INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY AND THE CAE'S – AN OVERVIEW

F.Emery, July 1977

For the purposes of this conference there seems little point in giving an overview of movements toward democratization of work on a world scale, or even a national scale. It is obvious enough that the movement in this country is such that the CAE's must start to give serious thought to two questions : -

a) as places of work they must ask themselves whether they can stand aloof from this movement.

b) as places of learning they must ask themselves whether they can ignore the educational requirements that have arisen from this movement.

I trust that it is clear that I am referring to a social movement not a political movement. In fact, the challenge to authoritarian structures is so widespread that I am sure we are confronting a cultural movement not just a social movement. It is the assumptions that underpin our social structures and social divisions that appear to be under challenge, not just particular forms or particular divisions.

As one way of looking for answers to those two questions I suggest that we consider six areas of day-to-day practical concern to all of the CAE's. (I will confine my discussion to the CAE's and ignore the universities because I think the CAE's are the potential sprinters and I do not wish to be sided by the agonies and the 'loneliness of the long distance runner').

These six areas are as follows:-

1. the 'teacher-pupil' relation.
2. staff relations, hierarchical as well as lateral.
3. support staff, blue and white collar
4. community oriented project work.
5. curricular etc for teaching about industrial democracy.
6. staff involvement in consulting about industrial democracy.

I will discuss these in turn.

1.   The teacher-pupil relation.

I elected to start with this area of CAE life because it is central to what the CAE's see as function and it is the very point where they are dead-locked with the counter-culture. The CAE's, with the exception of some old Teacher College components, have not had the problem of standing in as surrogate parents protecting the morals of their students. However, the teacher-pupil relation contains enough of the Master-Servant relation to constitute a potential source of serious trouble. People who reject the master-servant relation in the workplace are unlikely to rest easy with the teacher-pupil relationship when they come to work at further studies at a CAE. People who doubt if the 'oldies' comprehend where society is at and where it is going are little likely to respect their judgment of what education they need now for entering or re-entering work some years hence. People who have come to distrust the judgment of people who are expert in only a narrow discipline are little likely to trust the judgment of a subject teacher about

what is important and relevant in that subject. They can, of course, discern what has to be temporarily treated as important if they wish to pass that teacher's exams.

How do we get out of this deadlock before it poisons the life of the CAE's; in either apathy or confrontation?

The answer, to my mind, is that we must seek ways to transform the traditional teacher-pupil relation into a collegiate relation. Let us accept as fundamental to the learning process that there must be some tension generated by the fact that some know more about some things than others do. Let us also accept as fundamental that there will be no transfer of learning unless those who do not know are both able and willing to pay heed to those who do know. I suggest that the context of the teacher-pupil relation and the method of talk-and-chalk are not the only way of fulfilling these conditions, and not necessarily the best. A relationship between junior and senior colleagues in the pursuit of learning seems to fulfill these conditions equally well, and allow for less dependence on one-way modes of communication about common concerns.

The ideals we have for the learning process point the way for the transformation I am suggesting. Our ideal teacher is surely one who is continuing to be a student in his subject, and even open to learning from his students. We think poorly of the teacher who reiterates the same lecture notes year after year. Our ideal student is surely the one that eagerly shares the new and unexpected knowledge he comes across – not the one who misplaces the book or journal in the library so that no-one will find it before he makes his mark in the exams, or in his essay.

How is it possible to bring about such a transformation in the traditional definition of the staff-student relation?

Many things may have to be done to bring Principals and other staff to the point where they will not only condone but will actively support such a transformation. When that has been achieved it will still be necessary to actually make the transformation. This transformation will require that every recurrent form of contact between staff and students be re-examined to see how far it is based on the traditional assumptions of 'teacher prerogatives' or the 'presumptive authority of teachers'. No matter how honest the staff, it is most unlikely that these efforts to re-design for a relation based on collegiality. Will be achieved without a common effort by students and all levels of staff.

It seems pretty inevitable that this transformation will entail the shift from the 'classroom' to the 'self-managing learning group'. In turn this should entail a marked reduction in staff-student ratios and physical overheads. There will be no place for the compulsory lecture.

(These observations are based on teaching at the tertiary level, not just theory). When people accept that they are colleagues in a joint enterprise for learning they will be little inclined to hide behind gown, mortar, lectern or privileged possession of the blackboard. In the transitional phase we will of course find many who are little motivated toward joint learning: those who think they already know it all, those who think it is enough to memorize without seeking understanding and then those who think that one can only learn from one's superiors.

