

Patrick Keane

The Work/Leisure Ethic in Adult Education

Current attitudes and priorities in adult education reflect long-held views that certain studies are "useful", while others are merely tolerable, if not downright "frills". Those considered "useful" have traditionally encompassed the area of marketable vocational skills, and have sometimes been described as "training". Those deemed, under various euphemisms, less than useful have traditionally encompassed the area of liberal education and leisure-time pursuits. In effect, the work ethic has long determined that public support of adult education might be justified for "useful knowledge" or "training". However, the same ethic produced varying degrees of doubt or hostility if leisure-time interests were to be promoted in a like manner. With the growth and increasing complexity of adult education provision, the distinction has sometimes become rather arbitrary, but it remains influential in an era when meeting individual needs may conflict with the work ethic. Recent social and economic changes in western society have given some prominence to the leisure ethic, with recreation even being accorded the dignity of a science (Recreology). The human fulfilment, so often absent from many contemporary work situations, is being sought increasingly through the medium of leisure. Even in employment providing reasonable individual satisfaction, such factors as the shorter working week or periods of employment merely foreshadow a problem made manifest in the new longevity and often mandatory retirement. However, a latent diffidence in according leisure full stature with work remains at the heart of adult education, and testifies more to centuries-old values than to current financial problems. This paper will accordingly consider first the inhibitions which flowed from a pervasive concept, equating leisure with an elite class, and the production of goods and services with subordinate classes. We shall then examine the impact of this viewpoint on the first popular adult education movement of the nineteenth century. Here a leisured class sought to "improve" subordinate classes by directing their energies toward "useful" education and away from "sinful pleasures".

An antithesis drawn between culture and utility influenced the philosophy of education as early as the days of classical Greece. Plato and Aristotle had reserved liberal education for a leisured governing class, while for the vulgar or artisans remained some form of technical education or training.¹ For the latter, whether free craftsman or slave, leisure had, at best, a residual function: "the worker needs relaxation, play is intended to provide relaxation".² Thus the worker's leisure time was subordinated to his primary productive role and intended to render him more efficient in that role. For the governing class, while "both occupation and leisure are necessary . . . leisure is higher than occupation, and it is the end to which occupation is directed." Leisure thus had a prescriptive-normative function for the ruling class, who alone were endowed both with the liberal education and social position considered necessary to invest it with any degree of quality or refinement. Some form of technical or practical education might reach even the slaves,³ but both they and the wage-earning craftsmen were held to lack the attributes necessary for the enjoyment of true leisure. "Any employment which is pursued for the sake of gain . . . keeps men's minds too much and too meanly occupied."⁴ Clearly then, leisure had connotations beyond the chance availability of free time to any member of society. The functions and quality of leisure related directly to the social class of the individual Greek.

The Romans also felt the need to amuse their urban populace, using "bread and circuses" as a soporific, and building that ancestor of all sporting arenas, the Colosseum. However, neither the callous brutality associated with popular spectacles in the amphitheatres, nor the materialism and hedonism so prevalent among upper classes of the Empire augured well for an evolution of the concept of leisure. Change was to come, but not so much from the influence of the cultured Cicero, Vergil, or Tacitus, as from the later founder of a monastic order — (St.) Benedict of Nursia.⁵ The classical distinction between a leisured class and a labouring class was now challenged in the framework of Christian theology. St. Paul had written "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought: but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you."⁶ In formulating his sixth-century rule for monks, Benedict prescribed regular manual labour: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. The brethren, therefore, must be occupied at stated hours in manual labour, and again at other hours in sacred reading."⁷ This rule thus served to combine attributes of hitherto distinct social classes. A new dignity was accorded to labour, and

neither a liberal education nor contemplative study were held to be excluded because of it. However, the Benedictine ideal remained an internal monastic code, in a medieval world retaining varying degrees of serfdom and a continuing acceptance of pre-Christian notions both of servile work and of a leisured class. The most that a Renaissance gentleman might accept was the belief that the obligations of gentility could not be met without "learning, previously the monopoly of the cleric."⁸ Few could implement Sir Thomas More's ideal in *Utopia* (1516) of a daily adult life of both labour and learning,⁹ although later adult educators were to echo his plea that individuals should not spend their leisure "in riot or slothfulness but . . . bestow the time well and thriftily upon some other good science."

Reformation ethics may also be instanced as supportive of the dignity of labour and the value of education. Allied to the general Protestant demands for a Bible reading laity was Calvinist theology, which accorded only too well with the disciplined and austere self-interest considered necessary for material prosperity.¹⁰ As early as the seventeenth century, a contrast was being perceived between the social conservatism of Catholic states and the more aggressive economic policies of Nonconformist commercial centres. The Reformation ethic was most acceptable to an evolving middle class, freed from such medieval inhibitions as that on usury, and anxious to benefit from growing trade and commerce. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings"¹¹ — such was the view of personalities as diverse as Martin Luther or Charles Wesley. It was perhaps less appealing to the poor, who, if freed from the exactions of feudal lords, might also have lost the respite afforded by the numerous saint's days of the Church calendar, not to mention the amelioration afforded by monastic almsgiving, or the stimulation of the pageantry, music, and drama associated with the medieval church.

