

## TRADE UNION EDUCATION

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1. Of the five specified functions for T.U.T.A. the one that seems to be in question is “(b) *to provide... trade union education...*”.

I do not see a basis on which one could challenge the need for a body like T.U.T.A. to “plan and develop”, “co-ordinate”, “promote”. “review”. These particular functions are beyond the scope and competence of any other Australian body.

Hence my comments will be on the question of provision.

2. I see *no* need for a new, separate and exclusive educational system if it is going to provide only the same sort of education that the T.A.F.E system is geared to. Some of the questions that need to be asked before T.U.T.A. becomes another self-inflating educational system is what is so unique about its content, its educational forms and its delivery mechanisms that they cannot be carried by the T.A.F.E system? There may be nothing unique than the fact that T.U.T.A has got out and made these provisions whilst T.A.F.E. is still talking. I have confined the comparison to the T.A.F.E system. When one considers also the resources dispersed around the country in the regional C.A.E.’s and locked up in the city universities the question of T.U.T.A. as a provider becomes even more debatable.

3. It is all very well for me to suggest that existing educational systems might be able to provide the educational services that T.U.T.A. wishes to provide.

In fact I think they could, but, I think it might be five years before they would be providing the sorts of services T.U.T.A. should provide. What I think T.U.T.A. should be providing does not seem very close to what they seem to be gearing up to. But then I am not well briefed on their intentions.

4. My views on what T.U.T.A. should do if it is going to provide education are not peculiar to consideration of trade union education. They are fundamental to the considerable changes taking place in “continuing education”. I have already advised along these lines to the Coombs Commission and various other bodies.

### *5. Emerging principles of continuing education*

There is a growing awareness in continuing education that:

- (a) the classroom is the best educational setting for teaching people how to behave in other classrooms. (ditto tutorials, ditto repeated examinations).
- (b) The objective is learning, not teaching.
- (c) People learn best and remember best when they are learning to solve their problems, the ones that plagued them before coming into the learning setting and are expected to confront them when they return.
- (d) The best way for students to learn is to learn from each other.

- (e) If the deliberate seeking out of learning is no part of a people's way of life then those offering relevant learnings must themselves minimize such barriers of time, location, status, differences and hang-ups from earlier educational experience.

6. *The particular circumstances of T.U.T.A.*

- (a) The jobs that the unions require of their cadre range from being ombudsman, negotiators and leaders on the job to being court advocates, chairpersons and administrators. The officer bearers normally perform the last three functions.
- (b) The union cadre, at the lower levels, typically are short on general education. At the full-time officer level they are typically grossly overworked on routine tasks.
- (c) At both levels there are grievous obstacles to taking time out for further education. At the lower levels the workers must ask 'who is going to make up my pay packet'. At the official level someone must answer the question of 'who is going to do my job whilst I am away'. Our unions are so understaffed that in most cases there is no substitute. It would not do, at either level, for individuals to appear as ripping off the system for personal advancement.
- (d) The needs for trade union education cannot be forecast and planned for from a relatively stable geographical spread of the population. This is quite unlike the situation for existing educational systems. The Geelong colleges could be upgraded to the status of Deakin University and a country primary here and there can then be phased out because of firm data trends. Even errors of judgment in their planning process are not too serious as the rest of their systems are relatively unaffected by the shortcomings of one part. This is not so for the environment of T.U.T.A. A change in tariff policy or exchange rates, a geological discovery and a dozen and one other things can create an urgent need for more sophisticated handling of industrial relations. Failure to promptly deliver educational service to even small groups of unionists in remote geographical areas, or suburbs and towns heavily dependent on protected industries, can have repercussions much wider and more serious than the premature closure of a primary school in the country or the delay in establishing a regional C.C.E.

7. *Designing a responsive education service for union Officials.*

The design of an effective T.U educational system would have to cope with at least the points raised in paragraph 6.

Following on point 6a, I do not think the same service can do the job for both kinds of educational needs.

For the further education of union officials as advocates and administrators I think a good model is the extension service provided by the University of New England, i.e. a correspondence course supplemented by week-end workshops. In the closer urban settings I think more would be gained from following the model used by the ANU last year for its MBA students i.e. self managing learning syndicates. These syndicates organized when and where they got together and shared out private homework in pursuing educational goals that they had jointly agreed with the staff. The staff helped with advice, explanations and learning material. Learning progress was reviewed from time to time with staff and relevant persons from outside the course. The students in the

ANU, MBA course were almost all part-timers in demanding full-time jobs. I did not get the impression that they would have been better served by 6 weeks at Mt. Eliza.

Learning in this way does not require class-rooms or fixed time-tables and is much less demanding of staff time. Getting together in learning cells or syndicates is perhaps the most important motivational device. The principle is simple, "learning never operates independently of sources of motivation which in the social being lie within one's social setting". The development of mutual support and respect in these groups helps the individual over the humps of despair and frustration. It motivates him to make his contribution and to stick with the task. This spirit is, of course, more likely to emerge if the learning task of the group is to tackle a current trade union problem. If they see themselves as such a task force then they will also be better able to weigh the priorities of other union demands on their time.

