

Edwardian Boys and Labour in the East End of Sunderland: Welfare and Work

Introduction

Welfare to Work policies have recently been presented as new, constructive and radical approaches to the problems of unemployment and poverty in modern Britain. Yet such policies have a long history in different guises and can clearly be discerned for example in the principles informing the operations of the Poor Law and in the activities of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) at the end of the nineteenth century. (Rooff, 1972; Humphreys, 1995). Certainly the political philosophy which informs Welfare to Work is not new, and its history provides examples of contradiction, tension and conflict in practice. Using evidence gleaned from the records of a voluntary boys' club in Sunderland at the beginning of this century, this chapter highlights some concerns which have resonance in the current situation and which might provide a starting point for a more critical response to contemporary Welfare to Work policies than has hitherto been apparent.

The detailed minutes of the *The Sunderland Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club* suggest that its managers were pursuing an early prototype of 'Welfare to Work' in a local and voluntary context. Obviously few direct comparisons can be drawn between the activities of a local boys' club in the years before the First World War and those of national Government nearly one century later. Nevertheless, the values, assumptions and objectives of the policy-makers suggest some striking continuities. In particular, in their

focus upon positive arrangements and support for 'transition', their negative attitude towards 'welfare' and their presuppositions about the inherent benefits of skilled work, those involved in running the Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club articulated attitudes which would not be out of place within the discourses of 'New' Labour (Player 1999; Jeffs and Spence, 2000). At the same time, those working class young people who were the object of the attention of the club's managers and workers frequently responded to the exercise of seeking work in ways which dealt primarily with their everyday reality and local knowledge of the labour market and this sometimes resulted in class based tensions and conflicts which might not be unfamiliar to anyone who has undertaken youth work with young people in areas of high unemployment today. Examination of the responses of Edwardian boys to the work and welfare opportunities with which they were presented highlights some questions and problems which the Labour Government might do well to consider in the contemporary context.

The Sunderland Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors Club

The club whose intervention into the lives of the Sunderland poor demonstrates the longevity of the values and propositions enshrined in Welfare to Work, still exists as the Lambton Street Fellowship Centre. It was founded in 1901 by a local architect named Frank Caws and the story connected with its founding is a classic late Victorian narrative of rescue with echoes of the Barnardo story (Wagner, 1979). It tells of Caws leaving his office one winter's night and finding a shoeless waif freezing on his doorstep. The boy had been selling matches. This prompted Caws to call together a number of wealthy and influential colleagues from the town who agreed to set up a club specifically for boys

(Smith 1951; Sunderland Daily Echo 5/12/01). The purposes of the club are inferred in its title. It was to 'rescue' homeless waifs from the streets, (Platt, 1972), and it was to respond to the problems of casual boy labour as exemplified by the prevalence of juvenile street vendors (Urwick, 1904; Bray 1911; Stedman Jones, 1971).

From the very beginning, in the assumptions informing the constitution and management of the club, class difference and inequality was accepted as a given although the working classes as such were not conceived as problematic by the founders. It was understood rather that those who were in need of intervention were boys from the families of the east end tenements and slums, from families which relied upon the irregular and poor wages of unskilled manual labour. In the east end of Sunderland, experience of unemployment was commonplace and poverty endemic (Tedder, 2000). In analysing the conditions of the unskilled poor at the end of the 19th century, Stedman Jones (1971) describes a similar population as 'outcast'. In contemporary language, there is little doubt that the children of the east end of Sunderland would have been defined as 'excluded', as an 'underclass'. The purpose of intervention in their lives was ultimately to work towards their 'inclusion' into the benefits and responsibilities of full adult citizenship (Sunderland Daily Echo, 5/12/01:3). However, in the circumstances of Edwardian England, citizenship did not mean membership of a fluid, open, classless society. For those involved in the Lambton Street club it meant rather encouraging the children of the poor towards full participation in respectable *working class* life, towards accepting the conventions and rules of class relations and behaviour.

The records which detail the weekly proceedings of the management committee indicate that the key objectives of those involved in the Sunderland Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club were to provide an inviting alternative to the streets, and in the process of making contact, to offer paternalistic guidance. However, running alongside that agenda were other, less clearly expressed intentions. Human sympathy, charity and a concern for social justice were frequently tempered by the need to address popular and common worries among the middle classes about the relationship between welfare dependency and idleness, about problems of control posed by young people (especially boys) 'on the streets' and about the responsibilities of families for children. Among the speeches at the opening of the Club, the terms of reference which were to frame subsequent activity were clearly set out:

Coun. Summerbell said a great deal had been said about clubs of that kind taking upon themselves the feeding and clothing of the children of those people who had spent their money in drink, but they would be doing a grand work if even they succeeded in tracing the drunken parents who neglected and ill treated their children, and got them brought before the magistrates. It was their duty, however, if they desired to uplift the community morally and socially, to at least rescue the lads from drifting into a life of vice and crime by the institution of a club of that character.

