Abstract: In 1925 Herbert Heaton, an economic historian at the University of Adelaide, unable to obtain promotion, significant pay increases, or another academic position in Australia, left for Queens University in Canada. Heaton, an internationally known scholar, a popular teacher, and author of a book about Australian economic history, was doomed to Australian academic failure. His papers, deposited in the Archives of the University of Minnesota, offer insights into how the Workers’ Educational Association, the extreme fear of economics as a source of ‘radical’ thinking, nationalism, and academic organisation led to the collapse of his Australian career.

A Distinguished Scholar ‘Exiled’ From Australia

On 14 August 1925 Herbert Heaton, his wife, and three children faced one hundred well-wishers from Adelaide bidding them farewell as they began the long journey to Canada. That evening Heaton confided to his diary, ‘Are we going into exile?’ For eleven years he had worked hard in Australia dealing with the problems of being a pioneer economic historian – setting up courses in economic history, sociology, political science, and economics; writing textbooks to support his Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) courses; teaching courses to undergraduates and WEA students in Tasmania and Adelaide. While doing all of this he had proven himself an excellent teacher and an internationally respected scholar, who liked Australia. Yet in 1925 his academic future in Australia was hopelessly moribund. His papers provide insights into why one internationally recognised scholar felt ‘exiled’ from Australia.

The Education of a Working Class Economic Historian

Herbert Heaton, the son of a Yorkshire coal-miner, earned scholarships from the age of 11 for his education. In 1912, the 22-year-old Heaton wrote in the annual summary of his diary that he wanted to dedicate his life to teaching economic history to the working class. He wrote in the April 1913, British WEA magazine, Highway, that ‘the W.E.A. resembled religious movements in many respects. It strives to bring light into the dark strongholds of ignorance and prejudice, and to open up new ideals, new possibilities’. Heaton’s enthusiasm for the WEA did not blind him to the career difficulties involved. From the beginning he knew a successful WEA teacher required success as an economic historian, both to maintain the quality of WEA courses and for financial survival. He did everything an ambitious economic historian had to do – develop credentials as a competent teacher, publish the results of historical research, and keep in touch with the network of economic historians. He never abandoned these practices.
Carrying his Yorkshire Coalfield Beliefs to Australia

Heaton wished to marry, and a 1914 job offer from the University of Tasmania and the WEA made that financially possible. Both Heaton and his wife were enthusiastic immigrants, admiring Australian universal suffrage and progressive politics.

It is important to understand the Yorkshire and WEA beliefs which Heaton brought to Australia, because they were the foundation for everything he did during his eleven-year stay. First, he followed the educational philosophy of Albert Mansbridge, the founder of the WEA, who wanted the WEA to teach students how to think, not what to think (Comor and Casella 1987, p. 6). By 1914 Heaton had developed a basic classroom technique of a lecture, presenting well-argued cases for various points of view, followed by a discussion period in which students were urged to agree or disagree with the points of view in the lecture.

Second, he brought to Australia the beliefs of the pre-1914 Yorkshire coal-miners, which he also subscribed to. He acquired these beliefs growing up as the son of an unusually well-read and self-educated Yorkshire coal-miner, who was both a religious leader and an activist in his community consumer co-operatives. Like many of the Yorkshire coal miners before 1914, Heaton’s beliefs were typical of a Lib-Lab, a supporter of the Liberal Party to the extent that it supported the causes important to the worker. His beliefs can be summarised as five principles (King 2006).

One, he wanted to offer courses in economic history to workers comparable to those offered at Cambridge or Oxford. In this way working-class men and women could be educated as knowledgeable voters.

Two, parliamentary democracy and universal suffrage were necessary for an economically and socially just society.

Three, economic and social justice in a capitalist economy was possible if strong labour unions existed which could represent their members in industrial disputes and lobby for legislation of interest to the working class.

Four, economic and social justice in a capitalist system required that everyone in society, rich and poor, subscribe to an ethical system, similar to the one outlined in the Gospels.

Five, British-style consumer co-operatives were useful to the working class because they offered high quality goods at lower prices than for-profit retailers.

With one exception he retained these principles throughout his Australian career. He did change his views on consumer co-operatives. Upon landing in Hobart he urged the founding of consumer co-operatives. But ten years later he acknowledged that ‘chain’ retailers could offer quality goods at lower prices than consumer co-operatives (Heaton 1925, pp. 295-6, 304-6).

