

## THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF ADULT EDUCATION

**I**N an individualistic era the usefulness of any institution depends upon its approbation by the majority. You cannot go on one day with a work that meets with the open aversion and decided opposition of the majority.

Adult Education, too, therefore, appeals to Mr. Everyman, because one day it will not last if Mr. Everyman comes up against it.

Every formula in the propaganda of Adult Education has to be formulated in a way that takes this situation into account. And if Mr. Mansbridge's devise\* takes its departure of this human side of the thing, it answers the tendencies of democracy in a most efficient and fortunate way.

But there is not only individualism or humanism in the world of to-day; there is socialism and Christianity too, as in any world. And there is not only political democracy in the countries of adult education, but economic division of labour as well. And division of labour means the government of the few "who know" in every department of life. Political democracy is not casually the fruit of an acquisitive society. Democracy is perhaps but an answer against the overwhelming power of the specialist in modern society. Moreover, the specialist is always an aristocrat, belonging to a minority. Modern society and its economy exists only by the functions of minorities. Physicians, engineers, taxi-drivers are wanted. But they can never hope to become the majority. Their very existence depends upon their remaining a very small group inside the body of society. For, if everybody becomes his own physician, if everybody drives his car himself—then farewell surgeons and hospitals and taxi-drivers. The definite and continuous function of any wheel in the machinery depends upon its rarity. The King is unique. That is all his value in England.

In France things are very different. They do not want a King. Because everybody is trying to be "unique" there—it is a French word, this word "unique"—and Paris, the only queen of France, gives the counterbalance to all these originals, gathering them and softening their originalities. And therefore Paris is unique in its political function as the organising factor of France.

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\* *The Multitude of the Wise is the Welfare of the World.*

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Now the French, as everybody knows, have given little attention to adult education up till now. Before the war there was no activity of that kind in France worth mentioning.

Perhaps there is an interesting connection between this indifference of the French and the very existence of adult education in all the other countries which had and have to live and to organise themselves under the burden and the influence of the French ideas of 1789. Perhaps adult education is something like a safety-valve against the damages arising from the export-article of the French *bourgeois*, the French "individual," the French "self," into other climates which lack the French safety-valve of Paris.

To ask a question like that is more important to-day than to answer it. Because to ask a question like that means to start quite a series of questions which differ distinctly from the usual question we are accustomed to, the individualistic question: What can I and what can Mr. Everyman get out of adult education? It is not the individual and his opinion of the value of adult education; it is not a million of individuals asking for personal education which we are concerned with in putting the new matter of the function of adult education on our table of discussion. It is the question of adult education as being a very, very small and rare cell, or as forming cells out of very, very small numbers of individuals inside the organised body of society.

From this point of view we may neglect for a moment the propaganda-formulas to convince the multitude and ourselves of the usefulness of our aims. We may neglect all that is wanted to induce as many new members as possible to join our settlements and classes and summer schools and to share our efforts. We know that these two tendencies of getting the public opinion and of getting pupils must be kept alive and could not be neglected one minute without disastrous consequences.

But perhaps we must allow to some of us, and everybody among us must give a spare minute of his leisure, to study the question from the other side. Is it the purpose of adult education to get the majority inside its schemes? Or is it the destiny of adult education to be indifferent towards numbers and masses and to fulfil a definite function which depends not on the consciousness of its pupils but on the very existence of adult educational groups and on their reaction on the other organs of society?

Let us put aside for one moment all the ideology about what we are promising to do, if one day millions and millions, ministers, brewers and Marxians will belong to our ranks. Let us look—

for I hate your "ifs," like Tristram Shandy—not to our preaching but to the man who preaches. What significance has the very existence of the adult educationalist in the world of to-day?

Certainly this may seem to be a very insolent question, showing a lack of decency and self-control. Is it not impossible to divulge before the public a kind of vain self-reflection? Are those people not hungry for spiritual food? And now instead of feeding them with good lessons and lectures and syllabuses and written papers and good tutors, you give us the handicaps of a shameless and useless self-introspection. Has not the question to remain the private secret of the individual teacher?

To this I shall answer at first in a rather evasive way. So long as this question remains the private secret of the individual teacher, adult education is imitating the behaviour, and is sticking to the creed, of the private person and of the individual. And it will faint and die out, with these its servants. This is the first answer only. The real answer can only be given by practice. Practically what can we get out of a sociological study of the conditions and functions of the single adult educationalist?

