THE WORKERS’ EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
AND THE PURSUIT OF
NATIONAL EFFICIENCY IN AUSTRALIA
BETWEEN 1913 AND 1923

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES

SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
AND ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

WORKING PAPER SERIES
ISSN 1325-8028

March 1997
1. INTRODUCTION

The history of workers’ education reflects a contested terrain, a landscape of power in which competing social groups have struggled to influence, if not control not only its institutional fabric but also its potential outcomes, in terms of work practices and political participation. In early twentieth century Australia, such contestation centered on the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) which had been successfully transferred from the United Kingdom in 1913, through the joint involvement of the Australian labour movement and middle class intellectuals who were located in the public service and the universities. Given Australia’s satellite status in the international division of labour, it is not surprising that both groupings readily adopted overseas models, such as the WEA, as a framework within which to pursue their goals. And while the institutions and programmes established to educate workers provided a forum for class conflict, as was the case in other countries, in Australia it became an arena in which ideological struggle not only focused on the fulfillment of cultural aspirations, but on the very nature of citizenship.

The labour movement’s involvement was predicated on its interest in education; an interest which accompanied its emergence during the nineteenth century, and continues to this day, to be informed by the urge to provide adult workers with the necessary knowledge and skills to protect their industrial and political interests.\(^1\) As in the United Kingdom, nineteenth century Australian workers keenly recognised that the right for ‘mental improvement’ was closely associated with the fight for reduced hours of work, particularly the eight hour

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day. But in Australia, the movement’s approach was fundamentally shaped by local contingencies, such as the Australian tendency to rely on the state, the formation of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) during the 1890s and its support for state socialism and, as a corollary, the impact of electoral vicissitudes on government policies and funding. After the turn of the century and the election of Labor Governments, these factors provided the labour movement with an opportunity to, at least temporarily, influence the form and content of workers’ education.  At the same time, in the absence of middle class socialist societies ‘led by publicists such as the Webbs or the Coles’, Australia’s middle class intellectuals mediated bourgeois and proletarian thought by promoting class conciliation through a national efficiency campaign. It was a campaign which relied on the advocacy of a social harmony ethos and scientific management methods and principles in forums associated with workers’ education.

The interaction between middle class academics and labour movement activists, initially in the Universities’ Extension Movement, and later the Workers’ Education Association (WEA), draws attention to the way that British models were changed by local structures, class relations and American influences. It also throws light on how different labour organisations reacted to the ideas and practices which were preached in these forums by middle class intellectuals. In order to interpret such reactions and their connection to the industrial and political concerns of Australia’s workers, the paper begins by describing the way that adult education institutions were transferred to Australia from the United Kingdom during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This approach enables Australian developments to be related to British precedents, while highlighting the influence of local class relationships and international networks. On this basis, the paper explains how the WEA’s accommodation of apparently divergent imperial

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influences from the United Kingdom and the United States of America (USA) prevented a long-lasting compact between its labour movement and middle class membership. In the aftermath of World War One, conflict between the competing ideologies of social transformation and social harmony climaxed not just in a contest over the orientation and goals of workers' education, but in a broader struggle over political citizenship.

2. THE ORIGINS OF THE WORKERS' EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
The WEA was formed in England in 1903 in an attempt to spread liberal education and more specifically, 'education in citizenship'. Building on the limited success of earlier efforts, the founders forged a triple alliance between the Co-operative, University Extension and the trade union movements in order to more effectively secure working class participation. In 1920 the WEA's leading missionary, Albert Mainsbridge was able to report that the Association's alliance with the English trade union movement had 'increased in power every year' because working class societies had continually 'sent their best' people to co-operate in its work.

In the interim, in 1913, the WEA was successfully established in Australia through the combined efforts of labour movement representatives and middle class professionals, during a visit by Mainsbridge for precisely this purpose. And while both parent and off-spring similarly responded to the advance of industry, democratisation, mass mobilisation and social reform, characterised by Hobsbawme as the 'Age of Empire', their achievements differed. Unlike the English WEA, the Australian branch was unable to maintain an enduring bond with the colonial labour movement even though it did not have to share that portion of the community which desired adult education with a plethora of other agencies, as was the case in England.

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7 Mansbridge, *ibid.*, p.16. By 1951 it was reported that over 4,000,000 British workers were affiliated with the WEA through their trade unions and that many larger British unions provided the WEA with annual contributions to pay for their members' classes. Emily Maloney, 'Education and the Worker', *The Australian Highway (AH)*, xxxiii, 4, (November 1951) p.62.
9 E.J. Hobsbawme, *The Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London, 1987) p.76; The English WEA had to compete
Why, given this enviable position and the Australian inclination to closely imitate British cultural ideas and practices, was the WEA unable to fulfil its founders’ aspirations? The answer can partly be found in the precise timing of its arrival in Australia. Simply put, the colonial branch did not have the same opportunity for gradual and peaceful growth as its parent because it was formed on the eve of World War One. In this context, the Australian WEA became enmeshed in broader social and political conflicts which exacerbated quiescent ideological differences between the Association’s labour movement and professional middle class members. The ensuing struggle between the competing ideals of social harmony and working class emancipation thwarted the WEA’s development in Australia. But although wartime conditions crystallised such differences, the struggle itself was firmly rooted in earlier educational initiatives undertaken in both England and Australia, as well as in the very nature of Australia’s political economy.

Australia’s strong labour traditions and institutions played a critical role in the WEA’s formation and its early activities. Those who represented the working classes through Labor Governments, Labor Councils and trade unions helped to launch the WEA because they viewed education as a useful tool of working class emancipation and social transformation. These activists did not, however, act alone. Leading middle class professionals also helped to create the institutional structures necessary for WEA activities. They willingly taught WEA classes and participated in its conferences because such activities helped to legitimate their social position and enabled them to publicise middle class values and practices among workers. Unlike the Association’s early labour movement supporters, these middle class intellectuals used WEA forums to promote social unity in the face of labour’s increasing political and industrial power and militancy.

with the Education Advisory Committee of the Trades Union Congress; the National Council of Labour Colleges; the Education Department of the Co-operative Union; the National Adult School Union; the education committees of the YMCA and YWCA; the Catholic Social Guild; the National Council of Social Sciences; the Church Tutorial Classes Association, the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, the Working Men’s Club and Institute Union, the National Industrial Alliance, the National Home Reading Union, the Working Men’s College at Camden Town, Morely College for Working Men and Women, the Working Women’s College, the Educational Settlements Association. G.V. Portus, Director, Tutorial Classes - Report on the Tutorial Class Movement Overseas (1928) p.4, in Annual Report of the Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes for 1929, Department of Adult Education, G.5, Sydney University Archives (SUA).
Such social and ideological differences between the WEA’s working and middle class members were not unique to this particular model of adult education. They arose with the earliest responses to the advance of industrial capitalism in England which sought to improve workers’ literacy, and they continued to frustrate the efforts made by the co-operative and university extension movements to reach working class audiences through People’s and Working Men’s Colleges and lectures. The tension between the ideals of social emancipation and social harmony did not prevent experiments, as the founding of a residential college for working people at Oxford in 1899 shows. It did, however, undermine their success. The collaboration and participation of trade unions and their members in the work conducted at Ruskin College was not enduring. A clash occurred in 1908 when College authorities altered the syllabus by substituting subjects in Literature and Temperance for Sociology and Logic, despite the demand then being made by the students and lecturers for ‘a more revolutionary curriculum’. The latter responded by accusing the governing committee of ‘drifting towards the University’, and after seceding from Ruskin, they established the Plebs League to provide support for the formation of their own college. As the founder of Australia’s first Labor College, W.P. Earsman put it in 1920, the governing committee had ‘side-tracked the original object of the College’ by introducing ‘a new spirit which was foreign to the exclusive interests of a militant labor movement.’ Henceforth, such interests were pursued by the syndicalists and revolutionary socialists of the Plebs League. The Australian experience echoed these developments, albeit with important variations. The tension between working class and middle class cultural imperatives developed into an outright struggle later than in England, and the new spirit which side-tracked the WEA’s object of building a highway between labour and learning was not British but American in origin.

