

SOCIAL CLASS, STATUS AND TEACHER TRADE UNIONISM:

The Case of Public Sector
Further and Higher Education

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Many professionals working in the public sector, whether as doctors, teachers or nurses, feel that their interests and those of the institutions in which they work are under attack. This book examines some of the causes underlying the growing resentment of public sector professionals, focusing on the teachers in the polytechnics and colleges of further and higher education and on their union, once the *Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions*, now the *National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education*. It looks in depth at the relationship between professional commitment and trade union activism and at the limits employee status within a bureaucratic control structure can impose on professional self-management and control.

The book provides both an important social history of the teachers and teaching in this sector and an incisive analysis of the nature and development of 'professional trade unionism'.

Sandra Turner is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the Ealing College of Higher Education.

To Jack Hendy

Foreword

It is a paradox of British society that it hides what it is best at. It hid its industrialism in the nineteenth century behind a screen of arcadian greenery and continues to do so in the twentieth-century period of high tech. It hid its inventive genius behind a facade of ancient continuity. It hid its capacity to educate industrial and technological experts behind grammar schools and ancient universities.

One consequence has been the invisibility of industrial and technical teachers who have lived under the shadow of dons, whether from Cambridge or Sussex, their persistent excellence obscured by a metropolitan culture which contrived to ignore the historical fact that Britain was the first industrial nation. That the splendid universities of the modern provincial cities in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds or Sheffield owed a great deal to teachers of the industrial arts and sciences in such nineteenth-century colleges as Josiah Mason or Owen's has, at least until recently, gone unrecognised. The institutional path from 'night school' or technical college to technological university has been the path into social visibility.

Dr Turner's book is a welcome antidote to the conventional focus on the universities of histories of higher education. It tells the story of the men and women who have gone about the task of intellectual labour in the service of commerce, industry and administration on which the economic life of the nation (and indeed the export of industrial skill to other nations) has depended for the last century and a half. Moreover it is more than an antidote; it is an empirical study of permanent value to those who wish to understand the growth and fortune (including misfortune) of the teaching professions as a whole.

The story corrects many a false image. The history of university teachers tends to be written as either the slow extension of the way of work of the Oxford tutorial fellow or of the imitation of the German professorial hierarchy. Dr Turner's NATFHE is neither and is in any case an

Foreword

upthrust from the wider, more popular base of secondary school teaching. Thus she is able to remind us how technical teachers have been the agents for the promotion of mobility of many boys and some girls out of the classical urban working class, and it emerges that they themselves have often been socially promoted by the enlightenment they spread. In the same context the relation of college teaching to union organisation, which she relates so well, has a special significance. While ideologies compete in defining the class and professional position of further and higher education teachers, the facts as Dr Turner marshals them, serve to inform the debate.

It may well be that future historians will describe educational developments in the second half of the twentieth century in Britain as a failed thrust towards universal education beyond school despite and partly because of the programme of university expansion associated with the Robbins Report. We now have twice as many university teachers as we had students at the beginning of the century. But Robbins also ushered in a binary system the 'other side' of which is Dr Turner's concern. The Principal of Leeds Polytechnic, Christopher Price, has asserted that Britain has the worst provision of higher education of any country in the western world. It is in such a perspective that we must recognize the present discontents of a body of teachers to whom the nation owes a debt which ought to be repaid.

A. H. Halsey

Preface

This book is about teachers in public sector further and higher education and their union, once the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions (the ATTI), now the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE). These teachers work in the colleges of further and higher education and in the polytechnics in England and Wales and number over 90,000 in total. The colleges have their origins in the technical colleges and night schools of the late nineteenth century and owe much of their contemporary character and status to that fact. Nevertheless, from the 1960s onwards they diversified to such an extent that for many the once familiar 'tech' became a singular misnomer. What is now called non-advanced further education (NAFE) not only comprises work-related or directly vocational schemes, but also the sort of 'O' and 'A' level work taught in the schools. At the other end of the scale, the polytechnics and colleges of higher education engage primarily in advanced further education (AFE) at degree and postgraduate level. Whilst the original binary philosophy which signalled the development of such courses outside the university sector implied that they be vocationally relevant in keeping with the technical college tradition, that relevance was always broadly interpreted and by the seventies the social sciences had found a relatively happy home there, either as degrees in their own right or servicing the more directly vocational business studies courses which were mushrooming at that time.

