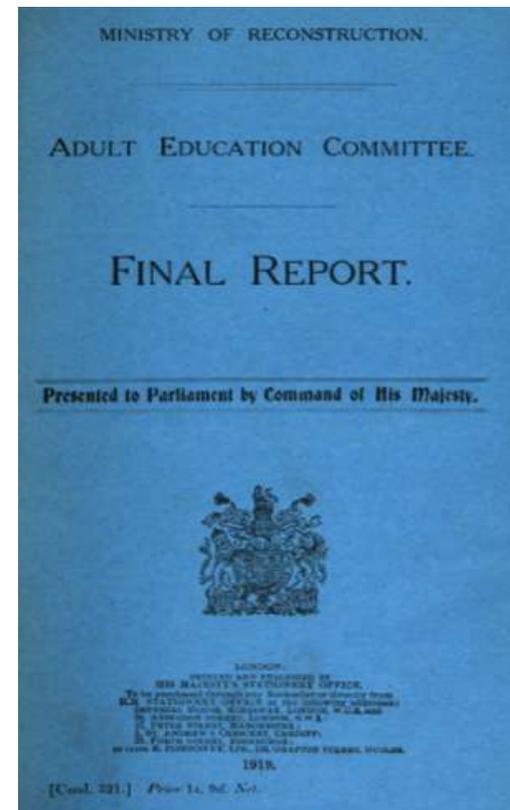
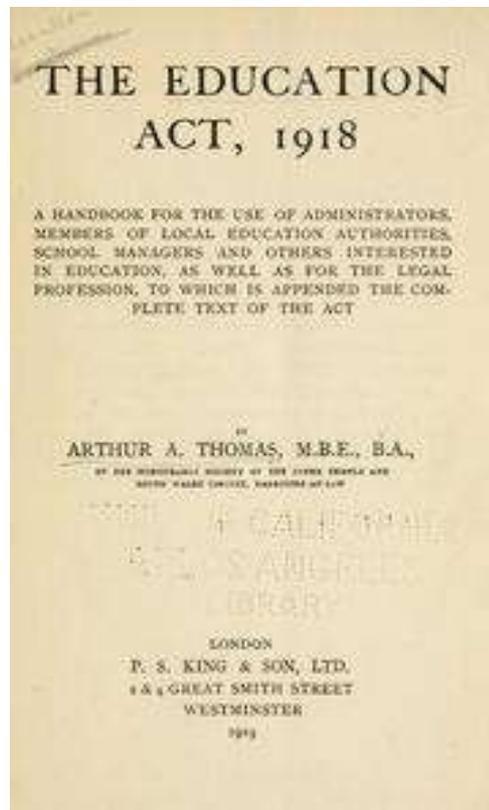


The 1919 Report and the 1918 Education Act: the respective roles of the state and the voluntary sector – a report on the Society for Educational Studies research findings

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The SES Research Focus

This research examined the impact of the ethos of independence and the non-vocational on the Ministry of Reconstruction's Adult Education Committee's (AEC) (1917-19) mode of work, as well as its relationship to the 1918 Act.

We considered the tensions and compromises inherent in state leadership in adult education: a point of contestation throughout the 20th century: some independent organisations refused state funding; others took it as a social right.

We considered the long-term impact of state intervention and juxtapose this with the alternative, informal connections that emerge from grass roots adult learning.

Key strands in the 1919 Report

In 1919 the Ministry of Reconstruction produced a report which concluded that liberal, 'non' technical, adult education was an essential part of the life of all individuals and communities as "adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong".

"The value of adult education is not solely to be measured by increases in earning power or productive capacity or by any other materialistic yardstick, but by the quality of life it inspires in the individual and generates for the community at large..."

'Humane' - "the satisfaction of intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual needs"

'Civic' - "to understand and help in the solution of the common problems of society... rendering themselves better fitted for the responsibilities of membership in political, social and industrial organisations"

The Report ushered in legislation enabling local authorities to provide adult education and this, along with the adult education offered by trade unions, university extra-mural departments and organisations like the Workers' Educational Association and the Co-operative Movement transformed the lives, aspirations, communities and experiences of working class people who had little access to education of this kind.

Two worlds of change and risk in Britain

1919

The Great War just ended

“The war after the war” – strikes, rents, etc.

Extension of right to vote to all men, some women

International ideological influences (socialism)

Break-up of established (two-party) system (rise of Labour)

Surge in growth of adult education infrastructure – state and non-state

2019

“Brexit”, challenges to political legitimacy (EU, democracy, etc.)