Mr. Perris said they would like to provide the lads with a comfortable home, to which they would come and be clothed and fed, and taught a good trade - to act as a sort of god-father towards them. But their present means were limited.

(Sunderland Daily Echo, 3/1/02: 3)

Up to the period of the First World War, the minutes books are rich with references to family, welfare, reform, education and training which reveal some of the complexities

and contradictions faced by the committee members in these matters. In their reliance upon the goodwill of the bourgeoisie of Sunderland in raising the necessary funding for the club and sponsoring its activities (eg. Sunderland Daily Echo, 24/3/04:3, Minutes, 14/8/02), it was important to take cognisance of prevailing views, and besides, these views often corresponded with those of powerful committee members. Goodwill from sponsors could only be sustained if 'outcomes' of the work could be assessed in acceptable terms. Yet at the same time, the committee members were concerned to intervene directly and do something practical to alleviate the individual suffering caused by the poverty of the families of the East End. The two perspectives were not necessarily complementary. Resolution of tension was sought through what can be identified as a practical 'welfare to work' approach within policy decisions. The idea of 'providing a comfortable home', was conditional upon the boys being prepared initially to obey club rules, but the possibilities of gaining access to 'clothing and feeding' came to be linked directly with the willingness to be 'taught a good trade' and upon families conforming to standard measures of 'respectability'. These measures of respectability included conventional expectations of gender roles. It was considered as important that a mother should work to keep her home clean and in good order as it was that a father should be prepared to work and use his earnings for the benefit of his family (e.g. Minutes 3/11/10). The club itself came to be understood by its sponsors as a means of aiding such efforts, as a supplementary instrument of transition between exclusion and inclusion, dependence and independence; it was a ladder which boys could use to climb out of the 'underclass', into the regularly employed and disciplined working class if they and their families were prepared to make the effort.

Welfare and the Club

Policy which focuses upon the processes of transition from one state to another, implicitly assumes that the original state is undesirable and seeks to address what are claimed to be the causes of that condition. Intervention is often designed to break the cycle of reproduction and to subvert the socialisation process which brings about the undesired condition. The younger generation is a naturally identified target for inculcating new habits. In the case of the managers of the Lambton Street club, the undesirable state of poverty was associated with irregular and unskilled work and that condition in turn was held to be related to non-conforming attitudes, values and behaviour consequent upon slum living. Like those who advocate Welfare to Work arrangements today, the key to breaking the cycle was thought to lie in the escape route of regular and preferably skilled employment. For those suffering the consequences of poverty and unemployment in their daily lives, constructive and practical interventions are generally welcomed. They bring the possibility of relief. Thus many of the boys of Sunderland's Edwardian east end responded positively to the possibility of belonging to a club which addressed their circumstances just as many long term unemployed people today initially embraced the introduction of the New Deal (Jeffs and Spence, 2000).

However, this apparently harmonious foundation for building an infrastructure of transition is only so in the abstract. There is rarely an equal partnership between the providers and recipients of welfare. In reality there are inherent difficulties associated with definitions, priorities and with inequalities of power, right from the very inception of

the policy. Living in conditions of poverty and unemployment is different from viewing those conditions from the outside and it is power relations between the providers and recipients which decide the priorities for transitional arrangements.

In the case of the Sunderland club, the perspective on poverty portrayed in the minutes books is that of the managers, supporters and, to a lesser extent, that of the resident superintendent. The voice of the boys and their families is mostly silent, although occasionally it is possible to deduce from the text some of their concerns and perspectives. The view of the management committee was that there were two conditions of poverty. One was associated with misfortune and the accidents of life, such as widowhood or ill health (e.g. Minutes 3/11/10, 4/12/03). The other was associated with unreasonable, undisciplined and 'unsanitary' behaviour and sometimes with idleness and drunkenness (e.g. Minutes 23/10/02; 6/11/02). Overall, it was feared that whatever the source of the poverty, once a family found itself in that condition, its ability to care for and adequately socialise its children and young people became impaired. The poor family was considered to be deficient in the resources and skill required to prevent poverty being reproduced in the next generation. The strategy of the managers was to help make good those deficiencies, 'to act as a sort of god-father' whilst at the same time tailoring individual interventions according to the type of poverty encountered.

In a general sense, the club itself was understood to be a welfare benefit offering temporary shelter from the streets and from slum housing. Within that, the collective benefits of membership included opportunities for recreational activity, for occasional

'treats', such as trips, entertainments and food, and for self-improvement through association with the superintendent and managers, attendance at lectures and talks, and the use of the reading room. Although in theory these benefits were available to all those who fell within the targeted group, in practice, the rules of membership must undoubtedly have led to self-selection on the part of the boys. In some cases, breaking of rules led to exclusion from the club. The rules of membership were fairly general, but nevertheless, they were devised without reference to the boys themselves. At the very first meeting of the founders of the club, it was agreed that:

A placard to be put up in each room of the Building.

"No smoking, swearing nor gambling allowed.