My first example lies near at hand. The very subject of the next Conference of the World Association in Sweden is "The State and Adult Education." From the propagandist point of view the relations are very easy to define. Let the State give all the money needed and let adult education go straight forward as freely as possible. This is no answer at all. But most of the answers that can be given to-day to the question "State and Adult Education" will not be based on far better ground. Because, if you want to answer this question, you ought to know if the State and State policy and the educational institutions of adults ought to be for competitors or if the State may interfere. The Fabians—a first class adult educational movement—and the Tutorial Classes of the Workers' Educational Association in England, have trained many of the people who govern England to-day. Did this happen casually? Then adult education must seek its way without taking any notice of that fact. Did this happen once and once only, but by good reason? Then perhaps adult education can shut its doors now, its work being done. On the other side, adult education in Germany came into existence by the competition of the different and very antagonistic political and ecclesiastical and cultural bodies. Since the war the exhaustion of every fund, bursary and capital in the period of inflation has obliged all these bodies to turn to the State for assistance. Now the State

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can answer : Is not the pupil—the pupil is an adult—the first to pay the fees ? Perhaps, but let us look at the obvious consequence. That means that it is the pupil who earns all the values involved in adult education. It means that it is merely the largest profit of the largest number which shall be reached by adult education. Then, of course, we decide that there is no social function of our work, but merely the market of private demands for education and of private supply, the whole traffic not interesting anyone else.

But if we realise that things went the other way round and that the State gives money and does interfere and that private people give money and employers and trade unions, then again we must decide on principles. We must know something about the secret of money. Can you accept the money from one side without turning to this side ? To take the money from the State—does it not mean to organise the market of intellectual goods by State interference in a fascist manner, all the adults of a nation being compelled, or at least invited, unwarned to buy their best ideas and intellectual methods in a shop which is run by the State and its semi-officials ? Must this not lead on to a horrible though unconscious slavery of the human mind ? Have we fought for freedom of all adults from ecclesiastical predominance only to come back to the mediæval system under new names ?

All these questions will arise at Brunnsvik this summer. But we cannot answer them without knowing something and more than something about the rights, the possibilities and the function of the tutor in adult education. Different opinions may be held. The tutor, being a free seller of goods in a free market, must look to his students for his remuneration. If he does not, he may be a very charitable man ; but we may be doubtful whether he takes the right view of his enterprise. If he asks no money from his student, he depends upon other means, private income or salary as a teacher, as a priest, etc. Then the function of the adult tutor is a secondhand function only, a sort of gratuitous superfluity. Very kind, very respectable indeed, but I should think rather insecure. And it is doubtful even, if a man asking no payment from his adult students, will not corrupt their brains by giving too cheaply away what must have its price in this world as any other article has.

On the other hand, take the enthusiastic tutor believing himself to be under the command of a creed or a social mission, is it not rather intolerable to think that the taxpayer subsidises by the grants of the State Ministry sectarians and prophets of a

rather uncontrolled type ? Because it is impossible for a prophet to silence his creed, the prophet must try to propagate it amongst his students. But while the average sectarian has to fight the prejudices of the public first and has to collect the money afterwards, the tutor can proceed *vice versa*, which does not seem very fair. Now to answer these questions, the proper starting point would seem to be to seek the answer from the individual theory to which you personally adhere—preferring free trade you will prefer the type of the free seller ; preferential treatment being your predilection, you will be inclined to underestimate the fanaticism of the subsidised tutor and therefore to vote the grant. Or you can start as a Fabian or a Hegelian and then you will be in favour of any monopoly run by the London County Council or by the Leviathan of a State bureaucracy.

Here we are in the heart of our question. 'This way of answering the questions would be the wrong way. The function of adult education cannot be developed out of Liberalism, or Methodism, Fabianism or Marxism. Adult education must find the basis of building up the decisions to keep it safe in all these puzzling difficulties inside its own field of action. As a Marxian or a Christian you will have one answer. But this answer is not your answer as a member of our movement. Adult education is self-supporting for these decisions. It is autonomous. The first decision we can give is the apparently egoistical exclamation : that tutors and students in adult education exist and that they ought to exist. It is the experience of the reality of our work which gives us the only sure start for any theory of our social function.

