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THE ADULT LITERACY CAMPAIGN: POLITICS AND PRACTICES

by

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C O N T E N T S

Abbreviations Used:

AAE	Association for Adult Education
ALBSU	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
ALRA	Adult Literacy and Resource Agency
ALU	Adult Literacy Unit
ATTI	Association of Teachers in Technical Institutes
BAS	British Association of Settlements
LEA	Local Education Authority
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NARE	National Association for Remedial Education
NIAE	National Institute for Adult Education
OU	Open University
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UKRA	United Kingdom Reading Association
VWB	Voluntary Workers Bureau
WEA	Workers Educational Association

Introduction

Adult Literacy 1972-1980

This paper was first written nearly three years ago, in the Spring of 1982. It was basically an attempt to analyse my personal experience as a literacy worker and to set the conflicts and quandaries involved in a wider context. It is, therefore, a specific story, set in a particular place and time. Nevertheless, the issues which I faced, both at the time, and in subsequently writing about it, have a far wider pertinence and show no signs of going away. They include the relationships of power that exist in the possession of skills and knowledge, and the conditions under which people are allowed to learn; the place of volunteer work and its relationship to such categories as professionalism and trades unionism, especially in the current context of high unemployment, state cut-backs, and a conservative version of self-help; and finally, the concept of literacy itself, with its extension into basic life-skills and such fields as computer skills, and its origins in the liberal philosophies of citizenship and individual rights. I am able to offer little in the way of final resolutions to the contradictions I see. What I hope this paper can do is to lay out the possibilities of transformation and resistance that existed in the Leicestershire Adult Literacy Service at one particular time. There were real gains, although they have constantly to be resecured. I have tried to show what powerful issues of class and gender were at stake, what gains seemed possible and for whom, and the limitations that were in operation.

In 1972 when the Adult Literacy Campaign began to gather momentum it was not self-evidently a good time to launch a new educational initiative. Governmental spending cuts were already threatening. Hostility to schools and 'trendy' teachers was already being articulated in the popular press. The first half of this paper is therefore an attempt to understand

the ways of mobilising public opinion that were available to the Campaign. It takes a close look at exactly which formulations were used, and at how they worked in bringing effective political pressure to bear on the government.

On the surface, the case put forward for an Adult Literacy Service seemed drawn from an already existing repertoire of arguments: the inadequacies of schools which produced adult illiterates, the needs of industry for a literate work-force, the rescue of individuals from Sir Keith Joseph's 'cycle of deprivation', the use of voluntary labour to fill in gaps in social provision. The support of the BBC added further to the pressure on the government, giving the whole campaign high visibility and offering pedagogical, administrative and financial backing which it was inexpedient for any government to be seen to disregard. The scene seemed in many ways to be set for 'the revival of soup-kitchen policies'. (Rogers and Groombridge, 1976, p.28).

However, when I began to work professionally for the Adult Literacy Service in Leicestershire in 1976, I did not find myself in a conservatively minded organisation which regarded its students as personally deficient. The second half of the paper, therefore, analyses the other determining factors which contributed to the radicalisation of this particular group of literacy workers - partial and temporary though it was. This section also examines the local workers' relationship to the National Campaign and the ways in which the philosophy expressed there proved subject to re-inflection towards more radical meanings. It was the potential contradictions both at the ideological level and at the level of the professional workers' ambiguous social relationships, with students, voluntary tutors and other professionals, that created the space for educational practices which went beyond the orthodox notion of literacy as the transmission of a neutral skill.

PART I THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

The Educational Consensus:

The Adult Literacy Campaign emerged in the first half of the 1970s, an unlikely time for any new educational venture to meet with success. What follows is a rather rough account of the campaign's historical location, which is included to indicate how it was able to re-work pre-existing concepts and attitudes.

The seventies saw the rupture of the post-war consensus. The dominant assumptions of the fifties and sixties were that, through affluence, the UK was becoming a classless society; that the interests of labour and capital were identical, and this was often constructed in terms of the 'national interest'; that the few remaining social problems could be taken care of through an expanding economy; that the most fundamental political issue at stake was who could best manage the 'mixed economy'. It was also for many a time of real improvement in private standards of living. This helped to make the given axioms of public discussion even more plausible and further hindered any recognition of fundamental conflicts.

The educational world had its own version of these constructs[1]. the interests of the individual in developing his (rarely her) potential were the same as those of industry, which, because of technological 'progress' needed a more highly skilled workforce; the glaringly different educational outcomes between working- and middle-class children, to say nothing (as was the custom) of gender differences, were construed as a waste of the nation's talent; equality of opportunity was the watch-word. The problem of the off-spring of working-class families who resolutely failed to appreciate the rewards, in all senses, of formal education, was solved through notions of 'relevance' in the curriculum (the Newsom Report). There were also the problems of the inner city schools. These contradictions, however, were held at bay by the messianic belief that

education could in itself actually eradicate social injustice. Liberal, progressive and egalitarian ideas won some ground for themselves in educational publications, and together with comprehensive schools, were to be the route by which all these conflicting ideals were to be realised.

The Politicisation of the Debate:

Quite apart from these inherent contradictions, what must also be recognised is the gap which existed between the rhetoric of the educational media (e.g. the TES, the Schools Council, professional journals and debates) and actual practices within schools. The progressive forms of practice as advocated, and sometimes opposed, in the professional literature were perhaps never as dominant as the writers of the Black Papers were later to claim. The expectations of social transformation were either not aroused in pupils, parents and employers (the Newsom Report in particular continued to assign the education of young women to the areas of domestic and personal interests) or, where awakened, not necessarily fulfilled. for example, the new technologies failed to deliver their promise of wider job opportunities and more human satisfaction. Both as a means of facilitating social mobility and, more radically, as a means of eradicating inequality, education was proving less than satisfactory.

Thus, when the social democratic consensus began to falter, these faults were already there to be opened up by the critics of the Right and Left alike. The Black Paper writers were to launch their attack on indiscipline as the cause of the nation's economic and social ills, through a re-working of notions of old-fashioned standards. 'De-schoolers', such as Illich and Holt and radical critics such as Bowles and Gintis, and more ambiguously, Bernstein, attacked education on the more realistic ground that it served to reproduce the relations of the capitalist mode of production.

The Rediscovery of Poverty:

Into this particular set of circumstances, one other significant factor

entered in the late 1960s: the rediscovery of poverty, not least through a series of government commissions of enquiry (Milner and Holland, Ingleby, Plowden, Seebohm, Skeffington). Associated with these were the theories of 'deprivation' and 'disadvantage'[2] which percolated through to the field of adult education. Of particular influence was Peter Clyne's book, The Disadvantaged Adult, 1972, written under the supervision of Professor H.A. Jones of the NIAE (National Institute of Adult Education). The thrust of his argument was to identify adult education with social and community work in the cause of social justice; he writes of

> that section of the adult population which, through no fault of its own, has failed to understand, maintain contact with, or become involved in, the rapidly changing technological society which for many spells affluence and success. The gradual evolution of Western society more often than not drives the weak and strong in opposite directions. Thus, one realises the urgency of providing educational and social amenities in poor areas inhabited by disadvantaged people, whose disadvantages and degradation will increase if left unattended. The trend towards a social environment in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, however we wish to define rich and poor, is almost inevitable without the active intervention of adult education, welfare and community work agencies. (p.106).

This quotation contains key assumptions about the nature of a 'rapidly changing technological society' and the role education could or should play within it. Since the 1940s educational debate has drawn on the linked concepts of science and democracy.[3] It was assumed that the developments of science, and the changing technologies which were derived from them, would automatically result both in more wealth and in the need for a more highly skilled work-force. Education was thus needed to supply industry with the appropriately trained work-force, and the new wealth created

through the new technologies would repay the capital investment in more education. Technology was represented as a neutral form of knowledge, free from any determining conditions of existence within a profit-orientated industrial system.

The earlier common-sense assumption that 'higher' technology also meant a more highly skilled labour force has now been critically challenged, for although, as research such as Braverman's Labour and Monopoly Capital (1974) has shown, certain new technical and design skills were needed, the majority of workers experienced a down-grading of necessary work skills and even redundancy. That the process is by now highly visible is suggested by this quotation from a staff member of a comprehensive school for 14 - 18 year olds, written after a week's industrial experience:

> We saw computers controlling lathes to do jobs not just faster than skilled craftsmen, but to do jobs which human beings could not do at all (on a single machine).... The New Technology seems to be carving a big hollow into the centre of industry!
>
> (Bosworth Staff Bulletin No. 551, 21/6/82)

What the common-sense assumption also crucially concealed is the actual nature of the relations of production within which the expansion of the new technologies has taken place. There is no possibility of recognising, in this account, the difference in interests between the owners and developers of the new technological processes, who need to counteract the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and the working population whose skills have traditionally provided them with a terrain on which to resist and to protect themselves.

Clyne shares with this earlier version both the uncritical view of technology and ignorance of the social relations within which it operates. Despite the fact that he is explicitly focussing on the experience of adults, he reworks these arguments, developed in connection with school education, quite uncritically. Although he recognises the existence of

adults who live on the margins of society he wholly fails to identify any economic or political causes for this marginality, other than the inevitable 'gradual evolution of Western society' (my emphasis). The use of the quasi-scientific term again aids in effacing the human agents of change.

Indeed, the 'we', who might be able to agree on a definition of 'rich and 'poor', are implicitly placed outside the determining structures of this Western society, mysteriously impartial observers having no material interests, archetypal social democrats. Furthermore, such inequities in the distribution of wealth as are acknowledged can be solved with 'adult education, welfare and community work'.

Despite his emphasis on the disadvantaged adult, Clyne assumes there is no fundamental conflict between 'the individual's needs' and 'the good of society'. He does not seriously challenge the assumption found in previous educational politics that there is a comfortable convergence between human needs and the demands of the economy. The problems he identifies are susceptible of solution through the application of yet more education, adult this time, which will

> enable individuals to live their lives in a more informed and contented way, as members of a community. (p.105)

The emphasis on 'individuals' within the 'community' also draws attention away from the constitution of those individuals by their location within society. There is no suggestion that age, class, gender or race have any systematic effect on individual experience.

This book supported by the influence of the NIAE was highly influential in the production of the Russell Report (1973, Adult Education - A Plan for Development, HMSO). Clyne's book also managed to synthesise the growing shock/horror of the popular conservative press over allegedly falling standards in schools, with the new equation of adult education and community work. Professor H.A.Jones, of Leicester University and chairman of the council of the NIAE, with Dr. A.H. Charnley, research officer of the NIAE, are joint authors of the two standard works on the Adult Literacy Service. They themselves make the same point, in a somewhat unreflecting way, about the BAS Campaign Document.

> This coincided with a growing public disenchantment with the escalating cost of public education and the apparently inadequate pay-off in standards of attainment.
>
> (Jones and Charnley, 1978, p.2)

The two themes, of falling standards and of the reforming potential of adult education, can be nicely rolled up together in the 'disadvantages' theme:

> However unsatisfactory it might appear to be, the notion of disadvantage has many strengths when it comes to educational and governmental intervention...so far as policy-makers are concerned it has the capacity to appeal to a wide range of people with varied and conflicting ideologies. To social and political liberals it indicates the need for initiatives based on optimistic progressivism and couched in terms of 'compensatory education' and 'positive discrimination' in favour of 'deprived groups'. Even to political and social conservatives, educational provision for the disadvantaged has the attraction of being cheap and conciliatory and intended to transform the feckless and potentially disruptive into more responsible citizens.
>
> (Thompson, 1980, pp.89-90)

It was this potential for different inflections within a variety of discourses that helped the Adult Literacy Campaign successfully to mobilise such a wide range of support. Thompson also sharply observes that

> In many respects the definitions of disadvantage used by adult educators reflect the worst aspects of individualistic and pathological explanations of inequality and are quite uncritical of the fact that they are principally cultural definitions. (p.91)

It is also true, however, that the Russell Report and the Clyne book forced adult educators to acknowledge, as a minimum, that what they offered as adult education is demonstrably unpopular with the majority of the population:

> adult education typically draws the reasonably affluent, reasonably well-educated, young middle-aged. Men are outnumbered five to two, partly because they are hived off, physically and administratively, into various kinds of vocational training. The elderly, the poor, the rich and powerful, the young adult and the ordinary worker are all under-represented.
>
> (Rogers and Groombridge, 1976, p.40)

These facts undoubtedly caused professional concern over the image of adult education and the terms on which it was offered. The self-assessment stopped short, however, of any analysis of the function of education as

part of the means of reproduction of the social relations of society. The causes of the widespread hostility or suspicion which adult education arouses remained unexamined.