Importing the WEA to Tasmania

When Heaton and his wife landed in Hobart July 1914, he expected difficulties establishing economic history as part of the University curriculum and WEA classes. His work with W.J. Ashley in the ‘commerce’ programme at the University of Birmingham made him aware of the problems which could be encountered. The Hobart Mercury, 17 April 1915, offered one example of the Tasmanian criticism Heaton faced:

[Workers] ask for the bread of the higher spiritual culture, and they are fobbed off with such stones as the history of unions...We have not the
slightest wish to belittle the attainments or the work of the tutor engaged, Mr Heaton....With all the treasures of philosophy, literature, science, art, biography, poetry, to explore and make our own, we prefer to bury our noses still in the dust of past strife. It would scarcely be possible to find a better proof of the need for spirituality as against materiality in our education.  

Heaton treated such comments as one side of the argument, and he usually managed to make a rebuttal public through a newspaper interview or a letter to the editor. In this instance he answered the Mercury with a letter to the editor shortly after 17 April 1915:

[The WEA] aims first at arousing and stimulating the demand for adult education no matter what the subject....You object to my lecturing on the history of the movement. 'Dry as dust details of sordid and by gone industrial struggles in the Old World.' May I suggest, sir, that in some of the early struggles one finds heroes and feats of heroism and sacrifice quite equal to those which are gaining men the V.C. on the battlefields of Europe today.

He later recalled the WEA and tutorial classes that were being transplanted to Australia from Britain in 1913-14:

....found both soil and climate fairly congenial. The labor movement had developed no educational facilities of its own but was willing to give the new-comer a cautious welcome. Government supplied the universities with special funds to pay tutors and provide libraries and gave the W.E.A. annual grants to help it in stimulating the demand for three year classes or for less ambitious lecture courses. There was little difficulty in collecting bodies of students or audiences of listeners. But where were the competent teachers and the suitable books? Neither was available, and a supply had to be created. Two or three universities 'imported' men who had worked in the movement in England. These apostles divided their time between teaching undergraduates, conducting tutorial classes, preaching the educational gospel, discovering and directing other tutors, and generally working about eighty hours a week in the land of the eight-hour day (Heaton 1943, p. 303).

The Australian WEA did not have a strong commitment from either the Australian unions or the Australian Labor Party. The Australian working class had not shared the long British tradition of worker education through churches, trade unions, and consumer co-operatives. Instead Australian unions had achieved considerable political success without working-class educational programmes.

However, Heaton saw the WEA as the major instrument for introducing social science subjects into Australian universities. In 1923 he wrote: ‘The Workers’ Educational Association is the really live body in the university teaching of social sciences, and we have already published eight volumes on different aspects of Australia economic thought or practice.’

But he had scarcely landed in Australia before he was faced with an unforeseen problem.
The Ferocity of 1915 Australian Nationalism

Despite the sword-rattling that had gone on for years among the European powers, the outbreak of war in 1914 surprised many Australians. In 1925 Heaton described the situation:

The crisis which prefaced the outbreak of the Great War bewildered labour. No one wanted war; war had threatened so often that this was surely another cry of ‘Wolf, wolf!’ Norman Angell had told us [in *The Great Illusion*, 1911] there would be no more wars because war did not pay – at least that was what we thought he said; and of course the German Socialists would prevent hostilities. Labour leaders did their bit, first to preserve peace and then to keep Britain out of the struggle; but the Belgian Neutrality plea swept all before it, and on August 4, 1914, the government had the almost unanimous support of Labour in its action (Heaton 1925, p. 223).

His first classroom comments on the war tried to incorporate it into his view that history provided insights into current events. Some time in September 1914, a Hobart newspaper, probably the *Daily Post*, reported Heaton delivering a lecture at the Hobart public library entitled, ‘History Was the Story of Men in Society’. The paper reported Heaton arguing that T.H. Green had revolutionised history forty years before by showing history could be a guide in developing the evolution of the future. It then quoted Heaton: ‘An impartial understanding of the great war that was now being waged could only be arrived at by a reference to history’.\(^\text{10}\)

The *Daily Post* reported on other lectures Heaton gave after the outbreak of war, none of which mentioned it. He gave lectures on 16-17 September 1914 on the ‘History of Wages’ at the Hobart Technical School. On 8 December 1914 he added another lecture, on the use of initiative and referendum in an educated democracy.\(^\text{11}\)

The British WEA told its teachers either to continue teaching their courses as planned or interject various subjects related to the war. The President of the British WEA, William Temple, wrote, in October 1914:

> England needs and still more will need the influence of a fully informed democracy if the wisest and justest end of this conflict is to be reached. I am not at all urging those studying other subjects should change in the middle of their course, unless intensely eager to do so. But I urge that all who never thought or studied before should think and study now. It is not for us to assume conclusions and then look for evidence by which we can support them. Our task is to see the truth so far as we can find it (Temple 1914).

