Engaging citizens

The Kent miners and workers' education for the common good

Linden West

Abstract

This article embodies a kind of backward travelling by revisiting the history of workers' education in a mining community as part of our contemporary struggle to reinvigorate notions of the common good and popular education. Its focus is the complexities of working-class history, disparaged in neoliberal condescension and oversimplified in some progressive thought: a history of contention and struggle, yet rich in experiment in dialogical, democratic and cooperative learning.

Keywords*:* dialogue; psychosocial; participative democracy; internationalist

Introduction

The opening words of the title – 'engaging citizens' – were crafted during the 2024 general election in the United Kingdom. The election raised questions about political disengagement, the decline in trust in representative democracy, and divisiveness bedevilling political debate; about hopelessness too in the face of seemingly intractable crises. Maybe the words resonate against the echo-chambers of solipsistic social media and the threat of populist nativism, racism, authoritarianism and fundamentalism. Representative democracy can seem inadequate in the face of steepening inequality, rising poverty, housing and food insecurity – as well as occupational, financial and ecological precarity – in a place where public services are pared to the bone and 'welfare' has become Orwellian in its punitive and miserly reality. Poor levels of mental and physical health, and declining life expectancy, haunt the social margins.[1]

So how might we reimagine any experiment of creating more inclusive and healthier politics and what I call democratic learning? Maybe this partly has to do with historical memory's struggle against amnesia, even among progressive contributors to a new FORUM book on *Renewing Public Education*.[2] Adult education and lifelong learning are hardly mentioned in that book, and there is danger in expecting too much of formal schooling. I want to think outside this particular box: there were times when forms of participative democracy, including workers' education, were strong in creating a widespread thirst for knowledge and social solidarities across communities.

Representative democracy appears shallow. When overly detached from civil society, Raymond Williams likened it to an elected court.[3] Most people, for most of the time, are passive observers of an exchange of slogans, interruption, evasions and deflection.

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Maybe some 'courtiers' think the masses are ill-equipped and don't know what is good for them. Maybe, at a conservative, authoritarian extreme, the mass is considered an ill-educated mob who threaten law, order and established democratic institutions without proper disciplining of the collective 'id' in traditional forms of schooling and work, however demeaning. Or maybe, in the manner of the Fabian professional/managerial class, a kind of technocratic fetish prevails, with a rhetoric of scientific rational socialism and technological fixes from above. All accompanied by the mood music of social mobility and reward for high-achieving individuals. However, even if a few with the right qualities emerge and rise, social inequality remains largely intact, as does discontent among the many left behind.

All quite different from the experiment in a living, inclusive and participative culture of democratic, dialogical learning characterising the best of workers' education.[4] A participative culture that Raymond Williams, and earlier Richard Henry Tawney, thought both essential and practical. There were no 'masses', Williams insisted, but men and women with potential to learn agentically and participate in creating a thriving culture from below.[5]

Such vision is distant from present realities. The British Social Attitudes Survey chronicles how the public is more critical of how they are governed than they were at the height of the 1990's 'sleaze' allegations or in the immediate wake of the 2009 MPs' expenses scandals.[6] And deep-seated concerns bubble away beneath the surface, even among frontline politicians. Lisa Nandy acknowledges the despair affecting politics. Her book – *All In* – makes a case for what she calls 'a democratic revolution' to address endless political crises.[7] Crises, in part, she suggests, of distant, overly centralised managerial and marketised politics (as well, of course, of Johnsonian chaos and the wild economic follies of Trussonomics).

Nandy paints a vivid portrait of distressed communities in the post-industrial town of Wigan, Lancashire, where she was born and which she represents. She has listened, she says, to the stories local people tell. She embraces their concerns, using as an example her local football club, Wigan Athletic, taken over by financial interests based in Hong Kong who then placed the club into administration with a fire sale of assets. A campaign of resistance began against this distant disregard, too often mirrored in the stance of public institutions and government. At the same time, porters and cleaners at the local Royal Albert Edward Infirmary were threatened with privatisation and the last pub in a working-class district was set to close. Big, macro-level dynamics of unregulated capitalism, unresponsive central government and neutered local politics were manifest in this struggle. Nandy develops her case against life, community, politics and attachments – to which I could add popular education – reduced to the logic of the market and 'bottom line'.

