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Thus, the situation having become impossible for any self-respecting advocate of genuine working-class education, Crane publicly resigned, and had published in the Press his letter of resignation. After setting out in that letter his reasons, Crane went on to point out that the real crime of which he had been guilty was that of publicly espousing the railway men's case in the strike of 1925. He said, "In failing to stand by me . . . the W.E.A. have shown that they are unwilling to claim for their servants the right claimed by every citizen—to speak as an individual—and, in dropping me, . . . they have shown that their educational policy, to this extent at least, is governed by, and subordinated to, political expediency. . . ."

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In December, 1926, Crane visited Rockhampton and conferred with the unionists who had been responsible for the repudiation of the W.E.A. in Central Queensland. As a result of these discussions, it was decided to draw up a scheme for the launching of a Plebs League—"to undertake the propaganda of the class struggle as the basis of industrial, political and educational action, and to establish Labor Colleges to supply education for emancipation."

The Plebs League was launched in Rockhampton on 3rd January, 1927, when Crane was appointed General President, and E. Ellis, General Secretary. Crane visited Townsville, Mackay and Ipswich during January, and established branches of the League. During February and March, Ellis visited Townsville, Innisfail and Cairns, and established branches in the two last-named centres. With the later establishment of a branch in Toowoomba, this provided a chain of branches in the chief centres of the State to support the campaign for Independent Working-class Education.

Upon this basis the Brisbane Branch, during April and May, took the preliminary steps for the establishment of a Labor College. Of 11 Unions appealed to, 7 sent delegates to a meeting to consider the project. A satisfactory constitution was adopted, giving the Trades Unions definite control of the Movement, and 5 Unions immediately decided to affiliate and launch the Movement.

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Independent Working-Class Education and the W.E.A.

The recent attempt by the University Extension Board of the Melbourne University to insinuate itself into the Trade Union Movement by requesting the Melbourne Trades Hall Council to appoint two delegates has again raised the question of a self-sufficient and independent working-class educational movement versus the extension of University teaching into the Labor Movement.

The present publication does not set out to discuss the question so much as to give an outline of how the W.E.A. and its parent University, under the most favorable circumstances (under the aegis of the Queensland Labor Government), fails to adhere to the hollow boast of freedom of action by W.E.A. tutors and to an impartial pursuit of truth. We are indebted to the Plebs League of Queensland for the subjoined extracts.

The individualities of the University Extension Board, the Tutorial Class System, and the "Workers' Educational Association are difficult to distinguish. The Board receives all its financial support, and the W.E.A. half, from the University. But it is clear that both are offshoots of the University, and are equally interested in foisting their views on the Labor Movement, on the assumption that a slabby eclecticism is what the Movement most needs in fighting, not only its bread-and-butter battles, but also in its struggle to end capitalism.

PRIOR to the formation of the W.E.A. in Queensland, little, if any, educational work amongst the workers had been attempted by any organised body, excepting the political agitationalists. The W.E.A. in Queensland was established as the result of a visit by Albert Mansbridge to Australia in 1913. Mansbridge established contact with the University and with sufficient of the Trade Unions to create the basis for an agitation for working-class education upon W.E.A. lines. The first classes and tutors made no attempt to cater for particular working-class interests, except that the students were offered a qualified choice from the courses and tutors available. The tutors reproduced in the W.E.A. the courses they were giving within the University. Economic History, Economics (of the Marshall-Gide-Clay variety), and Constitutional History were the courses availed of by the workers at this time.

Meanwhile, Meredith Atkinson had been sent by Mansbridge from London to Sydney to take charge of the Australian movement. He properly established the W.E.A. in New South Wales upon the lines of the Oxford Report, and set out to bring the other States into line. As a result of his representations to a section of the University Senate, Rev. T. C. Witherby—a High Church Anglican, with a Radical Christian Socialist outlook, and with a record as a successful slum rector in Poplar—was specially appointed to the Queensland University staff to under-

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take this work, and to build up the "alliance between Labor and Learning," at which Mansbridge had taught the W.E.A. to aim.