If any Member of the Club is guilty of disorderly conduct he is liable to expulsion"

(Minutes, 9th December, 1901)

Later, these rules were made more precise, including the injunction that the boys should be clean (soap and towel being provided in the yard for washing), that 'Gambling, Smoking, Swearing, Spitting or Dirty or Disorderly Conduct, are absolutely forbidden' and, as an addendum, that 'Boys who wish to get work or are in need of advice or help, should speak to the person in charge.' (Minutes, 15/5/02).

The managers did use their power to enforce the rules with some discretion, but nevertheless they exerted their authority in relation to the behaviour of the members both inside and outside the club premises. Thus, for instance, in 1904, six boys were excluded for 'disorderly conduct' inside the club (Minutes 2/6/04) and a further two for 'fighting and riot' outside the club (Minutes 17/11/04). The minutes later record, without comment,

that the six excluded in June were later arrested and imprisoned for gambling (Minutes 30/6/04), thus silently affirming the wisdom of the decision to deny access to the undeserving.

Access to the general benefits of membership required no more than a willingness to observe the rules. However, in relation to particular benefits to individuals, access was much more diligently policed. All of the boys who used the club were poor. Most were also hungry and ill-clad. The role of the club was to provide help and support for poor lads, but only in the terms identified as appropriate by the committee, the members of which understood their task as a practical one of distributing limited resources in relation to need, and also as a moral one of prioritising those needs according to the attitude and behaviour of the intended recipients.

The men involved in running the agency were determined that their philanthropic efforts were not to be considered as dole for the poor. Their paternalism was significantly tempered by fears that their resources would be depleted by uncontrolled demand, that their goodwill might be exploited by the mercenary and that by misplaced generosity they might undermine the willingness of the poor to seek independence through work. They did not wish to offer handouts or ameliorate suffering by giving unconditional alms. They conceived their social duty to be that of distributing such charity only in exceptional circumstances when it could be proved that the need was unavoidable and genuine, for instance in the case of serious illness (Minutes 7/1/09), or when it would be of value in enabling member to participate more effectively in the labour market, for instance in

purchasing from club funds the 6d Birth Certificates required by boys before they could take up offers of work (Minutes 1/4/09).

In order to ensure that their good intentions were not abused, they worked with the Charity Organisation Society and for a few years utilised the services of representatives of that organisation to investigate the circumstances of anyone who *asked* them for anything - in particular for help with clothing. In asking for material benefits, in expressing their needs in their own terms, individuals were immediately inviting inquiry into their personal situation. The COS had been created specifically to rationalise the charitable efforts of the Victorian middle classes (Bell, 1942; Roof, 1972; Humphries, 1995). Its intentions were to ensure that such charity was fairly distributed, that fraudulent claims were not rewarded, and that benefits would be used to help the poor to help themselves. Crucially, charitable help was not to be used to encourage idleness or dependence. In order for the administrators of the COS to satisfy themselves that claims were genuine and that the poor in question were 'deserving' a system of visiting and interviewing those requesting help was devised. Not surprisingly, most requests for material help were turned down on grounds which involved value judgements about the circumstances, behaviour and attitudes of the poor. In relation to the Sunderland Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club, the reports of investigators frequently suggested that either the parents of the boys in question were able bodied and weren't working - in which case members of the committee sought work for them - or that members of the family had work and were not spending their income as the COS deemed appropriate - in which case other agencies such as the Society for the Prevention of

Cruelty to Children might be brought in to further investigate.

Mrs Scott of 20 Hope Street (staying with her sister Mrs Gordon (or Hughes) there) waited on committee and applied for clothing for her son and nephew members of the Waifs club. After fully considering the matter and interviewing the two boys who seemed better clad than most members of the Club, the Committee could not see their way to give these two boys clothing at present. But on the advice of Mrs Seinfeld who had visited 20 Hope Street and reported the miserable condition of things there, the Committee decided to offer the husband of Mrs Hughes (and also the husband of Mrs Scott if he is physically fit to accept it) employment. Mr Nicol kindly undertook to obtain labouring employment for these men or one of them if the other proved unfit.

(Minutes 23rd April, 1902)

...a number of other members of the Club applied for boots with the promise to pay so much a week for same. Mr Perris undertook to make enquiries as to Golledge's Father's circumstances.

(Minutes 6th October 1904)

...Mr Charlton reported that the result of Mr Coley's inquiry concerning the Golledge family was somewhat unfavourable as it appears that the father is regularly employed as a machinist by Messrs. McColl & Pollock, earning 27 shillings a week. The eldest son is also employed by Messrs. M & P and earns 25 shillings per week. Other members of the family also are well employed so that it appears that the two boy members of the Club should not be in straightened circumstances or in want of boots. The application was therefore not entertained. Mr Cameron undertook to inquire through the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children as to whether the parents could not be compelled to make better provision for these two boys.

(Minutes 13th October 1904)

... Mr Caws was requested to obtain through Mr Cameron the Report of the S.P.C.C. agent as to the brothers Golledge...

