

THE INSTITUTE FOR INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION AND WORKER EDUCATION

Johann Maree

Worker education is of immense importance to trade unions, but there has often been intense dispute over the way in which it is to be provided and to whom. This was the case with the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) which was founded with the express purpose of providing african workers with education after the mass strike in Durban in 1973. The IIE emerged at about the same time as those african unions that combined together to form the Trade Union Advisory and Co-ordinating Council (TUACC). These unions eventually formed part of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). Although the IIE worked closely with these unions, considerable tensions and conflict arose between them.

The conflict was basically over the form of the worker education that the IIE was to provide and the relationship between the IIE and the emerging trade unions. The conflict manifested itself over three issues: firstly, the question of who was to control the IIE: whether it should be a relatively autonomous body or whether it should fall firmly under the control of the unions. In effect it boiled down to whether intellectuals outside the unions or organically linked with the unions should control the IIE. Secondly the contents of the education to be provided became highly contentious: it was disputed whether it was to be aimed at the broad upliftment of the black working class as a whole or whether it should be closely tied to organisational needs of the trade unions. Out of this arose the third issue: which workers were to be educated? Should the courses of the IIE be open to all workers or should they be limited to workers from the TUACC

unions only?

This article examines the disputes between IIE and the TUACC unions. In particular it focuses on the roles of intellectuals in these bodies because the conflict was really fought out between them with workers playing a passive role.

Origins and Structure of the IIE 1973.....

The roots of the IIE, as those of the unions, lay in the Durban strikes of 1973. The strikes revealed a need for workers' education. At the inaugural meeting of the IIE on 30 May 1973 Harriet Bolton, who was secretary of a number of registered trade unions and who had done a great deal to help african unions get started in Durban, explained the need had arisen to establish an institution to cater exclusively for the education of workers:

during the strikes the trade unions and other interested bodies were appalled by the lack of knowledge displayed by the workers, the employers and the general public, about the rights of workers. While the employers and the general public could easily remedy their lack of knowledge by making use of educational facilities at their disposal, the same does not apply to the workers. The workers have neither the time, nor the money, nor access to these facilities. (1)

The IIE was founded by intellectuals who were either providing services for the emerging african unions or directly organising the unions. Effective control of the IIE was vested in the hands of a relatively small Working Committee although an elaborate umbrella body was created as a protective shield. Like the trade unions, the IIE was operating in a hostile political environment. The Working Committee was dominated by a few individuals including Harriet Bolton, Foszia Fisher, Halton Cheadle and David Hemson. Fisher was particularly

active in the formation of the IIE and was subsequently elected the first chairperson of the Working Committee. (2) She received considerable support from her husband, Richard Turner, a political science lecturer who was banned in February 1973. Although she acted autonomously and was in no way dominated by Turner, they discussed IIE matters together to the point where Fisher became protective of an idea thinking of it "as our idea and wanting to protect something that I thought was Rick and mine". (3)

The umbrella body of the IIE consisted of its Council as well as an Academic Advisory Panel. The Council, which had very limited powers, consisted of representatives from worker organisations as well as people and institutions who could make constructive contributions to the IIE or potentially shield it from state repression. These included the Chancellor of the IIE who was Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, two other representatives from the Kwazulu government, one from the South African Institute of Race Relations and two from the Academic Advisory Panel. The Panel consisted of academics from the University of Natal in Durban who were to play an advisory role in the preparation of teaching material. Considerable efforts were initially made to retain the goodwill and involvement of TUCSA, but TUCSA rapidly turned against the IIE. (4) The IIE also registered under the Correspondence College Act of 1956 as a protective measure. (5)

In its early stages, the Council went through rather elaborate procedures to launch the IIE, but it did not do much more than endorse the decisions already taken by the founders and the Working Committee of the IIE. They decided that the IIE would offer a Diploma in Industrial Relations in 1974 as a correspondence course.