The social and economic changes, which followed the development of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, were to influence the concepts of both leisure and work. During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the middle classes had found their growing prosperity accompanied by a greater degree of leisure than they had previously possessed. Domestic servants or hired craftsmen now undertook many of the chores formerly undertaken by the household, while the availability of cheap manufactured goods similarly lightened the burdens of household labour. The new-found leisure had to be applied in "self-improvement" or harmless diversions, since evangelical prin-

ciples forbade participation in such "sinful" pastimes as dancing, card-playing, or theatre-going. Accordingly, a variety of educational ventures was to blossom, ranging from home-reading circles to literary and philosophical societies. Prevailing attitudes dictated that such activities should be socially exclusive; and while the growing numbers of domestic servants might have limited access to the periodicals and books of their employers, the working classes in general had limited opportunity for such self-improvement.

There was, nevertheless, one working class group that was showing signs of having met sufficient of the basic physiological needs for some of its members to strive toward a fuller development of their potentiality. In A.H. Maslow's hypothesis, this group was still near the base of the pyramid in meeting the hierarchy of human needs, but it was, at least, "on the move".¹² The group was generically termed "mechanics", implying a connection with the steam engine on which the Industrial Revolution rested, but in practice composed of all those skilled (and often literate) workmen who had served a regular apprenticeship in some recognized trade. The mechanics constituted the "aristocracy of labour" by virtue of their skills and the status and living standards that accompanied them. The early nineteenth century found the craftsmen or journeymen largely self-employed or working in small-scale industrial enterprises, rather than in the larger factory units which were to become such a feature of industrial society. However, they still had to endure a definite lack of the political and economic power needed either to conserve or improve their position in urban society. Their relative material prosperity had to be balanced by a feeling of insecurity and exploitation in the drab world of the new industrial towns, and many, doubtless, had occasion to regret the often enforced move from the rural parishes of their birth. The passing of the pleasures associated with "Merrie England" was to be lamented in a variety of prose and poetry.¹³ Thomas Hardy's description of a typical rural fair embraced a

frivolous contingent of visitors, including journeymen out for a holiday, a stray soldier or two come on furlough, village shopkeepers, and the like, having latterly flocked in; persons whose activities found a congenial field among the peep-shows, toy-stands, waxworks, inspired monsters, disinterested medical men who travelled for the public good, thimble-riggers, nick-nack vendors, and readers of Fate.¹⁴

William Barnes, the Victorian Dorset poet, who idealized the rural life of his youth, wrote of Easter Mondays:

An' there we play'd away at quaits,
 An' weigh'd ourzelves wi' sceales an' waights;
 An' jump'd to zee who jump'd the spryest,
 An' sprung the vurdest an' the highest;
 An' rung the bells vor vull an hour,
 An' played at vives ageän the tower.
 An' then we went an' had a taift . . .¹⁵

The pleasures and conviviality associated with rural life must, however, be viewed in the context of the Victorian search for both past and possible Utopias. By the early nineteenth century, as rural and urban contrasts became increasingly manifest, the myths and realities of rural innocence and freedom formed a treasured nostalgia among many town dwellers. Musings on the paternalistic village community ought not to exclude, however, the harsh game laws, the poor harvest, the humiliating hiring fairs, the power of parson and squire, the degrading workhouse, and particularly the loss of common lands on which so much customary privilege and practice had depended. The relative passivity and inarticulatedness of rural labourers, amid the social deference of the countryside, had permitted a degree of tranquility and communality which contrasted with growing class consciousness and assertiveness among urban mechanics. The latter were as much concerned with their status in relation to their unskilled brethren, as in relation to their employers. While they might enjoy musing on those more pleasurable aspects of their rural youth, it is doubtful that they would have accepted a return to the status of villagers. Indeed, social and economic changes were not the prerogative of the urban community, as the Agricultural Revolution had shown. Thus the often strident rural viewpoint of William Cobbett was to "despise the man that is poor and contented,"¹⁶ just as he had earlier despised the ignorance and corruption he encountered while on military service in New Brunswick.¹⁷ That the agricultural labourers themselves were not prepared to remain poor and contented was manifested in the Labourers' Revolt of 1830. Fulfilment for the mechanics was thus to be sought largely within the context of the urban community, although, under the influence of Robert Owen and others, experiments in cooperative communities on the land were to continue. These were to be attempted not only in Britain, but by equally idealistic migrants in Canada and the United States.¹⁸

For most mechanics, recreation had no more than the residual function it had been assigned for the artisans of classical Greece. The working day ranged from ten to fourteen hours, and early advocates of fac-

tory legislation were concentrating their efforts on the plight of women and children, since a campaign to limit men's hours had little hope of success. The Saturday half-holiday did not become general in Britain until the 1860's, so the mechanics were earlier limited to a few hours of freedom in the evenings and one day of rest on Sundays. Over the latter, the inhibitions and prohibitions associated with Sabbatarianism held sway. Nevertheless, the temptation to escape from their often cramped and squalid dwellings influenced mechanics to seek recreation outside the home after returning fatigued by long and arduous employment. Their choices were limited in an era lacking public parks, libraries, museums or art galleries; with few theatres, and only expensive taxed newspapers; but with an abundance of taverns, brothels, cock fights, and bare-fist boxing. The violence and debauchery that often resulted served to alarm the middle and upper classes, who equated it with the political and economic radicalism of the period. Concern for the manner in which the working classes spent their meagre leisure became a pressing matter not just for government, but for the churches, and for many of the voluntary agencies that characterized the early nineteenth century. Lord Macaulay was to write in 1823:

