

Politics in Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-1850:

A Study in Conflict

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at Leicester University.

Colin Turner April 1980.

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PREFACE

This thesis is an interpretative study of mechanics' institutes in the years 1820 to 1850. It draws upon the research already carried out in this field, and acknowledgement of these sources is found in the bibliography. This includes earlier work by the author, presented to Leicester University in a thesis for the degree of Master of Education. This work concerned the mechanics' institutes of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, but the sources have been re-examined and the material reinterpreted for inclusion in this thesis.

The author has carried out detailed research into the mechanics' institutes in the counties of Avon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, and Shropshire and into individual institutes at Leicester, Banbury, Swindon, Chester, Southampton, York, and Cambridge. The major institutes at Manchester, Leeds, Huddersfield and Nottingham have been well researched and the results published in various books and theses, but some of the primary source material relating to these institutes has been re-examined.

The term 'mechanics' institute' is used flexibly in this thesis to cover all those institutes which were so described in the lists compiled by contemporaries, and which seem to have some claim to provide educational and social facilities specifically though not necessarily solely for the adult working man. Most, although by no means all, incorporated the word 'mechanic' in the institution's title.

In order to avoid confusion, the words 'reformist' and 'radical' have been used throughout the thesis with standardised meanings. 'Radical' is taken to apply to those who wished to bring about fundamental shifts of political and economic power to the working class. It applies therefore to such writers as Thomas Paine, William Thompson, Richard Carlile, and to the early socialists and Owenites, the trade union leaders and the Chartists.

The term 'reformist' is taken to apply to those who desired to make reforms which they believed would improve the efficiency and rationality of social organisation, remove obvious abuses and out-dated institutions, but would not fundamentally alter the balance of power between the working class and the more prosperous classes. It applies therefore to the utilitarians and the school of political economists which derived from them, and to the political and social reformers within the Whig party who were led by Henry Brougham.

Throughout the thesis the term 'working class' is used, but it is recognised that this is a convention, and does not ignore the fact that contemporary usage was very varied, nor that there is considerable historical debate on the origin and rise of a coherent self-aware working class.

The author has made extensive use of material available in public record offices, public libraries and university libraries and wishes to acknowledge the help of their officers in the preparation of this thesis, in particular at:

The university libraries at Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Leicester, University College London, Sheffield, London University.

The British Museum.

The Public Record Offices at Taunton, Warwick, Stafford, Gloucester and Exeter.

The Public Libraries at Banbury, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Cheltenham, Chester, Coventry, Durham, Evesham, Gloucester, Hanley, Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Redditch, Rugby, Sheffield, Shrewsbury, Southampton, Stafford, Stourbridge, Swindon, Taunton, Walsall, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton, and York.

Where no reference is given in the text to events in mechanics' institutes, the information is derived from institute records or reports in local newspapers. All significant events are referenced.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Environment of Education in the Early 19th Century.

- 1.1 The Class Basis of Educational Change. c. 1790 - c. 1850
- 1.2 The Reaction of Industrialists and Capitalists to Mechanics Institutes
- 1.3 The Reaction of the Landed Classes to Mechanics' Institutes
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CHAPTER 1

1.1 The Class Basis of Educational Change c.1790 - c.1850

The concern of this thesis is the interplay of political activity in mechanics' institutes in the years 1823 to 1850. It is an assumption of the thesis that the basis of such political activity lies in class affiliation derived from sectional economic interests. The primacy of the economic base of society is assumed, and conflict between groups is seen to arise from their relationships within the economic power structure. Some class interests are taken to be irreconcilable. In particular the concern of classes or sectional interests to gain or maintain privileged positions against other classes in controlling the means of production or enjoying the fruits of production, is reflected in struggles for dominance in political and cultural arenas. In the arena of education there was a struggle between rival classes for the power to control or influence the consciousness of the people.

Analysis of the period 1780 to 1850 in class terms and based on the above assumptions has been presented by a number of historians in particular by E.P. Thompson, and in relation to education by Simon, Harrison and Silver.¹

¹ See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (1963). B. Simon, Studies in the History of Education 1780-1870, (1960). J.F.C. Harrison, Living and Learning, (1961). H. Silver, The Concept of Popular Education, (1965) and English Education and the Radicals 1780-1850, (1975), and an earlier influential work A.E. Dobbs, Education and Social Movements 1780-1850, (1919).

The general line of argument, in simplified form, can be expressed in the following way. The period under consideration was one in which economic control was moving from landowning families to the owners of factories, mines and quarries, and to merchants, financiers and bankers. This is not to deny of course the considerable economic power that remained with landowners, nor to ignore the fact that some landowners were also industrial capitalists and that first generation industrialists invested in land.

Given, however, that there was a shift in economic power to a new group of people who controlled the major means of production, there was a corresponding struggle in establishing control over political, social and cultural institutions. Thus there were attacks on various strategic centres of institutional power, encompassed in the campaign for the reform of parliament and local government, of the penal code, of the Poor Law, of educational endowments, of such legislation as the Orders in Council and the Corn Laws.

A necessary part of industrial capitalism was the creation of a labour force, that stood in a novel relationship to employment and society. In a society based on landowning, the labourer was generally enmeshed tightly into a rural economy which, however miserable his lot and hard his work, gave him a rhythm of activities and a web of social relationships which were relatively local and static. Both privilege and obligation were clearly spelt out, if not always practised, and social stratification was most commonly into small horizontal groupings.

Control of the labour force was not problematic. The local landowner/landlord/employer, the local magistrate and the vicar could exert external control, and social education was such that approved societal attitudes and behaviour were transmitted and internalised with considerable effectiveness.¹

It is important to stress the complexity of this society. It is a common response at times of social dislocation for compensatory models of society to be formulated, very often in the form of a disappeared Golden Age, and from Cobbett onward, the pre-industrial society was romanticised and its complexity simplified. There was much mobility and resettlement in this society, as the work of Mingay has shown,² and there were parts of the country where there was little evidence of the small group structure based on parish administration and local landholding patterns. This was most obviously the case in such places as the Mendip and South Staffordshire mining areas.³ As a general statement, however, and accepting the above qualifications, we can assume that social control was exercised within relatively small local settings by those set in authority through a system of rights, duties and privileges backed not only the force of law but by accepted social norms.

An urban industrial proletariat could easily be perceived as a threat to the order of this society. As old forms of institutional control began to change or disintegrate, so there was

1 For a useful description of this society, see H. Perkin, The Origin of Modern English Society, (1969), pp.17-62.

2 See G. Mingay, English Landed Society in the 18th Century, (1963).

3 See, for example, A. Roberts, (Ed.), The Mendip Annals, (1859).

concern by many of those who assumed positions of power in the new economic order that a growing, mobile, complex labour force should be accommodated within the social ethos of industrial capitalism. Although the formulation of the problem by the middle classes may have been partial, confused or vague, the need for new forms of social consciousness among the labour force was likely to be increasingly apparent to them as the development of the economy made fundamental changes in the social fabric of the country. Particular issues were likely to centre in the discipline imposed by the technology and organisation of factory life and machinery on the working force, and in the prevailing beliefs among the middle classes about the nature of social economics and the laws of political economy.

It was in the interests of the middle classes that the working force should accept a new factory discipline, and the conclusions of a political economy in its relevance to wages and profits, the use of machinery, hours of work, rents and prices. It is an argument of this thesis that one of the principal mechanisms for developing and transmitting to the working class an ideology which expressed the dominant interests of capitalism was through educational institutions. Such institutions were also needed to produce the diversified skills of labour required by an expanding economy, and to support the sets of relationships that existed between industrial and commercial enterprises and the machinery of state. However, the very development of capitalism brought into existence feelings of class consciousness and class solidarity as a response to the exploitation of the

economic vulnerability of its labour force.

In the process of attempting to achieve dominance, those who represented industrial capitalism were in conflict with other representative bodies and interests in educational, social and cultural areas. Total dominance was never likely to be achieved, and some degree of conflict was endemic in the system. There are fallacies in reductionist or mechanistic thinking applied to arguments using class interest as an explanatory tool, and it should be stressed that the following outline does not deny the ambiguity and complexity of social and class interaction as made manifest in any particular situation. We are describing the setting of a general class environment and the dynamic behind class interaction.

In general categories therefore we can describe three parties to the struggle: the landed class representing a tradition of social ordering that looked backward to the 18th and 17th Centuries; the class we will refer to as the middle class which represented industrial and commercial capital; and the labour force. While the middle class was compelled to struggle with the landed class to alter the economic system, both had a common interest in preventing the working class from obtaining any kind of power. The middle class was prepared to ally with the working class to destroy the hold that the landed class had over parliament and other agencies of political control, but only if this did not lead to any major increase in the political power of the working class. Conversely the working class, anxious to obtain some alleviation of its conditions,

was prepared to work with the middle class against the power of the landed class, but expected at least some share in the rewards afterwards. On the other hand, its allies in the struggle against the social and economic injustices of industrial capitalism might well at times be drawn from the most traditional representatives of the landed class.

Within a general class interest, the members of the middle class expressed many varieties of thought and attitude towards society, education and political economy. Utilitarian beliefs were, however, central to this thinking, and were generally representative of middle class attitudes and perceptions. James Mill had developed the idea of enfranchising the masses so that they could destroy the existing aristocratic oligarchy and establish a society directed by those most qualified to govern, by which he meant the middle class -

"the class which is universally described as both the most wise and the most virtuous part of the community."¹

The crucial strategic role of this class was emphasised by Thomas Wyse.

"They, of all others, require both habits and knowledge; an abundance and appropriateness in education. They have the task, not only of improving themselves, but of checking one class and guiding another; of uniting both. The middle class is a distinctive feature of modern communities, by which our civilisation most differs from that of the ancients.... They form pre-eminently the centre of the system."²

"It is this middle class which is the true core of the community; this makes and saves the state"

1 J. Mill, An Essay on Government, (1937 Edition), pp.71-72.

2 Central Society of Education, 2nd Publication, (1838), p.205.

wrote Baldwin Brown, a leading London Congregational minister.¹

In fact the middle class was often equated with the 'real' population of Britain. Lord Brougham, for example, recorded that

"by the people, I mean the middle classes, the wealth and intelligence of the country, the glory of the British name."²

Briggs has analysed the growth of middle class consciousness, and in particular records the overwhelming confidence of the class that developed in this period.³ It is well expressed in one of the major organs of middle class thinking, The Westminster Review.

"The value of the middle classes of this country, their growing numbers and importance, are acknowledged by all. These classes have long been spoken of, and not grudgingly by their superiors themselves, as the glory of England; as that which alone has given to us our eminence among nations; as that portion of our people to whom everything that is good among us may with certainty be traced."

"Of the political and moral importance of this class, there can be but one opinion. It is the strength of the community. It contains beyond comparison, the greatest proportion of the intelligence, industry and wealth of the state in this country at least, it is this class which gives to the nation its character."⁴

Thus, Marx commented, the middle class believed that

1 The Evangelical Magazine, Vol.10 p.585 (1868) in J. Briggs and J. Sellers (Eds.), Victorian Non-Conformity, (1973), p.23.

2 Quotation in A. Briggs, 'The Language of Class in Early 19th Century England', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (Eds.), Essays in Labour History, (1960), p.55.

3 Ibid, Also A. Briggs, 'Middle Class Consciousness in English Politics 1780-1846', Past and Present, No.9, (1956).

4 Westminster Review, Vol.1 No.1, 1824, Quotation in E. Halevy, The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism, (1928), p.286.

"the special conditions of its own emancipation are the general conditions within the frame of which alone modern society can be saved ..."¹

Proponents of such beliefs saw the necessity of providing appropriate institutions for the education of the middle class. It was necessary for them to transform the existing institutions of school and university, which, besides their offending inefficiency and inutility were doctrinally supportive of the aristocratic oligarchy. It was also necessary to develop new types of schools, and for this purpose Bentham described his prototype chrestomathic school. One experiment much praised by Bentham was the school at Hazlewood near Birmingham, later transferred to Bruce Castle, Tottenham, run by Thomas Hill and his sons. There was much interest in reforming the universities to reflect a moral rational and efficient concept of education, and under utilitarian influence University College, London was founded. There was also a drive to reform Public Schools along the lines essayed by Arnold at Rugby, and to widen the curriculum of schools to include science.

The utilitarian view of society, in simplified, debased or corrupt forms became an ubiquitous mode of thinking among the middle class. It was a teleological view with little flexibility. Society, it was believed, was approaching its most perfect expression which was the point at which the iron laws governing social and political relationships were understood, accepted as both desirable and inevitable, and not hindered by any remaining obscurantist doctrine. This was powerfully expressed in Professor Godwin Smith's inaugural

1 Selected Works Vol.1, 1950, London, p.250.

lecture at Oxford University in 1859.

"The laws of production and distribution are not the laws of duty or affection. But they are the most beautiful and wonderful of the natural laws of God."¹

The purpose of education of the working class was to convince it of these inevitable and beneficial results of an industrial capitalist economy. Control of the educational system would enable this to be done. Some of the utilitarians seem to have had a naively simplified view of how this would be accomplished.

James Mill, for example, wrote:

"I should have little fear of the propagation among the common people of any doctrines hostile to property, because I have seldom met with a labouring man whom I could not make to see that the existence of property was not only good for the labouring men, but of infinitely more importance to the labourers as a class, than any other."²

The particular form of political economy formulated by the utilitarians hardened into a rigid orthodoxy disseminated among the middle classes. Political economy became in Thomas Love Peacock's phrase

"the art of converting conjecture into certainty."

It became particularly associated with Lord Brougham and his circle of political reformers, and throughout the first half of the century was popularised and diffused by lecture and pamphlet among as many of the nation as would read or listen. The propagandist drive was particularly strong in Scotland, led by such popularisers as J.R. McCulloch, William Chambers,

1 Extract in C. Harvie et al (Eds.), Industrialisation and Culture 1830-1914, p.165. 1970.

2 Letter to H. Brougham, 3rd September 1832. Brougham Mss. 10765.

Dr. Thomas Murray, and the erstwhile working class leaders, J. and A. Bethune. The Edinburgh Journal and the Edinburgh Weekly Review were two of the major organs of publicity. In an attempt to make abstract political economy more concrete and acceptable to the working man, increasing emphasis was placed on the model of the self-made and self-reliant man. Its greatest exponent was Smauel Smiles who had developed his ideas while working for Murray's Edinburgh Weekly Review.¹

Among the working class, however, the political economists in pure or popularised form were seen with no particular favour. In Hill's phrase,

"Political Economy had come to be looked upon as a sort of black art. Rightly or wrongly the industrial operatives had convinced themselves that Political Economy was a weapon in the hands of their masters."²

The Tories were often as critical of the political economists as the Radicals. The Tory Quarterly in 1831 wrote:

"In their theory of rent, they have insisted that landlords can thrive only at the expense of the public at large, and especially of the capitalists; in their theory of profit, they have declared that capitalists can only improve their circumstances by depressing those of the labouring and most numerous class; in their theory of wages, they have maintained that the condition of the labourers can only be bettered by depriving them of their greatest happiness and their only consolation under trouble, the feelings of the husband and father; in their theory of population, they have absolved the government from all responsibility

1 For the work of political economists in Scotland, see A. Tyrell 'Political Economy, Whiggism and the Education of Working Class Adults 1817-1840'. Scottish Historical Review, Vol 48, 1969.

2 R. Hill Toryism and the People, (1929), p.153.

for the misery of the people committed to their care: in their theory of morals, they have impressed on the poor that the legitimate indulgence of their natural appetites is the greatest of all crimes - on the rich that the abandonment of the poor to destitution is the most sacred of all duties."¹

The interest of middle class groups in sponsoring institutions for the enlightenment of the working class is understandable. It was part of a system which attempted to control the consciousness of the working man, and it transmitted an ideology which underpinned the power of capitalism. Such control had to be attempted over adult consciousness as well as in the formation of child consciousness. Given the considerable number of working class leaders who had been educated in church schools or Sunday schools, it was apparent that education of children alone could not guarantee in the future work force those beliefs and values which it was felt desirable to inculcate. Alienation in daily labour, unemployment and poverty were themselves powerful educators. An increasing interest in adult education in a variety of forms was manifest from the beginning of the 19th Century, and the initial proposals to form mechanics' institutes were made in an environment already favourable to middle class experiments in adult working class education.²

It would over-simplify the situation, however, to suppose that the middle classes, and particularly those closely associated with industrial capitalism, were all in favour of such experiments,

1 Quotation in B. Simon, Op.Cit. p. 140-141.

2 See for example J. Hudson, The History of Adult Education (1851), pp.1-39.

and the conservative representatives of the established landed society were apathetic or opposed to them. It has been assumed by some historians that opposition to mechanics' institutes came primarily from the Church of England, the aristocracy and landed gentry, and the Tory party, while support came from industrialists, professional men, non-conformists and reformist Whigs. Kelly writes that

"in general the political complexion of the movement was Whig, its religious complexion Non-conformist, with the Unitarians as particularly strong supporters in some places. The Tories and the Church either stood aside or were openly hostile."¹

It is true that some prominent mechanics' institutes, including those at London and Manchester, were almost exclusively sponsored and run by the whig/non-conformist interest. At Exeter, the mechanics' institute was used as the headquarters of the Whig party in the 1832 elections,² and Bridport Mechanics' Institute was housed by the reformist Whig MP, Henry Warburton, a close friend of Hume.³ But those Whigs who supported institutes were often far from reformists. At Plymouth Mechanics' Institute for example there was active support from Sir Roundell Palmer, later Earl Selbourne, and Sir John Trelawny, neither of them great reformists.⁴ At Nottingham Mechanics' Institute one of the ubiquitous Portland family was involved, Viscount Ossington who in time became Speaker of the Commons.⁵ At Brechin, the whig peer Lord Panmure had built the mechanics' institute.⁶

1 T. Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain, (1962), p.123.

2 Mechanics Magazine, XVIII, (1832), p.43.

3 Sherborne, Dorchester and Taunton Journal, 27 February 1834.

4 They receive a number of mentions in the Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald.

5 J.A.H. Green, History of Nottingham Mechanics' Institute 1837-1887, p. 13. (1887).

6 Mechanics Magazine, LVI, p.191.

There were however a number of Tories who were involved in the movement: Earl Howe, the President of Hinckley Mechanics' Institute,¹ Viscount Sandon at Stafford Mechanics' Institute,² or John Gladstone at Liverpool Mechanics' and Apprentices' Library,³ for example. At a number of institutes, the rival parties, violently antagonistic at election time, provided bi-partisan support. Such apparently was the case at Blackburn, Warrington, and at a later stage at Macclesfield.⁴ It is also true that some Anglicans and country gentlemen supported mechanics' institutes and conversely some non-conformists and industrialists opposed them. A study of the institutes in the three Midland counties of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, shows both Tory and Whig supporters among the nobility, members of parliament of all persuasions, and clergymen of all the major churches were involved.⁵

Appendices B, C and D list the support given by the aristocracy, churches, and members of parliament to a sample of mechanics' institutes for which information was available. Kelly's statement is partially borne out. There are more Whigs involved than Tories, more dissenting ministers than Anglican priests, but the balance is not as one-sided as Kelly suggests. The case of Stockton Mechanics' Institute is particularly striking. In 1825 it had the support of three local vicars, the Bishop of Durham, a Unitarian and Independent minister, and the son and heir of the Duke of Cleveland.⁶

1 Rules, Hinckley Mechanics' Institute, 1840.

2 Staffordshire Advertiser, 4 November 1837.

3 Manchester Guardian, 11 June 1825.

4 M. Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851, (1957), pp. 278-279.

5 C.M. Turner, The Development of Mechanics' Institutes in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire 1825-1890, M.Ed., Leicester, (1961).

6 Annual Report, 1826.

The evidence thus suggests a variety of support across class or group boundaries. An endemic problem of using class analysis in capitalist societies is that members of a homogeneous group often show themselves unaware of their apparent class interest, lack class consciousness, and do not perceive their exploited or exploiting position. Thus sectional interests, such as owners of factories, or Anglican clergymen or working class leaders, express within their ranks a bewildering set of contradictory responses. The differences are more apparent than real if one separates responses related to economic and political power from other social and cultural concerns. In most instances, differences between sectional interests are sharp enough if one looks at basic interest. The middle class may have had considerable internal disagreements over moral, social or educational programmes, but were generally at one defending the basic tenets of a capitalist economy and opposing socialism.

Within superstructural phenomena, where differences within classes and groups were real, we can consider the work of Toch on social movements to some effect.¹ Toch assumed that homogeneous interest groups had a clearly identifiable area of common concern, but on any specific issue that was not central to that area, even though it might be related, then a variety of responses was likely. Particular responses depended upon the selective perception of the individual, which in turn was related to such factors as socialisation processes, role models and reference groups, worlds of discourse and channels of

1 H. Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (1966)

information. In line with this reasoning, which Toch supported by empirical evidence, we will in the following section examine the varying responses to mechanics' institutes from the following key sectional groups: industrialists or capitalists; the landed class; members of the professions; the working class. It is recognised that membership of these groups would have overlapped.

1.2 The Reaction of Industrialists and Capitalists to Mechanics' Institutes

The owners of industrial concerns could perceive the provision of adult education in favourable terms. In three particular ways they saw possible benefits. They needed men who were more highly skilled technicians than were generally available, they needed to educate men to use and accept machinery. It was also an advantage if their work force were taught the concepts of economy as related to wages, hours and combinations.

This did not affect all industrialists equally. Those who were involved in introducing new techniques in industry and requiring new skills were more likely to perceive a problem than those using traditional methods. In many institutes, leading manufacturers took a prominent part in the founding of the body, in return expecting a general improvement in the skill and working capacity of local workmen. In the early 1820s, there were no Schools of Design, and for many of the newer skills, no adequate apprenticeship system. The advantage England had

gained in industrial advance over the rest of the Continent was something that the nation wished to be preserved at all costs, but many observers were well aware of the superiority of technical education in Prussia and France, and were very concerned that England would eventually lag behind in the technical race. Mechanics' Institutes could be seen as an answer. A speaker supporting the creation of a Mechanics' Institute at Stockport in 1825 said:

"It is to our manufacturers that we owe our national superiority. It is by our manufactures that we must maintain it. We have at present got the start of other nations, and we must take care that they do not come up to us there is certainly no way of proceeding by which we may keep in advance of our national competitors, more certainly than by enlightening the mechanics."¹

It was particularly in design that England was backward. Traditional and rather unexciting designs were handed down from generation to generation, but nearly all the manufacturers bemoaned the low state of design and the great superiority of foreign designs. In the early 19th Century, it was common for manufacturers to buy foreign patterns and then have their highly-skilled craftsmen work them up. At Coventry, the centre of this country's ribbon weaving manufacture, the mechanics' institute, founded in 1828, was given a specific brief to improve the standards of design, and this was also the case at the Stoke Mechanics' Institute and Atheneum and at the Potteries Mechanics' Institute at Hanley.²

¹ Stockport Advertiser, 16 September 1825. See also L. Playfair, Lectures on the Results of the Great Exhibition, p.196. Quotation in J. Hole, An Essay on the History and Management of Literary, Scientific and Mechanics Institutions, (1853), pp.50-51.

² Coventry Herald, 9 October 1828. Staffordshire Advertiser, 27 May 1847. Place Ms., f.94. Brougham Ms., f. 27407.

At Coventry, the absence of any workers with skill in design was stressed by its mayor, George Eld. He claimed to the Select Committee on Arts and Manufacture in 1835, that of the seven thousand population in Foleshill, only six could copy a pattern and not one could design one.¹ Evidence that even in ship design the country was deficient and resorted to copying ships was given by William Morgan in 1827.

"It has generally been admitted that the knowledge of the theory of naval architecture has been less in England than in many other parts of Europe. Ships have consequently been built agreeably to forms of some of the ships we have taken. Danish and French ships were favourite models."²

In Manchester in the 1830s it was claimed that industrialists were paying over 20,000 pounds a year to France for calico designs,³ while at Kidderminster Frederick Hill claimed that the carpet manufacturers had not one single designer in the town and had to go to London for all their designs.⁴

Many of the mechanics' institutes made specific appeals to employers in the area when they were first established. This was the case at Taunton. One of the problems of this town was to find operatives of sufficient skill, and most of those who were employed had come down from the north where they had attended mechanics' institutes, so manufacturers and tradesmen were inclined to favour appeals for a Taunton mechanics' institute.⁵

1 Mechanics' Magazine, XXIV, p.146.

2 A.J. Sims, The Royal Corps of Naval Constructors: Its Predecessors and its History, Ms. 1961, p.4.

3 M. Tylecote, Manchester Mechanics' Institute, in D. Cardwell (Ed.) Artisan to Graduate, (1974), p.60.

4 F. Hill, National Education, 1, (1836), p.134.

5 Taunton Courier, 13 October 1830.

Part of the appeal to manufacturers was to emphasise the prime purpose of the institute. At Bolton Mechanics' Institute, the committee stated that

"the primary object of the Institution being the diffusion of mechanical science among the operative classes, no consideration of the excellence of other departments of human knowledge was allowed to divert the attention of the Committee from this fundamental principle."¹

Similarly in Cornwall the institutes sought to increase technical skills among the miners. In a report from the Royal Institute of Cornwall which was helping to establish classes for miners, the statement was made that

"the instruction which is intended to be given, is to enable the miner to turn to advantage the opportunities which present themselves to him, while engaged in his daily avocations, but it was never meant to divert him for a moment from his work."²

Whereas in some areas employers were only interested in the improvement of one particular technical skill, (Wilson arguing that this was the case at Macclesfield where leading silk manufacturers set up the institute³) in other towns which had a diverse occupational structure, the aim was to improve generally the intelligence of the artisan and his ability to tackle novel problems with adaptability and ingenuity. At London Mechanics' Institute, the object was defined as the

"instruction of the Members in the principles of the Arts they practise and in the various branches of science and useful knowledge."⁴

1 1st Annual Report, 1826

2 Report of the Royal Institute of Cornwall, 1861, p.10.

3 R.C. Wilson, The Objectives and Achievements of the Chester Mechanics' Institute and the Macclesfield Society for the Advancement of Useful Knowledge. M.Ed., Manchester (1968).

4 Rules and Orders, 1823. London Mechanics' Institute Minutes, 2 December 1823. Place Ms., 27823, ff.309-322.

The members were drawn particularly heavily from the 'new trades'. Over 50 were employed in engineering and metal trades, and a number of manufacturers in this field were also members. There was a similar situation in Birmingham.¹

There was a common belief that if workmen became more intelligent and ingenious they would make discoveries on a par with those of Watt or Stephenson. A report of the Royal Cornish Polytechnic Society expresses this well.

"The genius of a Watt has perhaps slumbered often within the breast of many a rude and uneducated mechanic whom poverty and neglect have led to distrust his own powers. The germ of thought has either been repressed in the bud or may have expended itself in crude and hopeless attempts or in the pursuit of some chimerical project for want of some hand to prompt his endeavours and direct his energies into the right channels."²

These sentiments were echoed in the first Report of the Shropshire Mechanics' Institute in 1826, and many other places.³

Timothy Claxton himself a self-taught mechanic, argued particularly strongly that the forces of creativity in artisans were too often suppressed or slumbering, and that advance in industry was absolutely dependent upon harnessing the inventiveness of artisans.

"I want every workshop in the country to be filled with experimentors."⁴

The attitude of some employers is spelt out in the evidence they gave to the various Parliamentary Commissions examining

1 Annual Report, 1834.

2 E. Whitley A Lecture on the Utility of Mechanics' Institutes (1847) pp. 15-16.

3 T. Claxton, Hints to Mechanics, (1839), p.101.

the education and employment of young people. The span of opinions expressed was naturally very wide, but there was a frequent and common argument that education of workers was beneficial to the employer. R.D. Grainger, in a sub-commission reporting on Nottinghamshire lace and hosiery employment in 1842, notes that he found among employers the view that

"without exception that exactly in proportion as mechanics were better educated did they become more valuable to their employers and more trustworthy, respectful, conscientious and reasonable in disputes and in alterations to routines."

The educated mechanics were seen to be more valuable to the employer and 'better conducted than the ignorant and uneducated,' or 'the best educated men were the best workmen', or 'the educated and instructed work people were most valuable'.

Employers variously expressed the view that employees should receive some elementary scientific and technical training through mathematics, design, mechanics, chemistry and general science. But they also added that employees should receive

"a sound moral and religious education, a process of mental and moral training as will develop the intellect and promote religious conduct"

with

"everything subordinate to religious and moral consideration".¹

One particular advantage the industrialist saw in mechanics' institutes was their utility in popularising machinery. The suspicion or hostility of workmen to the introduction of machinery could there be countered by a rational explanation of the economic laws involved and the eventual increased

¹ Report of the Royal Commission on Child Employment (Trades): Nottinghamshire 1842, pp.31-8. Examples are quoted in H.K. Briscoe. The History of Technical Education in Nottinghamshire. M.A. Sheffield (1952) pp.90-93.

benefit to the working class. This topic is discussed in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

There were on account of the perceived advantages described above many employers who were willing to organise and support mechanics' institutes. Among the many institutes which attracted particular support of local manufacturers we can mention those at Bolton, Stockport, Stalybridge, Dewsbury, Halifax and Huddersfield as examples. Tylecote analyses the supporters of the mechanics' institute at Manchester who encompass most of the leading commercial and industrial figures of the town.¹ Some institutes were very much under the influence of one major employer who instigated and controlled it. An example of this is at Derby, founded in 1825 by the Strutt family and its associates, which almost totally reflected the Whig and non-conformist complexion of that family which indeed pervaded the whole of the town's political and social life.²

However, many industrialists saw mechanics' institutes in a very different light. Their opposition came from a number of sources. Firstly, they saw mechanics' institutes as bodies requiring expenditure of money and energy; the return for such expenditure was of doubtful value at the most optimistic count, and certainly capital could be put to better use. Many industrialists operated with little floating cash, ploughing back much of their profits into factory and production expansion,

1 M. Tylecote, Op.Cit., pp.55-56.

2 A.F. Chadwick, 'The Derby Mechanics' Institute 1825-80', Vocational Aspect, XXVII, 1975.

and working on extended credit from sources of some instability. They could mostly certainly afford to live well and support local functions. They were not, however, going to spend money if there were not some obvious benefit to themselves, either in direct financial return or in increased prestige. Neither of these were guaranteed in the early days of the institutes. Attleborough argued this point in a critical pamphlet published in the 1840s:

"Viewed comprehensively, mechanics' institutes as an educational agent have achieved no great success. In commercial terms, there has been no return commensurate with the capital embarked in the undertaking."¹

Secondly, employers could have been concerned at the possibility of workmen acquiring increased practice and sophistication in the use of group activity. It was in the interest of factory owners to prevent their workmen acting as a body, just as it was in the interests of the workmen to act en masse. It was the trade union that the employers particularly feared, but many were ready enough to equate the organising by workmen of institutes with the organising of unions and political clubs. Workmen who had experience of common group activity in one field, one could argue, could easily transfer it to another, and while the industrialist had little to fear from the strength of the workman on his own, he was well aware of the strength of workmen acting together. In areas where there was industrial unrest and bitterness between unions and masters, there was much greater opposition from industrialists to the founding of

1 R.W. Attleborough, Mechanics Institutes: their Non-success. (n.d.), p.2.

institutes. This is apparent for example in Birmingham in 1824 and Bristol in 1825, but it was in those towns where employer-worker relationships were particularly bad that the position of mechanics' institutes became critical. One response, as at Walsall, was for factory owners to take action against the institute.¹ Another response was positively to use the institute to attack working class activity, as happened at Stourbridge.² A third, and frequent, response was for the middle classes to take over and neutralise the institute driving away in the process most of the working class members. This was the case at Spitalfields Mechanics' Institute where the presence of manufacturers in force on the committee led to mass apathy by the local working class.³ At Hackney, the Literary and Mechanics' Institute changed its name to the Literary and Scientific Institute, with the comment:

"We have only done what others have done: finding that 'Mechanic' was a stumbling block to many, we struck out the word. Hackney is not much peopled with Mechanics." ⁴

Much the same process occurred at Southwark⁵ and Bermondsey,⁶ and as we will note later it was a development common throughout the period 1825-50, affecting institutes at Birmingham, Bath, Bristol, Coventry, Cheltenham and many others in the latter part of the period.

Factory owners could also be concerned at the possibility of increased aspirations for a better standard of living among their workmen. Their attitude to this was necessarily ambivalent.

1 See infra, pp.27-29.

2 See infra, pp.154-156.

3 Mechanics Magazine, XVI, p.279.

4 Mechanics Magazine, VIII, p.422.

5 Mechanics Magazine, VII, p.215, 245-247.

6 T. Kelly, George Birkbeck, Pioneer of Adult Education, (1957), p.225

On the one hand such improvement or ambition to improvement would benefit industrialists because it would lead to increased consumption and an extension of the existing market for many of their goods. On the other hand such aspirations meant demands for higher wages, shorter hours, better conditions of work and housing, and this would result in new attitudes towards the economy and structure of society which would endanger the position of capitalism. It was a fine line which maximised profits from the working class without creating a revolutionary force which would destroy the industrialists. More surprisingly, many of them saw the potential threat of an increasingly powerful and prosperous working class as a greater danger than the loss of profits from failing to exploit a new market. So they opposed organisations which seemed to be encouraging the workers' rise in self-esteem and ambition. They supported much more readily the campaign against the Corn Laws, which would give the worker cheaper bread and therefore increase his consumption capacity, but would not necessitate changes in the relations of workmen to master - no need for shorter hours, increased education or fundamental alteration of life-styles.

There were some industrialists who were opposed to the creation of a more technically sophisticated labour force, because it created a labour hierarchy with an elite which could use its expertise as a bargaining weapon. Such highly skilled men could be very mobile and sell their services to the highest bidder, and industrialists who valued order, dependency and loyalty to the firm, did not like that at all. Even as late as the 1860s the renowned Potteries firm of Minton were refusing

to pay for their workers to be trained in the Schools of Science and Art. One of their spokesmen, giving evidence to a select committee, defended this attitude in these terms

"Messrs. Minton considered, and I think justly, that there was no just claim upon them to pay for the artisans of the potteries, because when they had educated the men in their own works they had no power over them; they might go away, and they were sought after by other manufacturers and paid higher wages than Messrs. Minton would give them after educating them."¹

Not all manufacturers by any means adapted well to the rapid change in mechanised industries. Lack of understanding of the principles of mechanics was prevalent among employers as well as workmen, and David Burns was constrained to write:

"Just in proportion as those who manufacture and direct our powerful machines acquire correct notions of the principles on which they are constructed, may we expect their productive power to be increased, and the prosperity of our country maintained and promoted."²

A further reason for opposition from factory owners to institutes was common in those areas where employers felt their position threatened by the rivalry of educated skilled workmen. The local economy and employment structure could be such that a master could easily be replaced by an ambitious and intelligent workman. We may take as an example of such an area the Potteries. Here there were a number of large employers, such as the Wedgwoods, Spodes and Mintons, who employed men, though mostly they organised their factories by sub-contracting work to skilled, independent

1 Quotation in Bell, Schools of Design, (1964), p.133.

2 Quotation in T. Claxton, Op.Cit., p.103

workmen. Outside these few employers, most masters were employing only a handful of men and boys, and had themselves once been employees. They were working on limited capital and profit-returns, and were likely to face bankruptcy if any emergency arose. They could well imagine themselves being replaced by some employee, and were therefore particularly reactionary in their attitude to most reforms, no more so than to attempts to educate the workman in science and technology through mechanics' institutes. Josiah Wedgwood II, who helped to found the Potteries Mechanics' Institute in Hanley in 1826, wrote to Brougham:

"Our trade has for a long time been unproductive, and many of the potters are scarcely able to meet their necessary expenses."

This had led to much short-time among employees.

"There are among them (the masters), few if any men of education or scientific acquirements and many of both parties have strong objections to any measure which they think likely to facilitate the raising of the workman to the class of master, a feeling none the less powerful because in many instances they or their father have risen from being workmen themselves."¹

Nevertheless at Hanley Wedgwood persevered with science and technical classes which were very relevant to the industrial processes of the area, gaining the support of the major manufacturers if not all the masters. The 1832 Annual Report of the Potteries Mechanics' Institute is quite specific about its aims to help industry.

1 Brougham Mss. f. 27407.

"The chief manufacturers of the district are the proper patrons of this Institution, its leaders, and directors. It is an Institution subservient to their interests; promotive of the usefulness and happiness of those who unceasingly depend upon them for employment, and all its agreeable consequences."¹

At Liverpool Mechanics' Institute, its spokesmen claimed it had similar suspicions from master craftsmen as was experienced at Hanley.

"Master tradesmen have had a great dislike to the education afforded by Mechanics' Institutions; they seem afraid that the secrets of their respective trades will be divulged..."²

Insecurity of status and fear of economic displacement could be potent forces working against the mechanics' institutes.

The effect of strong opposition from factory owners to a new institute could be catastrophic. This can be illustrated from the events that befell the Walsall Institute in 1839. The institute was founded in that year, and it was an unhappy one for such projects. With a background of Chartist activity culminating in the Bull Ring riots in Birmingham, the whole of the Black Country was in a disturbed state. The area was economically and socially a depressed area, though Walsall, with its long-established economy based on the lorrimer trade and a market of some antiquity, was a little better off than the neighbouring Wednesbury, Bilston, Tipton and Smethwick.