Having lived with workers, with peasants, discussing class war, religion and policy, we know something about the order of things. We have got an original, a genuine table of values. We know where to put knowledge and theories, where to put life and where to put practice. We shall abhor both futile theory and blind practice. We shall sense the meaning of co-operation and the mind of the group. Because we wanted to teach and to learn for our own sake, we began to learn a number of new things. We shall forget all our economic and political theories, and we shall make a start to discover the countries of State and Society and Church quite afresh.

Because the harbour in which we have equipped our vessel to discover those foreign countries of to-day, Industry, Education, League of Nations, Disarmament, etc., etc., is called Adult

Education. The tutor in adult education, feeling not as the teacher but as the real student, learns that no individual can discover these countries successfully any more by putting his casual and more or less artificial questions. Having this harbour of his intellectual family he will know what to seek outside. He will sail the sea because he wants to bring back bread and wine from outside, but he must know that there are hungry people and what they are hungry for, and that he is one of them himself.

The social function of the tutor in adult education is the provisioning of any group or spiritual family in modern society with the intellectual food it wants for the sake of remaining a human group and of remaining a spiritual family.

But the social function of adult education as a whole includes the education of the tutor himself. He who shall be the cook must belong to the household before he is enabled to cook! The riddle of the comradeship between the cook and those he serves is our riddle. The solution of the riddle cannot be found outside the symposium; though the spiritual family is the first cell of a larger body, the laws of nature of this cell cannot be derived from outside. The cell is incomplete, inefficient, half-conscious, but it is alive. Society and Church and State may be much more complete, very conscious and terribly efficient. But meeting our poor little group of adult education we cannot help thinking that perhaps those mighty bodies are not alive with the same intensity, and that the frailest life will conquer a gigantic machinery because life can change and can learn and can develop. Machinery cannot.

I doubt whether I have succeeded in showing the usefulness of my question. But perhaps these few lines show the urgency of developing a common spirit among all the different activities of adult education. Because though we must congratulate ourselves for the greatest variety of names and works and tendencies in our movement, nevertheless with the growth of the exterior varieties the discoveries of the interior secrets of our work must keep pace. Having the good fortune of living really in an intellectual and spiritual nucleus which is alive, we must visit one another, because life wants contact with life. And as our little cells are shaken every day by the earthquake of a re-election of parliament, a declaration of war, a new theory on economics, a new explanation of the Creed, trembling in their poorness and weakness, considering the enormity of all these "unicorns," it is good for us to remember our existence as a minority and

to be conscious, and I dare say proud, of this fact as a normal one.

What follows? We are not interested in majorities, as far as we work in the movement. Secondly, it is good to imagine our situation not only as a minority in that political and democratic way of numbering the members of our activities and comparing them with the number of the inhabitants of Europe or of the industrialised world. But what counts is our lot of being dispersed into incredibly small cells of the most different languages, creeds, nationalities and names, but all of a modest but real and intense life. We should remember that our existence as members of adult education depends upon the existence of those nut-shells in the ocean of modern society.

What follows? The sovereignty of the Group. Our function inside the group as a part of the cellular nucleus dominates over all other tendencies. State interference is welcome if it supports the characteristic life of this intellectual family and respects its variety of name, form, creed and tongue as being its secret, if it protects our group against the selfishness of its members, against the personal prejudices of the tutor, against the majorities of the big machineries which run the public life of the nation.

Amongst all our personal and various public and private activities adult education may play only a modest part. Other occupations ask of us far more attention, they will pay better and they may be more urgent. But in entering any activity of a genuine educational character even for half an hour only, we must forget all the principles and theories and systems and creeds we have chosen to be our individual clothes. These private garments are of no use to us in that moment. All the value of the "unique" personality has faded away. (Here, finally, we give an answer to that question about adult education and the French Revolution.)

It is the emptiness, the exhaustion and despair, the hunger, the hope and the expectation of a real group, a real little co-operative fellowship, which dominates during this half an hour.

And it is not only at the wedding of Cana that poor water then becomes a first-rate wine.

EUGEN ROSENSTOCK.