The Labor Party had come into office in 1915. It suspected the University a little, but did not quite know what to do with it, or how to justify to trade unionists its expenditure upon this institution. Witherby found the Minister for Education, Hardacre—a confused idealist, with vivid recollections of the inspiration drawn as a boy from "Popular Science" lectures at Manchester—very sympathetic to his project for bringing the University to the workers. Theodore, the Treasurer, with a keen eye on the electioneering value of all public expenditure, was more difficult to handle; but eventually, by persistent lobbying at Parliament, greatly aided by the establishment of a bond with Fihelly, and conscientious canvassing of University staff and Senate, Witherby was able to secure a substantial Government grant to set the W.E.A. upon its feet, and, at the same time, to set up a perfect joint committee upon the Oxford lines to control the University end of the scheme, and to make it more acceptable to the Trade Union Movement.

Meanwhile, Witherby had succeeded in making himself acceptable to Trade Union leaders and rank and file. His liberal basis enabled him to challenge existing conditions in the manner of a Bertrand Russell, and his tact and sympathy enabled him to absorb the opinions of leading propagandists in the local Movement. He lectured freely upon Syndicalism and the strike, and became an apostle of Guild Socialism when this was the latest novelty produced by the University intellectuals in Britain. He accepted the Russian Revolution with enthusiasm, although his complete ignorance of Marx prevented his proper understanding of its significance. Nevertheless, under his direction, the W.E.A. became a live educational organisation. He gathered around him most of the younger intellectuals in the University and the Union Movement, and helped to reproduce in Queensland something of the "ferment of ideas" which marked the war period in Britain.

Despite the general acceptance of the W.E.A. by the Union Movement, there were elements within and without the W.E.A. whose Socialist groundwork assured them of the fallacious basis of the W.E.A., and who, under the inspiration of the Russian Revolution, desired to move forward. Norman Freeberg, who had travelled from Liberalism to Socialism while actively participating in the W.E.A. classes and administration, moved in 1918 for the severing of the University connection of the W.E.A., the acceptance of direct working-class control, and the introduction of proletarian teachings upon the basis of Marxian Economics. Defeated in this movement, he withdrew, and, with Ed. Turner, Spencer Brodney, J. B. Miles, Dr. E. J. Howley, and other Socialists, established the Workers' School of Social Science. This School secured the support of the more militant trade unionists, and managed to maintain an effective existence, despite the opposition of the Government-subsidised W.E.A.

T. C. Witherby had tried to digest Marx and failed, but he had sufficient faith in the idea of workers' education to desire to give the workers what they wanted. Consequently, having worked for four years to put the W.E.A. on a sound financial footing, having secured the creation of the position of Director of Tutorial Classes, with a salary of £600 a year, and held this for a year, he resigned in order to engineer into the position one who held all the University qualifications necessary under the W.E.A. constitution, and, at the same time, had a good reputation amongst militant unionists that would enable him to win the support so essential to the existence of the W.E.A. Such a man was B. H. Molesworth, M.A.

B. H. Molesworth came to Queensland direct from Broken Hill, where, in two years, he had built up an enviable reputation as a working-class educator. He had the additional advantage, for the purpose of securing the appointment, that he was a Queensland University man. He had spent two years at Oxford as a travelling scholar, had there managed to secure a sound grounding in Marxian Economics, and, at the same time, during his vacations, had established contact with the militant miners of South Wales. The inspiration of this contact, together with the theoretical grounding, enabled him to return to Australia full of enthusiasm for working-class education, and eager to expound Marxian Economics to proletarian students. After a year as W.E.A. tutor in Tasmania he secured his opportunity at Broken Hill, and, arriving there in 1918, he was able to ride on the wave of class consciousness associated with the prolonged Barrier Strike of 1918-19 to tutorial success. His success there proved his recommendation to the Queensland position, which he took over in 1920, full of enthusiasm and energy.

From 1920, the year Molesworth took charge, to 1925 a new spirit pervaded W.E.A. activities. Keen young enthusiasts from University and Unions alike enrolled under its banner. The W.E.A., probably for the first time in its existence in this or any other country, was providing a thorough-going exposition of working-class History and Economics, and, what is more, influencing its students to study further along the same sound lines. Naturally, opinions were divided as to the fundamental unsoundness of the W.E.A., with its liberal constitution, setting out to be non-party, non-political, its University ties and its Government subsidy, for signs were not wanting that its activities were being closely watched. To this, the enthusiasts for working-class education replied, "Take advantage of it while you may. Use it until it ceases to serve the working-class, and, when it reverts to type, repudiate it."