To overcome the apathy and conservatism of students the major efforts should be made to engage them in the decisions that directly effect them e.g. with whom and how do them organize their work to achieve the course objectives. It is more difficult to

involve them in setting course objectives when they have no previous experience of the course. They should not, however, be left in the situation of choosing courses from the opaque descriptions printed in hand books. On the other hand I think it is unrealistic and unfair to burden the staff with interviewing every individual student. An interesting and novel way is the so-called 'market-day' introduced by Trevor Williams. The market day is held while students are still making up their minds about which course options to choose. At the market each staff member, or groups of staff, display posters, text-books etc to illustrate what they are going to be on about and what learning objectives they want to achieve; and then stand by their wares to talk to their potential student-customers. This might sound corny but in practice it defines a more equal relation between staff and students and is a step toward open government.

At the other end of the academic term we and the community expect the staff to stand in judgment on the work performed by the students. I see nothing intrinsically wrong with this. In a collegiate relation there is nothing undemocratic about one's colleagues giving you feed-back on what you have set out to achieve. Unfortunately we carry a legacy of examination practices that could be interpreted as expressing the dominating role of the teacher rather than the objective performance of a pupil. If some of the learners want to go away with some sign of the approbation of their senior colleagues than they must accept the risk of an equally public judgment of misapprobation. We must, however, seek agreement with the students that they are going to get feed-back which is strictly relevant to the claims of increased knowledge they are likely to make of the community. Thus preparation for written exams should not be based on guessing the hobby-horses of a particular lecturer. Also, if in professional practice one will work with books and colleagues to hand then so should it be in any examination for entry to that profession.

This is not a trivial matter and neither can we excuse ourselves by saying that students in recent years have blown up the question of examination methods out of all proportion for the selfish end of doing less to get more from the community.

I suggest to you that the quality and the nature of the judgments we permit ourselves to make of each other in a learning community are central to whether that community is democratic or a hierarchy of elites. If the whole learning process is over-shadowed by the prospect of an arbitrary judgment then the learning process will be subverted into the farce of 'playing the system'. And elitism is re-enforced.

It is not enough to open up the feedback mechanism.

When students have completed a course they are in a position to stand in judgment of the staff who designed and ran the course. They are in a position to do for those that follow in their footsteps what they could not do for themselves at the beginning of their course. I think this de-briefing of the staff should be a requirement of their contract with the learning establishment. Further, I think this de-briefing should be one of the prime inputs to the staff planning sessions for the next set of courses.

At this point you might well have got to asking yourselves what all this has to do with democratization.

I have clearly accepted a hierarchy of functions: that some people know more than others, that some planning for courses is necessary before people can plan what they will be resource people rather than novices. We have come to accept that a hierarchy necessitates a hierarchy of dominance of one lot of people over another. This is simply

not so. Different people can be involved in the different levels of functioning at different times. Every such involvement is a further step toward the democratization of the system. How to arrange that involvement is a problem each and every system has to work out for itself. You will note, however, that I have made no reference to involvement by means of elected representatives. This is an extremely attractive pseudo-solution. It can be brought into play to bridge any plurality of interests; it can be brought into existence by agreeing on mechanisms without touching on the interests that are at odds; and, best of all, it can be neutered whilst passing the blame for this back onto the aggrieved groups for their failure to elect suitable representatives. After the world-wide student uprisings of 1967-8, we traded this pseudo-solution to the students, and they in their ignorance accepted it as the real thing. But not for long. They found that they were now very special kinds of students, neither fowl nor fish. They also found that if they tried to use their potential as student representatives, the decision making process by-passed the committees to which they had been elected.

That exercise in student involvement would have had to be done in bad faith. Those who were old and wise in the ways of university government knew quite well that the committee structure was a façade, and always had been. The committees were where you displayed your power, or were disgraced; not where power was made.

If we are serious about the democratization of the CAE's then I suggest we forget about staff-student committees at any level until the students demand them. Even then we must confront them with the hard question of how do they now claim to speak as a student. As and when students do want to be involved in determination of the higher functions of planning their education then I think we should suggest that they send in one of their lot who truly remains one of their lot i.e. someone who is on the higher body simply because he has been picked by lot.

2. **The staff relations and staff hierarchy.**

I have dwelt on the staff-student relation on the grounds that this is the most central concern of the CAE's. I think this is true of the long run. I do not think that any CAE could get to solving this problem unless they first achieved some democratization of the staffing system. But this in turn would only arise if there was a common awareness of a staff-student problem.