This is the age of societies. There is scarcely an Englishman in ten who has not belonged to some association for distributing books, or for prosecuting them; for sending invalids to hospital, or beggars to the treadmill; for giving plate to the rich or blankets to the poor.¹⁹

Insofar as the poor were to be aided by such societies, it was largely in terms of rendering them more "useful" members of a society increasingly dominated by middle class ideals of sobriety, frugality, and, above all, work.

On the one hand, unacceptable forms of relaxation might be either ridiculed or prohibited. One writer concluded that

The amusements of the poor were preached and legislated against until even the most innocuous were regarded in a lurid light. The Society for the Suppression of Vice extended its sphere of reference to two-penny hops, gingerbread fairs, and obscene pictures. Nude sea-bathers were prosecuted as if they were forerunners of tumbrills and guillotine.²⁰

On the other hand, desirable forms of relaxation might be promoted, and attempts were indeed made to effect a degree of social control here through the medium of adult education. This was an era of social endeavour productive of much controversy when it blossomed into a

large scale popular movement during the early nineteenth century. Whether one explores the ramifications of its main constituent, the mechanics' institute, in Britain or in British North America, one finds the same fundamental conflict of purpose. The early promoters, mostly from the middle classes, rested their case for the institute's inauguration and support mainly on the grounds that it would promote certain desirable social ends. Specifically, it would disseminate "useful knowledge" among an urban working class whose "self improvement" would be equated largely with improved technical expertise and adherence to the work ethic of the Victorian middle classes. The mechanics were therefore being assigned a role in a scheme not of their making, and the tenuous partnership rested on an assumed community of interests circumscribed by the ideals and ambitions of their employers.

Despite the utilitarian and paternalistic concept of adult education with which so many early mechanics' institutes were associated, it is worthy of note that the archetype Glasgow Mechanics' Institution, Scotland, was itself the product of a revolt against such concepts. Its origin lay in a program of scientific lectures delivered by Dr. James Birkbeck at Anderson's Institution, Glasgow, in 1799-1800. Birkbeck, impressed by the intellectual curiosity of some local mechanics, arranged a special program of Saturday evening lectures for them, and was gratified by an ever-growing enrollment.²¹ Later mechanics established a committee to collect textbooks and equipment in support of their course, and following a dispute with the administration, the mechanics established a separate Glasgow Mechanics' Institution under their own management in 1823. While other British attempts at self-governing institutes might also be instanced, it was soon realized that middle-class support was essential, and that an advocacy of vocational rather than intellectual aims was more likely to receive that support. At a time when the possibilities of scientific and technological discovery were capturing the public attention, it was clearly advantageous for this educational movement to identify itself as a potential contributor to public wellbeing and material prosperity.

A product of educational borrowing, the early institutes of British North America consciously adopted aims and procedures similar to those of the British institutes with which some of their members were already familiar. If the vast sub-continent appeared to offer even greater potentialities for the harnessing of science, then frontier society seemed to lack many of the slender educational opportunities possessed by working men in Britain. The impetus for innovation and change now

seemed more compelling, and the rewards for industry more tangible and immediate. In Upper Canada, where the greatest provincial concentration of institutes was to be established, it was said that "in them particularly may a foundation be laid for a life distinguished for that devotion to science, that thirst for knowledge, and that honorable desire to be useful to the world, which has, in so many instances, conferred great and lasting benefit on society."²² In similar vein, Joseph Howe urged the study of science by members of Halifax Mechanics' Institute, saying it "has been an important effect, not only on the character, fortune, and influence of individuals, but upon the advancement, resources, and happiness of nations."²³ He then quoted Lord Bacon's dictum that "knowledge is power", as did so many later institute promoters. Lest "power" for the unenfranchised working classes might appear a dangerous concept to some, "knowledge" was to explicitly exclude any mention of politics, economics, and religion in the programs of early institutes. Since recreation and entertainment were something of an anathema to promoters of the work ethic, they seldom merited any explicit mention in the formative stage of the movement. Programs of study were typically based on the provision of lectures and a library, with efforts made to put an emphasis on scientific and technical content. The latter was a goal somewhat difficult to realize, at the onset, particularly in the libraries. Institute museums were also assembled over the years and some attempts were made to provide formal class instruction.