...A lengthy report provided by Mr Cameron from Mr Stokes of the Society for the Prevention of

Cruelty to Children dealing with the case of the Golledges which had been previously investigated by Mr Coley of the Charity Organisation Society through the mediumship of Mr Charlton, was read and considered.

(Minutes 24th November 1904)

Mr Caws reported that last Sunday night he had been informed that the Golledge boys desired to frequent the club (from which they had absented themselves since the investigation began) but their father had threatened to thrash them if they did.

(Minutes 1st December, 1904)

In the extracts above, it is apparent that work, ability to work, and income from work were the key factors in the decision - making processes relating to the provision of clothing. In the case of Mrs Scott, even though the ill health of her husband was acknowledged, the answer was felt to lie in work rather than welfare. In the case of the Golledges, even though the application was only for boots *on credit*, it led to what must have been experienced as highly intrusive intervention from over-zealous investigators who assumed the moral authority to make judgements about how a family's income should be used.

It is possible to read between the lines of the text of the minutes some dissent between those members of the committee who were fully in favour of the authoritarian methods of the COS and those who wished to adopt a more liberal approach, making provision according to perceived need rather than in relation to questionable measures of respectability and industrious intention. Notably, Frank Caws, the founder of the club seemed less inclined to 'investigate' than other members particularly in relation to the

distribution of clothing (e.g. Minutes 6/11/02). It seems that it was only because of the personal eminence of Caws within the committee that his view was aired. The predominant feeling about welfare provision for individuals and families was authoritarian. Demonstrated willingness to work for the benefit of the family unit was the main measure of eligibility. When Mrs. Seinfeld, the voluntary and self-appointed COS investigator for the Club left Sunderland, the resident Superintendent, Mr Smith, picked up the visiting duties and although he carried these out much more informally, the pattern had been set. Subsequently, it was always assumed that free clothing, or clothing on credit, except in exceptional and accidental cases of need which would be identified by managing representatives of the Club, would only be granted in association with the acceptance of employment.

The following extract is only one of a number of instances where such provision was discussed and debated in similar terms:

Mr Smith stated that Mrs Thorman had sent down some Clothes for the boys.

Reuben Baxter's case was discussed, Mr Smith stating that the boy was badly in need of a shirt, but confessing at the same time that Baxter was a very unreliable lad and apparently would not stick at work when he got the opportunity. The Committee refused to clothe Baxter.

(Minute 13th February 1908)

No matter how poor or ragged, a boy who did not co-operate with the standards of behaviour associated with the compliant worker, was considered 'undeserving' of individual help. Willingness to conform rather than absolute need was the ultimate test of eligibility in the allocation of a welfare benefit.

Employment of Boys

The question of 'boy labour' was an important social and political issue during the Edwardian era (Bray, 1911; Urwick, 1904). Reflecting the conventional gendered division of labour at the time (Montagu, 1904), it referred primarily to circumstances wherein boys from poor families left school as soon as possible in order to take unskilled, short term- and casual work at rates of pay which were higher than those commanded in the skilled trades. Such boys were usually paid off as they approached maturity which entitled them to an adult wage. Families whose poverty was immediate, generating needs which could hardly be met day to day, were complicit in this process encouraging their sons to seek the highest wage. Because the labour market was constantly swelled with new school leavers, employers could virtually do as they please. Often they employed boys for only a few weeks, finishing them if the work was slack or if the boys did not measure up to requirements.

A combination of necessity and the unreliability of the labour market compounded the problem for the poorest families whose children often began working well before they left school, as street vendors. In this, the most casual occupation of all, young people earned an irregular income on the streets without even the most basic control which would be imposed by an employer. For those who had been street traders, the transition to regular waged work was particularly difficult; the independence of the street did not easily translate into the discipline and rigours of waged labour. It was these young people who were the most unlikely to satisfy employers and who were therefore prone to lose

any work they had on attaining adulthood. Adult unemployment and poverty were therefore blamed upon the habits learned under the conditions of boy labour, and street trading in particular was held responsible for ignorance, fecklessness, crime and prostitution among the urban poor (Urwick, 1904; Stedman Jones, 1971; Walkowitz, 1996; Davin, 1997).

The 'problem' was one which clearly related to the conditions of the labour market, implicating employers as well as the employed. However, regulation of the labour market and of employment practices in general called for national legislation rather than local action. It required both political will and influence to intervene at this level. From the perspective of local activists and philanthropists who relied upon employers for their patronage and financial support, who indeed were sometimes themselves employers, it was never likely that this would be part of the agenda for change. Instead, they focussed attention upon specific boys and their families. They were intent on changing the behaviour attitudes and values which led to casual labour being accepted as the only option, providing alternatives where they could, and using welfare as a means of encouraging and supporting those who made efforts towards regular and respectable employment. Alongside this, they campaigned to regulate street trading, which did not implicate respectable employers (Minutes 3/2/10 -10/10/12). For the sponsors of the Sunderland Club, the main object was to secure the interest and compliance of their members in obtaining and retaining secure employment ideally via an apprenticeship (e.g. Minutes 1/4/09)