The founders of the IIE also planned to produce a

"newsletter which was to report on general problems of the Trade Union Movement in South Africa and elsewhere". The "newsletter" was called the South African Labour Bulletin and was published at intervals of seven to eight weeks. The policy of the Bulletin was placed in the hands of its Editorial Board which was initially composed of the entire Working Committee of the IIE. The target readership of the Bulletin was clarified by Fisher at a Working Committee meeting. She stated that it was aimed essentially at trade union officials who were in need of more detailed analysis on issues that they came across daily. The Bulletin was also peripherally aimed at academics for financial rather than educative reasons, but it was not aimed at rank and file worker readership. (6)

Struggle for Control of IIE 1974-75.....

In 1974 the IIE commenced its education by means of a correspondence course. It enrolled a total of 139 students virtually all of whom were african workers from Durban and Pietermaritzburg: only 9 lived in other centres. The IIE was aware of some of the drawbacks of the educational method it had adopted. To try and ensure that the written material it produced was more or less at the right level, some workers "proofread" the first drafts of the material which were then amended in the light of the criticisms. (7)

The IIE initially operated as a relatively autonomous body although it was linked with the trade union movement by having trade union representatives on the Working Committee as well as on the Council. It also operated from the same premises as the unions in Central Court which gave it an organic link with them. However, the tie with the unions was considerably loosened when Halton Cheadle and Dave Hemson, who were two trade union representatives on the Working Committee were banned in February 1974 and were not replaced on the

Committee. (8) This meant that the IIE no longer had effective trade union representation nor participation of the unions' intellectuals in its activities.

This situation led to increasing dissatisfaction with the IIE on the part of intellectuals in TUACC, particularly John Copelyn and Mike Murphy, who were opposed to the existing role of the IIE.

We felt it should be union controlled, that it should be oriented exclusively towards the specific educational needs of the actual organisations we had and that the correspondence technique was pretty much irrelevant; that what was needed was to develop BEC programmes, shop steward programmes, organiser programmes, and to work on a different level. (9)

Support for this position also came from workers in the unions. As a result the executive body of TUACC, the Secretariat, made a move in October 1974 to bring the IIE under its control. They decided that they would not elect two union representatives onto the IIE Working Committee until the TUACC Council, which consisted of the Executive Committees of all the unions, had formulated "the desired nature of relationship with the IIE". The Secretariat wanted the IIE to become a sub-committee of TUACC because they objected to the independence of the IIE as this enabled it "to take its own decisions and formulate its own direction". There was also resentment on the part of TUACC with the IIE's reluctance to co-operate with it in their fundraising efforts with the British Trade Union Council.

In agreeing with these criticisms Eddie Webster, the Academic Advisory Panel representative on the Working Committee, pointed towards a different relationship between education and organisation. He maintained that:

it was vital to prevent a sharp dichotomy

between education and organisation. The mistake of the IIE was that ideas were formulated by intellectuals isolated from the workers and the trade unions. Ideas were not located in practice... As a service body the IIE had to satisfy the needs of the trade unions. TUACC should provide direction and the IIE implement it. (10)

Although some members of the Working Committee tried to prevent a polarisation between the IIE and TUACC, these attempts proved to be futile. This was largely due to the political and ideological differences between the intellectuals. At the one end was Fisher supported by professor Lawrence Schlemmer, chairman of the IIE Council. This grouping showed liberal leanings and placed great emphasis on the need for african workers to engage in black community struggles. On one occasion Professor Schlemmer stated that his view on the role of the IIE was that 'it was conceived as an organisation concerned with social change on a broad front. More particularly it was seen as directing its effort towards the needs of leaders in the working class who were outside the unions as well as those in the unions.' (11) At the other end were the intellectuals in the TUACC Secretariat such as John Copelyn and Mike Murphy who perceived african workers' struggles as predominantly a class struggle and considered trade unions to be the most suitable vehicles through which to mobilise the african working class.

The political and ideological differences between the two sides was shown clearly at a Council meeting in July 1974 when professor Schlemmer proposed that the IIE should introduce a Diploma in Community Studies. He motivated the proposal on the grounds that there was a need to train leaders in Black communities, that a workers' organisation needed to have a leadership with knowledge of community problems and an awareness of the organisation's rela-

tionship to the community. Copelyn opposed the proposal on the grounds that it was not related to the needs of the trade unions and that priority should be given to establishing trade union structures in the factories. He felt that the IIE should be a trade union school training shop stewards and should not distance itself from the factory. (12) The issue could not be resolved at the Council, but Community Studies was in fact never taught by the IIE. The resistance from TUACC was too strong and conflict between the two sides over more fundamental issues soon overshadowed the proposal.