## NOTES ON THE FOREGOING ARTICLE.

The foregoing article of Professor Rosenstock discusses the more intimate working of the group unit from which Adult Education proceeds, and describes its social function. But, however concerned the unit may be with its own affairs, if its effect is to be something more lasting than the momentary flash of a squib, it must have relations external to itself and accept and exert influence from and upon bodies outside the range of its own immediate activities. If it be really a cell, as Professor Rosenstock conceives it, then it is part of an organism, and its life and conduct must be related to the larger whole. One special aspect of these relationships, as has been pointed out, is to form the main consideration of the special Conference which is to meet this summer, and a few general reflections on this problem may not be out of place here.

If the conditions as they exist to-day be examined, it would appear that in the association of the State with Adult Education the whole gamut of relationship from complete dissociation to absolute identification is in evidence somewhere. If by the State is meant the central Government responsible for the guardianship of the greater issues of national existence—defence, foreign relations, economic policy—then it might appear as if under Federal Governments such as the United States, Switzerland, Australia, the State had but little or no concern with Adult Education. This would be a superficial judgment, lacking in penetration to the real significance of the conditions observed. The absence of direct administrative responsibility is far from implying ignorance or indifference. It is manifest at once that the United States Government has not divested itself of all interest in this matter, since it maintains a Central Bureau which is a potent factor in the educational life of the country by its collection and large-scale dissemination of information. It needs only a passing thought to the memory of Henry Barnard and James W. Harris to realise how pervasive can be the influence of an office apparently so insignificant and endowed with functions so limited. To-day that office recognises the national concern for this branch of educational effort by including among its officials an officer whose special duty it is to follow the developments of adult education. Here is a potential source of influence and direction of great moment. A more direct influence, supported by considerable grants, is exerted by the Federal Board



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of Vocational Education. The limits, formerly so rigidly set, between vocational and cultural forms, are daily lessening, and the Board cannot be neglected when the interests of adult education are discussed. The action of the Board, however, which tries to work through the constituted authorities of each State, leads us back to the State organisation of education. The methods of the individual States vary too widely to permit of any summary statement being attempted here.

In Switzerland, diversities of race, language and religion have rendered any common cultural policy hitherto impossible. The Federal Government maintains but a single educational institution—a school of advanced technological instruction of world-wide fame. For the rest it contents itself with requiring a minimum of instruction for all its citizens, which in the case of its male youth is given a certain measure of permanence through the teaching of recruits. The comparatively small extent and difficulty of communications of many of the cantons have hampered the local publicly supported systems of further education, but in many of the larger cantons the authorities have taken their part in the development of adult education courses. Still, with the growth of associations of a national character—*e.g.*, the organised bodies of workers—and with the increased desire for a more general spread of culture, the problem of adult education may attain such significance as to call forth a national effort.

Even in some of the unitary states the Central Government has found itself as yet unable to take any co-ordinatory or directive action with regard to adult education. In Belgium and Holland the State still stands aloof, though in both countries there are signs that this attitude of detachment may be modified in the near future.

At the opposite end of the scale stand Italy and Russia, where no form of adult education can exist which is not completely identified with a State-directed policy. But whereas in Italy it is the aim of Fascism to include the whole nation equally within the orbit of the State, the Soviet Republics address themselves with intensive solicitude to the interests of a particular section of the population.

In a recent address Signor Bottai, the young Minister of Corporations, said :—"The State, as modern life compels us to conceive it, is not a force superimposed, with periodic or occasional prevalence of one category over another. The State is an organism, harmonious and complete, and as such needs each of the elements

of which/it is composed, and these elements, to the exclusion of none, are equally indispensable to its life. The indispensability and the co-existence of the diverse elements of the State form a kind of sovereign equality between the different social categories, in which, however, every difference of character and function is clearly established and maintained. Each category and each class has its function with which the State cannot dispense without putting to the hazard the wonderful and necessary unity of its organism and its own existence. Thus, to put it better, each class has not a function but its own function foreordained, inalienable in the life of the State."

Accordingly, the working classes are not to be debauched from their special function of production by the offer of culture which is the essential quality of the intellectuals. Their proper method of development is through increased technical skill and the serenity of moral enlightenment. Thus the creation of vocational schools and opportunities for a suitable use of leisure are all that is required.