Ineffectiveness of governance (many levels) – linked to globalisation

Break-up of established (two-party) system

International ideological influences (erosion of left; rise of nationalism; right-wing populism)

Destruction of adult and further education infrastructure, especially for working class communities

The role of the voluntary sector

- Democracy, the AEC argued, meant ensuring voluntary agencies and social movements were central in shaping and delivering adult education.
- The AEC was chaired by A.L. Smith, Master of Balliol, Oxford, included R.H. Tawney and Albert Mansbridge, founder of the WEA
- It sought to bolster the likelihood of this through a range of democratic institutions and mechanisms to enhance the influence of voluntary organisations (“an integral part of the fabric of national education”) in the adult curriculum. Their ambition was to oversee rebuilding “the national life on a better and more durable foundation”.

Recovery and necessity

- “Economic recovery of the nation” and “the proper use of their responsibilities by millions of new voters” requires education “throughout the life of the adult”
- Adult education **“MUST NOT BE ... A LUXURY FOR A FEW EXCEPTIONAL PERSONS” NOR CONCERN “ONLY A SHORT SPAN OF EARLY MANHOOD”,** but is **“A PERMANENT NATIONAL NECESSITY, AN INSEPARABLE ASPECT OF CITIZENSHIP, AND THEREFORE SHOULD BE BOTH UNIVERSAL AND LIFELONG”**
- The **“OPPORTUNITY FOR ADULT EDUCATION SHOULD BE SPREAD UNIFORMLY AND SYSTEMATICALLY OVER THE WHOLE COMMUNITY”**
- “We need to think out educational methods and possibilities from the new point of view ... of the adult learning to be a citizen”.
- The State “should not ... refuse financial support to institutions, colleges and classes, merely on the ground that they have a particular ‘atmosphere’ or appeal to students of this type or that. All that it ought to ask is that they be concerned with serious study.”

The 1918 Education Act

- The Education Act of 1918 (The **Fisher Act**) aimed at the establishment of a “national system of public education available for all persons capable of profiting thereby.” Local authorities were called upon to prepare plans for the orderly and progressive development of education.
- The 1918 Act was clear that education, for all ages and of all types, should be supported and managed through state infrastructure and its primary focus was upon education for children and adolescents.

'Vocational' and 'non-vocational' education

- What little indication there was of Government interest in adult education was primarily of a vocational nature – emphasis on 'technical instruction'
- Even the distinctions between vocational and non-vocational were problematic:
 - **“subjects such as Modern Languages may have either a vocational or a non-vocational object, and the mere naming of the subject in a programme of work will leave this object uncertain. Again, a subject may be included in a course which is primarily designed for a particular vocation, but an individual student may attend the instruction for individual non-vocational purposes ... Much depends on the way in which a given subject is taught, and the object with which it is taken by the individual student” (L. Welby Briggs, Board of Education letter, 12th February 1918).**