Meanwhile, the appearance of a theoretically sound Marxian on the W.E.A. platform had weakened the position of the Workers' School of Social Science. With the dispersal of the group that had made it possible—Freeberg went to Sydney, Brodney to America—it was decided to wind it up, and all definite opposition to the work of the W.E.A. was withdrawn. The Communists, aware of its fundamental unsoundness, avoided any boosting of the W.E.A., but, as they were not in a position to supply a counter scheme, they tolerated the W.E.A., and, meanwhile, watched it from without. P. R. Stephenson, an intellectual from the University, who had absorbed a proletarian outlook from V. G. Childe during the latter's brief sojourn at Maryborough Grammar School, developed by contact with Witherby and Molesworth, and threw his indefatigable energy behind the development of the W.E.A. to the limit of its working-class possibilities or until these were exploded.

With Stephenson worked Gordon Crane, B.A. In 1925 Crane was responsible for 38 classes in Central Queensland and Mackay districts, out of 54 set up throughout this vast State. His energy was so untiring and his enthusiasm so infectious, that many of the "broken-hearted rebels," so-called, who abound in Queensland were inspired into once more doing something for the Movement to justify their existence. Wherever four or five men were prepared to get together to study and discuss problems Crane was there, encouraging and helpful, supplying a sense of direction.

The result of such activities began to have effect. At the end of 1925 Molesworth, the Director of Tutorial Classes, began a pin-pricking policy, which was very noticeable after Crane had extended his sphere of influence around the sugar district of Mackay. Molesworth and the Executive of the W.E.A. proposed to increase the fees of members, and, largely through

the solid vote of the country branches against the proposal, it was defeated. As a reprisal, Molesworth attempted to reduce the country branches' representation on the State Council. Again the country branches won out. Later Crane submitted proposals for approaching the Unions for financial support on the basis of a capitation fee scheme. Molesworth opposed this, and the Executive sabotaged it, even after a conference had decided that the scheme should be examined. Meanwhile, as part of the "game," Crane was carpeted for disrespect in correspondence to the Director (Molesworth). As an indication of a growing change in W.E.A. control, it is well to mention that, during one State Council meeting, Molesworth declared that his influence was being thrown against the supremacy of the W.E.A. in the educational scheme, and upon the side of the University.

In 1925 F. W. Paterson, B.A., who had tutored a W.E.A. class in Ipswich, was employed as W.E.A. organiser in Brisbane for four months. Paterson had been at the University with Stephenson and Crane, and, as one of the group that gathered round Witherby, he had become preoccupied with the social question. He won a Rhodes Scholarship and went to Oxford, and, at the conclusion of his course, he fell under, first, the Guild Socialist, and then the Communist influence. Upon his return to Brisbane he threw himself with energy into the Communist Party, and, while working as a teacher, took an active part as a working-class propagandist. The casual work in the W.E.A. enabled him to do some definite educational work. After completing his work as temporary organiser for the W.E.A. in 1925, Paterson retired to work on the land at Gladstone, his home town, and, after resigning from the Communist Party, set himself to win the Labor plebiscite for this electorate against Carter, the sitting member.

He was known as a member of the Communist Party when he was elected as organiser for Brisbane, so that it showed the W.E.A., up to this time, had not wholly succumbed to the fear of Government intimidation. It is worthy of notice, however, that in 1924 Molesworth changed the title of his typed lecture course on "Marxian Economics" to "Economic Theory."

In September, 1925, the Railway Strike occurred. Paterson, who was one of the leaders in Central Queensland, took his place on the Rockhampton Strike Committee. Crane was invited to join him on the platform at the mass meetings. He did so as an individual, publicly and definitely disassociating himself from the W.E.A. in this action, and, without restraint, endeavored to point out to the railway men the issues at stake, and the moral of their struggle.

Shortly after the strike, J. D. Story, Government representative on the University Senate, moved for an inquiry into the work of the W.E.A. in its relation to the University. While this inquiry was pending, Crane interviewed (in connection with his work) Dr. Richards, Chairman of the University Committee controlling W.E.A. classes. He was also Chairman of the Board of Faculties which was engaged upon this inquiry. He was informed that his action in the Railway Strike had caused considerable comment, and he was invited to explain whether he thought it right for a lecturer under the University to publicly attack the Government.

When the report of the University Inquiry was completed it showed some mild criticism of W.E.A. educational work, and made three radical proposals:—

1. Abolition of title of Director, and appointment of Chief Tutor.
2. Combination of University Tutorial Class Department (W.E.A. Classes) with University Public Lecture Committee.