It appears that the leaders of Walsall Mechanics' Institute went out of their way to divert the expected opposition. The

1 B.F. Duppa, Manual for Mechanics' Institutions, (1839), p.121.

2 F. Hill, Op.Cit., 2, p.186.

library was to purchase no "immoral or blasphemous publications" and written into the constitution was the rule that

"the Institute shall not at any time be perverted to serve the purpose of any party or sect in politics or religion, or be made the instrument of any party in questions of local politics." ¹

The President was a local factor, R. James, and the Vice-Presidents were Dr. Day, a surgeon, and the Rev. McKean, a Unitarian minister. One of the secretaries was J. Hickin, a prominent Chartist speaker around the region, and this did not help dispel the deep suspicion with which the body was viewed by local industrialists. Its programme was innocuous enough. After starting with a Chemistry lecture, it arranged for Professor Dartington to give a course of lectures on mechanical science.² But the opposition of employers was strong enough to force the institute to its knees. The position is best described in a letter written by the secretary to Lord Hatherton in September 1841.³

"When the Institution was in formation, and also up to the present time, it was our practice, as far as possible, to steer clear of politics and religion; we selected members of opposite politics, and also of various religious opinions, for committees and other offices; we did not allow any religious discussion to take place between members while on the premises of the institution; yet, with all this, the high Tory party of this town never gave us any credit for so doing but, on the contrary, used all their influence to prohibit the young men in their warehouses and offices becoming members, and ultimately prevented attendance of those who had already entered without their knowledge; this too just at a time when a party of them had established a class for mutual instruction, appointed to meet on certain evenings for the purpose of delivering and receiving opinions on philosophical questions. They have spoken of Mechanics' Institutions in terms not the most

¹ Rules, Walsall Mechanics' Institute, 1844.

² Wolverhampton Chronicle 28 August 1839. Staffordshire Advertiser, 11 May 1840.

³ E. Glew, A History of Walsall, (1856), p.40.

respectful, for which I am sorry, they have not more prudence and discernment; for I think that such societies are calculated to inspire the minds of the young with a real love of science and literature, and (next to religion), are best adapted to conduct them from all that is low and sensual."

The institute was able to raise a subscription not only from Hatherton, who gave ten pounds, but also from Robert Wellbeloved Scott, later MP for the borough, and Charles Forster, Liberal MP at the time.¹ There were influential men prepared to back it, but they represented the County landed families and members of the professions. Their help was limited in the circumstances where employers took sanctions against any of their men who were members. In 1841 the building temporarily had to close its doors. It staggered on until 1850, when at the last recorded mention of the institute, it had only forty members.²

Industrialists who feared mechanics' institutes could gain control of the body and make sure its activities were innocuous, but as the case of Walsall Mechanics' Institute demonstrates, the alternatives of implacable opposition was always a likelihood, and would normally result in the closure of the institute.

In summary industrialists displayed a number of differing responses to mechanics' institutes, both favourable and unfavourable and were able to justify their various positions with arguments of self interest.

1 Ibid, p.40.

2 J. Hudson, Op. Cit. p.230.

1.3 The Landed Classes

The representatives of the old order of England, the aristocracy, the squirearchy, the greater landowners were divided in their reaction to mechanics' institutes. The problem perceived by some of them was simple. They wished to preserve as far as possible the traditional economic and social structure. Relationships between groups of people they saw not in terms of socio-economic classes but in terms of bonds of attachment and chains of connection. The society they envisaged consisted of vertical groupings rather than horizontal classes, and differences of level between people they described as ranks or grades rather than classes.¹ The danger such people saw in any educational scheme was twofold. Men would get ideas above their station and destroy the natural harmony of relationships, and they would be susceptible to jacobin or socialist ideas that struck at the heart of a society based upon the ownership of land. There was much instinctive fear of the mob among the upper classes, and particularly a fear that they could be led to commit the excesses they had witnessed in revolutionary France. Their reaction to any schemes for helping to educate the working class was frequently intemperate. Their view is well expressed in the often quoted parliamentary speech of David Giddy when attacking Samuel Whitbread's scheme for parish schools in 1807.

1 A. Briggs 'The Language of Class in Early 19th Century England', in A. Briggs and J. Savile (Eds.), Essays in Labour History, (1960), pp. 44-5. Also P. Laslett, The World We Have Lost, (1965), Ch.2.

"However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would, in effect, be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and, in a few years, the result would be, that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them."¹

The status of the landed classes, their political and economic position, were threatened by industrialisation, and the last-ditchers tried to fight off any threat to the disappearing order of clear social stratification and unambiguous role performance. They saw the working class organised behind their leaders like Francis Place, Thomas Hardy and George Edmonds, working in alliance with the reforming liberals led by Brougham. The various Hampden Clubs and Political Unions gave striking and alarming evidence of this unholy alliance against the landed interest, and their distrust of bodies like mechanics' institutes, designed to educate the workers and sponsored by the reformist Whigs, was natural enough.

The opposition case against mechanics' institutes was strongly put in an article in the St. James Chronicle:

1 Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), IX, 798, 13 July 1807. See also C. Wellbeloved, An Address to York Mechanics' Institute, (1828), p.5 for a similar statement.

"A scheme more completely adapted for the destruction of this empire could not have been invented by the author of evil himself ... every step which they take in setting up the labourers as a separate or distinct class is a step taken, and a long one too, towards that fatal result."¹

There were a number of similar comments published in response to Brougham's Practical Observations. An article in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine claimed that

"to educate the working man we must put into his hands the writings of such people as Leigh Hunt, Cobbett, and Carlile, Brougham, Bentham and Bowring."²

A hostile pamphlet by 'A Country Gentleman' quoted in the Edinburgh Review, poured scorn on the possibility of effective teaching of science to working men and believed that only error or uncertainty could result which would be exploited by the Radicals and Unitarians.³ There was a strong response by a lawyer to the proposal to establish a mechanics' institute at Southwark. He wrote that if working men were taught science they would

"neglect their families and homes ... constitutions weakened and debilitated by intense mental study ... society would be uprooted ... the marks which distinguished different classes thrown down ... the government overturned with a state of anarchy the ultimate result."⁴

On the other hand many of the propertied class were willing enough to support mechanics' institutes. The evidence already produced of support from the aristocracy can be amplified by

1 Add. Mss., 27824, f.80

2 Vol XVI, May 1825

3 Edinburgh Review, December 1826, "The Consequences of a Scientific Education to the Working Classes of this Country ..."

4 Newspaper cutting in Add. Mss. 27824, f.107

many more examples of country gentlemen. The institute at Coatbridge was under the presidency of the laird, Buchanan of Drumpellier, at Hawick under the patronage of James Douglas of Cavers,¹ and at Darlington under the support of General Aylmer.² It would be wrong indeed to think of all of the landed gentry as Tory. A number of them were Whig, and not a few were enthusiastic reformers. For example Francis Canning of Foxcote and Arthur Gregory of Stivichall were well known in the reforming circles of Coventry, Warwick and Birmingham.³

Those landed gentry who supported mechanics' institutes, other than the reformers, made the assumption that they would help rather than hinder the solving of two endemic problems: the existence of lawlessness and disorder, and the weakening of attitudes towards social obligations. The fear of a lawless, riotous and criminal people from the lower sections of society, was based on enough real evidence of the state of criminality in the period before the introduction of the first police force in the metropolis in 1829. Most men of substance and property were magistrates, and knew well the danger of mob violence. To many of them, education seemed the best antidote. An educated people, so it was argued, was less likely to indulge in riotous or savage behaviour than an uneducated mob.

"Real knowledge" wrote Brougham⁴

"never promoted either turbulence or unbelief", while Austin wrote,

"an enlightened people were a better auxilliary to a judge than an army of policemen ..nothing but the diffusion of knowledge through the great mass of the people will go to the root of the evil. Nothing but this will cure or alleviate the poverty which is the ordinary incentive to crime."⁵

1 W.H. Marwick, Op.Cit., p.300.

2 Rules, Darlington Mechanics' Institute, 1825.

3 Both appear on a number of occasions in the records of Coventry and Birmingham Mechanics' Institutes.

4 Speeches of Lord Brougham, Vol.III, p.96 (1838).

5 J. Austin, The Province of Jurisprudence Determined, (1832), pp.73-4.

Dr. Hook of Leeds succinctly put the problem thus:

"I call upon you to assist the government to empty the gaols by building schools."¹

From this followed the many claims by mechanics' institutes, when soliciting the support of a nobleman or landowner, that their members were renowned for their sobriety and good behaviour, never appearing in street tumults or the police courts. For example, at Hull the mechanics' institute aimed to gain the support of the respectable class.

"Many who regarded the Institution with aversion, now considered it not only harmless but useful. To this alteration of sentiment, arising from the good conduct of the Society, was partly attributed the large addition of Honorary Members from the higher classes made during the year."²

The Hull institute was the platform for attacks on Owenism, a system

"which was certainly incompatible with existing habits, and subversive of many of our affections and kindest associations."³

There was considerable debate over the relationship between education and crime, and not every writer believed education decreased crime. J. Symons argued that all available statistics showed that crime had increased with education, which he imputed to the absence of moral and religious teachings in schools, but more commonly people took the view of Hook.⁴

1 W.R.W. Stephens, The Life and Letters of W.F. Hook Vol.2, 1885, p.213

2 Hull Advertiser, 8 June 1832. Quotation in H. Silver, Op.Cit., p.215

3 Hull Advertiser 3 February 1832. See also the letter from George Lee to Brougham, 13 Sept 1826, SDUK Mss. 22

4 J. Symons, Social Economy, (1852), pp.29-33. For opposite views see J. Hole, Light More Light, (1800), Chapter 15; R. Slaney, The State of the Poorer Classes in Large Towns, (1837), p.22; R.W. Hamilton, Report of the Select Committee on Public Libraries, (1849), p.99.

Even stronger motivation to support mechanics' institutes came from the realisation that they could help preserve the system of duties and obligations between the classes of society. Respect for the Law could be matched by respect for the divinely ordained ordering of stations in society. The lower orders could be taught that he who murmurs against authority set over him, openly blames the Lord who gives it to mankind.

"We wish" wrote one Anglican publication

"to give them a religious and useful course of instruction suited to their station in life." ¹

and the results hoped for were well summarised by a School Inspector in 1841.

"By its aid they may learn to think so soundly, and to weigh evidence with so much acuteness, that the vile doctrines of a licentious infidelity may shock their understandings as well as revolt their hearts ... inspire them with loyalty to the Queen and with love to their country; raise them above temptation of a bribe in the exercise of any political rights which they may possess; and separate them from those who would seek any supposed amelioration of the laws by the methods of violence and injustice." ²

A non-conformist minister gave much the same message

"Respect for the laws and a ready obedience to them: that due subordination of rank on which the well-being of every gradation of society depends: and the fruitful discharge of those duties which we owe the whole community are among the plainest results of that intelligence which shall teach to every man the obligations which he contracts as a member of the social state Violence for the redress of grievances, unlawful combinations for the destruction of property or the injury of obnoxious individuals, absurd and impolitic regulations

1 The Perils of the Nation, (1843), p.209.

2 Quotation in P. Hollis, Class and Conflict in 19th Century England, (1973), p.338.

interfering with the free exercise of trade and commerce are never the consequences of sound knowledge diffused among the people at large."¹

January Searle, who had much to do with the development of Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute, claimed in 1848 that mechanics' institutes had contributed to the absence of

"that sullen spirit of dissatisfaction and defiance which has lately moved so many populations into rebellion and bloodshed."²

A Baptist, the Rev. J. Acworth, president of Bradford Mechanics' Institute made much the same point

"adult education would not make levellers but respectors of property rights and a wider understanding of the natural and inevitable inequalities of society."³

He noted the docility of the working class in Bradford in the depression of 1837 which he ascribed to the influence of the mechanics' institute. The Welsh mechanics' institutes were defended by The Cambrian on the grounds that

"the nation receives a fresh pledge for public security in every rightly educated man it detains".⁴

The kind of institute which appealed to sections of the landed gentry was exemplified by the Southampton Mechanics' Institute. Southampton was, in 1830, primarily a royal watering town, near to Osborne House, and the institute was under the patronage of the Duchess of Kent. When it opened in 1830 an editorial in a

1 E. Higginson, Observations addressed to all classes of the Community, (1825), pp.9-10.

2 J. Searle, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, April 1849, p.236.

3 J. Acworth Account of the Proceedings .. Bradford Mechanics' Institution, 1837, p.25.

4 The Cambrian, 29 April 1848.

local newspaper commented,

"nothing would give us greater pleasure than to see
a well-regulated establishment of this description".¹

The assumptions behind the concept of 'well-regulated' can
partly be gathered from the institute's statement of objectives

"to furnish instruction in science and general
knowledge - brought within the reach of the humblest
mechanic by the payment of the small sum of two
shillings per quarter...furnishing instructive
recreation at hours not interfering with the time
of labour...presenting to him sources of enjoyment
calculated to supersede those too often resorted to".²

The report of the AGM in 1832 makes it clear that the institute
had obtained substantial support of the establishment. New
members included

"the names of several wealthy and influential
gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood."³

A president of the mechanics' institute, the Rev. John Bullar
said of it in 1834:

"From all I know of this Institution, I could venture
to pledge myself, that its members would hail with
delight, solid instruction imbued with the spirit of
Christian simplicity and benevolence, from those
quarters particularly, in which the education of
their instructors should combine with their high
moral principles and station in life, to inform,
delight and improve them at once."⁴

This was reflected in some of the lectures. Although there was
a ban on topics leading to political or religious controversy,
Bullar gave a course of lectures on The Wisdom of the Deity in
1832.⁵

1 Hampshire Advertiser, 27 March 1830.

2 Hampshire Independent, 28 March 1835.

3 Hampshire Advertiser, 26 May 1832.

4 J. Bullar Hints and Cautions on the Pursuit of General
Knowledge, (1833), p.45.

5 Hampshire Advertiser, 13 October 1832.

At a later date after the mechanics' institute had changed its name to the Southampton Polytechnic Institute (in 1843), an editorial made it clear how far lectures were to be kept within orthodox bounds. The editor of the Hampshire Advertiser, commenting on a lecture on Admiral Blake admitted he was one of England's most noble heroes whose courage and patriotism could be admired. However he had not expected

"to hear the republican spirit manifest at the time of Cromwell held up for admiration ... and we must remind the Committee that neither the democratic tone pervading the lecture, nor the sarcastic insinuations against the spirit of loyalty to the 'powers that be', were calculated to fulfill the professed object of the Society - that of imparting literary and scientific information to its members."¹

Another mechanics' institute which received royal patronage, in this case from Queen Victoria, was the Salford Mechanics' Royal Institute, but it failed to compete with the Salford Lyceum to which it lost nearly all its working class membership, and it closed in 1842.²

Not a few of the landed class defined a community of interest with the common people. The dislocation and distress which was occasioned by the activities of industrialists adversely affected many working men, and the landed gentry who felt their own political and economic power threatened could respond by becoming the defender of the working man in the face of his

1 Hampshire Advertiser, 6 January 1855. Further information can be found in B. Field, The Provision of Post-School Education in 19th Century England with Particular Reference to Southampton. M.A. (Ed.), Southampton, 1971.

2 I. Cowan, M.A. (Ed.), Southampton, 1979, 'Mechanics Institutes and Science and Art Classes in Salford in the 19th Century', The Vocational Aspect XX, (1968), pp. 201-10.

economic exploitation. What they wished to try to preserve was the supposed existence of a balance of rights and obligations when in Hannah More's well-quoted passage

"each according to his place, pays willing honour to his superiors - when servants are prompt to obey their masters, and masters deal kindly with their servants - when high, low, rich and poor - when landlord and tenant, master and workman, minister and people...sit down satisfied with his own place."¹

A more sympathetic and sophisticated argument was advanced by 'a Gentleman of wealth and talent in the neighbourhood' who was an honorary life member of Southampton Mechanics' Institute and who wrote to a local newspaper in support of that institution. He argued that: the provision of education was a social duty to all fellow creatures.

"The diffusion (of education) must advance the general state of mankind, and enable each man to improve his individual condition, without disturbing any of the rights or just relations of society. It will enable those who now regard rank and wealth with foolish admiration, or repining desire, to discover that the only genuine sources of human happiness are within reach of all classes alike (whose condition is not that of abject poverty), and that the upper branches of the tree bear neither fairer nor better fruits than the lower."²

This is a more penetrating perception of education as a form of social insurance by the upper classes, but it is clear that in supporting educational institutions and accepting the degree of social mobility this might offer to some individuals, the fundamental concern is with the preservation of the existing structure of society.

1 Quotation in M.T. Hodgen, Workers' Education in England and the United States, (1925), p.30.

2 Hampshire Advertiser 25 February 1832.

The dilemma for the Tory with social concern was well expressed by Southey: On the one hand the fear of the Radical who aimed to overturn the institutions of society; on the other hand an industrial expansion which created more and more grievances among the common people from whom Radicals drew their strength.

"There is among the lower classes a mass of ignorance, vice and wretchedness which no generous heart can contemplate without grief and which when the other signs of the times are considered may reasonably excite alarm for the fabric of society that rests upon such a base ..."

"You have a great and increasing population exposed at all times by the fluctuations of trade to suffer the greatest privations in the midst of a rich and luxurious society."

Southey has no sympathy however with the Radical responses to such privations. He saw the working class as

"a class of men aware of their numbers and of their strength; experienced in all the details of combination; improvident when they are in receipt of good wages, yet feeling themselves injured when those wages, during some failure of demand, are so lowered as no longer to afford the means of comfortable subsistence; and directing against the country their resentment and indignation for the evils which have been brought upon them by competition and the spirit of rivalry in trade."

So,

"You have spirits among you who are labouring night and day to stir up a bellum servile, an insurrection like that of Wat Tyler, of the Jacquerie, and of the peasants war in Germany."¹

The combination of fear and sympathy is typical of one branch of thinking among Tories.

1 R. Southey, "Sir Thomas More: or Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society" (1829), in B. Coleman (Ed.), The Idea of the City in 19th Century Britain, (1973), pp.59-61.

Not surprisingly therefore the institutes were favoured in so far as they could show that this harmony was reinforced and the point was often made by institute spokesmen that by encouraging social mixing in the proper controlled setting, this reinforcement was made. A printing operative who made good in the world and acknowledged his personal debt to the mechanics' institutes, wrote

"they aid in removing jealousy and distrust between the orders, stimulate the moral sense, render men more expert and able workers, and as a religious influence are a grand engine in the design of providence."¹

But in spite of some differences, there was a large community of interest between the landed classes and industrialists in relation to the working class. Much of the accepted system of norms and values, and the institutions through which these were expressed, were protected equally by the millowner and the squire. Many landed gentry had indeed involved themselves in some industrial enterprise, and factory owners were quick to adopt the manners and life styles of landed squires.

1.4 The Professions

The term 'profession' has to be defined rather loosely, because in the early 19th century, a number of occupations were still in the process of evolution towards full professional status.²

1 D. Burns, Mechanics' Institutes: their Objects and Tendency, (1837), pp. 56-57.

2 See W.J. Reader, Professional Men, (1966).

Encompassed in its usage here are the occupations of medicine, law, banking, insurance, finance and accountancy, journalism, bookselling and publishing, and rather insecurely of teaching. Members of these groups formed a small body in the 18th Century, but expanded rapidly with the growth of industrialisation and urban building. They were service occupations needed for the effective growth of industrial and commercial organisations, and for the people who lived in the growing towns. The professional classes were not uniformly spread round the land. The capital and the large regional towns had concentrations of men of this type, but they were thin on the ground in the smaller and dirtier towns, and very scarce in the country districts. In the Midlands, for example, the Black Country had very few professionals except in Wolverhampton, which was the largest town and on the western edge of the area. Most professional men, even if they worked in the Black Country, preferred to live in the adjacent town of Birmingham, which became the regional capital of the area.¹

The professionals were reasonably well-educated, working in occupations which required the continued use of learning and intelligence. They frequently had lively minds, and were accustomed to discuss, to analyse and to criticise. They were by no means all Radicals, but as a group they tended to be Whig and reformist, and non-conformists were well represented among them. They tended to oppose the more obscurantist institutions in society, which were difficult to defend on rational grounds and were of some hindrance to them in their work. They campaigned, to a greater or lesser degree, for the reform of local government

¹ Evidence for this can be obtained from the local directories of the period.

and parliament, for free trade, and for the reform of local charitable endowments. They hoped to see the evolution of a new industrial community based on efficiency and scientific understanding, and for many of them their occupations were intimately tied up with industrial expansion. Many of the banking families, like the Attwoods and Birkbecks, had originally made their fortunes in industry, and their future prosperity depended upon further industrial expansion. As a class, they had considerable feeling for the good of the local community. They were concerned with building up their towns into fine cities, and the civic pride which was such a feature of late Victorian life may be said to owe much to these men.

R.S. Neale, in his five class model which uses Dahrendorf's definition of class as conflict groups arising out of authority structures of imperatively co-ordinated associations, sees professionals with the skilled and educated artisans as forming the 'Middling Class'. Members of this class he sees as lacking the property and secure liquid assets of the true middle class. From them in particular were recruited the philosophical radicals: they had a general tendency to assert the rights of man against property and status, and were aptly described by Wakefield as 'the uneasy class'.¹

They had been responsible for founding and supporting the Literary and Scientific Institutes which flourished in the last twenty years of the 18th century in most of the large towns. These

1 R.S. Neale, Class and Ideology in the 19th Century, (1972), pp. 21-9.

bodies were careful to avoid provocatively reformist programmes, in spite of which they were frequently attacked as seditious in the years of Tory repression. They did much to propagate and analyse new scientific ideas, and as far as was prudent, discussed the political ideas thrown up in the ferment of European revolution. At the Newcastle Literary and Scientific Institute, the library in 1798 contained works by Bentham, Godwin, Helvetius, Wollstonecraft and Priestley.¹ Many of the men who became reformers in the 1820s and 1830s were introduced to the world of discourse and debate in these societies.

While not all the members were professional men, they formed the heart of these societies. Robert Owen describes how he was introduced to this world in Manchester in 1793. At the Society he was

"introduced to the leading professional characters, particularly in the medical profession, which at this period stood high in Manchester, and its leading members were the aristocracy of the town. The manufacturing at this period were generally plodding men of business."²

It is not surprising that such men of intelligence and learning should see mechanics' institutes as a necessary and important agency for the improvement of their towns. Their motives, like their political beliefs, were various enough, but they were bound together by a general if rather vague belief in the beneficent effects of universal enlightenment. Their involvement in the mechanics' institutes can hardly be over-stressed,

1 Quoted in H. Silver, Op.Cit., p.84.

2 R. Owen, Life, (1857), pp.36-7.

particularly in the early years when distrust was at its greatest. The key figures in the founding of the institutes at London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds were drawn from the professional class, and the picture is repeated at scores of institutes up and down the country.¹

The prevailing though not exclusive climate of political thinking among the professional groups was utilitarian, and politically very many gave allegiance to the reformist Whigs. For such people, there were two beliefs which were important in the relationship to schemes for the educational improvement of working class adults. Firstly the support of very many of them was dependent upon any proposal being clearly self-supporting rather than dependent upon charity. Charitable philanthropy was not a part of the utilitarian creed. Brougham condemned charity to the poor in his Practical Observations,² as did Dr. Nankivel, one of the leading figures of the Coventry Mechanics' Institute, who stated that

"eleemosynary aid tends as effectively to pauperise the poor as the maladministration of the Poor Laws."³

Such views promulgated by Ricardo, Malthus and others had very general support, at least in theory. The advantage of mechanics' institutes was that they were self-supporting institutions relying on the initiative, enthusiasm and self-reliance of the members to establish and develop their work. As such they were

1 See the evidence presented infra on the industrial institutes.

2 H. Brougham, Practical Observations Upon the Education of the People Directed to the Working Classes and their Employers, (1825), pp. 29-30.

3 Quotation in P. Searby, Coventry in the Age of the Chartists, (1965), p.26.

the style of institution which had general approval from those whose thinking was bounded by utilitarian concepts.

The second strand of thought among many in the professional groups was opposition to the extension of state control over individuals. This was focussed by factory legislation and by education in particular. Thornley, the reformist MP from Wolverhampton and a leading member of the Wolverhampton Atheneum and Mechanics' Institute refused to vote for the Factory Act of 1833, and Baines of the Leeds Mechanics' Institute took the same line over the 1844 Factory Act. Harriet Martineau, the great populariser of the political economists, summarised a major tenet of their beliefs in her statement that

"all interference of government with the direction and rewards of industry is a violation of its duty towards its subjects."¹

The Education Bill of 1847 was heavily attacked in the name of voluntaryism. Many of the leading figures of Coventry Mechanics' Institute led such an attack, earning the epithet from Charles Bray that they were like a "sort of dog in the manger who will neither move forward himself nor allow anyone else to do so."² Hudson summed up this general attitude in his History of Adult Education.

"On the whole then, the experience of the past is the proof of the danger of government influence, and of the instability of extreme centralisation, while it affords conclusive evidence of the superior and enduring value of voluntary efforts."³

1 H. Martineau, Illustrations of Political Economy, IX, p.124. (1832-4)

2 Coventry Herald, 19 March 1847.

3 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.188. See also E. Baines, Education Best Promoted by Perfect Freedom, (1854).

For such men, the voluntary nature of mechanics' institutes, totally without state control or finance in the first half of the century, made them institutions deserving support.

In the majority of mechanics' institutes, professional men were at the heart of the activities, serving as officers or committee members, raising money, lecturing, and not infrequently taking classes. The most prominent group were medical men, whose special professional interest in science and social reforms affecting health drew them to such institutions. G.K. Clark has drawn attention to the involvement of the medical profession in reforms of all types in the 19th century, and points to the absence of research which has adequately explored this activity.¹ Certainly they were heavily involved in mechanics' institutes, among others, in the institutes at London, Birmingham, Manchester, Hackney, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds, Nottingham, Leicester, East London, Huddersfield, Scarborough, Brighton, Ashton under Lyme, Mansfield, Stalybridge, Keighley, Evesham, Redditch, Stafford, Wolverhampton, Stoke, Uttoxeter, Aberystwyth, Bridgend, Cardiff, Carmarthen, Haverfordwest, Llanelly, Neath, Newcastle Emlyn, Swansea, Newport, Cheltenham, Walsall, Banbury, Southampton, Shrewsbury and Leamington Spa. Bankers as an occupational class were well represented: Birkbeck at London; Attwood, Lloyd, Sholefield and Spooner at Birmingham; Backhouse at Darlington; Smith Wright at Nottingham; Hordern and Fryer at

1 G.K. Clark, Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832-85, (1973), p. xxi.

Wolverhampton; Addison at Wednesbury; Goddard and Harvey at Longton; and Cobb and Tawney at Banbury. Considerable support, together with strategic resources, also came from editors of local newspapers: for example Poole at Coventry, Cox at Taunton, Asline Ward and James Montgomery at Sheffield, Harper at Cheltenham. There were also many lawyers involved in mechanics' institutes, as at Stoke, Longton, Burslem, Dudley, Taunton, Stourbridge, West Bromwich, Bristol, Birmingham, Evesham, Uttoxeter, Banbury, Shrewsbury and York.¹

Little opposition is recorded towards mechanics' institutes from professional men as such. It is reasonable to suppose some of them had the same kinds of objections as we have recorded under the categories of industrialists and landed classes, and certainly some of them had close social and financial connections with both these groups. More commonly however we may suppose that lack of support came from professional men choosing to put their energy into other rival schemes. The professional was frequently involved in many local ventures and the sheer multiplicity of activities, even within the one field of adult education, must have limited the support that any one could obtain. The situation at Taunton was not untypical. In a small market town, there were by 1840, three rival institutions drawing membership from the lower middle classes, the Mechanics' Institute, the Literary Institute, and the Archaeological Society, and this rivalry caused the near collapse of all three.²

1 The list is a sample collation, extracted from numerous references, local newspapers and institute documents.

2 A.K. Hudson, 'The Taunton Mechanics' Institute', Notes and Queries: Somerset and Dorset, XXVI (1952), p.102.

1.5 The Working Class

We have to this point suggested reasons why support might be given or withheld by groups within the middle and upper classes to organisations meant to provide for the working class. Implicit in much of the argument is that justification for support came from degrees of manipulation of the ideas and habits of the working class members.

We cannot argue, however, that the working class was merely a passive partner in this struggle for possession of its soul as well as its body. As the working class gained some coherence as a self identifying body, so it also became concerned to develop an educational system based on social and economic assumptions that were consistent with its class ambitions. It is true that such self-identification, particularly in the period before the late 1830's was partial and often elitist. Definitions of the working class could be and often were confined to artisans or skilled craftsmen, or at the very least those who were in steady work, and did not recognise the unemployed, the pauperised or the casual unskilled workers. Nevertheless there has been general agreement among historians of this period that forms of working class consciousness were emerging and growing more coherent and embracing in the first three decades of the century.

Attempts by the working class, however defined, to establish their own educational systems appear to have had relatively little success in this early period. It may be that our problem

is that much of their activity was never recorded. It was short term and transient. We know that there were many mutual improvement societies, front room bookclubs, cottage fireside reading and debating classes, but our knowledge of their number, extent and character is very slim indeed. We do not know what went on in them, and without that knowledge it is not clear how far they were genuine working mens' bodies or how far they were established by a middle-class benefactor such as the parson or a factory owner. Harrison produces evidence of the prevalence of working mens' classes run in vicarage kitchens¹ and evidence will be produced later in this thesis of many small working class bodies which were taken over by middle class organisers as soon as they were reasonably successful and turned into mechanics' institutes.

We have frequent mentions also of classes connected with the corresponding societies and reform clubs, of Hampden clubs, secular Sunday schools, trade union classes and the like in the period 1790 - 1830.² But before the Owenite activities of the 1830s, we are working on very patchy evidence of the extent of working class educational activity and of the attitude of working class leaders to education. With the growth of the co-operative movements, of unionism, of socialism and Chartism however, an articulate programme of education for the working classes began to be formulated. Owen was the most potent individual force in this development. He carried over from such radicals as Wollstonecroft, Godwin and Priestley the rationalism of the 18th Century. Like them also, and particularly

1 J.F.C. Harrison Op.Cit., pp. 187-192. Also for mutual improvement societies pp.51-55, and T. Kelly, George Birkbeck, pp. 66-69.

2 B. Simon, Op. Cit., pp.180-193.

under the influence of Helvetius, he argued that man was formed by his environment.

"Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of the proper means ; which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men."¹

Initially his concern was to provide a more just society by spreading the force of reason among all men. Only thus could society achieve its proper goal.

"The legitimate object of society is to improve the physical, moral, and intellectual character of men, and in the most convenient manner to supply all their wants, in order that they may experience the least suffering and the greatest enjoyment. Society, as it is now constituted, is not calculated to produce these results."²

It followed logically that education must occupy a central place in the programme for the regeneration of society. Owen argued the centrality of his educational programme with single-minded and unwavering consistency throughout his life. It is in this emphasis of centrality that differentiates him from Godwin, Paine and even Wolstonecroft. He saw it of course subordinate to the end, or rather the means of attaining the end of the best mode of distribution of the fruits of labour. But he was unwilling to contemplate education in terms of class struggle and class control. It is true that his thoughts became more

1 R. Owen, A New View of Society, (1813), p.16.

2 R. Owen, quotation in H. Silver, Op. Cit., p.129.

socialist over the thirty years after the writing of

A New View of Society in 1813. His followers could fully accept his famous statement that:

"Every individual of the human race has a full equal right to the earth... No man has a right to require another man to do for him, what he will not do for that man: or in other words, all men, by nature, have equal rights."¹

But Owen never worked out the class dynamic of society so that education remained for him a missionary enterprise to lead rationally to a just world, rather than a control mechanism or tool in the political struggle for power over economic production. This latter position was developed by those who were influenced by him as a fellow radical working class leader - by Henry Hethrington and Bronterre O'Brien, by Hodgskin by Detrosier, by J.C. Bray and particularly by the Chartists. But the influence of Owen's practical work was profound.

"The Owenite movement proper, and the wider movements with which it became for a period identified, established schools and ran lecture courses on political, social and scientific subjects; they gave rise to private ventures in education, and wrote educational aims into the constitutions of trade unions and co-operative societies; they planned infant and adult education; they issued cheap publications and taught masses of people to analyse economic and social issues; they made ideas a real tool in the work of social reformation."²

Owen brought into much clearer focus the arguments of Radicals such as Carlile, William Thompson and Hodgskin that a new kind of education was the necessary prelude to achieving a just

1 R. Owen, Six Lectures Delivered in Manchester, (1837), p.70
Quotation in H. Silver, Op.Cit., p.227.

2 H. Silver, Op.Cit., p.203

society.¹ For Carlile, who drew heavily on the ideas of Paine, this involved a non-religious education based on the absolute and moral truths of science. Thompson, like Owen and Hodgskin believed in the full return of the value of the product of his labour to the worker. Education was to facilitate co-operative living in a rational society which was underpinned by an economy based on the natural laws of distribution. Thomas Hodgskin went further in his analysis of the economic principles of capitalism. His primary concern was to demonstrate the basic conflict of interest between the worker and the capitalist which resulted in the worker being deprived of most of the value of his produce. Hodgskin believed that there were iron laws of political economy, that rational analysis could only lead in the end to a socialist society, and that the purpose of education was to spread a true understanding of the nature and dynamic of society. Since however such understanding was opposed to the economic interest of the capitalist class, education was controlled and operated by those in power to prevent the labourer from knowing the economic and social laws on which his existence and happiness depended. Hodgskin, suspicious of state activity in almost any form, was particularly opposed to state education because it would inevitably try to convince workers of the justice of the existing social and economic arrangements, and prevent them from understanding the basis of their exploitation.² Thompson however was optimistic that the system of

1 The key texts of Thompson and Carlile are available in B. Simon (Ed.), The Radical Tradition in Education in Britain. (1974)

2 For Hodgskin, see E. Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin, (1956).

keeping the masses in ignorance to perpetuate the power of government was nearing its end. He was very aware, however, of the connection between education and class control. He, like Owen and Hodgskin was totally critical of existing educational institutions, and particularly the Bell-Lancaster schools which have operated

"with existing institutions in forming passive habits of blind obedience."¹

He argued that

"the Industrious Classes must also acquire power, the whole power of the social machine in their own hands, in order to render their knowledge available, on a national scale, and with immediate effect for promoting the impartial and equal happiness of all."²

So by 1830 from a number of sources a policy was developing which stressed the central importance of education to the working class struggle and which described education as a mechanism of control in the interests of various orderings of economic and social societies. The great expansion of Owenite and Chartist institutions and schools that followed in the next two decades was accompanied by continuing exposition on education and the class struggle.

One major development in this period was the full realisation that the aims of the Whigs and Broughamites were as opposed to education in the interests of the working class as were the Tories, or the clerical party. Lovett represented acutely this perception in the well known passage:

"While a large portion of the hawks and owls of society were seeking to perpetuate that state of

1 W. Thompson, *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth*, (1850), pp.233.

2 W. Thompson, *Labour Rewarded*, (1827), p.73 Quoted in B. Simon, Op. Cit., p.205.

mental darkness most favourable to the securing of their prey, another portion, with more cunning were for admitting a sufficient amount of mental glimmer to cause the multitude to walk quietly and contentedly in the paths they in their wisdom had prescribed for them."¹

It became a central belief of many working class leaders that education was dangerous if it were controlled by or influenced by the middle and upper classes. Ernest Jones stated succinctly that

"a People's education is only safe in the People's own hands"²

and Bronterre O'Brien saw education as a means of revolutionary activity.

"The only knowledge which is of service to the working people is that which makes them dissatisfied, and makes them worse slaves. This is the knowledge which we shall give them."³

Paul Rogers, a Radical at the Sheffield Mechanics' Institute, put the argument strongly in a lecture subsequently published in 1840.

"To themselves alone the people must look for the help for which they have too long looked in vain to other quarters the bulk of the world's population have been taught just as much as the possessors of the world's wealth permitted. And the masters have always taken good care to impress the servants with a deep sense of their inferiority."⁴

1 The Life and Struggles of William Lovett, (1876), p.134.

2 Quotation in P. Hollis, Class and Conflict p.337.

3 Destructive, 7 June 1834. Quotation in P. Hollis, Op. Cit., p.336.

4 A Lecture on the Origin, Progress and Results of the Sheffield Mechanics' Institution, (1840), pp. 11-12.

Thus the working class leaders were involved in a full-blooded political battle against their former allies as well as their traditional enemies. Although Lovett spelt out the most complete programme of how schools should be organised, syllabuses constructed, and pedagogy conducted for the education of the working class, it was in the political activity of the Chartists that we see the clearest perception of the place of education in the class struggle.

For the line taken by Bronterre O'Brien, and backed by Harney and O'Connor as well as the mass of the Chartist membership was that the essential first step towards a working class educational system was the improvement of the physical conditions of the workers, which could only come about by political activity ; in fact by gaining the Charter. Though there is a simplistic tendency in Chartist thinking to assume that proper education would follow automatically with the achievement of political goals, just as conversely the Owenites tended to assume that education would lead to political goals, the Chartist writers had grasped the central fact of the relationship between education and economic control. Hence their condemnation of the whole apparatus of middle class sponsored schools and institutions.

The Northern Star was one of the main vehicles through which much of this thinking was transmitted.¹

1 See P. Hollis, The Pauper Press: A Study of Working Class Radicalism in the 1830s, (1970), for the impact and extent of the press in developing working class activity and consciousness.

"The political enfranchisement of the whole male (sic) adult population, is an indispensable preliminary to every kind of educational, social, and physical improvement."

"The ignorance of the people is the tyrants' title to power",

but

"education will follow the suffrage as sure as day succeeds night."¹

The view of the main-line Chartist movement, from which Lovett had diverged after 1840, is well summed up in the following passage.

"Men, interested in the continuance of the present robber-like system of society - the lordly aristocrat - the monied vampire and the prostituted priest - in a word the enemies to the rights, the liberties, and the happiness of millions, will pretendedly acquiesce in the propriety of educating - of moralising the people; and it will ever be found that so long as the people's political rights are withheld from them, any system of education which meets with the acquiescence of their foes, will have for its object the perpetuation of the people's slavery."²

What Chartism added to the thinking of the rationalists and Owenites was a realisation of education through the very fact of participating in a class struggle. Dobb's phrase 'education by collision' is apt.³ Silver develops the point thus:

"In the actual conditions of the 1840s, it might be said that the fight for the franchise and a free press was the best available schoolmaster. Listening to speeches and making speeches, writing handbills, public debate, the clash within the movement itself

1 Northern Star, 11 July 1846, 12 September 1846

2 Northern Star, 24 March 1838

over concepts of democracy and rights and strategy - all these were part of the role of chartism ... as a teacher."

