

Address to WEA 100th Anniversary dinner.

Garry Moore, CNZM.

Page references are all to ["The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers Educational association 1915-2015".](#) [Written by Ian Dougherty.](#)

Thanks for inviting me. I apologise if

- I miss out anything you find important
- Offend you.

My involvement

- I blame my mother.
- Attended the 1975 -76 Summer School at Arthur's Pass.
- Became Director of the next 3 summer schools
 - Curious Cove .
 - Glen Tui – Is small beautiful ?
 - Balmoral – Our children, our future?
- Moved onto WEA Council representing CPIT

I want to acknowledge some people -

- Brian Pauling
- Patricia Morrison
- Katherine Peet
- Alan Dingwall

History.

Started in UK by Albert Mansbridge. **Page 11-** of People's University (PU). "He felt the Trade union and Cooperative movements were not doing enough to educate their members". "He also witnessed a decline in the attendance of workers at the extension classes as it became the fashion of leisured members of the public, mainly women to attend". He thought there could be "a working alliance between the trade Union and cooperative movements and the universities."

As Dougherty comments "the intention was to teach the students how to think, not what to think and the classes were designed as liberal education not vocational training".

Page 15 – "The involvement of Christian socialists in workers education was more prominent in Christchurch than elsewhere in NZ." Including Bishop of Christchurch, Churchill Julius, Frank Dunnage etc. Bishop Julius declared "he was a socialist because he found socialism on every page of the New Testament."

Page: 19- The CWEA was launched in Christchurch after a public meeting chaired by Mayor Henry Holland on the 20th January 1915. A 17 man provisional committee was elected to prepare a branch

constitution. The provisional committee included a range of eminent Cantabrians from the University, Trade unions, City Councillors, MP's, Fabians, etc.

Page 22- "The CWEA brought together a broad cross section of Canterbury society and shades of political opinion." Henry Acland whose family had a strong tradition of educational philanthropy and an association with the UK WEA was WEA President from 1917-1942. "Howard and Cooke were former revolutionary Socialist Party candidates, McCullough was a former President of the Farm Labourers Union and Acland had regarded him as a trouble maker. Their mutual commitment to the WEA dissolved their lingering differences"

The first employee of the CWEA was a cleaning lady

In the first few years there were more courses in economics than any other area. "Members of the Economics class were prominent in the establishment of the Canterbury Industrial Co-operative Society in Christchurch in 1918 and the opening of the store in Colombo Street owned by the shareholding customers. James Struthers was manager and his classmate George Manning was assistant manager."

Page 28- "The CWEA gave an early indication that it was not afraid to tackle controversial or unsavoury issues."

Page 29 – In 1916 "The renowned Christchurch architect and Town Planner and Canterbury School of Art lecturer, Samuel Hurst Seager, drew so many people to his 6 lectures on town planning, illustrated with lantern slides, that they were moved from the WEA room to a large lecture theatre at Canterbury College"

The courses were popular and well publicised --- "5000 leaflets printed advertising E.E. Stark, the city's electrical engineer's talks on the electrical motor alone.

In the 1918 series John Denniston, a retired Supreme court Judge spoke on crime and punishment and "espoused the enlightened view that the most effective method of reducing crime was to improve social conditions."

Page 49- Horace Belshaw was appointed as a full time WEA tutor based in Greymouth. He found it difficult and it seems that dogma stopped open discussion. Belshaw explained to George Manning "I am of the opinion that the Communist party organised a boycott at Blackball and used their influence to prevent students from attending. One person who was approached stated that he could not attend because he would be expelled from the (local branch of?) the Communist Party. I decided that further attempts to educate the mining proletariat of Blackball were futile until such time as the inevitable collapse of the few pseudo scientists who worship at the shrine of Marx and of no other should remove the prejudice against attempts at working class culture."

Where are the current examples of this?

Key events in the WEA Story.

Summer and Winter Schools.

Page 50. - First winter school held in May 1922 at Hokitika. "It was heralded as being unique in bringing together for the first time in NZ farmers, university professors, teachers and students." "The lectures were designed to treat the broad principles of education or farm practice so as to encourage the study of particular problems"

First summer school was at Oxford in 1920-21 with 100 attendees.

Page 58. After the second Summer school in 1921 Tutor John Johnson noted “thus innumerable students came into contact with one another and created social values – not only for themselves but also towards community. Thus social relationships developed amazingly as the days passed. At first people were inclined to associate by sex, age or locality and previous knowledge of one another. But soon students discovered their common interest with new acquaintances and widened their association. The West Coaster and the Dunedinite commiserated over climate. The Marxian and Capitalist even find a good deal in common on other issues. The materialist has his eyes opened to the beauties of art and the idealist to the need of considering the fundamental facts of human nature. One and all found that there was far more in heaven and earth than was dreamt of in their philosophy.”

Key people made a difference in Oxford and Geraldine and really at all camps. Mayors of Christchurch including, John Archer who had been involved in a tense debate and analysis of WEA focus in 1920, Page 65, George Manning and Garry Moore were all very heavily involved.