> Despite the fact that writers like Lawson and Patterson have begun discussions about the nature of knowledge from a philosophical perspective, the status of knowledge itself, the way in which it is selected and made available to students, the reasoning which underpins a differentiated curriculum and the assumptions which constitute the 'hidden curriculum of the great tradition' are all aspects of the 'content' of adult education which are rarely treated as a problem.
>
> (Thompson, 1980, p.210)

Nevertheless even these unpromising debates did create a space into which more radical voices could intervene.

The National Beginnings:

The Russell Report was itself one of the means through which the different interest groups who generated the literacy campaign began to identify and define themselves. The NIAE which, as has already been indicated, was highly influential in the production of the Report and The Disadvantaged Adult, continued to play a significant role in the creation of the Adult Literacy Campaign, finally becoming the agent for central government when ALRA was set up in 1975.

Notable also was the BAS. This is an association of voluntary agencies, established mainly as philanthropic ventures in inner city areas in the late nineteenth century. With the growth of State social services their original aims of the relief of poverty and the 'improvement' of the working classes became increasingly irrelevant. Often they turned to the provision of Welfare Rights information, discovering in the course of this that many of their clients had difficulties with literacy. A pioneering literacy project in the 1960s, the Cambridge House Literacy Scheme, suggested that voluntary labour could be used to help adults needing to improve their reading and writing skills. From the mid-60s there developed 'a handful of modest schemes' (Charnley and Jones, 1979, p.1), run by both voluntary organisations and a few LEAs. It was this experience which formed the basis for the effective BAS initiative in organising the Campaign. As a small organisation it had apparently taken the decision that its most efficient way to operate would be as a pressure group.(4)

Also crucial to the success of the Campaign was the involvement of the BBC's education department, which at this time was 'identifying submerged needs' (Rogers and Groombridge, 1976, p.175). Eventually it was to put its considerable influence behind the literacy campaign. It was the alliance of these diverse professional and voluntary interests which generated the public campaign..

The first step in the organisation of such a campaign, designed to extract financial resources from a not-enthusiastic government, was the National Conference in November 1973 Status Illiterate: Prospects Zero. At this Conference a National Right to Read committee was formed, chaired by Lady Plowden. The membership was drawn from a number of organisations including the BBC, BAS, NIAE and, at a later date, representatives from LEAs and the DES, the Welsh and Scottish offices. From this committee came the campaigning document that was the initial focus for publicity and for leverage upon the government.

A Right to Read: The BAS Campaign Document.

The BAS had selected the area of adult literacy as one in which there was an identifiable need with no provision to meet it. It therefore put its energy, commitment and finances into orchestrating a national campaign. In order to do this it was not only necessary to persuade the government of the day to provide the resources but in one sense to create the problem itself,or at least to represent it in such a way that it became highly and embarrassingly visible. The specific adults who experienced difficulty with literacy, for whatever reasons and to whatever degree, needed to be constituted as a discrete group, given a name, identified as a problem,; and then a solution to this new social ill needed to be proposed. The document through which these new meanings were created was the BAS publication, A Right to Read (May, 1974).

The title itself is a clue to the movement of the campaign: a new right is claimed. Rights normally accrue to the recognised citizen, and now, in addition to democratic rights, BAS formulated a new demand: not the right of access to education but the right actually to acquire a particular skill. Hidden within the claim to a right is often the unspoken implication that the right is in fact being denied by a power group and the veiled suggestion here is that school and teachers have failed (denied) their pupils this right to read. It is a possible inflection of meaning that was not lost on the right-wing press in its attack on the dominant educational sentiments of the 1960s which it characterised as

'liberal' or 'progressive'. Reading, in and of itself, is constructed as part of the nature of citizenship, a necessity for any individual to take up his/her place as a member of society. It is, furthermore, discussed only as an abstract ability, without reference to its potential use, in Freire's famous couplet, as liberation or as pacification.(5) There was no discussion of how the transmission of reading and writing skills is located within hierarchical structures, nor of how socio-linguistic analyses points to the way in which power is encoded in language use itself.

The role of the BAS itself is defined in terms of its "long standing tradition of voluntary social work" which it claims is 'aimed at 'helping people to overcome various forms of powerlessness. Although the Foreword, (p.2) by Geoffrey Clarkson Development Officer of the BAS, does thus refer to relative differences of power in society, there is nothing in the pamphlet to indicate how or why these differences might have such dramatic educational outcomes that 2 million adults can endure ten years compulsory schooling without acquiring effective reading skills. There is Clarkson's further statement,

> In order to participate, to exercise certain rights, to choose between alternatives and to solve problems, people need certain basic skills; listening, talking, reading and writing.

What these rights, alternatives and problems may be is not defined, and although it is reasonable not to preach subversion in a document addressed to the government there is no sense in what follows of inequalities of power dividing along the lines of class, race or gender, nor of <u>structures</u> within society that might themselves require change.

This campaign document is nominally addressed to the Secretary of State for Education and Science; but also in its change of tone and use of direct address, it explicitly creates a position for its readers to occupy.

> If you believe in a Right to Read and you represent an organisation, or simply want to help as an individual, please write to us at...
>
> (p.25)

The wider audience has become an as yet unawakened 'public opinion'.

The immediacy of the moral appeal of "if you believe in a Right to Read..." (and who would dar identify themselves as opposing it?) is not, however, the mode of address of the greater part of the publication. Using the neutral tone of the judicious expert, Part One (pp.3-20) examines the evidence for the numbers of adult illiterates, and gives its own definition of 'functional literacy'. It is certainly clear that the adult

literacy campaign was not a campaign created by a mobilisation of grass-roots opinion, of the oppressed themselves, or even because of the perception of threatening social unrest. Rather, however genuine the needs identified, it was the creation of 'experts'.

The BAS document lists the members of its advisory group:-

- the assistant secretary of the ATTI
- the director of education and training of the CBI
- the assistant director of the Council for Educational Technology
- the professor of educational studies at the OU
- a 'reading specialist' and representative of UKRA
- the national development officer of the WEA
- the chairman of the AAE
- the secretary of the NIAE
- the chairman of the illiteracy sub-committee of the NARE
- the secretary of the education department of the TUC

It is an exemplary group of 'experts'. They are drawn not only from institutions of education such as the OU, but also from industry (CBI, TUC), from professional bodies (UKRA, NARE) and from voluntary organisations (WEA). Such self-constituted experts are a part of civil society, rather than directly of the apparatuses of the State, yet they have great power in the creation and definition of knowledge and control over its dissemination. In this way the professional expert plays an important role in supporting or challenging ideologies. The relationship between these diverse bodies, whatever their difference of interest or emphasis, is one of mutual validation. As entry into the hierarchies of schools, colleges and universities is guarded by the ritual exclusions of examinations, so acceptance into the culturally accredited world of experts is signified by the presence of an organisation on such committees.

The actual writing group was drawn from officials of the BAS itself, including three out of five who were already 'adult literacy practioners'. From this small group of 'experts', mobilisation of opinion spread out to 'concerned opinion'. Through professional journals, down the hierarchies, new ideas spread to those who might have a potential professional or voluntary interest in the area. Finally, through the mass media the experts' opinions reached and created that mysterious creature, 'public opinion'. Politicians particularly may have been likely to interpret the visibility of voluntary tutors in the BAS version of an adult literacy service, as a manifestation of public opinion. Once again the role of the BBC in giving publicity to the need for volontary tutors was crucial. An ALRA newsletter said:-

...

> By October 25th - the Saturday after the second BBC TV programme, nearly 6,000 students and 8,000 volunteers were being referred local referral points ... one puzzled journalist 'phoned the Agency to ask how it was that, with no immediately identifiable charismatic leader, and with so many other causes worthy of support, the campaign to eradicate adult illiteracy has had such an impact. Patient endeavour on the part of many people is all we could think of to say ...
>
> (November 1975, p.1)

It seems unlikely that the reference to 'patient endeavour' included the recognition that the production of ideology and the representations of the literacy campaign in the different media, did, indeed, constitute 'work'.

As a document produced by self-styled literacy specialists, A Right to Read takes up surprisingly few of the debates that were being conducted at an international level about the nature and purposes of literacy. A Turning Point for Literacy (ed. L. Bataille) although not published until 1976, contains an account of arguments which were certainly available to a researcher in 1973 when the BAS document was written. The key issues were summed up in UNESCO's Declaration of Persepolis in September 1975:-

> 'It is true that all social structures give rise to the type of education which can maintain and reproduce them, and that the purposes of education are subordinated to the purposes of the dominant group; but it would be incorrect to conclude that there is nothing to be done within the existing system.
>
> 'Literacy ... is not the driving force of historical change. It is not the only means of liberation but it is an essential instrument for all social change.
>
> 'Literacy, like education in general, is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political.
>
> (Bataille, 1976, p.274).

Such analyses were undoubtedly available in 1973, not only through the radical critics of the earlier educational consensus, already cited, but also from such third world theorists as Nyere and Freire. They represent a principled break from the 1965 UNESCO stance which attempted to justify literacy solely through an economic vindication of its role in so-called 'development programmes'. A concise account of this 1960s

version of functional literacy is to be found in the Literacy Process, 1975, by Carol and Lars Berggren.

The writers of the BAS document, however, chose to represent literacy in terms of passive reading ability, and made no mention at all of the need for writing skills which can serve in many ways to subvert and intervene in social relationships. They also implicitly represented potential students as inadequate consumers, unable to function effectively due to their inability to read the BAS's essential texts: a bleach bottle label, newspaper reports about the CBI, the back of a packet of pastry mix, and Leaflet FIS 1, issued by the DHSS. The assumption made about reading was that it is an essentially private activity undertaken by individuals in isolation.

This privatisation of the issue of illiteracy was continued in the characterisations of 'illiterate adults' as

> a wide variety of men and women doing all sorts of different jobs, suffering from the inability to read in different ways. (p.11)

The focus on the capable, employed student in their six profiles suggested two misleading beliefs: first, that society basically provides equally for all its members' needs, apart from a few inevitable failings; second, that this group of individuals, identified as illiterate, is equally distributed throughout society. In other words, illiteracy was presented as having no structural determinations but as occurring only through unforeseeable and random circumstances. This approach was partly generated by the desire to redress the stigma attached to illiteracy. It is also, however, part of the social democratic discourse of the 60s which constructed a notion of the 'national interest' as the harmonisation of the goals of all citizens. In so doing, it denied any basic economic or cultural conflict between classes or races or between women and men. Once reading had been constructed as part of the inalienable rights of a citizen, it was easy to represent students in this privatised way, without other material location in a stratified society.

Stigma

The dependency of the BAS document on existing educational ideologies, of citizenship, of deprivation and of the need for further forms of provision, has already been indicated. The one significant disjuncture which it sought to make was centred on the issue of the stigma associated with illiteracy. In order to make it possible for students to come forward to learn, it was strongly felt that such stigma was a barrier that needed removal. The document sought to do this through a sympathetic account of how it feels to be illiterate and how students can experience shame and a

profound lack of self-esteem. This account failed to provide any indication at all of the inadequate or discriminatory practices within education which result in failture for students. Still less did it show awareness of any inequality in the distribution of power, wealth or cultural capital throughout society.

By giving six separate accounts of six different students the document managed to establish a sameness of motivation and basic social assumptions that held true for all six. The accounts rehearsed an unproblematic view of employment opportunities, and social and cultural participation as undifferentiated across age, gender and class. It was this undiscrinating sympathy, this expectation that literacy students are the same as you and me, that enrolled so many well-meaning tutors in the scheme. The publicity and the sympathy did, to a degree, remove the stigma, but at the cost of concealing the syxtematic economic and cultural pressures that produced the illiteracy in the first place.

Without any recognition that, in the words of the UNESCO document already quoted, 'the purposes of education are subordinated to the purposes of the dominant groups', A Right to Read had no theoretical framework to explain the existence of illiteracy except as a kind of dysfunction. While it scrupulously avoided blaming the victims, it was unable or unwilling to identify the oppressive functions which the education system serves. At no point did it give attention to the enormous issues raised by the attempt to understand how schools conform individuals to the demands of an advanced capitalist society, in its needs for a flexible, docile workforce and for consumers of its products. Nor did this attempt, to remove the stigma attached to illiteracy, extend to examining the power relations implicit in the holding of knowledge and skills. The document gave no account of how the whole process of schooling is situated within the broader social and cultural context. It certainly left unexamined the further possibility that failure to learn to read might even be a resistance to the terms on which such skills are made available within schools.