Radical education has therefore three distinct characteristics: a critique of all forms of education provided by the middle and upper classes; a concept of education as a political strategy or as a means of changing the world; and an identification of the relevant Knowledge which should form the content of education. On this last point, there was consensus among Radical writers that it must include political knowledge, the science of society and causes and explanations of poverty. This was what, in contradiction to Brougham, Radicals termed 'really useful knowledge'. Johnson adds a fourth characteristic which is of importance in relation to mechanics' institutes.² He argues that Radicals saw the forms of education not as institutionalised in schools or institutes, nor as making sharp distinctions between student and non-student, but as generally diffused through working class cultural forms. In particular it did not admit of the child/adult distinction made by middle class educational forms. Johnson states that

"the typical forms were improvised, haphazard and therefore ephemeral, having little permanent existence beyond the more immediate needs of individuals and groups. Educational forms were closely related to other activities or inserted within them, temporally and spatially."³

So although the Radicals provided counter-institutions in the Halls of Science and Chartist schools, and on occasions used

1 H. Silver, Op.Cit., pp.234-235.

2 R. Johnson 'Really Useful Knowledge' in J. Clarke et. al. (Ed.) Working Class Culture, (1979), discusses and illustrates these four characteristics of radical education.

3 Ibid, p.79.

middle class institutions such as the Sunday school or mechanics' institute, concentration on such formal education disguises a central characteristic of Radical education which was its de-institutionalised nature.

In summary, this section argues that it would be unwarranted to see the struggle over the educational practices developed in the first half of the 19th Century as one between the industrial capitalists led by reformist Whigs and the landed gentry led by the traditionalist Tories, with control of the body of the labouring class the prize for which they fought. The period witnessed the emergence of a self-conscious and self-defining working class whose leaders pressed its own interests in educational as much as in social, political and economic policies.

1.6 Summary of Chapter One

A common interpretation of the years under study has been used, which centres in the dynamic of struggle between the conservative representatives of established social order, the representatives of the new order of industrial capitalism, and the working class which serviced the productive economy. The education of the working class was a key focus in this class struggle. The landed classes and the middle class had concerns in common and concerns in conflict as they strove to mould the working class to an image which fitted their conception of society. The middle class drew considerably from the political

economy of the utilitarians, as the landed class drew from an older tradition of Tory and Whig social philosophy. The working class was itself in the process of self-awareness and self-definition, and its leaders were developing their own ideas on education, which generally involved an analysis in terms of economic class interest. The simple model of class conflict thus described was in practice infinitely complicated with many areas of ambiguity, but the basic division into a threefold class division is assumed to be valid.

It was hypothesised that all classes had an interest in educational institutions for the working class adult, and the key question was not whether a particular class or sub-section of that class supported mechanics' institutes or not, but on what terms they would give support and what would arouse their hostility. This was examined in relation to the landed gentry and aristocracy, industrialists and capitalists, professional persons, and the working class. Underlying the analysis presented was the assumption that educational institutions operate in terms of class interest, and the support any institution enjoys depends upon the function it is perceived to be serving. Its function will largely be determined by the group that is in control of the institution, and a key area of interest therefore centres on the struggle for such control.

In the following section, this general argument is further expanded, a categorisation is presented based on institutional control systems conceived in class terms, and case studies of mechanics' institutes are used to check the validity of the categorisation and explicate the way in which control was exercised.

CHAPTER 2

Mechanics' Institutes and Political Affiliations

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CHAPTER 2

2.1 Introduction

Mechanics' institutes were a part of the cultural phenomena of society, and within them struggles took place between class interests to gain power of the educational processes. Whoever gained control of this sector of the education of the working class would be able to use the process to facilitate the provision of appropriate skills for the economy they wanted, to buttress the institutions of the state which represented that economy, and to transmit an ideology which legitimated that economy.

The control that the various class interests attempt to exercise involves transmission of the following:

1. Approved political and politico-economic beliefs.
2. Approved ethical and religious beliefs.
3. Approved demands and systems that translate politico-economic beliefs into the ways in which working people are required to relate to their labour - for example in factory discipline, the use of machinery, mechanisms for fixing wage rates.
4. Approved styles of living and social behaviour, partly derived from ethical and religious beliefs, which could include valued personal habits and characteristics such as thrift or punctuality,

and valued attitudes to the institutions of society such as status systems.

5. Required skills and knowledge to underwrite the approved economic system. This would include not only technical and vocational but also general education and training.

We can hypothesise three basic models that exemplify the different political power positions of the protagonists in the struggle. An institute could reflect the prevailing class beliefs of the landed Gentry, the Tory party and the Church. Its aim would be to preserve the existing social order (as selectively perceived in class terms), to teach respect for its institutions - the Church, the Crown, property and those set in authority.

A second prototype institution might mirror the class interests of the industrial capitalists and associated middle class agents, thus embracing both factory owners and shopkeepers, lawyers, merchants, etc. One aspect of such an institution would be reformist, even radical, in that its supporters wished to sweep away obscurantist habits and institutions from the past and replace them by political social and economic systems which were in line with capitalist, utilitarian or Broughamite beliefs. On some issues they would attack working class policies and programmes, in others they would support them, according to what was in their own interest.

Such institutes generally had a heavy representation in their management of non-conformist, professional men such as bankers, doctors and publishers who were mildly reformist, and the more liberal factory owners. A third and rare institute reflected the attitudes of the working class leaders. It drew strands from Owenism, Jacobinism, Cobbettism, Unionism and Chartism. The texts of discussion would be from the writings of Paine, Godwin, Cobbett, Carlile, Hunt, Lovett and O'Brien. There was generally a common antipathy to capitalism as well as to landed property. Such institutes attracted middle class supporters who espoused the cause of the proletariat, and who gave not only valuable leadership but also financial help.

These are pure models in the Weberian sense. We will examine the extent to which deviation from that took place as a result of alliances and clashes between the three class interests. Three types of conflict and two types of alliance were possible. There could be conflict between Tory traditionalism and capitalist reformism, between Tory traditionalism and working class Radicalism and between capitalist reformism and working class Radicalism. Alliances were possible between Tory traditionalism and Whig reformism against working class Radicalism and between capitalist reformism and working class Radicalism against Tory traditionalism. Alliances and conflicts depended on definitions of where one's enemy lay at any one particular time, and such definitions changed as circumstances changed.

We will use the following categorisations in our examination of individual mechanics' institutes, and endeavour to establish

that such categorisation is valid.

Category One

Within this category are institutions which are characterised by strong support from liberal, middle class reformists generally inclined to the position of Brougham, but opposed to the working class movements whether of Jacobinism, Unionism, or Owenism. The institutions face some opposition from traditionalists, Tories, and the Established Church as a reflection of the general opposition of interests between liberal reformists and Tory traditionalists.

Category Two

Within this category are institutions which reflect some kind of an alliance between the liberal reformists, spread across a spectrum from mild reformists to Broughamites to middle class Radicals associating themselves with Owenism or Chartism, and working class leaders. These institutions faced opposition, often quite hostile and prolonged, from the representatives of Tory and Church traditionalists. Institutes falling in this category may show the characteristics of the middle class - working class alliance only for a period in their history, and as a general rule it was commoner in the period 1825 - 38 than in subsequent periods.

Category Three

In this category fall those institutions characterised by an alliance between liberal reformists and Tory traditionalists, both totally unsympathetic to any expression of independent

working class thought or action. The liberal reformists tended to be of the utilitarian school and took a hard class line as capitalists or the agents of capitalists.

Category Four

Within this category are those institutions which are controlled by Tory traditionalists, generally members of the Church and landed gentry, and oppose any expression of independent working class activity. They are opposed to Unionism, Owenism and often the milder forms of reform connected with the Reform Act, the Anti-Corn Law League and the like. What support there is from industrial capitalists is small and absorbed into the prevailing conservatism.

Category Five

This category includes those institutions in which there was a struggle between Tory traditionalism and liberal reformists, with little or no reference to the working class. The struggle was very much that of emerging industrial capitalism challenging the control of pre-industrial landed society.

Category Six

This category which may be found to contain no Mechanics' Institutes at all would include those institutions which were genuine working class bodies under working class leadership, opposed by Tories and Whigs alike. Against such opposition institutes only survived by becoming something else, and we will find a number of institutions that started off successfully in this category, but were under pressure transformed

into an institution within one of the other categories. The purpose of using this categorisation is not simply to place an institute in the appropriate category, but to use it as a device for examining the question of class control in institutions, and by inference in society as a whole. We will expect therefore to find institutions which move over time from one category to others, to find institutions which do not exactly fit any category, and some which may operate in the interstices between categories.

2.2 Category One

"Institutions characterised by strong support from middle class reformists within the general position of Broughamites, opposed to working class movements such as Jacobinism, Owenism, or Unionism, and generally opposed by traditionalists, Tories, and the Established Church".

2.2.1 The London Mechanics Institute

This institute has been thoroughly researched and the issues involved have been presented, by Kelly and Halevy, and summaries of the major findings are to be found in a number of works on education of this period.¹ Although no new

1 For London Mechanics' Institute, see T. Kelly, George Birkbeck. E. Halevy, Thomas Hodgskin. B. Simon, Op. Cit., pp.153-7. The following account is derived from their work.

material is presented here, a summary is given based on published research, with an emphasis on the issues arising from political or class conflict. The history of this institute has a special significance because of its importance in the general movement of mechanics' institutes. It was one of the very first founded, it had attached to it a number of men who were national figures in educational advance, and it was very frequently perceived as a model or exemplar upon which other institutes could be based.

The initial impetus for the founding of the London Mechanics' Institute, came from Joseph Robertson and Thomas Hodgskin. These two, though important men in their own right, were acting in concert with a group of working men, which included some who had been imprisoned or fined in the years of repression. They had been in the habit of meeting every night in a coffee house in Clerkenwell, two nights devoted to reading, two to discussion, and one to music.¹ Robertson was a journalist of some repute, and an agitator of some force and ability. In 1823 he started The Mechanics Magazine, of which he remained editor, proprietor, and main contributor until his death in 1852. Associated with him in the editorship was Thomas Hodgskin, a retired naval officer, who had come into contact with Francis Place and through him with James Mill. His ideas were from the start more radical than was common in utilitarian circles, and in 1825 he published a book of seminal importance in the history of Socialist thought, Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital. In this, he challenged the

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.49.

assumption that the interests of the worker and employer were identical, postulated a fundamental clash between labour and capital, and claimed that the labourer was entitled to the full value of his produce.

The two of them approached Francis Place in 1823, for he had behind him a long experience of working class organisation, and suggested the formation of a working man's institute. This was a crucial mistake by Robertson and Hodgskin, for Place envisaged a body very different from that suggested by the two journalists. What followed was a battle for control between capitalist ideologies of the middle classes and the nascent socialism of working class leaders.

Place took up the idea of an institute with enthusiasm. He envisaged a large body holding lectures in a room that could hold at least a thousand members, with a museum, a laboratory, an experimental workshop, and classes in various subjects. For all these services, it would be necessary to charge a substantial subscription in the region of 20/- per annum, and to appeal for capital to the wealthy classes. It is quite likely that Place did not see the introduction of patronage by the wealthy solely as a financial convenience, but also as something that would give stability and order to the Institute, and guarantee that its activities fell within his estimate of permissible radicalism. Robertson and Hodgskin fought bitterly against this, rightly assuming that unless the workers had financial control they would lose any form of real control. In an article they drew up for The Mechanics Magazine to publicise

their intentions, they made their position very plain.

"The British government has hitherto been always so much occupied in devising means to secure its power, that it has been able to pay but little attention to the instruction of the people: nor do we wish that it should. The education of a free people, like their property, will always be directed most beneficially for them when it is in their own hands. When government interferes, it directs its efforts more to make people obedient and docile, than wise and happy. It desires to control the thoughts, and fashion even the minds of its subjects; and to give into its hands the power of educating the people, is the widest possible extension of that most pernicious practice which has so long desolated society, of allowing one or a few men to direct the actions and control the conduct of millions. Men had better be without education - properly so called, for nature of herself teaches us many valuable truths - than be educated by their rulers; for then education is but the mere breaking in of the steer to the yoke: the mere discipline of the hunting dog, which, by dint of severity, is made to forego the strongest impulse of his nature, and instead of devouring his prey, to hasten with it to the feet of his master. The people only want to have the means of educating themselves left in their pockets untouched by the tax-gatherer, and there is but no doubt but they will employ those means more for their own advantage than they can possibly be employed by men who, for the very reason that they belong to the upper classes, can know little or nothing of what the lower classes need, nor what is fitting for them. They know, indeed, too well what is proper for them as subjects, as tax-paying machines, as slaves, but not what is suitable to them as labourers and men."

"We are desirous of seeing a 'London Mechanics' Institute' established by the mechanics of the metropolis themselves We are convinced they can accomplish this if they please We do not doubt, that in this undertaking, the operatives will find much friendly assistance, particularly from the master mechanics; but as the Institution is intended for the benefit of the operatives, our present appeal is chiefly directed to them." ¹

1 Mechanics Magazine 11 Oct 1823

Place, however, continued to campaign for his own version of an institute, working exceptionally hard to gain the maximum body of support. In the end, he claims, he converted Robertson and Hodgskin to the view that patronage of interested parties must be obtained.¹ At a meeting in November 1823 Robertson, Hodgskin, and Place were joined by Birkbeck, who had immediately shown interest in the scheme, by Brougham, and by a number of employers. Subsequently, Place obtained leave to launch a public appeal for funds, and on November 11th, a public meeting was held with an estimated attendance of over two thousand. Among the meeting were "many most respectable master-engineers, manufacturers and tradesmen". The meeting agreed to the establishment of an Institute, "entirely or chiefly supported by mechanics themselves Friends of knowledge and improvement be invited to contribute ... by donations of books, money, specimens and apparatus".² Place had obtained his victory, and the contributions started to come in - from Birkbeck and Brougham, James Mill and Jeremy Bentham, J.C. Hobhouse and William Clement. Cobbett supported the Institute, but made it clear that he was aligned with Robertson and Hodgskin. He warned, in a speech at the opening meeting, that "men would soon be found who would put the mechanics on one side, and make use of them only as tools."³ In his Weekly Register he amplified this.

1 Place Mss. 27823 ff. 245-6

2 Mechanics Magazine 15 Nov 1823

3 Mechanics Magazine 15 Nov 1823

"I gave my five pounds as a mark of my regard for and my attachment to the working classes of the community, and also as a mark of my approbation for anything which seemed to assert that these classes were equal, in point of intellect, to those who have the insolence to call them 'the Lower Orders'. But, I was not without my fears, nor am I now without my fears, that this institution may be turned to purposes, extremely injurious to the mechanics themselves Mechanics, I must heartily wish you well; but I also most heartily wish you not to be humbugged, as you most certainly will be, if you suffer anybody but real mechanics to have anything to do with managing the concern"¹

The argument of Cobbett was reinforced by the comments in The Trades Newspaper, probably written by John Gast.

"When it was founded, there was such a strong and general feeling excited on its behalf among the Mechanics of the Metropolis, that we felt perfectly convinced, had not that feeling been damped ... the Mechanics themselves might and would have furnished all the means requisite for ensuring it the most splendid success."²

Robertson and Hodgskin fought strongly to retain financial control with the mechanics. An elaborate address appealing for funds was put to the committee, with the support of Birkbeck, the employers, and Place, but was rejected by the workmen led by the two journalists. After a period of fierce in-fighting, in which both Place and his opponents used various dubious manœuvres against each other, the victory went to Place, and his opponents had to be content with a rule that two-thirds of the committee must be taken from the working

1 Cobbett's Weekly Register, 48, 435-8, November 1823.

2 in E.P. Thompson, Op. Cit., p. 744-745.

classes. In the election for officials, the middle-class radicals tightened their hold. The four trustees were Birkbeck, Brougham, Joshua Walker, and Alderman John Key, Birkbeck was President, Vice-Presidents were John Martineau, an employer, McWilliams, the architect, Professor John Millington and Dr. Gilchrist. Key was treasurer. Robertson and Hodgskin¹ were not elected. Significant was a section of Birkbeck's opening address at the first formal meeting.

"All intention of interference with political questions we do therefore disclaim I am persuaded we shall invigorate the attachment which must ever exist to every wise and well-constructed system of legislation."²

As the institute's work got under way, more support was given both from working class leaders such as Major Cartwright, Robert Owen, and Sir Francis Burdett, and from middle class reformers such as J.C. Lambton and William Wilberforce. The money to put up a building for the institute was obtained partly by a loan from Birkbeck at four per cent interest.

Robertson's fears seem to have been justified, for the institute was now in debt to its own President, whose power henceforth was unchallengable. The Mechanics Magazine commented, "it is placing the Institution under the foot of one man; it is making a private speculation of what was meant to rest on the broadest basis of public co-operation and utility".³

1 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., pp. 89-90.

2 Mechanics Magazine, 28 February 1824

3 Mechanics Magazine, 11 December 1824

Robertson withdrew the support of his journal from the Institute, refused to attend the ceremony of laying the foundation stone, and also boycotted the opening of the new lecture theatre in July 1825. Indeed this last ceremony demonstrates just how far the Institute had moved from its original conception. The ceremony was performed by the King's brother, the Duke of Sussex, supported by the Marquis of Landsdowne and other Whig magnates.

The work of the institute rapidly developed, with courses of science lectures, classes in Mathematics, Drawing, Geography and French, a circulating and reference library of nearly 1,500 books, and a museum of pieces of variable usefulness. "800 to 900 clean, respectable looking mechanics" formed the body of support.¹ Among them were a number of past or future working class leaders, including Henry Lovett, John Gale Jones, Thomas Evans and Thomas J. Evans.

Although the institute had been taken over by the middle class reformers, the course it was to follow was not made explicit until the raising of the question of political instruction and debate. The mechanics, we can assume, wanted free discussion and lectures by exponents of Owen and Spence as well as by those of Mill and Bentham. In 1825 Hodgskin offered a course of twelve lectures on political economy, and although the committee initially were not unfavourable, pressure by Place behind the scenes caused the offer to be rejected. It was decided instead to ask William Ellis to lecture on the same subject, but as he was a member of

¹ Place Mss., 27823, f.337.

J.S. Mill's Utilitarian Society, his approach to the subject was very different.

In spite of Place's opposition, Hodgskin did manage to give a series of lectures on The Produce of Labour (later published as Popular Political Economy) in 1826. This created a furore at the time. There seem to have been three reasons for his engagement. Firstly, he was taken on at very short notice after William Ellis' course had fallen through. Secondly, he had become a close personal friend of Birkbeck. Thirdly, he was not so generally known as an anti-capitalist writer, partly because his first book had been published anonymously, partly because he was publicly still rather an obscure figure.

Nevertheless, it was an unlikely decision, and after the course was given, the reformers attacked Hodgskin with some scorn. "The mad nonsense of our friend Hodgskin, which he published as a system, and propagates with the zeal of perfect fanaticism",¹ commented James Mill. "Such doctrines ... end in the maddening passion, the drunken frenzy, the unappeasable tumult - the plunder, the fire, the blood",² suggested Charles Knight. Place's complaints were enough to ensure that Hodgskin was not asked to speak again. The antidote was carefully provided by a lecture series given by Wilmot Horton, a utilitarian particularly interested in emigration as a solution to pauperism. He first took a

1 Letter to Brougham, in A. Bain, James Mill, (1882), p.364

2 The Rights of Industry, Vol II, (1831), p. 152-153.

discussion group on problems of population and emigration, and then gave ten lectures, "the object of which is", in Greville's words, "to explain to the labouring classes some of the truths of political economy, the folly of thinking that the breaking of machinery will better their condition, and the efficacy of his own plan for emigration."¹ Birkbeck wrote to him, in his letter of thanks, "The more they are really educated, the more they are raised in the scale of intelligence, the more perfect will the institutions of the state become; made so not by frantic violence, but by temperate and reasonable improvement."² A classic statement of the theory of universal enlightenment for the benefit of state security.³

Further trouble came over the letting of the lecture theatre to outside organisations. Birkbeck himself seemed quite happy to allow a free field for all opinions, but much pressure was applied to ban political organisations from institute property. Robert Owen had lectured there in 1825, and the London Trade Societies in 1826. In 1829, the London Radical Reform Association, the Association for the Promotion of Co-Operative Knowledge, and William Cobbett, all hired the theatre, and in 1830 at a special meeting, the institute agreed to stop all political and religious meetings on institute premises. Although Owen managed to give one more lecture, and an Owenite meeting was held protesting at the

1 Journal of the Reign of George IV and William IV, (1874) Vol. II, pp. 97-8.

2 T. Kelly, Op.Cit., p.119.

3 The Hodgskin-Horton episode is well-documented in B. Simon, Op.Cit., pp.155-157, and T. Kelly, Op.Cit., pp.116-119.

Taxes on Knowledge, and one or two Trade Union meetings were held to protest against the introduction of machinery, the rule was applied more and more rigorously. Thus although the voice of working class organisations was not completely unheard in these early years, it was effectively stifled by 1831, and throughout the prominent note was that of Whig reformist utilitarianism.

So it is not unreasonable to claim that the London Mechanics' Institute was an arena of a class struggle in which the ideologies of industrial capitalism successfully defeated a socialist challenge. But while working class leaders might perceive the Institute as representing an alien political philosophy, many Tories saw it equally as an unpalatable body. To them, Brougham, Place, Mill and Bentham were very dangerous men who were trying to subvert the Constitution and destroy society. While not all of them opposed the principle of educating the masses, they did suspect any body that had gathered together quite so many of the reforming party. No prominent Tory came forward to support the Institute;¹ with the exception of the Bishop of Norwich, who was known as the most liberal of the bench, the Church kept well clear, and the high-born who lent their names to the venture were, like the Duke of Sussex and the Marquis of Landsdowne, well-known Whigs. The concentration of Quakers, like William Allen and Birkbeck, of Unitarians and other non-Conformists, was noticeable. Not surprisingly, therefore, the institute was

1 This is not strictly true. William Wilberforce was a supporter, as was Huskisson.

attacked as a Radical, non-conformist body. A Leeds journalist wrote, "Party men were there elected as trustees: just as if an honest Tory had no bias towards the cultivation of science, and as if Whigs alone were interested in the well-being of those in the humbler walks of life."¹ The European Magazine gave the Institute quite a specific political purpose. "We are not sure that he (Place) was the absolute inventor of mechanics' institutions, but we do think that either he, or ... some of his pupils, gave to the London combination bearing that name, that unity and bias which cannot fail to make it a very efficient organ of civil liberty in Westminster, in the event of a contested election."² The Radical paper, The Examiner, noted the absence of any Tories at the meetings which established the Institute.³ Brougham's support encouraged many of the attacks in Tory journals. "Much undoubtedly of the alarm, attributed to the patronage and advocacy of (Brougham). It is his singular infelicity to prejudice every cause which he undertakes to advance."⁴ "Liberty and Independence were the themes of every harangue, and violent party spirit pervaded every meeting", wrote another paper.⁵

We can now summarise the political significance of the founding of London Mechanics' Institute.

1 Leeds Intelligencer, 25 December 1823.

2 European Magazine, N.S. II, 227-33 March 1826.

3 Examiner, 16 November, 1823.

4 Quarterly Review XXXII 413, October 1825.

5 London Journal of Arts and Sciences IX, 1835, 369-370.

1. It originated in an unambitious group of working men, and was taken up by Robertson and Hodgskin to make it into a larger and more powerful body.
2. Mainly through the work of Francis Place, it was transformed into an institute controlled and supported by the reformist Whigs.
3. The institute was financed by the contributions of well-wishers from the prosperous classes.
4. Although the mechanics held a majority of seats on the committee, a third of these seats and all the main offices were held by middle-class members.
5. The institute had appealed to the most prosperous of the working class. This it had done in two ways. It had fixed the contribution at one pound per annum, which priced it out of the market for most ordinary working men. It had adopted the policy of giving preference of membership to mechanics. These were defined as those who worked at trades, though if there was room in the institute all who earned their living by working with their hands were eligible for admittance.
6. Birkbeck, Brougham and Place had established themselves as leaders of the mechanics' institute movement throughout the country. Henceforth their influence was very considerable indeed.

2.2.2 The Manchester Mechanics Institute¹

The textile area of Lancashire proved to be a fertile area for mechanics' institutes and other forms of adult education. The impact of new technology on industry was nowhere more apparent, and the development of the factory system pointed up the need for educating a proletariat in factory discipline and political submission. The volatile migrant population in many of the mushroom cotton towns where social and living conditions were bad, and where no kind of stable social network yet existed, further pointed to the advantages of establishing some system of stabilising social education. Manchester took the lead. A mechanics' institute was established after a public meeting in 1824. The sponsors were representatives of the prosperous middle class, reformist Whig in political complexion, and mostly non-conformist. Over one-third of the first committee was Unitarian. The key figure for many years was Benjamin Heywood, a banker, and Whig member of parliament.

The institute differed from that at London in two important respects. Firstly, its promoters visualised it functioning in a very practical way to improve the technical competence of the employees.

1 For the Manchester Mechanics Institute see M. Tylecote, Mechanics Institutes of Lancashire and Yorkshire Before 1851, (1957), pp. 128-189, from which the following details are taken, except where otherwise indicated.

"The Manchester Mechanics' Institution is formed for the purpose of enabling Mechanics and Artisans, of whatever trade they may be, to become acquainted with such branches of science as are of practical application in the exercise of that trade; that they may possess a more thorough knowledge of their business, acquire a greater degree of skill in the practice of it, and be qualified to make improvements and even new inventions in the Arts which they respectively profess."¹

This was somewhat different from Birkbeck's vision.

"Now we have founded an edifice for the diffusion and advancement of human knowledge. Now we have begun to erect a temple, wherein man shall extend his acquaintance with the universe of mind, and shall acquire the means of enlarging his dominion over the universe of matter."²

Even Brougham, enthusiastic though he was over the teaching of science, did not see institutes in quite such practical terms. He believed that

"a high degree of intellectual refinement and a taste for the pleasures of speculation, without any view to a particular employment, may be united with a life of hard labour, even in its most humble branches, and may prove both its solace and its guide"³

and this is what the institutes should encourage. The Manchester ideal was adopted, at least initially, by many other institutes in the northern textile towns, as well as in the Potteries and at Coventry.⁴

1 Annual Report, 1828

2 London Mechanics Register, I, 1825 85-86. Quotation in T. Kelly, Op. Cit., p.97.

3 Brougham, Op. Cit., p.27.

4 See *supra*, pp. 16-18.

The other manner in which the Manchester Institute differed from that at London was even more significant, for it brings into discussion the whole question of worker representation. In Manchester it was decided to keep control of the institute in the hands of the wealthy. All those who paid the annual subscription of one pound, or who took up life membership, were to be classed as honorary members. They were to meet once a year, and elect twenty-one of their number to serve as directors. The ordinary members, paying quarterly, had no kind of representation or vote at all. Heywood claimed from the beginning that eventually all subscribers would take part in the management.

"At the outset of the undertaking, however, when all is new and untried, they think that the stability and permanence of the Institution and your advantage from it, will be best provided for under the regulations they have adopted." ¹

One committee man put it more succinctly.

"If they came for instruction, they were, of course, incompetent to manage." ²

Of course, the directors claimed to take into account the members' views.

"On its first establishment, the subscribers could not reasonably expect to receive any advantages but those of education; however, when they have expressed any wishes, the Directors have ever listened to them with interest, and whenever their duty would permit, they have granted them." ³

1 B. Heywood. Addresses delivered at the Manchester Mechanics Institute, (1843), p.11.

2 Annual Report, 1847 .

3 Annual Report, 1831 .

Some of the members became impatient under this tutelage. In September 1828, a meeting of subscribers was held, and 37 signed a resolution forwarded to the directorial board. Its main points were that the ordinary members should elect nine of their number each year, who would draw up an annual report on the state of the institute and suggestions for minor improvements. This would be presented to the directors. The resolution requested an extraordinary general meeting to discuss the proposals, but this was turned down by the directors. Instead at the Annual General Meeting the following year, the directors put through a resolution whereby they could select five members to assist them in the management of the institute. None of the thirty-seven signatories were selected. The directors added the following.

"Now, however, they see many of the Subscribers uniting with their increased acquirements, an intelligence and good feeling so creditable to themselves, and so happily illustrative of the good effects of the Institution, that they are disposed to think, the time is at hand when some share in the management may be advantageously extended to them." ¹

Not unnaturally, there was a steady drift of working class members away from the institute which came to a head in 1829, when Rowland Detrosier set up a rival institution, democratically organised, called the Manchester New Mechanics' Institute. It started with one hundred or more dissidents from the old body.

1 Annual Report, 1829.

2 See *infra*, pp. 178-180.

Within the Manchester Mechanics' Institute, there was little place for discussion of political or social issues of relevance to the workers. Requests to hire the lecture hall by Detrosier and J. Rayner Stephens were rejected, as were courses of lectures on the Corn Laws. It could not be used "for political meetings and for discussion relative to the differences between masters and workmen", and on this basis a request for a history class was turned down, lest it led to political discussion, and books like Godwin's Political Justice were banned from the library. Significantly however the SDUK course on Political Economy written under Brougham's influence was given in 1834.¹

The system of government was slowly democratised, until by 1847 there were no honorary members on the Board. But this was not a very important change of heart, for by the time any real power was given to the ordinary member, the working-class members had mostly left to join other organisations. What the changes did was to give rights to "clerks in counting houses and assistants in warehouses", not to give them to mechanics, millwrights and engineers. The growth of lower middle class membership, which by the late 'thirties comprised at least two-thirds of the total membership, was the factor which caused the change of attitude by the rich patrons of the Institute.²

The Mechanics' Institutes of London and Manchester show a pattern of dominance by middle class industrial or professional and generally non-conformist men of reformist Whig belief taking stances against any expressions of socialist, co-operative or working class ideologies. In the London Institute, though the

1 M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., p.134. Annual Report, 1834.

2 Ibid, Appendix 3, p.297.

general pattern was clear enough, the development of reformist Whig dominance was complex and the occasional emergence of working class expressions reflected an ambivalence by the institute's leaders to the questions posed by this challenge. Men such as Brougham, Place and Birkbeck had very complex attitudes to the emergence of working class movements, and their general and increasing opposition intermingled with occasional sympathy and tolerance. At Manchester there does not seem to have been such uncertainties by the controllers of the institute. They reflected in a fairly clear form the desire to run the institute in the interests of capitalism. These variations in the institutes reflect the different social and economic patterns of the two towns.

2.2.3 Company Institutes

The institutes over which factory owners had the greatest control were, naturally enough, those founded in Company towns and backed by the Company. This is very clearly demonstrated in the railway towns, of which the best example is Swindon New Town.¹ The Great Western Railway Company opened its workshops there in 1843, and within five years was employing over a thousand men. The Company had to build a town to house its workers. What it built was a progressive example of early industrial town planning, with well laid out streets and squares, and workmen's cottages which were in advance of their day.

1 See for Swindon history L. Grinsell, Studies in the History of Swindon, (1950).

Apart from housing its workers, however, the Company provided for and therefore substantially influenced many aspects of their social life. It built a Church and paid the vicar's stipend; it built a non-denominational elementary school; it built a hospital and provided by a Medical Insurance Fund free medical and dental treatment, artificial limbs and funeral arrangements; it laid out a park with a cricket ground; and it used a Mechanics' Institute as a social and educational centre of the town.

The Mechanics Institute was started in 1844 and met in a room freely provided in the railway works.¹ The Company provided money for a stock of books, and in 1854 went much further by helping to build a structure of some grandeur. It donated the land free, and gave an annual grant of £100 plus free coal and coke. The building was financed through a joint stock company which raised £4,000 in share issue. It contained apart from the usual rooms, a breakfast and dining room for men from the works, a bathhouse with eight baths and a market place with nineteen shops and eight stalls. The institute became the major social provider in the town. It ran a series of large scale annual events such as fetes and parties for the town, a regular series of lectures and entertainments, and concerts of popular music. It provided a variety of clubs including a choral society, a band, a chess club and a theatrical society. Its library grew rapidly and had nearly 2,000 books by 1850 and an issue rate of 19,000 a year by 1854. The annual day trip for workers and families provided by the Company was organised through the institute. The institute also ran a very impressive

1 The following details are taken from records held by the Swindon Mechanics' Institute.

system of elementary education, and increasingly provided technical classes. The comment in the Annual Report of 1874 that "the Company has ever regarded it as part of their duty to provide innocent recreation with solid instruction for their members" reflects the dual concern of the sponsors of the institute. They wanted to provide education for their skilled work force, and they wanted to avoid what they defined as anti-social behaviour or attitudes dangerous to the establishment. So we do not find lectures given on political or economic matters, and no controversial works are mentioned as being in the library. The Reading Room contained no very radical papers and was overloaded by family journals such as Chambers Journal and morally improving journals such as Sunday at Home, Good Works or Sunshine. The control of the Company did not need to be heavy - after all it owned the town and employed its inhabitants. It was an enlightened employer and was unlikely to face much trouble from its workers. It did, however, have fairly effective power in the committee of the institute. The president was the Superintendent of the Works and of the committee, half were chosen by foremen and managers.

The Company subtracted members' subscriptions to the institute from their wages at source, and there is no doubt that the institute remained in its membership a working class body.

"It has been maintained and kept as an Institute especially for working men", commented the Swindon Advertiser in 1854,¹

¹ Swindon Advertiser, 29 May 1854.

but its ideology was very much that of the factory owners. They wanted superior, intelligent and well behaved workmen for which they were prepared to pay well and provided good working conditions. There was much interest in the Samuel Smiles variant of self help which came through clearly in the following report from the Swindon Advertiser.

"These Institutes are great levers and work well. They do not turn mechanics wholesale into philosophers, for nature had never intended that all brains should be of such sterling stuff. But they infuse an intellectual tone into the majority of the class, and enable many a worker to step out of the ranks and obtain celebrity and wealth." ¹

Not surprisingly the Company saw complete identity between its own interests and those of the institute. A spokesman in 1900 remarked that "Whatever is good for the Company is good for New Swindon", and at the opening ceremony of the new building in 1854 one Company speaker, with no doubt a slip of the tongue, proclaimed that "We always equally study all things to the convenience and advantage of the Company". ²

At Crewe there were many similarities to Swindon. ³ The Grand Junction Railway Company of the LNWR started production from its railway works in 1843. By 1848 it was employing 1,600 workers. A committee of four ran the railway town for the Company, building cottages and shops, laying on a water supply

1 Swindon Advertiser, 29 October 1866.

2 Swindon Advertiser, 29 May 1854.

3 W.H. Chaloner. The Social & Economic Development of Crewe, (1950), pp. 245-8 is the main source from which the following details are taken.

and a gas works, erecting public baths and a cottage hospital, employing a surgeon and devising a sick scheme, providing workers allotments, and building a Church and school. What had been a village of 148 people in 1831 was an industrial town of 4,500 people in 1851.

When it came to providing an institute, however, things did not run as smoothly as at Swindon.

In March 1843, the Directors were asked to provide a reading room and in 1844 the Chairman established it in temporary premises. Two separate committees were elected, one for the Newsroom, and their proceedings had to be submitted regularly to the Directors. This was not a notional control for within a few weeks the directors ordered the removal from the Newsroom of the Northern Star and Weekly Despatch. A large number of subscribers resigned, and though the Directors amalgamated the two committees and subsidised the costs of the enterprise, by the summer of 1845 the Reading Room was more or less dead. Some of the seceders had been attempting to set up a mechanics' institute. The Company lost little time in arranging for an institute to be started before any such independent body should get under way. The key men in the first years of the new Institute were Francis Trevithick, the superintendent of the locomotive power department, and his successor John Ramsbottom.

Control was firmly in the hands of the Company. The institute was controlled by an annually chosen council of 21. Three of these were nominated by the Directors and a further nine were

elected from a list prepared by the Directors. As would be expected, the rules prohibited discussion of religious or political subjects. Certainly Crewe Mechanics' Institute enjoyed many advantages over other institutes. In 1846/7 the Company gave it a useful block of buildings which included a newsroom, library, assembly room and classroom. When these were damaged by fire in 1869 the Company had them reconstructed, adding more classrooms and in 1902 paid for further extensions. The Company gave solid financial support and encouraged the development of classes as a part of the technical training of its employees. Not surprisingly, the institute achieved well in the examinations of the Union of Lancashire and Cheshire Institutes, the Society of Arts, the Department of Science and Art and the City and Guilds. The work of the classes, which were mostly attended by teenagers, built on the provision by the Company for elementary education in the National Schools it had erected.

All this however was at a cost. The workers had little control over the establishment which not only provided the major cultural and educational activities of the town, but also most of the organised social ones.

Other mechanics' institutes provided for the workforce of one company can be found at the Institutes of Ashford (the S.E. Railway Company), Patricroft (Nasmyth's Bridgewater Foundry), Bridge Hall, Bury (A. & J. Grundy), Portsea Watt (Portsmouth Dockyard), the Walker Ironworks at Newcastle, and Chorlton New Mills.

2.2.4 Taunton Mechanics' Institute

Institutes in the category we are considering were not confined to large cities or industrial towns. Taunton, a county town with some textiles but mostly employment connected with agriculture and services, provides an institute of much the same type as London or Manchester.

It was launched in 1830 with a specific appeal to local manufacturers and tradesmen, and was supported by the local Whig MPs, one of whom was H. Laboucherie who became president of the institute.¹ It had among its supporters the liberal newspaper publisher, E.W. Cox, and the prominent scientist, A. Crosse. Apart from the support it received from local employers, it was also well supported by the town's non-conformist ministers:- four Unitarians, two Independents, and a Baptist. The local schoolmaster, an Anglican cleric, also gave some support.

It was clearly an institute which was liberal in political colours, and was predictably enough attacked by a Tory writer in one of the newspapers invariably unfriendly to mechanics institutes. It was there described as "a seditious proposal to the lower classes calculated to inspire them with discontent - a hot and truly republican phillipic", and the writer then describes "the beautiful scale of rank and station" which he strongly urges those responsible for the institute to "fortify rather than destroy"².

