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# The ILO and Workers' Education

by Curt N. Fernau, Geneva

If a trade unionist in Europe wishes to assume greater responsibilities in participating more actively in the decision-making within his enterprise, or an African worker wishes to learn to read and write so that he can better communicate with management — in both cases a fuller education is needed. But fuller education should be directed at broader understanding, and within this concept workers' education today is once again approaching the original aims established 150 years ago in the industrialised countries. A new world was then about to be born for those drifting from rural areas to the centres of the new industries, for those looking for work in the growing cities. This new world needed fuller understanding of its own social and economic laws. New impulses were constantly added, and during the past two decades the increased rhythm of technological change has brought about other changes, among them increased responsibilities for workers. While certain stages of this development were neglected in the developing countries, more recent educational methods were needed to bring about the necessary changes more rapidly and more efficiently, with a fuller understanding of the changing world so that everyone's active participation in development is secured. In the developing countries, knowledge means progress and paves the way to social advancement.

### **Common Study of Problems**

To help accommodate these needs of the workers, the International Labour Office acts in several direct ways. One way of assisting unions and workers' education bodies is to organise

seminars, workshops, study courses and similar types of instructional meetings. ILO seminars and workshops for workers or workers' educators deal with basic issues which fall into the organisation's competence: participation of workers in the planning of social and economic development, organisation of documentation and research services, trade unions and co-operatives, population problems—to name just a few of the topics which occur in series of regional or inter-regional seminars.

Series of seminars in these and other subject areas are conducted for 10 to 15 days and include group work, a lecture programme, field visits and final reports, as this "system" of approaching each subject seems to be especially suited to examine in depth not only those aspects which are valid for all regions, but also give a clearer impression of those factors by which regions differ from one another. As a result, seminar reports are progressively becoming useful reference works on their respective topics. Often, participants in these seminars organise courses or similar study sessions afterwards, using their freshly acquired knowledge and spreading it to their colleagues. It is in this context that ILO workers' education seminars become a stimulus for workers' educators, by encouraging their efforts and widening their understanding of difficult economic and social issues. Not all topics receive equally high priority in all regions of the world. In one region, a certain technical issue may be in the foreground of educational concerns of unionists, but the same issue may be of lesser importance in another. This may be the case, when the question is not

yet ripe for action in one part of the world, while elsewhere such action is urgently needed.

Apart from factual information about the seminar's or workshop's topics, participants are given an opportunity to see a variety of presentation methods and teaching aids and receive other types of pedagogical guidance which will be useful to them when they teach different subjects afterwards. These "by-products" of ILO seminars for workers' educators often provoke as much interest among participants as the seminar's topics and prove to be as beneficial for workers as the subject matter which is the seminar's centre of attention.

### **Provision of Study Materials**

Bibliophiles might not fancy ILO manuals for workers' educators too much; they are not made to match their refined tastes, but those for whom they are published find the manuals very useful reference sources although sometimes some persons find that reading these manuals is rather heavy going. In fact, it would be impossible to match the tastes and the needs of all those who are engaged in workers' education everywhere in the world, whether in a highly sophisticated labour college or somewhere under the village tree in a rural village of a developing country. For the latter category of workers' education, however, a need to teach a certain number of identical subjects in a much simpler form was felt and led to the publication of simplified and translated versions of such manuals adapted to this level.

A third child in this family of guidance material for the use of workers' educators published by the ILO are guides and brochures. Essentially, they differ from manuals in subject matters, presentation and volume, as they are more specific and to the point.

The understanding of basic economics is vital for workers in the developing countries; only through wider knowledge can they participate in the development of their national economies and contribute to their own well-being. The ILO Workers' Education Programme has developed and tested a series of teaching kits accompanied by various audio-visual aids which are at the disposal of workers' educators. In a simplified way these kits contain suggested lessons on a variety of economic subjects for the use of workers' educators; the series is expanded as teaching needs demand the addition of new topics.

Another publication of the ILO—an illustrated bulletin entitled "Labour Education"—is an inter-

national vehicle of communication between workers' educators. It is sent to workers' education bodies, unions and interested individuals three times a year in English, French and Spanish. Its columns are devoted to new trends, methods and techniques and other matters of interest to the education of workers throughout the world. Some of the more significant articles also appear as off-prints and may be obtained separately.