In short, this paper suggests that the WEA was initially formed in Australia because it simultaneously offered to address both middle and working class

educational concerns. The resulting collaboration between labour movement and professional middle class representatives made it appear that their respective ideals of working class emancipation and social harmony had converged. But these developments did not eliminate underlying differences. On the contrary, these were amplified under the pressure of wartime imperatives when middle class professionals took advantage of the complementarity between the WEA’s non-partisan ethos and the consensus ideology implicit in the American efficiency movement to legitimate their attack on working class interests and customs. In response, workers and their representatives concluded that the labour colleges established by their English counterparts to deal with analogous circumstances, provided the best means of defending and promoting their specific class interests.

3. PRECURSORS TO THE WEA
The tendency for colonial adult education to follow nineteenth century British models established the bedrock for Australia’s WEA. The first of these was provided by the London Mechanics Institute which was established in 1823. Ten years later, the foundation of the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts imported the tensions which characterised its English forerunner. Certainly, colonial institutes were modified by local circumstances in the sense that they had to rely on government grants instead of private initiatives and funding. Beginning with the Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, such grants were later extended to those mechanics institutes which were established in country towns during the 1850s and 1860s, as well as to the Sydney School’s offshoot, the Workingman’s College, formed in 1878. These mechanics institutes certainly ’made the concept of adult learning familiar and acceptable to many members’ of Australian society. But they suffered a similar fate as those which operated in England because, with minor exceptions, they failed to attract working class interest as originally intended, and instead became bastions of the middle classes. \(^{11}\) So much so that the Sydney School was supported by vice-regal patronage and the colony’s educated establishment. The institutes in colonial country towns may well have been 'more

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Necessity for Labor Colleges (Melbourne, 1920) pp.11-12.

genuinely popular’, as Whitelock asserts, in that they operated as ‘all-purpose centres for books, companionship, recreation and culture’. But throughout their history, working class people in Australia used such facilities sparingly and rarely for the purpose of mental improvement. Many, in fact, associated these educational agencies with the interests of the local capitalists who subsidised them.  

This tension between competing ideological imperatives and social needs likewise affected the progress of the next model to be imported from England in the form of university extension lectures. Inaugurated during the 1870s by Cambridge, Oxford and later London Universities ‘for educationally deprived adults’, such lectures were launched by the University of Sydney in 1886, the University of Melbourne in 1890, the University of Tasmania in 1893 and in anticipation of a university in Queensland, in the same year. Early in the succeeding century, South and Western Australian universities followed suit. Yet colonial University Extension Boards initially made little effort to directly address workers’ interests. This, coupled with their avoidance of controversial social and political issues, deterred workers who turned to their own industrial organisations for assistance. Some unions, notably those which covered railway workers and shearers, responded by mobilising in support of their members’ interest in education. Subsequently, during the 1890s, the newly formed Labor Party included a demand for universal free education in its political platform. After the turn of the century, the Sydney Labor Council also began lobbying the NSW Government for a free education bill and in 1906 its goals were attained with the passage of the *Free Education Act*.

Australian universities were not immune to these developments, particularly as they coincided with increasing pressure from liberal politicians who

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saw education as a means of responding to the population's growing democratic spirit. Consequently, between 1891 and 1912, they attempted, with varying degrees of success, to fulfil the demand made by the leading Liberal reformer and sometime Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, for the universities to 'be brought as near as possible to the masses'. In 1905, for instance, the Sydney University Extension Board invited Labor Council representation. In turn, Council officials became exponents of closer ties with that University. As a result, short annual lectures and courses by notable academics were presented to Labor Council delegates at Sydney's Trades Hall on different aspects of industrial development and the evolution of trades unionism.

Towards the end of the decade, the Sydney University Extension Board also attempted to engage working class interest outside of the city and the State of NSW. In 1909, the Board organised lectures in Queensland and also in Western Australia. On one tour Professor MacCallum gave 14 lectures 'to audiences averaging 350 in Perth and 234 on the Goldfields', an effort which was repeated the following year by Professor Edgeworth David. In addition, free lectures were presented to rural workers at a distant shearing shed in country NSW. This bid to involve the labour movement and to reach distant places of work, made the University of Sydney's extension lectures more successful than those offered by the universities of Melbourne, Adelaide and Tasmania. Unlike its English counterparts, moreover, the University of Sydney also succeeded in establishing a good relationship with organised labour because it permitted the latter to exercise control over the administration of lectures for workers. When the Sydney University Extension Board's attempt to shift lectures from Trades Hall to the University in 1908 decreased attendance, lectures were resumed at Trades Hall the following year. Run entirely under the management of the Labor Council, such educational activities succeeded in attracting large audiences of urban workers. The election of the first NSW Labor Government in 1910 simply

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16 Whitelock, op. cit., p.157.
reinforced this growing association between industrial labour and the University. Two years later, this Government nominated the Secretary of the Labor Council as a fully-fledged member of the University's Senate. At the same time, its legislative and financial support provided the resources necessary for the WEA to promote its goals, of which more will be said below. These precedents established a pattern for the WEA. Its greatest success would occur in NSW, as was the case for the colonial extension movement.

4. IMPERIAL INFLUENCES AND COLONIAL CULTURAL IMPERATIVES

The extension lectures undertaken by colonial universities provided the institutional framework for the WEA's educational pursuits. But the specific cultural imperatives which shaped its activities were produced by changes in Australia's political economy during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Economic restructuring, the consequent growth of manufacturing, and the expansion of state activities not only led to labour's political mobilisation but also to the emergence of a professional middle class. The formation of Labor Parties gave moral force to the ideology of state socialism. The resulting adoption of parliamentary strategies would, following the election of Labor Governments, provide the conditions necessary for the advancement of education for adult workers. Additionally, the reorganisation of the state during the 1890s, expanded labour market opportunities for Australia's middle class intellectuals, public servants and technical specialists. It also created an ideological arena in which they could advance progressive reform programmes which were informed by their desire to differentiate themselves from the working class, as well as the bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie.

New Liberalism was the ideology adopted to promote these ends. Much like progressivism in the USA, it enabled middle class reformers to represent themselves as the impartial standard-bearers of a new order by virtue of their position between the two conflicting classes of capital and labour. For Liberals, this ideology created a nexus between the application of science, as a panacea for social problems, and the transfer of power to members of the new middle class.\textsuperscript{22} From this standpoint, they championed social order through new methods of work and organisation which originated in the USA rather than Britain, but which complemented reformist ideas and approaches emanating from the latter country.\textsuperscript{23} The New Education movement provided an important conduit for leading public service reformers in Australia to advocate their views and aspirations and to influence the legislative framework for educational reform. It also provided the rationale for adopting both British and American educational models.\textsuperscript{24} In turn, the connection between the imperatives of the New Education and the social concerns of Australia's middle class professionals not only supplied the impetus for the formation of an Australian WEA, but also the basis for its mutation.

While there is some debate about when information about the WEA arrived in Australia, it is generally agreed that interest in it grew rapidly among Australian intellectual reformers during the closing years of the century's first decade. In his leading role as exponent of the New Education, Peter Board is attributed with having been the most influential in ensuring the formation of the Australian branch of the WEA. Following numerous missions to England and the USA from 1903, in

\textsuperscript{22} My understanding of this social formation is informed by: Robert H. Weihe, \textit{The Search for Order 1877-1920} (London, 1967) pp.44-75, pp.111-113; Donald Stabile, \textit{Prophets of Order} (Boston, 1984) pp.17-28; Reiger, \textit{ibid.}, p.3, pp.11-29; Deacon, \textit{ibid.}, pp.1-17. And while the use of this term has been disparaged, as Stabile comments, alternatives like 'intellectuals', 'co-ordinators', 'technocrats' or 'experts', leave much unsaid about the character of this group.
\textsuperscript{24} Barcan, \textit{op. cit.}, p.176; Peter Board, \textit{Report on Primary Education} (N.S.W. Department of Public Instruction, 1903) p.1, p.12; See also the following papers in Section J, \textit{Proc. AAAS}, 12 (1909): Peter Board, 'Mental Science and Education', pp.704-712; A. Mackie, 'The Training of Teachers', pp.714-722; J.D. Storey, 'Fifty Years of Education in Queensland, A Retrospect and an Outlook', p.723; Reginald H. Roe, 'The Relation of a University to Primary and Secondary School Teachers', pp.779-780; R.A. Grieve, 'Co-ordination
his capacity as Inspector and later Under-Secretary and Director of Education in NSW, Board took practical steps to create the legislative and administrative framework within which the WEA could launch its operations. At the same time, other intellectuals also showed a keen interest in emulating this imperial model, especially after its association with the universities of the United Kingdom was strengthened by the inauguration of university tutorial classes following a Conference held in Oxford in 1907 to consider 'What Oxford Can do for Working People'. This new pedagogical method marked an important departure which appeared to address labour movement demands for greater control over workers' education because it introduced a new form of administration involving the formation of joint committees of university representatives and WEA delegates from trade unions and community groups.