1 Taunton Courier, 13 October 1830, and A.K. Hudson, Op. Cit. p.95.

2 Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, 9 October 1830.

It is not very clear why he was so worried. At the inaugural meeting one of the Unitarian ministers stated to apparent general approbation that "it is not designed to give men such knowledge as will make them dissatisfied with their stations in society or to inculcate notions incompatible with the proper discharge of their social, religious or political duties".¹ The concern for this reinforcement of the existing social pattern had some point in the South-West in 1830 where the labourers' revolt of that year had been vigorous. Indeed we can hypothesise that the founding of the institute may have been a deliberate attempt to counteract disturbances among the working population. The support it won among employers can be gauged by the fact that they released their apprentices one hour early to attend the institute, and working boys were presented with free tickets to it if they showed good conduct and intelligence.² The institute played its part as a tool of social control often in a very deliberate fashion. Cox for example in his report as secretary in 1840 stated that the institute encouraged the social mixing of those from different ranks because this produced intelligent subordination to one's superiors.³

Nevertheless the institute faced periodic attacks from entrenched Toryism, and this reached a climax in 1848. It seems likely that the influence of the Unitarians had been growing and a number of

1 Taunton Chronicle 13 Oct 1830.

2 Sherborne, Dorchester and Taunton Journal, 21 March 1839
Somerset County Gazette 1 Dec 1838.

3 Annual Report, 1840.

discussions had been held on such subjects as Free Trade, the Results of Machinery, the Causes of Poverty, and the Value of Charity. There is little doubt that these discussions were led by the liberal/non-conformist leaders of the institute along predictable lines, but it may have been enough to annoy the more conservative Tories and some Anglican clergy. In 1848 a significant date for working class unrest, a letter was published that vigorously attacked the institute.

"The aforesaid Institution has acquired the unenviable reputation of being a hot-bed of Chartism and Sectarianism - right or wrong, this is the impression which exists on the minds of many who would otherwise be amongst its warmest supporters. Let the rev. gentleman and those who with him feel interested in the success of the Mechanics' Institute, labour hard to remove the stigma from its character; by preventing the Hall being let out to mob orators preaching sedition; and by encouraging a more catholic feeling among the members; by omitting religious matters (which are sure to lead to dissension)"

The letter is unspecific, but it is clear that the Tory/Anglican interest found it possible to define the institution as politically and religiously coloured by views opposed to their own.

1 Somerset County Herald, 16 Dec 1848 .

2.2.5 Significant Issues Raised in Category One

Two issues are raised in connection with this category of mechanics' institutes. The first is the extent to which they overtly presented a political philosophy that was of direct concern to the class struggle of the time. The second is the manner in which control was exercised in the institute. In relation to the first issue, the evidence presented strongly suggests that the ideology of the utilitarians informed the programmes of the institutes, and ideologies of rival sectional or class interests were allowed little or no influence. The instigators of these institutes had available to them a publishing machinery in the SDUK which was of strategic importance. A key publication of the SDUK, for purposes of this argument, is the Manual for Mechanics prepared by Duppa and published in 1836. It is on the whole a careful and well-balanced account of the problems and opportunities of mechanics' institutes. Many of its suggestions, particularly on forms of instruction and financial management are very reasonable. However the political function of mechanics' institutes in moulding the opinions of working men is made clear enough. Early in the book, Duppa declares that there is a need in the institutes for courses on Morals, Political Economy, Politics in the scientific sense, the Law of Nations, and the Law of the Land. Though he accepts that institutes could not become debating houses for controversial politics, he takes the orthodox reformist line that there are self-evident truths which are not or should not be, in dispute. "Happily, all these sciences possess leading facts, the truth and importance

of which all well-instructed persons admit."¹ As the generality of people acquire a larger share in the conduct of public affairs, so it is necessary to instruct them in these sciences. What this meant in practice can be gauged from two sources.

The first of these is the detailed outline of a lecture course in political philosophy devised by Duppa as suitable for delivery in mechanics' institutes. There are forty-five lectures and the first thirty-three are an historical and comparative survey of various kinds of institutions and systems. They show relatively little sectional interest other than some attacks on the remnants of feudalism in a too powerful landed aristocracy. In lecture 3⁴ and in the remaining lectures, Duppa outlines an approach and analysis which is based solidly on the utilitarian. Lecture 3⁴ starts from the thesis that

"When a government has well provided for police, justice, and defence, it has no other absolutely imperative duty.... On no account should it interfere at all with industry or with capital and labour."

There are certain kinds of public works the state might be involved in but only with the utmost caution. These would include hospitals, although there is a high likelihood of abuse, and foundling hospitals in particular are deplored. Hospitals for the aged and infirm, and the sick and injured are acceptable. The lecture attacks nearly all establishments for helping the poor by charity. This stimulates

"the population by encouraging improvident marriages and to relax the industrious thrifty, and provident habits of the working classes."²

In a subsequent lecture he argued that provision under Poor Laws

1 B. Duppa, Manual for Mechanics Institutes, (1839), p.36.

2 Ibid, pp. 225-227.

must never be seen as a right of the public. Minimal provision of churches and very cautious help to some areas of education completed the lecture's list of possible state intervention.

The remaining lectures develop these points in greater detail. Most emphasis is put upon the case against government interference with industry and trade. Mercantilism is shown to be injurious, free trade likely to be most beneficial to most people. The arguments of Adam Smith are expounded to show the relationship between capital, labour, trade and population.

Duppa's list of lectures has similarities with the suggestions by Timothy Claxton of the topics suitable for opening essays at mechanics' institutes which were to be followed by discussion. Claxton suggests the topics of restraint on imports, free trade, the ten hour day, machinery and representation. He also has a number of social topics such as marriage, crime, suicide, and the rights of females.¹

The second mechanism of propagation suggested by Duppa is the use of the library. His work contains a list of suggested books for purchase for mechanics' institutes' libraries.² This is a comprehensive list of several hundred books and under the section of Political Science were the following books:

1 T. Claxton. Hints for Mechanics, pp. 220-22.

2 B. Duppa, Op. Cit., p. 169-196.

Ansell	Treatise on Friendly Societies. Library of Useful Knowledge
Babbage	Economy of Machinery and Manufacture
J. Hopkins	Notions of Political Economy
Rev. R. Jones	Essay on the Distribution of Wealth
Malthus	Population
Mrs. Marcet	Conversations on Political Economy
J. Mill	Elements of Political Economy
McCulloch	Principles of Political Economy Wages and the Labouring Poor
H. Martineau	Illustrations of Political Economy Illustrations of the Poor Law
A. Smith	Wealth of Nations
Whateley	Lectures on Political Economy
Ricardo	Works
C. Knight	Rights of Industry Results of Machinery ¹

When Traice issued his Handbook of Mechanics Institutes in 1856 he used the list of suggested volumes from Duppa's Manual, adding in the section on Political Economy only J.S. Mills Principles of Political Economy, and F.W. Newman's Political Economy. ²

This list is totally within the one school of political science, as indeed one might expect from the recommendations of the SDUK. What is important to note is that the presenter did not define either the lecture series or the collection of books as 'controversial politics' but as the established facts of science, though there was certainly enough evidence around to show that it was not so accepted by either Tories or Radicals. There were many mechanics' institutes which were not particularly

1 Ibid, pp. 176-177.

2 W. Traice, Handbook for Mechanics' Institutes, (1856), pp. 46-48.

influenced either by reformist Whigs or by the SDUK, but a large number were and the representatives of the area local committees of the SDUK were in nearly every case associated with the local mechanics' institute. This is true of Estlin at Bristol, Arthur Gregory at Coventry, the Strutts at Derby, J. Tyrell at Exeter, J. Marshall at Leeds, B. Heywood and Wood at Manchester, the Rev. W. Turner at Newcastle-on-Tyne, the Rev. Jones at Stafford, R. Slaney at Shrewsbury, and R. Blurton at Uttoxeter.¹ Many of the central figures of the SDUK were connected with the London Mechanics' Institute.

The second issue that is raised as a result of our study of mechanics' institutes in the first category is related to the presence of a political function in favour of the utilitarian, reformist Whig and industrial interest. It concerns the locus of control within the institution. Given the concern that the correct notions of political economy should be taught, and even more important that dangerous rival notions should be censored, the determination of the middle class sponsors to retain control of the institute so that they could guide it, is understandable. The debate among them was how this was best done, not whether it ought to be done, and examination of the institute at Manchester and the opposing view of Brougham make this clear.

The model of government adopted by the Manchester Mechanics' Institute was derived from the Edinburgh School of Arts, and was copied elsewhere - at Leeds, Liverpool, Shrewsbury and Stockport, for example.² It was a model, however, that was

1 List of area representatives in B. Duppa, Op. Cit., Title Page.

2 See rules and orders of each of these institutions.

generally disapproved of by the leading figures in the adult education movement, and most of the larger institutes adopted the London model, which gave some token control to the ordinary members and muted the power of the rich patrons. Birkbeck had made his own position on this matter very clear on a number of occasions. At one of the preliminary meetings of the London Institute he said

"the plan will prosper in exact proportion to the interest which the mechanics themselves take in its welfare. It is for their benefit, and ought to be left in their hands as soon as possible after it is begun."

The resolutions which followed his speech enshrined this principle. One states

"that such institutions are likely to be most useful and stable when entirely or chiefly supported and managed by the mechanics themselves."

Later, at the same meeting, Birkbeck said that if the mechanics allowed other than themselves to manage the Institute,

"men would soon be found who would put the mechanics on one side, and make use of them only as tools."¹

In a letter to Joseph Parkes of Birmingham, he wrote how important it was that the promoters of their Institute should

"resolve as a condition altogether vital in its operation that the committee of management shall contain two-thirds at least of real, unquestionable operatives of the very men for whom the Institution has been founded. Had I time to inform you of the results of this part of the arrangement in the London Mechanics' Institution, you would not entertain a doubt of its excellence. This is a point indispensable, and so far as I can see, upon no grounds to be conceded."²

Brougham's views on this matter were even more influential,

1 Mechanics Magazines, 15 November 1823.

2 Birmingham Chronicle, 2 February 1824.

because they were contained in his pamphlet, Practical Observations upon the Education of the People addressed to the Working Classes and their Employers, which was published in 1825, but was based upon articles he had written for the Edinburgh Review.¹ It ran through nineteen editions in three months, and a copy was to be found in almost every village in the kingdom. Many of the copies were given away by Brougham or his friends so that they would circulate in the most effective areas. Most mechanics' institutes received one free, together with a portrait of Brougham.

Brougham's views were quite explicit. He believed that mechanics should defray most of the costs of the institute themselves, and

"it is another principal... equally essential that they should have the principal share in the management. This seems necessary for securing both the success and the independence of the system."²

He argued that the surest way of ensuring conscientious management was by giving it to those who alone stood to benefit from the prosperity of the concern.

"I really should be disposed to view any advantage in point of knowledge gained by the body of the people as somewhat equivocal, or at least as much alloyed with evil, if purchased by the increase of their dependence on their superiors If the latter keep the management entirely in their own hands, they enforce the appeal to gratitude by something very like control; and they hurt the character of those whom they would serve."³

1 Edinburgh Review, October 1824.

2 Brougham, Practical Observations, (1825), p.16.

3 Ibid, p.16.

Brougham notes with approval that in the institutes at Newcastle-on-Tyne, Kendal and Carlisle, the mechanics have some say in the management, and in Carlisle and Sheffield, the two-thirds rule of the London Mechanics' Institute had been adopted. At Woolton Mechanics' Institute four members were drawn from the trustees, four from the annual subscribers, four from master tradesmen, and four from working men. He criticised the institutes at Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool for the extent of the control of the rich patrons.

The two-thirds rule became fairly common. It operated, for example, in the institutes at Deptford, Hackney, Poplar, Dunbar, and Ashton-under-Lyne. At Devonport and Stonehouse, the committee had three-quarters drawn from the cheap subscribers.¹ It is however open to doubt whether it was any real guarantee of working class influence. The reserved places were not necessarily made up of working class members, but from those paying quarterly rather than annual or life subscriptions.

Brougham argues that the concern of rich patrons should consist of encouraging the formation of an institute and setting it on the right course.

"The time when information and advice is most wanted, with other assistance from the wealthy and well-informed, is at the beginning of the undertaking: and at that time, the influence of those patrons will necessarily be most powerful. Much depends on the right course being taken at first; proper rules laid down; fit subjects selected for lectures; good teachers chosen; and upon all these matters, the opinions and wishes of those who chiefly contribute to found the several institutions must receive great attention."²

1 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., p.219 gives references for these institutes.

2 Op. Cit., p.16.

This careful guidance at the start considerably modified Brougham's claim that working men should run the institutes themselves. One can summarise Brougham's views on mechanics' institutes as follows:

1. The idea that the institutions should be financed by the participants was fully in line with utilitarian thinking that philanthropy, charity and subsidy was an evil, and encouraged idleness and dependence. Indeed Brougham in the same pamphlet, later beseeches the rich not to give to charities, however pathetic the cases, but set up educational foundations that could be self supporting.
2. The assumption behind much of what he says is that the mechanics will, in practice, take heed of the advice of middle-class patrons, even though such patrons will not be in power to enforce it.

"Neither is there any fear that the suggestions of people in a higher station, and of more ample information, may not be duly attended to. Gratitude for the assistance received, and the advice offered, together with a conviction that the only motive for interfering is the good of the establishment, will give at least their just weight to the recommendation of patrons What they (the mechanics) receive ... in good counsel, and in teaching, either by lectures or publications, shows much real kindness, confers a great benefit, and ensures a grateful return."¹

This belief that the workers would naturally and voluntarily heed the views of middle class patrons, Brougham shared with Francis Place.

1 Ibid p.15 - 17.

We find in a later publication, Duppa's Manual for Mechanics' Institutions, produced for the SDUK, adding a further gloss to what the Brougham circle intended. When an institute is founded "let the persons (concerned with founding it) consult those manufacturers or tradesmen who employ the greatest number of men". Clergymen and dissenting ministers should also be approached. As many life members as possible should be obtained, paying five pounds. Two-thirds of the committee should be mechanics, but control should be held back from members until it was safe to give it to them. There is, says Duppa

"much danger to be apprehended from placing the affairs of an Institution too rapidly in the hands of the body of the members. They must first well comprehend the objects of the Institution, and to understand its objects, they must have been submitted to its training."¹

Samuel Smiles however took a very different view. He argued that

"the intelligent portion of the working classes at the present day, hate patronage of any kind. They are in love with self-government and self-governing institutions; and they are not likely to become general supporters of societies in the conduct and management of which they have so little interest."²

Implicit throughout Brougham's pamphlet is the assumption, common to his circle, that mechanics faced with rational argument in favour of the developing form of industrial capitalism, would become the natural allies and supporters of the reformist whigs.

1 B. Duppa, Op. Cit., 144, 113.

2 S. Smiles, The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes. (1842), p.18.

3. The pamphlet is clearly concerned with the education of the superior operatives, the aristocracy of labour. If Brougham's party could capture these men, they had little to fear from "the lower orders". The natural desire of these men to increase further their relatively favoured position in society could be played on by the middle classes. Thus Brougham, while feeling that subscriptions much above a guinea per annum were too high to guarantee working-class support, also criticised those institutes like Kendal which fixed the annual sum at four shillings, and thus opened their doors to all members of the working classes.¹ It is noticeable that the London Mechanics' Institute, where Brougham's ideas held sway, raised its subscription to twenty-four shillings with an entrance fee of two shillings in 1827.²
4. Whatever the percentage of genuine artisans on the committees, it was always easy for patrons to exercise influence, and, if it came to the point, actual control, through superior tactical ability in using constitutional machinery. Working men were not necessarily happy or familiar with working the formal structures of organisations, and preferred to operate through more informal, loosely-knit, though no less effective bodies. The Institution, with its Minute Book, Rules and By-Laws, Annual General Meetings, Committees and Sub-Committees, was the natural vehicle for middle-class group activity. Even if there were no other extraneous pressures on artisans to conform, they were normally outmanoeuvred in all the strategic points of the

1 H. Brougham, Op. Cit., p. 22.

2 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., p. 110.

organisation when this was necessary.

And, of course, there were outside pressures to conform. There was financial pressure in all mechanics' institutes, for they depended to a greater or lesser degree on the good-will of the rich. They could not either afford to alienate the major employers in the town, who could close an institute by forbidding their employees to attend. There was pressure on the institute to keep the body functioning successfully with the greatest possible tolerance of local sections of the community. There was a desire to keep in existence those ties of friendship with powerful men, who had shown some interest, however qualified, in the education and welfare of the working class. The institutes attracted many men who were ambitious, highly-skilled, and consciously adopted as their reference set, the life-style of the small master and the respectable middle-class. They were likely to become foremen or managers, or masters themselves, and saw a certain community of interest with the employers and a separateness from the bulk of the proletariat. For them, the wishes of middle-class patrons had a saliency not typical of the average working man.

Thus, although the working class were kept in many institutes on a very light rein, there was little doubt that they were given their head only so long as the direction they took was approved, and if necessary a tightening of pressure could soon prevent them from wandering far off course.

2.2.6 Conclusion to Category One

The analysis of the foregoing mechanics' institutes suggests that we can define one category as consisting of institutes which were instigated and run by representatives of the industrial and commercial middle class under varying degrees of reformist philosophy. Such institutes were viewed with apathy if not with suspicion or hostility by the Tories and landed classes and they won little support from working class leaders. Some of the largest and earliest institutes were of this type, as at London, Manchester and Liverpool, and it is not unnatural that there was an assumption among some Tory circles that the whole of the movement was inspired by Whig reformism and functioned to propagate reformist doctrine.

2.3 Category Two

"Institutions characterised by an alliance between liberal reformers and working class leaders, and including a spectrum of political belief from Broughamite reformism to Owenism, Unionism and Chartism. The alliance of working class/middle class political interests was opposed by Tory interests."

Institutes that fall into this category were most evident in the period before 1832 and reflected part of a general alliance for reform via the Hampden Clubs and Political Unions that reached their greatest vigour in the campaign for the Reform Bill in 1830-32. After 1832 such alliances survived in special conditions where they still had relevance, but were unlikely to

survive the challenge of events in 1839. These two dates are crucial. From 1832 the leaders of the working class began to define the actions of their erstwhile middle class allies as a betrayal of working class interests. The penalising Poor Law, savage repression of agricultural unrest, judicial attacks on trade unionism, very reluctant factory and social reform, and an unstable economy that threw sections of the working force into periodic years of acute suffering were not the objectives for which the working class had fought in the political struggles previous to 1832.

In those towns where sections of the middle class still supported working-class movements, the years of Chartist agitation starting in 1839 set each man the test of whether he could commit himself or condone direct action against authority. Most working class sympathisers parted with their past associates at this point. The whole process was classically demonstrated at Birmingham, and was also seen in the mechanics' institutes at Coventry and Wolverhampton.

2.3.1 Birmingham Mechanics' Institute

In the first part of the 19th Century, Birmingham had a rapidly expanding population and economy based on a very great variety of manufacture, particularly in the brass, jewellery, toy, button and gun trades, and it was besides the commercial centre of the Black Country.¹ It's social and economic structure was

1 For Birmingham history, see A. Briggs and C. Gill, A History of Birmingham, (1952).

unlike that of Manchester, which may help explain its different attitude to political and educational institutions. John Collins wrote

"large manufacturers cannot shut up their men as they did in Manchester ... for it was well known (there) that the working people were at the mercy of the manufacturers"

and Richard Cobden wrote

"the state of society (was) more healthy and natural in a moral and political sense (in Birmingham than in Manchester). There is a freer intercourse between all the classes than in the Lancashire town where a great and impassable gulf separates the workman from his employer".¹

There were in Birmingham relatively few large factories, a high proportion of skilled men working for themselves or in partnerships, and Cobden was only one of a number who noted the lack of class antagonism. The gap between master and workman was nebulous, and a man might well move from employee to master and back again two or three times in his lifetime.

It was the co-operation between working class and middle class which gave Birmingham politics at this time its distinctive character.² Before 1800 the town had not shown much overt Radicalism, though it had a strong non-conformist element. It is true that some of the members of the Lunar Society were notable progressive thinkers but the town at large exhibited none of the Radicalism, of some northern places.

1 Quotations from A. Briggs, Victorian Cities, (1963), pp. 189, 191.

2 See A. Briggs, 'Social Structure and Politics in Birmingham and Lyons, 1825-48', British Journal of Sociology, 1. 1950.

After the Napoleonic Wars however, the progressive elements in the industrial and commercial classes changed their tone considerably as a result of the Orders in Council and the consequent depression in trade which hit the town very hard. The lack of parliamentary representation, Westminster's apparent disinterest in the problems of the commercial and industrial world, the dissenting non-conformists, combined to form a hostile reforming attitude. An alliance of the middle class Radicals with the artisan movement that had been organised by George Edmonds was a natural consequence of this situation, and it found institutional expression in the Hampden Club started in 1816. This was suppressed in 1819 under the Six Acts, and Edmonds was sent to Warwick Prison but after 1823, in a happier climate, the alliance gathered momentum again. One of the expressions of this was the formation of a mechanics' institute in 1825.

The idea of an institute was first mooted early in 1825, and an abortive attempt to launch it was made at a public meeting. Later in the year a provisional committee set itself up to undertake the task, and its composition demonstrates the political alliance that existed in the town.¹

George Edmonds was there as leader of the artisans, with one or two of his lieutenants. Of the middle class members, a number were known as socialists or at least sympathetic to working class movements. These included William Hawkes Smith and Daniel Wright. A more orthodox liberal was Joseph Parkes, a friend of Brougham. The chair at the first meeting, however, was taken by Francis Lloyd, a young member of the Quaker banking

1 These early proceedings can be followed in the Birmingham Journal, 8 Oct 1825, Arris's Gazette, 3 Oct 1825, and the Report and Address of the Provisional Committee, 1825.

family, and unlike most of his family a tory. Subsequently the committee was enlarged by another 23 names. There was a mixed bag of clergymen - three Unitarians, two Independents, one Baptist, one Church of Scotland, and one very radical Roman Catholic. Also there was Thomas Attwood, the acknowledged leader of the town's middle class Radicals and later to be prominent in the Birmingham and national Chartist movement, and Joshua Schofield who was the man who threatened to march on London at the head of 100,000 men if the Reform Bill was not passed. Both became the town's first members of parliament. Among other well known Radicals who became connected with the institute in its early days and also were involved in the local growth of Chartism were Joseph Sturge, William Salt, and Edmund Corn, and the Owenite, William Pare.

Though this high-powered committee inclined to extreme non-conformism in religion and Radicalism in politics, it had attracted some support from the gentry and leading citizens. Among the first honorary members of the institute were Lord Calthorpe of Edgbaston, Sir Eardsley Wilmot, Baronet of Berkswell, Francis Canning Esquire of Foxcote, Bertie Greathed of Guys Cliffe, Arthur Gregory of Stivichall and James West of Alscot Park. Added to these landed gentry were members of the Lloyd banking family, the Kendrick iron-founding dynasty from West Bromwich, and Dr. Booth, the leading physician in the town. This support gave respectability to the institute. It is true that Wilmot, Gregory, Canning, the Kendricks and most of the Lloyds were liberal in outlook, but Lord Calthorpe, although nominally a Whig peer, was much inclined to conservatism and

voted against the Reform Bill in 1831. Greateed was a product of the 18th Century Whig salons (his uncle was Duke of Ancaster), and James West was a country squire and Tory M.P.

In the last few weeks of the year, opposition to the institute began to grow. The Birmingham Journal led the attack in its editorials, describing the institute as "as poisonous a hot bed of sedition as was ever formed from those two most hopeful and promising materials, operatives and radicals". It published two anonymous letters written by Francis Lloyd and occasioned by his growing objection to the presence of Edmonds on the committee, his disapproval of some recently co-opted members, and his general impression that control of the institute was passing out of the hands of the moderate middle class members.¹ He claimed that most respectable support for the Institute had disappeared. He was answered by a letter from Hawkes Smith who pointed out that only a quarter of the committee were artisans, that Edmonds was there because he, and only he, was accepted as their leader by the artisans, that he had avoided politics in committee, and only one person (presumably Lloyd himself) had objected to his presence.² An editorial in the Birmingham Journal attacked the committee for starting an institute against the known wishes of most of the manufacturers, and refused to publish a reply by Smith,³ so in a circular the committee pointed out that in fact since September only four mechanics had been co-opted, against four clergymen and twelve masters or professional men.⁴

1 Birmingham Journal, 5 November 1825.

2 Birmingham Journal, 12 November 1825.

3 Ibid.

4 Circular by the Secretary defending the Provisional Committee, 1825.

Both because Edmonds had no rival to leadership of the working classes, and because of his close relations with Attwood and his friends, it was no easy job to remove him from the institute. That the institute was aware of the embarrassment of having him on the committee can be gathered from a letter written by Brougham to Parkes in November 1825.¹ In this, Brougham says that he has discussed with Birkbeck Parkes' letter about Edmonds, and they both agree that Edmonds should be told how much good he would do the institute if he would withdraw.

"Other respectable men had done the same elsewhere when they had given umbrage to those who otherwise would have given useful support."

This should only be done, however, if without any show of reluctance, for otherwise those who followed him would feel disgruntled. Needless to say, Edmonds took no notice of this pressure, and Francis Lloyd was expelled from the institute.

A more deep-seated cause of trouble was the declared intention of giving majority voting power to the artisan class. In this, Birmingham followed a separate line to the Manchester institute. Also by establishing the subscription at 12 shillings, as against the twenty shillings at London for example, the membership was not so exclusive as elsewhere. On this matter, Parkes wrote to Brougham that

"the popular constitution also lodged in the hands of the members at large gave great offence to the higher classes: but I would never relinquish that vital principle."²

1 Brougham Mss., f. 608

2 Brougham Mss., f. 5.

By 1826, from these initial skirmishes, a truce situation was emerging. The truce figure was Richard Spooner, a man of great local prestige and popularity, a banking partner of Attwood, and at this stage more a Whig than a Tory. In 1839 he became the first and only Tory MP to be elected for the town in the 19th century (if we except Joseph Chamberlain's Unionist phase). His presence blunted the attacks of the more extreme Tories.

The truce situation was based on an alignment of various parties and interests in the town behind an anti-government, pro-franchise reform programme. This was expressed in the Birmingham Political Union founded in 1828 by Thomas Attwood who drew together all the discontent of the town under his leadership. There were close unofficial ties between the Political Union and the Mechanics Institute. Attwood, Salt, McDonnell, Scholefield, Edmonds and William Pare were officers of both bodies, and many of the rank and file supported both. The institute was conveniently situated by Newhall Hill, the traditional site for mass meetings, and here members found their first experience as speakers and organisers. The institute itself was the meeting place of all the progressives, and played an important part in the political life of the town. There was probably no organised direct political indoctrination in the institute, or the more right-wing patrons would have withdrawn their support. George Holyoake as a young boy was educated there, and he specifically denied that there was any such propaganda, but he also wrote that the indirect effect of the teaching and the general conversation of socialists like Pare and Daniel Wright

was profound.¹

While this general consensus between the artisans and middle class existed, the middle class supporters were prepared to give considerable power to the workers, but in return the workers did not challenge the fundamental position of the middle class by advocating revolutionary socialism. The activities of Edmonds were particularly interesting, as he operated in a way to prevent the institute falling under the sway of middle class ideology without antagonising his middle class supporters by too much violent socialism. All parties defined the situation in such a way that the institute could operate with the maximum support.

On occasions the institute was split with conflict. For example in 1827 an attempt to replace Spooner by the young Rowland Hill (then teaching at his father's school at Hazlewood) was defeated after some clever manoeuvring by Edmonds of the artisans' votes. It was ironic that Edmonds was protecting a Tory against a progressive liberal, but the point he was forcefully making was that such decisions did not lie with a caucus of the committee or with middle class patrons but with rank and file members. The lesson was spelt out in a letter of victory by Edmonds published in the Birmingham Chronicle.²

The alliance between the working class leaders and middle class

1 J. McCabe, George Jacob Holyoake (1922), p.12.

2 Birmingham Chronicle 11 January 1827

Radicals began to break down in the late eighteen-thirties. By 1837 it had become clear that the Whig government was not going to fulfil the hopes of the working class parties, nor their middle class supporters, and the particular economic reforms favoured by the Birmingham group, which were centred on Attwood's theory of currency reform, had made no impact at all in Parliament. In 1837 the Birmingham Political Union was reformed and adopted as its programme most of the points later embodied in the Charter. It was again led by Attwood with the help of Salt, Edmonds, McDonnell, Sturge and Wright. But opposition to the Radical line began to organise itself, and in January 1838 when the Chartists tried to put a political motion at the Mechanics' Institute Annual General Meeting, the conservatives led by James James, a screw manufacturer, and Dr. Booth of the General Hospital, managed to prevent them.¹ Shortly after this the Radicals were thrown into disarray over the question of physical force that was being raised in the Chartist Camp. They all opposed this and Edmonds said of the Birmingham workers - "No, by the Great God, the honest men of Birmingham will never stand it."²

But the trouble was that the Birmingham of 1839 was very different to that of 1825. Besides the skilled artisans, mostly working independently, that Edmonds had so skilfully led in the past, there were in 1839 thousands of very badly paid workers. More and more of these were factory workers, but there were a great many of the most depressed who were

1 Annual Report, 1838.

2 J. Langford. Modern Birmingham, (1868), Vol.2, p.313.

out-workers - nailers, chain-makers and the like. An unskilled proletariat, much more bitter with much less to lose by violent action, now became a potent force in Birmingham politics. The sheer extent of destitution was greatly increased. P.H. Muntz, a liberal factory owner, wrote in 1838 "there were thousands of mothers and children who were crying for bread and could not find it". He had taken the trouble to investigate the amount of distress which existed in Birmingham and he found it was enormous. He found that the wages of working men were reduced a third generally and in many cases a half, yet vast numbers could not obtain work at any price.¹ In 1848 it was estimated that 10,000 were receiving out-door poor relief. In place of the ageing Edmonds, new more militant leaders like George White were gaining control of the worker movements.

The Bull Ring Riots of 1839 were a traumatic experience for the Birmingham Radical-artisan alliance. The magistrates who, after some hesitancy, read the Riot Act and sent to London for reinforcements, were many of them old friends of Edmonds and Attwood, and had helped them in the mechanics' institute. Clutton, Salt and Edmonds, who had been elected as delegates to the Chartist convention, resigned after they saw what way the wind was blowing. Attwood, who presented the first Chartist petition to Parliament, was compelled to give up his seat on account of ill health. Daniel Wright, the socialist, died in the same year, and the Catholic Reverend M'Donnell was removed from his living at St. Peter's. His Radicalism had in the past

1 Place Mss., 27820, p.87.

been tolerated by the Catholic hierarchy, but his open advocacy of Chartism at a time when the town seemed near to the brink of civil disorder, prompted his superiors to issue a warning against further political activity. When M'Donnell ignored this, he was in 1841 dismissed from his post. A great protest meeting was held at the mechanics' institute where his warmest advocates were clergymen of other denominations, but all this did not reverse the decision.¹

The result of this break up of the alliance and the removal from the scene of some of its central characters was reflected in the mechanics' institute. The consensual norms that had operated broke down, and a new basis had to be found. A degree of political neutrality was observed. George Holyoake, who had taken over some of the teaching duties of Wright, was apparently forced out of his post because of his socialist beliefs.² In October 1841 the Coventry Standard wrote that because of this imposed neutrality the institute was virtually dead, and in 1843 after a financial disaster it did finally close its doors.³

A new body was formed under the leadership of Joseph Sturge, the Birmingham Polytechnic Institute, but the basis of this was quite different. The middle class liberals dominated this body and the alliance with the artisans disappeared. This institute was backed by people like George Dawson, Douglas Jerrold, George Dixon, Mathew Hill, the Cadbury's and the

1 Wolverhampton Chronicle, 17 November 1841

2 J.M. Cane, Op. Cit., p.9.

3 Coventry Standard, 29 October 1841.

Lloyds - still non-conformist and liberal with the germs of the Gladstone and Chamberlain monopoly of local political life that emerged later in the century.¹ The divorce with socialism, Chartism and co-operation was, however, complete.

2.3.2 Coventry Mechanics' Institute

Coventry was a prosperous town, centre of the silk-weaving trade in cheaper fancy ribbons. The weavers were protected from foreign competition by a high tariff that varied from 15-30 per cent on the products of Lyon, Basle, and St. Etienne. Most of the weavers worked in their own homes, sometimes with the help of a journeyman assistant or an apprentice. In 1838 there were 4,088 home looms compared with 598 in factories or loom shops. Even fewer used mechanical power, which was difficult to adapt to this kind of weaving. There was a price-fixing system in operation, agreed to by weavers and merchants, which gave protection from market fluctuations. Before 1832, there was a very open voting franchise - to all who became freemen of the borough by practising the same trade for seven years and paying a small composition. In the pre-Reform Act era, Coventry regularly returned a Radical member, as for example, Peter More, the pioneer of trade union emancipation.

The town had a very powerful non-conformist congregation, and politically inclined towards Owenism and Chartism, but, in the absence of great poverty or bad factory conditions, and with relatively good relations between artisans and the middle

1 Annual Reports, 1847, 1850.

classes, Radical beliefs were intellectual rather than emotional, non-violent rather than revolutionary.¹

In 1828, a Mechanics' Institute was set up on the initiative of a number of gentlemen of Radical views, who first met, significantly, in the Lancastrian School.² The chairman was a local doctor, and many of the leading industrialists, like Joseph Cash, were there. Lord Leigh and Sir Eardsley Wilmot signified their support, as did several Baptist and Independent ministers. Charles Bray, local newspaper owner and industrialist, and at various times an Associationist, Phrenologist and Chartist was there, and his close friend, George Eliot, showed an active interest.

The intention was to give complete control to the artisans as soon as possible, but among many of the promoters there was no idea that it should be political in any sense. At the first meeting one of the platform speakers said,

"Nothing is more foreign to a mechanics' institute than the promotion or encouragement of any political opinions whatsoever."³

However, within a year, the committee consisted of a mixed bag of Owenites, Chartists and extreme Radicals, all of whom opposed the Whig government.

This state of affairs was not seriously challenged until 1839,

1 For Coventry history, see J. Prest, The Industrial Revolution in Coventry. (1960)

2 Coventry Herald, 5 September 1828, 9 October 1828.

3 Ibid, 9 Oct 1828

when the effect of Chartist activity and particularly the Bull Ring riots in nearby Birmingham, alarmed the Tory and Whig parties in the town. They were worried about the work of socialist missionaries in the town, whose work had culminated in a series of lectures at St. Mary's Hall, and had made their activities the talking-point of the town.

The mechanics' institute was in an exposed position. Among its leading members were the following Owenite socialists: J.S. Whittem, Charles Bray, J.C. Farn, Joseph Squiers and W.H. Smith. Among declared Chartists were David Buckney, William Mayo, J.B. Browett, Josiah Cash, J. Watts, the Rev. J. Gordon, and the Rev. J. Sibree. Radicals whose position was very close to Chartism included John Gulson, Benjamin Poole and Abraham Herbert. This was not a collection of insignificant workmen but of some of the town's leading citizens. Poole was editor of The Coventry Herald, Bray, Herbert and Cash were all leading manufacturers, Smith was a nationally-known lecturer and writer, and Gulson was a member of one of the most powerful families in the town.

A powerful reaction against the mechanics' institute swept through the town among the Whigs and Tories, led by The Coventry Standard. Writers in that paper claimed that the Institute had been used to indoctrinate young people in its classes, it had been circulating socialist and jacobin books from its library, some of the older men were taking into the library inflammatory books and reading out loud to groups of boys. It was claimed that by 1839 most of the town's leading

socialists had been educated through the Mechanics' Institute.¹

The public outcry led to a number of socialists leaving the Mechanics' Institute to form a separate body, known as the Coventry Universal Community Society. The Atheneum described the incident as follows:

"It is worthy of notice, as showing the divorce of their rising intelligence, that some sixty or seventy socialists have seceded from the Coventry Institute and formed themselves into a separate establishment, because the numbers would not submit to the disturbances of discussion of which they made the Institute their theatre."

The Owenite paper, The New Moral World, replied to this in its issue of 18th July 1840.

"The cause of the secession ... of many of its most talented, intelligent and active members was this: the knowledge they had acquired through its medium made them desirous of obtaining more, and applying that knowledge to practical purposes: the clergy and other obstructionists, stood in the way and so the parties differed and separated. This is the history of many other institutions besides Coventry and, so far from the Socialists opposing such institutions, they regard them with favour as half-way houses to the attainment of sound knowledge."²

Relations between the institute and the new body were friendly, and a suitable parting gift was given.

"When it became too ripe for further concealment, about sixty or seventy persons of these (socialist) principles withdrew in a body from it, and now compose a distinct fraternity - which time one of the secretaries of the Mechanics' Institute was the medium by which a large quantity of books were given up to this body of persons."³

1 Coventry Standard, 12 November, 1841.

2 New Moral World, Vol. No. 3, July 18 1840, p.41, which quotes the Atheneum.

3 Coventry Standard, 12 November 1841.

The religious troubles which blazed up at this time, and the gradual change of character of the institute as Anglicans and liberals moved in to take the place of the seceders, saw an end of it as a socialist or Chartist body. A number of men, like Buckney, remained there, but their political activity henceforth took place outside its walls. The library was an inoffensive place, particularly after the amalgamation with the Anglican institute in 1855. This latter Institute had been criticised for the fact that

"there is not a work in the library of a liberal tendency ... there is no antidote to the political poison contained in Blackwood."¹

But even in the mechanics' institute before the amalgamation, the library catalogue contained hardly any works that attacked the capitalist system and many that defended it.² The utilitarians were well represented in the works of Malthus, Adam Smith and Bentham, and volumes of such economists as M'Culloch and Harriet Martineau intermingled with the publications of the SDUK: The only works that were remotely anti-capitalist or even strongly Radical were some volumes of Combe and Godwin, and these were significantly catalogued under Fiction and Romance. Among journals and newspapers taken were a number of liberal papers like The Coventry Herald, but no Chartist, Owenite or Co-Operative publications to offset The Quarterly Review, John Bull, or Blackwoods.²

1 Coventry Herald, 29 April 1836 .

2 Annual Report, 1844.

So the mechanics' institute at Coventry was very similar to that at Birmingham in that its crisis over who should control the institute came with the Chartist agitation of 1839, which made it necessary for men to declare which side of the fence they were. From 1839 onwards it became difficult to remain ambivalent, or to hold an alliance together within a consensus representing different views over working class agitation.

