A Pilot Scheme for Workers' Education

S D Punekar and S Nilakantan

There is no uniform course of workers' education and the content of the education differs from country to country depending upon its political, economic and social development. In USA workers' education is mainly carried on under trade union auspices and largely for the service of men and women in the trade union movement. In Great Britain and Scandinavia on the other hand, workers' education includes non-vocational education designed principally for the working class to provide 'objective' education to improve the students' understanding and increase their mastery of the world they live in, as well as to improve their personal culture. In France, workers' education is considered as one aspect of a wider movement of 'Popular Education'.

In India the literacy percentage is very low and the trade union movement is yet to be developed. Unfortunately workers have not fully understood their basic civic and political responsibilities and privileges. On the other hand, although the Indian worker is illiterate he is not ignorant of the things that happen around him. If given proper scientific training and guidance, he would not merely prove fit enough to shoulder any responsibility but could be an asset to the nation by rightly leading others in their endeavours. This aspect was amply demonstrated during the last general elections when a large percentage of workers exercised their franchise, understanding fully the significance of the whole business. So it is necessary that the workers' education, if it is to be organised on a sound footing, must be arranged to deal with the worker firstly, as an individual who is to develop his faculties fully, secondly as a partner in industry who must be able to do his job well and lastly, as a member of the community who has a responsibility as a citizen.

In view of this three-pronged approach to the worker as an individual, as a member of the working class and as a citizen (member of the community), the range of studies will be as follows: (a) primary education to satisfy the elementary literacy needs of an individual; (b) professional education comprising of vocational training and labour education, and (c) community education imparting knowledge in civics and citizenship. A fourth approach of looking at the worker as a member of the human race brings in the international aspects of workers' education, which however, is not of relevance in a pilot scheme.

Workers in India are not all equally advanced in their mental pursuits. It is therefore necessary to group them viz: completely illiterates for whom education must be started from the primary stage; those who have undergone some fundamental education; and those who have passed the secondary stage of education. This naturally brings in some changes in the objective of education for these three different groups. While preliminary education opens the horizon, secondary education brings with it further avenues of development and advanced education is designed to make them leaders of the community and the industry.

A chart giving details regarding objectives, duration of courses, conditions for admission, curricula, etc. is given at the end of this article. The chart is of an illustrative type and may serve as a basis of discussion. It divides the whole programme into three stages (a) preliminary, (b) middle, and (c) advanced and lays down the various standards accordingly.

The duration and the scope of the courses cannot be modelled on the school or college type—either as comprehensive or as prolonged. It must be understood that students here are primarily workers who have to support themselves as well as their families. It is expected that a three months' course will enable the worker to sufficiently understand his role. This time is enough to awaken 'the hidden genius'. If some workers show a special interest and ability they could very well undergo the advanced courses and later may be granted, some assistance to go through college education. However, no link of the workers' education scheme with the University is contemplated at this stage. It is necessary to prescribe some minimum qualification for admission to secondary and advanced courses for without it, uniformity of courses cannot be achieved.

Workers beyond a certain age come to accept, things as they are. They do not exhibit any enthusiasm to learn new things and they consider their lives as 'spent ones.' The only education that could be imparted to them is through the medium of audio-visual aids. To lead a better life they are only to see things by themselves rather than being taught. Hence, it is necessary to fix a maximum age. As for raising the minimum in the case of students of secondary and advanced courses, it is hoped that the worker will attain some amount of maturity to look at things 'objectively' and have a more 'balanced' outlook.

The method of selection of students may be done through the active cooperation of the trade unions and employers in the field, after giving adequate publicity in factories and among trade unions. If there is too much rush for the preliminary course, two sessions might be started on alternate days. As the courses advance, it is necessary that the number of students are to be limited as there must be a direct contact between the teacher and the taught. The teacher could only then take a personal interest in the students, and make out of them leaders and teachers.

It need not be emphasized that the co-operation of the employers for the success of the scheme is of utmost necessity. The employer need not grant any concession to those undergoing the primary education. The advanced course students, however, might be given permission to attend late or leave early by an hour. In a mill or factory employing hundreds of workers, such concession to a dozen or so will not hinder production. Only in the case of full time students, the employers might make a sizable concession by firstly treating the whole period of absence as on leave and granting pay for 6 weeks from his pocket. But he will be rewarded and the industry, shall profit by having the educated workers who will not only understand their own problems but also the problems and difficulties of the employers. This is a good compensation for the monetary sacrifice, of the employers.

No doubt, the worker sacrifices his three weeks' leave to educate himself but to give the worker a status
and a direct right to demand education, it is necessary to charge a nominal fee for the secondary and special education. This and a further addition is paid back to him, when the Workers’ Education Centre shoulders the responsibility to pay his wages for three weeks.

When designing the curricula of the courses, it must be borne in mind that practical utility in day to day affairs of the workers is the key note of the education; it is therefore, necessary to avoid theorizing and dealing with abstract subjects as much as possible. It is essential that the medium of instruction must be primarily the language of the region, though Hindi and English is of some importance for the secondary and advanced courses. The curricula are drafted, keeping in view the major objectives of education to different groups.

Uniform methods to impart education cannot be adopted for in the case of preliminary education, the audio-visual aids are emphasized, while in other cases academic teaching are relied on. It is easier for an uneducated mind to understand things 'by seeing by oneself rather than by being told. The former is easily expressed and comprehended and an 'impression' is made. As the workers advance, the academic education and group discussions are stressed and a greater emphasis laid on them. Material aids in the form of books and pamphlets (specially written for the workers), charts, maps and other graphic illustrations, cinema, gramophone, radio, etc will have to be utilised. The methods of education may also take a variety of forms, such as lectures, discussions, exhibitions, observational tours and visits, debates and other methods of self-expression.