On reading about this development in *Oxford and Working Class Education. A Report of a Joint Committee of University and Working-class Representatives on the Relation of the University to the Higher Education of Workpeople*, published in 1909, a number of prominent Australians were spurred into action. In March of that year, R.F. Irvine, eminent public service reformer, member of the Sydney University Extension Board and future Professor of Economics, successfully moved a motion to appoint a committee to consider the adoption of such a scheme. Subsequently, this committee recommended that the University conduct tutorial classes concurrently with extension lectures. At this stage, however, the reformers had insufficient support to implement their views. In a compromise reached with their more conservative colleagues, it was agreed that such classes would only be formed upon request from local bodies. Few responded to the university's call for interest. And discussions between Extension Board and Trades Hall representatives produced no real result. The latter's requests for classes on economics, politics and industrial history went unfulfilled ostensibly because the University had no one to teach them.

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Yet despite these obstacles, support for the WEA-joint tutorial class model grew during 1910, partly as a result of a visit to Australia by the WEA's first national president, William Temple who communicated 'the vigour and enthusiasm of the new movement' to colonial audiences through lectures on 'Democracy and Education'. He also inspired Australian academics and other middle class professionals. By the following year, the universities of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide had all affiliated with the English WEA and they all sent representatives to the first Congress of the Universities of the Empire held in London in 1912. Such contact with English missionaries would be crucial to the formation of the colonial branch. Temple's visit to South Australia resulted in friendly ties between Adelaide University and the South Australian labour movement. Indeed, his impression on the President of the Trades and Labour Council, Thomas Ryan was to be particularly significant when Ryan became a member of the first South Australian Labor Government and Chair of the Select Committee on Higher Education which sat between 1910 and 1912. Through this influence, claimed the University's representative to the Congress of Universities, Professor Darnley Naylor, the Labor Government increased its university grant. In NSW, too, Temple succeeded in stimulating interest in joint tutorial classes among Sydney University academics.\textsuperscript{28}

Personal visits to England further increased prospects for the formation of an Australian branch of the WEA. The Congress held in London in 1912 gave the Victorian representative, Dr. J.W. Barrett an opportunity to personally examine the work being done by the Oxford-WEA Joint Committee. Like Peter Board, who had seen the system the previous year while attending the Imperial Education Conference, Barrett was sufficiently impressed to invite Mainsbridge to Australia to promote the scheme. On his return from England, Barrett rallied moral and financial support from the colonial universities by distributing the papers which had been presented by Temple and Mainsbridge at the Universities Congress.\textsuperscript{29} When Mansbridge announced his visit to Australia in 1913, both Melbourne and Sydney University Extension Boards agreed to organise addresses through which he

\textsuperscript{28} Crew, \textit{ibid.}, p.9; Alexander, \textit{ibid.}, p.19; Whitelock, \textit{op. cit.}, p.175.

\textsuperscript{29} Crew, \textit{ibid.}, pp.9-11; Walker, \textit{op. cit.}, p.99.
could advise Australians on the formation of a local WEA and also tutorial classes. The universities in Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland followed suit resulting in joint action with trades hall authorities in all these states to welcome Mainsbridge and arrange for him to address meetings of trade unionists and teachers.30

Pending his visit to Australia, Mainsbridge mobilised his personal networks to secure a positive response from the labour movement. He wrote to David Stewart, an official of the Carpenters' and Joiners' Society in NSW and its representative on the Labor Council's Education Committee, requesting that Stewart try to establish a branch in NSW.31 Once roused, Stewart was unstoppable. His approaches to the Labor Council resulted in the formation of a committee composed of representatives from the Furnishing Trade Union, the Hospital and Employees' Union, and the Watchmakers and Jewellers Union to inquire into the problem of workers' education. The Committee's favorable report recommending that efforts be made to proceed 'along the lines of the English WEA', was adopted in February 1913. Labour movement involvement was then formalised in April when a Labor Council Conference unanimously endorsed this proposal and established a provisional committee headed by Stewart, to draft a constitution for the Australian WEA and to organise a conference which could be addressed directly by Mainsbridge. Later that year such support was reinforced by meetings between Mainsbridge and Labor Council officials and also by his public addresses in Sydney and other industrial towns during August and September.32

In the interim, Stewart's approaches to Peter Board succeeded in ensuring Government support for the new scheme. Board was particularly responsive because, as head of a committee appointed by the NSW Labor Government in

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30 Crew, ibid., pp.10-13; SUEB, Annual Reports: 1908-1909, p.8; 1912-1913: p.6; Correspondence: Registrar, University of Queensland and the Registrar, University of Melbourne; 18 March 1913; 2, 27 May 1913; 17 July 1913; Miscellaneous Note: Arthur L. Smith to Registrar, University of Queensland; Correspondence: A. Mansbridge to Registrar, University of Queensland, 26 July 1913, 5 August 1913; Correspondence: F. Todd, Secretary, SUEB to Registrar, University of Queensland: 8 August 1913, Subject Files "Old Series", Workers Tutorial Classes 1912-1939, Queensland University Archives (QUA).

31 Stewart, “1. "In the Beginning’”, p.5; Higgins, op. cit., p.16. David Stewart's brother Alex met Mainsbridge in 1909 while attending the University Summer Extension School at Oxford as a Co-operative Movement Scholar. On hearing that Mainsbridge intended to visit Australia, while a student at the London School of Economics in 1912, he suggested that Mainsbridge enlist his brother's support.

1912 to inquire into the Schools of Arts and Mechanics Institutes, he had concluded that these institutions had 'entirely lost their original character'. Similarly, his concern over the decreasing effectiveness of the university extension lectures, which were experiencing a massive drop in attendance, led Board to lobby for a new approach to adult education. Given the climate of reform, coupled with the Labor Party's commitment to the extension of educational opportunities for adult workers, the newly elected McGowan Labor Government responded favorably to Board's pressure. The NSW Minister for Public Instruction, A.C. Carmichael was especially supportive. His insertion of a clause in the University (Amendment) Act, presumably penned by Board, obliged the University to establish and maintain tutorial classes. Coming into force in December 1912, this legislation granted 200 scholarships exempting students from fees. Its grant of 1,000 pounds for the launching of evening tutorial classes also undermined opposition from conservative academics.33

Such government backing helped Mainsbridge in his campaign to establish tutorial classes. Following private conferences with officials representing the Department of Public Instruction, the Labor Council and the university, Mainsbridge gave a lecture on 'the University and the Worker' to an audience of 90 people. Board's presence and speech on this occasion, together with the University's Vice-Chancellor, reflected growing institutional support for the adoption of this English institution. Subsequently, addresses by Mainsbridge before the Professorial Board and University Senate, succeeded in convincing university authorities to launch tutorial classes. A hardly surprising outcome given the staunch support of the University's leading liberal academics, notably R.F. Irvine and Francis Anderson, and the fact that Peter Board had recently become a member of its Senate. By October, an agreement was reached to form a Joint Committee with equal representation from the University and the WEA. Following a recommendation from Mainsbridge, moreover, the English tutorial class lecturer, Meredith Atkinson was appointed to the position of Lecturer and Organiser of the

Sydney University Tutorial Classes. Early tutors of such classes included Irvine and C.H. Northcott, one of Anderson’s students.  

On this firm foundation the Conference organised by the Labor Council, chaired by Mainsbridge, and held at Sydney Trades Hall on November 3, formally established the WEA of NSW ‘as a non-partisan educational body controlled by its members and representatives of affiliated organisations.’ Twenty-eight joined immediately and within a short time this figure rose to approximately fifty. Included among them were the Labor Council, the Trades Hall Association, thirty-odd trade unions, 4 public service organisations, 3 political labor leagues, the Feminist Club, a co-operative society, a friendly society and 2 university associations.