Within this spirit of intervention, taking their lead from the example of the work of Barnardo's organisation and occasionally collaborating with Barnardo's (e.g. Minutes 12/6/02; 9/10/02) the founders and managers of the Waifs' Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club, hoped that the regular employment of young people within the formal economy would begin to address the problems and issues associated with poverty of the east end of the town. They made it a priority of the club's work to seek positions within the local labour market for its members as they left school. The long term strategy was to solicit the interest of employers in their endeavours whilst at the same time, through the activities, values and adult example practised in the club, training boys in the behaviour and attitudes appropriate to the respectable and respectful worker. The short term strategy was to find suitable vacancies for boys as soon as possible after they left school, providing information, letters of introduction and material support in order to help the boys access the work.

From the very start of the Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club, a great deal of effort was expended in securing the co-operation of established local employers. The managers used their personal networks and influence; they circulated letters and used the opportunity presented by Annual General Meetings and Fundraising Events to publicise their work and to appeal for support from Sunderland firms.

SUNDERLAND WAIFS' RESCUE AGENCY & STREET VENDORS' CLUB

15 Lambton Street,

April 1903

Dear Sirs,

The Committee of the above Agency are using their best endeavours to find employment for the boy street vendors, who are at present growing up with no knowledge of or liking for, any regular work.

Feeling sure that such endeavours will commend themselves to you, the Committee would feel greatly favoured if you would, at any time you are in need of boys of 14 years of age or upwards in your Works, notify us at the above address, when we would at once endeavour to send you any likely boys whom we might have knowledge of.

Yours truly

(Copy of letter circulated to employers: appended to minutes, 26th March 1903)

Even though the Club managers were acting as a sort of Employment Agency and taking some personal responsibility for the quality of the boys they sent, there was not exactly a rush of interest from employers to participate and offer openings. The same names emerge again and again. Some of these, particularly Councillor Summerbell who owned a printing business and Colonel Vaux, proprietor of the local brewery, had personal involvement in the club whilst Mr Charlton, an active management committee member involved in merchant shipping, procured a number of positions for boys on board his own vessels. As the coastal collieries began mining activities, they too took boys from Lambton Street.

In considering the nature of the employment offered, a number of issues emerge. Firstly, it is not clear how much of the work on offer really did fall outside the category of 'boy

labour' as understood in the Edwardian period. Frequently boys were taken on by employers only to be dismissed after a very short period. In particular, there was a problem around joinery. On one level, joinery seemed an ideal trade through which to skill the boys and quite a few were fitted out with clothes, boots and occasionally tools in order to enable them to take up the offer of an apprenticeship. No doubt, many of these boys learned the trade. However, it emerged that boys were often paid off as they came towards the end of their apprenticeship when they would have been able to command a higher wage from the employer, and that there was an over-supply of joiners in Sunderland. Up to the First World War it seems that only one boy from the club, Thomas Doyle, managed to complete an apprenticeship in joinery

J. Jackson 131 Is to start at Young's as a joiner. Captain Foster advised the committee that these Joinery Works depended chiefly upon apprentices and that as soon as apprentices had served their time they were paid off. A discussion followed concerning this advice and the Superintendent was consulted as to the desirability of sending more boys to these works. The final feeling of the meeting was that Doyle was doing well at Young's and that any boy could certainly learn the greater part of his trade there.

(Minutes, 21st October 1909)

J. Jackson 131 has started at Young's Joinery works at 3/- per week and with reference to last week's discussion Mr Smith gave an excellent report of the work done in this shop.

(Minutes, 28th October 1909)

Ernest Sinclair 135 and Martin Finn 190 are starting to work as joiners and undertakers at 4/- per week - with regard to this report Mr Charlton advised the Committee as to a conversation he had had with Mr Ball of the Labour Bureau, when Mr Ball stated that several trades especially joinery are seriously overstocked in Sunderland districts. Mr Charlton suggested that Mr Smith might

endeavour to procure employment for boys at trades which are not overcrowded.

(Minutes, 17th March 1910)

Michael Quinn who is 15 years old was paid off from Young's joinery Works the manager stating that the lad was too small and ragged to be of any use. Mr smith has however got Quinn started as an apprentice boiler maker at Clarks.

(Minutes, 23rd September 1910)

Thomas Doyle who is one of our oldest members has completed his apprenticeship at Young's Joiner works and is now earning full money. The committee assisted Doyle by advancing the money for his tools, all of which has long since been repaid.

Every credit is due to Doyle for the steady way in which he has served as an apprentice joiner for 7 years.

(Minutes, 27th March 1913)

Mr Smith reports that more boys are wanted at Young's Joiners Shop.