In general, the educational aims reflected a compromise between those who opposed providing any education for the working classes, and interests expressed in providing, or receiving, a much broader education. In the clichés of the time, "making the man a better mechanic" was an acceptable component of the work ethic, while "making the mechanic a better man" admitted of a host of conflicting interpretations. Thus, in St. John, New Brunswick, where a fraternal mechanics' society had been established as early as 1827, and a regular mechanics' institute in 1838, misgivings continued into the next decade, despite the patronage of Governor Sir John Harvey and the city-wide celebrations that marked the laying of the corner stone for a new institute building in 1840. The Rev. J.C. Galloway, in lecturing to the institute members in 1843, noted that "these institutes are condemned for supplying information of an extremely superficial character, degenerating into mere training schools for revolutionary democrats, and proving the hot beds of infidelity."²⁴ Noting that "there are individuals to be met with in the upper walks of life, who look with extreme jealousy, not to say alarm, upon all direct efforts to instruct and advance the working classes", Galloway

nevertheless argued that the education involved was supportive of "domestic virtue" and of "the general peace and improvement of the community". He instanced the incentive to learn epitomized by the successful James Watt, in that "the best informed operative is the best paid". Additionally, "reading and classrooms have been the means of keeping (the operatives) from spending their evenings in scenes of sensual indulgence" by providing "a truly gratifying and highly valuable recreation".²⁵ Galloway understandably supported the view that religion was an integral part of adult education but rejected the notion that mechanics' institutes must provide a full and intensive educational program or none at all. He was thus a typical protagonist of the institutes as providers of a limited and "useful" education — a compromise between more than some thought desirable, and less than others thought necessary.

The extent to which institute policy could be dictated by the work ethic and the social norms underlying it, depended on diverse and changing factors. The working classes clearly lacked the resources to implement a broad educational program calculated to meet their own needs and interests. Their response, or lack of response, to middle-class leadership, constituted their major influence on institute policies. The early nineteenth-century institutes benefited from the novelty aspect, in attracting the enthusiasm and support of diverse patrons and diverse members, for whom the somewhat nebulous concept of "useful knowledge" must have appeared more permissive than restrictive. That the directors of Halifax Mechanics' Institute saw fit, in 1832, to decline a proffered lecture on the British Constitution, in case it should lead to a political discussion, exemplified some of the limitations inherent in the movement from its onset.²⁶ That the members of Toronto Mechanics' Institute did not hear a lecture on "The Rights of Labour" in 1848 appears to have resulted from the lecturer's unwillingness to admit of some censorship of his material by the directors.²⁷ The foundation of York (Toronto) Mechanics' Institute in 1830 witnessed political misgivings deep enough for the Rev. John Strachan to preside over the rival Literary and Philosophical Society of Upper Canada, supported by members of the "family compact".²⁸ Not even the patronage of the Lieutenant Governor Sir Henry Colborne assuaged conservative misgivings at the institute's role. Doubtless the support afforded it by William Lyon Mackenzie, the firebrand editor of the *Colonial Patriot*, was a measure of its perceived potential for "making the mechanic a better man" — at least by one school of thought. Certainly Mackenzie, as journalist and politician, was concerned with much broader goals than were many pro-

taganists of "useful knowledge", and an informed and educated electorate was an integral part of his political creed.²⁹ His *Catechism of Education* (1830) had proclaimed education to be "for rendering the human mind to the greatest possible degree the cause of human happiness", and he advocated the establishment of apprentices' and mechanics' libraries as a means toward this end.³⁰ With the Rebellion of 1837, almost half the institute members left, and thereafter, both in Toronto and other Upper Canadian institutes, much more conservative leadership was to be in evidence. Clearly, the early association of some institutes, both in British North America and in Britain itself, with political reformers led to suspicions that the work ethic was not the sole motivating force behind this movement.

Subsumed beneath the political, economic, or religious controversy was a latent desire for recreation and enjoyment which no amount of moral preaching seemed able to eradicate. As the true magnitude was realized of the task of educating working class adults, early optimism and enthusiasm waned. It was not only literate skilled mechanics who had been attracted to the institutes, but their wives and children, their neighbours and employers, and a motley collection drawn small but prized libraries, occasional stimulating lecturers, demonstrations of scientific experiments, or the simple pleasures of convivial company. Despite some limited public funding before mid-century, these essentially voluntary bodies found the long-term financial and administrative problems onerous indeed. It was tempting, then as now, to measure success by an ever-growing enrollment, but when the larger and more diverse membership demanded equally larger and more diverse facilities and programs, even to the extent of including recreation and entertainment, many institutes found they had "a tiger by the tail". On the one hand, there were the fundamental misgivings of influential supporters, who equated "useful knowledge" with progress, and entertainment with debauchery. Having had to combat opposition and indifference in order to launch the movement, they now felt its ideals would be betrayed if "sinful pleasures" were admitted to the "temples of knowledge". On the other hand, some institutes had personal contacts with their British contemporaries where the same issue had been faced, and some tentative compromises had been reached. Thus Halifax Mechanics' Institute, deprived of its annual government grant after 1840, learned from the president of Liverpool Mechanics' Institute, England, of the profitability of holding public exhibitions to cater for more discursive interest in the sciences than was met in lecture courses or classes.³¹ Such exhibitions possessed both an educational and a recreational character,

brought institutes to the attention of a wider public, and provided funds that might be applied in support of other institute programs or new and enlarged premises. In northern England, where institutes were numerous, "the tendency to develop a variety of activities, which were largely social in character, but still, to a considerable extent, educational in purpose, was typical of mechanics' institutes from the thirties onwards."³²