The NSW Labor Government’s patronage produced a tripartite connection between the state, the university and the labour movement which ensured that the WEA would be strongest in NSW. Similar arrangements in other states were subsequently made where support for the WEA existed among leading middle class reformers, although the degree of government support was far less significant. In 1914, government grants in Victoria and Tasmania enabled tutorial classes to be launched on a better footing than in the other states. But even in these cases, the grants were minuscule by comparison with NSW, and as a result the classes were less numerous. The following year, after support was obtained from the Under Secretary of Queensland’s Department of Public Instruction as well as from a government grant, university academics and labour leaders in that State succeeded in establishing viable joint committees and tutorial classes. In Victoria, too, the Government agreed to provide additional funding for tutorial classes in 1917, following pressure from powerful WEA supporters like Barrett, Professor W. Harrison Moore, who chaired Melbourne University’s Extension

35 Higgins, op. cit., p.17.
Board, and other members of the University's Council, including the notable progressive judge, H.B. Higgins.38

5. LABOUR MOVEMENT INVOLVEMENT

Why was the industrial labour movement so rapidly drawn into a close association with the WEA? To a certain extent, the cultural imperatives of the labour movement's official representatives coincided with those of the middle class professionals who joined the organisation as individual members. As Rowse would have it, the WEA provided a nexus between liberalism and labourism. It offered 'radical' liberal intellectuals an opportunity to teach workers about their social responsibilities.39 At the same time, it offered the more conservative union leaders a chance to influence the education of workers. Their collaboration with middle class intellectuals was based on pragmatism rather than assimilation of the social harmony ideal; a pragmatism which reflected what Albert Metin had described in 1902 as 'socialism without doctrine'. As Connell and Irving point out, working class leaders recognised that they could not operate permanently outside the organisations of the state at a time when the meliorist strategies associated with the state's integrative role in Australia's class structure promoted an acceptance of labourism. This state of affairs 'did not demobilise the working class'. Rather, as subsequent developments would show, 'it reinforced its level of mobilisation'.40

Indeed, the high profile of trade unionists in the WEA and also the Joint Committee seemed to presage an equal partnership between labour and university. When a committee was formed to advise Queensland University's Senate on Workers' Tutorial Classes, under the auspices of the University and the WEA, the labour movement was represented by Mr McCorker from the Typographical Union. 41 Such incorporation made it appear that the WEA would address the labour movement's educational aspirations, and thus helps to explain

38 Bourke, op. cit., p.53.
40 Metin, op. cit., generally; Connell and Irving, op. cit., pp.195-205.
41 Correspondence: Registrar, University of Queensland to President of the Board of Faculties, 28 March 1916, QUA.
why its official representatives paid little attention to the alternative proposals then being promoted by labour movement radicals.

Opposition to the WEA was initially voiced by the Australian Socialist Party and Furnishing Trades Union member, Luke Jones, who had recently arrived from England where he had been involved with the Plebs League. On the basis of this experience, Jones argued in 1913 that the working class would be better served by a Labor College; a conclusion which was also drawn by certain unionists in Melbourne who attempted, unsuccessfully at this stage, to establish a labor college there. Their failure, according to Earsman, occurred ‘because some of the leaders of organised labor (sic) had become tainted with the supposed good fellowship of University dons’ when they joined the WEA.42 Such good fellowship was, however, not limited to labour leaders. The rank-and-file also initially responded positively to the WEA’s effort to provide classes on subjects which interested them. Against the backdrop of the NSW Labor Government’s educational reforms, the University of Sydney finally obtained the resources to fulfill the NSW Labor Council’s continuing demand for lectures on economics and industrial history, a demand which the Extension Board had hitherto been unable to meet. The fact that the first tutorial class launched in NSW, in early 1914, on industrial history was composed ‘chiefly of industrial workers’, and that other classes were rapidly formed in industrial centers, such as Wollongong and Helensburgh, suggested that the new arrangements would be predisposed to serving workers’ own espoused interests and that workers were interested enough to attend classes. Similar developments occurred in Queensland during 1913. Following interchanges between the Registrar of that State’s University and the Brisbane Trades Hall, the first tutorial classes launched in 1914 dealt with industrial history and elementary economics.43

Additionally, workers were drawn to tutorial classes because efforts were made to address them directly. In 1915, the Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes in Sydney adopted a policy of catering ‘for students at their places of occupation’.

43 SUEB, Annual Reports: 1908-1909: p.8; 1912-1913: p.7; N.R. Wills, ‘Francis Armand Bland’, AH, 47, 2 (August 1967) p.4; Correspondence: Registrar, Queensland University and Brisbane Trades Hall, 22
Regular classes and study circles were soon formed at the government’s railway and tramway workshops, at the Cockatoo Island dockyard, the W.D. and H.O. Wills Factory, and the Commonwealth Bank. Additionally, the success of classes held specifically for women workers at the Trades Hall in 1914 on industrial history, economics and biology, led the Joint Committee to employ a female graduate to recruit women who worked in a number of the city's larger factories, notably David Jones, Reckitts, Lever Brothers and Arnotts. In some cases too, study circles were successfully launched because of the active support of prominent ALP politicians. It was later recalled that W.A. Holman, the war-time Premier of NSW, had inspired numerous members of the NSW Parliamentary Labor Party to attend classes in the pre-war period. In this context too, study circles were launched in various industrial towns, such as Bathurst and later Broken Hill.\footnote{44}

The inauguration of classes on industrial history in NSW, initially taught by Professor Irvine, attracted a large number of workers. In the year 1914-1915, recorded participants included: 45 trade union officials, 15 miners, 10 carpenters, 6 plasterers, 4 boot operatives, 37 from engineering and mechanical industries and 7 shop assistants, as well as 40 teachers, 46 involved with clerical occupations and 36 with household duties.\footnote{45} In order to maintain the involvement of unionists, moreover, the WEA soon augmented its classes with one on industrial law. These captured the interest of leading labour movement activists, such as W.J. McKell of the Boilermakers Society, later Labor Premier of NSW, who became Secretary of this class in 1915 and 1916 and a member of the WEA Central Council. Clearly, in its early years the Association’s missionaries sought to validate the claim that the WEA aimed to ‘be truly representative of working class opinion on educational questions’ by fulfilling the 'strictly utilitarian' educational demands of unionists.\footnote{46} But despite the initial collaboration between

\footnotesize{\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize{September 1913, 15 December, 1913, QUA.
\footnote{44} WEA, \textit{First Annual Report}, p.11; Sydney University Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes, \textit{Annual Report for 1917}, p.4; Marjorie Chave Collison, Personnel File, Accession No.405, Group 4, Series 6, Item 1, SUA; Minutes of the First Conference between the Joint Committee and Tutorial Class Secretaries, 9 January 1921, Accession No.405, Group G, Series 4, Item 1, pp.6-7, SUA.
\footnote{45} Alexander, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.20-22. See further: Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes, \textit{op. cit.}, p.11.
\end{flushleft}}
the WEA's labour movement and professional middle class members, the organisation was unable to accommodate both the ideals of social emancipation and social harmony. Within a short time of its formation, the Association's offer to address specific working class interests was subordinated to the principle of non-partisanship adopted from the English Association's constitution. For notable individual members who were bastions of the progressive middle class, such as Peter Board, Meredith Atkinson, Professors Irvine and Anderson, F.A. Bland, and Justices G. Heydon and A.B. Piddington, this principle bolstered a desire to make the WEA a 'common meeting ground to all'. And although the 'representative committee' appointed by the Labor Council in April 1913 to draft the Association's constitution adopted this principle 'without challenge', the serious debate among its members over the meaning of 'non-partisan' reflected the labour movement's ambivalence towards it. As Stewart later said of this debate: 'Looking back I doubt if the committee really appreciated the full meaning of the words "non-partisan".' Herein lay the fundamental difference in values and aspirations of the Association's middle class missionaries and its labour movement members. As the evangelical Stewart admitted, the labour movement's involvement in workers' education was linked to its struggle 'to effect some form of social change' which would benefit all workers.