M. Stocks, an historian of the WEA, wrote: ‘In this war effort the reputation of the W.E.A. for objective discussions stood it in good stead. Its tutors and lecturers were handling controversial material in an environment highly charged with emotion and irrational response to disturbing events’ (Stocks 1953, p. 65). Heaton made every effort to follow the war policy of the British WEA.

The ‘Scottsdale Smell’ in Tasmania

Heaton delivered a few lectures on the war without complaint until 26 August 1915, when Australia was about halfway through the Gallipoli campaign. The Gallipoli campaign began on 26 April 1915, and 8,000 Australian soldiers died before the
bloody, heroic, and futile campaign ended on 20 December 1915 (MacIntyre 2004, p. 159). Heaton described the lecture as an:

….analysis of the causes of the war, issues at stake, suggestions on ways in which settlement could be found....talked about the German bid for power, how the old Europe would be gone at the end of the war….discussed how war could end in defeat, draw, or victory. Talked most about victory but discussed that it would be a lesson against future wars if war ended due to exhaustion on all sides.12

The Scottsdale audience, some of whom had lost loved ones at Gallipoli, was in no mood for such a lecture. The emotions of the audience can be gauged by one member who advocated ‘….tearing the Germans limb from limb, and wiping them off the face of the earth’. Heaton rationally responded that you could smash a form of government, a dynasty, or a military system, but you could not destroy a nation of 70 million people.13

Initially Heaton believed the Scottsdale lecture had gone well. The first attack resulting from the lecture was a public accusation of treason by two Tasmanian politicians. This was followed by personal letters accusing him of disloyalty and treason, an attack from a colleague in a University meeting, and jeers from people gathered on railway platforms as his train passed by. It became a personal hell for Heaton, which he labelled in his papers ‘The Scottsdale Smell’.14

Upsetting as the incident was to Heaton personally, it was a modest uproar considering the virulent nationalism aroused in immigrant nations during the 1914 War (Riendeau 2000, p. 189). Heaton also discovered supporters among his colleagues, students, community friends, and complete strangers. He told a librarian friend, who had helped him with Yorkshire research, that he was even asked to stand for the Federal Parliament by both the Liberal and Labor parties in Tasmania – requests he immediately turned down.15

The last cutting about the ‘Scottsdale Smell’ is from the Hobart Daily Post, 11 December 1915. Understandably, Heaton did not seem quite as upbeat as usual, when the Post quoted him: ‘The work had sometimes been hard, and at times he had felt inclined to be cynical, but the results had convinced him that it was worth while to have come out here....His wife was as enthusiastic about the W.E.A. as he was himself’.16

**Reviving the South Australian WEA**

At the end of 1916 Heaton was ‘stationed’ (by the WEA) at the University of Adelaide in South Australia.17 There is no evidence in the Heaton papers that the move had anything to do with the ‘Scottsdale Smell’, and it was a sensible move for the WEA. Since 1902 the University of Adelaide had offered a programme of ‘commercial training for young business apprentices’. Only the University of Birmingham, Heaton’s first academic employer, had an earlier commercial programme. In 1911 the University of Adelaide thought to strengthen its commercial training programme by affiliating with the British WEA and upgrading it in the following year to a ‘diploma’ programme.

In 1913 the WEA of South Australia was launched when Alfred Mansbridge visited Australia and spoke to an Adelaide meeting arranged by the Trades and Labor Council. The meeting included representatives of the trade unions, the University of Adelaide, the School of Mines, the State Education Department, and both houses of the legislature (including members of the
governing Australian Labor Party and the opposition Liberal Party). At the conclusion of his talk, the Labor Council voted to establish a WEA in South Australia. Despite the promising beginning, only 14 unions had affiliated with the South Australian WEA by April 1914. Even worse, the South Australian Labor government refused to fund tutorial classes, claiming financial difficulties due to the drought (Jennings 1998, pp. 30-2).

Without financial support, there was little the University of Adelaide could do. Like other Australian universities, the University of Adelaide was very weak in its social sciences programme. Heaton later described the situation:

...[in 1913] Australian university teachers were doing little research and less publishing in the social sciences. In the six universities there were not more than a dozen men engaged in teaching in that field. All of them were general practitioners, and the stock joke concerning those who held professorial rank was that they occupied not chairs but sofas....In Adelaide one professor did history and English literature with the aid of two part-time assistants, while the professor of philosophy carried psychology as well and gave economics its one lecture a week....In the whole continent there was no full time political scientist and not a single sociologist (Heaton 1943, pp. 303-10).

The ‘professor of philosophy’ Heaton referred to was W. Mitchell, the famous Australian philosopher and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide while Heaton was there. Mitchell is probably the originator of the ‘not chairs but sofas’ joke Heaton refers to.