In British North America, the same tendency was to be followed. In 1843, Montreal Mechanics' Institute inaugurated the first of a series of annual industrial exhibitions, accompanied by "vocal and instrumental music and addresses. They not only attracted the interest of most of the city's mechanics but were largely patronised by the citizens generally."³³ Nine years later, one finds this institute arranging an excursion to Portland, "under the auspices of the Marine Charitable Mechanics' Association of Portland", which brought not only much pleasure, but a £60 profit for the building fund. Dartmouth Mechanics' Institute, Nova Scotia, arranged a picnic and bazaar, under the patronage of Lieutenant Governor Falkland, on neighbouring McNab's Island in 1845, and this was recognized as "the outstanding summer event in the social life of the community."³⁴ Four thousand people were conveyed by ferries to a picnic ground, where displays were intermingled with refreshment stands, with music provided by a military band, and with everything from quoits, balls, and swings, to dancing on the green. A gross profit of £500 was realized and was to facilitate construction of the institute's new building in the following year. The neighbouring Halifax Mechanics' Institute, doubtless chagrined that this more recent foundation was able to erect new premises before itself, had wrestled with the issue of recreation for some time. In 1832, it had declined to patronise a theatre performance in return for the proprietor's offer of the net profits, but that was a time of educational optimism and growing enrollments. A decade later, after lamenting "the want of extended cooperation on behalf of the institute among the various classes in the community", it singled out the mechanics for their "unexpected apathy", and noted rather regretfully that the transition from specific aims to more general ones was prevalent also in British institutes.³⁵ A bazaar was proposed and rejected in 1842, but it was held in the following year, and the net profit of £180 was set aside for a building fund. By 1846, sufficient misgivings had been overcome for "a day of recreation" to be planned. Clearly, the middle-class administration was still torn between the probable increase in the building fund, and the dangers in-

herent in popular recreation. When a franchise for refreshments was awarded, it was impressed on those concerned that the picnic was to "be conducted on temperance principles" and "objection was expressed to the provision of a platform for dancing purposes."³⁶ Despite the inhibitions, there was a sufficient popular response for a profit of £200 to be made.

In Upper Canada, the 1840's also witnessed the start of innumerable institutes ventures into broader social activities.³⁷ In 1842, Toronto Mechanics' Institute inaugurated its summer excursions for members and their families, with "a pleasant sail across Lake Ontario . . . to Niagara Falls, where dinner had been arranged." This produced a net profit of £54. 5s. In 1844, the members of Hamilton Mechanics' Institute likewise made their first annual boat excursion to the same place, and five year later they commenced an annual music festival. London Mechanics' Institute inaugurated a series of soirées, with a ball and tea party in 1844, while nine years later, Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum (Ottawa) held its first exhibition, in honour of a visit by Lord Elgin, the governor general. In 1856, Guelph Farmers' and Mechanics' Institute held a profitable music festival, followed by an equally successful art exhibition in the following year. By 1864, it was able to mount both a Shakespeare Festival and an art exhibition in one summer season.

Clearly, then, a much greater degree of public participation appeared possible at this time if leisure time interests were to find a regular place in institute programs. However, both in British North America and in Britain there remained among institute managements a degree of apology in meeting such interests, which no amount of popular support or financial return seemed able to eradicate. Thus observed Charles Dickens, the celebrated novelist and patron of adult education, who, during a brief stay in Halifax in 1847, was a guest of Joseph Howe, former president of Halifax Mechanics' Institute. Dickens, president of Chatham Mechanics' Institution for thirteen years, had begun his famed public readings in aid of these often struggling institutes, and was very familiar with both their early aims and their contemporary problems. He spoke of a typical institute as having "a shyness in admitting that human nature, when at leisure has any desire whatever to be relieved and diverted", of "the masking of entertainment and pretending it was something else", and of the library's "painfully apologetic return of 62 offenders who had read travels, popular biography and mere fiction. . . ."³⁸ Particularly, in *Hard Times* Dickens had satirized the utilitarian concept of education and had embraced a more liberal

philosophy wherein recreation and enjoyment merited some place.³⁹ He had attended numerous institute social gatherings, and even drawn the inspiration for his *Christmas Carol* from "the bright eyes and beaming faces" at a soirée over which he presided at the Manchester Athenaeum in 1843.⁴⁰ Such institute soirées, or social gatherings, had developed to the state where a galaxy of literary and other figures were invited to participate, and at the Glasgow Athenaeum in 1848, Dickens was partnered by Ralph Waldo Emerson, then in the course of a tour of British institutes.⁴¹ Joseph Howe, while having been as optimistic as many other institute promoters, in expecting to see "many brilliant discoveries" made by mechanics, had mellowed sufficiently to admit of the merits of both "recreation and utility", and his own undoubted talents as a lecturer were to be applied in a broadly liberal context.⁴²

One might ascribe much of the failure to implement the early utilitarian aims to the basic financial and administrative problems of these essentially voluntary bodies. Some consideration thus seems desirable of a publicly supported phase of their existence, which resulted in a substantial growth in their numbers. In 1857, the government of Upper and Lower Canada established a Board of Arts and Manufactures, among whose aims was an improvement in the educational effectiveness of mechanics' institutes receiving grants from public funds. By 1858, these numbered 143, and the total annual grants amounted to £7,300.⁴³ The board, which included institute representatives among its membership, interpreted the functions of institutes as being two-fold — to provide both "a means of instruction and of healthful recreation."⁴⁴ If the explicit mention of "recreation" appears liberal, it should be balanced by the board's equally explicit reference to promoting "habits of sobriety and study", and to saving men from "the drinking and gambling saloons".⁴⁵ Temperance principles, noted earlier in Nova Scotia, were clearly a concomitant part of the work ethic, and "recreation" needed the appellation "healthful" for any respectability. (One suspects that "useful knowledge" was grudgingly being partnered by "useful recreation" at this stage.)

