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SURVEYS AND SPECULATIONS, X

Social Control in Victorian Britain

By F. M. L. THOMPSON

There is nothing particularly new about the observation that the social order in Britain was subjected to immense strains by the processes of urbanization and industrialization. It threatened at times to disintegrate into anarchy through the disruption of social ties and institutions, and the emergence of frighteningly large masses of apparently masterless men. And it was transformed in the course of the nineteenth century without suffering the collapse, or revolution, which many contemporaries from right and left, from Martineau to Marx, and Eldon to Engels, had anticipated with dread or relish. Neither is there anything particularly new in observing that those who have power, authority, and influence seek to use these to protect and preserve the state of things which gives them power, and to maintain the peaceful, and preferably contented, subordination of those less comfortable than themselves. What is new is that in the last decade many social historians have approached a whole range of the activities of power-groups as exercises in devising mechanisms of social control which conditioned and manipulated the propertyless masses into accepting and operating the forms and functions of behaviour necessary to sustain the social order of an industrial society. Such efforts at social control are seen as playing an important, conceivably decisive, role in the formation and underpinning of bourgeois capitalist society. In such a view the success of social control in taming and civilizing the working classes in moulds shaped to fit the needs of bourgeois society must take its place alongside the iron disciplines of wage labour, and the coercive power of the state, as a key factor in the shaping of modern society.

In many ways this is a curious view, placing the working classes perpetually on the receiving end of outside forces and influences, and portraying them as so much putty in the hands of a masterful and scheming bourgeoisie, a remote and powerful state, and a set of technological imperatives. It allows little for the possibility that the working classes themselves generated their own values and attitudes suited to the requirements of life in an industrial society, and imposed their own forms on middle-class institutions. The tables might be turned on

embourgeoisement by social control by giving due weight to the autonomous development of working-class culture. Nevertheless, the recent flow of essays on social control from social historians, culminating in the publication of two volumes of papers devoted to the topic, has attained such proportions that it is opportune to review the claims made for the centrality of this concept for understanding the nineteenth century, and at the same time to offer some signposts towards a more tenable overall interpretation of the process of social transformation.¹ This article, therefore, attempts to flavour a critical appraisal of a body of recent literature on social control with occasional more general pronouncements, whose *ex cathedra* character will, no doubt, provoke varying amounts of apoplexy and rebuttal.

I

The concept of social control has leapt somewhat abruptly to prominence, eagerly and almost greedily adopted by historians anxious to escape from the "poverty of empiricism" and set their particular findings in a theoretical framework. In 1977 A. P. Donajgrodzki could write that "the concept of social control will be unfamiliar to many historians", but a couple of years later the phrase is almost on every historian's lips.² The frequency of its use, however, has not contributed a great deal to its precise definition, and acceptance, as an analytical tool. It is generally used to denote the imposition of opinions and habits by one class upon another; but it is not very clear whether this is a matter of the intentions of policy-makers, moralisers, and organizers of social agencies regardless of the practical efficacy of their efforts; whether control mechanisms, like bits of engineering machinery, are historically significant in the main only when they can be shown to have worked; whether a desire to legitimate authority, and ensure that the desired behaviour is subsequently willingly given without fear of sanctions, is a necessary ingredient of social control; whether the unintended results of economic, political, and legal systems, the behavioural side-effects, for example, of wage-earning, job discipline, or administrative arrangements, are part of the concept; and whether the line at which socialization ends and social control begins can be at all firmly drawn.

The last difficulty may be taken first, since it is apparently a minor one. Socialization concerns individuals, particularly newcomers to social groups, whether children or new recruits, and is the process whereby people learn the rules and practices of their group, and the expected and accepted forms of behaving are transmitted. Social control, although some sociologists have developed the concept to refer to the capacity of a social group to regulate itself and induce conformity to its own standards, is generally used, by historians at least, in the context of inter-class relations.³ This seems clear enough: in the one case a group or class devises its own means for communicating and instilling its own *mores* on its own members through the family, schools, peer groups, the sanctions of its own public opinion, and so on; in the other case a group or class

¹ A. P. Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1977); Phillip McCann, ed. *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century* (1977).

² Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control*, p. 9.

³ H. Brown, *Socialisation* (Open University, 1975), p. 16; Robert Colls, "'Oh Happy English Children!': Coal, Class, and Education in the North-East", *Past and Present*, 73 (1976), p. 75 n. 3.

imposes its notions of what are suitable habits and attitudes for another class upon that class, also by means of schools, education, and the sanctions of opinion. Unfortunately, the concepts become totally confused when, for example, we pick up an otherwise most interesting and stimulating book with the title *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century* and find that it is about education “in schools provided ‘from above’ for the instruction of working-class children”, which is not surprising, and tackles “the question of who guides, modifies or controls the behaviour of whom and for what purpose”, which sounds suspiciously like a social controller’s question. When it emerges that the essays in this collection raise the issue of “the degree to which popular education operated as an agency of political socialization rather than as a transmitter of literacy, skills and knowledge, and the function of religion, political economy and authoritarian ideologies in this process”, it seems obvious that the book really is about education as a form of social control, or that socialization and social control are seen as interchangeable terms.⁴

The subject of the editor’s own essay in this volume, “Popular Education, Socialization, and Social Control: Spitalfields, 1812–24”, suggests that the two concepts are intended to remain distinguishable. One way out of the problem would be to argue that what was an exercise of social control in one generation, the imposition by middle-class philanthropists and educators on the children of the poor of habits of submission, deference, orderliness, punctuality, respect for property, and other desirable props of social stability, became part of the internal socialization processes of the working class in the next generation as successfully indoctrinated children became parents passing on these norms to their own children, as grafts which had firmly taken on the stock of working-class culture. The mechanisms for producing Gramsci’s “bourgeois hegemony” presumably work in some such way.⁵ Another way would be to regard class divisions in society as essentially irrelevant in this context. Thus, adopting a paternalist standpoint, it might be argued that society was like one big family which could be made into a happy family by those of superior wealth and intelligence guiding the child-like poor, deciding what were the “anti-social” characteristics of the poor when left to their own devices and what were the “social” virtues which should be imparted to them. In this view ruling class educators were simply acting as the elders of one vast tribe, as the tutors and prefects teaching the rules of living in society. This highly conservative route, which manages to present controllers as no more than socializers, at the expense of ignoring the basic facts of class differences, is, however, not one favoured by any of the social control historians; and it leads back to an abandoned sociological position that socialization is a neutral concept concerned with the objective needs of society to guide, restrain, and control its members so that they observe generally accepted conventions in thought and behaviour.

Neither route is taken in the interpretation of the launching of schools for the poor of Spitalfields. To be sure, McCann presents abundant evidence, which can readily be accepted as convincing, that the upper and middle classes of early nineteenth-century Spitalfields sensed a mounting threat to order and stability from the great upsurge in the numbers of the poor, which had swamped the

⁴ McCann, ed. *Popular Education*, pp. xi–xii.