2.3.3 Wolverhampton Mechanics Institute

On occasions, an institute which approximated closely to the Manchester Mechanics' Institute type under control of utilitarian free-trade reformist Whigs, would for a short time see a precarious alliance between working class and middle class movements. This happened briefly at Wolverhampton in 1838.¹ An institute had been set up in 1835 and was run by a mixture of professional men and industrialists. They were almost all non-conformist reformist Whigs, supporting or conducting campaigns in favour of free trade, the new Poor Law, the SDUK and the Anti-Corn Law League, and against church rates. Most of them had been members of the Wolverhampton Political Union in 1830, but the main impetus in their activities seems to have been to facilitate the expansion of commerce and trade.

During the mid-1830s some of them began to develop socialist or Chartist sympathies. Dr. Simkiss who had been secretary

1 For Wolverhampton, see J. Jones. Historical Sketch of the Art and Literary Institutions of Wolverhampton. (1897).

of the Political Union began to organise socialist meetings at the institute, though not as official institute activities. In November 1838 after one such meeting the Wolverhampton Chronicle complained at "the desecration of the Mechanics' Institute for such a purpose", and in 1839 a discussion on socialism, held over two nights at the institute, ended in the socialist speaker being voted the surplus money of the meeting.¹

Three leading figures in the institute, Joseph Walker, a manufacturer, Kettle, an attorney and the Rev. S. Hunter, a Unitarian, had become Chartists, and for some months a political group controlled the institute in the interests of the Chartist and socialist movements. However the reaction was rapid. The institute wanted to arrange an industrial exhibition in the summer of 1839, and it was necessary not to antagonise manufacturers if they were to support it.

The institute began to modify its position. A leader in The Wolverhampton Chronicle wrote,

"It has been assumed the Mechanics' Institute possesses a political character. Such an assumption, we are assured, is completely without foundation."²

In order to show that this was so the institute cancelled all its newspapers.

In 1840, at a meeting of subscribers, there was a discussion on the question of political neutrality, and Joseph Walker

1 Wolverhampton Chronicle, 23 January 1839.

2 Ibid, 28 August 1839

advised his fellow Chartists, among whom was George Wynn, the leading working class organiser in the Black Country, to avoid provocative words and actions.¹ This advice was taken, for the institute reverted back to official political neutrality, which in practice was interpreted to mean acceptance of the orthodoxies of liberal capitalism. The industrial exhibition obtained the support it was seeking, and was held under the patronage of the Earl of Stamford.

There are a number of other institutes which, though solidly middle class, nevertheless, contained in the membership known socialists or chartists during the 1830s. Brighton Mechanics' Institute was the home of the co-operators including Dr. King, Owenite lectures were given at Bolton Mechanics' Institute, at Sunderland Mechanics' Institute two of the local Chartists were members.² At Dundee Mechanics' Institute an early supporter was James Myles, the Chartist author of The Autobiography of a Dundee Factory Boy, and even at Leeds Mechanics' Institute there were co-operators on the committee and the library took Chartist and redemptionist newspapers.³ E.T. Craig, the leader of the Ralahine Community, lectured to the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes in the 1840s, and there is some evidence of secularists operating in Finsbury and the City of London Mechanics' Institutes in the years after 1846.⁴ At Wincanton a Literary and Mechanics' Institute

1 Ibid, 8 April 1840.

2 H. Silver, Op. Cit. p.222. M. Hovell, The Chartist Movement, (1918), pp. 64 & 125.

3 W.H. Marwick, Op. Cit., p.297, J.F.C. Harrison, Op.Cit., p.148.

4 E. Royle Op.Cit. p.317

was set up by Joseph Cowen, a supporter of Chartists, who believed in the development of a working class education uninfluenced by any other class.¹

Sheffield provides another example of a period of co-operation between radicals led by Isaac Ironside, and the reformist Whigs. Within the ambit of the Sheffield Political Union, and in spite of considerable differences of political emphasis within it, this alliance existed from 1830 to 1839. In 1838 Ironside threw in his lot with the Chartists, and though during 1839 he and four other Chartists held key positions in the Mechanics' Institute, they had by 1840 switched their attention to the Owenite Hall of Science.²

2.3.4 Conclusion to Category Two

It was hypothesised that some mechanics' institutes would present an alliance between Whig reformists and Radicals with some opposition from Tories. The three institutes examined show that such an alliance existed although in the case of Birmingham there was some Tory support as well as opposition. In all three cases the alliance was unstable and was broken as a result of Tory pressure and an increasing divergence of interest between Reformist and Radical. It can be argued that the Tory interventions in Coventry and Birmingham in 1839 were

1 T.R. Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in Mid Victorian England, pp. 149-52, (1976).

2 J. Salt, 'Isaac Ironside 1808-70', British Journal of Educational Studies, 19, (1971), pp. 189, 193.

catalysts of the dispute between Radicals and reformists.

In all three towns the reformist-radical alliance existed against an economic structure of self-employed craftsmen, small employers and masters, and an absence of a small group of large employers who could dominate the town. The reformist-radical alliance had existed for some years previous to the founding of the mechanics' institutes, and had been expressed in a particularly solid form in the Political Unions. One can contrast this pre-1832 environment with that at Nottingham where the divergence of interest and consequent hostility between textile workers and manufacturers was marked from the beginning of the century. The research of Thomis, into the voting patterns of textile workers shows no evidence of them favouring the Whig rather than the Tory candidates.¹ So even before 1832 the working class - middle class alliance depended upon the presence of a particular economic environment in which some areas of common interest could be identified. After the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, such alliances were increasingly unstable, and the Chartist activities from 1839 onward made their survival very unlikely. Certainly at Birmingham and Coventry the Radicalism of both working class and middle class Chartists and Owenites was of the moderate rather than extreme kind,² and the confrontations of 1839 placed many of them in a personal dilemma of choice. At Wolverhampton, the Radical group

1 See M. Thomis, Politics and Society in Nottingham, (1960), pp.166-8.

2 P. Searby. Coventry in the Age of the Chartists, (1965) particularly pages 20-22. c.f. the situation in Sheffield described in J. Salt, Op.Cit., p.146.

was not strong enough to cause much disturbance to the institute when it was overthrown, and middle class Radicals were quick to realign their beliefs and channel their energies into the Anti-Corn Law League. In Birmingham and Coventry the effect of the dispersal of the Radicals was much more catastrophic for the institution. In both cases the institute went into decline and was replaced by a new more conservative body. Working class radicals sought to create educational institutions for the working class adult outside the mechanics' institutes.

2.4 Category Three

"Institutions characterised by an alliance between liberal reformists and Tory traditionalists, both unsympathetic to independent working class movements and their aspirations"

A common type of mechanics' institute was that in which any expressions of independent working class thought or ideology or any attempts at working class control was vigorously countered by an alliance of industrialists, professional men and land owners exhibiting all shades of belief from reformist Whig through to reactionary Toryism. Of the many examples of such institutes we will examine the situation in the Potteries area.

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2.4.1 The Potteries Institutes

At the Potteries Mechanics' Institute founded in 1826 the prime mover was Josiah Wedgwood, the china manufacturer and reformist MP, but he was careful to gain the support not only of the leading pottery manufacturers such as Minton but also the leading country gentlemen and particularly the Duke of Sutherland.¹

The Duke was so rich and powerful, with immense land holdings and investments in mines and canals, that his patronage effectively killed any hopes of developing a working class institute. Much the same kind of institute was later established at Stoke and Newcastle under Lyme.² At Longton however the suppression of working class bodies was more overt.³ There existed three small bodies run by working men - the Vauxhall School Room, which ran classes and a library supported by a penny a week subscription; the Longton Working Men's Hall and Political and Scientific Institute whose directors were a tailor, a packer, a working potter, and a clog and patten maker; and a society of socialists. Local manufacturers, professional men and some of the gentry banded together to form an institute to replace these bodies, and it emerged as the Longton Atheneum and Mechanics' Institute. It was to be free from 'sectarian or political bias' and the committee, which was appointed only by those paying the higher subscriptions, consisted mostly of pottery manufacturers plus a few coal mine owners.⁴ Members of

1 Place Mss., f. 94., Brougham Mss., f. 27407.

2 Staffordshire Advertiser, 19 October 1837.

3 See J. Ward, Longton Atheneum and Mechanics' Institute: Its Rise and Progress, (1891). A.G. Haggard, 'Some Adult Educational Institutions of North Staffordshire', Rewley House Papers, 3, (1957-8), pp. 12-36.

4 J. Ward, Op. Cit., pp. 5-6.

Parliament from both parties, clergymen both Anglican and non-conformist, many of the local gentry, and the Duke of Sutherland backed the institute, which never caused any real disturbance to locality.

Thus in the Potteries area, the mechanics' institutes were controlled by an aristocratic and capitalistic group, totally antipathetic to free political argument or working class activity. It was a fair argument when Samuel Kydd, the Glasgow chartist, wrote of the Potteries Institute:

"Mechanics' Institutions have had a fair trial, and no-one will charge me with expressing a harsh judgement, when I aver, that they have not fulfilled the intention of their benevolent founders. Mechanics' Institutions, so called, are not what their name implies; they are none other than Institutions for the middle and higher classes; and as such are useful enough. (Working men) are raising up Institutions for their own purposes and suited to their own wants."¹

He started a People's Hall in Hanley in opposition to the Potteries Institute, with a series of provocatively titled lectures on politics and religion, with the aim of provoking fierce controversy and encouraging debate.

2.4.2 Leicester Mechanics' Institute

At Leicester a similar alliance between Whig and Tory prevented the emergence of a working class body. Leicester was primarily a hosiery town and there was a strong stream of working class radical thinking among the working force. Many of the

1 The Lever, 25 Jan 1851.

manufacturers were non-conformist Whigs with varying degrees of reformist sympathies.¹ In the Mechanics' Institute however Tories and liberals were conjoined in an attack on the working class Radicals.

In November 1833 a meeting of working men, called by some of the town's working class leaders, was arranged to set up a News and Reading Room for the Working Classes. The Chairman of the meeting, Mr. Parry, was described as an agent of Carlile, and it was apparent, so a hostile witness said, that all the business had been arranged beforehand and the important decisions already taken. In particular, the managers had already been appointed. The meeting was inflammatory. Speakers attacked almost everything the establishment valued. The aristocracy, the millocracy, the principle of primogeniture and inheritance of wealth, church tithes, the priesthood, all were attacked in blunt and forthright language. The plan was to take a building near West Bridge, and use the lower floors for unstamped periodicals and the upper floors for free discussion.²

There were present some employers, and one spoke very forcefully against the plan, but intimated that many of the town's employers would look favourably upon a properly constituted mechanics' institute. Within a fortnight, a group of artisans, self-employed men, and small masters had met and agreed that their best interests would be served by such an organisation.³

1 A.T. Patterson, Radical Leicester, (1954), R.W. Grieves, The Corporation of Leicester 1689-1836, (1939).

2 Leicester Chronicle, 2 November 1833.

3 Minute Book, 1833.

When they had gained the support of about 150 men, they sent a deputation to call upon the town's leading citizens, asking them for help in founding an institute. Some of the main hosiery employers, like William Biggs and Alfred Burgess, and some of the Anglican clergy, agreed to sponsor an institute and gave enough money to guarantee one year's rent, but they made it clear the institute must become self-supporting.¹

So within one month, two institutes of quite different nature were put before the public, and the one had behind it the powerful support of the manufacturers, the magistrates, and the upper classes, while the other faced hostility from the same source.

The organisers of the mechanics' institute began to make decisions which reflected the assumptions on which it was to be run. It was decided not to open the Reading Room on Sundays; invitations were given to the town and county members of parliament, representing both parties, to become sponsors. When one wrote that he could not support the institution without knowing what its religious and political affiliations were, the reply was made that there were to be no party politics at all.

When in December 1833 a public meeting was held, the platform party included Mr. Dawson, Whig MP for the borough, Dr. Noble, three Anglican clergymen, and several professional and manufacturing men. Their expectation of the function of the Institute was made clear when one speaker said that it would

1 Minute Book, 1833.

"teach man his duty and his interest".¹ The rule on political neutrality was quickly put to the test. When Biggs made a speech that dwelt on the virtues of the Reform Act and the beneficial effect of a whig government, the curate of Oadby, the Rev. G. Holt, immediately made it clear that his support and that of his friends was conditional on absolute political neutrality, and speeches such as Biggs' were only going to cause antagonism. The meeting agreed with Holt's view, and on this basis the institute was launched. At a meeting in the following year, a speaker praised the Institute for

"refining and exalting their tastes and fitting them for the enlightened performance of their sacred and moral obligations."

Although there is no evidence that the institute involved itself in Radical activity, the Tories kept it very much up to the mark. In 1835 Holt became worried about some tendencies he thought he could see, and published an open letter to the managers of the Institute. In it he wrote that

"it should not be perverted into a school for the diffusion of infidel, republican and levelling principles."

He claimed that many of the levelling and deistical school were on the management, and was particularly concerned about

"the offensive Jacobin principle of the equality of ranks."²

1 Minute Books, 1833.

2 Copy in Minute Books, 1835, under the title "A Complete Exposure of the Houses of the Leicester Mechanics' Institution".

Control by the conservative establishment was reasserted, and in 1839 the Duke of Rutland was quite happy to associate himself with the Institute exhibition.¹ Commenting on the Leicester and Leicestershire Institutes, Allaway writes,

"(most of them) rather exceptionally numbered the local gentry and Anglican clergy among their patrons and committee men."²

The corollary of this was that many of the working class, and particularly the framework knitters, who were in a disturbed state and much affected by revolutionary thought, took no part in the institute, and regarded it as a tool of the upper classes and employers.

Although the interpretation of the Leicester Mechanics' Institute presented here is believed to accord with the evidence of the institute minute books and reports of local newspapers, an alternative interpretation has been put forward by Patterson and supported by Grieves. Their view is that the mechanics' institute was seen as a centre of the reformist Whigs and was consequently viewed by the Tories as a sectarian body. It is true that many of the prominent members of the institute were non-conformists and of Whig reformist opinions. As a body they were representative of the middle class manufacturing interest which had fought and won a bitter battle for control of local government against the Tories, which is chronicled in Grieves' study.

Patterson therefore argues that

1 Minute Book, 1839.

2 Victoria County History. Leicestershire. Vol.3 p.253

"despite the institute's profession of political and sectarian neutrality, it was regarded from the first as a Radical affair - as indeed it was. The Conservatives were dubious or hostile from the outset. Some professed willingness to co-operate if politics were excluded, while doubting if this were possible in any institution in which William Biggs and Winks were connected ... Since, under the influence of these doubts and fears, the Conservatives did not participate in the inaugural meetings, the new institution immediately took the Radical colour they had prognosticated. They were therefore confirmed in their hostility, and soon came to look upon it as a hot-bed of republicanism and religious unbelief."¹

This is a difficult view to sustain against the evidence.

There were Tories present at the inaugural meetings and

Anglican clergymen remained prominent members for some years.

Patterson's view seems to spring from his close identification of the reformist Whig group and the working class Radical group, together set against the Tories. However the evidence seems to suggest conversely an alliance of reformists and Tories against the working class group. This partly can be inferred from the successful attempts to destroy the first institute, partly from the mixed composition of Tories and Whigs, Anglicans and non-conformists on the committees. Disillusionment with reformists was rapid among working class leaders after the passing of the Reform Act. As early as June 1832 Richard Seal, the trade union hosiery workers' leader was claiming

"having gained their victory (they) stood aloof. The manufacturers I say are bound to assist us in the attainment of our just rights."²

In fact the working class made little impact on the institute.

In 1834 one of the working men who helped set up the institute,

1 A.T. Patterson, Op.Cit., p.236.

2 Leicester Chronicle, 23 June 1832.

a hosiery worker called Rozzell, resigned over the pressure to ban all political and religious discussion. Only one of this group, Clepham, was appointed an officer at the first meeting, and he was voted off as secretary in 1835. Two middle class leaders, Hutchinson and Stone, publicly urged more middle class members to join, and the subscription was raised from 8 to 15 shillings to discourage too many working men.¹ At the most only 8 out of the committee of 20 in 1835 were working class, and even they were really better described as tradesmen. Most of them were relatively prosperous, and a number, including Rozzell, donated books to the institute.² The institute never showed any evidence of sympathy to radical views or the holders of such views, and in 1838 a group of Owenites who attempted, unsuccessfully, to place Owenite literature in the reading room were locked out of the classes which they had joined.³ Although some Tories may not have liked the reformist character of some of the leading officers in the institute, the way in which the institute functioned in opposition to working class Radicalism can hardly have distressed them, and was the basis upon which they gave their support.

2.4.3 South Wales

The use of mechanics' institutes by the middle and upper classes

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- 1 E.C. Eagle, The Leicester Mechanics' Institute 1834-70: A Reassessment, Bewley House Papers, (1958-59), p.55.
 - 2 M. Greenwood, Education and Politics in Leicester, M.Ed., Leicester, (1974), pp. 44-45.
 - 3 Leicester Chronicle, 21 July 1838.

to control working class activity and expression is likely to have been related to places and periods of working class disturbance, and in particular Chartist activity. This can be seen in South Wales.¹ Certainly the area needed some kind of technical education. The large iron works like Dowlais, Cyfarthfa, Penydarren, and Rhymney employed large labour forces with a high percentage of skilled men. For the upkeep of machinery, an army of engineers, founders, mould-makers, forge-carpenters, white-smiths and masons were needed. As significant however was the degree of social disturbance and unrest. In an area where the state of education had been deplorable for centuries, a population explosion took place, compounded by a massive migration to the coal-mining belt. Merthyr Tydfil, the largest town in South Wales in 1851 had only a third of its inhabitants born in the county, and was in many ways a typical pioneer frontier town. We are suggesting that the institutes were to be used partly to provide skilled workmen for industrial demand, and partly to counteract any working class disturbances. A key part of this control process was to carry on education in English rather than in the people's language. There were few parts of Britain where the institutes were more clearly sponsored by the middle class, with a minimum of initiative from the working class. In town after town, the vicar, the non-conformist ministers, the doctor and the local tradespeople initiated the institute and obtained the patronage of the influential gentry in the area. Their greatest effort was made between 1839-45

1 This section is based on the research of T. Evans, The Mechanics Institutes of South Wales, Ph.D., Sheffield, (1966), from whose work the following details are taken except where otherwise indicated.

when institutes were founded at Brecon, Cardiff, Carmarthen, Llandilo, Llanelly, Neath, Newport, Pontypool, Rhyader, Swansea and Tenby. Another eight were founded in the following five years. This activity may well have been related to local Chartist activity. The years after 1839 witnessed violent Chartist activity, reaching its climax in Frost's march on Newport. At the same time the Rebecca riots spread from Pembroke into Carmarthen and Cardigan. In 1843 and 1844 the attacks reached their greatest severity. These were years of constant military movements by the authorities, mass meetings on the mountainside by men armed with pikes made in hidden caves, drilling in the secrecy of the night, attacks on prisons and warehouses, and long sittings of magistrates courts.

Against this background of working class struggle, the mechanics' institutes were set up by those in authority, to pressure the working class into acceptance of law and order, and rejection of Radical insurrection. The managements of the four largest ironworks, at Aberdare, Dowlais, Cumavon and Cwmgwrach, helped to foster the institutes. The clergy dropped inter-denominational quarrels to unite behind the institutes. Anglican and Baptist clergy at Aberdare and Cardigan, Anglican and Independent at Milford Haven, Anglican, Baptist, Independent and Calvinist Methodist at Newcastle Emlyn, Catholic and Anglican at Swansea, the vicar and Archdeacon at Aberystwyth, all helped in the good work. The Bishop of St. David's sponsored institutes at Narberth, Cardigan, and Carmarthen, the Bishop of Llandaff backed the Cardiff institute. Among the aristocracy, support came from the Marquis of Bute, at Cardiff, Lord Aberdare at Bridgend, the

Duke of Beaufort at Brecon, Lord James Stuart at Cardiff, the Earl of Lisburne at Cardigan, and the Earl of Cawdor at Pembroke Dock. At Pontypool, the Lord Lieutenant took time off from organising a militia which was to deal with Chartist rebels, in order to help the local ironmasters start an institute. At Brecon, the son of the Lord Lieutenant did the same. The Anglican Church, the most politically conservative of the churches in Wales, was involved in institutes at Abardare Aberystwyth, Cardiff, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Llandyssil, Milford Haven, Narberth, Neath, Newcastle Emlyn and Tenby.¹

In view of all this activity, there is an ominous ring to the speech of a doctor at the opening of the Carmarthen Mechanics' Institute in 1840.

"The most perfect knowledge was that which would make the mechanics most capable of fulfilling their social, moral, and religious duties, with zeal and fidelity."²

The way in which institutes were seen as adjuncts to the militia was pointed up by the comment of the leading Welsh newspaper which said in support of them:

"the nation receives a fresh pledge for public security in every rightly-educated man it obtains."³

The situation was not so different in Cornwall.⁴ The most populous area was around Camborne, and an Institute for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge was founded in 1829 by

1 The support for institutes indicated in this paragraph is taken from T. Evans, Op. Cit., under each of the institutes which are arranged alphabetically from p.460.

2 Quotation in Evans, Op. Cit., p.226.

3 The Cambrian, 29 April 1848.

4 For Cornwall see L. Piper, The Development of Technical Education in Cornwall from the early 19th Century to 1902. M. Ed., Leicester, 1977.

Dr. Richard Lanyon. It was backed by such families as the Vyvyans, Bassets and Pendarves, whose wealth came from the mining industry. With such heavy middle class sponsorship we would expect to find an association between Chartist activity and the support of institutes, and indeed when a new building was provided for the institute in 1842 it was said that the sponsors were

"especially gratified that the site is now so worthily occupied"

as it was previously

"the place where the Chartists had so frequently met for the purposes of diffusing their obnoxious and destructive sentiments." ¹

Not only was the institute to protect the workman from Chartism but also to persuade him to accept the rough conditions in which he lived. It would

"light up within him the inner world of thought and feeling into which he may retire at will and find a delightful solace for the asperities of outward fortune." ²

It does not seem that this was an attractive proposition to the Cornish miners. Although only seven counties in England had more mechanics' institutes than Cornwall, there were very few there that reached 200 members, and Camborne had only 85 in 1851.³

1 Camborne Literary Institution 1829-1929, (1929), p.18.

2 Ibid, pp. 30-31.

3 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., pp. 222-223.

2.4.4 Nottingham Mechanics' Institute

At Nottingham the institute, sponsored by Whig non-conformists and the town's manufacturing interest, and supported by the surrounding landed gentry, tried and failed to attract the working class in any significant number.¹ The town was predominantly a lace and hosiery manufacturing town, and relationships between masters and men were throughout this period very bad. The town was run in the Whig interest through a notoriously corrupt and bribery-ridden system, and the volatile state of local political and economic feeling erupted frequently into serious rioting. From the Luddites through the Political Unions to the Chartists there was a powerful Radical party among the working class, and in 1847 the town returned Feargus O'Connor as its Member of Parliament.²

Against this background, the middle class were unlikely to encourage the growth of educational institutes for adults without exercising considerable influence over them. The first attempt by working men to form an institute, the Nottingham Scientific and Mechanical Society which was set up in 1825, quickly ran into opposition from the middle classes, because the members wanted the right of free debate in all subjects, and it disintegrated in the face of such hostility.³

1 Details of Nottingham Mechanics' Institute in H. Briscoe, A History of Technical Education in Nottinghamshire 1851-1902, M.A. Sheffield, 1952.

2 M. Thomis, Politics and Society in Nottingham, (1960), provides a useful political analysis.

3 D. Wardle, Education and Society in Nineteenth Century Nottingham, (1971), p.176.

In 1837 a banker and landowner, J. Smith Wright of Rampstone Hall provided the impetus to found a mechanics' institute, which had the backing of many of the most important people in the town. The inaugural meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Mayor who was a leading lace manufacturer, and in subsequent years the institute had at the very least the tolerance of successive mayors. Among the life members were a number of manufacturers, gentlemen and a general. Two of the vice-presidents were dissenting ministers, an Independent and Unitarian, but the Anglican church was also involved and the Rev. H. Alford who later became Dean of Canterbury gave his support. So too did the two local members of parliament.¹ J.E. Denison (later Viscount Ossington) had been Lord of the Admiralty in Canning's government and he eventually became speaker in 1857. He was not unfriendly to working class groups, but he can best be described as a cautious liberal. He was opposed to the ballot, and as Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire was involved in keeping public order during the Chartist disturbances. By marriage he was connected to the Portland interest. He gave considerable support to the institute and became its President. T. Gisborne, the other MP, was a more radical liberal supporting the ballot and working for the relief of dissenters. Not unexpectedly, the institute rigorously excluded all political and religious controversy.

1 J.A.H. Green History of Nottingham Mechanics' Institute, (1887), p.1. H. Briscoe, Ibid, p.38.

The institute was much in the debt of its founder, Smith Wright. He gave it many gifts, paid the rent for the building it inhabited, and in 1845 gave land upon which a new building was erected. However, the hopes that the institutes could survive as a major agency of working class education, particularly in the aspects of design and science particularly sought by employers, were dashed very rapidly. There was an attempt to concentrate on technical education, under the enthusiastic encouragement of a famous civil engineer of the day, Thomas Hawksby. There was a very successful industrial and art exhibition in 1840, which made £800 profit.¹ But the working class did not enroll, and most of the members were middle class. By 1845 most of the activity was literary, musical or social, and the lace manufacturers had in 1843 switched their efforts to the founding of a School of Design.² An analysis of membership in 1850 shows that only 16 per cent could be defined as working class, and the category of clerks, warehousemen and shopkeepers alone accounted for half the membership. There were more shopkeepers, tradesmen and manufacturers than³ workmen.

Wardle argues that this was a direct reflection of the bitter feelings generally existing between masters and man.⁴ Indeed Nottingham provides an excellent example of those towns where working men opposed rather than supported the liberal interest which controlled political life in the town. Thomis has shown in his examination of the framework knitters' political activity

1 J.A.H. Green, Op. Cit., p.7.

2 H. Briscoe, Op. Cit., pp. 40-44.

3 Nottingham Journal, 1 February, 1850.

4 D. Wardle, Op. Cit., p.178.

that there was no partiality shown towards liberal over Tories.¹

The working class had formed their own bodies in the Operative Libraries.² An attempt by Denison in 1846 to effect some kind of merger with the Mechanics' Institute fell through, even though Denison was personally friendly to the Operatives Libraries and had donated books to them. The issue that could not be resolved was the right of free discussion on political and religious issues, and as the proposal coincided with the Chartist disturbances, there was little hope that Denison could carry the supporters of the Mechanics' Institute with him. At a later date, Charles Paget, an MP and a president of the mechanics' institute referred to the feelings of this period

"He recollected the strong expressions which were used at the time (1846) as to the impossibility of the masters and men meeting together in the same association. There was one in particular which one of the men used to reply to an observation made by the speaker. It was... 'We are at daggers'." ²

Nottingham therefore demonstrates to us a situation in which the rival interests of capitalist and working men were clearly drawn and understood. The dilemma of the manufacturer, who wanted a more skilled and educated craftsman but who did not want workers who challenged the system under which they worked, was exposed in their venture of establishing a mechanics' institute.

1 M. Thomis, Op. Cit., pp. 166-168.

2 Infra, p.177.

3 Ibid, p.185.

4 D. Wardle, Op. Cit., p.181.

2.4.5 The Ashton-under-Lyne Mechanics' Institute

This institute, lying on the borders of Lancashire and Cheshire, demonstrated dramatically the conflict between the reformist Whigs and the Chartists. It was founded in 1825 with support from many of the area's notables, including some of the leading cotton-spinning families, and it had as its president and major organiser the Hon. Charles Hindley, a landowner, manufacturer, and friend of Lord Brougham. Hindley followed very much Brougham's line on mechanics' institutes: that they could help men rise to better conditions, understand the workings of the economy, and give them the essential scientific background that was needed in the new world of industry. Guidance was to be light-handed.

"It must be the operatives who must perform all the labour which necessarily attends the conduct of such an Institution - they will do much better than their superiors - but when the latter assist by their advice and countenance by their presence, the men feel much encouraged." ¹

The very effective control of the institute, in the interest of capital, may have pleased the local manufacturers but it led to a fall in membership so great that the institute, after a period of bitter economic turmoil and distress in 1826, migrated to nearby Dukinfield, where it was looked after by Hindley's industrial partners, the Hydes, and there it remained until 1833.² During this spell, the workers in the area formed combinations, and were answered by agreements among the masters

1 Brougham Mss., 15 September 1826.

2 The history of this institute is well documented by M. Tylecote Op. Cit., pp. 247-257, from which this narrative is drawn.

to reduce wages. In November 1830, fifty-two firms in the Ashton-Stalybridge-Dukinfield area reduced wages simultaneously, and by December, 23,000 workers were out on strike. Great marches and demonstrations were held, and on occasions violence broke out. One master was murdered, shots were fired round Hindley's factory. Some of those most active in trying to break the Spinners Union, including the magistrates who read the Riot Act, were involved in the mechanics' institute. Hindley's own position was very exposed to the criticism of workers. Not only was he 'One of the Fifty-Two', but he was widely suspected of being the main channel of information about the disturbances to the Home Secretary.

With the revival of trade after 1833, the fortunes of the mechanics' institute improved, but Hindley continued to face attacks from the workers' leaders. Hindley had been one of the advocates for Factory Reform Acts at Westminster, but his own factories widely abused the terms of the Factory Act of 1833. His firm was taken to court and fined in 1834 and 1836, and Hindley's excuse that he was at Westminster and did not know the details of his factories' shortcomings, was given short shrift by the local press.

"It will hardly do for Mr. Hindley to pocket the profits of the concern in which he is the great money partner, and then shabbily throw all the blame and shame of long time and low wages on the young man who is junior partner in the firm and acts as manager of the works. In this as in other matters of conscience, no man can serve two masters. Between God and mammon Mr. Hindley must make his deliberate choice To a person of high religious as well as political profession it must be

galling indeed to be jeered by John Bright for running his own mill thirteen hours a day, and for being the first in the borough he represents to lower the wages of his constituents The benevolence of his natural disposition for which all give him credit, and the love of popularity which has characterised every step of his public career only serve to render the philosophical errors of his party more visible, and the failure of his humane aspirations more solemnly ridiculous."¹

Joseph Rayner Stephens, the prominent Chartist and editor of the Ashton Chronicle, had at one time co-operated with Hindley, but became increasingly suspicious of him and of the intentions of the reformist Whigs. The great strike of 1842, and the Chartist demonstrations at the time, which so concerned the authorities both in Ashton and London, were not reflected in the mechanics' institute which was run by a self-perpetuating administration of manufacturers, mostly non-conformist and liberal, but with a sprinkling of Anglican Tories.

Increasingly, Stephens attacked Hindley, and at the election of 1837 even put up in opposition to him. In the Chartist activity of 1848/9, Stephens' paper carried on a bitter war against Hindley.

"I am at a loss to understand what a factory master can think of himself, or what he expects will result from his conduct, when he boasts of running his mill, mealtimes included, between 14 and 15 hours a day, and also boasts, that he has secured the patronage and support of the Bishop of Manchester to the Mechanics' Institution of which he is one of the active directors."²

The Ashton Chronicle referred to

1 Ashton Chronicle, 23 December 1848.

2 The Champion, 1 December 1849.

"a want of confidence in those who are at so much trouble and expense in founding these literary follies. The people know them too well either to trust or respect them. When the tyrant turns teacher, the poor slave may look as though he were listening to what is said to him, but it goes down very badly From the notorious failure of these expensive play-things, I would draw an admonitory lesson for the future. Wise and good men should carefully consider the social bearings of the question. I am for BREAD BEFORE BOOKS." ¹

The feelings of the officials of the mechanics' institute were well put by the vice-president, Samuel Robinson, a millowner, in 1836.

"I am not an alarmist. I have great faith in the good sense and increasing intelligence of the people; but if I had not that faith, I should look not without anxiety to the future. Through the whole of our commercial and manufacturing districts, and especially here, population is extending itself with an immense, I had almost said fearful, rapidity Yet I see no adequate means provided for guiding and controlling this tremendous physical force I have yet to learn in what manner a superior physical force can be resisted, except by a moral one a large portion of political power is passing from the hands which have hitherto almost exclusively wielded it into those of the middle and lower ranks of society the change ... is I believe certain and irresistible, and its consequences will mainly depend on the degree in which sound knowledge shall have been diffused among the mass of the people. (They should see) in the restless agitation, which pervades society ... the stirring impulses of an awakened curiosity, an intense interest about all that regards its social relations, which will be stilled with nothing short of complete satisfaction. To resist such a spirit has, in all ages, been found dangerous - to stifle it, impossible. (If instruction were not given to the masses, it would be a case of) delivering them up, unarmed and defenceless, to the half-information and shallow reasoning of every ignorant and interested demagogue, who chooses to constitute himself their adviser and leader Those who, by their property and influence are the natural leaders of the people, must step fearlessly forward to do their duty, and

¹ Ashton Chronicle, 14 July 1849 .

shew themselves its guardians, its counsellors, and its friends. The prejudice in favour of birth and title has lost much of its authority; they can recover and maintain it only by evincing a ready sympathy with the wants and feelings of the people, and a steady support of every judicious plan for their moral and social improvement." ¹

The answer to this was put by another writer in The Ashton Chronicle.

"Teach the hungry to read, and they will read the long roll of their wrongs, in being robbed of their lawful hire, till they have them at their tongue end; teach them to write and they will write their sufferings in words never to be blotted out, till the day of reckoning with their oppressor comes :- teach them to cast accounts, and they will one day show the tyrants to what a fearful amount they can cast up the sum of their accumulated miseries!" ²

There was really not much common ground between these two attitudes.

Though the most prominent individual in the Ashton Mechanics' Institute was Hindley, a non-conformist and reformist Whig of national standing, there were Tories among other key figures in the institute. The treasurer, George Heginbottom, was an Anglican and rather unpredictable Tory. Samuel Robinson was a non-conformist reformist Whig, but his successor as vice president was Thomas Mellor who later became Tory MP for the borough. In a significant statement, Robinson declared on his resignation in 1844 that he did so because

1 S. Robinson, Two Addresses ..., (1836), pp. 54-62.

2 Ashton Chronicle, 1 April 1848.

"frequent opportunity ought to be given to the members to elect their officers from all sects and parties." ¹

It can be presumed that he was referring to Whigs and Tories, and not to Radicals. What is most obvious about the management of this institute is the high level of control by spinning manufacturers, whose economic interest was common which was more significant than any divergence of political party.

2.4.6 Conclusion to Category Three

It was hypothesised that there would be mechanics' institutes which would display an alliance of reformist Whigs and Tories, together showing no support for Radical views and concerned to prevent Radical working class organisations from gaining any control over the institutes.

The mechanics' institutes that have been examined have shown evidence of such an alliance, which has also embraced in itself the additional dimensions of non-conformism with Anglicanism, and manufacturing interests with landed interests. Although in the case of Leicester, Nottingham and Ashton, the working officers of the institutes were in the main reformist Whigs, there were some Tories, and there was substantial patronage and support from the Church and landed gentry whose views could not be ignored by the managers.

The necessary condition for an alliance of this nature was that the institute eschewed all political teaching or activity,

¹ Quotation in Tylecote, Op. Cit., p.253.

including that of the political economists. As we have noted in the examination of institutes in category one, there were a number of places where a reformist Whig faction used the institute to spread political propaganda, but this would in most circumstances destroy any support from the Tory faction. Alliances were most likely to succeed where the activities of the working class were seen as a threat by the middle and upper classes, Tory and Whig alike, and this was most likely to happen in towns which had a history of disturbed relations between an articulate work force and an identifiable group of employers who had a monopoly over most of the work in the area. These conditions most often were found in the textile towns, and it is of some significance that three of the mechanics' institutes examined under this category were textile towns.

2.5 Category Four

"Institutes which are sponsored and controlled by Tory and Anglican interests, and opposed to independent working class activity. What support there is from industrial capitalists is small and absorbed into the prevailing conservatism."

A number of institutes, which were generally situated in rural areas, were dominated by country gentry though they often also had the support of manufacturers and tradesmen in the area. In this section we will refer to three such institutes, at Cambridge, Evesham and Stourbridge, with reference to others.

2.5.1 The Cambridge and Cambridgeshire Mechanics' Institute

The institute was set up in 1835 very much under the control of established authority. The patron was the Earl of Hardwicke, and the vice-patrons consisted of the members of parliament for town and county, the university vice-chancellor, the mayor, any past presidents, and not more than six others. In 1838 these others included the Dean of Bristol and four reverend professors, one of whom was president. The committee consisted of twelve members elected from one guinea a year annual members, and twelve from the 2/6 a quarter members, but as the officers were also members and they were gentlemen of some standing, one way or another, the university, church and landed gentry held control of the institute.

The aim of the institute was

"the cultivation of experimental natural and moral philosophy and of useful practical knowledge in every department, avoiding political and religious controversy."¹

The library contained a mixture of philosophical works and works by middle of the road political writers like Adam Smith, Harriet Martineau, Brougham and Cobbett, and the newsroom took a collection of Tory and Whig papers.²

The main activity of the institute was in lectures on various subjects in philosophy, literature and the arts. Classes had to be self-supporting - fees had to cover not only any salary

1 Rules, 1838.

2 Library Catalogue, 1838.

for teachers but also materials, light and heating. There was some encouragement for public debate of members' papers, but these had to be sanctioned by the committee which made sure that the prohibited areas of discussion were avoided. The institute was in fact totally unexceptional, and under the type and character of management it had, it is difficult to see how members could experience anything which was at variance with a conservative view of society.