The provincial government, concluding that the institutes were "merely circulating libraries", which did not appear to have "provided lectures or conducted evening classes", in 1859 ended its policy of making direct grants to them.⁴⁶ Within two years, it was officially acknowledged that this change had "resulted in the failure of some of them, and in crippling materially the usefulness of others."⁴⁷ Not until 1868 was a reprieve granted to the survivors, when the new province of Ontario reinstated annual grants to a maximum of \$200, "for the pur-

pose of evening class instruction, or the formation of libraries of practical works."⁴⁸ Even more specific was the responsible minister's decision to prepare "a catalogue of such books as I deem to be of the character of technical works." A survey conducted in 1880 by Dr. S. D. May, of the Department of Education, provides much information on the contemporary situation. May, who was to be appointed Superintendent of Mechanics' Institutes in the following year, reiterated the view that "the chief purpose for which mechanics' institutes were established, was for imparting technical education to the working classes."⁴⁹ He found that "very few institutes have conducted classes, and the large annual grants have been chiefly applied for the libraries and reading rooms." Even the original intention to limit the library grant to specified technical publications had been moderated over the years, admitting literature, travel, history, and other categories, together with a reading room for newspapers and periodicals. May concluded that most institutes in receipt of government grants were still "only circulating libraries, and that too for the dissemination of light literature".⁵⁰ The grant-aided St. Catherines Mechanics' Institute was instanced as having never provided any evening classes, and with a library in 1878 classified as "1003 works of fiction and 583 miscellaneous"⁵¹. Even where fiction remained a minor part of library holdings, the tendency was for its circulation to be disproportionately high.

May noted the conflicting views expressed on library holdings — views applicable to the basic issue of "useful knowledge" in support of the work ethic, or a broader provision in support of individual fulfilment. He found some convinced that it was not the government's responsibility "to furnish the people with mere recreation", others convinced that "it is wicked to read novels", and yet others believing in supplying "whatever the public sentiment calls for."⁵² Toronto Mechanics' Institute, favourably situated in a thriving and growing city, appears to have been almost alone in being able to make a reasonable gesture in pursuit of both "useful knowledge" and recreation, and May found much to commend in its policies. In 1862, in the period of no government grants, it was able to enlarge its evening class program and also introduce literary and musical entertainments. After building renovations in 1876, "a ladies reading room was established, the music hall was made a recreation room with eleven billiard tables, chess boards, &c., for the use of members. This latter feature was a success both financially and otherwise."⁵³ By 1880, with 1050 members, it had an annual income of \$22,817; 10,053 volumes in its library; 66 newspapers, 36

magazines, and 9 reviews, in its reading room; while 213 students were enrolled in a variety of its evening classes.⁵⁴

The generality of institutes in the province found difficulty in living up to the role of "people's colleges" pictured for them by the government.⁵⁵ None of the 143 grant-aided institutes in Upper and Lower Canada, from whom the government sought information in 1858, reported providing any evening classes,⁵⁶ and only Dundas, Kincardine, and Toronto were apparently providing any a decade later.⁵⁷ Of the 125 recorded Ontario institutes in 1880, 72 received provincial grants, but only 29 provided classes; while of the 311 recorded in 1895, 289 received provincial grants, but only 36 provided classes.⁵⁸ Of the slender class provision, which government policy had fostered, this included much that May classified as elementary, rather than technical,⁵⁹ and such subjects as elocution, music, and wax flowers merit the classification of "recreation". Indeed, one critic of May's Report instanced an institute class "for teaching pianoforte, chiefly to the children of members."⁶⁰

With the appointment in 1880 of the public school inspectors as inspectors of mechanics' institutes, the Department of Education was to attempt even closer supervision of their programs. However, it would seem that this came too late to produce any radical change. Indeed, the decline of these institutes in the early 1860's, after government grants were withdrawn, followed by the substantial increase after grants were reinstated, suggests that the government did more than merely tolerate "literary and musical entertainments", the reading of "novels and light literature", the study of eloquence, and the playing of billiards and chess. Its system of grants stimulated the growth of institutes wherein such activities found a more congenial home than did the statics, dynamics, chemistry, geology, mineralogy, zoology, and botany urged by Dr. May. He had mentioned the success of certain major British institutes in fostering the development of technical studies, but neglected to mention also that most British institutes had had no more success in this field than had those in Ontario.⁶¹ The reasons for the failure to sustain graduated technical studies were numerous and complex in Canada and in Britain. In both, there was an early shortage of competent teachers, and of the funds to pay them, while comparatively few adults possessed sufficient elementary education, perseverance, or conviction to follow James Watt's footsteps. Despite the potential for technological progress seen in both countries, their governments were relatively late to recognize and provide the tremendous public investment needed for the development of an efficient system of technical education. If, as hindsight suggests, it was premature to graft an adult education move-