I made much the same point in an auto/biographical narrative study of the post-industrial city where I was born.[8] Similar problems required, I suggested, an eclectic

response, grounded in listening to the stories people tell. Stories linking life under neoliberalism with hollowed-out democratic politics; evidence of mental and physical distress with zealous individualism, poverty, disrespect, the rise of racism and Islamism. All further soured by the voyeuristic judgementalism of ordinary working-class folk among elements of the mass media in programmes like *Undercover Benefits Cheat.*[9] The decline and loss of spaces for democratic education and resistance in institutions like trade unions, cooperative organisations, churches, friendly societies, and workers' education has been a calamity.

More recently, using oral history, I revisited aspects of workers' education in the post-industrial terrain of the Kent coalfield.[10] The study drew on research during the 1990s, alongside new interviews and analysis. What was the contribution, I asked, of workers' education in cultivating a learning, questioning, supportive, democratised culture? Lisa Nandy quotes Clement Attlee, Labour prime minister 1945-51: 'Socialists', Attlee wrote, 'are not concerned solely with material things. They do not think of human beings as a herd to be fed and watered … They think of them as individuals co-operating together to make a fine collective life'. Popular education can be crucial to such ends.

So this article looks back to reimagine ways forward in nurturing (paraphrasing Raymond Williams) structures of democratic feeling, agency and empowerment, where people feel welcomed and recognised, including in the symbolic world – enabling them to better recognise others and otherness in turn.[11] Such a process engages with the seemingly intractable issues of past times: war, fascism, inequality, violence, class and gender, propaganda and education. In the coalfield it encompassed profoundly human, relational and transitional processes – individually and collectively – in the making of democratic community.

In this research, we bore witness in fact to a cosmopolitan, internationalist spirit of openness to the other and otherness created in humanistic, structured, progressive, inclusive educational experience: from the intimate and local, to residential university education, and international engagement, with financial and moral support from the miners' union. A humanistic, spiritual and material struggle to create learning lives beyond a discourse of skills, economic rationality and narrow localism. Several of the old miners in the study were saddened by support for Brexit in the coalfield – it represented, as they saw it (and paraphrasing Czech writer Milan Kundera), the triumph of forgetting over memory: not least of the emotional and material support from French and other continental trade unionists during the 1984-85 strike.

Starting points

I worked in adult education at the University of Kent in the early 1990s, and got to know the Kent coalfield. Snowdown had closed in 1987, Tilmanstone in 1988 and Betteshanger,

the last pit, in 1989. I was part of a small group undertaking oral history among 30 or so miners, teachers and administrators on the theme of radical dissent and workers' education. Kent, it should be remembered, was one of only two places in the country to witness a strike during World War Two – at Betteshanger.[12]

In 2023, I donated the recordings to the newly opened Betteshanger Miners' Museum. Not enough had been done with the material and I wanted to deepen my understanding. It was clear from Goldman's and Rose's work that many working-class students in university extension from the end of the 19th century sought more involvement in defining what was studied and how: beginning to create a more democratised classroom compared to extension lectures.[13] The first 'tutorial classes', as they were called, began in 1908, while the 1919 Ministry of Reconstruction report on adult education recommended a national structure for adult education as 'a permanent national necessity.'[14] This gave impetus to the expansion of workers' tutorial classes in the Kent coalfield, as chronicled in a recent exhibition.[15]

Oral history

Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people and communities. It is both the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating the written word, and one of the most modern, initiated with tape recorders in the 1940s and now using 21st-century digital technologies.[16] Oral history itself can be seen to have 'democratic purpose' in allowing more people to tell their story and to create confrontations between different partialities. This, according to the Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli, is what makes oral history important and democratic.[17] Given the Thatcherite labelling of miners as 'the enemy within' and as industrial dinosaurs, this matters for the people of the Kent coalfield.

I have chosen some 'telling stories' to illuminate this experiment in democratic education. 'Telling' in that the material generates rich insight into whole-person struggles – mind, heart, soul and imagination – for agency, meaning and learning. I refer to two tutors – A. T. D'Eye and John Thirkell – playing an especial role. From the students we gain detailed insight into the complexities of democratic education and journeys they made – from unconfident students sometimes to teachers themselves. I should add that the Kent miners were never a homogenous mass but came from different parts of the country, with varying ideas and cultures. Violence and dissent could be found in these differences, but workers' education (and the miners' union) was a prime vehicle to weave dialogue, shared understanding and social cooperation.