2.5.1 Evesham Literary, Scientific and Mechanics' Institute¹

This body was founded in 1837. Its declared aim was to provide instruction in Arts and Science, and it was to have no local party or sectional bias. The committee which launched the institute was chaired by T.N. Foster, the mayor and a coal merchant and lead crusher. It contained a cabinet maker, an ironmonger, a surgeon, a schoolmaster, a textile agent and an Anglican clergyman. An attorney and draper were shortly added. The committee thus represented the leading citizens of this small town, and they set out to obtain the support of the landed gentry and the richer fruit farmers of the area.

When the constitution was drawn up, Lord Northwich became president, and among the vice-presidents were three influential gentlemen, Edward Holland, E.J. Rudge and H.E. Strickland, plus Dr. Thomas Beale Cooper, the prosperous local physician.

¹ Information taken from the institute minute books, 1837-1850.

Within the first few years, support came from several Anglican clergy, farmers, gentry, and professional men. Lord Marcus Hill voiced the local opinion when he wrote

"I have long followed with much interest the proceedings of the mechanics' institute established at Evesham, and have heard them highly spoken of." ¹

He presented the institute with a set of the Encyclopaedia Britanica. Sir Thomas Phillips of Middle Hill gave books to the library, and Sir Henry Willoughby stated that he was ready to help the institute in any way. The only opposition, and this was the case in every rural area, came from some of the farmers, who did not want their labourers wasting valuable farming time at an institute, particularly in seasons when the work was heavy.

In this institute, there was no hint of political activity or religious non-conformity. Lectures were arranged in some science subjects, and on historical, literary and general matters. A body less likely to challenge the order of local society can hardly be imagined.

2.5.3 Stourbridge Mechanics' Institute ²

While Evesham was a small rural town whose prosperity mainly depended upon farming the rich and sheltered lands of its Vale, Stourbridge had some industry. To the south it faced

1 Minute Book, 1846.

2 H. Palfrey, The Story of Stourbridge Institute and Social Club, (1948), recounts the history and incorporates institute records.

the Worcestershire countryside, but to the north was the Black Country, and the town was influenced by both these environments. Its industry was based on glass-making, which had been brought to the area in the 17th Century by Huguenot families, and it had a high proportion of skilled craftsmen in its working population. It was dominated more than most manufacturing towns by an established upper class, who exerted a strong paternal influence but was less deeply imbedded in the old rural society than was that at Evesham. Possibly because the presence of potential disturbance by the labourers was more obvious, not only in the town but also in the nearby Black Country, the Stourbridge institute showed a more active concern in preserving traditional values than did Evesham.

It was founded in 1836, for the purpose of affording "information on a variety of interesting subjects, especially among the labouring poor", and was financed and run by the wealthy. The President was the local squire, J.H.H. Foley, of Prestwood Hall; the Chairman was E.B. Bailie, in whose chain works the Institute at first met; and the committee was composed of gentlemen, lawyers and doctors, and tradesmen. Among those supporting the institute were the Bishop and Dean of Worcester, Lord Ward, the Earl of Stamford, Sir Thomas Winnington, Viscount Lyttleton of Hagley, Colonel Rushout (who later became Lord Northwick), the iron-founding family of Cochrane, and some of the local clergy. The only members whom one might suspect of having a reforming attitude were Robert Wellbeloved Scott, the liberal MP for Wolverhampton, and W. Ackroyd, a prosperous currier and one of the hardest workers

for the institute. Ackroyd's father had been a jacobin, and his grandson was to be William Beveridge. He was a Unitarian, and it was from the Penny Bank that he started in his Church that the institute first emerged.

Scott and Ackroyd's political attitudes seem to have had no effect on the institute which remained an aggressively conservative body. One of the lectures courses provided for the workmen was by the notorious anti-socialist propagandist, Brindley, who spoke on "The Exposure of the System of Modern Infidelity Misnamed Socialism", and on "The Errors and Abominations of Popery". The prospectus announcing the lectures, informed the readers that "a committee of gentlemen will assist to preserve order".¹ Frequent lectures were also given on the dangers of alcohol, with titles like "The Chemical Properties of Spirits, Wines and Malt Liquor".²

Such an institute commended itself well to the upholders of Law and Order. The local newspaper was able to report in 1840 that

"the efficient and praiseworthy manner in which the institute was conducted had induced the magistrates, nobility and gentry of the town and neighbourhood to give their kind and valuable support."³

Other institutes which were very much under the influence of county families would include those at Darlington, Worksop and Shrewsbury.

1 H. Palfrey, Op. Cit., pp.6-7.

2 Ibid, p.7.

3 Worcestershire Journal, 1840. Quotation in H. Palfrey, Op. Cit., p.7.

At Darlington Mechanics' Institute the president was a general, the patrons included the Bishop of Durham and the Earl of Darlington, and other officials included a sprinkling of army and navy officers, Anglican clergymen, and two members of parliament.¹

At Worksop Mechanics' Institute, set up in 1852, its supporters included the Duke of Newcastle, Viscount Galway, Earl of Manvers, Lord Henry Bentinck, Lord Robert Pelham-Clinton, the Hon. W.E. Duncombe, and the vicar of Worksop. The committee was barred to those who were clerks journeymen, apprentices, and labourers and who paid a lower subscription.²

The Shropshire Mechanics' Institute at Shrewsbury was, like Worksop, run by a committee of the proprietary members, who paid one guinea or more.³ Its purpose can be gauged from the comments in the first annual report.

"The institution has nothing to do with politics in any way: one of its first rules being that no work on political or religious discussions shall be admitted into the library. Its object is to afford to tradesmen, mechanics, and workmen, the means of self-instruction and improvement in the arts and occupations upon which their own livelihood, and much of the comfort of others depend; and also of innocent amusement when the hours of labour are over ... nothing can so effectively keep up that good feeling which happily prevails in this country between the richer and poorer classes than to find the former coming forward to aid ... the latter. This will cement the numerous bonds of mutual interest between them; the one will look back with pleasure

1 Rules and Regulations of the Mechanics' Institution Darlington 1825. Report by J. Watson, in Darlington and Stockton Times, 24 April 1948.

2 Rules and Regulations, 1852.

3 Rules, 1825.

to the liberality they themselves have shown, and the other will remember with gratitude the benefits received." ¹

The institution was well supported by the prosperous families in and around the town. ²

It had at least one notable educationist among its members, for R. Slaney, liberal MP for the borough and leader of the Education Debate of 1839 was for some time president of the institution. Support also came from two other MPs, the Hon. H.G. Bennett, a reformist Whig and P. Corbett, a Tory. A number of the local gentry were honorary members, and the Church of England was heavily involved from the start. Two Anglican clergymen, one a teacher at Shrewsbury School, were subscribers, and the Archdeacon, J. Butler, who was also headmaster of the school gave considerable support. It was in his premises that the institute first established a home. The classes which were started met in the schoolrooms of the church. At a later stage a Baptist minister was involved but at this early stage only mention is made of Anglicans. An early move of premises was made to rooms let by the Earl of Tankerville so the institute was of sufficient respectability to enjoy at least that much acceptance by him. Indeed an examination of the names of the proprietary members from which the committee was drawn, shows three groups. There were a number of people of independent means living in and around the town. There were a number of tradesmen and small manufacturers, including builders, whitesmiths, painters, coal

1 Eddowes Salopian Journal, 20 October 1826.

2 The following information is taken from the Minute Books and Annual Reports, 1825-44.

merchants, grocers, ironmongers and printers. There was a group of professional men, including several doctors, an agent, solicitors, a school teacher, surveyors, architects, and bankers. There was a mixture of Whigs and Tories among these members. The pattern did not significantly change throughout the period 1825-50. Support of the local gentry and the prosperous members of the town was retained, and one reflection of this was that the institute was financially well provided for, and was seldom short of money.

Control by the proprietary members was complete through these years. Initially they were the only members who could attend general meetings, vote, or be elected for office.

In 1827 as a result of a request by a number of the proprietary members including the secretary, a special meeting was held at which it was agreed that the ten shilling members could vote and be elected. It was not until 1839, however, that the cheapest category of members who paid five shillings a year were given the vote, and they continued to be barred from election to the committee.

The rules had stated that the institute should avoid all political matters, and this it did with only rare exceptions. In 1836 a course of lectures was given on political economy and the library contained Lord John Russell's book on English Government. Other than that the institute stuck rigidly to

its objective in providing courses of lectures and classes related to the arts and occupations of the members. There were hardly any lectures of a general nature, nor books other than ones concerned with science and technology, and there is no evidence of any recreational activity. So strict initially was the intent to relate all lectures to the occupations of the members that when a local doctor in 1826 offered to give three lectures on natural history, this was only accepted after some hesitation because "the proposed lectures are not strictly in conformity with the objects of the institution."

The Shropshire Mechanics' Institute was disturbed in 1841 by a dispute, the reason for which is not clear. No mention of it is made in the local press or in the institute minute books, but it would appear that a number of members left the parent institute to found a new body called the Shrewsbury Mechanics' Institute. It was under the presidency of the Rev. Dr. Kennedy, Butler's successor as headmaster of Shrewsbury School, and from occasional references to it in the Salopian Journal it would appear to differ little from the Shropshire Mechanics' Institute except in having a higher proportion of general rather than scientific lectures.¹ There was also a Mechanics' Hall in the town which in 1841 sought and obtained semi-amalgamation with the Shropshire Mechanics' Institute. Possibly by 1851 and certainly by 1864 an amalgamation between the two mechanics' institutes had taken place, under the name the Shrewsbury Mechanics' Institute.² In default of any satisfactory

1 Eddowes Salopian Journal, 3 Nov 1841, 17 Nov 1841.

2 Shrewsbury Chronicle, 23 Aug 1912, 8 Nov 1912.

evidence we are left to assume from the lack of interest of the local press that the schism was over no matter of great importance, and was unlikely to concern either religious or political differences.

2.5.5 Banbury Mechanics' Institute

Not all mechanics' institutes in small rural towns were dominated by Tory and landowning interests. In some, of which Banbury Mechanics' Institute is typical, the institute was run by local professional and trades people, and their political and religious attitudes could be mildly reformist and non-conformist. However it was usual in such small town institutes for there to be careful avoidance of activity likely to cause offence to the local gentry. The accommodation between reformists and Tories seem generally to have been well understood by both.

Banbury, a town of a little over 7,000 inhabitants in 1841 if one includes its contiguous villages, had been a pocket borough of the North family and had returned candidates according to which way that family inclined. The town owed its prosperity to its market trade, its weaving, and increasingly its manufacture of agricultural implements. It possessed a lively group of professional people, attorneys, bankers, surgeons, booksellers, and the like who inclined to reform and who had formed a pressure group for political reform at local and national level. In 1832 they returned one of their own,

Talfourd, as a Whig member, and in the elections for a reformed council they swept the board. Henceforth local government and most local community activity, from charities and poor law administration to cultural and educational ventures, was firmly in the hands of no more than twenty or thirty people, successively moving round the various offices and responsibilities between them. There seems to have been no great Tory reaction to this. The vicar of Banbury, the Rev. J. Lancaster, had declared himself before 1832 in favour of political reform, and most of the gentry in the surrounding area were not disturbed by the Whig control of town life. The Whigs were only mildly reformist and indeed faced a Radical challenge in the 1841 election from Vincent, the Bath Chartist. 1)

When the caucus decided in 1835 to set up a Mechanics' Institute they proceeded with the utmost circumspection, visiting or writing to other institutes at Wellingborough, Oxford, Reading, Northampton and Coventry to obtain advice.² On the provisional committee were many of the leading citizens - William Potts the Bookseller and Printer, E. Cobb the Banker and a Unitarian, Samuel Hill a local schoolmaster, William Bigg the Chemist, J.V. Beesley Clerk to the Council and Registrar, William Bloxham a Bookseller, F. Francillon, an Attorney, plus one or two gentry and trades people such as a hatter, coal merchant and ironmonger. On the first committee elected were insurance agents and an actuary, and the names

1 See for Banbury background, W. Potts, A History of Banbury, 2nd Edition, revised E.T. Clark, (1978).

2 Details from the Minute Books, 1835-50.

that appear in the first months of 1835 are the names that are still involved in the institute ten years later.

The institute set about establishing its respectability, and this it did in three ways. Firstly it made some very strong statements about its political neutrality -

"the Institute shall not be perverted from (its) objectives to serve the purposes of any party, sect or establishment in politics or religion or be made the instrument of any party in questions of local politics."

Within its own definition of politics the institute kept closely to this rule. No lectures were given on political topics nor was there any evidence of any kind of political debate or disagreement. The institute did not see it as a matter of contentious politics that it purchased the SDUK publications including the Results of Machinery, the Administration of the Poor Laws 1833, Earl Fitzwilliams Second Letter to Landowners on the Corn Laws, or most of Cobbett's books. This is what might be expected of a reformist Whig committee, but whatever appeared on the library shelves, there was no public discussion of overt political issues.

The second way in which the institute established its respectability was by very strict control of everything that went on in the building. It was an extremely rule-ridden institute. When some members wished to form a drama group in 1837, the committee drew up strict rules of conduct which included a halfpenny fine for misbehaviour and a penny fine for non-excused absence. Similar rules governed the music and drawing classes, and particularly tight control was exercised over the

mutual instruction class, which was really a discussion group - typical of its discussions was 'which is the most powerful - love of life, liberty or the fair sex'.¹ All books that were presented or purchased had to be approved by the committee - and indeed the evidence of the minute books is that this was its major preoccupation other than finding premises. From the start, the Institute refused to take newspapers though it took periodicals, kept the institute closed on Sunday (which was the one day people had time to attend) and only opened the library in the evenings. Very little fiction was allowed in the library. Proposals in 1837 to allow the housekeeper to serve coffee to the members were strongly rejected. The whole tone of the institute was in fact very strict, and trouble-makers were dealt with rigorously. In 1847 eight youths were publicly expelled for unruly behaviour.

If a lot of freedom and enjoyment were curtailed, on the positive side many lectures were given to encourage good behaviour. The very first lecture was given by the local attorney, Francillion, on Mendicity, and others were subsequently given on such topics as The Improvement of the Mind, and The Care of the Teeth.

The third way in which the institute sought respectability was by association. In addition to the caucus of local worthies who ran the institute attempts were made to bring in to honorary

1 Banbury Guardian, 29 March 1844.

2 Banbury Guardian, 25 March 1847.

positions people of substance from the surrounding areas. This proved less easy than expected. The presidency was offered to the Earl of Bute who had a local connection through marrying into the North family. He declined it however on the grounds that he had rejected offers from other mechanics' institutes previously, but was well inclined enough to send a present of some books. An approach was then made to Lord Saye and Sele who accepted the presidency. As vice presidents a number of people were suggested including two of the caucus, H. Tawney the banker and J.V. Galby. The vicars of Banbury and Beddington were approached but both declined. In the event the vice presidents comprised the two local MPs, Talfourd and Tancred, and four of the caucus, three of whom were lawyers and one banker. As important however was the support given by many of the gentry in the area, particularly in the provision of gifts of books. However suitable books were or were not, the fact of the presentation indicated public acceptance of the institute. The institute also relied heavily on gratuitous lecturers to fill up the programme since their funds did not extend to the engagement of many professional lecturers, and were able to bring into the institute in this way a number of local gentlemen and clergymen.

The aims of the institute had been spelt out as "to instruct members in the principles of the Arts and in the various branches of science and useful knowledge". The strength of the institute lay in its library as the Annual Report of 1844 acknowledged and in this it was very typical of most small town institutes. With a membership that oscillated between

100 and 250, and with very limited premises, the opportunity to develop classes or lecture courses was small. An occasional drawing class was run, and lectures were given on a fairly regular basis. More lectures than not however were given on historical, travel or general interest topics, not because this was what the members wanted but because this was what the lecturers available could offer. Some scientific lectures were given. In the first four years, two lectures were given on Astronomy, four on Chemical Science, and one on the Nature of Gas. This was not as many, however, as lectures given on History alone.

It is not possible in this institute to estimate the proportion of working class membership. The subscription was fixed at a low figure, two shillings a quarter, to encourage working class membership and was subsequently lowered to one shilling. There is no evidence from the recorded activities of the institute however that any provision was made for this section of the Banbury community. The absence of any political discourse, of any topics which related specifically to the working man's experience, the almost non-existent provision of classes, the emphasis put upon the library as the chief means of achieving the Institute's aims while screening out from the library newspapers or fiction, and the very limited place given to entertainment or recreation suggests that Banbury Mechanics' Institute had no great attraction for the working man. For those who did attend, the experience provided was one of socialisation into the life styles of the middle classes, and no doubt for those who wished to make the middle class their

reference group the institute performed a useful function. Other than that it was an organisation that reflected and reinforced the power of the caucus as the dominant force in local community life.

2.5.6 Conclusion to Category Four

It was hypothesised that a number of institutes would show heavy influence from Tory and Church interests, and that support from commercial and industrial interests would be absorbed within this. There would be no evidence of Radical views or working class influence in institutes and the programmes would be supportive of the status quo. The institutes examined were all controlled by the rich and powerful with the support of traders and manufacturers. Evesham institute was archetypically the world view of the conservative establishment of the small town dominated by the surrounding rural society, and our assumption is that many of the institutes in rural towns were of this type. It would have been difficult for an institute to have survived in such circumstances if it was opposed by the Church and the landowners and the traders. Banbury Mechanics' Institute was included because although in a small rural market town it was encouraged by a group of professional and tradespeople, some of whom were mildly reformist, particularly in terms of local government reform. However it is significant that the institute took great care not to do anything provocative to the Tory interest, and included among its lecturers a number of Anglican clergymen,

and among its benefactors many of the local gentry.

2.6 Category Five

"Institutions in which there was a struggle between tory traditionalists and reformist Whigs, with little or no reference to the working class"

There are a few institutes where there is a record of control firmly held by the Tories but challenged on occasions by reformist Whigs. There is not very much evidence of this across the country but such a struggle is recorded at the institutes of Halifax and Stroud.

2.6.1 Halifax Mechanics' Institute¹

This institute had observed very rigorously a rule excluding controversial theology and politics. When a reformist Whig proposed a class in political economy, the chairman made it clear that if they wanted peace there must be no mention of political economy.² It was not for many years that the reformist Whigs tried again. Then Henry Martin, their leader, spoke at the annual general meeting in 1849 in favour of rescinding the rule banning politics and religion; and received a very favourable and enthusiastic hearing from his audience. At a

1 Details taken from the institute's records, and J.F.C. Harrison, Op. Cit., pp. 148-151.

2 Halifax Guardian, 12 January 1833

special meeting in July 1849 Martin and the liberals obtained the votes they needed to rescind the rule, and the new Reading Rooms which had just been opened, were stocked with books on political economy, and magazines like the Edinburgh and Westminster Reviews.

But the traditionalists were very disturbed. John Waterhouse, a founder member and president for many years, acted as their leader and created a great stir when he resigned in protest at what he described as political indoctrination.

In 1851, the Dean of Ripon, while addressing the institute at its annual Soiree, attacked the introduction of politics and suggested that things should revert to their former state. The influence of the Dean, one of the great Establishment figures behind the Yorkshire Mechanics' Institute movement, was placed firmly behind the traditionalists, and the directors of the institute were forced to recommend the reimposition of the ban. At the next AGM, after a long and stormy argument, the directors' motion was carried against the reformers' amendment, and the liberal reformists' brief rebellion was over.

2.6.2 Stroud Mechanics' Institute

An incident at this institute demonstrates the exercise of power by a powerful Tory over his liberal reformist colleagues. In 1837 Harwood of Bristol gave a lecture on the Corn Laws, as he had to other places in the south-west region. Harwood

was a free trader and there is no doubt his views would come across to his audience. One of them wrote a report of the lecture highlighting its more controversial statements and placed it in the local paper.¹

This at once drew an angry letter from the institute's president, Edmund Gilling Hallewell, an influential and wealthy Tory who stated that the report was biased, that the lecture was not of a political nature, and that in future the newspaper should only accept reports that came from the committee after approval.² The editor naturally refused to accept this, and published the following week a letter from a member who claimed Hallewell had got it wrong not surprisingly as he had not attended the lecture. The initial report, claimed the writer, was accurate, it was an attack on the Tory corn laws, and the president's attempts to suppress these facts was worrying.

"It behoves the members of this institution (the greater part of whom are I believe true-hearted liberals) to watch the movements of this wary partisan or the unity and prosperity of the institute may be endangered."

The editor further stated that Harwood did in his lecture prove

"the injustice and impolity of the Corn Laws and that none but the landed proprietors are benefited by them." ³

The committee, having to choose between losing the support of

1 Cheltenham Free Press, 11 November, 1837.

2 Ibid, 25 November 1837.

3 Ibid, 2 December 1837.

their powerful president and thus creating local animosity from Tories, land owners and Church alike, or denying what it was obvious to most people had happened, decided on the latter. In advertisement the committee publicly stated its support for the chairman:

"by existing rule politics are prohibited from being entertained - the discourse of the lecture was acute, clear, and free from political or party view."

It may have convinced no-one, but it made clear where power lay in the institute, and no more such lectures or reports appear in the local press.¹

2.6.3 Conclusions to Category Five

Although there is comparatively little evidence of conflict between reformist Whig and Tory in mechanics' institutes when the latter was in control (though it frequently happened the other way round as suggested in the discussion under Category One), the issue is raised of the relationship of Toryism to adult education in general and mechanics' institutions in particular.

Although as we have shown, many Tories were willing enough to support a mechanics' institute, and not infrequently did so in alliance with Whigs, they had a very considerable dislike of Whig reformism as represented by Brougham and the political economists.

¹ Ibid, 9 December 1837.

Hill, in his study of Toryism, claims that Tories were hostile to two beliefs that were characteristic of reformist Whigs. The first of these was the belief that the diffusion of knowledge per se was a beneficial activity which would reinforce the march of progress towards universal enlightenment. Hill comments

"the belief that the diffusion of knowledge leads necessarily to self improvement of the individual is a form of philosophical optimism native only to an age which places the value of Reason very high".¹

Tories were opposed to the unregulated spread of knowledge particularly through institutions which were secular.

"Unregulated, uncensored science was assuredly considered a form of sin, not only by Tories but by the body of Church opinion".²

We would argue that both Hill and contemporary commentators were naive if they thought that the reformist Whigs were sponsoring unregulated knowledge, but it was true that there was a pervasive rhetoric if not reality which advocated that. Indeed it is partially contradicted by the fears Tories had of the second characteristic of radical Whigs, their belief in Political Economy as an exact science upon which political and social policy could be based. What was anathema to many Tories was not simply the Whigs' particular version of political economy but the certainty with which it was proclaimed. Their feelings may typically be expressed in the following extract:

"Men who arrogantly talk of Political Economy as a science, so completely perfected, so universal and all-important, that common humanity and morality, reason and religion must be pooh-poohed down if they seem to interfere with its infallible conclusions

1 R. Hill, Toryism and the People, (1929), p.145.

2 Ibid, p.151.

- The Politico - Economical discoveries of 20 years ago solemnly forbids all future discoveries."¹

It was clear enough to those who looked that the working class were not by and large inclined to accept this new 'science' as based on universally true laws but were rather inclined to see it as based on self-interest of employers and authorities.

Thus the association of Lord Brougham with the mechanics' institutes, Hill suggests, was bound to rouse all the suspicions of the Tories that secular bodies were going to be diffusing assortments of knowledge in an uncontrolled way, and that informing them would be the science of political economy which would endeavour to convince the working class to accept the kind of programme the reformist Whigs sponsored. There was a widespread assumption that Brougham's motives in supporting mechanics' institutes were suspect -

"self-improving labourers were not there, as it was said, to imbibe Pure Science, but rather Reform, Radicalism and Political Economy."²

Hill concentrates in his analysis mostly on rural Toryism which he implies encapsulated the true stream of thought. There were Tories however who were friends of Reason, supporters of some parts of orthodox political economy, or politically Radical. The whole tradition of Huskinson and Peel, let alone Radicals like Cobbett and Eardsley Wilmot are implicitly dismissed by Hill as deviations from true Toryism, There were Tories who would have willingly supported those

1 The Christian Socialist, November 16 1850.

2 Quotation in R. Hill Op.Cit. p. 149, from Thoughts on the State and Prospects of Toryism, (1837).

parts of current orthodoxy which claimed to reinforce the social order.

"Political economy will be found to have pre-eminence over the other sciences in acting as a sedative and not as a stimulant to all sorts of turbulence and disorder."

If it is taught in mechanics' institutes

"the lessons of such an institution will be all on the side of sobriety and good order".¹

Nevertheless we can assume that rural Toryism supporting a traditional social and economic structure was powerful throughout the land, and in localities where it was strong, mechanics' institutes would be looked on with suspicion. The question for local Tories was whether to oppose mechanics' institutes or to use them, and as shown under Category Four and Category Five increasingly in the 1830s and 1840s they chose the latter course.

2.7 Category Six

"Institutions which were working class bodies under working class leadership, and opposed by Whig and Tory alike"

2.7.1 Working Class Institutes

No mechanics' institutes existed for any length of time as

1 T. Chalmers, Polity of a Nation, Vol. III pp.132-133, (1856).

bodies run by the working class for members of the working class and expressing a working class ideology. For brief moments there was identity of interest between working class and middle class leaders in institutes such as Birmingham, but no institutes appear to have been both led by and composed of working men. It was a common situation for an institute to be formed by taking over existing working class bodies which were often of an informal and unassuming kind. We have recorded in this chapter that such was the case at Longton and Wakefield. Many other institutes grew out of front room discussion groups or libraries or mutual improvement societies, as for example at Wolverhampton, Stonehouse, Bridport, Sherborne, Keighly, Bridgwater, Stalybridge and Sturminster. Not all of these were necessarily controlled by the workers themselves. Some were sponsored by a middle class member who provided a room in their house and the use of their library, as did that at Mansfield in 1831 which met in a doctor's house.¹ Many however were set up and run by workers themselves. Once they were transformed into mechanics' institutes, control passed to the middle classes who took the major offices, a number of the committee posts and provided much of the finance. We have seen how this occurred at Longton Mechanics' Institute, and the story is common elsewhere.

However, working class institutes carried on being set up throughout the period, and particularly in the late 1830s and 1840s posed a serious challenge to mechanics' institutes as bodies offering a distinctive alternative. They were characterised by being very cheap, often charging a penny a week;

1 H. Briscoe, Op. Cit., p.44.

they were self governing run entirely by workers; they were situated in working class districts; they allowed free discussion particularly of political issues; they were recreational as well as educational, providing education suitable to the needs of their members; and they generally allowed in women members on the same terms as men.

Among the earliest of these bodies were two in Glasgow, the Gorbals Popular Institute (1833) and the Parkhead Popular Institute (1837). At Liverpool the Northern Mechanics' Institute (1839) was organised in this fashion. At Stourbridge when a Working Men's Institute was founded it rapidly acquired twice as many members as the Mechanics' Institute. In Birmingham the Peoples' Improvement Society was established in 1846. Similar bodies were the Hyde Working Men's Institute (1838) and the Stalybridge People's Institute (1839).¹

The Birmingham Peoples' Improvement Society provides good evidence of the general approach of these bodies.² For one penny a week, members were provided with a Reading Room with a wide selection of newspapers and none of the elevated journals favoured by mechanics' institutes. There was a library of 1,300 books, weekly lectures on popular topics and current controversy, a political and religious debating society, a chess club, a refreshment room providing cheap meals and a programme of excursions and social events. So it provided both for those who just wanted to relax and for

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., pp. 88-89, 106. H. Palfrey, Op. Cit., p. 12. S. Hill, Bygone Stalybridge, (1907), p.111. T. Middleton, The History of Hyde and its Neighbourhood, (1932), pp. 99-100.

2 Rules and Regulations, 1846. J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p. 65.

political activists who wanted to engage in hard debate. For a further penny a week the Birmingham members could have lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, elocution, singing and phonography. Most of this teaching was done on the basis of mutual instruction with an ex-pupil acting as leader. The Society with an income of only £47 a year was self supporting. The only help it got was the free use of a Unitarian schoolroom.

At Nottingham the workers organised themselves into four Operative Libraries. These were run from public houses which were also the centres of Chartist and other political and union activity. The entrance fee was sixpence, and then the cost was a penny a week. The rules of Operative Library No. 1 indicate its general philosophy:

"As we progress in knowledge, we must advance in freedom, knowledge being the only lever that can raise the working class into a fit condition to possess electoral privileges...Politics concern our welfare here, and religion affects our happiness hereafter, and as we believe that no political institution ought to stand which cannot bear examination, and no creed ought to be believed that cannot bear discussion, we resolve to purchase books of every description, political and theological ..."²

By 1850 the libraries had over 700 working men as members while the mechanics' institute had well under 100.

The most widely publicised of these ventures were the Lyceums, peculiar to the Manchester district. They were founded at

1 Quotation in D. Wardle, Op.Cit., p.183.

Miles Platting (1836), Salford, Ancoat and Chorlton (1838), Oldham (1839) and Pendleton (1841). Initially they were very successful. In their first year Chorlton had 1,500 members, Ancoat had 700 and Salford 500, and for a few years they were seen as a major contribution to working class education.¹

2.7.2 Rowland Detrosier and the New Manchester Mechanics' Institute

The Lyceums and other attempts to form working class mechanics' institutes owed much to the advocacy and encouragement of Rowland Detrosier.² Detrosier came from a Swedenborgian background, and through John Shuttleworth had close connections with the Unitarian Radical fringe in Manchester. His own views were somewhat eclectic and he was prepared to offer his platform to almost any variant of working class Radicalism, but he had a general belief in human perfectibility and the coming of a new age in which this would be achieved by the application of scientific and rational thinking to social conditions

"It is ours to live in an age when political rights for the people are beginning to be manufactured"³

but the greatest obstacle was the degradation of the workers themselves as a result of their industrial exploitation. His

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., pp. 135-40.

2 For Detrosier, See G. Williams, Rowland Detrosier (1965), R.G. Kirby, "An Early Experiment in Workers' Self-Education: The Manchester New Mechanics' Institute" in D.S.L. Cardwell, (Ed.), Op. Cit.

3 R. Detrosier, Lecture on the Utility of Political Unions, 1832, p.21.

belief was therefore that the achievement of political rights required as a precondition the moral and political regeneration of a debased working class and this could only be done in educational and social establishments over which the working class had control. Hence his rejection of the Manchester Mechanics' Institute and his attempt to found a new institute.

"Become yourselves the founders and supporters of institutions where the governing principle shall be the greatest possible knowledge to each, that all may enjoy the greatest possible happiness."

Here they could discuss questions of

"capital, population, supply and demand, and last, but not least, the subjects which occupy so much of the working mans attention at the present time, the wages of labour and co-operative unions."¹

Detrosier obtained the support of John Doherty, the leader of the Lancashire cotton operatives who condemned the

"the huxtering owners of the misnamed Mechanics' institutions who had tried to restrict political knowledge flowing to the working class."²

He also had the support of William Pare, the Birmingham Owenite, though Detrosier himself was opposed to Owenite socialism. He chose a good time to launch his new institute, as nearly all Manchester Radicals were totally disillusioned with the oligarchic mechanics' institute, and he was joined among others by Charles Britland, James Wroe, Thomas Potter, William Edge and W.G. Seed. Joseph Hume accepted the position of patron, and three hundred subscribers joined the New Mechanics' Institute.³ The institute itself had the benefit of Detrosier himself as a frequent lecturer. He was widely

1 R. Detrosier, An Address on the Advantages of the Intended Mechanics Hall of Science ..., (1831) p.13, p.5

2 Poor Man's Advocate, 25 February 1832.

3 Add. Mss. 27824 f. 381.

recognised as one of the most brilliant teachers of his day and invariably attracted large crowds. Courses were organised in Astronomy, Chemistry, Geometry and Steam, and political lectures were given on co-operation and such similar topics.

There is no doubt that this was a working class mechanics' institute but the most significant fact about it is that it survived such a very short time. Within a year it had ceased to exist as a mechanics' institute though it re-emerged as an Owenite Hall of Science. The breakup is not entirely explicable, but seems mostly to have resulted from the departure of Detrosier for London. Some of his views in fact were running very counter to the Owenites and other Radicals in Manchester. He was a follower of Malthusian beliefs on population, and he accepted many of the beliefs of the classical political economists, though he endeavoured to reinterpret them in a way that benefited the working class. He, like Owen, came to believe that a political union between the middle class and working class was necessary in order to regenerate the working class for political power, and his departure to London to join Place's National Political Union as secretary was a step that must have seemed to some of his Radical allies, a desertion to the enemy camp. He was taken up in London, during the remainder of his short life by Lady Byron, Bentham and J.S. Mill, though he was still sufficiently Radical to run into trouble with London Mechanics' Institute because of his connection with the St. Simonians.¹

¹ The somewhat complicated events behind this are described in T. Kelly, *Op. Cit.*, pp.138-40. The version in G.A. Williams, *Op. Cit.* p.22 does not seem to accord with these facts.

The right of free debate on political and religious issues was the particularly valued contribution of these working class bodies. The Hyde Working Man's Institute opened with two sermons by Rayner Stephens, three lectures by Robert Owen, and an address by Richard Oastler.¹ Hudson reports that the Ancoats Lyceum

"developed itself occasionally in chartist meetings, in appeals to the legislature for protection to labour, and gatherings to promote socialism and communism."²

2.7.3 Political Discussion in the Mechanics' Institutes

One fact that motivated working class leaders to press very strongly for political education in the mechanics' institutes was the political ignorance of many of the working class. The extent of political knowledge and sophistication varied from one industrial area to another across the country, but the researches of Barnsby certainly show it to be low in the Black Country.³ Although this was an area in which much organising and missionary activity took place on behalf of the political unions, Owenism and Chartism, Barnsby shows clearly how difficult it was to develop mass support for political campaigns. The industrialist who made the following comment may have exaggerated his case:

1 T. Middleton, Op. Cit., p.100.

2 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.136.

3 G. Barnsby The History of Working Class Movements in the Black Country, 1815-67, M.A., Birmingham (1965).

"No class of people are more totally devoid of any sort of political feeling than the South Staffordshire miners. Not one of the six points of the Charter could be made intelligible to them and no orator could persuade them to listen for ten minutes on such a theme." ¹

But T.C. Salt, the Birmingham Chartist visited seven Black Country towns in 1838 to whip up enthusiasm for the Chartist programme, and in most of them could not even get enough support to call a meeting.² And at one iron village, Bradmore, in 1841 a Chartist visitor discovered that not one of the workers had ever heard of the Charter.³ Special campaigns at times of depression could yield results and at Bilston, the centre of Chartism in the Black Country, 5400 people signed the 1842 Charter.⁴ But a common complaint from the Owenite missionaries and Chartist organisers was the political ignorance of the workman. The position may have been much better in the textile areas, but can hardly have been sufficient to have induced complacency about the level of political understanding among the workforce.

It was the refusal of nearly all mechanics' institutes to grant free political and religious debate that caused many working class members to desert to other bodies.

Invariably on the platforms of meetings to launch mechanics' institutes and subsequently incorporated into their rule, it

1 Midland Mining Commission, 1st Report, 1842, cx.

2 M. Hovell, Op. Cit., p.169.

3 Barnsby, Op.Cit., p.169.

4 Northern Star, 30 April 1842.

was stated that no religious or political discussion would be allowed. Some institutes worked hard to keep this neutrality. At Warrington for example, the committee was strongly representative of the Free Trade movement but when one of its members involved the institute's name at a meeting of the Anti-Corn Law League, he was reprimanded by the committee.¹ Macclesfield Mechanics' Institute went so far as to ban a lecture on phrenology lest it should

"embrace anything contrary to Christianity or favourable to scepticism or socialism".²

But it will be apparent from our consideration of the previous categories that it was not uncommon for institutes to transmit approved political dogma. Brougham's lectures on political economy were used at Manchester Mechanics' Institute and were available to the members of the Yorkshire Union, and many institutes made a point of attacking Owenite or Chartist doctrine.

The argument for allowing political discussion went on throughout the period. Thomas Hodgskin expectedly argued that mechanics' institutes should

"teach men the moral as well as the physical sciences. (The Labourers) may care nothing about the curious researches of the geologist or the elaborate classification of the botanist but they will assuredly ascertain why they only of all classes in society have been involved in poverty and distress."³

Joseph Hume had argued that the failure of the mechanics' institutes came from the exclusion of political and religious

1 Minute Book, December 1845.

2 Minute Book, 1839.

3 Labour Defended, pp. 100-101.

issues, when he spoke at a meeting in Deptford¹ in 1832.

Ebenezer Elliott at the Annual Meeting of the Sheffield Mechanics' Institute said

"Your enemies, the legislating or landed class, basing on folly their edifice of fraud, dare not examine the foundation; but that is no reason why you should not examine it."²

The same point was made five years later in a lecture to the same institute by Paul Rogers³, and Holyoake argued that

"men will not always tolerate the discredit it puts upon them, to be told that passion is so strong and reason so weak that they must, like children, be forbidden certain things."⁴

Samuel Smiles argued the case for political discussion on the grounds that it was what working men quite reasonably wanted, and without it they would not stay in mechanics' institutes.⁵

William Pare at a meeting of the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute in 1832 quoted from the Monthly Repository:

"the instruction for which millions were craving, political instruction, that is the principles of social morality - were not yet provided for the people, and the SDUK as well as mechanics' institutes were in a great measure inoperative because of the exclusion of those topics about which people care most."⁶

1 Mechanics' Magazine, XVI, 1832, p.279.

2 Add. Mss. 27824 f. 379.

3 A Lecture on the Origins, Progress and Results of the Sheffield Mechanics' Institution, pp. 11-12.

4 G.J. Holyoake, Literary Institutions: their Relation to Public Opinion, (1849), p.7. See also p.12.

5 The Diffusion of Political Knowledge among the Working Classes, (1842).

6 Brougham, Mss., 43998.

These arguments for open debate were not those put forward by Brougham who wanted expounded

"the true principles and mutual relations of population and wages",¹

and the case for political education as seen by his advocates and disciples was argued at some length in an SDUK publication by Thomas Coates in 1843. He had seen by then that the absence of political discussion placed the mechanics' institutes' under an insuperable handicap. He accepted the reasons for the original ban.