Heaton revived the WEA programme in Adelaide. By 1918 the state government supported the programme with an annual grant of £1,300. Heaton improved enrolments with his excellent teaching abilities and his revision of the ‘Diploma of Commerce’ programme. In 1919 he had 150 WEA students, with 140 students in his ‘economics’ class. An ‘appeal drive’ was made for £25,000 to endow a Chair of Commerce, but the effort failed, a failure that foreshadowed the fate of Heaton in Adelaide. Still, in 1919 the fortunes of the South Australian WEA were on the mend, and Heaton had energised the Commercial Studies programme.18

The Board of Commercial Studies to Heaton – Go Away!

Unfortunately the Board of Commercial Studies, the de facto governing body for the Commercial Studies programme of the University of Adelaide, quickly decided it disliked having an economic history course in its programme. In a 1919 letter Heaton explained: ‘to the business men I am a Bolshevik, whilst to the Trades Hall I am a well sharpened tool of the Capitalist class’.19 Unlike Hobart, where the governing bodies had included a democratic mix of academics and various people from the community, the Board of Commercial Studies was controlled by Adelaide businessmen drawn from the Chambers of Commerce and Manufactures. Despite Heaton’s ability to increase his enrolments, his growing scholarly reputation, including the publication of his highly acclaimed *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries* in 1920, and his popularity among the students, he was consistently denied recommendations for promotion or significant pay increases by the Board – a policy apparently designed to encourage his departure from the University of Adelaide.20
A Talented and Energetic Scholar Doomed to Failure

Heaton early realised that his departure from Adelaide might be the only solution for resolving the deep dislike of the Board for his economic history classes. As early as 1919 he expressed the hope that he could soon permanently return to England. He thought his highly praised *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries* (1920) might result in a British job offer.

The first job application mentioned in his Papers is for the Chair of Political Economy at the University of Aberdeen, which R.H. Tawney noted in 1921. Despite many applications, Heaton never received a job offer from a British university until 1929, when he was happily settled in North America.

Applying for jobs was only one part of his strategy. He worked very hard at his University of Adelaide and WEA duties, hoping his future would somehow sort itself out. Bourke (1990) describes in detail his efforts at the University to revise the existing commercial diploma and establish a three-year economics programme. He also wrote *Modern Economic History With Special Reference to Australia*, with the first edition, in 1919, appearing as an edited version of his classroom lectures. Other, more refined, editions followed in 1922 and 1925. In addition he wrote WEA pamphlets and prepared articles for the WEA publication, *Australian Highway*. He also continued publishing scholarly articles, further enhancing his reputation as an economic historian. He did everything Australia could expect of a young, talented, popular, and energetic economic historian.

Neither his teaching nor his scholarship ever impressed the Board of Commercial Studies. Nor did the Board ever change its view that he was a radical.

Oddly he was attacked from both right and left. An outgoing chair of the Board accused him of ‘propaganda work’ for the socialists in 1922. In 1919 an anonymous letter stated: ‘I make bold to say that the W.E.A. is fully as much a tool in the hands of the capitalist class for capturing the workers in the field of education, as that of liberalism in the realm of politics’. H. Darnley Naylor, a University of Adelaide classics professor, described Heaton’s predicament in a letter of recommendation on 11 July 1921: ‘I have nothing but admiration for his [Heaton’s] work as Director [of Tutorial Studies], and I write with confidence because for four years I have been the Chairman of the Joint Committee and have seen him steer a clever course between capitalists and Marxians’.

With such powerful enemies, Heaton’s eventual departure from Adelaide was almost certain.

Heaton the ‘Radical’ – The WEA Contribution to his Reputation

Important as the WEA was to Heaton, it was also partially responsible for his radical reputation. His textbook illustrates the problem.

The South Australian WEA published four editions of his *Modern Economic History with Special Reference to Australia*. In the preface to the 1925 edition Heaton explains:

This volume has grown out of efforts to provide, for University and [WEA] Tutorial Class students, an introduction to the study of economics. Experience with both kinds of students in Australia suggests (1) that the best approach lies in a historical and descriptive survey of modern economic life and organization; (2) that for Australian students it is better to concentrate on the developments of the past two hundred years than to give much time to the fascinating but (to
Australia) scarcely relevant movements of earlier history; (3) that the range of treatment should be world-wide, with special reference to Great Britain, Germany, North America, and Australia (Heaton 1925, ‘Author’s Preface’).