The formation of the WEA did little to subvert this ethos. In fact, its insistence on a policy of non-partisanship brought the WEA into direct conflict with such cardinal labour movement principles as the 'closed shop' and 'preference to unionists'. In 1914, for example, the Trades Hall Association refused the WEA's request for tutorial class students to be given access to the Trades Hall library because not all WEA members were unionists. The WEA's attempt to circumvent this direct attack on its 'non-partisan' position, by appealing directly to unions, resulted in the disaffiliation of the Trades Hall Association and some other labour organisations. Other conflicts of this nature soon followed. In 1915 the WEA's Central Council refused the NSW Typographical Association's request that all its

Minutes of Meetings of the Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes, Meeting of 28 June 1917, S22, QUA.

49 David Stewart, 'Pioneering the WEA in Australasia - VI. Reflections,' AH, xxix, 6, (December 1947) p.87.
printed matter bear the union label; the 'preference to unionists' principle was deemed to be 'outside its sphere'. Similarly, when its Victorian Branch accepted the membership of a scab union, 'genuine unionists promptly disaffiliated'. In turn, this incompatibility between the WEA's policies and the concerns of the labour movement soon affected the viability of tutorial classes. Those established in highly unionised industrial towns in NSW were suspended when industrial and political strife escalated during 1915. But this breakdown was not entirely one-sided. Classes for women factory workers in Sydney were also halted during the war; the circumstances were inopportune for continued 'organising work specifically among women through the salaried officers of the Department (of Tutorial Classes)', declared the conservative male academics on the University of Sydney Joint Committee's executive.

These developments merely reflected more deep-seated differences between workers and their representatives, on the one hand, and middle class educators, on the other. The seeds of struggle which would eventually cut the formal connections between them were rooted in the competing meanings these two groups attached to the WEA's stated aims. For despite the claim made in its first Annual Report that it had been launched to become 'truly representative of working class opinion on educational questions', the organisation failed to adequately address the concerns of its labour movement members. Indeed, the WEA's efforts to maintain the support and involvement of those unionists who initially joined as corporate members was irrevocably hampered when its generally middle class individual members reinforced the consensus ideology enshrined in the principle of non-partisanship by advocating social efficiency.

6. **EMPIRE LOYALTY AND NATIONAL EFFICIENCY: THE IMPACT OF WAR**

The loyalty to Britain which infused Australia's public culture initially encouraged unanimous support for the Empire's war effort among rival Labor and Liberal politicians, as well as the wider community. The advent of war thus 'acted as a binding force' to the extent that it was arguably the first event after Federation

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51 Minutes, First Conference... Joint Committee and Tutorial Class Secretaries... 1921, pp.6-7.
which was shared by all Australians."53 Yet the pledge to use all available resources to support Britain's cause, together with the cancellation of contracts with German firms, soon impinged on domestic economic conditions and living standards. The loss of German trade and the uncertainty of British imports resulted in unemployment, particularly in those industries which relied on foreign commerce. These economic pressures were then reinforced by the financial costs of the domestic war effort, as well as by the Federal Government's methods for dealing with the resulting social tensions. The enforcement of various controls over individual and collective liberties, through the imposition of a wages freeze and censorship regulations, heightened a sense of deprivation and exploitation among workers."54 The resulting social disharmony exacerbated class conflict, while simultaneously strengthening intra-class bonds. The deteriorating economic, social and political conditions inspired a greater sense of solidarity among working class people who mobilised their labour organisations and informal community networks to defend their collective interests."55 Additionally, as a counterpoise to this rapidly escalating working class militancy, middle class intellectuals united to prosecute the war effort and to promote their vision of Australia as an industrial nation. A critical feature of their mobilisation was the pursuit of what they referred to as national efficiency."56

At the helm of this quest for national efficiency were those leading public servants and academics who were simultaneously associated with the Australian Round Table and the WEA-University Joint Tutorial Committee."57 Given this

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57 The most significant of these were Peter Board, R.F. Irvine, G.H. Knibbs, Professor Edgeworth David, H.B. Higgins, W.A. Osborne, W. Harrison Moore, Meredith Atkinson, G.V. Portus, F.W. Eggleston and Gerald Lightfoot.
association it is hardly surprising that these forums were used to promote the efficiency campaign which was, to a certain extent, legitimated by the war-inspired demand for Empire loyalty. However, as Foster points out, while the members of the Australian Round Table and their fellow-travellers were `proud of their British race heritage' and culture, their loyalty to Britain was not unquestioning. On the contrary, their ardent nationalism produced a dual loyalty which allowed them to criticise British industrial and scientific weaknesses, while attempting to emulate American achievements in these fields.  

The National Efficiency campaign launched by Victoria's Commissioner for Public Works, F. Hagelthorne, in early 1914, was critically important in creating a channel for reformers to promote the ideas and practices associated with the American Efficiency Movement. It also provided an important base for the ideological campaign which they subsequently launched through the WEA. Beginning with a number of lectures on Industrial Efficiency, the campaign drew on progressive networks between Australia and the USA and it helped to diffuse the social harmony gospel associated with scientific management. In September 1915, Hagelthorne wrote that the campaign for National Efficiency was not `a movement for one party, or one section of the people', but an ideal which could only attain success if it was based on `the combined efforts of a whole people'. In his contribution to this lecture series, R.F. Irvine remarked that the crisis of war called for the inauguration of special organisation `for the efficient use of all our resources of men and material' in place of the old laissez-faire methods. The latter's bankruptcy, Irvine suggested, called for the adoption of American models

58 Foster, op. cit., pp.26-27, pp.30-32, p.37, p.48, pp.55-56, p.73, p.76, p.78, pp.189-243. Foster's conclusions concerning the nature of dual loyalty is more convincing than McKernan's which simplistically suggests that the war `created a particular type of dual loyalty to which all classes in Australia could give their allegiance in varying degrees.' As both Foster and Alfred McCoy indicate, this phenomenon should not be temporally restricted to an event. Indeed, McCoy demonstrates that the Filipino elite's `bi-nationalism' was tied to the nature of colonialism although it was not limited to one colonial master. When, at the turn of the twentieth century, the USA succeeded Spain as the major imperial power in the region, the `bi-nationalism' of the Filipinos' elite shifted accordingly. McKernan, op. cit., p.6. Alfred W. McCoy, 'The Philippines: Independence without Decolonisation' in Robin Jeffrey (ed.) Asia-The Winning of Independence (London, 1981) pp.26-27.

59 N.C. Harris, Industrial Efficiency: A Series of Lectures Delivered at the Victorian Railways Institute (Melbourne, 1914); Correspondence: William C. Redfield to Frederick Winslow Taylor, 5 November 1914; Correspondence: J.C. Morrell to F.W. Taylor, 10 November 1914; Frederick W. Taylor Collection, Samuel C. Williams Library, Stevens Institute of Technology, New Jersey; Taksa, 'The Cultural Diffusion,' pp.427-461.

which would provide the best means of achieving national efficiency.\textsuperscript{61} Specifically, Irvine recommended scientific management principles and practices to remedy Australia's inefficiency, its waste of natural and human resources and its need for 'more effectual training of the population'. Unfortunately, Irvine informed his audience, this system's aim of reducing costs and stimulating industrial energy had generally been misunderstood in Australia. Its principles not only emphasised standardisation and system, but as importantly, they laid 'still more stress on human motives and results.' In Irvine's view, scientific management recognised that people, 'do not work or think or invent efficiently under the lash of fear or starvation. Hope, pleasure in work and brotherly cooperation, the sense of social service, are the feelings and motives the expert appeals to'. Through education, he suggested, the prevailing negative attitude to scientific management could be overcome.\textsuperscript{62} In fact, all the speakers in Hagelthorne's lecture series saw a crucial link between the further training of workers and the triumph of scientific management ideology and methods over labour's ability to restrict output. As had earlier been enunciated by F.W. Taylor in America, these Australian reformers argued that workers had to be made to see the fallacy of their belief that increased production inevitably reduced employment. Meredith Atkinson represented scientific education, one of F.W. Taylor's four principles of scientific management, as the best way of eliminating workers' antipathy to efficiency methods through persuasion rather than compulsion; a view which had earlier been expressed by Josephine Goldmark, one of Taylor's progressive supporters in the USA.\textsuperscript{63}

