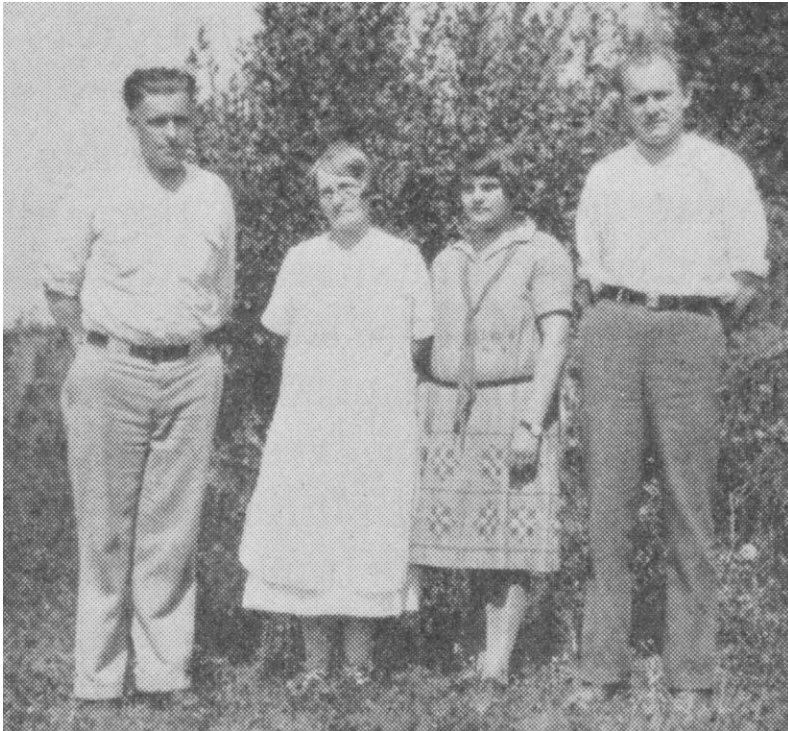

The Aims and Methods of Young Workers Education.

by Oliver Carlson

Published in *Red Dawn: Commencement Annual of the Northwest Young Workers Summer School held at Winlock, Washington, July 10th-August 20th, 19-27.*
(Astoria, OR: Pacific Development Society, [1927]), pp. 6-7, 42-44.

It is still too early to formulate a complete program of education for young workers. The methods of procedure are still experimental. The more ultimate aims have been quite clearly formulated — but there still remains much to be said as to the more concrete and immediate aims. In this article I shall give my point of view on these questions as based upon the specific experience of conducting and directing three young workers summer schools.



1927 Winlock, Washington YWL Summer School Staff:
*W.A. Harju (Technical Manager); Anna Oja (Cook);
Vivian Miller (Instructor); and Oliver Carlson (Director).*

These schools have been held in quite different parts of the country: Northern Wisconsin, Illinois,

Southern Washington. The schools have varied in length of time: 4, 5, and 6 weeks. The number of students have also varied considerably in each case. The smallest attendance was 32; the largest 57, while the other had 42 students. The background for the students have also been quite distinct in each case; while they have ranged in age from 14 to 28 years. In education they have represented elements who were still attending public schools, high schools, and colleges.

There have also been a few university graduates. Insofar as occupation was concerned, the majority of all have been those who are still attending schools. However a wide diversity of occupations have also been included among those who were already workers. There have been machinists, coal miners, timber workers, loggers, needle trades workers, farmers, unskilled factory workers, clerks, clerical workers, domestic workers, etc., etc.

It must also be mentioned that the method of study has been somewhat different in each school. The same applies to the curriculum and the textbooks used. It is upon this background of experience that I base my conclusions.

The Aim of the Schools.

From the very beginning we have been definite that these schools should in no way be considered as supplements to the ordinary public schools. We were not trying to give culture to the young. We were not interested in education for its

own sake. The regularly accepted lines of education were neither accepted nor followed. Nearly all the material given to the students was such as is never obtained by them in ordinary schools. In fact, one of our first tasks of our educational program has been that of debunking the students, i.e. of freeing their minds from a confused mass of outright falsehoods and half-truths which they had consciously or unconsciously imbibed through the schools, movies, newspapers, and other agencies.