⁵ A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971).

traditional agencies, of church and charity school, for maintaining quiet and orderly habits. The result was that apparently wild hordes of children roamed the streets, "filthy and very ragged . . . rude and unmannerly in the extreme, being under no sort of control", as one parson described them.⁶ Bereft of the influence of working parents, they were suspected of being vicious little heathens, lying, stealing, and being sexually precocious as well as dirty, and only too likely to grow up into dangerous characters. Whether this was all there was to be said about the characters of the Spitalfields children, and whether they developed any rules and conventions of their own in their street life, no one troubled to enquire. To the reformers it was obvious that the situation called for urgent action to eradicate anti-social tendencies and breed respect for law and order, other people, and other people's property. In other words, they perceived the problem as one of socializing the masses, who in the absence of proper guidance and training were liable to destroy any social order. The means adopted for coping with this, however, were explicitly those of social control: to provide schools controlled by religious bodies—whether Dissenting or Anglican made little difference in this context, although there were significant denominational differences in the ways in which the message was put across—which would instruct children "in the principles of piety and virtue; in the necessity of honesty, veracity, and sobriety; and of having them at the same time inured to habits of subordination, industry, and cleanliness".⁷ The aim was to produce children, and thus adults, who would make well-behaved members of the community; good behaviour meant that they should be properly equipped in morals, manners, and thoughts for a submissive, obedient, and inferior role in society, conditioned not to challenge or disturb the position and authority of their superiors.

The motives of these middle-class educators can hardly be doubted; their success is another matter. McCann shows that while a considerable proportion of the district's working-class parents did send their children to the religious schools, there was active rejection of them by the poorest, and a very strong preference for independent, purely utilitarian and commercial, schools on the part of the better-paid workers. So much was this so that it is quite possible that the private sector of dame and day schools for the working classes, providing literacy without preaching and moralising, had as many children as the "public" sector of the religious societies' schools, perhaps more.⁸ Moreover, there is more than a suggestion that many of the parents and children who were in contact with or

⁶ The Revd Joshua King, Bethnal Green, 1816, quoted by Phillip McCann, 'Popular Education, Socialization, and Social Control: Spitalfields, 1812-24', in *Popular Education*, p. 5. The argument of this chapter is condensed in this paragraph.

⁷ Quoted *ibid.* p. 12, referring to a Lancasterian school under Quaker patronage.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 30 and n. 175, referring to the 1820s and 1830s. The high demand of the working classes for private, fee-paying education, even though the weekly cost was two or three times greater than that of "public" voluntary society schools (which sometimes provided free education for the poorest) is a major part of Prof. E. G. West's thesis in 'Resource Allocation and Growth in Early Nineteenth-Century British Education', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. XXIII (1970), pp. 68-95 and in his book, *Education and the Industrial Revolution* (1975). But see J. S. Hurt, 'Professor West on Early Nineteenth-Century Education', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. XXIV (1971), pp. 624-32 and West's rejoinder, *ibid.* pp. 633-42 for further discussion of the relevant educational statistics. West, 'Literacy and the Industrial Revolution,' *ibid.* XXXI (1978), pp. 369-83 bears indirectly on the same issue; and Richard Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge": Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790-1848', in John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson, eds. *Working-Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory* (1979), discusses the radical "alternative" to "provided" education.

attended the "public" day schools were astutely discriminating in their responses to the experience, accepting the instruction in basic literacy and any other useful knowledge which might be offered, and rejecting the moral and controlling purposes by simply allowing the attempts at indoctrination in the ideology of submission to pass over their heads or run like water off a duck's back.⁹

All this forms a familiar pattern in the analysis of educational history, and indeed more generally in the whole social control approach. A small minority of active educators, reformers, philanthropists, and other do-gooders perceive their task as a disinterested mission to civilize the ignorant and unruly. What they see as transparently necessary works of socialization to produce a better society for all, which it is self-evident are in the general interest, they propose to conduct by social controls that impose their views on other classes. In the terminology now fashionable, socialization becomes an internal rationalization by a sub-group of self-appointed guardians of society of their desire to impose social controls that would uphold a particular form of social order based on a particular class structure, not some universal social order. The social controllers may propose what they wish, and if they command the necessary resources of money, influence, and authority they may set up their institutions, services, or laws; ultimately, however, it is the intended objects of control who dispose, by their responses to what is thrust at them, by accepting, rejecting, absorbing, adapting, distorting, or countering the wares on display. Without investigating these responses it is impossible to say how important social control agencies were in the general development of nineteenth-century society, although it may be possible to say that the desire to establish such agencies motivated a number of individuals. It may well be that what were intended as controlling agencies produced incidental effects which most people would regard as beneficial, while at the same time failing in their ostensible purpose. This is one of the conclusions to be drawn from the Spitalfields study, and it is reinforced by Dr Goldstrom's analysis of the growing secularization of the content of the education given in the voluntary societies' "public" schools between 1830 and 1860. Obligated by economic and social pressures to reduce their emphasis on moral and religious instruction and increase their provision of directly useful teaching of elementary numeracy and everyday economics, in order to retain their pupils and the approval of the inspectorate, these schools are judged by Goldstrom to have largely "failed in what they set out to do" in using education to foster church attendance, reduce crime, and curb strikes and riots as part of a general aim of creating a contented industrial labour force. Rather, they "unwittingly contributed in a rather more material way to the well-being of society" by helping in the spread of literacy.¹⁰ In this view social control was practically an outright failure, but its pursuit unconsciously brought social improvement. But since these "public" schools were by no means the only, and perhaps not the single most important, agency in the spread of literacy, even this incidental contribution cannot be regarded as decisive.

⁹ McCann, ed. *Popular Education*, pp. 30-1. A cognate point is made about Sunday schools by T. W. Laqueur in *Religion and Responsibility: Sunday Schools and Working-Class Culture, 1780-1850* (New Haven, Conn. 1976), where he argues that after being launched as instruments of middle-class domination of the labouring poor, Sunday schools were appropriated by the working classes and incorporated into their own culture of respectability.

¹⁰ J. M. Goldstrom, 'The Content of Education and the Socialization of the Working-Class Child, 1830-60', in McCann, ed. *Popular Education*, especially pp. 106-7.