Recommendations.

Part Two of the document put forward a 'Policy for Two Million Illiterate Men and Women' (p.21) comprising, as its measured mode of address phrased it, 'a moderate and realistic set of proposals'. The seventeen points varied from the exhortative: ('the Government should enter into a firm commitment to eradicate adult illiteracy') to the administrative and prosaic: ('this fund would be best administered by

a National Resource Council for Adult Literacy', staff should be paid above the lowest Burnham rates, etc.). The last few points made reference to the roles of the CBI, the TUC, the MSC and to publishers and the media, especially television. It was in fact an impressive bid for State finance, which mobilised a wide section of civil society to put pressure on the Government: from the quasi-governmental BBC to the right-thinking citizen there was a moral crusade mounted "to establish the ability to read as a right offered free of charge to every man and woman in the country." Behind this orchestration of concerned opinion stood the experts, who, validated by their specialised knowledge and experience, had the power to name problems and to propose means to their solution. Behind both these groups lay the mighty weight of public opinion, ready to be articulated through the media in favour of their deprived fellow citizens.

The Favourable Factors.

The location of the Campaign at the intersection of the interests of the State and of a section of civil society, self-defined as speaking for those without power, is particularly interesting. The discursive strategy of appealing to "rights", together with presenting the judgment of experts, is a powerful one. Yet the economic situation at the time was highly unfavourable to any expansion of government spending in a new field, particularly as the 1974 IMF cuts were about to fall, not long in following the earlier round imposed by Barber, and education was indeed being represented as highly unpopular.

It was two further factors that were the key to unlocking the government's purse. One was the tradition of 'voluntary social work', which, through the recruitment of 50,000 voluntary tutors (and voters) was to become an established aspect of the literacy scene. The ambiguous meanings of voluntary work and some of its practical consequences will be looked at later. The second crucial factor was the prominent involvement of the BBC, which produced and disseminated the key ideas as well as acting as a material agent of recruitment. This gave the whole project such enormous publicity that it could not be ignored. Both national and local government were forced to make some sort of visible response.

The Role of the BBC

From 1972 onwards the BBC had been studying the possibility of offering some sort of service to adults with literacy needs. The BBC is not well-known for revealing its internal debates or its system of decision making. It is therefore hard for an external observer to discern

without further research what were the particular factors that governed its decision to support the literacy campaign by spending £750,000 over three years on its TV series On the Move. It is in any case a mistake to see the BBC as a unified agent without its own internal contradictions. The decision may well have been a congruence between the liberal intentions of members of its education section, and the more calculating opinions of the hierarchy that such an operation would pay good dividends in terms of public relations. TV is certainly a better place to recruit literacy students than is a printed poster put up in a library. If educationalists had sometimes pointed the finger at TV as a cause of illiteracy, through its role in the Literacy Campaign TV redeemed itself by becoming part of the cure. This contradiction is also remarked upon by Jennifer Rogers in Adults Learning (2nd Edition). She is herself now a producer in the Further Education division of the BBC but her account of the BBC's contribution to the literacy campaign is resolutely bland:

> The campaign against adult illiteracy depends for its success on a most elaborate publicity network which includes TV, a telephone referral service, local classes ... This brilliantly executed campaign has uncovered a vast new clientele for a particular type of adult student whose needs were desperate but largely hidden.
>
> (Rogers, 1977, p.32)

Later in the same book she maintains the same non-committal level about the other half of the conundrum:

> One of the common charges against broadcasters is that they encourage 'passivity' in their audiences. The best efforts of research have so far failed to prove whether or not this is true.
>
> (p.178)

All other published pronouncements by BBC staff which are easily available are equally unrevealing and seem to go no further than the assertion that as literacy is a transparently 'good thing', it was the BBC's duty to assist its promulgation all it could. What benefits accrue to the BBC in being seen as a public service in this particularly well-defined way, are not hard to discern. They would presumably strengthen its case in a struggle with the government for increased funding, as well as perform the more ideological function of its self-representation as a trust-worthy and caring organisation.

Clearly it was impossible to offer any realistic form of actual literacy teaching to an unknown and disparate audience. The BBC's favoured form of literacy provision was, therefore, to offer a "taste" of literacy teaching, together with the reassuring input of illiterate adults discussing their difficulties. The centrepiece of the BBC service, however, was their offer to set up a national referral service to put both students and voluntary tutors in touch with a local scheme where they could work. Clearly, the voluntary agencies could in no way provide such comprehensive coverage throughout the country. The only way such a service could be set up was through the LEAs, and even then, if only 5% of the estimated two million potential students came forward, there would be severe demand on very limited resources. It was not until the National Literacy Conference of November 1973 that the BBC made this proposal known, the availability of its resources being contingent on the co-operation of the Adult Education section of all LEAs. It was difficult for the LEAs to be seen to refuse such a demonstrable need and such an opportunity to render service to the community, and so they concurred.

The effectivity of this combination of voluntary 'experts' and the massive publicity and support given by the BBC was acknowledged in Adult Literacy. Progress in 1975/6, HMSO:

> Overall the general publicity resulting from the BBC's project, in addition to the specific recruitment of volunteers and students, has been of inestimable value in making a national impact, and we cannot speak too highly of the contribution to this field made by the BBC. (p.2)
>
> The invitation for men and women to teach a fellow adult to read and write caught the imagination of many. The publicity given to the need for volunteers via the BBC referral service and other BBC programmes was taken up enthusiastically by the provincial press in particular ... Thousands of men and women offered their services. (p.7)

It was not merely the publicity, however, or the promised referral services, that the BBC provided, but a substantial input in terms of structuring the pedagogy of the service.

The BBC Adult Literacy Handbook

This handbook was a particularly powerful amplifier of contradictory educational discourses that contended, and continue to contend, for dominance within Adult Literacy practice. Published in 1975, to accompany the radio

series, Teaching Adults to Read, first broadcast on Radio 3 on Tuesdays at 7.00 p.m. from 28th October 1975 to 16th December 1975, it had immense influence as it was one of the very few sources of professional guidance actually to exist. It can also serve to exemplify the range of conflicting debates as to the purpose and practice of literacy work that emerged from the beginning of the campaign. The Handbook contained a substantial amount of rather routine methods for teaching reading, but also more importantly addressed itself to such topics as 'The Nature and Extent of the Problem', 'Characteristics and Causes of Illiteracy' and 'Organisation'. The terms in which the different BBC authors set up these debates were largely to govern their discussion at the plethora of conferences and training sessions that were soon to be held nation-wide.

Many of the educational discourses re-articulated through this handbook were those which were at that time being challenged by the emergent Black Papers of the right:

> It becomes a specific work of the new educational right to try to fix it (progressive/comprehensive education) as part cause of a problem, even of the multifarious 'crisis' itself.
>
> (Education Group CCCS, 1981, p.169)

The campaigners for an adult literacy service entered this terrain in a curiously circuitous way. Partly they drew on the liberal consensus of educational theory of the 60s already discussed, yet they reinflected these categories so that some fitted into the newer disillusionment with that set of principles, and yet some others could be extended into radical assertions about the nature and causes of illiteracy.

The clearest statements of the radicalism latent in the 'student-centred' approach to Adult Literacy work are to be found in the section, 'Organisation' by Margaret Bentovim and Susan Shrapnel. They say,

> ...illiteracy is an acute result of the general working-class experience of education, and [that] this experience cannot be changed in the educational field alone. (p.75)
>
> Literacy is still a fundamental power in this society, and its unequal sharing is as basic to life chances as the distribution of other kinds of power. (p.78)

The limits of fulfilling the promise of what the authors characterise as their 'bursts of rhetoric' were succinctly indicated by their final paragraph in heavy type, which reads:

> Imagine you are planning a literacy programme from scratch:
> Write down your objectives,
> Would you show them to your boss? (p.92)

These questions are undoubtedly addressed to imagined 'chalk-face practioners, who, the authors assume (correctly, I will argue later) are low in the hierarchy of educational management. Because of their more marginal position such literacy workers are assumed to be more likely to be in sympathy with their students, and therefore to recognise the need to conceal their actual practices from the judgement of more institutional figures. A 'boss', it is implied, is likely to be more firmly wedded to the dominant repertoire of adult educational practices: fee-paying, formal enrolment, etc.

This radical stance was certainly not sustained throughout the official BBC publications, especially in those sections written by professional broadcasters. It has nevertheless surfaced regularly in professional Adult Literacy debates, and has helped to determine the form of practice in particular and protected places. In most other sections the ideologies of 'the cycle of deprivation' and thepathology of the non-middle-class family still dominate, although usually with an interpretation sympathetic towards the individual sufferer. illiteracy as a randomly occurring illness, rather than as a symptom of the mal-distribution of power. For example, these quotations are all drawn from pages 13 - 14.

> From all the research on reading difficulties in schools, it is not difficult to argue a most forcible case for the importance of certain factors of family background to literacy. The term Cycle of Deprivation is commonly used to describe the legacy of deprivation which passes down from parent to child ... Researchers have plotted the crucial importance of parental interest, so much is a confirmation of commonsense observation.

and

> Associated with literacy problems, there seems to be a high incidence of large family size.

and

> Illiteracy walks hand-in-hand as cause and effect of other deprivations such as poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, etc.

Ann Risman, author of this section and also 'Head of Adult Education and Organiser of the Literacy Scheme in Reading', seems unconcerned with the inconsistencies in her account. On page 14 she states that

> The apparent disregard (by parents) for the consequences of reading failure is one aspect ... which gives most cause for concern to teachers,

yet concludes another section on page 15 with this observation:

> It is always difficult to know what credence to give to the many stories students tell of the horrors of their school life. Trenaman's research conclusion that 45% of the adult population were resistant to the thought of beginning their education again must be a sobering reminder to all in this field that education has failed the student once already...

She at least makes very clear that while the judgements of teachers and academic researchers need no questioning, the accounts offered by mere students should be subject to a certain amount of suspicion.

Similarly the actual profiles of 'typical' students by Jennie Stevens, 'ex-Deputy Director of the Cambridge House Literacy Scheme and now a BBC Further Education Officer', reveal ambiguities and a reluctance to listen to the evidence:

> None of the five boys [the student's brothers] is literate and Sean [the student] attributes this to the family's general lack of interest in education as well as to the fact that all the boys missed quite a lot of schooling, doing seasonal work on neighbouring farms to supplement the family's meagre income. (p.4)

Presumably this 'general lack of interest in education' also explains the reported fact that the sisters went to a local convent school where they all did well. And again,

> Jackie [the student] maintains that she does not want to blame her parents for their lack of interest [in her reading difficulty]. (p.6)

The value of 'maintains' carries not only a faint suggestion of disbelief but wholly excludes the possibility that Jackie understands precisely why reading seemed so unimportant to her parents: their realistic perception of their social position suggested to them that it would make very little difference to her life's trajectory. Along with the inability to recognise the rationality of working-class attitudes to education, goes a readiness to offer explanations based on the individualised failings of women:

> Murray's mother was highly intelligent but rather neurotic. (p.9) ..

And that explains Murray!

The dominant frame of reference, however, as has been sketched in the account of A Right to Read is that of the 1960s, summarised in these quotations from the section, 'The BBC Adult Literacy Project' by David Hargreaves:

> Our basic aim is to encourage people to seek individualised help.

and

> ...
>
> [the BBC] has a responsibility to educate society about illiteracy, and to encourage those of us, who are literate, to help those of us who are not. (p.73).

The construction of the social democratic citizenry "us", to include those of "us" who just "happen" to be unable to read and write is peculiarly plain here. The problem is presented as being located entirely in personal learning difficulties. The emphasis on the individuality of and differences between students, articulated against the notion that we are all members of the same community, serves once again to conceal relations of unequal power. This pretence of equality where it does not exist makes the task of achieving it not only more difficult but often simply unrecognised.