But what about their basic grounding in economics, law etc? The learning settings I have been describing will teach them the basics soon enough. People discover what they need to know by themselves as soon as they appreciate what is needed to solve the problem. As and when an individual appreciates a particular "need to know" the staff can act to meet the need in whatever way is appropriate. It is grossly inefficient to try to pump into a person a knowledge of the basics outside the content of a problem that is relevant to him. What is learnt that way is mostly forgotten in a couple of months.

When we are talking about expertise in subject areas, not 'basic grounding', then we are talking about what the existing tertiary bodies are all geared up to do. I suspect we are also talking about a very small percentage of union officers.

#### *8. The Clyde Cameron College*

What has been recommended in paragraph 7 does not require a central T.U Staff College. In fact, it would require tutors to be located in the regions and metropolitan districts so that they could build up face-to-face contacts, an awareness of local T.U. problems and an awareness of the sheerly physical obstacles to effective learning networks.

What functions then could the college usefully serve:-

- i. a training college for tutors?
- ii. higher level education for some of the more fortunate officials?
- iii. a symbolic headquarter for T.U.T.A?

I do not think the first or third reasons would justify the cost. Training could be more easily and effectively done on the job and in local centers. The mere existence of a symbolic H.Q. would degrade the status of the people out in the field.

The second function seems to be the one demanding serious consideration. If the College functions to serve the select few officials who can get time off and financial support (or fellowships) then it will inevitably serve to create a trade union elite. An elite with 'old school' ties. This may not be bad in the short run. However, one has to ask why this sort of advanced live-in study could not be accommodated by the Australian Management School or by the Australian Administrative College. Staffing arrangements specifically geared to union requirements could surely be made.

The only function for which the Cameron College might be distinctively competent is as the 'national trade union think-tank'. In serving this function the problem areas would be the decisive factor in deciding which trade unionist would be invited and

who would constitute the 'staff' for the purposes of the particular exercise. Any elite that emerged would have had to earn their status.

Such a think-tank is badly needed. Too much of what passes today as trade union policy has been developed in ways that could only make one's hair curl to hear of them. I have had a lot to do with think-tanks overseas and I do not think they need a permanent home nor permanent staffing.

#### *9. T U education for delegates, reps and stewards*

The crux for any argument for TUTA providing education must lie here. It is here that we find political problems and problems of servicing that the existing educational systems are not well equipped to cope with.

By 'political problems' I mean the problems associated with distribution of power in the existing industrial relations setting. Thus, the unions are obviously concerned that shop floor delegates understand their role vis-à-vis union policy and the mechanics of union administration. The officials are probably also concerned that the training should sieve out the incompetents and the intractables rather than serve as a springboard for competitors for their offices.

Some managers have expressed concern that the education of delegates would be geared to training them to be bush lawyers and stirrers. This concern is not without justification. Today, however, the major concern of management should be with the fact that shop floor delegates are gate-keepers in the flow of communications and to and from the shop floor. They need to have some confidence in those gate-keepers. They need to know of trouble before it passes the boiling point; they need some assurance that their intentions are communicated to the shop floor when they dictate some change. Sometimes, of course, delegates will use their position to distort the flow of communication. It is more serious that the flow will be unwittingly distorted because the delegate does not understand what is going on or realize what is possible.

It makes a lot of sense to have these gate keepers educated.

It makes little sense if the level of management that they directly confront do not understand what they are on doubt. I am referring, of course to the foremen and supervisors.

The implication is clear. If delegates and foremen (first line supervisors) do not do some of their learning together then there is little hope of bridging this gap at the bottom of the executive chain. Little chance of keeping disputes in perspective or of mobilizing good-will on either side.

I have referred to the perceptions of managers and union officials. Even if I agree on the educational services that should be provided it will mean nothing if delegates opt out or treat it as a mere break from work. Any effective service for delegates would need to be such that they believe that it offers learnings they can use on the job; learnings they can get without feeling they are being put down as ignoramuses; and learning they can get without having too much of a hassle sorting out conflicting commitments or winning union support.

The preceding paragraph spells out three criteria. What these criteria mean, I think, is that the education be provided in the form of short workshops (2 to 5 days) held as close as possible to the place of work and residence, at a time that fits the local calendar, and with a curricula that fits local requirements at the time.

Working this way would minimize travel and away-from-home expenses and maximize use of local educational resource people. Investment in owned or leased physical resources and teaching aides can also be kept very low. When learning is designed around rapidly emerging needs, shared problems and the use of learning syndicates the level of motivation requires little more than adequate sheltered space, felt pens, butchers' paper and sticky tape.

TAFE and the tertiary educational systems are not geared to meeting these requirements. They are geared up to work in the opposite direction i.e., heavy investment in static facilities and tenured specialists forcing the potential students to shape their needs to the offered courses, at times and places that best suit the educator.

If TUTE is to provide educational services at the work-place level they must accept a staffing policy that is quite unrelated to the other educational systems. Little value can be expected from a body of full time trade union educators. Such a body would soon move to bring their terms and conditions in line with other teachers and, to open up career lines into TAFE etc, increasingly model TUTA on academic lines.

A more appropriate direction would be toward a field service of temporary educationalist. These should be organized as teams of four or more having joint responsibility for a region. The team structure would provide the flexibility to match work loads, varying demands and fluctuations in staff due to illness, holidays, in-service training etc. this form of organization would also provide continuity in local contacts and the expression of policy. The organizational super-structure should be no more than is needed to administer, select, train, supervise and co-ordinate these first teams.