While the bulletin's distribution includes the widest possible number of readers, the manuals mainly reach workers' educators—through union libraries, the labour colleges or directly. Manuals are generally not distributed to teach participants or students of labour subjects; they are reserved for instructors only, and instead students receive guides which contain the subject matter in more condensed form. Pamphlets and brochures, finally, on a variety of subjects, are distributed as widely as possible.

So that publications can be read and used throughout the ILO's member countries, almost every title first appears in English, French and Spanish. But among the workers in many developing and industrialised countries alike none of these languages is understood. Translation into national languages, therefore, is essential. Versions in Arabic, German, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi and Urdu of ILO's workers' education publications are quite frequent, and occasionally some selected books have appeared in a dozen additional languages, among them in Gujarati, Greek, Hebrew, Amharic, Swahili and Tamil. The need of publications in the field of workers' education is especially great in the developing countries.

### **Provision of Teaching Materials**

Basically, the ILO's action in this field is divided into four main categories: provision of study materials and equipment, guidance in the use of audio-visual training methods, production of new study materials and research on new classroom tools, their evaluation and testing of their efficiency. Increasingly workers' educators in developing countries are beginning to realise that for various reasons—such as the high rate of illiteracy—audio-visual methods are more effective than traditional teaching methods. The establishment of workers' education institutes or centres in a number of countries also creates a demand for more elaborate and modern equipment. The trend is clearly to achieve maximum learning effects through integrated application of the most effective classroom tools.

To achieve this, however, instructors must be trained in the proper use of these aids; this implies that they must be able to produce slides, transparencies for overhead projectors, posters, flip-charts and other "software" that can be fed into modern teaching machines. If such tools are produced locally, students will more easily identify them and have less difficulty to understand. Upon request from the respective national authorities, the ILO's Workers' Education Branch has carried out a number of missions to familiarise workers' educators in a number of countries with the application of audio-visual training methods and their potential value. Such training was given to trade unionists from a variety of countries, both developing and industrialised.

On several occasions, the ILO's guidance has been solicited from the beginning in layout and planning of workers' education centres. In such cases a more profound study can be made, of course, of future uses of buildings which will be available for conducting courses and other teaching activities. More sophisticated installations can be considered in these buildings and, if planned well in advance, better results can be hoped for.

#### **Evaluation of New Equipment**

The production of audio-visual aids for workers' education mainly consists of "model" tools which are used by ILO experts in the course of their missions. These model tools are tested and modified or adapted to local needs by the experts so that national instructors may subsequently use them with the best effect. Some standard aids with sufficient subtlety for necessary adaptation have been developed. Such kits include background material from which the illustrated lecture may be supplemented, if needed. These semi-finished products go about as far as one can proceed in the prefabrication of audio-visual lecture aids without sacrificing a good proportion of their effectiveness. ILO research is constantly devoted to finding out exactly how far (or, "to what extent") audio-visual aids can be centrally prefabricated.

Another important side of ILO research is the testing and evaluation of new equipment for use in workers' education. Evaluation of new labour films for possible addition to the ILO film lending service, testing of new projectors or recorders, new types of transparencies and numerous other innovations which reach the market are carried out in the ILO's audio-visual laboratory. Research work has also begun on the use of closed circuit television for instructor training. Combined sound and visual signals hold great promise for

helping instructors to improve presentation techniques, and this warrants a thorough practical study of problems involved in the use of these techniques by unions and workers' education bodies.

The utilisation of press, film, radio and open circuit television for workers' education is another field of ILO research. How best to use these mass media for the benefit of workers was the subject of a series of ILO workshops, the conclusions of which indicated that these media hold considerable possibilities for workers' education. These workshops, sometimes carried out jointly with other organisations equally interested in this subject, contributed concretely to prepare the ground for collaboration between workers' educators and broadcasters; it is essential that both sides understand the pedagogical and technical problems involved in production and utilisation of broadcasting media.