For the most part the arguments mobilised in the BBC Handbook are reformist, a blend of the humanistic appeal to everyone's right to personal fulfilment with the needs of the 'national economy' for a literate workforce, especially in the light of technological change. What made these formulations acceptable at a time of generalised media hostility to schools was the way in which they could be rearticulated in an anti-school form. The revelation that two million adults were illiterate was, for example, a reinforcement of the Daily Mail's concerted attack on the alleged general decline in 'standards' in education, which it ascribed to progressive teaching methods and comprehensivisation. Among the many opposing pieces of evidence, which the Daily Mail also chose to dismiss, such as the Bullock Report of February 1975 ("WHITEWASH spells Whitewash", DM 19/2/75, quoted Education Group, CCCS, 1981, p.213) were the facts that the majority of adult illiterates had been at school before comprehensives were established, and that the rigourous implementation of progressive educational practices was at that time scarcely universal.

The focus on the 'individual' also reinforced that more generalised form of the right-wing argument that 'we know how much our children vary... no one system is going to be perfect for all of them.' (Daily Mail, 21/4/75), which leads into the theme of 'freedom' and the 'right to choose'. The representation of voluntary tutors who, with a dash of common-sense, succeeded where ten years of compulsory schooling had failed, completed the circuit by validating everyday notions about the '3Rs', and getting back to basics. The whole pattern of discourse drew its credibility from the disparity between the views of professional teachers and the perceptions of the taught, and their parents.

This particular conjunction of themes round adult illiteracy created a popular appeal which it was hard for the government to evade. Coupled with the imminent start of the BBC's referral service, which of itself had pressurised LEAs into offering some form of provision, and the 'experts recommendations in the Russell Report, the BAS document, and the later Bullock Report, it was impossible for the government to be seen to withdraw the £1,000,000 allocation promised in 1974. Shirley Williams' Foreword to the 75/6 ALRA Report incorporates most of the issues: 'Literacy is indispensable for personal development', 'the willingness of local authorities and voluntary organisations to take up the demand for increased literacy tuition in financially difficult times', 'a debt to the Russell, Alexander and Bullock Committees for drawing public attention to the task; to the BAS... and to the BBC'. These civil interests had by the end of 75/6, proved powerful enough to have forced state provision, of an admittedly minimal kind, for a previously stigmatised group.

The form of this provision actually was to vary greatly between different LEAs. Among the determinants on the nature of local provision were the respective strengths of adult education institutions and established voluntary organisations. In their turn these affected the type of professional posts created, and thus the recruitment of staff tended to be drawn from identifiable groups. This point will be elaborated on in Part II. As literacy was a newly constituted field of professional expertise these staff members had an impact on the dominant pedagogies and organisational methods that came to be adopted. These themes, with a more detailed consideration of voluntarism, will be explored in Part II which looks at the financing, organisation and professional ideologies of the Adult Literacy Service in Leicestershire.

PART II: ADULT LITERACY AT THE GRASS ROOTS

In Part I, I tried to show where the Literacy Campaign was located within the institutions of the state and of civil society. I also offered an analysis of how it drew on existing educational ideologies in defining its problems and their solutions. In Part II, I rely heavily on my own experience as a professional employee of the Adult Literacy Service in Leicestershire. Jane Mace has offered a somewhat idealistic definition of the potential within literacy work; nevertheless it catches the sense of empowerment that can be experienced through the acquisition of these essential skills:

> Writing is a political act; and in the process of writing, we think, define, describe and communicate. By naming the problem, the feeling, or the issue (in whatever form we choose to express it) we take on some degree of control over it.
>
> (Mace, No date, p.7)

The origin of the arguments used in the National Campaign appeared to leave little space for such a radical approach. The specific practices at a local level, however, cannot be simply read off from the campaign rhetoric. The location of the adult literacy practioners also needs to be analysed in terms of their economic and gender relations, and of the particular history of the institutions with which they became involved.

As an account of historical changes over seven years, what follows is somewhat limited. There is no attempt to chart the precise fluctuations in funding and staffing which were constant preoccupations for participants at the time; nor is the crucial issue of the selection and training of tutors considered in any depth; the changing nature of what students actually came to read and write is only indicated by implication.

The Institutional Location

One of the many ways in which 'education' functions to reproduce the existing forms of power in society is through exercise of its own institutional power. In adult education this overtly takes the shape of bureaucratic impositions that place the student firmly on the lowest rung of the hierarchy - form-filling, fee-paying, registration of attendance, use of school-buildings, etc. Implicitly it conforms to established notions about the nature of education:

> Adult education is oriented towards the same dominant or middle-class values that are reflected by the education system as a whole and are evidenced by its clientele ... In locating the

> dominant ideology of adult education within a consensus model of society, I would argue that adult education is like rather than unlike the rest of the education system in its form of cultural reproduction.
>
> (Keddie, 1980, p.47).

The National Literacy Campaign had begun to suggest that these overt manifestations were stumbling blocks, although more because of the students' assumed personal inadequacies than through any critique of their function:

> LEAs must ensure that their remedial classes for illiterate adults are free from the normal adult education practices relating to minimum class size, normal student hours and term times and formal enrolment procedures. These all obstruct the sensitive and intensive process that illiterate adults need to be involved in.
>
> (BAS, 1974, p.13).

Just how tightly literacy work in Leicester was locked into 'the bureaucratic structures that surround it', or whether in any sense it escaped from 'the status quo of hierarchical management that the bureaucratic structure demands' (Jeffrey and Sagin, 1979), is the first area I shall investigate. In order to do this, a background description is needed to explain the concrete institutional location of the early Adult Literacy Scheme in Leicester.

County and City

Before Local Government Reorganisation in 1974 the County of Leicestershire and the City of Leicester were still separate LEAs. The County, although usually under Conservative control, had introduced one of the earliest schemes for comprehensive secondary education, and considered itself to be liberal and progressive. One of its main philosophies was the development of Community Education. This was based on the Leicestershire Community Colleges, usually 14-18 year old Upper Schools, but with extra facilities and staff exclusively for work with adults. Part of their function is to open up school courses to adults from the community and to provide for community needs such as playgroups, creches, youth clubs, sports facilities, evening classes, etc. There are several moderate-sized market towns in the county, but the area on the whole is rural, with extremes of both isolated, poor settlements and wealthy enclaves of suburbia near the city boundaries.

The City, on the other hand, is dominantly Labour controlled, but has only in the last few years completed its transition to a comprehensive system. It has clung to its grammar schools (and a new, independent one opened in 1981) and claimed exclusive understanding of the grave problems of inner city, multi-racial secondary moderns. Its Adult Education took place, on the whole, in school buildings which were used during the day for other purposes and whose staff had no commitment to any form of community education. Some of its professionals, however, saw themselves as defenders of the 'disadvantaged' of the city, in comparison with their colleagues who enjoyed the greener, wealthier pastures of the County. When the two systems were compulsorily merged in 1974 under the aegis of the County and its Director, there was not only confusion but hostility.

As a direct consequence, the two wholly separate initiatives towards an Adult Literacy Service, which had been independently embarked upon by City and County, were also merged. The City had one full-time organiser. The status she, and prospective students, enjoyed is indicated by the fact that the office space allocated to her was situated in a hospital for the mentally sub-normal, despite her nominal attachment to the education department.

Later she was given, as the 3A5 document recommended, the title of County Advisor, although she was accorded neither the status nor the salary of other advisory posts. The six pilot-project, quarter-time posts, scattered round the County were maintained in their isolation. The pressure from the national literacy campaign caused the LEA to review its staffing, and in 1975 five further quarter-time appointments were made, three to city areas. It was these eleven, and later twelve, quarter-time 'area organisers' who provided the core to the Adult Literacy Scheme. In 1978 they became half-time Burnham F.E. Lecturer Grade 1 permanent posts, but until then they were renewable contracts on a totally ad hoc salary basis. Over the years a variety of paid group tutors and assistant organisers came and went according to financial fortune. The ambivalence of their position was compounded when these area organisers were made responsible not to the County Co-ordinator (as she rapidly became), but to their Area Further Education Officers.

A Place to Meet.

Originally the Adult Literacy Scheme was envisaged as home-based provision on a one to one basis. The function of the area organiser was supposedly to take referrals, contact and interview students and voluntary tutors, prepare the tutors, match them up with a student, provide support

and keep track of what happened. It soon became clear that within the city the influx of students was not going to be equalled by an influx of prospective tutors. In September 1976 the four organisers in the urban areas had a total of 270 students on record, with a waiting list of 30, and a total of 21[illegible] trained tutors, with about 100 waiting to attend an induction course. The drop-out rate for tutors enrolling on a course was usually around 50%. The eight rural and suburban areas had a total of 471 students, no waiting list and a total of 473 tutors already trained with a further 142 waiting to train. In other words, there was a comfortable surplus of tutors over students in the county area and a shortfall in the City.

The above information has been compiled from the minutes of the Leicestershire Adult Litracy Advisory Group of 23 September 1976. It has not been easy to provide statistical information in this section of the paper. Much of the information is simply not clearly recorded anywhere. Also, the categories in which recorded statistics do appear are not standardised across the period, and, in fact, seem to vary from month to month. Furthermore, as one of those who was responsible for actually producing the statistics from my own area's records, I have some reservations about their accuracy.

There can be numerous reasons for what might, in a benevolent light, be seen as the creative production of statistics. The demand for these figures was experienced as a drain on time, a purely bureaucratic requirement from the hierarchy. Such pressures or threats from a central administration often produces a reaction that may remain at a relatively subjective level: a refusal to co-operate, a private withdrawal of enthusiasm or good-will, a reluctance to conform to what is felt to be unreasonable demands. It can also develop into more conscious forms of resistance that challenge the bases on which the information is being gathered, with, for example, a critique of economism. Organisers in this case, also had material advantages at stake, since resources were allocated according to numbers, plus a 'weighting' formula. There were plenty of objective factors as well as subjective motivations which meant that those who actually performed the labour process, who designed and operated the filing systems that generated the figures, also had some control over the end product. Since they were also the workers who had some material interests in the use to which the information they produced was put, and they were quite prepared to use what powers of control they had for their own purposes. The use of these apparently 'hard' and official statistics should not therefore conceal the conditions under which they were produced,

and the available scope for manoeuvre.

This disparity in the tutor : student ratio incidentally confirmed the view of the city adult educators that the county was predominantly a middle-class, 'easy' area. Thus it was the city organisers who through certain circumstances were forced to seek places for students to meet in groups. It was a simple expedient for coping with the numbers. By February 1977 the same city areas reported a total of 100 students in 14 groups, out of a total student population of 402, while the county had 4. students in 5 groups out of a total student population of 71?. (Adult Literacy Advisory Group minutes, 3 March 1977).

In the County the well-established Community College principals in most areas took a controlling, if sympathetic interest in literacy. In this way literacy became part of a more mainstream site of education, although no explicit directive from the authority had imposed this formation. Although it escaped from the formal requirements of registration, etc., it was firmly and physically located in the actual buildings belonging officially to Community Education.(6)

In the City, where there were, at this time, no purpose-built Community Colleges and physical space was at a premium, the place of literacy work was literally insecure. In addition, Literacy Organisers felt that the City's AFEOs' attitude was largely one of benign neglect, so that the area organisers were forced to look outside educational premises for places to meet. Bodily removing literacy from such locations carried ambivalent implications: Was it a chance to enact new forms of learning, or did it simply tell students that what they were doing was so remote from 'real education' that they were not even to be allowed through the door?

Marginality and Ideology

The specific responsibilities of area organisers officially required them to interview, assess and place students; recruit, train and match volunteer tutors with students; provide classes and groups to meet a variety of needs - shift-workers, mothers of pre-school children - and give support to one-to-one students and tutors meeting in the home. In order to do this there clearly needed to be a place to keep records and resources, both for student-use and also for the purposes of tutor-training. My personal experience in 1978 was to be confronted with a locked metal cupboard in a hallway of a boys' secondary modern, due to become a community college in another three years' time, which represented the total domain of adult literacy in the North West area of Leicester. To go with this was the information that, due to the educational spending

cuts, the secretarial help given to the former area organiser was no longer available. The budget allocation of class-teaching hours had also been reduced and was no longer sufficient to pay the existing group leaders for the full financial year. This situation was extreme but by no means untypical. As one city organiser was later to observe:

> In spite of the national campaign and the BBC's On the Move, many people had still never heard of the Adult Literacy Scheme. Even sections of the Education Services doubted that these home-based organisers were part of the Education Department, the usual assumption being that it was a voluntary organisation. Never had a section of LEA Adult Education been so marginal.
>
> (Mitchell, 1980, p.18).