Two tutors

Alfred T. D'Eye appealed to influential miners because of his explicit left-wing politics.

Born in 1898, he left school at 14, yet won a scholarship to Oxford, and worked for the Oxford Extramural Delegacy, which provided tutorial classes in Kent until 1975. (He was also for many years secretary to the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson).[18] D'Eye was sympathetic to the experiment called the Soviet Union, not only as a bulwark against fascism but also as a convinced Communist. We should remember the world through the eyes of teachers like D'Eye: 1930s' grimness, inequality and the awful sacrifice of World War. But D'Eye's views, like many of his students, evolved into more critical judgement.

He was a prickly yet inspirational character, not always popular with conventional WEA branches because he was too left wing.[19] John Thirkell was of a later generation. Born in Hastings in 1934, he studied at Trinity College, Oxford. He subsequently worked for the National Coal Board and Oxford Extramural Delegacy. John was the driving force behind miners' day release courses. We must judge D'Eye and Thirkell on the quality of this work and relationships with students, rather than our contemporary take on political history. And we should distinguish faith in particular ideals – when leavened by openness to doubt and change – from a kind of fundamentalist zealotry.

Worker/student perspectives

Jack Dunn (see Figure 1) was a key inspiration in workers' education and the miners' movement. Born in 1915 in a West Midlands mining town, 'I couldn't go to grammar school', he said, 'because of the cost'. His family moved to Kent in 1929 for work. His motivation lay in his life and family experience. And over time engagement with a diverse literature, ideas, teachers and students. He talked passionately about 'injustice', and of an elder brother injured in an underground accident. He likened working at one of the pits in the coalfield – Snowdown, notoriously hot – to Dante's Inferno; 'atrocious, seven pints of water were needed a shift'.

Betteshanger was a 'much better pit than Snowdown, but there were frictions over 'snap time'. Conflict arose too over compensation for injuries in the mine, and 'people being forced to go back to work by coal owners before they were fit, so they didn't have to pay compensation'. Jack became interested in Hegel and the Communist Party and started to

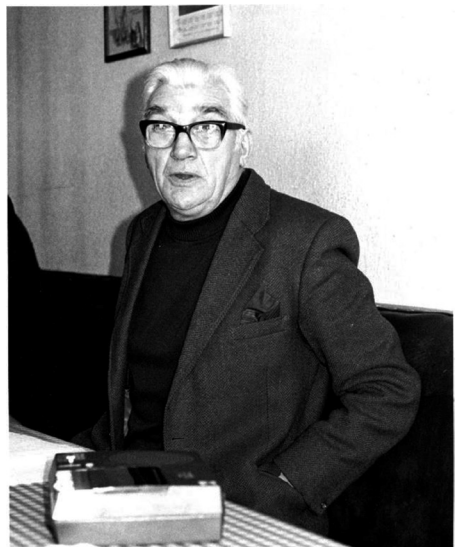

Figure 1: Jack Dunn, president of the Kent miners, advocate of workers' education, and Communist. (Photo, Kent Mining Museum)

attend union meetings and then a class at the Miners' Welfare Club at Mill Hill, Deal. Here was a library full of political tracts and novels. Reading was taken seriously, and this 'liberal' workers' education should be located within a widening commitment to self-improvement.

Jack talked enthusiastically of how D'Eye's class covered topics like socialism, capitalism, the Russian Revolution, Tom Paine and the Rights of Man, the French Revolution, the British Empire and colonialism. At Betteshanger, there were frequent union meetings, and 'a whole maelstrom of factors created the atmosphere: the Catholic Church, the WEA branch. There was politics for breakfast, tea and dinner'. Jack was chair of the WEA branch for many years. 'We never considered ourselves inferior to anyone'.