(Minutes, 29th April 1913)

Although the aim was to facilitate the transition to regular work through the opportunity to learn a skill, there was no guarantee that learning the skill of joinery would facilitate that. Moreover, during the period of working as 'apprentices', boys could be paid a very low rate of pay with no guarantee of ever graduating to the adult rate, unless they were exceptionally attentive and skilful as Thomas Doyle seems to have been. For the majority of the boys who pursued this option, there could have been very little difference between this situation and that of working in the unskilled sector, except that their wages might have been higher in unskilled work.

Whilst the minutes books of the Club are particularly explicit about the problem of joinery, there is no indication that boys fared much better in other trades to which they were directed. The superintendent diligently reported the position of boys vis a vis their employment circumstances, and when there were reports of boys 'doing well' this was recorded in detail. Sometimes, a boy's name appears as 'doing well' at a particular trade only to reappear, weeks later, as engaged in completely different work, or as looking for work. It is perhaps significant that Thomas Doyle is the *only* reported case of a completed apprenticeship, although there are some indications that one other boy, Alma Hunt, who was sent to stables in Yorkshire to learn to become a jockey, was making good progress over an extended period of time (Minutes, 7/10/09; 21/4//10; 29//6/11; 1/2/12).

A second employment issue apparent in the minutes concerns the question of 'skill' and 'training'. The ideal of accessing the skilled trades unfortunately remained just that for most of the boys, an ideal:

[Coggins] was brought before the Committee and said he had been obliged because of the drunkenness of the man he worked with to give up the slating job. He was sent to Mr Davison's at Southwick to take the place of Whitehead (65) who had left.

(Minutes 28th August 1902)

Mr Caws reported that Thomas Coggins (15) being paid only at the rate of 3/6 per week at the joiner work his mother would not allow him to continue at that work though the boy himself would have liked to continue. So he had resumed his employment as a slater's help for which he was paid a much higher rate.

(Minutes, 4th September 1902)

Mr Caws reported that Thomas Coggins (no 15) was gone to Candlish's BottleWorks after being fitted out with clothing.

(Minutes 23rd October 1902)

It was reported that Tom Coggins (no 15) and Alfred Finkle (No 32) had left Seaham BottleWorks their parents being unwilling for them to remain.

(Minutes 30th October 1902)

Generally boys were found places in semi-skilled or unskilled work where formal apprenticeships did not exist, where training was minimal and wherein casualisation remained the order of the day for most youngsters. Sometimes the need to find work for particular boys was so urgent, that the question of finding a skilled trade was not even raised. Although a line was drawn to exclude any employment which was *in itself* casual or temporary and directly associated with boy-labour, such as that of messenger boy, or which belonged to the category of street trading, (e.g. Minutes 21/5/08), there were occasions when even temporary employment was accepted:

Mr Caws reported that he had...fitted the boy [Coundon] out with clothing and boots and sent him to temporary employment with Mr R Bradford...Agent for the Hydraulic Scrap Power Company with whom he is to receive 5 shillings per week and 2/6 bonus at the end of 4 weeks.

(Minutes, 26th February 1903)

Two weeks later:

Thomas Coundon explained to the committee that he had been sent away by Mr Bradford who did not require him longer.

(Minutes 12th March 1903)

As the first decade of the century slid towards economic recession, it became clear that finding any job for the boys associated with the club was considered preferable to the alternatives of unemployment or street vending. Not surprisingly, increasing use was made of the openings for boy labour in mining both in Sunderland itself and within the surrounding colliery villages of the Durham coalfield. Although the club sometimes received requests to send boys to particular pits, it is unlikely that this opened any particular 'opportunities' for such work. In many cases, reporting in the minutes that boys had found work in a mine does not indicate anything other than that the boys were told jobs were available. Sometimes it is obvious that the boys found the jobs themselves. The main influence of the Club in this respect was in the material support it could offer - ie. in helping boys with boots, clothing and, where necessary, to find lodgings near their place of work.

The following 8 boys have started work at New Seaham colliery at 8/- per week - W. Struthers 175, G. Pringle 154, J. Marchbanks 157, Walter Smith 61, Harry Finkle, 50, David Kelly 25, Alfred McMann 85, T. McMann 86. Mr smith went to Seaham Harbour and arranged for lodgings. The lads are living all together in two houses, 4 in each house. Clothes have been provided for them at the following costs, Finkle 6/3, Kelly 9/-, Smith 3/9, Pringle 2/3, McMann 3/6 total £1-4-9. this amount will be paid out of the boys earnings.

(Minutes 23rd December 1909)

Between January 1908 and October 1914 over 50 boys are mentioned in the minutes as working in the pits. This is about 10% of the total membership list between 1901 and 1914. The implications of this are that the Club was having very little influence upon the employment prospects of many of the boys and that their situation was being determined

almost entirely by the economics of supply and demand in the labour market. Indeed, the club was acting in this situation as an easy recruiting ground for the mines and in helping the boys with clothing and lodging was providing an indirect subsidy to the employers. The wages in the mines, compared to other possibilities was relatively high (averaging about 1s 8d per shift) and this more than any other factor probably persuaded the boys away from the alternative of street vending.