3. Appointment of six University representatives and four W.E.A. representatives on this Committee.

No provision was made for a tutor in Central Queensland; Crane's position was tacitly wiped out. He thus reverted to the Education Department, which relegated him to a small bush school, miles from any civilised centre.

Before leaving Rockhampton Crane publicly expressed himself in a farewell address to students. He feared, he said, that a muzzle was being put on working-class education, and there was never a time when the problem of education of the workers was of more vital importance. He showed how the contradictions of capitalism had been accentuated by the war. Unsolved problems were accumulating in a manner which meant that, unless the working masses were awakened to the issues at stake, their conditions would be as depressed in Australia as was the case in post-war Europe. He definitely declared: "The problems of the working-class in Australia, as in England and in Russia, could only be solved by enlightened leadership; in England, where conditions were more oppressive than in Australia, there were increasing indications of the development of this leadership; in Australia scarcely a beginning had been made in the direction of scientifically trained leaders of the working-class." He appealed to the workers to take the question of education more seriously.

"Some people," said Crane, "spoke of perverting education with working-class propaganda. This was impossible and unnecessary. The working-class could afford to face the truth in a way that their opponents could not. Consequently, it was not a question of perverting education with working-class propaganda so much as freeing it from the restrictions which prevented it from supplying the truth about capitalism and the working-class. Capitalist fear of the truth was imposed upon the University, which still depended upon the endowments and bequests of the rich, and, in facing present-day issues, the University showed a caution and timidity which made its teachings pernicious to the working-class. It was this that had to be guarded against in the proposed committee to be set up to control Workers' Tutorial Classes."

The State Council of the W.E.A. met on 19th February, 1926, to consider the University report. Crane represented the Central District, and moved the motion of protest against the new committee being set up. Other motions were carried opposing the new committee, and demanding equal representation of W.E.A. and University upon the Committee of Control. A motion was also carried opposing the alteration of the title of Director, and demanding the appointment of a tutor for Central Queensland.

The Central Queensland branches of the W.E.A. were meanwhile demanding to know whether the W.E.A. any longer stood for the working-class movement, or if it were becoming a mere adjunct of the University. Events were pointing to the latter case, and they felt it to be their duty, if this proved true, to set up an Independent Working-class Education movement. Many resolutions of protest were made, typical of which the following will suffice:—"That we record our appreciation of the services of our late tutor, Mr. G. Crane, and feel disgusted at the shabby treatment meted out to him by whoever runs the Education Department, in transferring him to such an outlandish place, and feel it is a deliberate attempt to prevent him from expounding his working-class ideas. Further, we declare that we believe he has been victimised."

The class leader of the Rockhampton Branch, in a public statement, summed the position up succinctly. He said: "Mr.

Crane was removed from Rockhampton because his influence was dangerous to some of those people who to-day are more concerned about their own jobs than the conditions of the people they are supposed to represent. . . Mr. Crane is only one individual in this Movement of ours who must suffer. Any man who takes action in the interests of the education of the workers is always singled out for special treatment, and, I feel sure, he knew he would get treated in the long run as he did—by a good kick."

Subsequently, the State Council of the W.E.A. met on 20th March, 1926, when, after a full discussion, the following proposals submitted by the University Committee for tutorial classes and public lectures were adopted:—

There shall be a sub-committee of eight members, including the four members elected by the W.E.A., whose duties it shall be to attend to matters dealing exclusively with the Workers' Tutorial Classes, and to furnish reports and recommendations to the full committee regarding these matters.

Subject to the supreme control of the Senate, the full committee shall have power to review any decision of the sub-committee, and to confirm, refer back, or comment upon such decision. Full copies of all reports, recommendations and determinations of the sub-committee shall be transmitted by the full committee to the Senate, with the full committee's observations thereon.

The Chief Tutor and Director of Workers' Tutorial Classes, and such other persons as the sub-committee may from time to time recommend and the Senate may approve, shall be associate members of the sub-committee.

It shall be open to associate members to take part in the deliberations and discussions of the sub-committee, but they shall not have a vote.

The Secretary was instructed to inform all branches and affiliated organisations of the agreement, and to notify members that the 1926 tutorial session would start during the week commencing Monday, 10th May.