Assessment of the impact of a process such as education on its recipients is inherently extremely difficult. On the one hand, while levels of knowledge and intelligence can be tested by examinations, and were so with somewhat unjustifiable confidence in the outcome under the system of "payments by results" in mid-century, it is less easy to test or measure the characters and general outlook of those coming out of the schools. In any case schooling will have only been one influence among many—the family, home background, leisure activities with a peer group being other obvious influences—in shaping them. On the other hand, those on the receiving end of nineteenth-century popular education have left few records of their feelings on the subject. Nevertheless, studies of school attendance throw some light on the question, and tend to emphasize the comparatively short, and interrupted, periods for which individual children were exposed to the influence of schools because of the great economic and social pressures which caused irregular attendance. The need to bolster family incomes meant that many children went out to work as young as possible, and in the meantime took odd weeks and months off school for casual or seasonal jobs; while poverty frequently meant quite simply that a child did not have enough clothes to face going to school in bad weather or to face the ridicule of his fellows in the classroom. Even after attendance became universally compulsory from 1880, school attendance officers did not always enjoy the support of the magistrates if truants' parents were taken to court. For a long time there remained a minority, perhaps no more than eight per cent of the age group, found chiefly among the poorest, who stayed away from school as much as possible and probably never spent enough consecutive time in it to receive any influence beyond the sporadic confirmation of triumphant rebellion.¹¹

While severe practical limits on the effectiveness of schools as vehicles for imparting anything, whether knowledge or character, were set by attendance records, there is some evidence that parents and children involved with "public" schools not only ignored or spurned those aspects of the social disciplinary regime which they found unacceptable, but also voiced their disapproval with sufficient force to help induce the school authorities to alter their tune.¹² It begins to look very much as if the strident moralism and sense of social mission with which the religious voluntary societies approached education marked only the early part of the nineteenth century, especially the periods of acute social tension after Waterloo and in the 1830s and 1840s. This attitude culminated in Kay-Shuttleworth's advocacy, as a saviour of society and social engineer rather than as a man of religion, of the urgent necessity of "properly managed" education as a form of social control.¹³ Thereafter school administrators and managers

¹¹ Beryl Madoc-Jones, 'Patterns of Attendance and their Social Significance: Mitcham National School, 1830-9'; W. E. Marsden, 'Social Environment, School Attendance, and Educational Achievement in a Merseyside Town, 1870-1900'; and David Rubinstein, 'Socialization and the London School Board, 1870-1914: Aims, Methods, and Public Opinion', all in McCann, ed. *Popular Education*, all tackle the attendance problem. D. Rubinstein, *School Attendance in London, 1870-1904: A Social History* (Hull, 1969), considers the London case in detail. See also A. C. O. Ellis, 'Influences on School Attendance in Victorian England', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, xxi (1973), pp. 313-26 and J. S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes, 1860-1918* (1979), ch. viii, 'Unwillingly to School'.

¹² Simon Frith, 'Socialization and Rational Schooling: Elementary Education in Leeds before 1870', in McCann, ed. *Popular Education*.

¹³ Richard Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', *Past and Present*, 49 (1970), pp. 96-119; idem, 'Educating the Educators: "Experts" and the State, 1833-9', in Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control*.

modified their attitudes, and although they did not abandon the notion that they were in business to supply an education specifically appropriate for working-class children, they did adopt an increasingly low profile on its religious, moral, and disciplinary content, so that it looked less and less like an overt attempt to perpetuate and secure class domination. A group of educators may well have desired education as a form of social control, and this motive may explain in large measure the efforts which they devoted to education. Nevertheless, in the light of the widespread existence of alternative forms of schooling and education, the patchiness of school attendance, and the selective response of the clientele of the "public" schools, it is doubtful whether "education from above" ever did act as an effective agency of social control.

II

This leaves unexplained a very large area of social transformation, even if this is restricted only to matters of manners and behaviour. At some time since the early nineteenth century there has clearly been a great change in the social habits of the urban masses, and—at least until people became aware of mugging and the riskiness of some neighbourhoods in the 1970s—the towns became much less rough and disorderly, cleaner, more decorous, more predictable than they had been. The poor, although far from disappearing, were generally thought to be better behaved and less wild and dangerous in the early 1900s than they had been at the beginning of the nineteenth century. How was all this brought about? Much was the result of the work situation: of the discipline, punctuality, regularity, and routine of factory work, and indeed of non-factory work in large organizations such as the railways or the post office; and of the influence of many employers on their workforces through the services they provided outside the workplace in patronising chapels, schools, reading rooms, clubs, institutes, works' outings, not to mention factory villages.¹⁴ Much resulted from the work of larger, professional, police forces, enforcing law which in some respects at least—for example, capital offences—became less of an ass and hence more obviously to be respected by rational men. A great deal followed from economic growth, improvement in living standards, and the increasing availability of goods and services which the working classes were eager to consume provided only that they could afford them. If such eagerness requires explanation beyond the intrinsic attractiveness of the goods and services, and is not to be sought in advertising, then it might be found in the principle of emulation. The idea of emulation, with its connotations of apeing one's betters and keeping up with the Joneses, does not appeal to radical or Marxist historians, but has been enlisted to account for the spread of ideas and ethics as well as consumption habits: the self-induced socialization of ambition and aspiration.¹⁵ Something must be allowed to housing

¹⁴ E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), pp. 56-97. A most important and original treatment of the factory as the centre of local communities, with the patriarchal authority of the factory master as their focus, is given by Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Factory North of England in the second half of the Nineteenth Century* (1980). Joyce summarized some of his arguments in a paper on 'Work and Social Control' given to a colloquium on Social Control in Nineteenth-Century Britain held in the Institute of Historical Research, London, in 1979, and to be reported in *Social History*.

¹⁵ Emulation is one of the key explanatory factors deployed by Harold Perkin in *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880* (1969).

improvements, civic improvements, and public health measures; something to state action, for although positive welfare policies came only at or after the end of the Victorian era, poor law rules and practices had a profound effect on working-class attitudes as goads to maintain respectability and avoid the stigma of the workhouse; and, above all, something to self-respect, self-help, and self-discipline—the autonomous or independent evolution of working-class cultures.