In a situation where poor relief was sought and provided only in the most extreme circumstances of destitution, and then only after considerable investigation and with much social stigma, it is unsurprising that the urban poor took a short term view of opportunities to earn money (Stedman Jones 1971). Wages were the primary concern. In many of the 'trades' wages were often very low and frequently could not compete with the opportunities presented by unskilled work or street vending. Some of the boys refused to take the respectable and steady jobs through the auspices of the committee members simply because of this. Boys and their families could compare the possibility of earning 2/6 per week in the Co-operative store or 5/- per week as a slater, working under the direct supervision and control of foremen and managers, with the possibility of earning as much as 10/- per week selling newspapers without any interference from authority:

Mr Smith is ...experiencing considerable trouble owing to the fact that apprentices wages full time only amount to 3/1 per week, whereas the boys as street vendors, can make from 10/- to 15/- per week selling papers

(Minutes 1st April 1909).

Young men and boys were seldom prepared either to make the sacrifice of the certainty

of present gains for the uncertain possibility of a long term regular wage or to sacrifice the personal independence which such a long term investment implied

Apprenticeships and training involved deferred gratification which could not be sustained by the family income, even if the boy himself was prepared to learn a trade. It was a luxury which families simply could not afford. The nature of the employment taken by boys, or their ability to stick to one particular job was not the main guiding principle for families. What was of concern was simply that the boys were earning their keep and contributing as much as possible to the family income:

The question of Club Members leaving their employment without giving the Committee satisfactory explanation was discussed - Mr Smith explained that he had great difficulty with these cases, and that as a rule the parents of the lads were chiefly to blame.

(Minutes, 10th August 1911)

Sometimes to take regular employment implied work in both sectors for the boy concerned:

Robert Reekie 128 has been found employment at Vaux's Brewery as a Maltster at 7/- per week, he sells papers on Saturday mornings in order to help his home people. Reekie was formerly at Doxford's yard.

(Minutes 7/10/09)

the main guiding principle of the club managers on the other hand, was not the wage but the principle of regular labour. They were concerned that the boys should view their jobs as a long term situation wherein they might hope to 'do well' and through which they

might attain a security of income and steadiness of habit which would enable them to gain access to 'respectable' working class society. That success in changing attitudes was limited can be established from the absolute growth in newspaper selling at the outbreak of the First World War when the minutes report that boys could not be weaned away from this activity because the wages were so high (Minutes, 20/8/14; 3/9/14).

The different cultural perspectives regarding the definitions, meaning and purposes of 'work' between East End families and the representatives of the Club created tensions and conflicts which were indicative of class interests and differences. It is hard to imagine that boys and their parents were not informed about the conditions which they could expect within the labour market. On the basis of their own experience and the networks of communication in the community they would have been aware that conditions of work whether within a 'trade' or within the casual sector, were usually physically hard, frequently monotonous and boring, seldom rewarding and often dangerous. There are recorded instances of boys losing jobs found for them because they were not physically strong enough to undertake the work required. There are also cases of industrial injury and death recorded -two boys losing their lives aboard a ship owned by the management committee member, Mr Charlton, when it foundered in the Bay of Biscay (Sunderland Daily Echo, 28/12/11:3; Minutes 18/1/12). The following case is indicative:

Martin Finn has left his employment owing to ill health. Mr Mann suggested that the boy should lie off for a week but Finn preferred to leave altogether as he did not feel strong enough for the work.

(Minutes 15th February 1912)

Martin Finn has started work at W. Thomas Summerbell's -Printer at 4/6 per week.

(Minutes 22nd February 1912)

Finn, Owing to getting his hand hurt in a machine is laid off.

(Minutes 7th March 1912)

Martin Finn's (190) finger which was crushed at Messrs Summerbell's Printing works is quite useless and his mother is endeavouring to get compensation from Messrs Summerbell. Dr Illiff [honorary solicitor] has the matter in hand. The boy has been receiving 4/6 per week from his employers. Dr Bruce, of the MnkWearmouth Hospital has reported that the finger may have to be amputated. Mr Routledge has offered to see Dr Bruce about the case.

(Minutes 2nd May 1912)

Dr Illiff has agreed to accept £30 as lump sum compensation for Martin Finn injury, the money to be paid into court until the lad is 21. - Mr Smith has asked for £5.0.0 to be handed over for Finn's clothing and outfit, and Dr Illiff is endeavouring to arrange this.

(Minutes 4th July 1912)

Mr Charlton reported that the boy Finn had obtained employment at the Pit Prop Yard of Messrs Horsley but as he could not grasp the tools owing to his damaged finger he had to leave. Mr Charlton suggested that Finn might get engaged as a Tram Car conductor and he offered to make enquiries re same. Mr Lodwidge suggested that the boy might get employment in a Time Keeper's Office.

Mr Charlton also reported that another of our boys Richardson had started at W Digby Nelsons Slate yard and within 6 hours of starting had fallen 40 feet from a roof. He is now getting 5/- per week compensation and will probably by (sic) permanently crippled.

