

Coal Culture

Arthur Gleason and Anglo-American Workers' Education

by
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He promoted and publicized workers' education in both Great Britain and the United States and also served as a liaison between their movements. Workers' education had its roots in the 1820's and 1830's and expanded in the late 19th century. Labor organizations, such as the Knights of Labor, played a crucial role in this process. Ruskin College, a component of British workers' education, emerged as a result of the joint efforts of Americans, especially Charles Beard, and British supporters. On the eve of World War I workers' education in Great Britain was more advanced than its American counterpart, but in the 1920's workers' education in the United States, aided by the contributions of Arthur Gleason, experienced its "glory years."

While in Great Britain, Gleason explored the British initiatives and did some teaching. Coal miners, in Wales and other regions, were leaders in this field. Gleason's pamphlet on workers' education in Great Britain and the United States provided linkages, offered information, and spurred development. Gleason also had connections with the Workers Education Bureau, Brookwood Labor College, and District 2, United Mine Workers. His contacts with John Brophy, president of District 2, United Mine Workers, contributed to Brophy's decision to have Paul Fuller as the education director and to initiate a significant workers' education program. After Gleason's death, Brophy and District 2 established an Arthur Gleason Scholarship. This award paid for two District 2

members a year to become students at the Brookwood Labor College. Francis Isban, one of these students, wrote articles for the Brookwood Review and spoke at the Sykesville Labor Chautauqua of 1925.

Arthur Gleason stimulated the growth of workers' education in the United States and contributed to developments which made the 1920's the "Golden Year" of workers' education in America. Unlike Great Britain, where leading intellectuals such as Harold Laski and R. H. Tawney played important roles in promoting workers' education, the United States followed a different path. Gleason's contacts, knowledge and experience with British workers' education made him invaluable in the United States as labor educators sought precedents and practices to guide their experiments.