The first nine chapters of the 1925 edition are largely an outline of the development of capitalism, listing its successes and failures. An ethical capitalism working with unions, parliamentary democracy and sufficient capital was arguably the best economic system. While these chapters offended dedicated radical socialists working toward the overthrow of capitalism, businessmen would presumably be delighted. Unfortunately, businessmen saw peril in the remaining dozen chapters, which traced the development of various economic ideologies and labour organisations. The book did not win Heaton friends in Australian business communities.

WEA work also required Heaton to provide pamphlets, articles and public lectures on the historical backgrounds of current events. For an academic his views on current events were unusually public. For example, his opinion of Australian foreign policy was summed up in a 1920 essay entitled ‘Land Settlement and Legislation’. He wrote:

…[Australian government] never had, during the whole war, an official statement of what Australia was fighting for, we have never had apart from the W.E.A. lectures, any campaign in favor of a League of Nations; our Labor Party says nothing concerning policy in Russia; and the promise of the Peace Treaty have left us cold with scarcely a comment in the editorial columns of our papers.\(^{26}\)

Heaton, true to his educational philosophy, was trying to present Australians with various points of view on foreign affairs, hoping to stir them to serious discussion of the issues and to reach their own conclusions. Unfortunately, many Australians saw him as a radical propagandist trying to shape government policy. The conflict is mirrored in a brief correspondence between Heaton and H.B. Higgins. When Heaton sent H.B. Higgins, the judicial author of the Australian ‘basic wage’ or ‘Harvester judgment’, a copy of his pamphlet on ‘Welfare’, Higgins responded with a wry note: ‘Many thanks for the “deed without a name” [a reference to the pamphlet]. If the knowledge of the gentle personality of the author does not save your writing from condemnation on both sides, I fear that this essay on Welfare will also be condemned. I shall put it among my forbidden, including Lenin’s address to the Soviets’.\(^{27}\)

**Heaton the ‘Radical’ – The Board of Commercial Studies**

**Contribution**

As Bourke (1990, pp. 66-8) and the Heaton papers make clear, the Adelaide business community and Board saw nothing to like about Heaton or his work, but they would have welcomed the departure of Heaton to some other Australian university. However, their well-publicised opinion of him made his appointment elsewhere unlikely.\(^{28}\)

The question then arises, if the Board disliked economic history so intensely, why was Heaton hired? The Heaton papers and his publications suggest one possible answer.

In the 1920s ‘economics’ had a broad definition, even among scholars. Heaton listed his economic history position at the University of Adelaide as
‘Lecturer in Economics and Director of Tutorial Classes. University of Adelaide’. He explained his position title in the textbook preface: ‘the best approach [to the study of economics] lies in a historical and descriptive survey of modern economic life and organization’ (Heaton 1925, ‘Author’s Preface’).

The Board of Commercial Studies had an even broader definition of ‘economics’. When Heaton was hired, the Board could have believed they were adding an accounting or statistics teacher to their faculty. Their appointment of L.G. Melville, a ‘conservative actuary’, to the first chair in ‘economics’ four years after the departure of Heaton, suggests such a possibility (Bourke 1988, p. 63).

Sadly, the Board so focussed on the dangers of economic history to their students that they never considered its practical value. Australia in this era was unusual in combining a great deal of government economic intervention, including wage settlements in special courts, with a very democratic form of government. This situation affected every business, and the coverage which Heaton gave to its development was useful to his students, not only as voters, but as future participants in Australian businesses. Heaton explained to his students how Australian patterns of immigration and geography proved to be a stimulus for government economic programmes like railways, shipping lines, consumer banking, improvement of working conditions and wage regulation. He also dealt with important business issues of the day. The 1919 edition of his Modern Economic History With Special Reference to Australia provides an overview of all of the lectures in his WEA economic history course. Among them are three lectures dealing with the important free trade issue: ‘Free Trade and Protection – The Rise of Germany and the United States – Protection and the Industrial Development of Australia’.  

Heaton also had his radical reputation with the Board enhanced by an incident over which he had no control. In 1920 he was invited to give a lecture on the history of professional organisations to the newly formed ‘Bank Officers’ Professional Association’. To his surprise he found himself elected as Vice-President of the Association, an office his correspondence shows he immediately tried to resign. Probably at the instigation of the Board of Commercial Studies, W. Mitchell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, convened a faculty meeting to determine if Heaton’s office in the ‘Association’ violated University policy on political activities. The faculty meeting concluded that the ‘Bank Officers’ Professional Association’ was not campaigning for changes to the wage-setting procedures of the Australian government, and hence he was not in violation of University regulations.

Certainly by 1922 the relationship between Heaton and the Board of Commercial Studies had solidified into a stalemate. Heaton tried to resolve the problem unsuccessfully by turning in a consistently laudable performance as a teacher and a scholar, as well as seeking a new position in either Britain or Australia.