In retrospect these professional conditions seem extraordinary. The area organisers were being asked to perform an administrative and educational function for the LEA but were not provided with the minimum requisites for the job: a desk, a 'phone, even a typewriter. At the time it all seemed part of a pioneering enthusiasm, which was partly to do with a need to prove the necessity for the existence of an adult literacy service, and partly a crusading spirit which was reinforced by the participation of voluntary tutors. The constraints were professional insecurity, lack of funds and total lack of recognition; the positive openings were a freedom from hierarchies, an ability to experiment, an hostility to established institutions (if only because of the latter's indifference and lack of co-operation) and a kind of subcultural solidarity between literacy field-workers. Jane Mace in Working with Words (1979) epitomises, with the anecdotal verve of her account, this aspect of literacy work. The Leicester organisers would also have shared her belief that illiteracy is as much a state of mind as a deficiency in skills (p.51), and her ideal of literacy as a way to enable students to be 'masters (sic), not victims,, of print.' (p.88).

This extreme marginality of literacy workers in the City for the next few years is interesting to examine. Nell Keddie makes a connection between the marginality of adult eductors in general and their explicit philosophy. She says this marginality ensures

> that their primary concern will be with meeting the students' needs and interests; and equally important, it operates to combat the marginality of adult education to the education system, and helps confirm practitioners' professional identities.
>
> (Keddie, 1980, p.46)

She also characterises the peripheral nature of adult education thus:

> ...the low status of both adult and primary education is determined by the distance of both from the major process of certification and as far as adult education is concerned ... that no value is set upon it in the academic market-place.
>
> (p.49)

Keddie's explanation of the power of the philosophy of 'individual needs' rests on the distance of its adherents from mainstream education. This definition of education takes as its paradigm the institutionalised, validating function of the examination system with its sanctioning of specialisation, competition and selectivity. Since primary school teachers and adult educators are excluded from these heights of 'excellence', the assertion of their professional competence in addressing the individual is seen, by Keddie, as compensatory; not the prestige of the academic hierarchy but the service of the humanitarian educator. However, unlike Keddie, who suggests that the different emphases of teachers who are differently located within the hierarchies of education do not 'differentiate practice in significant ways' (p.50), I wish to argue that for these literacy organisers they in fact did.

There are multiple connections between the marginal position of the Leicester adult literacy organisers and the educational philosophy which they evolved from what was already available. Part of the conceptual framework available from the National Campaign did subjectively address them, it called to them by 'explaining' their situation and assigning to them a professional identity. The non-judgmental approach to students and the emphasis on reducing stigma meant that the literacy worker could not take up an instrumental approach to students.

It is not only the tutors in literacy work who are voluntary; so are the students. Unlike school students, trainees on MSC schemes, or clients to the probation services, there is no formal or legal requirement on literacy students to keep on coming back. Literacy is therefore an area where the much vaunted notion of an agreed contract between student and teacher can more plausibly be implemented. This is not to suggest that it is totally impossible in other circumstances, nor that tutors and students meet on terms of instant equality, nor that students necessarily find it easy to articulate their own ambitions. It does mean, at best, that there is a chance of a sustained process of negotiation over what is learnt, and why and how, that is not also further constrained by the imposition of an examination syllabus or school curriculum, or the reluctance of the

student. In terms of tutor-training it also means that, at least in Leicester, great emphasis is placed on tutors becoming self-critical of their own educational experiences, of their own role as tutor, and of the grosser elements of class and race ignorance in the schooling process. This does not, of course, directly challenge the practices of the educational establishments, particularly during the years of compulsory attendance; but it does offer an alternative model, in which the transmission of knowledge and skills takes place in a different way, and in which the goal at least is to undermine the prevailing power relationships around knowledge. This is not purely voluntaristic on the part of literacy workers, but is underpinned by the ability of students to vote with their feet and go - so, unlike the concern, produced partly by financial necessity, of many adult educators to fill classes, the essence of the literacy theory was to privilege the student's needs, and to structure situations which fulfilled them. When, for example, a group of literacy students was permitted to meet in the comfortable surroundings of a Community Centre during the holidays, when general bookings were light, but was forced back into an uncongenial school classroom when the adult education term began and demand on space was heavy, two things were confirmed: the marginality of the students who were obviously accorded low priority compared with the needs of other groups, and also the marginality of the area organiser who had no power with which to challenge such decisions. The former reinforced the belief that literacy students did indeed need protection against being stigmatised and regarded as of low status, and the latter, by demonstrating the indifference of establishments towards literacy's priorities, reinforced the organiser's commitment to her differential identity as a literacy worker. The primacy of the students' needs became therefore a key focus, an essential component of a professional literacy identity.

Gender

There was a further factor in the marginality of Leicester literacy organisers at this time: since the posts created were part-time (in theory), on short-term contracts and paid, until 1978, according to no known salary scale (Unions were unenthusastic about admitting such mongrel creatures to membership, and the DES still refuses to count the work as superannuable), they were inevitably filled by women.

As Irene Bruegel notes:

> ...a job is 'women's work' partly because it doesn't offer stable and continuous employment.
>
> (Bruegel, 1977, pp.14-15)

This is determined partly by economic factors and partly by the pattern of segregation between women's work and men's work. In this particular instance the women concerned were all married and mothers of pre-school and school-age children. Whether women's dependency on the male family wage is created through their exclusion from well-paid 'masculine' jobs, or whether it is this dependency which enables employers to keep female wages low(7), the situation of women in the labour market is profoundly structured by the ideologies of motherhood. The obligation laid on women to be available to their children and the necessity, both financial and psychological, to maintain the family unit, severely limits their opportunities to enter waged, full-time employment. The part-time nature of the literacy posts therefore fulfilled these women's needs to spend some of their time with their children. This is a common solution to the contradictions experienced by women and also one which serves the needs of industry:

> In 1976, 40% of employed women in Britain worked part-time as opposed to 5% of employed men; ... Part-time work is now a vital feature of the British economy, as it is generally in industrial-capitalist countries, though the UK leads the field in this respect.
>
> Part-time work is intimately linked as both cause and effect to the exploitation of women.
>
> (Oakley, 1982, p.159)

The suitability of this work to women's structural needs was reinforced by the already noted absence of 'official' working space. This meant that much of the administrative work, contacting students and tutors by 'phone and letter could be done from home. Additionally, since the majority of both tutors and students are employed during the day, a proportion of the work necessarily had to be done in the evenings. The 'flexibility' of these working conditions also, therefore, functioned to enable the women literacy organisers to continue to work their double shift of unpaid domestic labour and paid employment.

There was a further aspect to the gender-specificity of literacy work, which was to do with the construction of the nature of women's work around notions of nurture and service. Not only in their primary definition as wives and mothers, but in their over-representation in the 'caring professions' and service industries women perform the tasks that ensure the smooth reproduction of society:

> More than half of employed women in Britain work in three service industries: the distributive trades...17%; professional and scientific...23%; miscellaneous services...12%... This kind of concentration is not found in male employment.
>
> (Oakley, 1982, p.151)

Women are expected to be peculiarly apt at understanding and supporting others:

> work that promotes the welfare of others, rather than the welfare or development of the worker herself.
>
> (Oakley, 1982, p.155)

As the report Adult Literacy: Progress in 1975/6 put it:

> There is evidence to indicate that some [students] are now responding to facilities which are offered sensitively and confidentially and that, throughout the initial tuition, the prime task is to give encouragement and confidence.
>
> (p.17, my emphasis)

Women are not, of course, wholly unaware of these forms of exploitation. The literacy organisers saw their pay before 1978 and their conditions of employment as exploitative. What made it tolerable was that it could be re-inflected, understood in more idealistic terms. The organisers' own experience of exploitation served to cement their identification with the needs of the students, whose interests the organisers believed were served by their own economic exploitation. What sustained them was the belief that their own control over the processes of literacy and the professional identity created by the philosophy of meeting individual needs, actually could change the students' position. In other words, their gender meant that these women found themselves in a vulnerable location in the labour market. Unlike the qualified teacher's protected position within an institution, the marginality of literacy activated for them the educational philosophy of student needs.

Acceptance of their exploited position was also reinforced by what I believe is a common type of negotiation with their disadvantageous position by 'married women returners'. This is a willingness to accept very insecure conditions in the expectation that this will lead to acceptance back into the professional job market. It is believed that recent experience is necessary to validate their marketable skills and qualifications. This tempered acceptance therefore also reinforced the literacy organisers' recognition of their professionally marginal position.

It had the ambiguous result of providing yet another determining 'explanation' for their exploitation, while simultaneously opening up the space for the creation of more radical practices.

The gender division of labour had further effects in the different positioning of organisers in the urban and rural areas. As the relatively few full-time administrative posts in Adult Education in the City were filled mainly by older males, the respect accorded to literacy was not increased by the part-time nature of its appointments nor by the fact of its being an all female sector. In the County the larger number of Community Education posts, with a different balance between the sexes and with younger people still climbing a career ladder, made the organisers in county areas more easily acceptable within the mainstream.

The Construction of Literacy as a Profession

Although distinctions are being made for the purposes of this paper between County and City, it must be remembered that all this was taking place within one administrative unit. In June 1976 a county-wide Adult Literacy Advisory Group was established. Once again the consequences for organisers in City and County were curiously different. Some of the County AFEOs and College Community Education Tutors were for historical reasons[8] better disposed towards Adult Literacy, especially as campaigned for at a national level. It was this generally liberal approach, with all its limitations, that led to support for individual literacy organisers in their areas. The protection this afforded obviously bound literacy closer to particular institutions, especially when it was accompanied by substantial financial help. It must also be said that the area organisers' eventual permanent contracts on a recognised scale also resulted from the endeavours of one such AFEO in particular. No such help was forthcoming from most city establishments. However, the existence of such a body, together with a number of conferences organised on a county and regional basis[9] provided the city literacy organisers with invaluable ideological support. It enabled them in fact to see their isolation and marginality as a positive opening, that gave scope for innovation.

Philosophy into Practice

Despite her disavowal of any necessary causality between the theories intellectually held by educators and their actual pedagogic practices, Keddie also identifies a further and crucial function of ideology. It is one which militates against this separation.

> Insistence on the distinctive nature of adult education may be seen as a counterclaim which provides adult educators with a collective sense of their unique identity.
>
> (Keddie, 1980, p.46 Emphasis mine)

The 'unique identity' of these urban literacy organisers was created by the way in which accentuations of existing understandings of both gender and professional identity were available to 'explain' their experiences in this particular conjuncture. Unlike the primary and adult educators in Keddie's analysis they had no protective institutional shell: no exclusive classrooms, no regimen of practices - enrolment evenings, registers, assemblies, timetables, etc. - to establish their identity as educators. The source of their professional identity was the literal taking up of the rhetoric of the Literacy Campaign in meeting students' needs. This subjective investment produced real differences in material practices.

The other feature of this take up of theories about literacy teaching was that it was not fully self-reflecting: it offered a way of thinking about and living through exploitation and contradiction without ever making them fully explicit. This is one reason why the change to educational practices which were objectively quite far removed from those of mainstream institutions and which implicitly challenged or refused much of the hierarchical power embodied in them, was not consciously radical. It was experienced as oppositional but was not the result of theoretically informed consciousness.