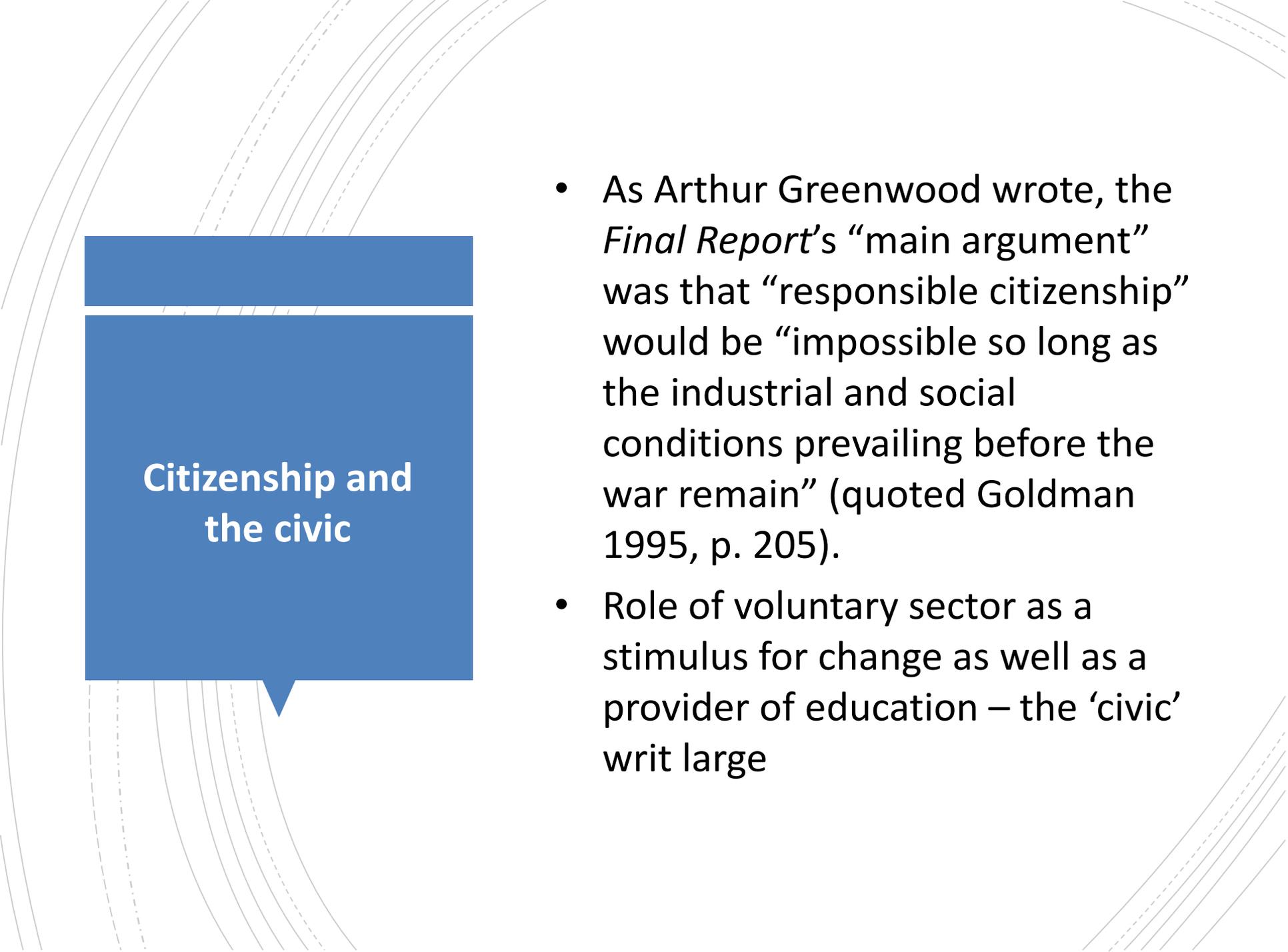


Ideology and suspicion

- “There is still a number of education committees who are unable to understand a desire for education of no direct utilitarian value, unless it be for purposes of personal accomplishment, and who suspect dark motives in the minds of those who desire such education. More especially is this so where the demand is for the study of problems which are controversial. It is within our knowledge that there are even today town councillors to whom the term “economics” is synonymous with “socialism”. The majority of those who desire to study do so probably because of the interest they have already taken in industrial or other public affairs [trade unionists]...This is presumably the basis for the charge sometimes made by Local Authorities and even by some members of universities, that the classes ‘encourage discontent and socialism’” (1919 Report, pp. 206-7).
- Tension and lack of trust was mutual: One tutor was reputedly told upon requesting a room for educational meetings by a Local Authority official, “If we let you have a room you will make the place a den of anarchists” (1919 Report, p. 207).

Methods and practices

- “The fact that there has been little demand made upon Local Authorities by adults for classes in non-vocational subjects is attributable not so much to lack of desire as to lack of knowledge as to the possibilities of obtaining suitable educational facilities from Educational Authorities and lack of confidence in their established methods” (1919 Report, p.105).
- “It will not ... be denied that adult non-vocational education has owed its main inspiration to voluntary organisations, and particularly those established for educational purposes” (p. 112).
- No new statutory duties for adult education: “The field of adult education is so large that the active co-operation of LEAs is a vital need, and non-vocational adult education should be regarded as an integral part of their activities” (p.108).



Citizenship and the civic

- As Arthur Greenwood wrote, the *Final Report's* “main argument” was that “responsible citizenship” would be “impossible so long as the industrial and social conditions prevailing before the war remain” (quoted Goldman 1995, p. 205).
- Role of voluntary sector as a stimulus for change as well as a provider of education – the ‘civic’ writ large



Where are we now?

- The ongoing withdrawal of the state from civil society – e.g. old Local Authority grant aid monies
- Austerity-focused policy and its consequences
- Critical skills and aptitudes required in providing good quality adult education and meeting the pedagogical needs of adults
- Engaging with people where their own points of interest lie; the ability to foster trust; time, commitment and energy; knowledge and understanding of given communities; awareness of how to work with groups that both enables debate and discussion, on sometimes contentious and complex issues.
- New and emerging 'horizontalist', grass roots, user-led groups

- What directions should adult education take in the years ahead? What role should it play in social, economic and personal development?
- What role can and should the voluntary sector play in adult education today? How is this affected by austerity?
- How should the state relate to the voluntary sector in adult education and vice versa?

Into our discussion