While the Board could deny him major pay increases or promotion, they could not dismiss him. He was an excellent teacher, with growing enrolments for both his WEA and undergraduate courses. He was also an internationally recognised scholar with an impressive publication list. The 1922 effort by a Board member to alarm the public by portraying Heaton as a socialist propagandist failed. The argument was not convincing to the many people in Adelaide who knew and liked Heaton.

1922 – The Australian Employment Situation Turns Worse

In 1922 Heaton hoped to reverse his Australian fortunes by gaining one of the positions opening almost simultaneously at the Universities of Sydney, Melbourne,
and Brisbane. R.F. Irvine, facing hostility from the Sydney business community and the University of Sydney, resigned as Professor of Economics in 1922. Heaton, well aware of his own radical reputation, thought it unlikely he would be appointed as the successor to Irvine. Although disappointed, he probably was not too surprised at the appointment of R.C. Mills, who was highly regarded in the Sydney business community.

Heaton had high hopes for the position at the University of Melbourne. He called upon his British friends, like R.H. Tawney, W.J. Ashley, and A. Mansbridge, to write letters of recommendation for him. His scholarly reputation as an economic historian and his WEA experience made him well qualified for the job. His failed application was a great personal disappointment.

The Brisbane job was filled by John Alcock in 1923. Heaton had not expected to fill that position, again believing his reputation as a radical prevented his serious consideration.

At the end of 1922 Heaton recorded a summary of his efforts in his diary. ‘Atkinson’s resignation [from the University of Melbourne], Irvine’s kick out, & new chair in Brisbane offered openings for [moment]. Didn’t come off; know that reputation for radicalism blocked me in Melb. & probably Brisbane....Apparently Aus. appt. settled by opinions rather than qualifications’.31 This is the bitterest comment to be found in the Heaton papers.

In 1923 Heaton wrote a letter about economics and economic history in Australia:

Obsession with politics means many things are left to the state. State seeks the votes which are in capital cities rather than outback...Only Sydney and Hobart have chairs in economics. Adelaide has an economics school. Brisbane and Perth economics goes with history. Melbourne does nothing in economics. Old school of university teachers and governors prevents a chair at Adelaide. The authorities are frankly afraid of the subject because every political topic here is an economic one, and vice versa.32

His situation at Adelaide was made worse by worry over the health of his wife.33 He began to feel desperate about earning more money.

The Australian WEA moves away from Economic History

The Australian WEA had controversy within the organisation. Heaton and his WEA colleague, Meredith Atkinson, were never collegial in their relationship, as evidenced by this exchange. In 1919 Atkinson published a pamphlet, ‘New Social Order’, as a publication of the WEA. Heaton objected to the pamphlet appearing to be a WEA publication. Atkinson tartly responded by reminding Heaton of his pamphlets, which had ‘been crowned by the W.E.A. crest….’. Atkinson went on to point out that the WEA had diverse opinions [Heaton would question that the WEA should have opinions.] and didn’t know ‘Whether my [Atkinson] bourgeois opinions or your [Heaton’s] proletarianism do the W.E.A. more harm….’. Atkinson went on, for unexplained reasons, to say that he did not regard Mrs. Heaton, among others, ‘...as competent critics’.34

Atkinson believed ‘ignorant masses….were the legacy of the rise of capitalism and individualist liberalism. They were in his view the poor stuff of democracy still in its cave-man stages torn by class cleavage and managed under perverted notions of the functions of the state’ (Bourke 1988, pp. 54-5). Heaton,
with his working-class background and respect for the intelligence of workers, could not agree with such an elitist view of society. In 1920 Heaton warned Tawney, by now president of the British WEA, that during an impending visit of Atkinson to Britain, the views which Atkinson would probably express were not an objective report on what was actually happening in the Australian WEA. On 10 October 1920 Tawney responded: ‘Thank you for writing so frankly about the situation in Australia and about Meredith Atkinson’s visit here….You can rest assured that in so far as I have anything to do with it we shall not accept as gospel any one sided account of the Australian movement and at the same time I will be discreet in not letting your comments go any further’.

The 1922 arrival of John Alexander Gunn at the University of Melbourne, to take the job Heaton had tried hard to obtain, increased the conflict in the WEA. Gunn advocated moving the WEA beyond Atkinson’s ‘social cohesion’ views to ‘social progress’ views. Gunn argued that the WEA should take up the ideas of sociology [a very vaguely defined subject in 1922] and work to improve the ‘quality of its [Australian] population’. Years later one historian wrote: ‘With Gunn a new element entered the teaching of sociology in the identification of social progress with better breeding and higher intelligence. Eugenics was as important as education’ (Bourke 1988, p. 56). Heaton could hardly have felt more comfortable with Gunn’s views than he had with Atkinson’s.