ment on to the stem of the work ethic, it would seem to have been a useful starting point. The latent desire for recreation and enjoyment was clearly not suppressed, though it might be ridiculed or legislated against. Being told that novel reading "fosters discontent with the peaceful homely duties", and is "intellectual dram-drinking, affording a temporary exhilaration, but ultimately emasculating both mind and character", did not check this lamentable trait among those seemingly preordained for "improvement".⁶² Rather, as the lower middle class also joined the institutes, the contagion appeared to spread. Noting that "there is no other country in the world where mechanics' institutes are so liberally assisted by the government, as those in Ontario", May obviously felt that public funds could, and should, be able to effect the transformation that earlier voluntary effort had failed to accomplish.⁶³ The government's policy in 1895, which converted the institutes into either free public libraries or fee-paying private libraries, and sought to introduce technical education through other agencies, was a belated recognition of its failure.

Later examination of the Ontario example indicates that voluntary agencies lacking explicit association with the work ethic might indeed win public approbation for programs both "useful" and "recreational". Thus, fifteen years after the formal demise of the mechanics' institutes, one finds an Educational Commission of Toronto studying involvement of the Y.M.C.A. in commercial and industrial education.⁶⁴ The Commission concluded that "with its flexible administration, the Young Men's Christian Association is well prepared to experiment with new, untried, and even doubtful methods and subjects." The Y.M.C.A., like the mechanics' institutes, had its origins in Victorian Britain, and it represented, in part, the concern of some Protestant denominations for that religious training which mechanics' institutes had excluded as a matter of policy.⁶⁵ The principle of *mens sano in corpore sano* led to a more natural expansion into the field of sports and recreation than did the dictum "knowledge is power", and thus enabled the Toronto Y.M.C.A. and others to combine attention to both work and leisure without the "shyness" noted by Dickens.

The heritage of this nineteenth-century contest between the work ethic and the leisure ethic is materially evident in the early "useful knowledge" libraries that formed the nucleus for later civic libraries from Victoria, B.C. to Halifax, N.S. The acrimony over content was soon transferred to elected public bodies, and Haligonians were assured in 1873 "that every work which would in any degree effect (*sic*) the mind for evil or injure the morals, had been rigidly excluded from the selec-

tion".⁶⁶ Nevertheless, a condemnation was extended to "the yellow-covered literature which was so extensively read at the time" Leisure, in the last century, was clearly only a peripheral part in the life of many members of the working population, but it was a part which they steadfastly defended against "improvement". On the one hand, recreation, in the form of handicrafts and sports, had been generally neglected by the institutes, and picnics, soirées, excursions and exhibitions were, at best, occasional and subsidiary ventures offering some release from labour. On the other hand, liberal education, in such forms as art, music, history, and literature had soon intruded into many lecture programs, and in the donations and purchases of sculpture and paintings. Herein had lain more substantial contributions to education for leisure and self-fulfilment. Added to the conviviality of the billiard room, the occasional refreshment of an excursion, the satisfaction derived from independent study in the library, reading room, or museum, the enjoyment of often stimulating lectures in the liberal arts, came a variety of opportunities for voluntary service in these much maligned institutes. It would seem that, while initiated to support the work ethic, they had made limited but creditable contributions to the leisure ethic. More progress undoubtedly would have been made but for the institutes' unenviable position of seeking to meet public needs and interests, which often conflicted with both their founders' intentions and the basis of much of their private or official support. It would also seem that this dilemma is still with us.

NOTES

1. *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: O.U.P., 1952), 1337b.ss.3; and Plato, *Protogoras*, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956), 312b.
2. Barker, *Aristotle*, 1337b.
3. *Ibid.*, 1255b. ss. 1.
4. *Ibid.*, 1337b. ss. 5.
5. On the early influence of St. Benedict, see John Chapman, *St. Benedict and the Sixth Century* (London: Longmans, 1929).
6. 2. Thess. 3: 8.
7. Abbot Justin McCann, *The Rule of St. Benedict* Rule 48, p. iii, (London: Burns Oates, 1952).
8. Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (Toronto: U.T.P., 1968), xi.
9. Sir Thomas More, *The Utopia* (Toronto: D. Van Nostrand, 1947), Book II, 83-85.
10. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970).
11. *Proverbs* 22: 29.
12. A.H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).
13. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973; and W.J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Toronto: U.T.P., 1974).
14. Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 8.
15. Williams Barnes, "Easter Monday", in Bernard Jones (ed), *The Poems of William Barnes* (London: Centaur Press, 1962), 76.