"When the first institutes sprang up, 17 or 18 years ago, there still prevailed in many quarters a strong jealousy of any political discussion by the people, and still more of any society which proposed to assemble periodically several hundreds of the labouring classes; nor had the prejudices against all education, beyond the miserable teaching of the Charity School, yet died away: thus the benevolent and enlightened persons who were active in the formation of these institutes found difficulties enough to impede them, without arousing party or sectarian animosities. Vain as their efforts have been to conciliate the favour of their adversaries, the framers of the rules in these circumstances did well, and merely used an indispensable circumspection, in rigidly excluding all discussion of matters touching theology or politics."

But he argued, times had changed over 20 years.

"The free expression of opinion, then so much dreaded, has not only come to be tolerated, but has become habitual and uncontrollable."²

To Coates the question was not whether mechanics should discuss and read political matters, but where and under what control. He suggested it should be done by

1 H. Brougham, Op. Cit., p.5.

2 T. Coates Op.Cit. pp. 24-25.

"systematic instruction and regulated argument", within the safety of the Institute's walls. It was, he argued, in the interest of employers that this should happen.

"It may be fairly contended that a man's clear comprehension of his true interests in society will induce him to perform with more heartiness his appointed duties; and most assuredly if it promotes his self-respect, a more careful display of skill in his art will be among the consequences."

He deplored

"the reluctance of mechanics' institutes to aid in the instruction of men on matters where they err most frequently, egregiously, and, unhappily it must be added, most fatally."¹

Coates was perceptive enough to see however that even without this compelling urge to defend the economic and social system and attack the nascent thinking of socialists and Chartists, it was necessary to introduce political topics because otherwise the members would depart to the Halls of Science and Popular Institutes where political discussion did take place. He quoted the success of the Owenite and Chartist institutes, particularly mentioning the Social Institution of John Street, London, and argued that while these bodies flourished, not to give political discussion was tantamount to saying:-

"You are curious to learn something respecting the economy of civil society, and to be assured of what we assert, that what now forms its cement is its best security: we withhold all information on these subjects; but at the Socialist hall opposite they will prove to you how unnatural is that economy, and how worthless that security."

"We explain to you the physical sciences; we demonstrate to you the atomic theory; we show you the orbits of

1 T. Coates, Op.Cit., pp. 27-28.

of the planets, but the nature and advantages of our political Constitution, a question which every newspaper more or less raises, and which is obtruded upon you and made a motive for your conduct at every election, shall not be taught or discussed here - nevertheless, the Chartists in the next street handle it quite freely, and will spare no pains to induce you to adopt their opinions."¹

So Coates argues for carefully organised discussion classes at which the management would be present to put the correct point of view and explain errors in the members' thinking. Naturally he recommends the SDUK books on political economy as a basis for discussion and suggests as suitable topics universal suffrage, taxes on food and the ballot.

Support for Coates' view came from many of the utilitarians and reformist Whigs. George Combe, W.B. Hodgson and William Ellis, among others, stressed the need to teach economics and government and knowledge of the workings of society.² So too in the 1840s did Archbishop Whately, and the Reverend Thomas Spencer, who wrote in 1840

"If we cannot give the people knowledge, liberty, commerce, good institutions, and good law, without endangering the Establishment, let the Establishment perish!"³

The Reverend Thomas Chalmers argued for the inclusion of Malthusian political economy in the institutes' programmes. There was

"no likelier instrument than a judicious course of economical doctrine for tranquilizing the popular mind"⁴

1 T. Coates, Op.Cit., p.30.

2 H. Silver, Op.Cit., 233.

3 Tract No.1, (1840), 'The Pillars of the Church of England', p.11., Quotation in H. Silver, Op.Cit., p.210.

4 'On the Mechanics Schools', The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns, Vol.3, 1826, pp.386-92.

Kay Shuttleworth, whose belief in a particularly rigid form of utilitarian political economy sat oddly with his reformist zeal for the moral regeneration of the poor and his enthusiastic participation in the new administrative elite, argued that in mechanics' institutes

"the ascertained truths of political science should early be taught to the labouring classes, and correct political information should be constantly and industriously disseminated amongst them ... The poor might thus be also made to understand their political position in society, and the duties that belong to it ... the relation between the capitalist and those in his employ, might prove a fruitful source of the most beneficial comments. The misery which the working classes have brought upon themselves, by their mistaken notions on this subject, is incalculable, not to mention the injury which has accrued to capitalists, and to the trade of the country."¹

In similar vein the schools inspector, J. Symons, argued that such political teaching should start in the higher grades of the schools, using Chambers' Political Economy as a textbook.

"Its rudiments, as far as they develop the conditions of well-being, the laws of profit, capital, and wages, should be assuredly taught to the advanced classes. How otherwise can our labourers be fortified against the anarchical errors contained in the vile publications ..."

which has never been more rife since the French Revolution.

He recommends Mr. Senior's work to be studied by all teachers.²

A pamphlet written by Joseph Dawson of the Halifax Mechanics' Institute argued the case for a class in political economy. Using a quotation from McCulloch for support, Dawson argued that the ignorance of the working classes was causing them distress particularly in their mistaken assumptions on capital,

1 Four Periods of Public Education, (1862), p.63-64.

2 Social Economy, (1852), p.112 .

profit, wages and prices, rents and the use of machinery. Dawson received some support when he argued the case at a general meeting of Halifax Mechanics' Institute, but the institute decided to keep to its policy of political neutrality.¹

Such transmission of capitalist economic and political thinking may well have been worse in causing workers to abandon mechanics' institutes than no political economy teaching at all. When in 1838 Dr. Thomas Murray gave a lecture series on political economy, one thousand Dunfermline workers turned up, much to Murray's confusion, on the mistaken assumption that they were to hear doctrines of working class Radicalism.² At Newcastle Mechanics' Institute, the readings of Brougham's Essays on Political Economy were stopped in 1836 because of the poor attendance.³ Dr. James Mitchell was reported in the Mechanics Magazine as having recalled that the weavers of Spitalfields opposed a suggested mechanics' institute as a scheme devised by employers to get more work out of their workers.⁴ In general, as Tyrrell has shown, the spokesmen for political economy were seen in Scotland by the institute members as employers' spokesmen sheltering behind a facade of religious, scientific, and philanthropic notions.⁵

1 A suggestion for the formation of a class for the study of Political Economy in the Halifax Mechanics' Institute, (1833), and institute records.

2 A. Tyrrell, Op.Cit., p.165.

3 L.J. Dyer, 'The Newcastle Mechanics' Institutes'. Journal of Adult Education, Vol. XXII, p.124.

4 Mechanics Magazine, XVI, 1832, p.279.

5 A. Tyrrell, Op.Cit., p.158.

It was because of the problems created by this type of indoctrination that James Hole opposed any kind of political discussion until such time as there could be free debate with all views represented, including socialists and Chartists. Otherwise, he said, the workers would feel their own views were not represented and would go elsewhere.¹ Hole was not one of the Brougham or SDUK circle, neither did he accept their views. He had been a communitarian and after disillusionment about its practicability, had rejected socialism and Chartism in favour of co-operative adult education. As secretary of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes, he had great concern about the desertion of many of the ablest of the working class to other bodies. Within his own area, Isaac Ironside had been compelled to resign from the Sheffield Institute for placing political books on the library shelves, and so went off to found the Sheffield Hall of Science.² He recruited as his first teacher, Holyoake who had been expelled from the mechanics' institute at Birmingham and was then refused a job at West Bromwich Mechanics' Institute and at William Lovett's National Hall School.³

Place and Brougham had argued that most institutes would fold up unless they had the backing of the wealthy and certainly among the more ambitious of the working men's institutes the survival life was often short. They were very vulnerable to financial pressures and to short-term crises arising from loss of membership. The Lyceums, one by one, had collapsed. Within

1 J. Hole, Essay ..., pp. 65-66.

2 J. Salt, 'Isaac Ironside 1808-70: the Motivation of a Radical Educationist! British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol. XIX. p. 193.

3 E. Royle, 'Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Classes, 1840-60', Historical Journal, 14, 1971, p.319.

four years that at Salford was taken over and transformed into a new mechanics' institute: the Lyceum at Oldham within weeks was beginning to copy the mechanics' institute model. The Working Men's Institute at Stourbridge was absorbed by the mechanics' institute in 1857, the Lyceum at Pendleton actually broke up as the result of a quarrel over religious subjects in the discussion club, and though this may at first sight be surprising most institutes had practical constraints within which they had to work in order to gain even minimal acceptance by local society.¹ At the Coventry Mutual Improvement Society, the rules stated that the committee

"do not intend to have anti-theological lectures delivered in the name of the society, although they wish the lectures to have not only the right, but also the duty of free enquiry into religious matters."²

There was a wide spectrum among these groups from the society sponsored by one or two of the middle class which was left to get on with its own modest affairs so long as it did not cause a public scandal, to the society instigated and organised by working men themselves without any middle class support and reflecting various aspects of working class thinking. Some of the smaller, less organised and less heavily sponsored mechanics' institutes may have been very little different from these bodies, and an institute such as the one at Burnley, founded in 1834, had very modest beginnings and for a long time enjoyed arguments, debates and controversies on subjects not excluding socialism.³

1 I. Cowan, 'Mechanics' Institutes and Science and Art Classes at Salford', The Vocational Aspect, Vol XX, p.202.

2 Rules and Regulations, (1851).

3 Burnley Express and Burnley News, 1 December 1934, 'Burnley Mechanics' Institute Centenary'.

Nevertheless it is difficult not to conclude other than that with odd exceptions for brief periods mechanics' institutes were not organised and run to express the aspirations of the working class.

2.7.4 Cheltenham Spa Mechanics' Institute

The nearest we can come to a working class mechanics' institute was that at Cheltenham Spa, and this is worth some study. The town was keenly divided between the Tories and the powerful Berkeley interest which was Whig but hardly Radical. The Whig interest generally prevailed and the first MP elected after the 1832 Reform Act was Charles Berkeley whose initial enthusiasm for reformist measures rapidly waned. In the run-up to the Reform Act, an alliance of all reformers was formed under the umbrella of a Political Union, but once the act was passed there was a rapid division between the Whigs and their more Radical allies. While not all the Radicals became either Chartists or socialists they were thoroughly disillusioned with the Whigs, and through Samuel Harper's newspaper, the Cheltenham Free Press, publicised their anti-whig and anti-tory views. The problem for the Radicals was whether to back the Whigs in elections or not, and the matter was endlessly debated in the 1830s at meetings of the Friends of Reform.¹ The powerful Tory presence in the town generally frightened enough Radicals into giving support to the Whigs, however reluctantly. In 1835

1 Cheltenham Free Press, 11 November, 1837.

however the Radicals put up their own candidate, W.P. Gaskell, and he was so little enamoured by the Whigs he advised the electors of Devon to vote for the Tory candidate rather than for Lord John Russell. In a letter to the Free Press in 1837 he argued that Radicals should never support Whigs but should make a point of putting up Radical candidates even if this resulted in the election of Tories.¹ Many Radicals however were more willing to compromise than Gaskell and it was not until 1847 that another Radical, Colonel Peyronet Thompson, was put up by them.

It is not possible to assess the significance of the Cheltenham Mechanics' Institute without also being aware of the religious background of the town. This more properly would be placed in section three of this thesis, but politics and religion were so much bound up together in the town that such separation does not make sense. In the first two decades of the 19th century, the town as a popular spa had an atmosphere of mild rakishness and worldliness but from the 1820s it changed character completely to become a spearhead of aggressive Anglican crusading zeal. The drive was led by a powerful Anglican priest, the Rev. Francis Close, who among many other local, regional and national initiatives, helped found the two Cheltenham training colleges for Anglican teachers.

The town became not only the home of a powerful Anglican party that dominated much of local life, but through that fact also

1 Ibid, 10 June 1837 .

became the centre of a bitter struggle between liberals and Tories. Close represented in its purest form the identification of the Anglican and Tory. This was perfectly expressed in an address he gave to the town's Working Mens Association in 1841

"I cannot for the life of me separate politics from religious preaching. There is no distinction between politics and religion ... In my humble opinion the Bible is conservative, the Prayer Book is conservative, the liturgy conservative, the Church conservative."¹

Although not exclusively non-conformist the Whig party contained many leading non-conformists such as Dr. Morton Brown, Rayner Winterbotham, Dr. Wright and the solicitor, G.E. Williams. The 1830s and 1840s were not years of compromise but of confrontation in Cheltenham, and it was difficult for any local society not to be drawn into the conflict. The Literary and Philosophical Society for example was gradually taken over by the Church party, though not without protest when members were accusing each other of being 'atheists, infidels and blasphemers', and Close's coterie was under hostile attack in letters to the newspapers. But the religious party won the day, declaring that the Church would

"not leave the mighty armoury of literature and science in sole possession to the base distortions and ignorant pollutions of the unbeliever." ²

This was the background against which the idea of a mechanics' institute was mooted. In 1825 Dr. Chichester, a progressive liberal, a member of the Political Union, and dedicated to the

1 Cheltenham Journal, 25 June 1841.

2 Cheltenham Free Press, 8 January 1835.

advancement of science, attempted to form a mechanics' institute, but it was abortive. It

"suffered from attacks of fanaticism on the one hand, and jealousy and affected apprehension of the powerful and wealthy on the other."¹

In 1834 the radicals banded together to form a new institute which initially was known as the Association for Scientific and Literary Instruction but within a year had changed its name to Mechanics' Institute.

There were a number of distinctive characteristics of this institute from the very start.

The first and most important was its avowed political intent. It was set up so that the working class had access to Radical newspapers and books, political lectures, and political reading and discussion. Sam Harper was writing in the Free Press in 1834 that

"it should make the honest assertion of an honest purpose, viz the dissemination of sound political knowledge"²

and a month later that

"political information and the comprehension of the largest number of members are the chief objects of the institution - political science is an inseparable limb of mechanics' institutes."³

In a later editorial, he expands this:

"it covers the teaching of the general and fundamental principles on which government ought to be founded and society governed, the exact nature of your position in the world - the relation which your own interests

1 Ibid, 8 January 1835.

2 Ibid, 22 November 1834.

3 Ibid, 12 December 1834.

bear to those of other men, and the means whereby your condition can safely and securely be improved."¹

One of the earliest reports of the institute stresses the same point.

"Its purpose was to offer teachings which are best calculated to prepare a man to learn and practise his duty to himself and his fellow man".

And to explain

"our social and moral obligations".²

So there was no doubt about the publicly proclaimed position of the mechanics' institute as a political educative body.

One of the leading members, Hollis, when lecturing on the Mechanics Arts said

"he had been charged with wishing to make it a political institution - he did wish so."³

All this could have been no more than an institution anxious to teach the received truths of orthodox reformist political economy. Although the thinking of Brougham and the utilitarians was evident in some of the speakers and activities at the institute, it was much more Radical than that and one reason for that was the very democratic nature of the constitution. This is the second key characteristic of the institution and one frequently proclaimed in its publicity. There was only one class of member, though payments could be made quarterly or annually, there were no privileges held by any one section of the membership, all members were eligible for offices and could vote for all offices. Gaskell quotes Roebuck with effect

1 Ibid, 21 February 1835.

2 Ibid, 1 November 1834.

3 Ibid, 30 January 1836.

to illustrate his deep conviction that it must be run by and for ordinary members.

"All permanent advantage to the people must be the work of their own hands. Any institution which depends upon the favour of the rich or the kindness of the benevolent, whatever may be its immediate good, bears within it the principles of decay and ruin; and in no case does this truth appear more evident than in institutions for the education of the people."¹

There is certainly a notable lack of sponsoring or supporting rich and prominent people at Cheltenham as was common in most other mechanics' institutes.

The third characteristic of the institute was its very firm intent to teach science to the working class. While it did not totally ignore literary and general themes, the great majority of lectures were part of courses in science, and behind that lay the firm belief that science was the lever or tool by which the world could be understood and then changed for universal benefit but particularly for the advantage of the working class. Thus apart from its political activity, courses of lectures on Physiology, Chemistry, Electricity, Pneumatics and Mechanics were the basis of the work of the institute, though there was an occasional lecture on social matters such as Infant Education (by Wilderspin), and Love and Marriage. Thus in 1835 there were major courses of lectures on Physiology and Chemistry, in 1836 on Mechanical Arts and on Chronology, with single lectures on Accoustics, Geology, and the Principles of Turning.² The tone of the statements from the institute in its early years is one of concern with

1 W.P. Gaskell. An Address to the Operative Classess, (1835), p.13.

2 From issues of the Cheltenham Free Press.

intellectual vigour and the development of rational thinking via scientific enquiry. Its assumption that the working man would respond to this has similarities with the published views of the associationist James Hole.

The political stance of the institute is most clearly developed by Gaskell, who has some importance in the history of Radical education. He was more radical than many of his colleagues in the institute. Sam Harper, for example, while a stout champion of the ballot, civil liberty and attacks on privilege was not in favour of universal suffrage. But Gaskell's was the dominant voice in the institute, and we can follow his political beliefs in the various lectures he gave there.

He had no time at all for the Whigs who had gained office in 1830. He deplored their lack of any reform which was not in their own interest, but he was particularly incensed by their acceptance of the existing level of corruption in political life.

"They have defended civil and religious liberty by the arts of corruption and debauchery ... I deny that political reform can be ultimately gained by the defilement of the people."¹

His concern was to give power to the people: to bring the common man into the centre of political life. He repeatedly attacked the concentration of power in the hands of the wealthy, and saw mechanics' institutes as means

"to defeat the power which wealth has of poisoning the public mind".

1 Ibid, p.29.

He assumed that the poor would use such power responsibly rather than become fanatics or anarchists.

"If you ask me how I justify putting political power in the hands of the ignorant poor - I answer that, first it is ~~now~~ in the hands of an equally ignorant wealthy class; and secondly, that the deep interests of the poor in a good government would, if they enjoyed political power, ensure their anxious study to learn in what good government exists."¹

The key to power for the working class was education, just as the key to its exploitation was ignorance.

"A people who cannot find pleasure in intellectual pursuits, can feel no degradation in forging the chains that bind them."²

Repeatedly Gaskell stresses that knowledge is essential if the working class is to break out of its exclusion from power. The two most useful areas of knowledge were, he believed, science and moral and political science. This latter was of particular importance for workers in unions, for they needed to decide on what opinions and principles their union should direct its advance.

Without access to sources of power, the working class would have its interests ignored by default if not by design. He quotes the example of machinery.

"Machinery is an enormous benefit to all classes of people - but the introduction of machinery is the cause of transient evils to the labourers displaced by machinery. To these transient evils, transient remedies should be sought ... as it is not the capitalist, but the labourer, who is liable to sanguinary and degrading punishments; as it is not the capitalist, but the labourer, whom the stamp duty prevents from perusing a newspaper; as it is not the capitalist, but the labourer, whom the introduction of machinery distresses; so these matters naturally do not engross the attention

1 Ibid, p.1.

2 Ibid, p.6.

... it out therefore to be an especial object with the working classes to co-operate for obtaining power of electing those to whom the charge of the common interest is delegated."¹

Gaskell proposed that the mechanics' institute should encourage the reading of a variety of radical writers, such as Owen, Cobbett and Bentham and should make available newspapers of all political persuasions. The newsroom was to be the hub of activity where people could read, discuss, and listen to public readings.

Gaskell's Radical feelings are clear as is his belief in the crucial importance of education, but his political beliefs were idiosyncratic varying between a bold and a more conservative stance. In a series of lectures he delivered in 1835/36 he tackled a wide variety of topics. The first was on the institution of private property and the plans of common or equivalent property.² Here as elsewhere he revealed his differences with the socialists. He came down in support of private property, but deprecated the extremes of inequality of wealth and property which gave privilege and political power to one set of people and serfdom to another set. He proposed to deal with this by taxing the rich. In this as in several of his other lectures, his analysis of power and control was accurate but his solutions tentative. In a subsequent lecture he attacked the taxes on knowledge with ferocity. Freedom of the press and its ready availability was fundamental to his hopes of producing an educated working class. He was an ardent free-trader and gave

1 Ibid, pp. 10-11.

2 Cheltenham Free Press, 4 April 1835.

3 Ibid, 18 April 1835.

two lectures, one on Free Trade and one on the Corn Laws which followed the orthodox line of the free trade movement.¹ In a lecture on population, he accepted Malthus' analysis of the dynamics of growth but rejected his solution of delayed marriage.² However rather typically Gaskell admitted that while he saw the problem as urgent he had no solutions to offer. In a series of lectures on political institutions, he argued strongly for the ballot, universal suffrage, and education for all people, and mentioned sympathetically Cobbett and Owen as friends of the working class, though he thought they were in error in some of their ideas. In fact he made it clear enough that he disliked the concept of natural or inalienable rights, and always claimed that he argued from the basis of utility rather than of rights. In a lecture on slavery in the USA he pursued his argument that education rather than structural change achieves the ultimate goal of freedom for all.³ In a democracy such as the USA, slavery flourished.

"If a democracy is found a persecutor of a sect or a caste, this crime is not the result of the form of government, but of the ignorance of the people under it."

This particular lecture caused so much discussion that a further session was arranged the following week to complete the debate.⁴

In an institute where the toast at the Annual General Meeting was to 'Civil and Religious Liberty' set in a town of militant Toryism and Whiggism, there was likely to be trouble. The

1 Cheltenham Free Press, 4 April 1835.

2 Ibid, 16 June 1835, 23 May 1836.

3 Ibid, 6 June 1835.

4 Ibid, 25 March 1837.

existence of a body propagating Radical political views must have been a source of considerable annoyance to Whigs and Tories alike. The first trouble the institute landed itself in was in March 1835 when the committee agreed to rent out its rooms to the Unitarians as a place for public worship.¹ The treasurer was himself a Unitarian, but a few of the members objected and left the institute. The editor of the Free Press was critical of the action of the institute, not because he himself supported religious intolerance but because it seemed a gratuitous invitation to the institute's enemies to cause trouble. Indeed shortly after this event, the breakaway members founded a new institution, the Atheneum which was intended to give to the working classes the same services as the mechanics' institute, but with control firmly placed with the Anglican clergymen and other figures of unimpeachable respectability. Some of its lecture courses exactly paralleled in subject and speaker the courses given at the mechanics' institute. In 1839 a Church of England Institution was founded and gradually replaced the Atheneum as the major alternative to the mechanics' institute. There was also a middle class literary and philosophical institute headed by a prominent physician but supported by most of the clergy and many of the gentry.

By 1840 Gaskell and his political colleagues had moved into the Chartist movement. In 1842 there was considerable political activity in the town. In March Bronterre O'Brien visited the town to give a series of lectures on Democracy.² One month later

1 Ibid, 25 March 1837.

2 Ibid, 26 March 1842.

Feargus O'Connor came to make a public speech, and he was followed shortly after by the itinerant socialist lecturer, A. Campbell.¹ Cheltenham was an attractive town to speakers because it was of easy access by railway and because it contained so many of the powerful and rich. In June Holyoake visited the town to give two lectures at the mechanics' institute, and it was at this point the institute was to learn a sharp lesson in the realities of institutionalised power.

Holyoake was then a young man, currently working in Manchester, and already becoming well known as a speaker on co-operation and socialism. He was also gaining a reputation as an atheist. So it was not only his political views which were likely to affront the Whig and Tory establishment of Cheltenham but also his religious views which would scandalise the Church.

Holyoake gave his first lecture, on Land Colonisation, to an audience of about one hundred at the mechanics' institute rooms.² At the end of his lecture he was asked a question as to whether man did not owe a duty to God as well as his fellow men. Holyoake's reply was inadvisedly lighthearted, but he denied the existence of any God or the need of any churches. The questioner was a member of the Teetotal Society, and the circumstances strongly suggest that he was a plant. He took along his report to the Tory Cheltenham Chronicle, and to the authorities, together with the two witnesses who had conveniently entered and left the hall with him. The Chronicle at once led a

1 Ibid, 23 April 1842.

2 Ibid, 28 March 1842

furious attack on Holyoake, demanding action from the authorities to deal with the committing of the offence of blasphemy.¹ This was no light matter. A close friend of Holyoake's had only recently been jailed and heavily fined for this offence. The Chronicle was itself prepared to supply three employees who were prepared to testify to the authorities that in the course of 'a lecture on socialism (or as it has been more appropriately termed devilism)' Holyoake had denied the existence of God.

The Free Press of course sprang to his defence, but when Holyoake returned a week later to give his second lecture on civil and religious liberty he had no doubts as to what lay in store for him.² A police superintendent was at the back of the hall, waiting for the conclusion of the meeting. Holyoake spent some time dealing with the inaccurate reports that had appeared in the Cheltenham Chronicle and the Cheltenham Examiner, which had described him as a 'miscreant' propagating 'diabolical sentiments'. While refusing to enter into another discussion of the existence of God, he did painstakingly establish that he did not raise the question, but simply gave his honest answer to a question put to him. It was an emotional meeting, and at the conclusion of his address the motion was moved and carried by the meeting

"that free discussion was equally beneficial in the departments of politics, morals, and religion".

Holyoake was then arrested and later charged before magistrates who committed him for trial. His treatment up to his appearance before the magistrates was not easy to defend. He was arrested

1 Cheltenham Chronicle, 28 May 1845.

2 Cheltenham Free Press, 4 June 1842, gives a full account of the meeting.

without a warrant, he was refused bail, one of his accusers was sitting on the bench, and had it not been for the intervention of friends he would have walked in chains from Cheltenham to Gloucester. His friends made a formal memorial of complaint to the Home Secretary which was upheld.¹

The Free Press continued to defend Holyoake's actions, but the rest of the local press was vituperative. The Examiner claimed that blasphemy and sedition were kindred crimes, and compared Holyoake's action to a recent pistol attack on the Queen. It claimed

"Blasphemy saps the very foundations of our social fabric, breaks the bond which holds society together, and sows the seeds of anarchy and confusion."²

Holyoake's friends rallied what support they could for him, and organised a public meeting of protest, attended not only by his political allies but by a number of liberals including a prominent Roman Catholic. The meeting agreed to the following statement

"It is the natural and inalienable right of every human being, to have the liberty to express his honest and conscientious feeling on the subject of religion, and any law or practice tending to prevent the same, is in opposition to the best interests of society, and calculated only to produce immorality and crime."³

It did little good however at his trial at Gloucester Assizes

1 Ibid, 18 June 1842.

2 Cheltenham Examiner, 5 June 1842.

3 Cheltenham Free Press, 18 June 1842.

where he was sentenced to six months imprisonment.¹ His own action of defiance was to return to the mechanics' institute on his release and repeat the statements for which he had been convicted. No further action was taken against him and none was needed, for it had been made clear enough where power lay in the town when it came to a confrontation. The mechanics' institute disintegrated shortly after this, its main organisers becoming concentrated in the various Radical political organisations and societies in the town.

As happened in so many other places the establishment, having defeated its enemy and destroyed its control, asserted its own by setting up its own institute. In 1845 the Cheltenham Institute was founded to replace the defunct mechanics' institute.² At the inaugural meeting of 350 members, the chair was taken by Dr. Disney Thorpe, president of the Literary and Philosophical Institute. Among the speakers and supporters were a number of Anglican and dissenting clergymen, doctors, and leading tradesmen of the town, and it was made clear in the platform speeches that the new body would work in harmony with the Church Institute. Its target membership was somewhat different from the mechanics' institute. The impetus for its founding had come from the introduction of earlier closing hours of most of the shops which left the assistants in danger of falling into bad habits, so it was felt. The Cheltenham Institute

1 Further details of the trial can be found in G.J. Holyoake Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life, (1892), Vol.1, p.148. J.McCabe, George Jacob Holyoake, (1922), Vol.1, pp. 62-63.

2 Cheltenham Free Press, 15 January 1845.

was a supporting agency of the Whig and Tory establishment, and it can hardly have voiced much if any critical comment on political and religious issues. The founding of the Cheltenham Institute to replace a more working class mechanics' institute is paralleled by many similar instances throughout the country - at Bath for example where the Bath Atheneum replaced the mechanics' institute¹ or at Coventry.

For ten years from 1834-44, the Cheltenham Mechanics' Institute was one of the very few examples of a political body overtly operating in the avowed interests of the working classes. Its long term survival was unlikely because in the confrontation politics of Cheltenham there was little room for compromises, adaptations and alliances. It was, however, the lack of such compromise, such as existed for a time at Birmingham or Sheffield, that enabled this institute to follow in a single-minded way its political mission.

2.7.5 Conclusion to Category Six

Hypothetically, working class institutes reflecting a Radical view could exist but the likelihood of their survival was low. Either they were taken over and re-established by the middle classes, as happened at Longton, or they failed through lack of support compounded by opposition from the chief employers in the town, as happened at Leicester. It was much easier to set up bodies outside the arena of mechanics' institutes as the socialists and Chartists eventually did. Cheltenham Spa

1 Mechanics Magazine, XII, pp.68-69, (1829-30).

Mechanics' Institute most nearly approaches an institute in this category, but its long term survival was unlikely.

2.8 Reformist Propaganda: Machinery and Trade Unions

It is apparent from consideration of the six categories that the majority of mechanics' institutes explicitly or implicitly reflected the values and beliefs of classes of society prospering from a capitalist economy. Within the mechanics' institutes we would therefore expect to find evidence that directly or indirectly some of the beliefs most crucial to the advance of industrial capitalism would be propagated to the working class members. In this section the presentation of two such beliefs is examined. The first of these relates to the introduction and use of machinery and its consequence in the redundancy of hand labour. The second relates to the acceptance of the so-called laws of supply and demand which regulated wages by allowing them to find their level on the free market. This second area of concern can alternatively be phrased as a rejection of trade unions, collective bargains and other restraints on a free wages market. Although both of these beliefs were an integral part of the prevailing political economy, they were also generally accepted within the commercial industrial and landed sections of the middle and upper classes even by those who rejected much of the utilitarian philosophy. Machinery and unionism were matters of open concern and discourse in many mechanics' institutes, and it is the evidence for that which we now examine.

2.8.1 The Use of Machinery

The institutes were widely used to popularise machinery, and to dispel the fears which were common among working people of the effects of its introduction. As the opposition to machinery was often a part of union activity, machinery and unionism were often linked together. At the inaugural lecture at Bristol Mechanics' Institute, its president, Charles Pinney, described thus the value of mechanics' institutes:

"By imparting rational views on subjects connected with our political economy, they would be very instrumental in removing those ideas which have often led to injurious consequences",

and he then referred particularly to machinery and combinations.¹

At Stockport Richard Cobden offered prizes for essays by members of the institute on the effects of machinery and the relation of capital to labour,² and similar prizes were offered at York Mechanics' Institute.³ Among the manuscript lectures of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes, available to be read at any of its institutes, was one on Machinery and Employment, and another on Machinery and Its Effects on Society. At Manchester Mechanics' Institute, lectures were given with such titles as "On Machinery and the Way in Which it Affects Wages".⁴ One of Birkbeck's lectures at the London Mechanics' Institute was on "Weaving and the Power Loom", and at the conclusion he attempted to show that, whatever temporary disturbances it caused, in the long run it could only benefit the worker.⁵ We have

1 Bristol Gazette, 4 November, 1825.

2 Annual Report, 1842.

3 ARYUMI, 1844, p.10.

4 Institute records, 1842-3.

5 London Mechanics Register, IV, 17 June 1825.

already noted Horton's lectures at the same institute that set out

"To explain to the labouring classes some of the truths of political economy, the folly of thinking that the breaking of machinery will better their condition."¹

At Sheffield Mechanics' Institute in 1841, the discussion class debated 'the effects of machinery'² and at Halifax Mechanics' Institute in 1833 a class in political economy was proposed, concerning itself with the fundamental principles which regulate the distribution of wealth, the use of machinery, rent and wages.³

We have testimony that all this propaganda was not well received by artisans in the comments of members of institutes in response to questions put by Frederick Hill. Asked why more artisans did not join the institute, a member of Leeds Mechanics' Institute said that

"from the prevalent opinion that machinery is detrimental to the interests of the working classes, some have withheld their support."⁴

Another member, who had worked his way up to become Master of the Lancastrian Free School commented that

"machinery and chemistry have injured them too much already for them to try to invent the one or discover the secrets of the other;...it is a tub thrown out by the government to amuse them and to draw their attention off (the all-important subject, to them at least) of politics."⁵

1 C.F. Greville, Journal of the Reign of George IV and William IV, (1874) II, 97-8.

2 Institute Minute Book, 1841. See also Sheffield Independent 24 January 1861.

3 Broadsheet, Quotation in J.F.C. Harrison, Cp.Cit., pp.81-2.

4 F. Hill, National Education, (1836), 2, p.221.

5 Ibid, p.218.

Apart from lectures and discussion classes, the institutes received the approved propaganda on machinery from books. In particular the SDUK publications, avowedly the vehicle of the reformist whigs, circulated extensively in mechanics' institutes. In 1830 the SDUK published An Address to the Labourers on the Subject of Destroying Machinery, and a year later it was followed by the notorious Results of Machinery. At Birmingham Mechanics' Institute, where Owenites and Chartists were in power, a public discussion on these books was organised at which SDUK representatives were present, but the Owenites launched furious criticism against the SDUK publications. William Pare claimed that

"Every man should acquire sound political information, but most books were ill adapted to the present needs of the suffering masses. Books should break down those barriers to political knowledge which now exist in the shape of oppressive stamp taxes on newspapers, and unjust, odious and tyrannical laws prohibiting the publication of cheap political pamphlets."

He attacked the specific arguments of Results of Machinery, concluding with the demand that such books

"Should honestly enquire into the principles of distribution of wealth most conducive to human happiness, not defend the present system."¹

At the co-operative congress of 1832 Pare carried on his attack upon this particular volume aided among others by William Lovett.²

The converse of Pare's views was expounded by Benjamin Heywood, president of Manchester Mechanics' Institute. He wanted lectures which dealt with the security of property, the necessity of differences in fortune and condition, the advantages of the

1 Brougham Mss. 43998

2 The Crisis, Vol.3-4, 28 April 1832, Quotation in B. Simon, Op. Cit., p.229.

division of labour and the introduction of machinery, the circumstances which regulate wages, the advantages of the provident society and the operation of the poor laws.¹ This list well itemises the points at issue between the Broughamites and the Radical leaders of the working class.

2.8.2 The Popularisation of Machinery

It is clearly not the case that the sole interest in machinery was the self-interest of the employer. Mechanics' institutes which had been set up overtly to educate working men in the science and technology of their employment tended naturally to give some attention to the marvels of developing technology and the exposition of the mechanics of power and energy. Such activity need not and often did not involve any political intent. It was an exciting area of discovery for working men and employers alike. Francis Place's enthusiasm was not uncommon.

"I have always delighted to be among machinery" he commented, and added that he accounted mechanics among his most favoured acquaintances.² Such enthusiasm for machinery however did help indirectly to acclimatise the labour force to the machine age.

Most institutes in towns which used much machinery gave lectures on Great Inventors, the Machinery of the Textile Trade, Electricity, Steam and such like. For example, at the West Bromwich Institution

1 B. Heywood, Addresses ..., pp.29-31.

2 Autobiography, (1972 Edition), p.242.

in 1837 there were three lectures on Cotton Manufacture and one on Mechanical Inventions,¹ at Tewkesbury Literary Scientific and Mechanics' Institute there were three lectures on Coal Mining in 1840,² and at Manchester Mechanics' Institute there were lectures on the Steam Engine, the Power Loom, Edge Tools, and Woollen, Manufacture.³ Sometimes these lectures were given with great dramatic impact. Birkbeck gave a series of lectures in the London Mechanics' Institute on The Lever, The Steam Engine, and Modern Inventions, and he dressed them up with the most ingenious and effective models and diagrams to explain the principles involved.⁴

The exhibitions of machinery and working models which became popular in Institutes after 1838 but which in limited forms existed in museums from the first years, also helped to develop a climate of opinion favourable to technical advance. At Shropshire Mechanics' Institute the collection of working models was supplemented by a collection of agricultural machinery.⁵ Many working men were in any case fascinated by machinery and delighted in studying and making working models of factory machines. Indeed many of the developments in machinery in this period came from working men, and more and more of the working class were in occupations that depended on machinery. The Royal Cornish Polytechnic Society had as its major activity the holding of exhibitions of machinery, and prizes and medals were awarded to those showing inventiveness or skill. Typical of the exhibits prepared by working men were a new method of ascending and descending mines (which went into general use), and a new type

1 Institute records.

2 Gloucester Journal, 17 October 1840.

3 M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., p.149.

4 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., pp. 101-102.

5 1st Annual Report

of water gauge for steamboilers.¹ At Taunton Mechanics' Institute its president, Laboucherie, awarded an annual prize of five guineas for

"the encouragement of talent and ingenuity".

The overt purpose of this was

"to foster and encourage a spirit of scientific research among our mining population; to reward to the extent of their abilities the productions of rising genius; and thus give effect to energies which would otherwise be expended to little or no purpose."²

Exhibitions of working models made by the men themselves however were never that successful. Hudson reports that only in the institutes at Newcastle-on-Tyne, Devonport and Glasgow were they much encouraged, and even there was difficult.