As I see it there are two problems here. How do teachers with different special agree to mutual control and co-ordination of their efforts and how do the chiefs, the Heads and Principals, accept that their work of control and co-ordination has gone to the teachers?

I suspect that the first problem will only be solved when students and staff are both engaged in course design. When it is agreed that an appropriate course of learning requires the support of more than one specialty of one person a primary condition for change has emerged. It would still be only a condition for change, not a determinant. In the past it has proven just too easy for such a course to be cut up into sub-sets of specialist contributions. What was supposed to be one course becomes a cluster of mini-courses. At the very least we need very different kinds of duty statements. If we appoint a staff member on the basis of his qualifications in a specialty we expect him to keep abreast of developments in his specialty. I am suggesting that we also make it imperative that in his teaching his decisions about what he teaches are aligned with those of the other

teachers. This is simple-minded. We do this now, and what happens? Each specialist goes his own sweet way and the students are left with disparate bits of input. How do we get a convergence of specialist contributions and not just a carve up of teaching time? I know of no sure way of ensuring this. I do think that if the students are encouraged to organize themselves about the agreed objectives of a course they will easily sort out what staff they need as resources, for how long and in what form. Some staff will inevitably find themselves redundant to this learning process.

I think that the fundamental thing to be aimed for is that no teacher has HIS class, HIS students or HIS part of a student. So long as staff relate to each other on the basis of their personal ownership of courses or students then I think that efforts at co-operation will be undermined to the detriment of the learning process. In that traditional one-to-many relation there is just too much temptation for the individual staff member to shape things to serve his selfish ends, whether it be to skimp on the work or to boost his ego. This is not, of course, to suggest anything as simple minded that all staff be in everything all of the time. The staff teams would need to be as flexible in their composition and duration as the planned and emergent learning requirements.

Within such teams differences in salary level and experience need not effect the degree of joint responsibility that is accepted. Co-ordination of individual contributions and control over individual efforts can be achieved by these teams without recourse to a director who is outside the teams and without anything like a 'leading hand' role inside the teams.

In designing an educational system based on team teaching we should not overlook that there is a hierarchy of *functions*. Thus effective day-to-day educational activities requires a set of over-arching agreements coordinating the efforts and contributions of academic staff and the supporting staff; these in turn require longer term planning. All levels of this hierarchy of functions have to be designed for. The aim should be, however, to prevent this becoming a *hierarchy of statuses* through some individuals claiming that only they have the right to perform these higher functions. Remembering also that even if this right is conveyed by popular ballot it has the same effect of creating dominant statuses.

There appears to be no practical reason preventing all of the staff being involved in the longer term planning for each year or semester.

It is not so practical to engage everyone in the routine of a Coordinating Committee. However, if membership of that Committee is seen to convey some special status it will not be long before the Committee starts to act as if it were an Executive Committee. An effective way around this difficulty is for the members to be chosen by lot. It then becomes a duty for each staff member to serve when his number comes up.

3. Support staff.

In one way this is the easiest of the problems. There is no reason why the lessons learnt in industry cannot be carried over directly into the workshops, offices and maintenance sections of a CAE. Provided of course that the unions are co-operative.

The difficult aspect is at the interfaces between academic staff, white-collar support staff and blue-collar staff. Traditional statuses pretty well define a caste system. I hope this will receive close attention at this conference because I am not sure where to

go. I do not see us doing the Chinese thing with academic staff cutting the lawns and washing the windows or cataloguing the books or making up the pay sheets. In part the old statuses have been propped up with the assumption that the academic staff own the support staff. If the basic educational relation becomes defined as a collegiate relation rather than the teacher-pupil relation then support staff might gain some independence on the grounds that they are support for students as much as for staff. But that is speculative.

4. **Community oriented project work**.

If we move toward learning teams and a collegiate relation we can expect that a great deal of the learning will be done around projects. This has the great advantage of reducing the extraordinary gap that usually exists between what is learnt in our institutions of learning and what learning is required in work and community affairs. It does this in at least two ways. First, the student's learning does not have to be confined to challenges that can be tailored to units that can be done by the average student in a semester course. Second, in project work the student cannot escape from an awareness that the contribution of a subject specialist is only relevant if it is appropriately embedded in a broader context involving variables that lie outside the special. This latter influence cannot but help to inhibit the development of the pride and egotism that goes with *expertism*.