Jack spoke of learning to research, and that good communication 'on behalf of your comrades' was essential. 'We used the WEA, the National Council of Labour Colleges too' (an explicitly Marxist organisation), suggesting that disputes at a national level between these organisations (a debate often framed as 'education' versus 'propaganda') made little sense in the coalfield. The NCLC, Jack said, was 'very useful', 'a paper once a month, and a test after eight lessons. Schools on Lenin, Engels, Communism, a host of subjects … We wanted union members to be technically educated too'. They were sent to technical college, challenging too rigid a distinction between 'liberal' and 'vocational' learning. Jack thought miners needed good technical education to engage with owners and managers, and for building industrial democracy.

There were residential schools in Oxford, at Balliol and later Ruskin College. The topics were industrial, political, cultural and economic. There were study tours to other countries, with organised translators, for which miners took two weeks from their holidays. There were active links with the miners of Pas de Calais in France, Sweden, Denmark and every Eastern European country.

Arthur Clay, 'looking up to Jack Dunn'

Arthur Clay was born 1925 in Yorkshire, a generation later than Jack. He provides a glimpse into the emotional importance of generous leaders like Jack Dunn. Arthur's dad was a miner who worked at Betteshanger. Arthur 'sat the exam for Dover Grammar School, couldn't afford the uniform, the books etc. In a family of eight, impossible'. Interestingly he had 'a feeling of vast relief not going to grammar school' – the imprints of class in a young life, and of poor levels of schooling that could be transcended in a democratised community of learners.

Arthur got a job at Betteshanger aged 17 but was called up for war service and became a 'Bevin Boy'.[20] 'I looked up to the Jack Dunns of this world'. The Mill Hill course, taught by D'Eye, was funded by the miners' welfare; these miners according

to Arthur 'were extremely well read, always the most significant people in the pit. They had a role to play from the pit to the wider community. Jack Dunn in the canteen would lead discussion: information, ideas and politics would be flung around'. Arthur's was no isolated, individualistic journey into adult education, but an induction into a cooperative, sometimes contentious but always evolving culture of debate, conviviality and hope.

Made in Birmingham

Terry Harrison (Figure 2), slightly younger than Arthur, was born in Birmingham in December 1930. He was an evacuee in the Second World War and school was 'nearly non-existent'. He eventually signed up for seven years in the Marines. He took the 'King's shilling and came to Deal'. He served in the Third Commando Brigade in places like Malaya; his experience there during the Emergency 'didn't do me any favours'. Terry left the Marines, married the daughter of a miner who was a 'Scottish Communist', and started work at Betteshanger in 1956.

He told stories of the 'red table' in Deal Miners' Welfare Club. 'The Communist Party basically ran the club. The red table was a social occasion, a bit of drinking but also, we spoke of progressive things'. 'Talked about decolonialisation, independence movements in various British colonies, Paul Robeson and his passport'. 'And what Labour governments weren't doing, and why. I was a good listener.' There were tensions and potential schisms around Trotskyism and the Soviet Union.

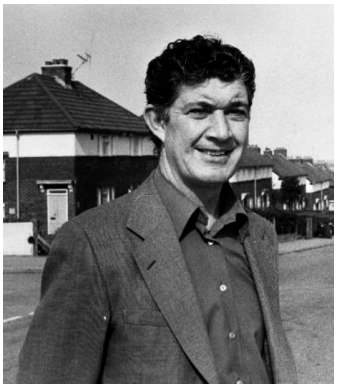

Figure 2: Terry Harrison, miner, trade unionist and trade union studies tutor, in Mill Hill, Deal, Kent. (Photo, Kent Mining Museum)

'Phyllis's Dad was very concerned about Hungary, later Czechoslovakia. He sent Phyllis out to buy papers other than the Daily Worker … He became a troubled man'. Hungary was a turning point: 'He'd already been criticised for being a bit of a Trotskyist'. 'I got disillusioned with the CP: if it fitted their purpose, democracy went out of the window. There was too much hectoring and bullying. Good minds in the CP that just couldn't face the pogroms'. We meet the occasional zealotry in rigid, fixed and defensive positioning: a kind of antithesis of lifelong learning. But dialogue continued 'at the red table, of emancipation from colonialism, and for women'. 'A good spirit, but there were no bloody women in the room'. 'You tend to struggle on, ignoring the obvious, till something rings a bell. For some it was Hungary; for others, later, the 1968 Prague Spring'.