We were determined that a definite *working class outlook* should permeate every subject studied. We openly admitted that all education is of necessity biased, especially that which deals with social, economic, and political problems. Ours was biased in favor of the proletariat. For the benefit of those who demand "pure truth," let me point out that the working class view on social sciences is far more correct than that "impartial" view which is dished out to the unsuspecting in the public educational institutions. These latter institutions are interested in the preservation of the existing social order. Their outlook is warped and made static for this reason. They become apologists for the system, not careful investigators. The working class, on the other hand, has no vested interest in the existing system. It can afford to look the facts in the face and admit the temporary and transitional nature of capitalism. It can and does take a dynamic attitude. Proletarian social science is superior to bourgeois social science "because it has a deeper and wider vision of the phenomena of social life, because it is capable of seeing further and observing facts that lie beyond the vision of bourgeois social science."

The importance of *theory*, that is, of the synthesis or generalization of the accumulated facts, has been stressed throughout the schools. But at all times the *theory* has been closely connected with *practice*. The two are bound up, one with the other. Theory loses its reason for existence "if it is not connected with revolutionary practice, just as practice wanders off into darkness if it does not light its way with revolutionary theory. But the theory becomes the greatest force in the labor movement if it is insolubly bound up with revolutionary practice, for it alone can give to the movement confidence, guidance, understanding of the inner relations between events. It alone can help to make clear the process and direction of class move-

ments in the present and the near future."

Insistence on being able to separate sentiment from fact has also been stressed. The importance of this cannot be overestimated for a working class movement that bases itself upon sloppy sentimentalities is easily misled and swayed from one point of view to another. We may say that the more ultimate aim of the school has been to prepare intelligent workers who can take their place in the organized labor movement, economic, political, educational, etc., and give it guidance and direction to the end that capitalism may be abolished and replaced by a worldwide Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. The more immediate aim of the schools has been (1) To acquaint the students with their position as members of the working class to the rest of society; (2) To give them an understanding of the struggle of the oppressed classes since the dawn of history and the methods and means which both oppressor and oppressed have used; (3) To acquaint them with the economic working of the existing social system; (4) To teach them the relationship between economic and political theories and organizational forms, giving special attention to the theories and organizations existing within the worldwide labor movement at the present time. Special attention has been given to the creation of the model Young Workers League organization amongst the students, where they could discuss and consider tangible problems that face them in their respective localities. Nor must we forget the importance attached to getting the students to *think for themselves*. Discussion and criticism of all subjects and proposals made by the instructors to the students have been encouraged and welcomed.

Methods Used in Teaching.

The lecture method of instruction has proved to be the best of the many methods tried. The circle-discussion method is suitable where the students already have a fairly good background for the subjects that are being studied, but in most cases our experience has been that this background was altogether insufficient. The method of reading and reciting in class from certain texts has also proved itself rather a failure. One method which has been developed to a certain extent and that promises to yield excellent results in the future is that of the group-problem method.

By this means two or more students are assigned a task of collecting material on a given problem and to prepare a written or a graphic report on the problem. This system, however, demands that there be on hand at the school an extensive library together with an ample supply of the technical apparatus needed to make the charts and graphs and maps.

Inadequate attention has been given to the preliminary training of the prospective students at the courses. In fact we may say that nothing has been done and yet it is highly essential in order that the schools may be able to work with a maximum efficiency.

The student body has been permitted to exercise a wide degree of control over itself. All problems of discipline as well as all other problems relating to student activities have been determined and directed by the students themselves. The success of this method is undoubted. It not only leads to making the students assume a large share of responsibility for the school itself but at the same time it also develops their resourcefulness and initiative and trains them in making decisions for themselves and organizations with which they are or may be affiliated.

Type of Students.

The question may be rightfully asked what type of students are the best for such a school as this? In answering this question one must bear in mind the

purpose of the school. Many times boys and girls of 15 and 16 years of age who are students are able to do the academic work of the school as well as those who are older; however, it is not merely the ability to give correct answers to the questions asked in the school which counts. Rather, it is the problems of making the students conscious of the fact that the subjects which they are studying have a direct bearing upon their lives and the organizations with which they are affiliated. The boy or girl of 14, 15, or 16 years who is still in school has not as yet been forced to shift for himself, to make his own living, and to feel the pressure of the class struggle. To such a one the class war and all other theories relating to it cannot be duly appreciated. On the other hand the boy or girl who has been forced to make his own living, even though he may not always be as able to give the correct academic answer to the questions propounded by the instructor, will nevertheless understand the significance of the subjects taught and their relation to the organized movements of labor. It may also be stated in connection with this that, whenever possible, one should seek to have the majority of the students of the male sex. This is essential, not because they are more intelligent than the girls, but because as a general rule they are forced to work for their living in far greater numbers than are the girls and also they are to be found in the more basic industries where the need for theoretical and practical leadership is the greatest.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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