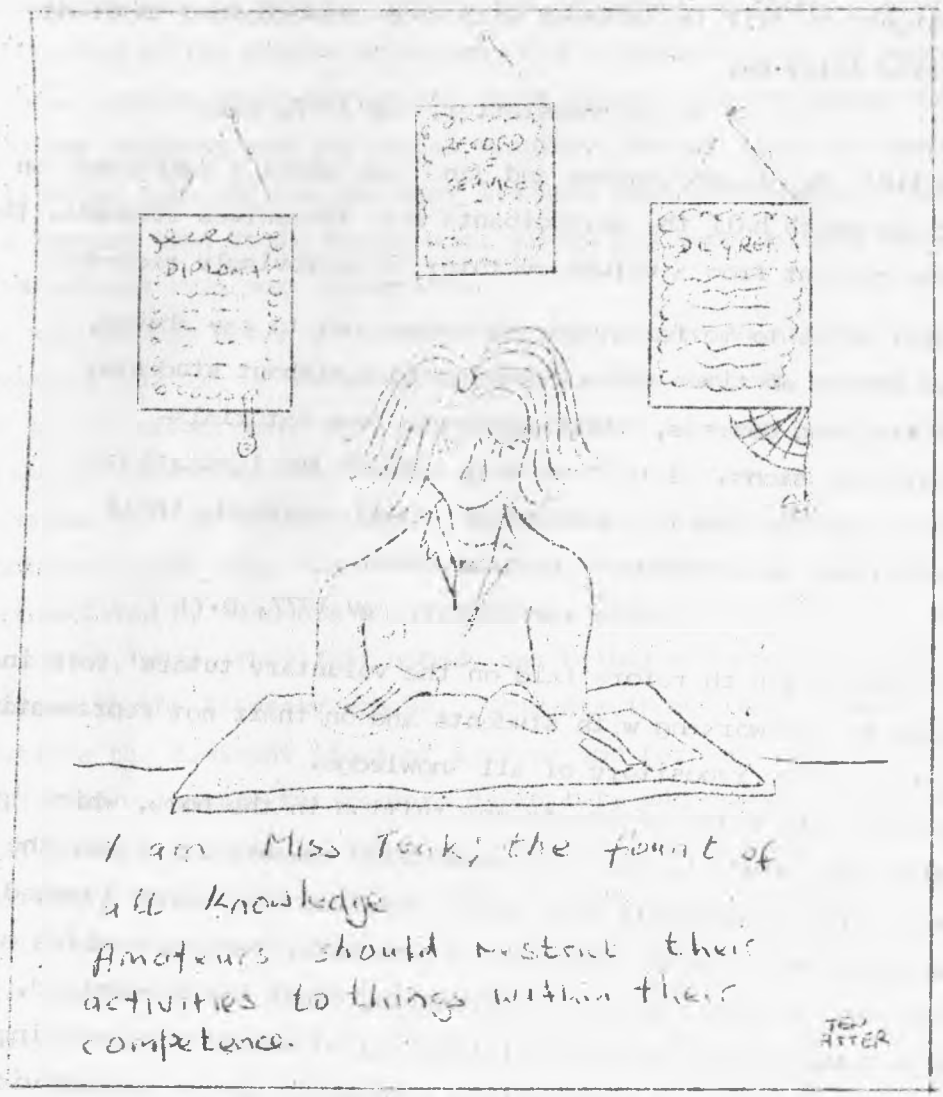
The organisers' own marginality (their part-time status, their gender, their novelty, their association with the 'trendy' county) already caused conflict with the educational institutions, if not with individual members of staff. Literacy, reinforced by a re-accentuation of the national ideologies and pedagogies, began to define itself: it was against fees, against enrolment procedures, against teacher-in-charge classes, against short academic terms and long holidays inappropriate to the continuous needs of a literacy service, against the relegation of literacy students to the poorest accommodation and certainly against County Hall's request for reports on 'average' progress. How could that be measured when every student began at a different place and, ideally, set his own goals? It was in favour of (expensive) home-visits, flexibility, and increasingly, collective group activity, extra-institutional sites for groups to meet, and student involvement in running the scheme.

Through various means, such as funding through the Inner City Programme and from the LEA, some of these goals were realised. Generous, and often illicit, help was given by professionals in the Library Service, the City Council Cultural and Recreational Department and the LEA. Literacy groups began in all sorts of non-LEA premises, including a short-life house (also occupied by an Afro-Caribbean organisation), youth clubs, Neighbourhood Centres, a Welfare Rights Agency and even Church Halls. A strange and temporary autonomy developed, not least because no-one in the hierarchy cared to interest himself in what was happening further than to turn a benevolent blind eye.

Voluntarism

Literacy organisers were also set apart from many of the assumptions of conventional school and much adult education by their involvement with voluntary tutors. The function of education in reproducing a society finely divided by class, gender and race, with different access to knowledge, financial rewards and power, is clear enough. A key element is its power to certify only a few people as qualified to occupy certain positions within its system. This is reinforced by the educational workers' own resistance against exploitation by the State that employs them. Together with the mystification of the profession of teaching, all these factors combined to make literacy organisers themselves appear somewhat deviant. To mainstream educators it was near treason to suggest that voluntary tutors could actually teach a student to write and read.

In order to resolve this professional contradiction literacy organisers were obliged, if at a fairly untheorised level, to revise their own educational theories. They had already begun to recognise that what the students experienced as their own failure was the result of the whole structure of education. An approach emerged which consequently privileged the non-professionalism of volunteers. Teachers were held to occupy, or to be perceived to occupy, a position which inevitably alienated students. This cartoon makes the point succinctly:



(ALRA Newsletter, February 1976)

That it could be presented in this form suggests how widespread this critique was. The Newsletter was at this time printing 25,000 copies per issue. The same edition also refers to an article in the TES, of 2 January 1976 which had the headline: Challenging the Myth of Expertise .

An unsigned front-page article also took up the egalitarian theme:

> ...it is of paramount importance that this equality is recognised... Yet some tutors still see themselves as the director of learning, the arbiter of information, the identifier of needs. Tutors still exist who prefer to talk <u>about</u> the student than <u>to</u> the student, who feel that a student's wishes have little relevance and, more importantly, see the learning process as a passive, one-way process, designed to fill the student with some pre-ordained 'knowledge called literacy.
>
> (ALBA Newsletter, May 1977, p.1)

In an article by Alison Chapman and Jane Mace about a conference on literacy in which half the participants were themselves students, the following comment from a voluntary tutor is approvingly recorded:

> ...it seems to me fairly preposterous, not to say absurd, the number of times tutors get together without students, in training courses, tutor evenings, even materials-making sessions. I feel we must rethink the limitations of a structure where students are still marginal, their appearance on committees largely token.
>
> (ALBA Newsletter, May 1977, p.7)

Great emphasis was therefore laid on the voluntary tutors' role in listening to and working with students and on their not representing themselves as the repository of all knowledge.

Initially the value of one-to-one tuition in the home, which 'protected' the vulnerable student, was also considered essential. Later the ease with which this construction of roles produced dependency (judged by tutors answering remarks addressed to students, keeping records of work to which the student made no contribution, etc.) was recognised, and the paradigm situation presented to tutors was of an equable, working partnership, either as a pair within a group or simply as individual members of a group.

This approach was reinforced by publications from the national Adult Literacy Resource Agency. In one of these a section entitled 'Evaluation and Record Keeping' contains the following recommendations,

> It is essential that both tutor and student are involved in evaluation... the student must stay in the driving seat.

and

...ask yourselves such questions as:

-Is what we are doing relevant?

-Who chooses the materials?

-Who talks the most?

-Who decides what is to be learnt?

(ALBA, 1980, pp.46,48)

The account given here is favourably inflected towards the possibility of evading the dominant/subordinant relationships of schooling; how far such relations were in practice subverted is harder to judge. Some tutors were attracted to the scheme by reason of the dominant role it seemed to offer them. Others could not escape their class position enough even to begin to see learning and its social meanings through their students' eyes. It is likewise incalculable how many students were short-changed yet again because knowing that their tutors were volunteers made voicing their dissatisfactions even more impossible.

I do not propose here, for reasons of space, even to attempt a political evaluation of the use of voluntary labour in this context, especially with respect to its association with the conservative ideologies of self-help and personal responsibility. I merely wish to register an argument that it is a practice capable of carrying a contradictory range of meanings. On the practical credit side the enthusiasm and commitment of volunteers was often appreciated by students who frequently would comment on the contrast between school, where they felt nobody had bothered about them, and their experience with the literacy scheme. Students themselves, however, do not stand outside the dominant ideas of society and for some there remained the suspicion that voluntary tutors were definitely second-best. This was expressed in an eagerness to 'move on' to a 'proper teacher'. The subversion of the dominant/subordinate relationship in education, which was necessitated by the involvement of voluntary, unqualified tutors, could itself be read by students in a diversity of ways which produced a range of meanings: from crippling gratitude to rejection of 'charity', from long-term friendship to a discovery of their own effectivity.

What Is Reading?

Another result of working with voluntary tutors, at least among City organisers, was an outright rejection of the massive orthodoxies of the teaching of reading. If reading really were a collection of discrete sub-skills which needed to be understood separately by the educator and sequentially taught to the waiting student, then no mere volunteer could hope to succeed. Instead, reading was seen as a process of searching for

meaning ('cracking the code' is the literacy phrase) through the use of a wide variety of cultural and linguistic clues, many of which the student already knows.

This whole area was also strongly contested at a national level, where the debate was often structured around arguments about the use of standardised reading tests. The Manchester Curriculum Development Leader for Adult Literacy, Tom MacFarlane put the case against tests on the grounds of the nature of reading itself; that reading depends on

> ...your background knowledge of the subject matter (in terms of vocabulary and ideas) and also your innate knowledge and expectation regarding word order (or grammar); secondly, this kind of fluent reading may well be prevented from ever emerging by the ...strategies which many tests encourage.
>
> (ALRA Newsletter, June 1976, p.3)

The next Newsletter contained an article by the Peripatetic Reading Advisor in Warwickshire, Aubrey Nicholls,, which presented a view of testing based on some wholly unexamined assumptions not only about the social relations of education, but also about the skill of reading. Its use of language to mystify and intimidate is also worthy of attention:

> Any assessment procedure must, of necessity identify two main items. The first one is the level of priority (sic) attained by the student and the second, an indication of the direction in which it will be most advantageous for the tuition programme to proceed. The latter is the diagnostic aspect of the assessment. To do this requires considerable expertise both in the practice and use of test procedures and also considerable knowledge of materials which can facilitate the preparation of an individual programme.
>
> (ALRA Newsletter, September 1976, p.2)

The clear implications that voluntary tutors are incapable of such an intimidating task, let alone the implied subordination of the student to his proper place as grateful recipient of such attention, perhaps caused the addition of the Editorial Note, prominently positioned and outlined:

> It is fair to say that a substantial number of adult literacy practitioners doubt the wisdom of the experimental assessment referred to.
>
> (ALRA Newsletter, September 1976, p.3)

Even in MacFarlane's piece, however, there is no critique of the essential social relations implied in the testing procedure. Inescapable in the testing situation is the power of the tester's 'knowledge' to define and judge the candidate, and the total inadmissability of any opinions the candidate might have about his abilities. The distortions which these relationships create are not discussed, nor the methodological assumptions which created the content and structure of the materials used. The limits of MacFarlane's focus on the inherent character of reading and on the individual use of reading are also revealed in this quote:

> There is a temptation for the teacher to import instrumental objectives, as in the stages of a formal reading scheme. If we ask what it is that the adult will learn to read, for what purpose, with what depth of understanding, with what result, we see that there is no linear progress here, such as could be assessed by an advancing series of objective tests. Each piece of reading or writing is a domain of its own, defined by the student's purpose and these purposes derive from his status as an autonomous adult, exercising will and judgement within the context of his own life....
>
> (Charnley and Jones, 1979, p.18)

What is said is useful and can provide a basis for quite positive action; but what is yet again excluded is any notion of the social construction of what seem to be individual 'purposes'. Charnley and Jones do not recognise that the adult's 'autonomy' is not simply self-made from within; nor do they deal with the fact that what any individual wants is deeply shaped by the practices and representations available to her/him. In their scheme of things 'will and judgement' exist unproblematically within the individual agent of choice and action. This framework, which privileges the unique individual, is of course, also implicit in the stance of the initial campaign, as well as in more general progressive educational thought.

The Positive Limits to Voluntarism

The early tutors were fed on a fairly heavy diet of the value of personal empathy, the vulnerability of students and the centrality of personal attention. All these attitudes emerged out of the classically individualistic framework which also produced the personal deprivation theories. Actual experience of one-to-one tuition in the home demanded a revision of this approach however. Many tutors and students were introduced, circled each other warily, and, baffled by what they saw, both

dropped out. It was plain that tutors as well as students needed something else if they were even to get started. The limitations of one-to-one tuition were also being discussed nationally. Articles with such titles as 'A Move Towards Group Tuition' (ALBSU Newsletter, July 1977) were beginning to appear.

