

Richard Lodge and the Edinburgh Branch of the Workers' Educational Association

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Albert Mansbridge

In 2008 the members of the 'WEA in Edinburgh – What a History Group' produced a pamphlet entitled *The Story of the Workers' Educational Association in Edinburgh since 1912*. The first person mentioned in their story is Albert Mansbridge who had helped to found the Workers' Educational Association. The success of this new organisation was underlined by the fact that in October 1912 over two hundred people attended a meeting, in the Free Gardener's Hall, Picardy Place, Edinburgh to hear about its work. Here, with Professor Richard Lodge presiding, they heard Mansbridge give an account of the Association and explain how working men and women had been able to call on the assistance of universities in England, Wales and the British Empire. After he had answered a number of questions from the audience, it was moved that a branch of the WEA should be established in Edinburgh. A number of speeches were made in support of this motion including one, at the request of Lodge, by Dr Bernard Bosanquet, and then, once the motion had been approved unanimously, a Committee on labour and education was appointed. Finally, Lodge moved a vote of thanks to Mansbridge in which he 'confirmed all that had been said of the high level of the work accomplished'. Lodge also said that he thought this work 'would help the Scottish Universities, as it had helped the English Universities,

to understand the needs of the people'. The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Lodge for his efforts.

On January 1913 Lodge led a 'WEA deputation to a meeting of the Edinburgh School Board to request the Board's assistance'. This question was considered by the Committee on Continuation Classes and on 24 April it recommended that WEA classes be organised as part of the Continuation Class system, and that a Board Committee should confer, with a committee appointed by the WEA, about programmes and teachers. Between them the two committees agreed that the 'WEA shall endeavour to promote classes for adults on such subjects as History, Economics, Political Science, Literature and Philosophy'. Classes were held in the evening at the University and the Board's Continuation Schools, but, as a concession to postmen, it was agreed that some classes could be held in the morning.

Much has been written about Mansbridge's involvement in the foundation of the WEA but, as far as we are concerned, it would appear that Professor Lodge made a more significant and direct contribution to the establishment of the WEA Edinburgh Branch. The question, however, that immediately springs to mind is who was Professor Richard Lodge?

Born in Penkull, Staffordshire on 20 June 1855, Lodge had been educated at Christ's Hospital and Balliol College, Oxford. He had been a Fellow of Brasenose College until 1893 when he applied for the newly created post of Professor of Modern History at Edinburgh University. Although unsuccessful in this, he did obtain a similar professorship at Glasgow University where he remained until 1899, when the climate of the west of Scotland began to adversely affect his health. Fortunately, this coincided with a vacancy at Edinburgh, where the incumbent professor, George Prothero, had resigned. This time Lodge's application was successful and he was to remain Professor of Modern History until his retirement in 1925.

It was perhaps only natural that Lodge should have been drawn towards the WEA. In the first lecture he delivered in Scotland he observed that in 'these days every man is a citizen: he has a share in the responsibility not only for local administration, but also for the government of a vast empire'. Lodge appears to have lived his own life in accord with this dictum. At Oxford he had been taught by A L Smith who devoted much of his time, as Lodge himself later wrote, 'to the task of bringing the working classes into the closest possible touch with University education'. This concern was also evident in another of Lodge's tutors, Arnold Toynbee, in whose name Whitechapel Toynbee Hall was founded. It was this foundation which was the prototype of so many University settlements in Britain. Looking back in 1924, Lodge wrote that there was 'no place in which the foundation of a University Settlement would seem to be more natural than in Edinburgh. The connection of the University

with the city is older and more intimate than elsewhere in Britain'. If working people were to assume the responsibilities of citizenship, it was vital that they have the necessary education and in this it was a short step from the University Settlement to the WEA.

Deeply committed though he was to bringing the benefits of a university education to as many working people as possible, Lodge had no sympathy with radical or socialist causes. He insisted that history had shown that class war arose out of ignorance and superstition. He was convinced that if you removed these two evils then individuals would be happier and happier individuals would create a healthier society. This end would be achieved through education. Lodge had pursued this goal whilst he was at Oxford, when he went up to London to lecture at the Working Men's College in Great Ormond Street. When faced with a similar opportunity in Edinburgh he eagerly grasped it. Clearly Lodge wanted to transform society, but his attitude was evolutionary not revolutionary. Politically, he was to be found on the right wing of the Liberal Party, alongside the likes of Archibald Primrose, fifth earl of Rosebery. Lodge and his wife were frequent guests of Rosebery, as members of the Dalmeny Club, which took its name from the earl's estate beside the Firth of Forth.