Terry mentioned the old mining town of Lidice (the Czech town that the Nazis turned

on during World War Two, in retaliation for the assignation of Reinhard Heidrich, the 'Reichsprotector' of what they called Bohemia). 'Lidice shall die' the Nazis proclaimed, and local people were murdered. The Kent miners established a strong, enduring relationship and paid for the memorial Rose Garden at Lidice. Later the Cold War raged, but the links continued: choirs travelling to Lidice, and their choirs coming to Kent.

'They were very progressive people committed to wider community well-being: walking the walk as well as talking the talk'. 'They started a youth club', which was Terry's introduction to the 'social side' of mining, and mining communities. It was backed by the Betteshanger union branch. There was 'a great football and netball team'. There were camping trips for young people, kids taken to Amiens, embodying strong links with miners in the Nord Pas de Calais.

Terry went to mining day-release schools from 1959-60. There were weekend schools to prepare for a week in Oxford, where there was opportunity to study a particular country, often from the 'socialist sixth of the world and the mining industry there'. 'Jack Dunn came up with an idea that three weekends at Kingsgate College at Broadstairs could be a good preparation for study tours to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union'.[21]

'I then met D 'Eye ... He taught ... WEA classes. He would encourage everyone to

Figure 3: Kent miners, including Terry Harrison and Jack Dunn, on a study visit to Bulgaria (led by John Thirkell). (Photo, Kent Mining Museum)

contribute, everyone to speak a bit more. He was a very pleasant man to be with … D'Eye was a campaigning teacher, over things like opening up a second front against Germany during World War Two'. He recognised and encouraged Terry, the evacuee with minimal schooling.

'There's a good 10-15 per cent of miners that have a thirst for knowledge', Terry thought. And many of these were involved in politics. 'They wanted to broaden the perspectives of the working class: the thirst was not just about individuals but a whole group. Making a better world for the majority. They were interested in regional development, and cultural education. Among the Welsh especially it came out of the chapels', and what we can call, paraphrasing Raymond Williams, structures of democratic feeling forged in the spirit of non-conformity, love of music and communal celebration.

This was no 'Luddite' culture. There was interest in change, the nationalised industries and building for the future. A reservoir of skilled workers and wider experience willing to adapt to changing times: 'the Kent miners were concerned about the advent of cheap coal and the arrival of nuclear power. Could new structures be imagined, more democratic forms of ownership, to build creative organisations like John Lewis Partnerships? Could other forms of work be imagined?'. 'We went to Yugoslavia, to study transitions there from mining to shipbuilding'. 'How best to secure the future of the coalfield's highly trained manpower, management structures (built on partnership); and land and technology for diversification'. Sustainability mattered: grounded in serious international study rather than naïve resistance to change.

John Thirkell took over responsibility for Oxford/WEA industrial relations courses in Kent in the late 1960s. 'Some thought he was training cadres for the revolution. But he made teaching look easy and was a lovely man'. 'He asked me if I had ever considered teaching? And that led me to teaching – rather more facilitation actually – on trade union courses. We would raise a topic, consider the evidence, and then encourage discussion in the class. The lad who had left school at 14 ended up teaching'. Terry also became 'a political activist … a councillor and school governor as well as secretary of the union branch'. Like others, he transitioned into 'a kind of social worker: re pensions, coal allowances, trips to the theatre and workers' health'. He did voluntary work, 'contrary to some of the cynics who thought we were in this for ourselves. No, there was something good and heartfelt … We built a gymnasium, a sauna, and established proper screening by the pit doctor'. Evidence of the building of finer community, grounded in what we can call psychosocial transition, encompassing self and relationships.

Women and strikes

A note on the women of the coalfield. 'The 1970s' strikes and especially 1984/5 with picketing and travel demanded more of partners', Terry said. Logistics mattered, as did

the growing strain. 'The women had to do the Deal Welfare Club. Breakfasts for the kids, three-course lunches, and dinners'. There were changes in family relationships, new roles, new identities. Kay Sutcliffe, the wife of a miner, recalled how the 1984/5 strike led to changes in the lives of some of the women of the pit communities, and how Aylsham Ladies' Support Committee transformed into the Women's Support Group. 'No burning of bras', Kay remarked, but a profound moment for the women's movement in the coalfield.