During the seventies, this process of diversification was completed with the 'rationalisation' of teacher education. Many teacher training colleges were forced to close, others to merge with existing polytechnics or with other colleges to become what are now known as the colleges of higher education. These colleges soaked up much of the 'spare capacity' from the teacher training colleges, mainly in the form of humanities teaching. In January 1976, the ATTI

Preface

merged with the smaller Association of Teachers in Colleges and Departments of Education and changed its name to NATFHE in a rather belated recognition of the post-war developments which had rendered the terms technical teacher and technical education somewhat obsolete. It has since merged with the Association of Continuative Education and also the Association of Teachers in Penal Establishments to become the only single union representing all teachers in public sector post-school education. It is the history of these teachers, their work and their organisation which is the object of this study.

As such this is a study in the history of education and of educational ideas as well as a study in the sociology of occupations. But in fact the research was originally conceived within the context of the debate about the nature and significance of white-collar trade unions. Teacher militancy always seems to take people by surprise, but it is not a new thing as this and other studies have shown. Neither were the school teachers exempt from the wave of white-collar militancy which characterised the late sixties and early seventies, militancy which gave rise to the question as to whether white-collar unions, including teacher unions, were any different from those of manual workers. Many believed that they were. Starting from the premise that white-collar workers were middle class in the Weberian sense, great emphasis was placed on their status-consciousness and individualism. Thus when white-collar workers did join trade unions, it was because they saw them as something to be used rather than as something in which to believe. Union membership for them, therefore, had little class significance. It was neither an index of objective proletarianisation nor of a change in consciousness, a position in direct contradistinction to those both inside and outside the trade union movement who had assumed that for all their warts, associations of white-collar workers were in practice beginning to take on the characteristics of those of traditional manual workers, thereby becoming the kind of class organisations those unions had always been taken to be.

The debate was further complicated by the professional status and aspirations of the teachers. Many early sociologists had assumed that professional status placed the individual above the normally antagonistic relations between capital and labour, a position which now seemed untenable as more and more came to be employed in large

organisations and by the state. Indeed the special status of both the professionals and their associations had been debunked to such an extent by the early seventies that some academics prominent in the field felt confident enough to assert that rather than being distinct from trade unions, professional associations could more accurately be portrayed as the craft unions of a different social group - by implication denuding not only white-collar unions but all trade unions of any necessary class significance. More recently still, work within a neo-Marxist tradition has resurrected the class significance of white-collar and professional trade unionism but from a totally different point of view. For many of these writers not only do these strata constitute a different social group from manual workers, they constitute a different social class, the 'new middle-class', and in so far as their associations represent the interests of that class (for example, where teachers are concerned, as part of the ideological state apparatus) far from being the progressive embodiment of proletarianisation, they can be bourgeois and reactionary - the class enemy within, if you like.

But whatever the theoretical predilections of writers in the field, all have agreed that whilst much has been said, too little is known in the sense that empirical work, especially of a historical nature, is too thin on the ground to resolve such important questions. This study of the ATTI from its inception as a self-proclaimed professional association in 1904 to its development into a self-conscious trade union is a modest attempt to help redress that balance. Research for the study has taken place over a period of 15 years, from 1972 to the present. The history of the Association was written from its own archives, in particular from its official journal, Executive and Council Minutes. Where possible, reference was also made to the educational press. In addition, during the period 1973 to 1976 prominent members of the Association both past and present were interviewed as key informants. This included all three General Secretaries from 1954 to that date together with long-serving Council and Executive members. Care was taken to include informants of all political persuasions to control for selectivity in the interpretation of past events. Interviews of both branch activists and members were carried out in the Manchester and Bristol areas and a postal questionnaire was sent to 1000 members of the West Midlands Division, then the largest division in

Preface

the country. In this way it was hoped to cast the net as widely as possible at the same time as allowing the history of the union to be written by those most intimately concerned.

Whilst empirical in thrust, the research was, of course, guided by the writer's own values and theoretical preferences. I could accept neither the rather blithe denial of any significant class difference between the traditional professional associations on the one hand, and trade unions on the other nor the neo-Marxist attempts to keep the working class pure. I preferred a good old-fashioned Marxist wage-labour definition of class, supplemented of course by the appropriate contextual variables. It was armed with this preference that I set out to examine the nature of professionalism and trade unionism amongst an increasingly significant group of teachers, the technical teachers as they once were, the college lecturers as they are now and of which the writer is one. The history of NATFHE's first ten years, therefore, has been written with the aid of a significant amount of participant observation. However, special thanks is due to all those ATTI and NATFHE members, branch secretaries and officers who gave freely of their time and without whom the research would not have been possible. It is they who are in practice resolving any contradiction there might be between real professionalism and trade unionism in action to defend their sector of education in what threatens to become an increasingly hostile climate.