Rockhampton then submitted a request for classes, including one on Social Science, to be conducted by F. W. Paterson. These proposals were subsequently turned down by the W.E.A. State Council or University Committee without explanation. Following upon this came the annual meeting, held in Brisbane on 15th May, 1926, when all of the country branch grievances were ventilated, and Crane's case received, for once, some adequate discussion, and the charges made against him refuted.

During August, 1926, the W.E.A. advertised for a State Organiser, and, on the advice of the Central Queensland branches, and, as a test of the sincerity of the non-party, non-political panjandrums, Crane applied for the position. The Executive Committee, in its preliminary review of the applications, proposed to reject Crane's at sight. The Vice-President, J. Maguire, challenged this, and secured its inclusion in the selection to be sent to the State Council. Crane was accused of being a Communist, and Maguire challenged the relevancy of this objection, and silenced it. To Maguire's public statement that Crane had done more good work than a dozen men, McCosker, the President of the W.E.A., privately retorted that he had done more harm to the W.E.A. than a dozen men.

When it became known that Crane's name had been finally rejected, a storm of protests was sent from the Central Queensland and Mackay districts. The Rockhampton Branch Council of the W.E.A. met on 1st November, 1926, and finally repudiated the W.E.A. and all its works. The speeches indicated clearly that the time had arrived when it was necessary to concentrate

on the establishment of a genuine Independent Working-class Education Movement. The treatment of Crane was of secondary importance to the betrayal of the workers' educational movement, it was declared, although it was evident that a personal issue had been made of the matter by reactionary individuals, to the detriment of the good work done for the workers in Central Queensland. The following motion was carried unanimously:—

"The Central Queensland District Council of the W.E.A., representing the strongest and most active district during 1925, condemns the State Council of the W.E.A. for betraying the cause of working-class education, upon the following grounds:—

- "1. That it made no serious protest against the removal of Gordon Crane, B.A., as tutor-organiser from this district after his three years' strenuous activities in building-up the movement in Central Queensland.
- "2. That it connived at the suppression of Mr. Crane's active connection with the W.E.A. in Central Queensland when the Education Department transferred him from this district.
- "3. That it refused to give serious consideration to Mr. Crane's application for the position of State Organiser, despite his three years' record of service as tutor-organiser, during which period the quality and value of his services to the working-class education movement were well proved.
- "4. That, in its attitude towards Mr. Crane during the current year, it had shown that it desired to be rid of a most valuable educator, not because he had shown himself to be deficient in duty to the W.E.A., but because he had shown himself, upon the W.E.A. platform, a fearless exponent of the truth concerning capitalism and the working-class movement, and because, in his personal and private activities, he has caused annoyance to certain Labor politicians and to the Labor Government.
- "5. That it has made no effort to supply either tutor or organisers for classes in this district, even within the limits of its available funds during the current year, but has deliberately allowed the good work started by Mr. Crane to be neglected.
- "6. That it has first starved the organisation in this district, and then denied it representation upon the State Council, in order to silence its voice.
- "7. That its action in relation to Mr. Crane and the work in Central Queensland has shown that its educational policy is definitely dictated by its financial dependence upon the Queensland Labor Government, that it is not prepared to defend the rights of its tutors to freedom of speech even in their personal capacities, when they are likely to criticise the policy of the Labor Government or the official Labor Party, and that it is not prepared to encourage or assist branches in their educational work when the activities of these branches or their personnel are offensive to Labor Parliamentarians, and that, in general, it is prepared to prostitute its educational policy, which is non-party, non-political in name only, to political expediency as dictated by the outlook, policy, and needs of the Queensland Labor Party.
- "8. That, for these reasons, it is no longer worthy of working-class support or patronage, and that, despite its promulgation of the proletarian and revolutionary economics of Marx, as expounded by Mr. B. H. Molesworth, M.A., it cannot be trusted to ensure the same freedom for the expression of working-class thought amongst its

members as it permits to reactionary University exponents of philosophy, psychology, and literature.

"Therefore, we hold that the W.E.A. should no longer enjoy the confidence of the Trade Union Movement or of the working-class generally, and that it should no longer be permitted to use Government funds in order to mislead the worker. We, therefore, as a District Council, repudiate the State Council and the W.E.A. of Queensland, and recommend to the surviving branches in this district that they wind up their affairs, and return the balance of their funds to members. We urge all affiliated Unions and other Comions in Central Queensland to repudiate and avoid the W.E.A. and its organisers and advocates."

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