As regards management, it is desirable to entrust the work on a State level to a Workers’ Educational Board or constituted with the State Education Department Municipal Schools Committee, Universities and employers' and workers' associations. Most of these bodies, along with the general public, may be approached for financing the scheme.

Workers’ education is a vast problem, if tackled on a national level. It is, therefore, advisable to start a pilot project in a concentrated industrial area like Bombay or Calcutta. Meticulous details will no doubt have to be worked out, before even the pilot scheme is launched, because the whole future of workers’ education will be affected by the success or failure of such a scheme. If the outline given herewith serves even as a draft for discussion for the formulation of a pilot scheme, which may pave the way for the education of the unfortunate millions in this country, we will consider that our labours have been more than worth the trouble.
# AN ILLUSTRATIVE CHART SHOWING THE PILOT SCHEME OF WORKERS' EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Preliminary Course (Primary Education)</th>
<th>Middle Standard (Secondary Education)</th>
<th>Advanced Courses (Special Education)</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives</strong></td>
<td>1. To make the worker literate.</td>
<td>1. To develop the individuality of the worker fully.</td>
<td>1. To train the worker to be a leader in the industry and the Society at large.</td>
<td>It must be understood that if the same worker shows a special interest, he is given promotion to the next immediate course after the completion of the first course.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. To provide a basic knowledge about the events that occur around him.</td>
<td>2. To understand and follow his duties &amp; rights as well as rights and privileges as a worker.</td>
<td>2. To make the worker if he is willing to become a teacher in the Workers' Education Centre.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. To follow the elementary principles of Civics, Politics and Sociology.</td>
<td>3. To make him a useful citizen who can shoulder some responsibility in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duration of Course</strong></td>
<td>Part-time 2 hours a day, 3 days a week for 12 weeks.</td>
<td>Full time 6 hours a day, 6 days a week for 12 weeks.</td>
<td>Part-time 3 hours a day, 6 days a week for 12 weeks.</td>
<td>Only 3 Sessions are conducted in one year.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minimum Qualification</strong></td>
<td>Must have passed at least the eighth standard or preliminary course.</td>
<td>Must be at least a Matriculate or must have passed middle standard of this course.</td>
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<td><strong>Age Limit</strong></td>
<td>16—40 years</td>
<td>20—45 years</td>
<td>20—45 years</td>
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<td><strong>Methods of Selection</strong></td>
<td>Through voluntary calling of names.</td>
<td>1. Trade unions and employers nominate the students.</td>
<td>1. The candidates are selected by a Board specially constituted for this purpose.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Those who have passed the Preliminary Course.</td>
<td>2. Those who have passed the Middle Standard.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Period of Training</strong></td>
<td>Timings are so arranged to suit the workers. No concession granted by the employers.</td>
<td>The total period of training is treated as on leave. 6 weeks is paid by the employer as on leave with pay. 3 weeks is debitable to the worker's leave and 3 weeks are paid by the workers education centre.</td>
<td>The employer grants a definite concession for those attending the course to attend the mills late or to leave it early as it might be necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Fees for full course</strong></td>
<td>Rs 10 - from the worker, Rs 5 - from the Trade Union.</td>
<td>Rs 15 - from the worker, Rs 5 - from the Trade Union.</td>
<td>The co-operation of the employer is of utmost necessity. His contribution per worker will be roughly Rs 100 - . The employer must be prepared to sacrifice something. The worker's education centre actively encourages in lessening the burden of the worker by bearing a portion of his loss in earning capacity.</td>
<td>The worker must understand that he is paying for his education. That alone gives him a status and a right to demand education.</td>
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### An Illustrative Chart Showing the Pilot Scheme of Workers' Education

(Continued from the previous page)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
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| **Scope of Curriculum** | 1. The teaching of the three R's.  
2. Basic civic, political and economical rights and duties.  
3. The local art, music and other cultural activities.  
4. Some knowledge of Indian History. | 1. Regional language, culture, art and music.  
2. Civics.  
3. History-Indian with special emphasis on regional History.  
4. Economics.  
5. Labour Problems  
8. Geography.  
2. Trade Union Studies.  
3. Labour Laws.  
4. Industrial Relations.  
5. National & International Politics.  
6. Current Indian & World History. | 1. Utility in practical life is the key note of education.  
2. Theorizing to be kept to a minimum. |
| **Medium of Instruction** | Regional Language. | Regional Language and Elementary Hindi. | Regional Language and Hindi or English. |         |
| **Methods of Education** | 1. Audio-Visual Education  
2. Academic Teaching  
3. Cultural Activities | 1. Academic Education  
2. Group discussions and seminars.  
3. Cultural and recreational activities.  
4. Visits to various centres of interests. | 1. Academic Education.  
2. Organisation of camps, lectures and seminars. | As the courses advance the academic education is emphasized. |
| **Agencies** | 1. Adult Education Centres  
2. Primary Schools | 1. Schools.  
2. Workers' Education Centres of the Trade Unions. | 1. Labour College of Workers' Education Association.  
2. Labour Research Bureau. | In all these cases, the Workers Education Centre remains the pivot of the whole Education Scheme. |
| **Teachers** | 1. Adult Education School Teachers. | 1. Trained Teachers specially selected for this purpose.  
2. Teachers already trained by the Asian Trade Union College. | 1. Trained persons specially suited to their jobs.  
2. Trained teachers from Asian Trade Union College.  
3. Experts from other countries.  
4. New recruits specially trained for this purpose. | Special care is taken to recruit those with an interest in such work. |