(Minutes 24th October 1912)

Both of the Finns are now working at Seaham Colliery and Mr smith reports that he has had considerable trouble to get Martin Finn to work steadily since he recovered from his accident at Summerbell's.

(Minutes 3rd January 1913)

For the majority of the poorest boys, work could have contained little of intrinsic value. Its worth lay primarily in its ability to provide the means of subsistence and where the worker was lucky, a little extra for leisure pursuits. Under these circumstances and in the face of the reality of the casualisation of employment, the response of some of the boys was to treat employment casually. They did not take the employment market too seriously except insofar as they needed the wages accruing from work. Outside periods of recession, when unemployment was a serious problem, they would seek work, gain work, lose work and change jobs in very short periods of time. They had no concept of a career and very little interest in present suffering for future gain. They would accept the benefits which the Lambton Street club offered in relation to accepting an employment opportunity, and just as easily would leave that situation for what might appear to their benefactors as a minor problem. This was nothing other than a rational response on the part of the boys to the conditions of the youth labour market and to their social and material circumstances. The work ethic advocated by the managers of the Club simply did not seem to them appropriate to their situation (Stedman Jones, 1971). Training was not considered by most to be a serious option and education as experienced within school was perceived merely as a hindrance to the possibility of easing the poverty of the family sooner rather than later (Minutes 22/2/06; Davin, 1997)

Conclusion

Finding places for young people within the labour market has seldom been solely about the benefits of work itself for the individual, although providers are keen to argue in these terms. There are inevitably other agendas concerned with social order, discipline and control which are associated particularly with negative assumptions about growing up in poor communities.(Davies, 1986; Griffin 1997). For the managers of the Sunderland Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club the practical help they wished to offer involved a public intervention in the lives of the poor which was validated by the argument that it was a means of addressing poverty through the instrument of work, diverting the younger generation away from the habits and values learned in the home and on the street.

The welfare interventions of those who managed and sponsored the club were motivated in the first instance by compassion and concern for the well-being of poor boys. In this context the economic recession of 1907 is instructive. As it hit the families of Sunderland's east end, the absolute absence of employment opportunities and the extent of the distress encountered led to a practical de-coupling of welfare and work in the club. For the duration of the recession, the management committee concentrated most of their energies upon the provision of food and clothing, opening a soup kitchen two nights a week and clothing boys in obvious need without reference to employment status or family attitudes.

Nevertheless, even at this time, the emotional response was constrained on the one hand

by an awareness of the responsibilities involved in managing charitably donated funds and goods, and on the other had by the political ideologies and sensibilities of the managers themselves in relation to the effects of charity upon the recipients. In their decision-making they were acutely aware of the public discourse of the period which considered uncontrolled charitable interventions to be both unethical and unhelpful to the poor. In order to maintain their public integrity and continue to benefit from subscriptions and fundraising activities, it was essential that the club be seen to be conforming to this dominant class biased view.

Decisions about the distribution of resources were un-selfconsciously affected by the class power of the providers and without reference to the perspective of the recipients. However, when resources were distributed collectively, through the provision of the club, through treats and general benefits to the members, there was less tension or conflict than when individual need was at issue. It was through the allocation of individual help that class difference and tension became most acute.

Class differences were most obvious in relation to the question of work. It is clear from the minutes of the club that the managers used their power over the distribution of the resources of the club as a lever to encourage the boys into conforming with the attitudes and behaviour of a compliant labour force. Significantly, employers found it almost impossible to deliver the ideal which was sought in terms of regular, skilled work for the boys. However hard the club worked to encourage the boys to submit to work-based discipline, they had no control over the behaviour of employers and ultimately the

attitude of the boys to work was shaped by their knowledge of the real situation rather than by what they were taught in the club. Whilst the voices of the members of the club are absent from the minutes books, nevertheless, it is clear that not all the boys or their families were prepared to submit to the authority of either the club's managers or employers (who were sometimes the same people), and class based conflicts and misunderstandings were played out significantly around work and individual welfare issues between members and managers. It was here that some boys resisted efforts to control them, even in some cases at the expense of being denied badly needed clothing.

The story of the work of the Sunderland Waifs Rescue Agency and Street Vendors' Club suggests that linking welfare to work as a means of managing the behaviour of the recipients of welfare in relation to the needs of the employment market, has little chance of success when this is not matched by management of the behaviour and attitudes of employers. Those who depend upon welfare are not completely influenced in their attitudes and expectations by their material needs although they will often adjust short-term behaviour in the light of need. What is of as much significance is the reality of their relationships with the employment market and their understanding of what it can and cannot offer. At the turn of the 20th century, some of the class-based issues apparent in the minutes of the Lambton Street boys club are still with us. Rather than ignore these issues, a more effective and just policy would attempt to address them and in doing so would de-couple welfare provision from moral exhortations and punitive strategies relating to 'willingness to work'.

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