The war legitimated the intellectuals' efficiency campaign because it reinforced the urgency for changing workers' attitudes and practices. Not content with preaching to the converted, they soon shifted their evangelical efforts to those forums which were likely to involve workers. The conference on 'Trade Unionism in Australia', organised by Atkinson in 1915 under the auspices of the WEA, the

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\item \textsuperscript{61} R.F. Irvine, 'National Organisation and National Efficiency,' in Irvine, \textit{ibid.}, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Irvine, \textit{ibid.}, p.15.
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Economic Research Society of Sydney and the Labor Council of NSW, provided a perfect medium. Here, too, F.W. Taylor cast a long shadow over those members of the Australian Round Table who participated. Atkinson, Irvine, F.W. Eggleston and Gerald Lightfoot all decried the trade unions' antipathy to efficiency methods generally and more specifically, to 'the new school of scientific management.' Irvine stressed, however, that this hostility was not universal among sensible workers who accepted the need for organisational improvements. In his view, opposition only came from those who adopted the 'ca 'canny principle' [output restriction] because of a mistaken belief that the system's capacity to simplify work processes decreased employment. Much like the American progressive, Professor Hoxie, Irvine acknowledged that '[t]he system of bonuses to reward special capacity and to educe special efficiency... looks like an attempt to undermine collective bargaining and to weaken the bonds which hold the workers together.' But because he believed that it was 'impossible to keep on raising incomes indefinitely without increasing production', Irvine did not think that this threat to the mutualistic ethic which united workers justified 'an indiscriminate hostility to all proposals for increasing output.'

Those who participated in this Conference promoted consensus ideology as a way of countering the collective industrial and political action undertaken by workers which threatened to undermine their quest for national efficiency. They paid lip-service to labour's sacred cows by acknowledging that trade unions had 'hastened the general progress of society' through their advocacy of distributive justice. And they acclaimed the fact that Australia now possessed the machinery for securing fair wages through public authority, as well as the eight hour day, old age and sickness pension schemes and factory legislation. But they firmly believed that legislative means had been exhausted. Now such gains had to be offset by greater productivity. Eggleston thus concluded, 'We have our higher wages, our increased comfort, and the like; but we have not inaugurated a new order. We still have the crude antithesis between capitalist and proletariat.' What

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65 Irvine, ibid., p.34; F.W. Eggleston, 'The Effect of Industrial Legislation in Australia upon the Ideals and
was required then, was a general re-organisation of industry and a `revolutionary change in the relations of employer and employee',\textsuperscript{66} in short, a Taylorian mental revolution. As F.W. Taylor had done before them, both Irvine and Eggleston told union representatives that they had to help promote efficiency, not by advocating that their members should work 'harder or faster or longer', but instead by enlisting their aid in the search for better methods of `co-operating in production'. Indeed, Eggleston stressed that labour's status could be improved through 'careful organisation and the gradual acquirement of habits of control'.\textsuperscript{67}

This language of efficiency provided middle class reformers with an important vehicle for promoting social harmony. It validated their attack on the collectivist consciousness which underpinned labour organisation, principles and customary practices, and yet enabled them to maintain a facade of support for the existence of trade unions. It was an approach which had been employed by F.W. Taylor. Unions, he acknowledged, had done much to improve working conditions in Britain and America through their involvement in 'bread and butter' issues. However, their formal support for the collective restriction of output was to be abhorred on the grounds that such action stirred up class hatred and warfare. For this reason, Taylor argued that unions had outlived their usefulness.\textsuperscript{68} In Australia this outlook was fused to the non-partisan social harmony ethos which had come to dominate the WEA. Indeed, the ideas and activities of reformers such Board and Irvine demonstrated the complementary nature of British and American imperial models. Board, for example, was not only a champion of British institutions like the WEA, but also an advocate for American progressivism. Following his trip to the USA in 1909, he introduced efficiency principles and methods as part of the reforms he made to all levels of the NSW education system. His support for Joint Tutorial Classes was, moreover, linked to his

\textsuperscript{66} F.W. Taylor, 'A Piece-Rate System, Being a Step Toward Partial Solution of the Labor Problem', \textit{Transactions, American Society of Mechanical Engineers}, 16 (June 1895) p.878; Irvine, 'Trade Unionism and Efficiency', p.35; Eggleston, \textit{ibid.}, pp.82-84.
acclaim of the American extension scheme operating in Wisconsin. Likewise, Irvine's missions to the USA inspired his advocacy of American reforms in a multiplicity of spheres, ranging from town planning to social science research. His involvement in the Sydney University Extension Movement and the WEA, according to Roe, drew on American precedents.

Advocates of national efficiency, such as these hailed the WEA conference on Trades Unionism a great success largely because it attracted a substantial audience from the labour movement. Of 188 delegates, 55 represented trade unions. And to a limited extent it did allow a few labour leaders, notably H.C. Hoyle and W.G. Spence, both Ministers in the NSW Labor Government, the chance to publicly articulate their commitment to workers' education and the government's support for the WEA. However, the Conference organisers made a fatal error in concluding that its success hinged on the participation of Labor leaders and on the presentation of papers on the history of trade unionism, its administration and relationship to industrial arbitration and legislation. Their combined criticism of workers' customary beliefs and practices was, as Rowse points out, a tactical blunder. From this time they became increasingly isolated from an embattled working class which had become immune to the ethics of non-partisanship, efficiency and social harmony, so vigorously championed by WEA enthusiasts. Perhaps because these men were blinded by faith in their own rhetoric, they failed to see that labour movement attendance would not result in unquestioning acceptance of the speakers' arguments.

The battle lines were drawn in 1916 not over of an educational issue but rather because the WEA became associated with the Federal Labor Government's campaign to introduce compulsory enlistment for overseas service; a campaign which was vehemently opposed by most unionists and rank-and-file Labor Party members. As the report of the Australian Trade Union Congress,

Principles, pp.81-82.
71 W.G. Spence, 'Trade Union Administration and Industrial and Craft Unionism', in Atkinson (ed.) Trade Unionism in Australia, p.45.
72 Conference Programme in ibid., pp.6-7.
held in Melbourne in May 1916, put it, 'conscription has been used to render null
and void all the achievements of Trade Unionism - to destroy customs, rights and
practices'. When the WEA's President and Director of Tutorial Classes, Meredith
Atkinson became a founding member and Secretary of the Universal Service
League which was formed to support the Government's conscription campaign, a
collision course was invariably set in train between the Association’s non-partisan
position and the labour movement's principle of solidarity. On the one hand, the
Labor Party's executive responded to its members’ views by making anti-
conscription a plank in the Party's Platform and expelling those parliamentarians,
among others, who failed to conform. On the other, Atkinson's middle class
supporters stuck to the 'right of all WEA personnel to express their views
unhindered' by refusing to accept his resignation as President. The labour
movement's reaction to this decision was, according to Stewart, 'certainly severe'.

Negotiations between the WEA and the Australian Workers Union (AWU) to
provide an educational service to rural workers, were immediately halted.
Approximately eighteen labour organisations, including the AWU, the Federated
Engine Drivers, and the Sydney Labor Council disaffiliated from the WEA Joint
Committee. The branch in the south coast industrial town of Wollongong
collapsed, while in Queensland, the pro-conscription stance taken by university
tutors affronted the labour movement. Unionists there quickly mobilised against
one tutor who was employed as a military censor. In South Australia, too, union
opposition succeeded in changing, albeit temporarily, the Labor Government's
decision to fund the WEA. War-time imperatives, in the name of Empire loyalty,
drove a wedge between labour and the WEA which was never effectively
removed. Even those unions who retained links with the WEA faced continuing
opposition from some of their members.75

The number of workers and union officials who had initially flocked to
tutorial classes rapidly diminished. From an initial figure of 45, the NSW trade
union officials enrolled in classes decreased to 22 in 1916/1917 and by 1923 this

75 Rowse, op. cit., p.60; Alexander, op. cit., pp.23-27; David Stewart, 'Pioneering the WEA in Australasia - IV.
p.185.
occupational group was down to three. Against the backdrop of the conscription crisis and a general strike in NSW in 1917 over the implementation of scientific management methods in the NSW government’s railway and tramway workshops under the guise of a new card system of recording work times, the labour movement began to directly challenge the influence of the middle class intellectuals whose efficiency campaign had come to dominate the WEA. Gaining their inspiration from the Plebs League and the Central Labor College established in London in 1909, radical intellectuals like W.P. Earsman, Guido Barrachi, Frederic Sinclaire and other members of the Victorian Socialist Party, launched their own labour college in Victoria in 1917. Operating under the aegis of the Victorian Railways Union, this College offered classes in economics, philosophy and industrial strategy. Its object, according to Earsman, was to obliterate 'the slave culture, which seems to dominate society', and its goal was therefore 'to implant a revolutionary culture in the minds of those it seeks to serve.' Two years later similar classes were organised in Queensland and the Labor College established in Sydney under the auspices of the Labor Council soon formed classes in Marxian economics, grammar, literature and industrial history.

