in the past—the present composition of the House of Commons reveals its magnitude—cannot hide this fact.

It is true that thousands of workers have been advanced in their calling by the help of adult education; that many more have experienced the joy of a broadening flow of knowledge and beauty; that numerous badly needed functionaries of the working-class movement owed their competence to this source; and that the life of the British people would be the poorer for its absence.

Nor do I believe that any purely Marxist education could better this achievement. Unless socialism is unhampered by rigid orthodoxies it must prove a fetter to the emancipation of the working class. Socialist consciousness should not be cramped by dogmas, which can provide only the burning urge for emancipation, without providing the tools of an up-to-date knowledge. To fight his battles, the socialist needs undogmatic instruction. What we must guard against is the infiltration of capitalist outlook under the guise of "objectivity."

Genuine working class education

In other words, we must have genuine working class education. This means instruction on facts and method free of the underlying assumptions of a capitalist society—such as the natural fitness of a condition in which man is supposed to act in everyday life on the

principle of gain; the inevitability of the wage system; the acceptance of a community in which economic activities are removed from the orbit of public life and social morality; the erroneous view that radical change is either impossible or immoral; the evolutionist tenet which holds that all progress is merely a semblance unless it happens spontaneously, "by itself," through the imperceptible growth of the social organism; that planning is the road to serfdom; that popular rule is the natural enemy of culture; and that he who even doubts the unique authority of traditional education puts himself outside the pale.

No education which tacitly accepts assumptions such as these can claim to be education for the working class. By all means do not let us mistake mere factual knowledge, familiarity with conventions, or even the faculty of methodical thinking for education.

Education means the development of human personality out of basic experiences towards basic ends—out of the experience of everyday life, towards the ends of society. For only knowledge that is related to such experience, and only ideals that are directed towards such ends, build up personality.

This alone is education. Apart from this, the collecting of knowledge must degenerate into mere intellectual snobbery, and sensibility become the vehicle of moral decay. Indeed, it is a widespread complaint against our adult education that it tends to make the student feel inwardly helpless, while supposedly endowing him with the armour of

knowledge. No wonder his personality, instead of being reinforced, has been sapped.

"Being at the root of things"

The reason for this is simple. In an industrial society the worker has the advantage of "being at the roots of things." (I heard this most appropriate phrase used by an aged student of mine who had been doing outdoor work over a decade in the service of the Public Assistance authorities).

He cannot help understanding the elements of modern society, since he lives in immediate contact with them. His is an avenue to the understanding of social existence which is denied to the rich man's son. But so is his mission in this society which it is his task to transform.

Thus the world of labour is built of different atoms and is moving towards different ends from those of the world of property.

What the one knows best, the other knows least; and their awareness and interest move in opposite directions. To teach political science, economics, social history, industrial-organisation, local government, anthropology, universal history or international affairs in disregard of this difference means to deprive the worker of a chance of making a study of these subjects a part of true education.

He may in the end have gained more knowledge of facts, and he may have learnt to appreciate all possible opinions, but he will at the

same time have become incapable of standing by any conviction of his own.

He has only acquired the semblance of an education. The results are disastrous.

A challenge to academic education

It will be a tremendous job to recast our curricula, to reshape our methods of instruction, to redraw the frontiers of subjects so as to produce an education for the working class that will be a challenge to academic education.

Some tentative advance has already been made. The Universities are beginning to see that the passing on of traditional knowledge in tutorial classes is not enough. Trade Unions feel the urgent need of a trained personnel which will be able to use its knowledge in the creative efforts now called for.

But the strongest impulse has come from Labour itself. The political maturity of the working class stands revealed by the election results. Labour has shed its inferiority complex, that baneful legacy of the past, and is prepared to change the world. It is ready for a genuine working class education.

**"Non-political" and
"Marxist" education**

Adult education in Great Britain to-day is, as everybody knows, of two kinds: "non-political" and "Marxist." I would not harshly criticise either, but neither is really satisfactory. The first is not related to the socialist mission of the working class; the second is too narrow in its interpretation of that mission.

What we need is an adult education committed to the socialist mission of the working class, yet formulating that mission in broad human terms.

I have learnt personally to appreciate the contribution made both by "non-political" and "Marxist" instruction. Forty years of my life were spent in the workers' educational movement—ten of them in this country. I was engaged mostly in the study of the social sciences, including the Marxian approach. The happiest memories link me with the W.E.A.; and wholesale attacks on Marxism still make me react in favour of a creed which has earned the fanatical detestation of fascists all the world over.

Yet I do not hesitate to say that lack of an adequate educational movement of the working class is one of the main weaknesses of