A survey of voluntary tutors carried out by the University of Nottingham Adult Education Department carried this conclusion:

> ...a sizeable proportion of volunteer tutors [came] from the same social background as the students, with modest educational attainments to their names. They...were not contributing from a sense of social duty in a narrow sense. They were involved because they had skills to offer... [and] a heavy leaning towards wanting to help others, coupled with a desire to extend their own skills of communication through literacy work.
>
> (Elsey and Gibbs, 1981, p.46)

Initially the literacy organisers failed to realise that indivualised teaching is just as demoralising, lonely and unrewarding as individualised, competetive learning. As most tutors freely admitted at a first meeting with an organiser, they also sought to feel useful and needed. The Nottingham survey also revealed tutors' dissatisfaction with the level of support offered by the full-time workers in Nottinghamshire. Whether a similar level of dissatisfaction would have been found in Leicestershire is simply not known. However, the Nottinghamshire workers were located in institutions and certainly did not make a practice of being available at their home telephone number, as did the Leicester organisers. It did become apparent to these literacy workers that voluntary tutors needed more recognition than it was possible to provide for isolated individuals.

One motive identified as a reason for women attending ordinary evening classes is that it can

> ...often be seen as an opportunity to restate their sense of themselves as individuals against the demand to service the needs of others that are made on them in the home.
>
> (Keddie, 1980, p.55)

Ironically this seems to have been the motive of voluntary tutors, about two-thirds of whom are women. Professionals do not necessarily acknowledge their need or desire for self-affirming feed-back, although they frequently function to ensure that they get it, if not through job-satisfaction then through status and salary. Volunteers have no such influence. If

voluntary work does not match their expectations they will simply disappear. The disappearance and/or disaffection of tutors was what faced the literacy organisers. Partly through expediency, but increasingly through conviction, they began to extend group work.

Collectivity

For all the reasons sketched above, including desperate over demand on non-existent resources of people and materials, more and more literacy groups were established. It would be far from the truth to portray them as instant solutions, but over the two or three years, about 1976-79, forms of collective working emerged. Organisers, voluntary tutors, students and paid group 'leaders', all slowly learnt ways of sharing and generating knowledge in a co-operative way. For example, a magazine of students' work was produced, the writing, editorial work and layout being undertaken by different groups in turn. The solidarity engendered between paid staff, voluntary tutors and students was to be dramatically demonstrated in the crisis that overtook the Adult Literacy Service in February 1980. By that time about 50% of the students in the City were part of a group, and even in the County the proportion of students in groups was about 35%.

Support for this move towards collectivity was also increasingly available from national sources. An ALRA document Working with Groups in Adult Literacy Schemes (Occasional Paper No.2) formulated the advantages like this:

> What this paper tries to do is to suggest ways in which the feelings of mutual support between students can be carried over into their work, so that they start actually to work as a group, to feel able to learn from each other as well as their tutor, to assume responsibility for their own learning and to grow more confident and more independent.
>
> (ALRA, March 1978, p.1)

In itself this method of work is not consonant with the dominant ideology of education in the secondary and tertiary sectors. The actual content of two evenings' work described in this paper significantly includes both active intervention by students in events outside the group (a letter from one student to the Public Health Inspector, written in a previous session had been seen to produce results) and also a political discussion (leading on from a Daily Mirror article) about cuts in the NHS.

From 1977 onwards literacy field-workers were also able to draw on the pedagogies coming out of ALRU that insisted on the centrality of writing. Cathy Moorhouse's Helping Adults to Spell (1977) was a vital influence, driving home the message that no-one needed to spell at all unless they first had something to say. The role of the tutor became that of scribe or secretary to the writer (or writers), writing and reading back until a final version was agreed upon. That text could be used as a basis for such spelling work as the student identified as what (s)he needed. This collaborative style of work horrified some tutors, who left, but others became skilled in such approaches. Jane Mace has described the process:

> the 'illiterate'...is taught to think...that their inability to write is the result of their personal deficiencies. Writers believe they write alone. Non-writers believe they don't write because they can't write in conditions of isolation - so they believe they can't write at all. Adult literacy work in this country over the last few years has made no small dent in this vicious circle. It has insisted, slowly and in piecemeal ways, but with some determination, that literacy is a social activity.
>
> (Red Letters, 12, p.4)

There is a marked divergence between this and the original 345 Campaign document with its emphasis on the passive reader and the individual pathology of the illiterate. Even among those originally responsible for mobilising the adult literacy campaign there appears to have been change. Ann Risman, whose section in the BBC Handbook displayed all the ideological assumptions about deprivation and a kind of contempt for students' own accounts of their difficulties, could now be found criticising Jane Mace's Working with Words for the absence in it of

> the major political themes of literacy...student self-management, group collectivism, volunteer participation, democratic decision-making on policy and finance (and)... a reasoned rethink of the ambivalent role of the professional in this climate.
>
> (NLU Newsletter, February/March 1980, p.7)

This is not to claim that Risman represented the dominant view in what had become an Adult Literacy hierarchy. Nevertheless what was analysed in Part I as being an essentially tired and regressive ideology seems to have opened up radical spaces in more places than Leicester. In the

later ALU and ALBSU[10] Newsletters a radical voice can often be heard, especially in the reviews and correspondence:

> That ALBSU failed to offer any critique at all of the content of the form and of the reasons given for the census, is not just disappointing. It highlights the essentially limited interpretation apparently given to what constitutes adult literacy teaching and learning by the Unit. If literacy tutors were looking for confirmation in the ALBSU material that literacy means more than the ability to fill in forms, they were destined to be disappointed.
>
> (Letter from Stella Merryweather, ALBSU Newsletter, June/July 1981, p.4)

This particular correspondent was a former assistant organiser in Leicester, but the same issue also printed a review by Julian Clissold, Organiser for Adult Literacy and Numeracy from the Borough of Waltham Forest. This was about two of the Gatehouse Project books and began:

> Both these books, like some of their predecessors of the same genre, are important. That importance lies in their provision of a break in the hegemony of the large British publishing houses, and their ability to give a voice to groups who have been systematically excluded from most media avenues.
>
> (ALBSU Newsletter, June/July 1981, p.11)

The sort of critique of the philosophy of the original literacy campaign which is presented in this paper, had seven years after the campaign began, been articulated in the official newsletter of ALBSU. It is not the dominant voice in literacy work, but its existence and visibility are evidence of the oppositional strategies now being developed within this field.

The End of the Story

In February 1980 one of the members of the Leicestershire County Council Further Education Committee 'leaked' the confidential information that, among other spending cuts approved for implementation that April, was the total abolition of the Adult Literacy Service. The shift to collectivity now paid unpredicted political dividends, enabling students, tutors and organisers to mount a campaign that was, I believe, wholly unanticipated by county councillors and administrators alike, coming as it did from this

marginal sector run by women. Groups were particularly vigorous in their letter-writing and lobbying, and once again the element of voluntary labour and the generous airspace given by BBC local radio were also key factors. The local Leicester Mercury gave the scantiest of cover to the issue, which received some coverage in the national press. This is perhaps a measure of the popular appeal of provision seen to be based on the goodwill of volunteers and the political embarrassment involved in rejecting it. Eventually the County Council grudgingly restored £50,000 out of the £94,000 annual literacy budget. Despite their large majority the Conservatives could not afford to be seen to be dispensing with the free services of around 1,000 volunteers, performing the self-evidently useful task of rectifying school-teachers' inadequate results.

The consequences of this experience for the City literacy organisers were highly contradictory. It was in many ways an enlightening education in practical politics, as it was for the students and tutors involved. However, the practical situation confronting them in the summer of 1980 was extremely demoralising and posed many problems requiring essentially political solutions: half the staff, namely assistant organisers and all group-leaders paid by the LEA had gone; there was no money at all even for stationery let alone for resources; no-one at County Hall seemed to have the time/inclination/competence to attend to the essential restructuring of responsibilities. The key problems were how to maintain some sort of minimum service to safeguard current students and what to do with new referrals. Any solution needed to display the crippling effects of the cuts, pass on the impact to the administrative hierarchy in County Hall in the forlorn hope that this would have some effect on the next set of decisions, and, simultaneously, not damage the individual student. It was, of course, impossible.

The results in terms of the organisers' sense of professional identity as discussed in this paper, were also profound. Ironically, the literacy campaign against the cuts was seen as uniquely successful, and made the literacy service highly visible to the rest of the education service. The fact that it had still suffered a 50% cut seemed to get overlooked. Community Education, previously protected by the Director's personal interest in it, was now under attack. Literacy representatives were co-opted onto various campaigning ad hoc committees such as the Association for Community Education. For the city organisers their professional isolation was over.

Acceptance of their own exploitation, especially in terms of their willingness not to count their hours of work above their contractual limit, was also over. Determined not to subsidise the County Council by absorbing any of the costs of the 50% reduction in budget, the organisers also began to count the cost of their own hours of unpaid labour. Using the criterion of efficiency which had previously had no purchase but now seemed essential for survival, they reorganised their method of working. Students were invited to a central office, drop-outs were not followed up, home-telephone numbers were guarded, fewer choices were offered to referrals - indeed, fewer were available.

After the May 1981 Council elections there was a 'hung' County Council, the balance being held by five Liberals and one (previously Conservative) Independent. Eventually, in September 1981 the 50% cut was restored. Since this represented a twelve month's budget which had then to be spent in six months, the Literacy Service was temporarily awash with funds. The metal cupboard in the school hallway had already been converted into a dingy but large room in a City Council Neighbourhood Centre. Now it acquired new paint, curtains, cupboards, easy chairs and a carpet. Literacy had begun to grow its institutional shell. The marginality and hence some of its autonomy were going. Three new Community Colleges have opened in the City. Both County Hall administrators and Community Education staff know of the existence and activities of the literacy service.

The radical inflection of the Campaign ideology which 'explained' the extreme professional marginality of the organisers in the earlier years is no longer necessary. The potential of literacy to be 'really useful knowledge' must now be argued for in a fully conscious way on the more central terrain of Adult Basic Education, overshadowed as it is by the repressive structures of the MSC, the proliferation of Youth Training Schemes, and the coercive threat of unemployment.

CONCLUSION

The Literacy Campaign drew on an already disparate set of ideas in its initial movement, and patched them together into a new constellation which, at that particular time, was very effective in achieving its aims. Despite the conservative origins and tendencies of some of these ideas - the pathology of individual failure, deprivation as the personal responsibility of the deprived etc. - they do not necessarily have reactionary consequences. Dominant ideas have in themselves no power to impose on individuals. They have to be taken up, given a material location and negotiated over before they become active. In this paper I have tried to show in detail how the precise circumstances in which ideas are received crucially changes the use to which they are put:

> What exists at any given time is a variable combination of old and new, a momentary equilibrium of cultural relations corresponding to the equilibrium of social relations.
>
> (Gramsci, 1971, p.398)

As far as the Literacy Campaign's effect on the Government was concerned, there appears to have been a negotiation between sections of the professional classes. The State itself was caught by its need to be seen in its ideological role of guaranteeing the rights of its equal and free citizens, in this case, the right of all adults to read. The institutions providing the leverage on the government were pre-eminently those of a fraction of the education system, strengthened by the ideological messages of the governmentally-commissioned Russell Report, and of the mass media, especially the BBC. Although the education system functions to ensure the reproduction of capitalist social relations, particularly in its production of a stratified labour force, it also fulfills the other ideological purpose of creating a consensus. In order to do the latter it needs to promulgate, and believe, a version of itself as guarantor of objectivity and guardian of knowledge.

> ...what is taught in schools is regarded as valid and worthy of preserving. Cultural artefacts, knowledge, and ways of transmitting knowledge and the values that surround such skills as literacy become consecrated.
>
> (Westwood, 1980, p.39)

The educational hierarchy and the government both benefitted ideologically from the process of the Literacy Campaign, which 'demonstrated' the

apparent independence of the supporters of literacy from the State through the demands which they made upon it. Materially the government had very little at stake, the £1,000,000 for literacy which captured the headlines being of relatively little significance, whereas the educators also made a modest gain in the creation of a further field of expertise and of a few more paid jobs. At no point was the government subject to any sort of fundamental challenge, so although it made a material concession it was able to do this also as a means of maintaining its hegemony, its ideological consensus.

A further agent in the Campaign was the voluntary sector, represented by the BBC. Once again the role of civil society in reproducing the hegemony of the dominant class can be seen at work:

> The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense but, in reality, a multitude of other so-called private initiatives and activities tend to the same end - initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes.
>
> (Gramsci, 197 , p.258)

Through its intervention, adult literacy provision could be represented as a vindication of the social democratic beliefs about the nature of society. Voluntarism in this context defined the terms in which the problem was viewed, by concealing the structures which really produce illiteracy, and also provided the ready-made solution: the individualised exercise of personal services. Thus it drew upon the available consensus of common-sense about society and personal responsibility, and simultaneously reconstructed a new variant of it on a new terrain, thus deepening its plausibility, its power to be seen as explanatory.