Professor Shelley’s influence

- **Lectures in a box. Page 73.** What is the modern equivalent to the circles which were set up? Circles were established in Chertsey, Cheviot, Geraldine, Kaiapoi, Methven, Pleasant Point, Southbridge and Waimate. Also extended to Sumner.
 - **Page 74** – “F.O. Bennet was a Doctor in mining towns of the West coast during the depression. A box scheme study circle met in his front room in Blackball each fortnight ‘with an enthusiastic cross section of about 20 from teacher to trucker, studying literature, art, music and drama’.”
 - **Page 75.** – “by 1932 a record 2076 students throughout NZ were enrolled in a record 127 box scheme study circles: 40 in Canterbury, 41 in wellington, 37 in Auckland and 9 in Otago.”
- **Page 78-83.-Travelling Library** – Canterbury Adult Rural (CAR) library with a tutor travelling in a truck modified to provide sleeping quarters and book storage. Geoff Alley delivered the books and 4776 were issued in the first year and only 3 were lost in 5 years. “Nationally the scheme was controversial because the University of New Zealand and its Auckland and Wellington Colleges were irritated at Canterbury College receiving Carnegie’s money directly when the university was preparing a joint application for more general funding.”
 - **Page 84** - “In 1938 the Labour government absorbed the Association for Country Education Travelling Library into a new nationwide Country Library headed by Alley.”
- **Professor Beeby. Page 86** - Was an active WEA tutor with Professor Shelley and he moved to be the first director the NZ Council for Educational Research in 1934 and was appointed Head of the Education Department in 1940.
- **Lectures for Prisoners. Page 91.** Begun in 1927 for between 51 and 96 inmates who attended voluntarily.
- **Lectures on Radio. Page 92 – 94.** – Debates and on air lectures and in 1936 Professor Shelley became the first director of the National Broadcasting service.

There was constant strife and disagreement with Government and the University of Canterbury

Lecturers who spoke at the WEA included

- Karl Popper
- Prominent trade Unionists
- Many wonderful academics including Bill Wilmott, Elsie Locke, Wolfgang Rosenberg, Brian Edwards
- Lunch time lectures in by George Manning. **Page 124**- "In 1955 he gave 156 lectures to between 358 and 527 workers at 14 workplaces."

Other Success stories:

WEA was the first provider of Maori language lessons in Christchurch and also

- Daytime courses
- Adult Literacy Scheme
- Book Discussion Scheme
- The Learning Web.

Observations:

- 1. When the WEA supported a strong individual things happened e.g. Shelley's time.**
- 2. Institutions were regularly awkward about the WEA**
 - a. Page 135-136.** -Institutional lack of accountability and abuse of power as in when Bernard Smyth was guest lecturer at the prison. An officious warder halted the lecture and as the prisoners filed out one said the Mr Smyth "We are very sorry about this Mr Smyth. There are people out here over whom we have very little control."
 - b. Page 140** – University lecturers were less keen to take courses as they were now paid better and because of the administration and preparation for large classes.
- 3. There are good people in every institution**
 - a. Use them
 - b. The example on **page 152** of Barbara Petre and the Adult Literacy scheme reflects this.
- 4. Competition.**
 - a. But people will not stay with you if they cannot afford it. E.g. Parent Centre **page 173**
- 5. Connect back to original Kaupapa. Page 210.**
 - a. Alan Dingwall in his annual report in 1980 noted "While a great part of what we did was effective and members can be satisfied with the results, there are always questions which must be asked when we seek to evaluate what we have planned. How far our programmes were imaginative and stimulating? How far did they reflect the educational purpose and philosophy of the WEA? Were they directed in such a way that we succeeded in reaching particular groups in our community or were they planned as survival exercises for the organisation? "

Where to Now?

Considering that original kaupapa....

I am not sure of the bank balance of the WEA but I suspect it is healthy.

Let's go back to the founding document –

Page 193 – “after the CWEA adopted the charter in 1984 the Council decided to encourage an expanded programme, “which will grow out of personal contact and the development of trust between people who identify with the WEA and its Charter, and members of powerless groups and people committed to working towards change in accordance with the Charter.”

Where are there gaps where others aren't performing already?

- Cooperatives
 - Education
 - Challenges of prevailing economic dogmas
 - Needs investment to support leaders.
- Housing
 - I am working in this area and local debates are needed beyond the trite.
- Civil Societies
 - Foster those who may not see themselves as allies.

Conclusion

The WEA must change or there will not be a 110th let alone a 200th anniversary.

Quote from “ My Own Life, by Oliver Sacks. February 19th 2015 in The New York Times. “

“I feel a sudden clear focus and perspective. There is no time for anything inessential. I must focus on myself, my work and my friends. I shall no longer look at “NewsHour” every night. I shall no longer pay any attention to politics or arguments about global warming. This is not indifference but detachment – I still care deeply about the Middle East, about global Warming, about growing inequality, but these are no longer my business; they belong to the future. I rejoice when I meet gifted young people – even the one who biopsied and diagnosed my metastases. I feel the future is in good hands”

Is the WEA to focus on the future or will it only focus on what it does right now? If you focus on the future things might change and that process should start immediately or you will stay the same and die like many other well meaning but myopic organisations have done before.

Thank you.