The Soviet Republics, on the other hand, make their appeal to the toiling masses in the factories and the fields, and would make them alone the bearers of the new political and social system. By a decree of November 12th, 1920, a "Central Committee for Political Enlightenment of the Republic" was created. Its function is thus defined:—

"In order to unite all of the work of political agitation, propaganda, and enlightenment in the republic and to concentrate it in the service of the political and economic reconstruction of the country a Chief Committee for Political Enlightenment is organised in the People's Commissariat of Education."

The following description of the work of this Committee is taken from *The New Education in the Soviet Republic*, by the President of the Second State University in Moscow, recently translated into English by the International Institute, Columbia University:—

"The analysis of this clause" (quoted above) "is of extreme importance, because it contains a clear statement of the purpose of the work of political enlightenment. Its major object is obviously that of promoting the economic and political regeneration of the country. Although the Communist Party is directly responsible for most of the strictly propagandistic work, the Chief Committee for Political Enlightenment takes upon itself a certain share of this task. There is consequently the most

intimate relation between the work of local committees and the work of this Chief Committee which, together with all Party organisations, occupies the central position. In similar manner, the efforts of the divisions for cultural enlightenment of the professional unions are co-ordinated with the work of the various institutions for political enlightenment. . . .

"If in the *volost* the cottage reading-room should be the central institution of political enlightenment, in the factory, in the city, and in the Red Army, the workers' club should bear a major responsibility for the education of the masses in the principles of communism. The central core about which all the activities of the club should revolve is the professional enlightenment of those who toil. Among the city workers emphasis should be placed on questions of industrial production, among the peasants on agricultural information, and among the soldiers of the Red Army on military science and on both factory and rural economy. A tactful and effective programme of anti-religious propaganda should also occupy a prominent place in the work of this institution. At the same time, as already pointed out, the club should be a centre of leisure and recreation. In every settlement of workers associated with factory or mill there should also be organised a school for adults. This institution should embrace a school of literacy, a primary and secondary school, and a school club for youths. . . .

"Since we are unable to outline with sufficient fullness the way in which these principles are applied to the work of all the institutions of adult education, we shall have to limit ourselves to a few illustrations. Let us begin with the work of political agitation. To agitate means to stir, to awaken, to call forth a certain mood, to create a will to action. It involves the arousal of the feelings and emotions of the masses by means of images and pictures; it compels men and women to throw off inertia and arise from slumber. Agitators, as one of our writers has aptly remarked, are the rousers of the masses.

"What are the methods of agitation? The most common, perhaps, is oratorical speech; but obviously one can agitate through the printed word, the poster, and the placard. A very desirable consideration is that all efforts should be focused on some common aim as is the case in the conduct of certain campaigns. The resolution of the Thirteenth Conference of the Communist Party has the following to say with regard to this point; 'By decreasing the number of campaigns and concen-

trating on the most essential matters we must strive to illuminate steadfastly and systematically the most important domestic and international political events, the most significant measures of the soviet government, and the most urgent questions of local community life, such as the activity of the soviet organs, the work of professional organisations, the economic aspects of various enterprises, the functioning of the co-operative, and the general status of the communal economy. By no means, however, should the interpretation of the general aims of the Party and the Communist International be humbled or distorted.' One of the most significant campaigns is that of election to the soviets. Campaigns which are concerned with elections to the organs of lower co-operatives and to peasants' committees of mutual aid are also important. The preparation for and the actual celebration of various soviet holidays also offer a rich field for agitation. This is particularly true of the anniversary of the October Revolution and of various types of non-partisan conferences.

"The process of propaganda differs from agitation in that it possesses greater penetration, objectivity, and calm. Though falling somewhat short of teaching, its primary appeal is not to emotion but to intellect. The aim of propaganda is to stimulate to action, not by means of images and pictures, but by means of conviction, logical persuasion, and critical examination of the mottoes and slogans proclaimed by the agitator. But in either case the work is of relatively brief duration, only the most important topics of the moment receive attention, and only certain aspects of these matters are analysed. The prolonged and many-sided study of fundamental considerations, as well as the examination of supplementary questions, lies not in the field of propaganda but in the domain of teaching."

Whatever view may be held of the aims and purposes of the Soviet Government, it is impossible to deny the energy and resourcefulness with which the campaign has been conducted. In further illustration of these methods an article follows which is published as it was received from its Russian source.