Those who have looked closely at popular culture, and enlarged our perspectives through the cultivation of “history from below”, have been chiefly impressed by the high survival value of traditional habits, customs, and beliefs in the face of massive environmental changes and in the teeth of condemnatory bourgeois moralising and preaching. It is, of course, salutary to be reminded of the essential conservatism of the working classes. Nevertheless, emphasis on persistent traditionalism suggests that working-class culture, if left to itself, would be purely defensive and static. It is, indeed, unwarrantably condescending to the humble and anonymous masses to suppose that they were incapable of cultural development except as a result of instruction or coercion from outside. It may well be, for example, that some or possibly many working-class children needed to be taught by middle-class schoolteachers to use toothbrushes in the early twentieth century.¹⁶ But then, the middle classes themselves had not always brushed their teeth, and toothbrushes do not just grow on trees. Cleanliness in general, however, was not necessarily simply a bourgeois habit imposed upon, or taught to, the working classes. It was also a habit which some working-class groups were perfectly capable of discovering for themselves and valuing in its own right as one of the attributes of decent and respectable living. There is plenty of evidence that the respectable working classes wished to be respectable not because some middle-class pundit told them to be so, but because they liked it and disapproved of shiftless and sluttish ways. Similarly, the working classes did not need to be told by the middle class that family life was important, that honest toil was better than loafing, or that saving for a rainy day was sensible. Certainly, some middle-class commentators and reformers approved of the family, hard work, and thrift, and made great efforts to promote these things. This does little more than suggest a coincidence of purpose and of values on the part of some of the bourgeoisie and some of the working classes. It does not show that these values, and the institutions that embodied them, such as burial clubs and friendly societies, were alien imports imposed on an unimaginative or reluctant working class. On the contrary, the working class was eminently capable of generating its own cultural evolution and development in response to aspirations and needs experienced by different groups within it. Insofar as members of the middle class took up and advocated, in modified forms, things which the working classes themselves desired and pioneered, social control devices might turn out to have been imposed by the working classes on the bourgeoisie. From a late twentieth-century perspective there is as much to be said for the view that everyone has adopted popular cultural values as for the view that everyone has been embourgeoisied.

This plurality of factors which contributed to the development of the particular social order of early twentieth-century Britain seems to leave little

¹⁶ Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes*, p. 142.

room for agencies of social control. Quite apart from the important strand of internally-generated working-class developments, most of these external factors are by definition and common sense excluded from the concept of social control, which has at its heart the assumption "that social order is maintained not only, or even mainly, by legal systems, police forces, and prisons".¹⁷ It is true that some historians have attempted to look at the police through social control spectacles. But on the whole it is misguided if not myopic to try to see the apparatus of law enforcement and its sanctions of force, punishment, and prison, in the same light as the not overtly coercive instruments of public opinion, suggestion, social religion, art, belief, ceremony and ritual, education, and illusion which are generally held to be the armoury of social control precisely because they are not blunt instruments of organized force. Thus John Stevenson, paying lip service to his editor by claiming to write about "Social Control and the Prevention of Riots in England, 1789-1829",¹⁸ in fact addresses himself to the problem of how order was maintained through troubled times without any proper professional police force, and answers it by producing interesting evidence of the effectiveness of the traditional arms of the law in keeping the peace. When the meat of the argument is about the deployment of active magistrates, constables, special constables, foot patrols, and the generally restrained use of the militia, volunteers, and regular troops as forces of last resort, it appears that the opening invocation of "the survival of traditional forms of social control" is not far removed from being a ritual and meaningless incantation.¹⁹ Police forces, once established in town and countryside between 1829 and the 1850s, were rather more than a mere law enforcement agency, keeping the peace and protecting persons and property. The simple fact of their presence no doubt encouraged more lawful behaviour on the part of the vast majority who never came in direct contact with a policeman, not only because of fear of the consequences, and increased chances of being caught out in wrong-doing, but also through the reinforcement of law-abiding tendencies provided by the assurance of a police presence in the background which would take care of the baddies. Beyond this general influence the police had the power to exert more specific, autonomous, influences in shaping social habits, since some of the laws which they enforced were vague and generic, allowing in practice considerable discretion in their interpretation. Thus the police could in effect decide what constituted a public nuisance, a disorder, or a threat to the public peace, and several writers have noticed the great pressure which the police brought to bear on popular amusements and sports such as prizefighting, or footracing in the streets, that were not in themselves illegal.²⁰

¹⁷ Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control*, p. 9.

¹⁸ John Stevenson, 'Social Control and the Prevention of Riots in England, 1789-1829', in *ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*. p. 27. This bald summary does less than justice to Stevenson's chapter, which includes several pages on the role of charity as a palliative for discontent and incipient disorder. Soup kitchens, and the good example set by well-publicized upper-class belt tightening, no doubt made a contribution to social peace. Their existence in this period has been noticed before; and the identification of the social control elements in charitable works requires a more sophisticated analysis than is in Stevenson's brief.

²⁰ R. D. Storch, 'The Plague of Blue Locusts. Police Reform and Popular Resistance in Northern England, 1840-57', *International Review of Social History*, xx (1975), pp. 61-90; *idem*, 'The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850-80', *Journal of Social History*, ix (1976), pp. 481-509; *idem*, 'The Problem of Working-Class Leisure. Some Roots of Middle-Class Moral Reform in the Industrial North, 1825-50', in Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control*. Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830-85* (1978), pp. 24-5, 83-4, 132-3.

The professional interest of the police in keeping order and hence in avoiding the provocation of disorder, and in channelling popular energies and exuberance into 'harmless' outlets, could also lead to the relaxation and liberalization of attitudes. The point has been well illustrated in relation to fairs and wakes, which from early in the eighteenth century had steadily decreasing trading and increasing fun and festival functions. During the eighteenth century local magistrates in many parts of the country strove to suppress, restrict, or control fairs, especially unchartered ones. By the early nineteenth century these policing efforts had the support of a considerable body of middle-class opinion, which viewed fairs as rough and disorderly assemblies which attracted the worst characters—thieves, pickpockets, swindlers, tarts, and idle rogues—and were breeding grounds of rowdiness, vice, immorality, and drunkenness which at best were an annoyance to respectable citizens and at worst possible centres of subversion. The suppression movement gathered way in the 1820s, but was then checked by the confidence of the new professional police that they were quite capable of keeping these popular gatherings under control and that there was no need "to interfere with these harmless recreations of the people at the proper seasons". The police attitude was countered by a renewed moral crusade in the 1850s and 1860s against the dissolute and immoral nature of fairs, and despite reiterated police statements that fairs were reasonably regulated and caused no special problems of disorder or disturbance, and that there was no cause to spoil the enjoyments of the people, magistrates and Home Office were generally persuaded by the moral arguments and pressure for suppression. It was only in the 1880s that the Home Office decided that far from being dangerous orgies, fairs were "innocent amusements of the poorer classes" and were not to be discontinued merely because no longer needed for business, or because they gave some trouble to the police, thus supporting a police view that well-conducted fairs helped the preservation of order by keeping people happy and by discouraging unsupervised and potentially mischievous gatherings.²¹

The history of the treatment of fairs is interesting in showing that there was a body of respectable, mainly middle-class, opinion expressing strong disapproval and pressing for suppression, which persisted from the eighteenth century at least until the 1880s, and which may be construed as seeking to impose a social control on one of the pleasures of the masses under the pretext of cleaning up petty crime and rather trivial disorders. At times this opinion was shared by authority, in the shape of the local magistracy, central government, and Parliament, and action followed in the 1820s. At other times, from the 1840s to the 1870s, the opinion was opposed by one part of authority, the police, but tolerated in a lukewarm way out of political calculation by another part of authority, the Home Office and Parliament, and the action was mixed, with some further suppressions and some survivals in the face of local anti-fair petitions. Finally, from the 1880s, the separate branches of authority, in the shape of Home Office, Parliament, and police, united in a tolerant, non-interfering, attitude and successfully ignored any surviving unofficial pressure for the abolition of fairs. The reasons for the police line on this seem quite straightforward: they were in business to keep order and prevent situations arising which might cause disorder, and it did not help to