The first move from the TUACC intellectuals came in December 1974 when they successfully increased the number of trade union representatives on the Working Committee from two to four. This considerably strengthened their voice on the Working Committee as the union representatives then constituted approximately half of the Working Committee's membership. In addition, TUACC also succeeded in redirecting the IIE's educational focus for 1975 to conform more closely to the organisational needs of its unions. At the same time they persuaded the IIE to share its financial resources with the unions on the grounds that the IIE had only succeeded in raising a grant of R18000 in December 1974 from the TUC because of its links with the TUACC unions. TUACC negotiated with the IIE to introduce an additional course exclusively for ten union organisers, eight of whom were to be appointed by the unions, and the remaining two by IIE. The ten organisers would however all be remunerated by the IIE and were to divide their time more or less equally between organisation and education. (13)

The outcome of negotiations between intellectuals on TUACC and the IIE at the end of 1974 appeared to be a compromise that could have left both parties satisfied. The Diploma in Industrial Relations correspondence course was to continue in 1975 with priority of place given to TUACC members, while the

organisers' course was specifically introduced to meet the needs of the unions. The reality however turned out differently and 1975 was a year of considerable turmoil for the IIE. This was because fundamental disagreement remained over the form of worker education the IIE was to provide: the TUACC intellectuals were insistent that the education had to be linked to the unions' organisational requirements while Fisher and her supporters tenaciously clung to their goals of running a general correspondence course with some degree of relative autonomy for the IIE.

Problems were encountered with both the correspondence and the organisers' courses because neither side of the Working Committee was willing to co-operate with the other side's objectives. A total of 92 students enrolled in the correspondence course in 1975. Fifty-nine of the students were TUACC union members of whom 23 were shop stewards. At the suggestion of the union representatives on the Working Committee, it was decided to run a shop stewards course that would be closely linked to the correspondence course. It was however up to the unions to get the shop stewards groups organised and it was not until mid-year before this part of the correspondence course began to operate.

The organisers' course generated general dissatisfaction on the Working Committee. (14) It was argued by Fisher that the organisers were under too great a pressure from union work to have sufficient time for theoretical studies, but it was also the case that Fisher was only willing to put work into the correspondence course.

The organisers' course was in the process of fizzling out by April when a proposal from Copelyn successfully put some life into it. He suggested that the organisers should be given a course on South African Labour History.

The motive that he had in putting forward this suggestion was his feeling that the major weakness with the organisers generally was their inability to abstract themselves from their work-a-day situation and so to attempt to understand and reflect upon the nature of the movement in which they were involved. (15)

The proposal met with general approval and a successful organisers' course on South African Labour History was run for the organisers by Eddie Webster and Luli Callinicos. This was followed up by an Industrial Sociology course that examined issues like oligarchy and bureaucratisation in trade unions. The latter course generated some dissatisfaction with the TUACC intellectuals as they felt that it subsequently exacerbated tensions within the TUACC unions as discontented groups used the concepts and arguments of the course to argue that TUACC had become oligarchic.

The TUACC intellectuals continued to work towards the incorporation and subordination of the IIE to TUACC. At the Secretariat meeting in July it was decided to present a memorandum to the IIE that it should become a TUACC sub-committee and that it should allocate fewer financial resources to the correspondence course. The memorandum also proposed that the South African Labour Bulletin should affiliate to TUACC as an interested party. (16)

The IIE Working Committee called a special meeting to consider the TUACC memorandum, but did not come to a definite conclusion. (17) The memorandum was raised at an IIE Council meeting a week later on 10 August where it was discussed from many sides. From the unions' side it was stated that the "crux of the problem remained that of linking education to union organisation". Fisher maintained that the Industrial Relations correspondence course was aimed at providing:

general education and to train the union

organisers in how to best make use of the information for their shop steward groups.

But the unionists saw little merit in the IIE running open correspondence courses that could even include black personnel managers when there was a real need to build up and train shop stewards.