These colleges were short-lived mainly because of doctrinal differences between their leaders, notably between Earsman and Moses Baritz. Nevertheless, they did represent an attempt to impute the WEA's ideological and cultural onslaught. As Earsman told a conference on 'The Working Class and Education' in 1918, in his capacity as the Secretary of the Victorian College, the WEA's claim of impartiality was untrue and 'dangerous to the working classes'. Other speakers, moreover, declared that the Victorian Labor College 'was a recognition of the necessity of workers to organise in the educational as they had done in the industrial and political fields'. Yet these educational efforts were not isolated from

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the industrial field. One of the features of the Sydney College, Earsman declared, was its effort to put 'into practice the principles which the industrial labour movement stands for - Control on the Job.'

For labour activists, education clearly formed the front-line in the battle over workplace culture. But for the middle class proponents of efficiency the underlying goal was far broader than this. As their rhetoric in WEA forums showed, the desire to create a 'highly educated democracy' in which the 'adult citizen' was instructed in 'subjects of daily concern' invariably entailed an attack on the intellectual structures which enabled workers to act in concert to protect and promote their own specific industrial and political interests not only in the workplace but also beyond it. For this reason middle class intellectuals were undeterred by the labour movement's oppositional efforts. Indeed, they continued to promote instruction in civic efficiency, despite what the Chair of Sydney University's Joint Committee, Francis Anderson referred to as the 'abnormal circumstances attending upon the war, the strikes, the elections and the (conscription) referenda'. WEA forums were crucial in this endeavour. In 1917, for instance, the WEA and the University's Extension Board ran a tutorial class series on the 'Problems of Democracy'. Also in that year the WEA published the lecture series on 'Industrial Psychology' by Bernard Muscio in book form; a publication which was little more than a summary of scientific management principles and practices based on the writings of Taylor and his followers. As C.H. Northcott pointed out in the doctoral thesis he completed in 1918 at Columbia University on Australia's social development, the WEA and the tutorial class movement supplied the means not only for a training in citizenship but also for awakening the social responsibility necessary to produce industrial efficiency and social harmony.

The papers presented at a conference on Adolescent Education organised by the WEA in 1919 demonstrated the ramifications of such views for working class cultural pursuits. Those who had earlier preached national efficiency at the Conference on Trade Unionism now focused specifically on further education,

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79 Earsman, op. cit., p.16.
80 Atkinson (ed.) Trade Unionism in Australia, p.115.
81 Joint Committee for Tutorial Classes, Annual Report.1917, pp.8-9; Bernard Muscio, Lectures on Industrial
vocational fitness and vocational selection. As Board put it, such approaches would provide the best way of overcoming 'the greater influences of the street corner, the workshop' and 'other aspects of the worker's social life.'\textsuperscript{82} Similarly, Irvine disparaged conclusions drawn on economic subjects, from the 'reading of newspapers, public meetings, and club talk'. 'The direct appeal of many of these matters to personal, class or party interests', he argued, 'distorted or poisoned the popular mind'. In his view, only an understanding of 'Economics as a science' and the adoption of 'a science of business administration...molded by Economics and scientific management' would facilitate social integration. Irvine's advocacy of scientific management rested on the belief that the application of scientific analysis to industrial problems challenged what he referred to as 'traditional systems'.\textsuperscript{83} Interests based on the material bonds of class clearly fell within such systems, as Atkinson made clear in \textit{The New Social Order}, a textbook he produced for WEA students in 1919. In a section entitled 'Class War and Tyranny', Atkinson stressed: 'To cultivate class hatred is to disqualify for true citizenship'.\textsuperscript{84}

This view was reinforced in Elton Mayo's \textit{Democracy and Freedom: An Essay in Social Logic}, which was published in 1919 as 'WEA Series: No.1' and which criticised the tradition of state intervention institutionalised by Labor governments on the grounds that this socialist endeavour had 'led to a marked increase in the intensity and bitterness of class-feeling.' As Mayo saw it, 'the democracy which was to reflect “the general will” and thus to secure social unity' had, by its reliance on 'the device of State control', done 'nothing to promote real unanimity or mutual understanding.' On the contrary, such 'practical politics' had created 'an aggravated partisan hostility' which had prevented democracy from moving 'in the direction of human freedom and personal autonomy.'\textsuperscript{85} What was needed then, according to men like Atkinson and Mayo, to overcome the 'scientifically false and politically dangerous' gospel of 'class-hatred' which was

\textsuperscript{83} R.F. Irvine, 'Teaching Economics to Adolescents', in \textit{ibid.}, p.40, p.43.
\textsuperscript{84} Atkinson, \textit{The New Social Order}, p.43.
preached at every street corner in Australia' and in trades halls by union leaders, was political education. Such education would, they thought, enable the emergence of social collaboration in place of the 'wrong conception of the group-interest' which had arisen as 'a result of the industrial expansion of the nineteenth century.'

Why were post-war WEA activities and publications all directed toward issues of democracy and citizenship? This was not simply part of the rising hysteria against the spread of communism. As Moore puts it, by 1919 'rule by consensus was in disarray' and social order was under such a strain that 'the government and police were unable to impose their authority in some working-class districts.'

Following the Labor Party split over conscription and loss of government, in the context of the post-war rise in prices and deterioration in living standards, trade unions mounted an offensive to defend working conditions and improve wages and hours with the result of 6.3 million days lost in industrial disputes in 1919 and 1.9 million in 1920. To stem this increased militancy, the ruling class engaged in political and economic re-organisation. One important strategy involved the effort to reintegrate returned soldiers into Australian society as 'useful citizens'. In both intent and ideology, the new Repatriation Training Scheme, which was introduced in April 1919, meshed neatly with the WEA's activities. In part, this was due to the influence of James Nangle, who became the Director of Vocational Training under the Commonwealth Department of Repatriation after being freed from his duties as the Superintendent of Technical Education by the NSW Director of Education, Peter Board. As an ardent proponent of scientific management, Nangle ensured that this Scheme would provide a practical way of linking citizenship and efficiency; an effort which he had earlier succeeded in achieving through the reforms he and Board introduced to the administration of technical education in NSW immediately before the outbreak of war. The Training Scheme adopted the basic tenets of scientific management

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ideology, its principles of ‘scientific education and ‘scientific selection’, as well as some of its techniques. Because, in Nangle’s view, the scheme inaugurated a system of selection and assessment by experts which directed returned soldiers into careers for which their natural qualifications were best fitted, he thought that it prevented them from being left in inappropriate jobs which caused them to be ‘discontented and unhappy’ and thus to ‘wage war with the social system.’ The result of this experiment, he added, ‘indicated what could be done on a very much larger scale’, particularly vis-a-vis school children. The same procedures were also adopted for allocating returned soldiers to trades and positions after they had completed class room training. Two years later, Nangle reported that the value of this ‘scientific’ approach to selection and instruction, was demonstrated by the fact that the 8,735 men involved in this scheme were now earning journeymen’s wages as a result of their short, but concentrated training. The Soldiers’ Industrial Committees inaugurated as part of the training scheme had not only brought representatives of both capital and labour more closely ‘into touch with technical education,’ but had also secured ‘sympathy and help instead of inevitable restlessness and opposition.’ In short, all aspects of this scheme attacked the prevailing informal and collective recruitment techniques which relied on working class family and community networks and on labour organisations and also traditional on-the-job apprenticeship training.