Contents

Foreword *A.H. Halsey*

Preface

PART ONE: THE GROWTH OF A PROFESSION

1. Modest Beginnings	3
Enlightened Self-Interest	3
The Deserving Poor Boy	6
The Hegemony of the Secondary Tradition	15
A Nation of Clerks	21
2. The Era of Expansion	28
A Universal Process of Aspiration	28
Education vs Training	37
The Changed Face of Technical Teaching	44

PART TWO: THE GROWTH OF A TRADE UNION

3. Professional Association	59
Professionalism as an Ideology	59
Trade Union Issues	67
The ATTI and the NUT	73
The Limits to Professionalism as an Occupational Strategy	78
4. The Transition	90
Early Deadlock	90
For Trade Unionism	98
The Significance of TUC Affiliation	102
Class Unity	110
The Houghton Award	117

Contents

PART THREE: THE LIMITS TO COLLECTIVE CONTROL

5. On the College Floor	125
All Trade Unionists Now?	125
A Fair Rate for the Job	139
Bureaucratic Hierarchy	150
Management's Right to Manage	155
6. A Future Secured?	166
Professional Trade Unionism	166
Education and Unemployment	177
Do More for Less	183
A Profession Divided	190
Bibliography	198
Index	203

PART ONE

THE GROWTH OF A PROFESSION

1

Modest Beginnings

ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST

It is to developments in the provision of education in the second half of the last century that we owe the creation of a body of men dependent for their livelihood and status on technical teaching as such. The Great Exhibition of 1851 had caused some concern amongst the ranks of educationalists, industrialists and politicians alike that Britain was in danger of losing her industrial pre-eminence if she did not begin to pay more attention to scientific and technical education. The resulting agitation led to the setting up of the Department of Science and Art in 1853 and the establishment of examinations by that body in 1859 to encourage the education of artisans in the scientific principles underlying their trades. The system of examination was one of payment-by-results, limited to the results of students from 'the industrial classes'. Secondary and elementary school teachers became qualified to teach these subjects and set up evening classes to earn money to supplement their incomes. With this incentive, the Department of Science and Art examinations flourished. The numbers increased from about 1,300 in 1861 to 34,000 in 1870 and passed the 100,000 mark in 1887.¹ During the early years of these examinations, scientific and technical teaching was scarcely ever followed as a profession, but only as an addition to more profitable or secure employment elsewhere. In 1871 for example, two-thirds of the teachers employed by the Science and Art Department under this payment-by-results system were full-time elementary teachers. Not more than eight teachers in the whole country earned their living by science teaching alone.²

Nevertheless, it is to the institution of these examinations that we owe the first generation of technical teachers. According to C.T. Millis, Principal of The Borough Polytechnic from 1892 to 1922:

The classes were attended by large numbers of the more skilled workmen engaged chiefly in the

Modest Beginnings

Engineering and Building Trades, who, intelligent and anxious for self-improvement, saw in them the opportunity of gaining knowledge of Science and Art which would assist them to understand some of the problems connected with their trade, make them better workmen and qualify some of them for higher positions ... Many of the students of these classes have made their mark in trade and industries. Some of the best students who had practical acquaintance with either the Engineering, Building or other trades, became excellent teachers when the Technical Education Movement became general from 1880 onwards.³

The Technical Education Movement referred to by Millis gathered impetus after the 1867 International Exhibition in Paris which revealed 'a state of affairs highly discreditable to this country'. Its avowed aims were 'to provide theoretical and practical instruction for artisans and others engaged in industry; an adequate supply of teachers of technology with proper schools in industrial areas and thirdly, proper scholarships with openings as teachers or as original researchers in applied science'.⁴

The efforts of private and corporate philanthropy combined with increasing state aid saw the near achievement of these aims by the end of the century. For example, 1872 witnessed a movement away from the idea of technical education as a smattering of science for the working man with the setting up of higher level technological examinations by the Society of Arts, although these examinations (open to those already qualified in the more elementary Department of Science and Art examinations) were slow to get off the ground. Since no payments were offered to teach them, no instruction was provided and all candidates were completely self-taught. This situation was remedied, however, in 1880 with the establishment of the City and Guilds of London Institute for the Advancement of Technical Education. Its first act was to take over the technological examinations of the Royal Society and give financial assistance to instruction, again through a system of payment-by-results. In so doing, the number of candidates offering themselves for examination rose from 68 in 1877 to 2,397 in 1883 and by 1888 there were 6,166.⁵

It was not intended that the City and Guilds should be merely an examining body, however. During the 1870s the