Fisher presented the basis of the dispute as seen from her perspective as follows:

On the Working Committee, the union representatives are wanting the IIE to spend less time on the Industrial Relations Course, maybe to do away with it altogether. But this course ...has been the basis for IIE's existence. (18)

The Council meeting was also inconclusive, but matters were finally brought to a head at the next Working Committee meeting when it was decided to take a vote on the issue. They voted by five votes to two in favour of the TUACC recommendation that the IIE should link its education to the organisational needs of the unions and that the correspondence course be given a secondary status. Fisher expressed a strong desire to carry on running the correspondence course, but her position had become incongruent with the reorientation of the IIE. She was pressurised into resigning and stepped down as chairperson in October 1975. Other than assisting in the final preparation and production of IIE Handbooks, she and her supporters took no further part in the educational activities of the IIE. (19)

The S A Labour Bulletin: Autonomy Increased.....

By contrast the South African Labour Bulletin had gradually increased its relative autonomy not only with regards to TUACC, but also with respect to the IIE. The process by which it happened was through step by step changes as the Bulletin's Editorial

Board responded to new situations facing them. As early as July 1974 it was decided that not all members of the Working Committee would serve on the Editorial Board, but only those who were actually involved and contributed to the Bulletin. This was because people were being held accountable for what appeared in the Bulletin even though they had no say in the matter whatsoever. A separation was thus made between the Editorial Board of the Labour Bulletin and the Working Committee of the IIE. At the subsequent IIE Council meeting it was explained that this gave the Labour Bulletin more freedom. This differentiation between the two bodies entitled the Editorial Board to formulate its own policy: at a subsequent Working Committee meeting a controversial article which was due to appear in the Bulletin was discussed. The question was raised whether or not decisions of the Labour Bulletin's editorial policy could be taken at an IIE Working Committee meeting. After discussion it was agreed that the Working Committee could not take policy decisions and the matter was left to the Editorial Board. (20)

A further step towards the autonomy of the Labour Bulletin took place when the Working Committee agreed to delegate to the Editorial Board the right to co-opt members to the Board who were not officially linked to the IIE. The IIE Council also granted the Board the right to open an account in the South African Labour Bulletin's name. The reason for the changes was that the Editorial Board had perceived the need to expand to a national level. The Editorial Board accordingly finalised a constitution in December 1975 to operate autonomously with editors from three major industrial centres. (21) Because of the growing self-reliance of the Labour Bulletin it was not subsumed under TUACC as was the IIE. It nevertheless continued to co-operate closely with TUACC as officials of the Secretariat carried on serving as Board members for a number of years.

Demise of IIE 1976 - 1977.....

Early in 1976 the IIE effectively became a sub-committee of the TUACC after the resignation of Fisher. Alec Erwin became chairperson of the Working Committee and Copelyn full-time trade union education officer of the IIE. He was assisted by Mbu Dlamini. (22) Their major activity was to design and run organisers' programmes. The courses were aimed at improving the organisers' abilities to analyse their factories, to know the laws that were applicable and to provide the organisers with a wider and deeper understanding of the political economy of their society. They ran a number of courses for organisers with the direct participation of Erwin as well.

However when two organisers of the National Union of Textile Workers were detained in May 1976, Copelyn started assisting the union in Pinetown. At the same time he and Dlamini also assumed some responsibility for organising the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union which was in a state of collapse. As a result of such pressing organisational demands Copelyn came to the conclusion that:

to be involved with the IIE was a luxury. There was just too much organisational work to be able to sit back and design programmes.
(23)

The same pressures operated on Dlamini who was drawn into the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union as a full-time official in mid-1976. (24) In addition the TUACC unions faced serious organisational problems in 1976 and 1977 due to the deteriorating economy, an external counter-offensive and an internal schism. Consequently the IIE's educational programmes were severely curtailed and failed to carry on successfully. Another factor that accounted for the demise of the IIE was the federation talks that TUACC entered into in March 1977. It became clear to TUACC representatives that the IIE

would have to cease having a separate institutional existence. The only educational efforts that were working well were the weekend residential seminars. (25) Although broader theoretical issues were touched on, the seminars were primarily geared to training workers to deal with organisational issues they faced in the factories. Such training was perceived to be the primary needs of the unions at that time. Increasingly the intellectuals employed by the unions and TUACC rather than the IIE also took over the planning and running of these seminars.