16. William Cobbett, *Cottage Economy* (1821-22), (London: Davies, 1926), 3.
17. See *The Autobiography of William Cobbett* (London: Faber, 1967), or G.D.H. Cole, *Life of William Cobbett* (London: Home & Van Thal, 3rd.ed.rev. 1947).
18. Robert Owen's communitarian socialism envisaged largely self-sufficient agricultural communities, providing a collective independence for their members. They were to be attempted in such places as Orbiston, Scotland, and New Harmony, Indiana, both in 1825; and Maxwell, Ontario, in 1827. A viable form of individual fulfilment was not however to be found. See Arthur E. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America; 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1950).
19. Lord Macaulay, writing under the pseudonym Tristram Merton, in Knight's *Quarterly Magazine*, 1823. Cited in Thomas L. Jarman, *Landmarks in the History of Education* (London: John Murray, 1970), 247.
20. Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, rev. ed. 1968), 442-3.
21. *Mechanics' Magazine*, (London) I, 178-191 (November 15, 1823).
22. J. Dallas, *A Lecture on the Aims and Usefulness of Mechanics' Institutes* (Barrie, 1865), 10.
23. Public Archives of Canada, John S. Thompson Papers, An Opening Address Delivered at the First Meeting of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute, on Wednesday January 11, 1832, by Joseph Howe.
24. Rev. J.C. Galloway, *The Claims of Mechanics' Institutes, &c* (St. John, N.B.: Robert Shives, 1844), 7.
25. *Ibid.*, 12, 11, 10.
26. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax Mechanics' Institute, Manuscript Journal of Minutes, January 10, 1832.
27. Toronto Mechanics' Institute. Minutes. December 5, 1848, in Foster Vernon, "The Development of Adult Education in Ontario, 1790-1900", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1969, 284.
28. Rev. Henry Scadding, *Memoirs of Four Decades in York* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Company, 1884), 122; and Foster Vernon. loc.cit.186.
29. See William Kilbourn, *The Firebrand* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1956).
30. Margaret Fairley (ed.), *The Selected Writings of William Lyon Mackenzie, 1824-1837* (Toronto: O.U.P., 1960), 68ff. The proposals for York Mechanics' Institute are to be found in the *Colonial Advocate*, December 9, 1830; and for the Literary and Philosophical Society of Upper Canada, on February 3, 1831. As early as July 12, 1827, the *Colonial Advocate* contained his offer to act as unpaid agent for the publications of the (London) Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.
31. See Patrick Keane, "George R. Young and Comparative Adult Education" in *Journal of Education* (Halifax, N.S.) Sixth Series, Vol. I, No. 2 (Winter 1973-74), 38-44.
32. Mabel Tylecote, *The Mechanics' Institute of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), 76.
33. Atwater Library of Mechanics' Institute of Montreal (Montreal, 1973), 9.
34. John P. Martin, *The Story of Dartmouth* (Dartmouth: Atlantic Print, 1957), 274.
35. Public Archives of Canada, John S. Thompson Papers. Annual Report of Halifax Mechanics' Institute, N.S. May 1842.
36. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax Mechanics' Institute, Journal of Minutes, June 7, 1846; June 17, 1846.
37. Foster Vernon, loc.cit. 304, 307, 455-458.
38. Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861) (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1969), Ch. XII, Dullborough Mechanics' Institution.
39. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854), (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1934), passim.
e.g. Mr. Gradgrind says "Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the mind of reasoning animals upon facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them."(1).
40. Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), I, 464.
41. J.W. Hudson, *The History of Adult Education &c* (London: Longman, 1851), 84.
42. See Patrick Keane, "Joseph Howe and Adult Education", *Acadiensis* III No. 1 (Autumn, 1973), 35-49.

43. Province of Canada, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture* (1858), Appendix No. 45.
44. Province of Canada, Board of Arts and Manufactures, *Journal* 11 (July 1862), 185
45. *Ibid.*, (February, 1864), 33.
46. Dr. S.D. May, *Special Report to the Minister of Education on the Mechanics' Institutes* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1881), 10.
47. *Ibid.*, 11.
48. Ontario Legislative Assembly, Sessional Paper No. 12, *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture and Arts . . . for the year 1868*, VII.
49. May, *Special Report*, 66.
50. *Ibid.*, 63.
51. *Ibid.*, 66.
52. *Ibid.*, 43.
53. Samuel Thompson, *Reminiscences of a Canadian Pioneer for the Last Fifty Years* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1884), 381.
54. Toronto Mechanics' Institute, Annual Report for the Year 1880. Much reference material on this institute is to be found in its lineal descendant, Toronto Public Library.
55. Ontario Legislative Assembly, Sessional Paper No. 12, op.cit. VII.
56. May, *Special Report*, 8.
57. Ontario Legislative Assembly, Sessional Paper No. 12. op.cit., Appendix E, 10.
58. Ontario Legislative Assembly, *Annual Reports of the Minister of Education, 1880-1895*.
59. May, *Special Report*, 66-67.
60. Otto Klotz, *A Review of the Special Report of the Minister of Education on the Mechanics' Institutes* (Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1881), 4.
61. See, for example, John F.C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790-1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961); Tylecote, op. cit.; Thomas Kelly, *George Birkbeck: Pioneer of Adult Education* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1957).
62. Otto Klotz, *Review*, 3.
63. May, *Special Report*, 63.
64. Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education, *Report of the Commissioners*, 1913, Pt. IV, 2113ff. Educational Commission of Toronto.
65. On the educational role of the early YMCA, see Hudson, 201ff.
66. Phyllis R. Blakeley, *Glimpses of Halifax* (Belleville, Ontario: Mika Publishing, 1973), 126.