No doubt it was Lodge's influence that helped ensure that History teaching was such a prominent feature of the early classes provided by the WEA, many of which were held on University premises. Lodge himself made an important contribution to the teaching of History by the WEA as the Edinburgh Branch annual report for the year 1923-4 confirms. It noted that an open course of lectures had been held in the University on Wednesday evenings, the lecturers being 'Mr H Wiseman, Mr A O Curle, Sir Richard Lodge, Professor R A Sampson, Professor Ritchie and Mr Douglas Strachan'. Lodge's contribution would have been considerable since as a lecturer his abilities reached out beyond the boundaries of the university. It was observed that he "lectured easily and informally with a nice vein of humour and with a gift of holding the interest of his students". His deep rooted Englishness, however, did not prevent him from communicating with a Scottish audience and the more time he spent in Scotland the more he became increasingly aware of the obvious lack of understanding of things Scottish amongst his compatriots. Writing on the eve of the bicentenary of the Union of Scotland and England Lodge remarked that the 'more I live in this country, the more I am convinced that Englishmen do not sufficiently realise the importance of that event'. So it was that Lodge 'had no difficulty in satisfying the interest of Scottish students in emphasis upon their own history'.

Lodge's enthusiasm for the WEA may also have stemmed from his concern at the condition of education in Scotland, and particularly the teaching of history. In his inaugural lecture as Professor at Edinburgh he called attention to 'the comparative neglect and precarious position of History as a subject in our primary, and even in our secondary schools'. Lodge's pessimism arose out of his having looked throughout the

annual reports of the Scottish Education Department which convinced him that History was taught so poorly in schools because 'it is taught by masters who have had no academic training in the subject'. The WEA may have been a bit too little and too late, as Lodge himself acknowledged, but there was ample proof that it was badly needed.

Lodge's skill as an administrator would have been of great value in the run up to the establishment of the Edinburgh branch. D J Medley, Lodge's successor at Glasgow University, recollected that his predecessor was 'pre-eminently a man of business, an ideal chairman'. Such qualification makes it highly likely that Lodge played an important part in the committee work that lasted from January to April 1913. It was a task that would have permitted him to exercise 'his exceptional capacity for originating ideas and securing their realisation by a rare gift of constructive imagination and ready and convincing speech'. Woe betide, however, anyone who was not up to the mark in this business, for although it was noted that Lodge was 'very sympathetic, & helpful & encouraging, he could see through a humbug & did not suffer fools gladly'.

Success here would have also owed much to Lodge's mastery of exposition. Many of his students later testified to his prowess as a lecturer. One explained that to 'every subject he touched in spoken exposition, he had the gift of imparting an arresting lucidity and charm. Something was owing to his magnificent physical presence, to the unfaltering purity of his diction, and to the enthralling cadences of his voice'. Having Lodge on your side would have been a profound advantage in bringing any proposal, even the most technical, to fruition.

There is room for further study of Lodge's involvement in the WEA. The full extent remains uncertain, but his long-time colleague at Edinburgh University, David Heatley, writing an appreciation in the Edinburgh University Journal stated Lodge 'took a highly appreciated interest in the ...Workers' Educational Association'. By the time that Lodge retired as Professor in 1935 William Marwick had been appointed as the first full-time WEA tutor organiser in Scotland. He would certainly have been troubled by the disagreement that broke out in 1926 when it was alleged that the WEA Scottish Council and the Trades Unions wanted to undermine the independence of the WEA. Lodge would have been heartened by the expansion in the subjects taught by the WEA, but although he wrote, in 1927, that he was glad at the progress the WEA was still making, he also enquired 'has it succeeded in Edinburgh in attracting any of the 'workers' for whom it was planned? It seemed likely to become a cheap form of University Extension, & to attract the ordinary extension audience'. Further study is needed to assess the validity of his concern on this point, but by this time he was living in retirement in Hertfordshire where he died on 2 August 1936. Basil Williams, his successor at Edinburgh, concluded that in his association with Edinburgh, Lodge 'was a power in all University matters, a potent influence in the

higher education of Scotland and a public spirited citizen, earnest for all that would make this beautiful city a more beautiful city and a better place to live in”.