Because of these developments the IIE started losing its educational role. Due to the earlier efforts of Fisher and its link with the unions, the IIE had been highly successful in fundraising overseas. In the first half of 1975 it raised R9335 and in 1976 no less than R30693. (26) The IIE was therefore able to fund other projects within TUACC, but in the process it had lost the key educational role that its founders had envisaged for it.

Conclusion: An Appropriate Form of Worker Education

At the time of its inception the IIE fell between two potential roles: either being an educational wing of the trade unions, or being a voluntary association with the aim of educating workers generally, but outside the trade union movement. Both tendencies were represented within the Working Committee. (27) Vacillation of the IIE between the tendencies continued up to the end of 1975 when the TUACC unions wrenched control of the IIE away from Fisher.

The TUACC unions were then caught in a dilemma of their own making. The intellectuals in the unions were convinced that worker education could only play a constructive role if it took place under the close supervision of the unions. However, the organisational demands placed on intellectuals in the unions during this difficult period from 1976 to

1977 were too great to enable them to devote sufficient time to worker education. For this and other reasons the IIE was therefore pushed into the background and eventually folded up. Broader worker education in the TUACC unions thus had to take second place to the training of workers to cope with the immediate organisational demands of the unions. Although this did not include a comprehensive analysis of the political economy, the training was still political in the context of worker organisation. It was only a number of years later when the unions were well-established and confident that general worker education could commence again.

In evaluating the IIE's role in worker education it has to be borne in mind that the IIE came into existence before the TUACC unions were well enough established for worker representatives to be in a position to assert effective control over the IIE and its educational programme. The two key issues that were at stake were the form of worker education and the relationship between an educational institution and worker organisation because they determined the effectiveness of the worker education in strengthening the trade union movement. The different experiences of the IIE on the one hand and of the South African Labour Bulletin on the other indicated that varied resolutions were sought. These issues were not finally settled with the demise of the IIE: the search for the most suitable form of worker education and its relationship to organisation commenced afresh with each new stage of development of the trade union movement.

Footnotes.....

Abbreviations used:

Comm - Committee

Int - Interview

Min - Minutes

1. Min of Inaugural Meeting, 30 May 1973.

2. Min of AGM of the Working Comm, 11 Aug 1973
3. Int Foszia Fisher, Durban, 16 Dec 1979.
4. Min of Working Comm, 29 Aug, 23 Oct and 6 Nov 1973.
5. Min of Report Back Meeting, 1 Aug 1973; Int Fisher.
6. Min of Report Back Meeting, 1 Aug 1973, and of Working Comm, 29 Jan and 3 June 1974.
7. Foszia Fisher, "The Institute for Industrial Education", Reality 7,1:19, 1974.
8. Int Fisher.
9. Int John Copelyn, Durban, 28 Nov 1979.
10. Min of Working Comm, 31 Oct 1974.
11. Min of Working Comm, 9 Sept 1975.
12. Min of IIE Council, 27 July 1974.
13. Min of TUACC Council, 1 Dec 1974, and IIE Council, 21 Dec 1974.
14. Min of Working Comm 18 Feb, 18 and 24 March 1975; Working Comm Report for IIE Council Meeting, 10 Aug 1975.
15. Min of Working Comm, 14 Apr 1975.
16. Min of TUACC Secretariat, 14 July 1975.
17. Min of Working Comm, 3 Aug 1975.
18. Min of IIE Council, 10 Aug 1975
19. Min. of Working Comm, 9 Sept, 28 and 31 Oct 1975, 2 Feb 1976.
20. Min of Working Comm, 9 July 1974 and 3 June 1975, and IIE Council, 27 July 1974.
21. Min of Working Comm, 3 Aug 1975, and IIE Council, 10 Aug and 6 Dec 1975.
22. Min of Working Comm, 5 and 20 Jan and 29 Feb 1976.
23. Int Copelyn.
24. Int Mbu Dlamini, Durban, 20 Nov 1979.
25. Min of Working Comm, 13 Sept, 11 Oct and 22 Nov 1977.
26. IIE Income and Expenditure Account for period 1 Jan 1975 to 30 June 1975; IIE Financial Statement for Year ending 31 Dec 1976.
27. Min of Working Comm, 7 Aug 1974.