Liberation theology

We have evidence of a complex mingling of ideas and faith in the coalfield. The Catholic Church was associated, by some, as a force for conservatism rather than radical dissent. Malcolm Pitt was president of the NUM Kent area in the 1970s and 1980s. He wrote *The World on our Backs* – an account of the role of the Kent miners in the 1972 strike.[22] A power station fitter recruited him into the Communist Party, where he stayed for a decade. He later joined the Labour Party.

Malcolm grew up in Thanet, completed a BA in history at Selwyn College, Cambridge, as well as spending a year at Ruskin. His faith was important in sketching out the nature of the struggle for a better world. He began working at Tilmanstone in 1972, and became active in the NUM alongside Jack Dunn – who Malcolm, like others, saw as a mentor and comrade. After the closure of Tilmanstone, he studied the life of St Francis, and then worked for the Catholic Bishops' Conference in England and Wales, completing a PhD in 2000 on the relationship between Marx's materialist conception of history and Catholic social teaching. Malcolm, like Paulo Freire, believed that the oppressed were given the great gift of epistemological privilege within liberation struggles. They knew what it was like to suffer, bringing them closer to a suffering, crucified Christ. There is a vision here of radical religious quest rather than induction into fixed hierarchy and dogma. There are potential parallels with socialism: this too can be an evolving, participative learning experiment or a rigid induction into the dogma enshrined in the edicts of 'democratic centralism'. A distinction between fundamentalism and openness to experience and doubt: as important as that between education and propaganda.

Phil Sutcliffe

Phil Sutcliffe (Figure 4) was born in 1948. During the 1974 strike he talked of how the police became less friendly on the picket lines. He joined the Communist Party and attended a summer school at Ruskin College, preparing for a visit to the Soviet Union. Four miners went from each pit. 'A Russian ambassador came to talk to us', he recalled. 'I went to Russia, Cuba and Bulgaria. We wanted to see how a workers' state functioned, and the role of unions in relation to management'. On a bus in Moscow, the traffic was

Figure 4: Phil Sutcliffe during the 1984/85 miners' strike. (Photo, Phil Sutcliffe and Aylesham Heritage Centre)

stopped: 'A load of fancy limousines passed at the end of the road. The interpreter explained that it was the Politburo going to the Bolshoi ballet. I was naïve, I thought this was a workers' state'.

But 'the pit was so democratic'. 'If there was an issue, we'd have a discussion there and then. And even if four or five disagreed, we'd walk off together'. Detailed discussions of technicalities, options and ethics. Glimpses of a putative industrial democratic culture that Raymond Williams describes in his novel *Border Country*. [23] Williams' railwayman father and others in a signal box during the General Strike, engaging with the logistics and morality of allowing trains to pass, like good students rather than passive workers. Made redundant, aged 40, when the pit closed, Phil was blacklisted from working on the Channel Tunnel because of his union activism. He later found work in a factory, but 'in a factory environment', he said, 'you'd just get individuals. Union dues were taken direct from wages at the pit. In the factories, other workers came from elsewhere, and they didn't have the concept of an active democracy and solidarity'.

Conclusion

We might interpret these stories simply as nostalgia. Or as glimpses of a common, if imperfect, democratic culture created in struggles for justice, dialogue and learning.

We could simply conclude that this was a dangerous, masculine, passé working world, but it was alive with solidarity, meaning and fine community. Miners' stories, as Robert Gildea observes, are the stuff of paradox.[24] Danger and solidarity; tragedy and triumph; resilience and retreat; reinvention and ruin; fine community and disintegration. The stories have also to do with the psychosocial complexity we call education and community: with the possibility of renegotiation of self in democratic space. With heart and imagination, music and soul, as much as mind.

Aspects of learning – its intimacies, emotionality, relationality and aesthetics – have not always been appreciated in overly rationalist, narrative-light interpretations of workers' education.[25] I'm reminded of Raymond Williams' encounter with a miner/student in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The miners were encouraged to write about their work. But writing could be a bridge too far for men with minimal schooling. One miner struggled to explain to Williams why writing was hard. He could have been Terry or Phil. Williams encouraged him to draw aspects of the work on a piece of paper, with Raymond helping, and then they talked more openly and generatively.[26] We could think of this as a moment of emotional intimacy and mutuality, of self/other negotiation, even of courageous learning given a masculinist culture where admitting doubt and vulnerability could be hard.