²¹ Hugh Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs: A Case Study in the Social Control of Leisure', in Donajdzki, ed. *Social Control, Bailey, Leisure and Class*, pp. 20-2, 86-7.

antagonize any sections of the public by needless busy-bodying. Some people were in favour of fairs and some were against them, just as some were in favour of drink, others against, some tolerated gambling, others disapproved, some enjoyed horse racing, others held it to be the work of the Devil. Where there was a law on the matter—on opening hours or on off-course betting—the police enforced it; otherwise they heeded order-keeping, not moral, considerations in their actions. It is difficult to see that anything is added to the understanding of police behaviour by saying that they were exercising a form of social control, unless it is argued that all actions to maintain order, and all laws, are forms of social control imposed by those with power and authority on those without: which widens the concept of social control to embrace precisely those instruments of maintaining the social order which it was initially designed to exclude, and makes the concept so general as to be valueless.

If social control is used simply as another name for law and order it is scarcely a great leap forward. If its application is restricted to efforts which induced people to behave willingly and “voluntarily” in ways that the guardians of law and order deemed conducive to law and order, then the concept becomes meaningful. Most people, in the twentieth century, do not wish to be cruel to children or animals and strongly disapprove of such cruelty, and this is in marked contrast to ordinary behaviour in the early nineteenth century. The change in attitudes is due in large measure to the operation of laws, and the activities of energetic humanitarian pressure groups, no doubt mainly middle-class in composition, in the nineteenth century.²² The process, however, smacks more of the reformation of the manners of the whole of society, through a lead from minority groups, than of the action of a dominant class contributing to the preservation of its own superior position in the social structure: socialization rather than social control, and socialization which needed to alter the habits of large sections of the upper and middle classes along the way. Law in general is designed to affect conduct, and either expresses existing prejudices and conventions or achieves its effects through fear of the consequences of law-breaking. Some laws, however, express the principles of minority reforming groups—religious activists, humanitarians, liberal intelligentsia—and succeed in altering, in time, the majority’s “ingrained” notions of right and wrong. It would be illuminating to identify and analyze this category of laws which have radically altered social habits, over the last century and a half; no one has yet done so, but the group would most likely be found to consist of laws concerning the treatment of weak or underprivileged groups, women, children, animals, possibly religious and racial minorities, laws with no clear class basis or class overtones.

None of this is to deny that the arm of the law, in the nineteenth century, fell almost entirely on the shoulders of the lower orders; it has only been in the present century, with motor cars, driving and traffic offences, that otherwise respectable middle-class citizens have become at all accustomed to being confronted by the police. The nineteenth-century police, therefore, may well have been perceived by the working classes as agents of the propertied classes; this made the police part of a conflict situation, an authority respected because of the physical force behind it rather than accepted as part of society’s machinery of

²² Brian Harrison, ‘Animals and the State in Nineteenth-Century England’, *English Historical Review*, LXXXVIII (1973), pp. 786-820.

self-discipline. In the particular case of the fairs, indeed, the police can be portrayed as allies of the fairground operators, rather than as defenders of the (properly regulated) amusements of the poor against the kill-joys. From the 1840s onwards fairs became increasingly commercialized. Swings and roundabouts were mechanized, and entertainment as a business produced showmen with a stake in the capital and goodwill of their enterprises, and an interest in co-operating with the police so that there would be reasonably well-behaved crowds of customers to trade with, and so that the continued existence of their places of business would not be put in jeopardy.²³ Commercial enterprise, and the necessary dependence of any business on forms of regularity and order, played a large part in altering the character of fairground behaviour, and in working the passage of fairs to a degree of tolerated and pleasurably naughty acceptability. Some puritans continued to object, and if they were the quintessential social controllers, who thought that coconut shies, fat ladies, and roundabouts were as immoral, depraved, and mindless as the brawls and rowdiness of earlier fairs, then they had conspicuously failed.

III

Social historians have in recent years begun cultivating the whole field of the history of leisure with zest.²⁴ On the whole they have come back from the pubs and clubs, the music halls, sportsgrounds, and holiday resorts with the message that the commercialization of leisure and the growth of an entertainment industry did more to transform leisure behaviour than all the efforts of reforming groups to substitute forms of approved rational recreation for what they saw as the licentious, abandoned, drunken, brutal, futile, degenerate, or even subversive forms of traditional popular amusements. There were of course many such efforts, some by organized movements, some by movements of opinion in the upper and middle classes operating through patronage, the local press, and local authorities, designed to control, regulate, or suppress all manner of things from drink to Saint Monday, from music halls to Whitsun. It is ironical that so many Victorians, whose ruling ideology is supposed to have been dedicated to the pursuit of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, should have spent so much time trying to throttle the happiness of the people. This attitude was rationalized by the conviction that the untutored and unguided masses sought happiness in ways which were short-sighted and illusory, giving fleeting gratification to base senses while doing material and moral harm to individual and family welfare. If reformers were not against leisure altogether, holding that it was an unjustifiable diversion from the duties of work, thrift, and church-going, they sought to ensure that it was used in uplifting and improving ways, and that the people should learn to find happiness in orderly, healthy, rational recreations. The motives of teetotallers and temperance reformers, of those who sought to clean up the music halls, of those who campaigned to provide public parks, libraries, reading rooms, working men's clubs, and organized games, were

²³ Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs', pp. 163, 179-80.

²⁴ The most recent work is Bailey, *Leisure and Class*. This provides both a convenient and critical synthesis of work which has been done on the history of leisure, and draws on much original research on Bolton, Lancashire. Other general treatments are H. E. Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (1976), and J. Walvin, *Leisure and Society, 1830-1950* (1978).

in large part those of social controllers consciously seeking to shape the tastes and habits of the working classes. Such efforts notched up some successes. Whitsun withered as a popular festival, stripped of its gentry patronage and shorn of its exuberant irreverence; morris-dancing, once the centre of popular feasting, drinking, and much chasing of animals or girls, went the same way when respectable patrons began to see such junketings as orgies, only to be revived towards the end of the century by earnest intellectuals who had discovered a mission to preserve folk customs, not to restore licence.²⁵ Hosts of traditional sports vanished under frowns of disapproval as well as from outright suppression. Those which came to be widely regarded as particularly cruel and vicious, such as cockfighting and ratting, were banished from the public eye and by the second half of the century survived only in a small underground trickle. Those which were ridiculed as boorish and uncivilized rather than condemned as directly corrupting and depraved, like the annual rough-houses between rival villages that constituted many traditional football contests, were smoothed away into the formalized substitutes of organized team games.