The philosophy of the Campaign, however, including its elements of progressivism, did not only mediate the negotiations at the national level between the various 'subaltern' and 'ruling class' fractions, to use Gramsci's terminology. It was also at work at the level at which the campaign rhetoric was being translated into practice. As this paper has indicated, what happened at this level was in no way simply determined by the available theory; rather the ideas were reworked and transformed by the demands of their new location. Similarly, the historical individuals involved also had previously formed subjectivities, already had their own

investments in attitudes and ideas, notably those of gender and professional position already discussed. The intersection of these different sets of subject positions created highly visible contradictions for the individuals concerned. Through the marginalisation which they experienced, the ideology of the Literacy Campaign, which had originally served to cement the hegemonic relationship between the civil and educational institutions and the government, was reworked. It produced not only new meanings but new positions from which some aspects of the class hegemony might be challenged, including

> ...the relationship between teacher (or other paid worker in education) and student, which can contain within it either a challenge or a reinforcement of prevailing class relations.
> (Jackson, 1980, p.17).

The method of working developed within the Adult Literacy Service in Leicester certainly had, and has, within it elements that challenge the standard power/knowledge relationships in education. The students' aims in learning and the means suggested by the tutors for attaining them are at least formally on the table for discussion. There is understanding too of the cultural signals of dominance and subordination through which power relationships are carried at an individual level, and of the grosser manifestations of race and class prejudice. Some of this derives from a fairly sophisticated grasp of how identity is formed in and through language, and the necessity therefore for the tutor to be wholly accepting of the student's forms of language, as well as of his wishes and anxieties. These do seem real gains, transferable to practices in other areas, and to offer, together with group learning, a hopeful model of how student experiences of subordination can be recognised, named and transformed. Whatever its limitations, it seems the necessary place to start.

Literacy in Leicester has also been relatively fortunate in that it has kept its own separate identity and has maintained clear distinctions between its own practices and those of the MSC. It is perhaps worth noting that this has been possible at least in part because of the thriving tradition of community education in the authority, outcome of a long commitment to progressive forms of education. There seems no doubt to me that it is far easier to open up issues of power, and definitions of really student-centred aims and forms of learning when there is no pressure to impart or acquire hierarchically imposed sets of skills and norms. Nor, in literacy, is there any limitation to the sort of political debate students can engage in. Yet many of these practices are only techniques,

recuperable to 'better' forms of management, to the winning of consent to more conservative ends. Can there exist, even in theory, a set of professional practices that is free of such regressive possibilities?

Equally ambiguous is the relationship of literacy workers to their employer, the local state. There is real tension between radical commitment to students and the trade(s)-union stance of literacy workers that defends them against exploitation, that makes them reckon their hours and, for many, the insecurity of temporary contracts, not to mention the inevitable emotional wear and tear of a demanding way of working, against what they are paid. The material conditions of work provided by the state therefore had a tendency to alienate literacy workers from their own labour, and to return them to more rigid and less demanding forms of practice. Is it possible for radical professionals in such fields to maintain the subjective commitment and openness needed to transform the terms on which they work, while also using their control over their own labour as means of defence against exploitation? The steady squeeze in the eighties in local government to extract more labour for the same wages certainly tends to make workers a great deal more instrumental about what they do.

Control over the labour process is one of the hall-marks of professionalism, but what is, on the one hand, a site of subordinated resistance against the interests of the employer, is, on the other, a site of power from which others may be excluded. Use of voluntary labour to carry out the 'professional' work of teaching has similarly ambiguous consequences. It undermines the mystique of teaching, claims back the skills involved into a form of unalienated labour, and demonstrates that it is not the nature of a task that commands power, prestige and payment, but the social relations within which it is performed. At the same time it potentially undercuts the paid literacy workers' professional position both at this ideological level of who is fit and able to 'do the job', and also at the economic level, by appearing to do the job for no wages at all. This latter point may be more illusory.than real, although in the abolition attempt of 1980 some local councillors did seem to think that literacy students and tutors could somehow magically identify themselves to each other without any mediation, not to mention find resources, meeting-places and develop their own methodologies. Volunteers may not in fact, be as cheap as they look. Literacy also differs somewhat from other forms of voluntarism in that many of its tutors are in employment.

However, voluntary labour is being increasingly used by the Thatcher

government both as a panacea for the effects of its own spending cuts, and as a way of concealing the true level of unemployment:

> The voluntary sector is being transformed. Many organisations have become subcontractors for the MSC and their traditional activities have been increasingly subordinated to their new role of the management of unemployed.
>
> In a context of expenditure cuts and rate-capping, the Community Programme is also starting to pose important questions for those working in local authorities and health services, whose activities and jobs are being eroded and redefined through MSC interventions.
>
> (D.J.Finn, Letter to The Guardian, p.14,15.3.85)

Against this undoubtedly realistic assessment of the situation, there must also be set the more tenuous evidence available from such sources as a document produced by a two-day seminar of paid workers from Voluntary Workers' Bureaux in the Midlands shows decidedly hostile reactions to such a trend. It declares the Government must:

- stop short term funding schemes, now.
- put the money it spends on MSC, Opps for Vols. etc.... back into public service, health, social services etc.
- realise the Volunteer Bureaux need long-term funding

(Ford, 1984, p.38)

And among the list of 'important things I (the participant) will do' were:

- keep speaking out about the MSC
- Campaign against unemployment.

(Project VBX, 1984, p.37)

In other words, although the MSC and other quasi-governmental schemes may have the power temporarily, to attempt to replace statutory services with volunteer labour, there are consequences that may not have been foreseen. For any government has to win consent as well as coerce. It would appear from the VBX document that as soon as organised groups begin to evaluate and discuss the situation, seeing the real effects of spending cuts and unemployment, they may well have a tendency to mobilise against such policies. The role of other groupings, outside traditional political associations, in organising, educating and campaigning should not be overlooked. It may be in such circumstances that Literacy workers, as well as many others, will have the scope to perform some necessary tasks.

Notes

1. A full analysis of this is given in Education Group CCCS (1981) Part Two, Chapter 5. 'Adult Education and the Sociology of education: an exploration' by Sallie Westwood in Thompson (1980) also investigates this area.
2. I have drawn heavily on 'Adult Education and the Disadvantaged' by Jane Thompson in Thompson (1980) in formulating this section.
3. See particularly Education Group CCCS (1981), pp.66-69.
4. BAS gives this account of its own activities:

> Since 1920, Settlements had been linked together nationally in the BAS, although until 1969 BAS had not existed as a separately resourced unit. In the 1970s, with a Development Officer and an an Administrator, BAS had decided that national campaigning was the most appropriate way to reflect the work of its individual members and thus influence social change. Such campaigns were seen as short-term, limited life inputs nationally, with a gradual fade-out as other bodies, more approrpriately placed, took over the initiative.
>
> (BAS, 1977, pp.6-7).

and

> Small voluntary organisations with limited financial and human resources need to plan their involvement in any work carefully, particularly when involved in campaigning. From the earliest stages of its involvement in the campaign for adult literacy, BAS had recognised that any campaign progressed from an initial build-up to a peak and thence to a gradual fade-out. A responsible campaign, however, should ensure that other agencies or individuals could continue after the fade-out of an organisation. Perhaps also any new political campaign needed to be of a different kind and BAS was not well-fitted to take a lead in such a campaign.
>
> (BAS, 1977, p.9).

5. Freire's work originated in his native Brazil and has been largely focussed on the ex-colonial world, including South America and West Africa. He often writes therefore of the cultural disinheritance of

the third world by the colonial powers and the need for revolutionary struggle. His writings are not directed in any straightforward way to the circumstances of advanced capitalist Western societies. Nevertheless his categorisation of the contradictory potential of education and particularly of literacy has been widely taken up - as, for example, in the sub-title of the Berggrens' book (1975). The following quotations are samples of his characterisations of this dichotomy; first, pacification or domestication:

> The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe. The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating 'knowledge', the distance between teacher and taught, the criteria for promotion.
>
> (Freire, 1980, p.50).

and, secondly, liberation:

> Education as the practice of freedom - as opposed to education as the practice of domination - denies that man (sic)is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from men.
>
> (Freire, 1980, p.54)

6. Maureen Stubbs, a colleague in a rural area, points out to me that because of the scattered nature of the rural population, a total of forty-eight villages with poor public transport in the area for which she has responsibility, adult literacy in the county remained rather more wedded to the one-to-one privatised tutor-student relationship. Whatever its other implications, this factor meant that the literacy workers there saw themselves as fulfilling a different role from that of colleagues in community education.
7. This debate is carried too, in Floya Anthias (1980) and Veronica Beechey (1977).
8. See Fairbairn (1979). Andrew Fairbairn was the Director of Education of the Leicestershire LEA until 1984. His book gives an account of the origins of Community Education in Leicestershire in 1949 when

Stewart Mason, who was Director at that time, produced his Scheme for Further Education and Plan for County Colleges. In its turn this was derived from the tradition of Henry Morris's Village Colleges in Cambridgeshire in the 1930s. Fairbairn traces the development of new Community Colleges in urban areas after the Local Government Reorganisation of 1974 which, by combining the City and County, demanded the translation of this approach into a new setting. The ideology of the book is not, in itself, in any way radical, presenting education in terms of personal recreation and cultural development in a wholly uncritical way:

> The provision of courses leading to qualifications in typing, shorthand and commerce, in elementary engineering, building subjects and the like for which students enrolled in order to better themselves in their future careers has shifted to more appropriate quarters. Community Colleges set out to serve the cultural and social needs of their communities in a much wider sense, and the class [educational] component of their programmes is characteristically non-vocational and recreative, serving the aspirations of people who want to occupy their leisure in a worthwhile manner, to develop known or discover unknown personal skills.
>
> (Fairbairn, 1979, p.19)

There is certainly recognition of the contradictions involved in offering education as a means of social regeneration, although no analysis of its causes is offered, and its tone of condescension is sometimes barely concealed.

> In these deprived urban situations, we are dealing ....with the needs of people who would not dream of going near an educational institution, and of those who, although stirred by new impulses to learn, recoil from their less happy memories of the school environment. That is why the mini-Community Centres, evolving on a college's contributory primary school sites will be so important, especially in 'catching' the young mothers bringing their children to the nursery units and infants' schools. They will be unsure of themselves and frequently greatly disadvantaged, but their strong feelings for their

> children and desire to do their best for them will not yet have been dissipated - in the way it so often is by the time the children transfer to secondary schools.
>
> (Fairbairn, 1979, p.38)

Nevertheless the long-term existence of such establishments in the rural areas, brought about by the implementation of the Mason plan, did have consequences with regard to literacy:

> It is perhaps interesting to note that, at a time of financial crisis, there has been much greater emphasis on disadvantaged members of the community. Long before the establishment of ALRA, several colleges had made great strides in searching out and providing for the adult illiterates of their areas, and since the Agency's establishment this work has blossomed.
>
> (Fairbairn, 1979, p.18)

There is also evidence in this book of the influence again of the NIAE, this time in the shape of research by another representative of that organisation, Edward Hutchinson, carried out in 1974, which is extensively quoted.

9. The Regional Advisory Council for Further Education, East Midlands funded the following courses for Adult Literacy practitioners in 1977/8:

17 September 77:	Alfreton, Derbyshire, Organisation and Management.
26 October 77:	Alfreton, Derbyshire, The Adult Slow Learner.
5 December 77:	Beaumanor Hall, Leicestershire, Organisation and Management.
19 January 78:	Beaumanor Hall, Leicestershire, Spelling.
28 January 78:	Alfreton, Derbyshire, An Approach to Functional Literacy.
11 March 78:	Beaumanor Hall, Leicestershire, Materials Workshop.
31 March - 2 April 78:	Nene College, Northants, Exploring the Techniques of Adult Learning Situations.

In following years these were repeated at LEA level.

10. In March 1980 the Adult Literacy Unit (ALU) duly ceased to exist at the end of its two-year period of work. After some uncertainty caused by the Conservative election victory in May 1979, it was re-constituted as the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) in April 1980, having longer term prospects and a slightly wider remit.