The stories also remind us of the place and importance of work in communities: instilling pride, purpose, point and the desire to learn as well as potential danger. We struggle to create meaningful work in 'post-industrial' communities in a neoliberal world. Work is often precarious, dehumanised, alienating. But when primacy is given to the local, devolved and community – alongside worker rights and protections at a national level – we can reimagine generating more forms of useful work. In places like Preston, where local authorities and large public and private enterprises have experimented with using local sources for purchasing goods and services to help sustain local economies. In Stoke, in one distressed neighbourhood, herbs now grow, a youth club flourishes, and a social enterprise makes cheery moulded ceramic tiles in the shape of pigeons, providing crucial employment.[27] Small, but beautiful. And we learn in the same location of artists turning a local pub into a democratised centre among people who have experienced the long wake of the decline and loss of an industrial base. We need more diverse and well-resourced, bottom-up experiments in this kind of community learning in places like the Kent coalfield too.

It could even include reinvigorating the idea of a civic university, beyond 'social mobility', conventional, academic-led research or engagement with business. It might involve creating university settlements in specific local neighbourhoods, bringing potential businesses, academics, students and local people into dialogue, rather than top-down prescription. Spaces for academics, local people, businesses, unions and others to research employment creation alongside new forms of cultural life, with

access to wider funding. All in ways recognisable to the miners above: grounded in equality and openness to diverse experience. And space too for the young in sport and conviviality. Space for virtual dialogical learning with folk in similar communities in other countries, and space to recognise there is more to human flourishing than being fed and watered.[28]

Dialogue across difference is fragile in many post-industrial communities. Nonetheless, in Stoke, for instance, working-class women from different ethnic and religious communities learned to dialogue and act together, despite racism and fundamentalist religion, when their local swimming pool was threatened – mirroring the resistance in Wigan.[29] Dialogue can be with memory too, inspiring present generations through learning more of the engaging humanity of parents and grandparents in struggles against fascist barbarism. Politicians and professionals – in their paternalistic technicist rationalist conditioning – need to be reminded, as Lisa Nandy suggests, of the importance of local stories and listening; to which we must add space for diverse, democratic learning in the quest for the fine collective life.[30]

Linden West is Professor Emeritus at Canterbury Christ Church University, and a widely published author in adult education and lifelong learning. He has developed auto/biographical narrative methods and psychosocial perspectives in his work. Along with Laura Formenti from the University of Milano-Bicocca, he was awarded, in 2019, the Cyril O. Houle prize for 'outstanding literature' in international adult education.

linden.west@canterbury.ac.uk

Notes

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20. 'Bevin Boys' were young men conscripted to work in coal mines to increase production between 1943 and 1948. The programme was named after Ernest Bevin, the former general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, who became minister of labour and national service in Churchill's Second World War coalition government, and foreign secretary in Attlee's Labour governments, 1945-51.

21. Kingsgate was a short-term residential college for adults in Broadstairs, Kent. Owned by the YMCA, its warden, Eric Bellchambers, had previously been the WEA's south eastern district secretary. It was a regular venue for WEA/university residential courses during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

22. M. Pitt, *The World on our Backs: the Kent miners and the 1972 miners' strike*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1979.

23. R. Williams, *Border Country*, London, Hogarth Press, 1988.

24. R. Gildea, *The Backbone of the Nation: mining communities and the great strike of 1984-85,* New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2023.

25. West, 2016, o*p. cit*.

26. J. McIlroy, 'The unknown Raymond Williams', in J. McIlroy and S. Westwood

(eds), *Border Country, Raymond Williams in Adult Education*, Leicester, NIACE, 1993.

27. C. Higgins, 'Levelling up has failed in my home town of Stoke. For hope there, look to the arts', *The Guardian,* 19 June 2024: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/19/stoke-on-trent-optimism-arts-levelling-up.

28. West, 2016, o*p. cit*.

29. *Ibid.*

30. L. West, 'Class matters, then and now: adult education, class and the psychosocial', *Sisyphus*, 12, 1, 2024, pp59-82: https://revistas.rcaap.pt/sisyphus/article/view/31183