The rise of organized sport, especially from the late 1860s onwards, exercised a profound influence on popular leisure habits, but it would be a mistake to attribute this influence wholly, or even largely, to middle-class reforming or controlling exertions. Soccer became the ruling passion of the working classes of northern and midland towns, and of London, surpassing cricket, horse racing, or rugby in its popularity, although these too had large followings from all classes. It is perfectly true that soccer was vigorously promoted as a leading instrument of muscular Christianity which would impart moral and social virtues of fair play, respect for rules, and appreciation of the team spirit; that many leading clubs of today originated as church or chapel teams; and that the rules and codes of conduct of the game were elaborated and standardized by essentially middle-class football authorities. Nevertheless, the middle-class reformist influence was a thin veneer, and the working classes rapidly appropriated the newly codified game—as partisan supporters rather than as players—as an important part of their own self-determined culture. So much was this so that by the 1890s it was not uncommon for middle-class observers to dismiss soccer as a vulgar working-class sport marked by blind partisanship, hooliganism, abuse of referees, and other such “unsporting” features. Indeed, it became so strongly stamped as a working-class game that it was not until the 1960s that middle-class intellectuals and professional people cared to confess that they were soccer fans. The working classes had accepted the outward forms of what may have been intended by reformers as a social control device, and supplied their own lively, colourful, and unrestrained content.²⁶ It was a working-class takeover that paralleled their reception of ‘public’ education, and which was strongly assisted by the commercialization of the game through the growth of large football grounds, the rise of professional, paid players, and the commercial expression of local loyalties in caps, scarves, and favours in the team colours.

If football became an important focus of local communities, and going to matches an essential ingredient of working-class life styles, the public house was,

²⁵ A. Howkins, *Whitsun in Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire* (1973).

²⁶ Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, pp. 136–46. See also P. M. Young, *A History of British Football* (1968), and J. Walvin, *The People's Game: A Social History of British Football* (1975).

and remained, the centre of much of working-class culture. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the public house had a virtual monopoly as a meeting place for working people—for relaxation, for enjoying one another's company, for entertainment, for informal or organized discussion and debate, for transacting the business of burial clubs, friendly societies, and trade unions, and for getting news of jobs—since there were no alternatives to use as public rooms. The social functions of the pub were founded on and lubricated by drink. Both the drink, or at any rate excess of it, and the assembly of potentially disorderly or subversive drinkers, had been looked on apprehensively by authority and respectable opinion ever since the public house appeared in the later sixteenth century as an institutional consequence of the long-keeping qualities of the new brew, hopped beer. It was an early seventeenth-century view which regarded pubs as "... receptacles for knaves and harlots, the robbers' council chamber . . . the drunkards' academy, the thieves' sanctuary. Here you are deprived of the obedience of your sons [and] of the duty of your servants."²⁷ The nineteenth-century attack on pubs as centres of a great underworld of sex, indecency, depravity, crime, cock-fighting, gambling, plotting, and subversion, was therefore an expression of a highly traditional attitude. It was, to be sure, a strikingly vocal and articulate expression, and moreover one which was orchestrated by energetic evangelical and dissenting hands into the nationwide temperance movement, a pressure group of whose political importance governments, particularly Liberal governments from 1868 onwards, were obliged to take notice. Temperance enjoyed some official successes, although the libertarian period of 'free trade in beer' which followed the 1830 Beer Act should be contrasted with the tight control over the granting of licences to sell beer, as well as wine and spirits, which followed the 1872 Licensing Act. The most profound effect on the nation's drinking habits and hence on its social life stemmed, however, from the imposition of afternoon closing times on all drink outlets, and these were instituted under D.O.R.A. regulations during the First World War ostensibly in order to increase war production by reducing drunkenness and not for temperance reasons. Until 1872 the law permitted Englishmen to drink round the clock so long as they could find publicans willing to remain open, and before 1914 the pubs were open from 5 a.m. until after midnight in London, and from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. in the provinces, which allowed a man what we might regard as very civilized drinking times and temperance reformers regarded as a standing, and irremovable, reproach to the country's reputation and an open condonation of debauchery. Certainly, a contribution to the joyless image of the English Sunday, narrowly restricted Sunday opening hours, does date at least from the 1840s; but this was a product of general Sabbatarianism, a force widely diffused among all religious denominations, not of the temperance advocates in particular.²⁸

There were several unofficial, local successes for the temperance cause, particularly when a powerful ground landlord insisted that alcohol, or at any rate its public sale and consumption, should be excluded from his urban estate—as

²⁷ I owe this reference—from the Grosvenor MS, 1625—to an unpublished article by P. Lake and R. Cust, 'Sir Richard Grosvenor and the Rhetoric of Magistracy'.

²⁸ The standard work is Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-72* (1971).

the Dukes of Bedford did in Bloomsbury, the Duke of Westminster in Belgravia, or the Dean and Chapter of Westminster in their part of Hampstead. Such restrictive estate development policies might indeed be construed as measures of social control, but they were undertaken to preserve the social standing, respectability, and hence the property values of residential neighbourhoods as much as out of any sense of moral commitment.²⁹ The overall impact of efforts aimed directly at the curtailment of the number and accessibility of beerhouses and pubs was, however, rather limited. Most temperance reformers looked for better results from the provision of teetotal substitute meeting places and social centres which would lead the masses to a willing and joyful rejection of the demon drink. Clubs and societies for working men were launched with this end in view, under middle-class patronage, and by the 1860s a whole network of working men's clubs, loosely associated through the Working Men's Club and Institute Union, was coming into existence. By the 1880s a working men's club was a normal feature of town life, and similar institutions were starting to appear in the villages to provide agricultural workers with some alternative to the beerhouse. Club life, a spartan, bare-bench, distant echo of London gentlemen's clubs, was accepted into working-class culture, but it was accepted on working-class terms. It was perhaps no more than a move into separate premises of the informal, but nonetheless regular, meetings of like-minded friends which were embryonic clubs in the pubs. No bourgeois lesson was required to teach working men the benefits and pleasures of association. Here was another take-over of the works of middle-class benefactors and would-be social controllers. The working men could put the physical assets of premises, rooms, and furniture to good use; on the whole they soon elbowed aside the original patrons, took over club management themselves, and introduced the sale of beer without which a club seldom flourished. They laid the foundations for the later growth of working men's clubs as co-operatively run social centres and, by the 1950s, vigorous centres of a popular, post-music hall, brand of floor shows and bawdy entertainment.³⁰

In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, it was the music hall itself which acted as the chief counter-attraction to the pub as the centre around which popular culture revolved, so that by 1892 it could be claimed that "it is to the music halls that the vast body of working people look for recreation and entertainment".³¹ This was a straightforward commercial development, the original music hall proprietors of the 1850s coming from the ranks of publicans and seeing the profitable possibilities of removing the informal audience-generated singing and entertainment from the "free-and-easy" of the public house, and professionalizing it in the separate commercial establishment of the music hall. Drink and entertainment were thus, to a considerable extent,

²⁹ Donald J. Olsen, *Town Planning in London, the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New Haven, Conn. 1964), examines the Bloomsbury estate. The Grosvenors adopted a restrictive attitude towards pubs from the 1860s, as and when redevelopment in Belgravia and Pimlico offered opportunities: I owe this information to M. J. Hazelton-Swales, whose University of London Ph.D. thesis on the Grosvenors and the Development of Belgravia and Pimlico will shortly be completed. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners similarly adopted a restrictive policy, late in the century, long after most development had already been completed on the Dean and Chapter of Westminster's Belsize estate: Church Commissioners' MS, File 33405, correspondence of 18 July, 14 Oct. and 2 Nov. 1895, 6 May 1896.