#### **Advise through Expert Missions**

Ever since the beginning of the ILO's Workers' Education Programme, expert missions have been sent to individual countries in response to requests from workers' organisations supported by the national authorities or initiated by the latter and seconded by the former. The usual purpose of these missions has been to advise unions or workers' education bodies on the structure and administration of their educational services, to give training to instructors and to co-operate with them in running model courses for leaders and active members at various levels. Some missions had different aims and those of shorter duration were sometimes carried out by the staff of the Workers' Education Branch. An official report is usually submitted on each such mission. These reports are prepared with a view to inciting and facilitating further action in the country concerned. In some cases they became useful documentation worth wider distribution to interested organisations in countries outside the one to which the mission was undertaken.

Some national missions have been carried out within larger projects sponsored by other sources such as the Special Fund component of the United Nations Development Programme. In Tanzania, for instance, a Special Fund project was set up to organise a Productivity Institute. A workers' education specialist was included in the team of experts sent to implement it, for it was felt that workers must be associated in planning and implementing the activities of the Institute, as well as sharing the benefits accrued from higher productivity.

The desire to achieve reasonably lasting results has been a constant concern of the ILO's Workers' Education Programme. In some countries, the solution has been sought through building up a permanent institution with premises, equipment and stable financing. But this is not the right solution in all cases; there are situations where permanent facilities and buildings are not realistic ventures for a union and where emphasis has to be placed on the training and periodical retraining of instructors, without heavy investment in physical installations. An instance of this is provided by the action begun in 1964 with the ILO's African Experimental Project in West and Central Africa, which was followed up by the work of three ILO experts each operating in a group of countries. Their repeated visits to each country enabled them to ensure the continuity of their influence while, at the same time, giving full opportunity for local talent and vitality to assert itself, particularly through courses organised by union instructors trained by the ILO experts. The value of the results obtained is probably best shown by the fact that the assistance requested of them is now changing levels and becoming more specialised: general training in workers' education has led to requests for further instruction in, say, labour economics and more sophisticated educational methods.

One of the problems which arise is that, up to a point, the more one does the more there is to do. These experts' useful work creates further needs which they cannot always fully meet.

#### **Fellowship Programme**

In order to provide workers' educators from the developing countries with direct insight into continuing programmes outside their countries of origin, a fellowship programme was set up by the ILO. Candidates are selected on recommendation of their own unions or workers' education institutes and must master the language of their host country. The usual ILO fellowship programme lasts from two to five months. It is sometimes scheduled so as to comprise several countries and different places in each of them. Fellowship programmes are therefore essentially rapid observation tours providing an occasion for discussions with programme managers and workers' education technicians. This formula can, of course, only be of value to candidates who have had considerable experience in workers' education before receiving the award.

In contrast to the fellowship under which all expenses are met according to certain established

rules, a system of "travel grants" offers another type of opportunity for workers' educators from developing countries to study further workers' education in Europe and in other countries which have well developed educational systems for workers. Such a travel grant only provides transportation for the worker-student. It is used whenever his organisation is able to place him with a workers' college of repute which agrees to pay his board, lodging and tuition fees. All beneficiaries of ILO fellowships are required to submit a report upon their return home.

Together with group study programmes for trade unionists organised in Geneva on a more or less regular basis, the ILO offers to workers' educators a number of educational facilities to improve their knowledge and their aptitudes to serve their fellow workers.

#### **Preparation for the Future**

Workers' educators the world over are conscious of the fact that tomorrow they will have to teach subjects of which they may perhaps know nothing today. Where can they find reference material and guidance on teaching entirely new subjects? In trying to cope with tomorrow's teaching needs, the ILO's Workers' Education Programme compiles documentation on labour and social subjects which may become important issues in the near future. An electronic data processing unit makes this information retrievable in case workers' educators write to the ILO for some specific information on a given subject. These bibliographical references, together with a brief analysis of contents, may be obtained on request.

Continuous research on new trends or developments in workers' education throughout the world produces material which, if placed in the hands of workers' educators, may influence the entire education of those who work. The role of universities in workers' education is one topic on which the ILO Workers' Education Programme has devoted much time and effort researching on an international scale all aspects and possibilities offered to workers by university education. Technology casts its shadows ahead upon workers' education of the future, and unless tomorrow's workers attain a higher educational level they will be unable to cope with the requirements of technological change.

They will have to use part of their increased leisure time to acquire knowledge they need. The question of paid educational leave also comes into play and needs international consideration to prepare the ground for eventual legal action through the ILO and by its constituents.