Labour leaders responded to such attacks on working class principles and practices by directly challenging the view of citizenship promoted in WEA forums. The 'producers of this country, and every country, are the only decent citizens there are', the radical Labor Member of the NSW Legislative Assembly Percy Brookfield told those gathered at a public memorial in 1919 for that 'stalwart'

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90 AMJ, 1 November 1918, p.29. See also, Australasian Manufacturer, 23 August 1919, p.14 and 18 October 1919, p.14.


socialist, Luke Jones. This struggle over political citizenship was not new, its roots stretched back to the 1850s. The campaign for 'responsible government' fought by members of the liberal bourgeoisie and radical workers alike obscured the existing contestation over citizenship. And although labour’s radical democratic orientation re-emerged in 1854 during the Eureka Stockade rebellion, according to Irving and Scalmer it did not represent a rejection of parliamentary democracy, but rather a sign that workers 'had learnt that “representation” by itself was not enough.' Nevertheless, the subsequent emergence of the Labor Party effectively institutionalised a ‘tame’ radical democracy, one which was only subject to substantial challenge during moments of intense crisis, as occurred after World War One when unionists become more vigorous in their advocacy of social transformation. Despite the excessive police surveillance of and attacks on workers' right to exercise 'free speech' on street corners and other such public meeting places, labour activists used their traditional mediums of spruiking and union and political newspapers to question the notions of education and efficiency then being promoted through WEA programmes. By the early 1920s they also began publishing educational literature for a wider working class audience. In 1923, for example, the Amalgamated Printing Trades Union devoted part of its paper to articles on social science in order to provide its members with education 'from the working-class viewpoint'. These were subsequently revised and produced as a book entitled, *Education and Science in Working-class Ideology*, which was envisaged as the first publication in a Social Science series for the members 'of every Trade Union, Labor League and other working-class organisation'. This effort, like earlier ones undertaken in opposition to the WEA, was inspired by the Plebs League in England. Indeed, the union’s editor thanked the League 'for much valuable assistance from its publications,' which were quoted to support the case for 'Independent Working-Class Education.'

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94 Irving and Scalmer, op. cit., p.4.

95 See for examples: Reports of Meetings at Sydney Domain: 12 May 1918; 23 June 1918; 30 June 1918; 21 July 1918; 25 August 1918; 8, 15, 27 September 1918; 24 November 1918; Extract from *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 August 1920. *ibid.*, Police Reports.

This book demonstrates that the labour movement's initial involvement with the WEA and Joint Tutorial Classes had not succeeded in fulfilling the aspirations of the WEA's founders. Labour movement intellectuals and activists not only responded to the ideological campaign which had been conducted by the WEA's progressive intellectual members during the preceding decade by terminating their affiliation. They also directly challenged the complementary ideals of social harmony and efficiency. As the author of this book, J.C. Eldridge told his readers, its object was:

not to duplicate or to compete with conventional schools, colleges and universities, but to cover that which such establishments cannot touch - the field of intellectual activity that has for its objective a revolutionary change in existing economic and social institutions and conditions.\(^\text{97}\)

Eldridge further pointed out that independent working class education represented 'a partisan effort to improve the position of that class.' It was 'a means to an end' and the end was 'to promote the victory of the Labor Movement'; a movement based on 'the antagonism of interests existing between Capital and Labour.' The ideal of social emancipation enunciated here, directly challenged the 'bogus education' offered by the universities and the 'outpatients departments of the Universities' whose 'current glib talk on efficiency', was according to the author, 'utter drivel.' He therefore denounced the 'false claims for increased efficiency' by questioning the reputation of the 'efficiency expert' whose lofty proposals were nothing more than the promotion of:

Bundy clocks, the important ceremony of signing attendance books in the approved manner (and at the right time), the profundity of Taylor Card systems... the systematic dismissal of defenseless employees (as an important policy of high finance, specially catalogued under modern principles of Scientific Business Administration').\(^\text{98}\)

The spirit of efficiency, so continuously advocated in WEA forums, clearly left its mark on the educational efforts made by labour movement activists. But instead of ensuring social harmony, it played a crucial role in undermining the WEA's fellowship with those unions and their members initially drawn to it and the tutorial

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\(^{97}\) Eldridge, \textit{ibid.}, p.10.
classes offered by Australia's universities. Irving and Scalmer are correct in their conclusion that the 'debates in which the WEA engaged galvanised working class opposition around specific issues and led it to develop a stronger sense of itself.'

As the WEA's Annual Report for 1919 admitted, 'we are not getting the proportion of wage workers we would like to get, and it will be a long time before we do.' The fact that 'a considerable section of workers' viewed any associations with the university as abhorrent, the Report continued, made it much 'easier to organise classes for professional and middle class people'. Indeed, following the war, the WEA and Joint Tutorial Committee became increasingly involved in promoting professional credentials.\(^{100}\)

Early in 1920, for example, arrangements were made between the Director of Tutorial Classes at Sydney University and the NSW Railway and Tramway Department's educational Institute for the provision of three courses specifically for those railway employees who wanted to 'qualify to higher positions'. These included one on Railway Economics, convened by F.A. Bland, a prominent member of the WEA, one on Business Management by W.J. Clearly, the Assistant General Manager of the brewers, Messrs. Tooths and Co., and one on Transport Economics by C.A. Hodgesen, the Railways' Chief Traffic Manager. At a social occasion attended by Institute officials, as well as by the Secretary of the WEA, David Stewart and the Director of the University's Tutorial Classes, G. Portus, it was pointed out that the growing relationship between these organisations was not surprising given their common attention to the promotion of efficiency.\(^{101}\)

This continuing obsession with efficiency did not alienate all labour organisations and their members from tutorial classes and WEA activities. But whenever the tension between the ever-present ideals of social harmony and social transformation erupted into conflict over specific issues, even these associations were terminated, only to be resurrected at a later stage. Such vacillation on the part of labour movement organisations towards the WEA meant

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\(^{99}\) Irving and Scalmer, \textit{op. cit.}, p.17.
\(^{101}\) \textit{NSW Railway & Tramway Magazine}, 1 July 1919, p.242; 1 March 1920, pp.267-268, p.283; 1 May 1920, p.433; 2 August 1920, p.525; 1 November 1920, p.674; 1 December 1920, pp.729-30; \textit{Engineering Journal},
that the relationship between them was continuously on the brink of collapse over competing industrial and cultural norms.\textsuperscript{102}

CONCLUSION

The activities of the Australian WEA, like those of its university extension forerunner, demonstrate the way that imperial models were adjusted to suit local conditions. The WEA’s early success was due, in large part, to the measures enacted by the newly elected NSW Labor Government which set a precedent of state aid and collaboration between the state, the labour movement and the university for the rest of Australia. The WEA’s original goal of spreading education in citizenship, particularly to working class people was, however, thwarted in Australia by a conjunction of temporal, social and political forces. Wartime conditions certainly exacerbated the ideological differences which existed between the Association’s labour movement and middle class intellectual members. But the special nature of the latter’s dominating influence was crucial in alienating the labour movement from the WEA, particularly after conflict over conscription split the ALP and Labor governments were succeeded by conservative Nationalist coalitions. The intellectuals’ pursuit of national efficiency failed to win the working class citizen’s support for social harmony and new modes of organisation and work, particularly because it affronted labour ideals and customary practices. Trade unions and other labour organisations counter-attacked by deserting the WEA or by trying to provide alternatives to it. The WEA gained little advantage from the fact that socialist, and later communist educational efforts failed to influence large numbers of workers. After the social and political turmoil of the war, the spread of WEA branches throughout the country was stunted, in some cases terminally.\textsuperscript{103} The oppositional models developed by their British comrades enabled Australian trade unionists and radical intellectuals to respond to the ideologies of social harmony and efficiency disseminated through imperial institutions and programmes.

\textsuperscript{102} WEA of NSW, \textit{Seventh and Eighth Annual Reports} (Sydney, 1920 and 1921) generally; Friesen and Taksa, \textit{op. cit.}, p.189.

\textsuperscript{103} Friesen and Taksa, \textit{ibid.}, pp.186-7; Whitelock, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.194-197.
International working class networks’ successfully challenged those which united middle class intellectuals in the United Kingdom, the USA and Australia in the pursuit of social consensus and efficiency. By refusing to rely on the WEA on any but its own terms, the Australian labour movement effectively resisted the education in citizenship which sought to transform its industrial culture.