³⁰ Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, pp. 103-23.

³¹ Quoted by Brian Harrison, 'Pubs', in H. J. Dyos and M. Wolff, eds. *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (1973), I, p. 175.

divorced; but it was not the handiwork of temperance reformers, many of whom were scarcely less disapproving of the salaciousness of music hall performances than of drink itself.³² The arbiters of popular taste were those who catered for popular demand and, through the patter of the show business they provided, helped to create it. The self-appointed social controllers who denounced music halls for their indecency, vulgarity, and inanity, and those who felt the can-can shaking the moral order of society to its foundations, were nowhere in the running. Neither temperance reformers nor their allies, the moral censorship lobby, succeeded in making much impression on popular enjoyments; if the music halls, despite the can-can, moderated their ribaldry and bawdiness a little by the 1890s, this was the result of business calculation by managers with increasingly large investments to protect. It would be misleading, however, to regard this as a working-class rebuff of middle-class attempts to impose bourgeois standards of propriety. Temperance, sobriety, and decency were advocated by sections of the working class—and not merely by the labour aristocracy at that—as part of the route to self-improvement, self-respect, and a proper standing in society. And there were considerable, established, middle-class interests in brewing and the entire drink trade, as well as the newer ones in the entertainment industry, which had no sympathy with the puritanical causes. Beyond these vested interests lay a larger section of the middle class, mainly no doubt Anglican, Tory, and pseudo-aristocratic, which approved of popular drinking and jollity, albeit as part of a bread-and-circuses strategy as well as out of attachment to ideas of robust traditionalism. The lines of battle over popular enjoyments were drawn across class divisions: not middle class arrayed against working class, but puritans against indulgers, respectables against roughs. If popular leisure was enjoyed in more respectable ways in 1900 than it had been in 1800, this was more the result of the work of the entrepreneurs, and of changing ideas of what was considered respectable, than of the missionary crusades.³³

IV

When all is said, the working classes did not have a great deal of leisure time and all attempts to influence their outlook and behaviour through controlling their leisure activities were always likely to have limited effects simply because of this inherently restricted exposure. What leisure time there had been was curtailed by the steady erosion of the custom of taking Monday (Saint Monday) as a holiday—an erosion powered by the work patterns required by factory industry, and accompanied by much preaching of the virtues of the work ethic and denunciation of the demoralizing effects of irregularity at work and indiscriminate idleness.³⁴ Work was the central experience of the working classes, it occupied the major part of their lives, and it is only sensible to look for the main formative influences on working-class attitudes in the workplace. Attitudes, values, loyalties were picked up on the job, and the formative influences were those of the employer as well as fellow workers, the totality of the work environment. Where factory paternalism was strong, as it increasingly was from the 1840s onwards, an employer's influence extended far outside the mill into the

³² Ibid. I, pp. 174–5; Bailey, *Leisure and Class*, pp. 147–68.

³³ Harrison, 'Pubs', p. 181.

³⁴ Douglas A. Reid, 'The Decline of Saint Monday, 1766–1876', *Past and Present*, 71 (1976), pp. 76–101.

entire institutional structure and equipment of the local community: houses, schools, church, chapel, Sunday schools, playing fields, and (over them all) local government. It was an influence based on the reciprocal relationship of master and men, patriarch and dependants, in which the characters and responses of the dependents conditioned and limited the employer's range of action. Many employers consciously used their position to steer and control the evolution of their community's culture in some chosen direction, usually defined in ideological or religious terms; others necessarily exercised a decisive influence on the development of cultural norms without explicit intent. Either way, work may be presented as the supreme instrument of social control, manifest more as the agent of community formation than of class domination.³⁵

The difficulty with putting work back at the centre of the stage is that it steals the show from the essentially non-work agencies "from religion to family life, and including for example, leisure and recreation, education, charity and philanthropy, social work and poor relief" which the concept of social control was initially invoked to illuminate.³⁶ A further difficulty is that social historians embraced the concept precisely in order to describe and explain class responses to a society which was perceived to be falling apart in the process of urbanization and industrialization, a process in which the factory played the leading role as agent of dissolution. The second problem can be met by postulating an initial social breakdown when the traditional and largely informal, uninstitutionalized, social order mechanisms of small-scale "face-to-face" pre-industrial society were disrupted by the surge of the Industrial Revolution. This phase can be pictured as lasting from the later eighteenth century through to the 1840s, and was followed by a revival of the patriarchal authority and paternalist behaviour of the employing class, regrouped and redefined in terms of the new factory environment—a phase which in turn was drawing to a close by the 1890s with the rise of large firms lacking intimate employer-worker relations, and the increasing independence, organization, militancy, and class consciousness of the workforce. It is not a model that can easily accommodate the history of working-class movements; it places in a curious limbo the dominating, not to say domineering, authority which the early factory masters enjoyed between the 1780s and the 1840s; and it requires that factory paternalism should only have been partially effective in its nineteenth-century heyday, since it was a social regime nurturing the seeds of its own decay. It is, nevertheless, a model which accords with a commonly held mid-nineteenth century view of the social disintegration of the previous half century, characteristically expressed by a

³⁵ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*.