However, the independence of the South Australian WEA shielded Heaton from these changes, and his papers include no criticism of Gunn. Instead, on 3 May 1923, Heaton wrote a letter to MacGibbon at the University of Alberta, praising the Australian WEA: ‘The Workers’ Educational Association is the really live body in the university teaching of social sciences, and we have already published eight volumes on different aspects of Australian economic thought or practice’. Heaton may have been somewhat over-enthusiastic about the Australian WEA, since it was the South Australian WEA which published the three editions of his Modern Economic History with Special Reference to Australia.

The Beginning of the End and ‘Exile’ from Australia

While 1922 was a year of professional disaster for his Australian career, 1923 brought personal tragedy. On 5 May 1923, Heaton wrote in his diary: ‘News of dad’s death [from lung cancer] great shock. Only about 55, had hoped for another 10 years for him at least’. His father was a remarkable man, with little formal education but a powerful intellect and a determination to educate himself. He greatly influenced Heaton’s view of the world and, to some extent, helped his son with the paperwork needed to apply for British jobs. Although the Heaton papers have been purged of family correspondence, there is evidence that father and son regularly corresponded.

The death of his father spurred Heaton to take an unpaid sabbatical in Britain. He wanted to introduce his children to their British relatives and search for a British university appointment. On 11 November 1923, Heaton, his wife and three children sailed for England. The sabbatical was supported by teaching summer school at Oxford, collecting the monetary peace prize – presumably the reward for his Australian lectures supporting the League of Nations – and a lecture series in North America, which took him from McGill University in the east to the University of Alberta in the west of Canada, and to Harvard University in the United States. The sabbatical proved to be the most financially rewarding year he
had yet enjoyed, a sad comment on his dismal financial position in Australia. The satisfaction he felt with the financial success of the sabbatical was completely overshadowed by his failure to find a British position.\(^\text{38}\)

Heaton returned to Australia and a bleak future. He had no hope of any jobs in Australia, outside the University of Adelaide, and the University of Adelaide gave him no hope of either reasonable pay increases or promotion. The only job offer he received came from Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, May 1925, the fruit of his 1924 North American lecture tour. Queen’s offered him both promotion and an improved salary. Assured by the Adelaide University Council on 29 May 1925 that promotion would not be forthcoming, and with no other Australian options, Heaton accepted the Queen’s offer (Bourke 1988, p. 63). Reporting on a farewell party on 8 August 1925, Heaton noted in his diary that Mitchell, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, ‘[was] worried – said would keep place vacant for year’.\(^\text{39}\)

The Heaton papers include many letters from influential South Australians lamenting his departure. J.W. Bernard, of the Adelaide branch of the English Speaking Union, wrote on 8 July 1925: ‘I hope that Canada will appreciate your worth perhaps just a little bit more than Adelaide has done’. T.P. Howard, Secretary, Union Trades and Labor Council of South Australia, wrote on 11 August 1925: ‘We regret that the reward to which your labors in the interests of society entitled you, was not given you by the authorities in power in our state….a fervent hope that when sanity rules, and not the press, you will be brought back to those in Sunny South Australia, to whom you have endeared yourself’. G. McRitchie, General Secretary, Workers’ Educational Association, South Australia, wrote on 21 August 1925: ‘As you will see, he [I.C. Hunkin in the House] does not make any charges, but he said what we all feel that he has an uncomfortable feeling you are being driven away’.\(^\text{40}\)

His final diary entries in Australia provide some idea of his emotions. On 8 August 1925, his diary reports on the large farewell party given in his honor by the WEA, among other organisations. He noted it was a ‘terrible’ evening, since he had to listen to his virtues for an hour and fifty minutes, but that people were very ‘kind’, and the speeches ‘made going, all the move, unnecessary’.\(^\text{41}\)

And so in 1925 Heaton and his family faced one hundred well-wishers in Adelaide bidding him farewell. Later he recorded in his diary: ‘Everybody there; got a lot of kinks in my throat. Are we going into exile?’\(^\text{42}\)

Why Australian Failure and North American Success?

Within three years of his departure from Australia, Heaton attained an academic position at the University of Minnesota which allowed him to specialise in economic history, allowed him time and money for research, and paid him roughly twice what he had earned in Australia. The reasons for his North American success provide perspective on his dismal Australian career.

First Heaton did not fit the Minneapolis business community profile of a radical. He was not an immigrant from Northern or Eastern Europe, he spoke English, was a distinguished history professor at the University of Minnesota, and a member of the Episcopalian Church – a most respectable person.