. Granted this, does it simply mean that the educators must now devise simulation exercises for learning teams instead of individual exercises? Such exercises would be better than what we have been doing, but I think we face a broader challenge, a challenge that involves our conception of what CAE's are all about. I might be able to explain what I have in mind if we go back a little in time. The war-time labor government was sold the proposition of the A.N.U. on the basis that it would be, to quote the then Minister for the Post-War Reconstruction, "an intellectual power-house for the Australian society". As Coombs pointed out in his ABC lectures the ANU reneged on that promise, but I think each CAE should ask itself what valid reason exists for not shaping itself to be the intellectual powerhouse for its region, whether the region be urban or rural. If they wish to take this role upon themselves then we are beginning to talk about project work that is oriented toward problems that are oriented to the problems of the region and are likely to engender collaborative relations with the people and organizations in the region.

If it is true that "the universal is to be discovered in the particular" then such an orientation of the CAE's (or the ANU) would in no way jeopardize their contribution to the general body of learning nor the intellectual standards of the education they offered. We would in fact be closer to the climate of intellectual creativity achieved in the 'think-tanks', and the students would share the climate.

The alternative perspectives on the role of the CAE's do not bear thinking about. If the CAE's get to thinking about themselves as simply multi-product producers of finished products in contrast with the old Teachers Colleges and Techs then where do we go? It is not as if the staff and students from the different specialties brush shoulders together for a general education to emerge. If the CAE's ape the universities then what are we into? Staff members will devote their creative efforts into getting the respect of their specialist colleagues in the universities with the hope of gaining appointments in such places. To do this they must, perforce, attend to the problems that are defined as

needing attention. In most specialties Australian editors of professional journals and the conference organizers are accepting priorities laid down by colleagues in the English speaking section of the Northern Hemisphere. All of this takes the mind of the ambitious, creative intellectual a long way away from his colleagues who see the job as a training job and are happy enough to seek their life satisfactions in the local community. A person who is locked into this sort of perspective would be barely tolerant of the students he has in his CAE courses. The students might even get that feeling.

5. "Industrial Democracy" as a teaching subject for CAE's.

Most CAEs seem to have made some provision for management 'sciences'. TUTA, the statutory body for trade union training, report that they have practically no effective relation with any CAE.

I do not suggest that this is how the CAE's would like it.

There are practical problems. The CAE's, as I gather, are not allowed to offer support for learning that is less than a year-course. Potential managers and managements can sometimes cope with that demand, unions can hardly ever do so (e.g. the number of union fellowships at the Mt. Eliza Administrative Staff College that have never been taken up).

Not all gates are closed. There is a potential benefit to industry and the community if those who are going into management learn about the many facets of industrial democracy. I do not think it would be very difficult to devise ways that enable the involvement of trade unionists without arousing parliamentary challenges to either the CAE's or TUTA.

The problems here are, I think, practical problems of just how the job would be done. The problems that occur to me are the following, and *not* in order of importance, staff experience, text-books, projects and the learning relation. Let me start with the last point. If some-one tries to help people understand the principles of democratizing work in an autocratic setting then the clearest message is that the whole thing is a con game. Staff experience and community projects cannot be divorced from each other. Experience in other territories has to be translated into local experience, shared by non-academic locals, before it creates a basis for joint learning in the region. It is in this process of sharing that staff may hope to build up a stock of goodwill in the region. It is that goodwill which will be needed if community oriented projects are to be accepted.

At first sight the question of text-books may seem a red herring. After all there seems to have been a veritable deluge of books and papers on the subject in recent years. However, most of these show a pretty superficial knowledge of the subject. The authors often have a good knowledge of where things are now at in some parts of the world but lack of insight into the conceptual and methodological evolution of the field. This latter knowledge seems essential if courses on industrial democracy are to be of scientific value.

6. Staff experience and staff consultancy

I can be brief about this last matter. There has been a good deal of willingness of organizations to call on the aid of academics. For the most part they have not been expecting the academics to come up with expert solutions but to help out as someone

who is independent of either management or the unions and to provide a sounding board. It is probable that only about twenty odd academics are actively involved in this way but they are scattered throughout Australia and just about any CAE should be within easy reach of one or more of these people. I mention this because such people could be of considerable help in breaking the ice.

Summary

I have tried to draw attention to some of the practical problems that would face the CAE's if they seriously tried to democratize themselves or to make an educational contribution to the efforts of others. More detailed development of these ideas are to be found in the following books and articles. Additional Australian examples will be dealt with in discussion.

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