³⁶ Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control*, p. 9. The idea that church and chapel were agents for transmitting cultures and upholding the social order informs the work of earlier historians, certainly from Elie Halévy's work in the 1920s onwards, even if they did not use the terminology of social control. Poor relief and social policy have been the subject of contributions by Michael E. Rose, 'Rochdale Man and the Stalybridge Riot: The Relief and Control of the Unemployed during the Lancashire Cotton Famine', in Donajgrodzki, ed. *Social Control*; Roy Hay, 'Employers and Social Policy in Britain: The Evolution of Welfare Legislation, 1905-14', *Social History*, iv (1977) pp. 435-55; J. R. Hay, 'Employers' Attitudes to Social Policy and the Concept of "Social Control", 1900-20', and John Brown, '"Social Control" and the Modernization of Social Policy', both in Pat Thane, ed. *The Origins of British Social Policy* (1978). It is not easy to see that the omission of the conceptual apparatus of social control from these contributions would seriously detract from their value, for policies, by definition, are necessarily advocated or adopted in order to regulate something and to help produce some desired results.

clergyman seeking to explain the deviant moral climate of the working-class quarters of large towns: "The gradual separation of the classes which takes place in towns", he explained, meant that "whereas formerly rich and poor lived in proximity and the superior classes exercised that species of silent but very efficient control over their neighbours", this had been destroyed. "In small towns there must be a sort of natural police . . . operating upon the conduct of each individual who lives . . . under the public eye; but in a large town he lives if he chooses, in absolute obscurity."³⁷

Social control is, and always has been, exercised by those with authority, whether that authority has spiritual, military, political, legal, educational, or financial roots, since it is the interest and business of its holders to maintain and preserve the social order within which their authority exists; and it has never been exercised with unanimity and agreement among the various agencies of authority, nor with complete effectiveness, for otherwise social changes could not have occurred. But if the concept of social control, when applied to the study of history, is not to become simply another phrase for describing social history itself, then it is perhaps of most service when given a special application to periods that were felt to be ones of particularly alarming social turbulence, flux, and disintegration, such as the Industrial Revolution, and maybe also the early seventeenth century. Such an application, although it is not part of any self-denying ordinance that the practising historians have applied to themselves, makes perfectly good sense of the urgent, sometimes desperate, efforts which many evangelicals, dissenters, and social reformers made in the period roughly between the start of the French Revolution and the Great Exhibition. These were efforts to devise, publicize, and establish a variety of institutions to replace, or bring reinforcement to, what they saw as the disintegrating and collapsing traditional means of ensuring social order and stability—the family, patronage and deference, and the established Church. The favoured institutional substitutes included a professional police, a morally purified aristocracy to give a lead, the propagation of a morally rarified stereotype of family life, a reformed poor law to stiffen the moral fibre, and an efficient sanitary system; but they centred on schools, Sunday schools, a revived Church, and a vigorous chapel.

All these endeavours have long been very well known, although it may well add to our understanding of them and of their linkages to have them presented as exercises in social control. Certainly, many of the participants have been shown to have had quite explicit social control motives. When it comes to attributing unconscious and unintended social control effects to all manner of actions, policies, and institutions, however, the concept is in grave danger of running away into the sands and being used simply as an alternative way of saying that most public actions have some social effects. Moreover, when it comes to gauging the actual results of the efforts of individuals or groups who did have social controlling motives, it seems that the intended recipients picked out what they wanted from the facilities on offer, and rejected the moral or authoritarian message. It has become fashionable to speak of the embourgeoisement of the working classes in the nineteenth century, and to see the capture and subversion of the labour aristocracy by cunning middle-class manipulation as the mechanism

³⁷ *S.C. on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles* (P.P. 1852, xxiii), M. D. Hill, Q. 386.

of this process. The values and institutions of working-class culture in 1900 were indeed different from those of 1800. But they were not simply "middle-class values" which had been imposed on the workers; they were also "working-class values" developed through selection and adaptation to the changing environment, by the workers for the workers.

Investigation of the social control approach helps to stimulate a redefinition and restatement of the entire process of social transformation. This process produced in the course of the nineteenth century a social order at least roughly appropriate to an urban, industrial, capitalist society. It can be accepted that that social order, or indeed any social order, was not developed and sustained exclusively "by legal systems, police forces, and prisons", although the edifice of legal and administrative rules and sanctions is clearly not unimportant in the shaping of personal and group conduct. Authority and the legalized force on which it ultimately rested were, as always, exerted in ways intended to uphold a social fabric congenial to the holders of power, and they were concerned to induce the people to accept as legitimate the ways in which authority was exercised. That was the aim of social control. It should not be accepted, however, as the sole, or even the most important, of the non-coercive agencies in the process of social conditioning, partly because of the often yawning gap between the aims of social controllers and actual achievements; partly because many improvers and reformers were socializers rather than controllers, peddling recipes for better survival in a changing environment rather than weaving webs of subordination; and partly because there was independent, spontaneous, life in popular culture, and the working classes were a great deal more than puppets on the end of bourgeois strings. It is right that social historians should pay attention to the manipulators and educators who thought expressly in terms of the forms and institutions calculated to foster comfortable habits of obedience, docility, and conformity. But it is also right that they should pay attention to the direct impact of physical and material changes on mass behaviour, regardless of any attempted mediation by social superiors. Popular life styles, expectations, and scales of values were bound to alter in response to town living, factory work, and commercial entertainment whether or not any messages filtered through from lay or clerical preachers. Above all it is right that they should pay more attention to the workers' own history as something with a life of its own, and its own inner directions, not to be viewed merely as a derivative series of responses to outside proddings.

Many of the persistent qualities of indigenous working-class culture are no doubt to be found in the intense traditionalism, distrust of the unfamiliar, and xenophobia graphically portrayed in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and so frequently the despair of radical and socialist intellectuals as the rock on which their schemes founder. These attitudes were not, however, cunningly implanted by the employing class and the press which served them, although they were understandably not averse to playing upon such qualities for their own advantage. They were the same qualities which were at the root of more positive developments generated from within the working classes: association, mutual help and protection, preservation of the sense of group and community and refusal to retreat to the social isolation of the individual family. Association and combination produced organized labour, existing substantially in a class conflict

situation; but it also succoured and developed the informal and non-institutional social organisms of street, neighbourhood, and local community, highly important instruments for defining, adapting, and shaping popular culture; and it produced organized outlets for thrift and savings, clothing clubs, burial clubs, friendly societies, which were expressions of voluntary collectivism more than weapons of conflict. Traditionalism also contained a tradition of relaxation, enjoyment, and pleasure which was carried into industrial society, was never extinguished, and was vigorously expressed in old forms and new, in pub and club, gambling and football ground, music hall and seaside resort, preserving the practical pursuit of happiness from the clutches of the moralists.

Many separate streams contributed to the process of social transformation, interacting with one another. When the robustness of independent working-class cultural development can be adequately appreciated, and the impact of economic growth on working-class attitudes can be more amply delineated, then the concept of social control may find its proper place in the general scheme. Meanwhile it looks as if the main function of the urge to control may have been to induce some of the propertied classes to provide services and facilities some parts of which the common people found useful. And the main function of the historians of social control may have been that pursuit of an alluring but poorly-defined concept has caused them to write much history that commoners will find useful.³⁸

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³⁸ G. Stedman Jones, 'Class Expressions vs. Social Control', *History Workshop*, IV (1978), pp. 163-70, challenges the validity of the concept from a different angle, arguing that it is incompatible with a conflict-based model of society.