Second, his public lectures drew no criticism to him, since few Minnesotans ever listened to them. Their disinterest could have various causes. 1. They were too busy earning a living to have the time to listen to lectures. 2. They
were mildly anti-British and distrusted anything spoken by an Englishman. 3. They believed America could be an island of peace and prosperity and ignore the international community. His foreign affairs lectures most appealed to Anglophiles, professionals, and Minneapolis families with international business interests. Ironically, the business group included some of the same people ruthlessly determined to keep labour unions out of Minneapolis, even at the cost of street warfare.

Third, he had few venues for his lectures. Minnesota had no organisation similar to the WEA, and he was only occasionally invited to give a public lecture.

Fourth, he was a professor of economic history in a history department. His performance was evaluated by his peers and academic administrators, well insulated from any public influences.

Despite his inability to carry on with his original goal of teaching economic history to the working class, Heaton felt he had found the ideal position at the University of Minnesota. There is no evidence he ever considered leaving. Unlike some of his Australian colleagues in economics, such as his friend D.B. Copland, Heaton wished only to teach and write about economic history. He had no interest in being either an academic administrator or involved in advising governments.

Heaton never returned to Australia, but he wrote some fifty articles and books, either devoted to Australia or making significant mention of it. While his Australian experiences seem very stressful to a modern academic, Heaton had a different perspective. His papers include an unidentified cutting commenting on his departure from Australia: ‘So S.A. loses one of the cheeriest grins it has ever seen’. The cheerfulness was sincere. Heaton truly believed that becoming an economic historian made him a most fortunate son of a Yorkshire coal-miner.

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Notes

1 Heaton Papers.
3 Heaton Papers.
4 Cutting. Heaton Papers.
5 References to his father are scattered through the early Heaton diaries. Heaton Papers.
7 Newspaper cutting. Heaton Papers.
8 Newspaper cutting of letter attached to the 17 April 1915 cutting. Heaton Papers.
9 Heaton to MacGibbon, University of Alberta, 5 March 1923. Heaton Papers.
10 Newspaper cutting. Heaton Papers.
11 Newspaper cuttings. Heaton Papers.
12 Heaton to Chair of the Extension Board, Hobart, Tasmania, 9 September 1915. Heaton Papers.
14 Scrapbook labelled ‘Scottsdale Smell’ containing newspaper cuttings, official correspondence with the Extension Board, University of Tasmania, letters from
detractors, and letters from supporters. Covers a period from 25 August through December 1915 (some material is undated). Heaton Papers.

15 In a long letter to his friend, A.J. Grant, University of Leeds, Heaton recounted many of his Australian adventures since his arrival in 1914, 26 May 1919. Heaton Papers.

16 Scrapbook ‘Scottsdale Smell’. Heaton Papers.

17 Heaton to A.J. Grant, University of Leeds, 26 May 1919. Heaton Papers.

18 Heaton to A.J. Grant, University of Leeds, 26 May 1919. Heaton Papers.

19 Heaton to A.J. Grant, 26 May 1919. Heaton Papers.

20 Diary Annual Summary, 1922. Heaton Papers.


22 Tawney to Heaton, 10 October 1921. Heaton Papers.

23 Annual Diary Summary 1922; anonymous letter to Heaton c. 1919. Heaton Papers.

24 Heaton Papers.

25 The Heaton Papers and WEA publications are bibliographically imprecise. There appear to be 1919, 1922, 1925, 1928 editions with 1920, 1921, 1923 reprints.


28 Diary Summary 1922, newspaper cutting 1925. Heaton Papers.

29 Heaton (1919), Modern Economic History, ‘Foreword….Each [table of contents] number is in effect a precis of one lecture….’


31 Annual Summary 1922. Heaton Papers.

32 Heaton to MacGibbon, University of Alberta, 3 May 1923. Correspondence. Heaton Papers.

33 Annual Diary Summary, 1922. Heaton Papers.

34 Atkinson to Heaton, 15 April 1919. Correspondence. Heaton Papers.

35 Heaton Papers.

36 Heaton Papers.

37 Heaton Papers.

38 Diaries 1923-1924, Heaton Papers.

39 Heaton Papers.

40 Correspondence. Heaton Papers.

41 Heaton Papers.

42 Heaton Papers.

43 c. August, 1925. Heaton Papers.

References

Personal Papers

Heaton Papers. The papers of Herbert Heaton were deposited in the Archives of the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The papers are arranged generally by date and type of material (diaries, correspondence, and so on), but some materials are gathered together into scrapbooks covering a specific period. The collection is uneven but does cover the period from 1908, the year Heaton entered the University of Leeds as an undergraduate, to the period just before his death in 1973.
Secondary Sources