At Halifax Mechanics' Institute the exhibition was confined to to the work of the Art classes in the area to get entries in spite of prizes offered.³ After the great Manchester Mechanics' Institute exhibition of 1837 set the fashion for multi-purpose exhibitions, a part was still kept in some institutes for working models. This was the case at the Wolverhampton Institute,⁴ and at Swindon at the 1854 exhibition there were working models of boilers, direct-acting engines, an oscillating engine, a disc engine and a steam wheel, (though by 1866 the local newspaper was claiming that all such 'putting forth of the talents of the Mechanics' Institute' had ceased and been replaced by a concert and a ball).⁵

1 Royal Cornish Polytechnic Report, 1840.

2 Taunton Courier, 9 November 1831.

3 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.85.

4 Wolverhampton Chronicle, 25 May 1839.

5 Swindon Advertiser, 22 January 1866.

The growth of exhibition mania was a feature of institute and town life and culminated in the Great Exhibition of 1851. There is an interesting progression in the way institutes developed the exhibition. The first of which there is any record was at Louth in 1835,¹ and Bristol Mechanics' Institute staged a small one in the following year.² They were really popularised, however, by the great Manchester Mechanics' Institute exhibition which opened in December 1837 and in five weeks admitted 50,000 visitors paying sixpence each. It was the profit as much as the educational or social value that appealed to the managers. Manchester made over £5,000 profit on its annual exhibitions from 1837-42.³ Liverpool Mechanics' Institute held exhibitions in 1840, 1842 and 1844 and made a profit in excess of £5,000.⁴ Leeds Mechanics' Institute made £1,825,⁵ and that at Sheffield made £662 on exhibitions,⁶ and many institutes were able to pay off debts and build themselves their own premises on the profits of exhibitions, as for example at Devonport⁷ and Gateshead.⁸ It did not necessarily follow that institutes always made a profit. Salford Mechanics' Institute exhibition in 1839 lost money,⁹ that at Leicester in 1839 did the same,¹⁰ Halifax Mechanics' Institute in association with the infirmary and Literary and Philosophical Society lost £100,¹¹ Wolverhampton Mechanics' Institute only made £5 on a very well organised exhibition.¹² Birmingham Mechanics' Institute, although it made £450 pounds profit on its first exhibition in 1840, was driven to bankruptcy and closed down when it tried a repeat.¹³

If profit was a major motive, and if that depended on attracting large numbers of paying visitors, then exhibitions would be

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| 1 T. Kelly, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p.237. | 2 T. Coates, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p.74. |
| 3 M. Tylecote, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p.178. | 4 J. Hudson, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p.104. |
| 5 <u>Ibid</u> , p.91. | 6 J. Taylor, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p. 158. |
| 7 J. Hudson, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p.151. | 8 <u>Ibid</u> , p.143. |
| 9 I. Cowan, <u>Op.Cit.</u> , p.202. | 10 <u>A.R.</u> 1839 |
| 11 <u>WRUMI</u> , 1841, pp.18-19. | 12 <u>Wolverhampton Chronicle</u> , 14 April 1841. |
| 13 <u>A.R.</u> 1840 <u>Birmingham Journal</u> , 8 January 1842. | |

arranged for maximum popularity. So from what were initially exhibitions of drawings, working models and collections of artifacts produced by the members themselves, the exhibitions came to be centres for showing the full range of local manufacture with the latest and most complex machinery occupying pride of place. This was of great importance to the institute in obtaining the support of industrialists who were only too prepared to back an institute which gave them free exhibition space. Some manufacturers indeed used the exhibitions to take orders. The best example of the industrial exhibition is¹ probably that at the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute in 1840. The exhibition idea progressed a stage further mainly under the influence of the Manchester exhibitions. In order to increase their appeal exhibitions from the start had included some paintings, sculpture, collections of shells, fossils and other museum pieces. These were vastly expanded in the later exhibitions, but much more entertainment was added as well. Bands were engaged, evening concerts and soirees arranged, spectacularly illustrated lectures on optics and electrics were given, novelties like chromatic fire clouds were pushed as star attractions. For the children there were numerous side shows, conjurors, grottos and the like.²

Such multi-purpose exhibitions undoubtedly satisfied several needs in the town. They provided a lot of social entertainment for the ordinary working family at very cheap cost. Before the existence of Public Art Galleries and Museums they brought

1 Catalogue of 1st Exhibition

2 Swindon Advertiser, 22 January 1866.

thousands of people into contact with works of art, and in some exhibitions this was the major emphasis, as for example at Newport (Mon).¹ They provided a major show place for local manufacturers but also gave public credit to the craftsmen of the new industries. They drew in support not only from local industrialists but also the professional and upper classes in the town and surrounding country. Even such a small institute as Coventry had its exhibition sponsored by a Marquis, five Earls, a Viscount, a Baron and four Baronets,² and the local members of parliament invariably associated themselves with these ventures. The gain to the institutes in profit and in legitimation by the most respectable parts of the capitalist and landowning order was therefore very great, and the amount of learning or entertainment provided for masses of people a positive advantage.

However these very facts reinforced an implicit message to the working people. The exhibitions associated the development of machinery with the progress of the nation, the increasing wealth of its people, and the increasing strength of its international position. As such it was bound to be seen by employers and owners of capital as a venture worth supporting in that it advanced the cause of industry and commerce and associated large masses of working people together without any discourse on combinations or other socialist ideas. It can be argued, and was likely seen by some of its capitalist backers in this way, that the exhibitions were an antidote to Chartism and socialism. Certainly the influx of middle and upper class support helped move the institutes away still further from

1 T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.225.

2 Catalogue of 1st Exhibition.

being working class bodies expressing working class aspirations. In so far as there was a refusal to discuss the economic and social consequences in any other terms than those of capitalist self interest or orthodox political economy, the whole endeavour of popularising machinery was a form of class propaganda aimed at influencing the working class into an acceptance of potentially exploitative situations.

2.8.3 Trade Unions

Discussion of machinery was frequently attached to attacks on trade unions and combinations. This was in the sectional interest of employers and owners of capital, but it was backed by a belief that wages and prices should find their own level, and interference with this process did more harm than good even to the working class. There are numerous examples of mechanics' institutes being used to transmit an anti-union message. Indeed Francis Jeffrey in a review of a work by the utilitarian J.R. McCulloch suggested that

"promoters of mechanics' institutes should introduce the study of political economy as a method of guiding working men away from reliance on combinations and strikes."¹

At Bristol Mechanics' Institute, following the opening lecture on the introduction of machinery, a second lecture was given which argued that

"one of the many important uses of these institutions is to diffuse a general and correct knowledge of the principles which affect wages",

1 Edinburgh Review, XLIII, 1825, Vol. 14, 23.

and the speaker stated categorically that mechanics' institutes

"could be a death blow to combinations, not favour them".

Manchester Mechanics' Institute was, expectedly, unfavourable to the idea of combinations. One lecture delivered was on

"the circumstances which determine the rate of wages"

and a paper was read on

"trade unions shown to be fallacies in principle and injurious in practice to the interests of both workmen and employers."²

There were frequent comments at the time that institute members were opposed to combinations. Timothy Claxton, for example, believed that education would convince the worker of the uselessness of strikes, and claimed that in Liverpool members of the institute were rarely members of trade unions.³

At Barnsley it was claimed that

"not one (of the members) was ever found to associate himself with any of the meetings... or engage in any procession of an intimidating nature, (during the depression and riots of 1837-39)."⁴

Frederick Hill in his book National Education published in 1836 quotes several examples of the reaction of mechanics' institutes to machinery and unions. He put a series of questions to his correspondents in seven institutes.⁵ These included the following two questions:

1 Bristol Gazette, 5 December 1825.

2 Institute Records, 2 September 1846.

3 T. Claxton, Op.Cit., p.139-142.

4 Annual Report, YUMI, 1842, p.15.

5 Ibid, 2, pp.186-229.

"Have any of the members had influence over their fellow artisans? If so, is it believed that that influence produces a beneficial effect?

Were any members of your institution ever known to take part in destroying machinery? or attempt to force up wages by a system of intimidation towards employers and employees?"

In answer to the first question the replies from Liverpool, Derby, Leeds, Birmingham, and Manchester unequivocally reported that members did have a beneficial effect on fellow workers. Hull gave no answer and Lincoln replied that the

"institute does not meddle with anyone's political, religious or private life."¹

In answer to the more specific second question, Liverpool Mechanics' Institute claimed that no members had become involved in machine breaking and only two out of 1200 belonged to trade unions. Derby Mechanics' Institute claimed that no cases of either were known to the committee and added the significant comment

"Mechanics' Institutes are decidedly favourable to the promotion of civilised subordination".²

Derby Mechanics' Institute was sponsored by the Strutts who were in the forefront of the use of machinery in textiles. Birmingham commented that

"We do not destroy machinery in Birmingham.
Our machinery, at present, assists human labour."

It was not yet the cause of unemployment (though three years later there were 10,000 on poor relief in the city). There were not many Union members in the institute, but this was

1 Ibid, 2, p. 201.

2 Ibid, 2, p.189.

because 'there were not many actual workmen'.¹ The study of this institute has shown that there was a socialist and chartist faction on its management committee so we would not expect particular hostility to unions.

At Leeds Mechanics' Institute the answers are particularly instructive of its attitude to working class activity. The correspondent reports regretfully two cases of members acting against employers. In one

"The most promising member we have had became secretary to the Short Time Committee which got the Factory Act"

However, added the correspondent with a fine touch of Victorian moralism

"His temporary elevation will prove to him a permanent fall."

The second case involved a member who was elected a trade union officer and wrote to the correspondent that his object was to prevent the reduction of wages and more perfect equalisation among the artisans in his trade.² Hull Mechanics Institute gave no answer to this question other than that there were few combinations in the town and the members were involved in the pursuit of general knowledge not the study of their own arts. We might assume that the majority of members were not working class members. At Lincoln Mechanics' Institute it was claimed that nothing in the way of machine breaking or union pressure had ever occurred in the city and the whole town would put it down at once.

1 Ibid, 2, p.191

2 Ibid, 2, p.197

The replies from these institutes taken together with their replies to a number of more general questions make it very clear that except possibly in the case of Birmingham, there was no sympathy for unionism and in many cases a positive desire to act as an antidote against it.

While it is true that some institutes did give trade unionism a limited platform, as in the early days at London Mechanics' Institute for example, the general attitude was expressed by C.W. Baker, friend and supporter of Brougham in an essay on Libraries and Mechanics Institutes.

"In towns where the population forms a dense mass - where strikes, trade unions, and combinations have been so ruinous to the merchant, the manufacturer, and the workman - it is of the utmost importance that the principles which affect national wealth and industry should be thoroughly understood."¹

A rather balder statement of the same point is made in the Third Annual Report of the Haddington School of Arts.

"Our mechanics do not sufficiently know the limits of their own, nor the extent of their masters' just rights.. Only let the working classes be trained to discrimination, either by that general science which sharpens the faculties of all who are conversant with it; or let them be made acquainted with that particular science, part of whose object it is to elucidate the nature of the relation in which capitalists and labourers stand to each other; and we shall be as little disturbed by the spirit of combination, as by a revival of the spirit of witchcraft."²

Haddington was one of the mechanics' institutes which was much under the influence of the Scottish political economy school.

The same report suggests that lectures should be given on:

'Property - labour - capital - wages - population - price - pauperism.' The same kind of approach was happening in

1 C.W. Baker, Central Society of Education, 1st Publication, (1833), p.248.

2 A. Tyrrell, Op.Cit., p.158.

Glasgow Mechanics' Institute and Edinburgh School of Arts.¹

In towns where there had been industrial unrest there was on occasions considerable opposition by many employers to the founding of institutes. This was true, as we have seen, at Walsall. In Birmingham the background of the repeal of the Combination Acts, with a number of threatened or actual strikes taking place, conjoined with a bad year for trade had led to enough opposition from manufacturers to see the collapse of the first attempt to launch an Institute. Joseph Parkes wrote to his friend Brougham that

"The institute has not been supported by the higher educated and wealthy classes of the town, as I could have wished and did hope. Perhaps the period of first organisation - the focus of last year's combinations - was a principle cause."²

The effect of union disturbance on the institute was commented on also in the reports of the Birmingham Journal. But generally, the argument was that institutes acted as an antidote to rather than an encouragement of unionism. Thus John Tyrell, addressing the Exeter Mechanics Institute, claimed that

"Educated people were usually more orderly, docile, and happier than a nation immersed in ignorance ... On the recent examinations relative to the combination laws before the House of Commons, the masters in this country unanimously bore testimony to the fact that the uneducated part of their journeymen were the most refractory, mulish, and difficult to manage."³

In parenthesis we might note that the practical fortunes of any educational or social institutions which aimed to recruit

1 A. Tyrrell, Op. Cit., pp.157-158. J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.88

2 SDUK Mss., 5, f.5.

3 Trevelyan's Exeter Flying Post, 24 November 1825.

working men was very much bound up with the fortunes of local industry. Particularly for towns dependent upon one industry, trade depressions would badly hit mechanics' institutes along with most other societies. For example a depression in cotton and worsted trades at Addingham, Yorkshire, between 1847-49, finished off the Institute; Sowerby Bridge Mechanics' Institute almost closed in the early 1840s for the same reason, and the Llanelly Mechanics' Institute went through a bad time in 1841 when the copper works temporarily closed at the same time as the East India Company coal contract was lost.¹ The same effect could be caused by a prolonged strike or lock-out. For example the glass blowers strike at Castleford in 1856-7 caused a great decline in the institute membership.²

At Ashton-under-Lyme as we have previously noted we have exemplified very clearly the politico-economic function of the institute. During the severe industrial depression of 1825-26, members of the institute stood aloof from the struggle of the workers, who were fighting to form trade unions and prevent unemployment arising from new machinery.

"In the recent distresses (which have arisen in the town) from twofold causes viz: combination spirit and badness of trade there has been no evidence of any improper political spirit existing among any of the members. In the Turn Outs, one of them a sensible operative, went to the club of spinners to reason with them on the folly and impropriety of their conduct, and, when a great deal of stir was made about a self-acting mule recently invented by Roberts of Manchester, I heard several of our members who were spinners considering about it, and though they were perfectly aware of the temporary inconvenience its general introduction might occasion to themselves and families, they never expressed the least wish to have the invention restrained or suppressed."³

1 J. Popple, Op. Cit., pp.59, 377.
T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.341.

2 J. Popple, Op. Cit., p.141.

3 Letter of Charles Hindley to Brougham, 15 September 1826.

In a previous section we have described how the institute's leaders were prominent on the side of factory owners in their fierce fight with the Spinners Union.

The vigorous and optimistic drive by the Broughamites to use mechanics' institutes as means of educating workers in acquiescence to the social effects of industrial capitalism was common in institutes throughout the country, as is shown in various places in this thesis. Typical was John Marshall of Leeds Mechanics' Institute who lectured there on such topics as 'the relationship of population and wages' taken from his book The Economy of Social Life, an exposition of orthodox political economy.¹

Not everyone however was equally sanguine that such attempts at social control would be successful. George Lee, for example, wrote from Hull to Brougham suggesting that the presentation of the doctrine of wages and prices to the workers was a matter for great delicacy and care so as not to encourage a reaction.² The working class leaders of course were never ambiguous. The comment in the Herald to the Trades Advocate is a measured answer to the Broughamites.

"We must pause, and recommend to the managers of such Institutions to direct the energies of the professors to the most important subject, viz. That the scientific and mechanical power now brought into existence in Britain... be distributed for the benefit of the working classes; and unless this is done, however much we may admire the analysis of a chemical compound, while in the lecture room; yet we cannot help... regret that the steam engine and the chemical compound deprives the labourer of his employment."³

1 J.F.C. Harrison, Op.Cit., p.80.

2 Letter to Brougham, 13 September 1826. Brougham Ms.

3 Quotation in H. Silver, Op.Cit., p.223.

An institute member at Leeds claimed that

"a great belief prevails among the working classes that the mechanics' institutions were invented by masters wishing to derive practical advantage from the men to apply to their own use."¹

While at Manchester it was argued that

"many of the workmen considered that the masters had some secret motive of their own to serve: and that there was some mysterious connection between the institution and wages."²

Claxton, whose enthusiasm for self-help and concentration on the narrow section of highly skilled artisans blinded him to the economic realities of the working class position, had little time for unions or strikes. The major message for workmen is that they must look after themselves and compete and strive as strongly as did the capitalist they serve. It was those who were like himself upwardly mobile into positions of influence and prestige and wealth that he wrote for. Of the rest of the working class he wrote that typically a working man was

"the creature of impressions and impulses, the unresisting slave of sensual appetites, the ready dupe of the quack, the thrall of the fanatic, and, above all, the passive instrument of the political agitator, whose sinister views and falsehoods he is unable to detect..."

This led the duped workmen to strike for shorter hours and more wages.

"The more intelligent mechanics become, the less they will get into these foolish scrapes."³

Claxton's concern in educating the skilled craftsman was so that he as an individual could come to occupy an individual

1 F. Hill, Op.Cit., 2, p.224.

2 R.G. Kirby, Op. Cit., p.88.

3 T. Claxton, Op. Cit., p.139-140, 142.

position of privilege through meeting the capitalist at points of common interest where it was of benefit to both to accept each other's power. Though this was a possible strategy for the individual mechanic, as Claxton's own experience showed, it only reinforced the underprivileged position of the mass of workers.

2.9 Conclusion to Chapter 2

This section has been concerned with the political analysis of mechanics' institutes. For this purpose six categories each with its specific mix of class conflicts and alliances was postulated. It was not expected that all institutes would fall neatly into one of the six categories. The purpose was to help analysis of institutes in terms of the conflicting forces which were attempting to exert control or influence in their own interest over the client membership. The ways in which some of the conflicts worked themselves out were complex, and the particular dynamic at work changed over time. The institutes that have been examined can be placed in one of the six categories with little difficulty. It can be argued therefore that analysis of the institutes in terms of conflict and alliance between classes defined in political and economic terms is a tenable procedure, and it is the argument of this thesis that it reveals the central dynamic of the behaviour and function of the institutes.

The categories fit most case studies of mechanics' institutes

although within each category there was considerable variation. It must be emphasised however that the categories are primarily an heuristic device to examine the interplay of political forces. It enables us to ask certain kinds of questions and use a particular form of political analysis which otherwise might be ignored. The category is a social construct, based on the expected behaviour of a large number of mechanics' institutes given the political environment of the time. We should not expect all institutes to fit within these categories, and some do not, defying as they do the expected constancy of class relationships and predictability of resultant activities. An example of this is provided by Wakefield Mechanics' Institute, one of the largest and most successful in Yorkshire.¹

The institute was set up, so the historian of the institute claims, in 1820 at the same time as degree of disorder was manifesting itself in the town. A meeting was called

"To adopt measures for checking the designs of the disaffected, supporting the constituted authorities, and protecting the lives of the loyal and peaceable part of the community, while viewing with heartfelt sorrow the hitherto unparalleled distress of the labouring classes."²

The assumption is that one of the measures to reinforce social order was the founding of the institute. It was led by the Rev. Dr. Naylor of the Grammar School and a local gentleman called Leatham. Not much is known about this first institute but it was most likely a Whig/Tory body attempting to neutralise

1 See J.T. Wilson. The History and Development of Wakefield Mechanics' Institute for the fullest account, from which this account is taken. M.A. Bradford, 1976.

2 Wakefield Herald and Journal, 21 April 1820

the effect of Radical or revolutionary ideas among the unemployed and dispossessed. Naylor however had had some sympathy with jacobinism in the past, and ran a Radical newspaper backed by Unitarians. The institute eventually died out.

In December 1838 there was the first of the Chartist meetings in the area, and this was followed by considerable Chartist activity in the next few months. By 1841 a second institute had been formed and it is tempting to see this as a response to Chartism such as occurred in the South West and Wales. There are certainly indications to suggest this. There was an emphasis on its

"utility in forming the characters of young men"

the aims stressed the

"instruction of mechanics at a cheap rate in the principles of the arts they practise as well as in other branches of useful knowledge".¹

In 1851 a Penny Savings Bank was established, and lectures such as that by Lord Morpeth on the Dignity of Work, reinforced the attitudinal stance of the institute. It would appear to have been a body which stressed the work ethic, thrift, sobriety, and other industrially useful virtues. Such an emphasis would explain the very respectable list of male and female life and honorary members, and the presence of three Anglican clergy even after the Wakefield Church Institute was set up in 1845.²

1 J. Wilson, Op.Cit., p.49.

2 Ibid, p.41.

However it is clear that the mechanics' institute was no narrow middle class affair. There was a strong caucus of Owenites and Chartists in the town, centred in the Unitarian churches. In 1837 Cameron, a Unitarian minister and declared Owenite, whose fervent espousal of Chartism was to lead him to be ejected from his chapel in 1844, was acknowledged leader of the group. He had formed a Working Man's Educational Association in 1837, and it was from this that the second institute emerged. At least two other Unitarian ministers supported him as did the Rev. G. Barnsby, the founder of the communist church. But the institute's president was Joseph Holdsworth, the liberal MP, and it had the support of other equally respectable members of the established classes. Clearly there was some flexible political consensus that survived during a fairly turbulent period of local political agitation. Although there was initially a rule that political and religious matters should be avoided, there was a debate in 1843 on rescinding the rule, and the upshot was that the institute buildings could be used by anyone

"unless religious points of doctrine were avowedly to be discussed."¹

At a later date, John Bright proposed that classes should be given in political economy, and these were eventually provided,

There are other examples of an unexpected mix of radical and middle class support for institutes, which make facile conclusions drawn from the categories dangerous. While the categories do appear to reflect the way in which political situations were typically worked out, they do not cater for such wide degrees of tolerance as shown at Wakefield.

1 Annual Report, 1843.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHURCHES AND MECHANICS' INSTITUTES

"In all plans for improving the condition of the poor, this is an indispensable ingredient. Education, scriptural education is not less needful to the mind than food or clothing to the body."

The Perils of the Nation 1843

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Church of England
- 3.3 The Old Dissent
- 3.4 The Methodist Church
- 3.5 The Churches and the Teaching of Science
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- 3.10 Coventry Mechanics' Institute
- 3.11 The Church Mechanics' Institute
- 3.12 Chester Mechanics' Institute
- 3.13 Conclusion to Chapter 3

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Introduction

The reaction to mechanics' institutes varied widely within and between the various churches. While it would be a contradiction of the evidence to ignore that a major part of the churches' activities were devoted to the spiritual mission of salvation and concern of the other world, they were nevertheless involved at several levels in political, governmental and social networks.¹ Outside their spiritual mission, the churches had profound influence on social institutions, and were involved in educational politics in three inter-connected areas.

Firstly, the sects were fighting among themselves for positions of greatest influence. The Church of England was attempting to hold its monopoly of influence at a time when its legal privileges, if not disappearing were at least being reduced. The other churches were conversely attempting to gain greater influence. A part of this internal battle centred in the removal of discriminatory legislation, another part in the development by non-conformist churches of rival institutions such as Sunday schools, adult evening classes and university colleges.

1 See particularly:-

K.S. Inglis, The Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England, (1963).

G.K. Clark, Churchmen and the Condition of England, (1973),
R.A. Soloway, Prelates and People, (1969).

Secondly the churches were generally though not universally concerned to keep education under the control of religious bodies and prevent the growth of secular educational bodies.

Thirdly, the churches, as transmitters of ideologies were concerned to protect or develop what they defined as the appropriate regulations, codes of norms, values and lifestyles within which their ideology and its accompanying institutions could flourish. The definitions might vary between or even within sects, but all churches had a basic concern with obtaining or protecting the kinds of social and economic relationships which they saw as essential to their vision of a christian society.

The changes in society consequent upon the growth of urban industrial capitalism posed as great a challenge to the churches as to the landed gentry or any other sectional interest. Given the turbulence of that society, the breakdown of traditional forms of economic and social relationships and their associated norms and values, and the sharpening definition of divergent class interests, there was likely to be some confusion, contradiction, and ambiguity in the responses of the churches. While all of them were anxious to establish their own kind of control through the manipulation of social consciousness, there were wide variations in the way specific support was given in relation to different class interests. In general, the churches worked to support forms of upper and middle class control of the political and legal institutions of the state, but it was not always an unwavering or an uncritical support. There was

a very rough correlation between Anglicanism and Toryism on the one hand and non-conformity with reformism on the other, which we will explore later in this chapter. This was to be expected since the major difference between the two parties by the 1820s was on the reform of the constitution which included the established position of the Church of England.¹ The tory party was committed to retaining the existing situation between Church and State, the Whig party had by tradition carried a brief for the interests of the Dissenters, and was not in theory opposed to changes in the political position of the churches. Nevertheless too much can be drawn from this correlation of Church and Party. It has been suggested that the mechanics' institutes were supported mainly by non-conformist Whigs and opposed mainly by Anglican Tories. Kelly concludes, as noted above, that

"in general the political complexion of the movement was Whig, its religious complexion Non-conformist, with the Unitarians as particularly strong supporters in some places. The Tories and the Church either stood aside or were openly hostile."²

It is certainly true that one or two of the major early institutions, such as those at Manchester, London and Liverpool, were very obviously non-conformist and reforming Whig in complexion, and the response to them by the Anglicans was naturally enough one of suspicion. These institutes had much publicity but were not necessarily typical of mechanics' institutes, and we would be wrong to allow the above generalisation to stand. At Stockton, the mechanics institute founded in

1 R. Blake, The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill, (1972), p.34.

2 T. Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Britain, (1962), p.123.

1825 had the support of the vicars of Stockton and Norton, the rector of Egglescliffe, and the Bishop of Durham, and in the same year the vicar of Huddersfield supported the first of the mechanics' institutes there.¹

The overall picture is complex. A study of all the mechanics' institutes in the three counties of Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire demonstrates this point.²

In the four institutes founded before 1835, at Birmingham, Hanley, Coventry and West Bromwich, sixteen clergymen are known to have given their support. Three of these were Anglicans, one a Roman Catholic, and twelve were Dissenters - four Unitarians, three Baptists and one Presbyterian. In the period of 1835 to 1850, there were seventeen institutes in existence. Seventeen Anglican clergymen were involved, two Roman Catholic priests and twenty-one Dissenter ministers - eleven Independents, five Unitarians, three Baptists, a Presbyterian and a Wesleyan.

Anglican clergymen worked in 15 of the institutes, and in the case of Rugby, Wednesbury and Bilston actually founded the institute. Support came from a number of leading churchmen, including the Bishops of Lichfield and Worcester, the Dean of Hereford, and the Chancellor of Lichfield. It is true that most of this support came in the latter half of the period, and it could be argued that the Church avoided commitment in

1 Annual Reports of Stockton and Huddersfield Institutes, 1825.

2 See C.M. Turner, The Development of Mechanics' Institutes in Warwickshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire, M.Ed., Leicester, 1966. Appendix D.

the early years, and then moved in when, for various reasons, it decided the institutes were either harmless or in need of Church control. However, all four of the pre-1835 institutes had the support of at least one Anglican clergyman, and these were all in areas where the Church was relatively weak.

If we extend this sample to include fifty institutes studied for which evidence is available, and situated across the country, the picture does not alter.¹ In the period 1825-34, 16 institutes were supported by Anglican clergymen. In 11 of these, they worked in the company of a non-conformist minister - at Stockton, Taunton, Bristol, Leicester, London, Manchester, Newcastle on Tyne, Hanley, West Bromwich, York and Birmingham. In the remaining institutes, at Hull, Scarborough, Keighley, Darlington, Shrewsbury and the second Barnsley institute, the only clergy appear to have been Anglicans.

In the period 1835-50 Anglican clergy seem to have worked without other non-conformist clergy in ten institutes - at Frome, Cambridge, Neath, Cardiff, Carmarthen, Aberystwyth, Bury, Warrington, Bilston, Wednesbury, and with non-conformist clergy at Nottingham, Wakefield, Milford Haven, Aberdare, Leeds, Uttoxeter, Longton, Newcastle under Lyme, Stafford, Redditch, Chester and Banbury. The sample could be extended, but it is unlikely that the picture would be changed. Support for mechanics' institutes came from bishops at Bristol, Lincoln, Chester, Newcastle, Norwich, Durham, Manchester, Lichfield and Worcester, and from deans at Ripon, Bristol and Hereford. Even the arch-tory Bishop of Exeter eventually gave grudging

¹ See Appendix C. The evidence has been taken from all available sources, as indicated in the bibliography.

support:

"Mechanics' institutes were good things in their proper sphere."¹

If we have interpreted from our samples the correct national picture then we are left with a confusing situation, for there is no doubt that the Anglican Church did frequently oppose mechanics' institutes. In the next section, therefore, we will examine the attitudes and alternative responses of the churches to the education of the working man.

3.2 The Church of England

The Church of England, as an established Church, was enmeshed in the political order. A fundamental assumption of the established Church was the unity of Church and State. A constant theme in the writings and statements of Anglican clergy was that the divine mission of the Church required it to be a unified and protected part of the political state. It was from the perspective of its position as an integral part of the body politic that the Anglican Church responded to political and social issues. Inevitably the Church in general wished to reinforce those social relationships and institutions which it saw as essential for the continuance of the state as a Christian body.

1 H. Phillpotts, A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Exeter, 1845, p.50 .

Its view of society was an hierarchic one, of the protection of the existing gradations of society, and therefore the protection of the rights of property and the inequality of provision that defined these gradations. These levels defined the duties each person had towards the state and his fellows, and laid down the station in life which God had ascribed to him. The hierarchies of rank and station were deemed to be ordained by God, and were therefore essential to the existence of ordered Christian society. The removal of such an ordered framework would lead to the horrors of anarchy, bloodshed, chaos, civil war, such as had been exemplified in the French Revolution, and would create a Godless society.¹

The combination of belief in the union of Church and State, and the protection of property, unequal provision, and existing social rankings, made the Church appear a very conservative body. Its attitude to most working class Radical movements was most often antagonistic because of the apparent intention to shake the foundations upon which Christian society was built. Many public utterances of the leaders of the Church reflect this. The Bishop of Ripon wrote on Chartism that

"it was not prompted, mainly by the urgency of temporal want, but that the principles of discontent and insubordination so sedulously instilled by the designing and too readily imbibed by hearts undisciplined by religious restraints were the springs that actuated it, while it was equally evident that just in proportion as the sound doctrine and discipline of the Church were inculcated did respect for law and a patient and exemplary submission to privations generally prevail."²

1 An example of this thinking from Archbishop Howley is quoted in R.A. Soloway, Op.Cit., p.235.

2 G.K. Clark, Op.Cit., pp. 28-29.

Such a sentiment could well have been voiced by Whig or Tory but it was the Tory party that had historically formed particularly close connections with the Church, and which continued throughout the 19th Century. One example of this was in the decision by the Hampshire Conservative Association in 1838 to celebrate a hoped-for election victory by building a church which would be

"congenial with those protestant and Christian principles which form the basis of true Conservatism."¹

At Nottingham, the church bells were rung on occasions of Tory electoral victories².

Nevertheless the Anglican Church was having to explore new approaches in the 19th Century. In the 18th Century, its values had been based on a local paternalism deriving from a secure base in the local hierarchy of the countryside. They were expressed in a system of privileges and duties based on possession of property and rank. Anglican values and social attitudes and behaviour may well not in practice have reflected what was claimed in theory, during a period when the church was full of abuses and antagonism between Church and people was particularly high. But by the start of the 19th Century as the effects of the evangelical movement and other expressions of increased intensity in the spiritual mission of the Church changed the attitudes of priests towards their responsibilities, the society upon which the reciprocal system of duties and privileges was

1 R.C. Hill, Op. Cit., p.59.

2 M.I. Thomis, Op. Cit., p.128.

based began to break up. The world of industrial urban capitalism which began to replace it had many aspects which were antipathetic to the traditional social values of the Established Church. The new situation threw up varied responses from the priests and laymen of the Church.

Some priests, of whom Rev. Dr. Wade of St. Nicholas Warwick is the prime example, and some laymen of whom Thomas Attwood serves as a good example, espoused a Radical position similar to or identical with socialism or Chartism.¹ There were relatively few Anglicans who took that position but another considerable section of the Church followed the lead of the Radical Tories like Oastler and were in the forefront of the protection of the working class from exploitation by capitalist employers and landowners. They were particularly opposed to the application of the principles of orthodox political economy which they saw as having destroyed the moral relationship between the grades and ranks of society. They therefore encouraged or led many reform movements, particularly those associated with factory reform, the humane application of the Poor Laws, and, increasingly as the century wore on, adequate housing. The Rev. G.S. Bull, known as the Ten Hour Parson, and Dean Hook are typical examples of this section of Church thinking. They were, in the formal sense, normally avowedly non-political, as indeed was that much larger section of Church thinking which was concerned with general improvement of the conditions in which the working class lived, in order to

1 T.H. Lloyd, 'Dr. Wade and the Working Class', Midland History, Vol.2(2), 1973.

improve their spiritual well-being. The Prince Consort, in his directive to the Bishop of Oxford, his former Chaplain, expressed a view which was widely supported in the Church.

"A Bishop ought to abstain completely from mixing himself up with the politics of the day ... (and) should take no part in the discussion of State affairs; but he should come forward whenever the interests of humanity are at stake ... I mean questions like Negro emancipation, the education of the people, improvement of the health of towns, measures for the recreation of the poor, against cruelty to animals, for regulating factory labour etc."¹

The increasing concern of the parish clergy in these matters particularly from 1835 onward is substantiated by a mass of evidence. It can be seen in Rev. J. Blunt's book, Duties of the Parish Priest, in the heavy involvement of the clergy in moves to improve the sanitation of towns, in the Ten Hour Bill Movement which was particularly supported by the Yorkshire clergy, by their support for the allotments movement, by the provision of libraries, reading rooms, medical clubs, coal and clothing clubs, dispensaries, schools, blanket clubs, co-operative stores which very many of the clergy worked hard to provide in their parish.²

There were, however, two assumptions that underlay most of this work. One was that it was mostly based on the concept of self help, that the poor needed the organising capacity of the clergyman to enable them to achieve or to protect their independence because they were vulnerable to excessive

1 Quotation in G.K. Clark, Op.Cit., p.144.

2 Examples are given in J.F.C. Harrison, Op.Cit., pp. 158-60. G.K. Clark, Op.Cit., pp. 168-86, For work of Vicar of Whitchurch, see Chester Chronicle, 5 December 1834.

exploitation, but that unless they were dependants, they had it in them to better themselves. One clergyman heavily involved in this kind of activity wrote that

"abject want is almost always the result of grievous error or gross misconduct."¹

The Church did not normally see the solution to poverty in changing the nature of society but in giving the working man some help in coping with the obstacles which might prevent him from leading a productive life in his allotted sphere. For the second assumption was that the hierarchic system of grades of society should not be dismantled, and the purpose of charitable activity was, apart from the exceptional individual, to make a man happier in his station.

A further section of the Church of England, though probably in a considerable minority, was in sympathy with the reformist Whigs, the political economists and the Broughamites. Generally the Church no more than the Tory party, was comfortable with such ideas or practices, but some clergymen were involved in them. For example Rev. T. Jones of Alton Towers campaigned for the Reform Bill in 1832 and then worked hard for the SDUK movement in Staffordshire.

Finally there was an 'ultra' party in the Church which took a militantly conservative line. It is best represented by Charlotte Bronte's fictional curate in Shirley who thought

1 Viscount Ingestre (Ed.), Meliora, p.23.

"the masters aggrieved, the workmen unreasonable, he condemned the widespread spirit of disaffection against authorities, the growing indisposition to bear with patience evils he regarded as inevitable; the cures he prescribed were vigorous government interference, strick magisterial vigilance, when necessary prompt military coercion."

Whatever the particular views of any individual clergymen, however, there is no doubt that the Church was a part of the government order and was felt to be such by the common people. The clergy had been steadily improving their social status throughout the 18th Century and by the 19th Century were incorporated into the local gentry.¹ Their education, economic resources, style of life set them far apart from their parishioners and they were inevitably seen as representatives of the order that controlled the wealth, the political institutions, and the law of the country in such a way that their privileged position was protected and supported by the labours of their parishioners. This was particularly reinforced by two duties the clergymen frequently performed.

Firstly, they were very often local magistrates, and in the first decades of the century this meant applying the hated game laws, the laws against combinations, and other penalising legislation affecting the working class. In 1831 it is estimated that there were in the English counties '1154 clerical magistrates as against 3372 lay magistrates - the numbers were much lower in the unreformed boroughs'.² They may well have

1 E. Evans, 'Some Reasons for the Growth of Anti-Clericalism 1750-1830', Past and Present, Vol.66, 1975.

2 G.K. Clark, Op.Cit., p.146. For variants of these estimates see E. Evans, Op.Cit., and S & B. Webb, Local Government - the Parish and the County, (1906), p.383.

made better and more humane magistrates than their lay counterparts, but it made difficult their other relationships with schemes to help the working class.

Likewise their heavy involvement with the application of the Poor Laws both before and after the reform of 1834, put them in a critical position in relation to their parishioners. They were chairmen of the Vestry Meeting, generally members of the Boards of Guardians and not infrequently the chairmen. It is fair to add that some leading clergymen were frequent critics of the more inhumane applications of the Poor Law, but they were nevertheless part of the system that operated a particularly hated law among the poor.¹

The leaders of the Church, the Bench of Bishops, were obviously particularly influential in formulating opinion on educational provision for the working class. The attitude of bishops towards the development of such provision varied. The attitude operating most strongly in the first three decades was one which combined the Anglican view of balanced harmony in an hierarchic society with the utilitarian view of providing man with a rational explanation for his place in the economic system. It was well expressed by Sumner, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was a great advocate of the harmony of the universe view.

"If labour is heavy or distress severe, how greatly is the load lightened by the conviction that man is not the sport of chance or accidental circumstances or human enactments, but the work of a wise and benevolent creator and the object of his paternal care."²

¹ See, for example, J.K. Clark, Op. Cit., pp. 158-165.

² J.B. Sumner, Treatise II, 1816, p.297.

Other bishops who were much influenced by the utilitarian approach were Gray, Bishop of Bristol, Coplestone, Bishop of Llandaff, and Ryder of Lichfield (and later of Gloucester).

There was however a much more conservative view argued with vigour by Van Mildert, Bishop of Durham, but also supported by Law of Chester and Butler of Lichfield. This view accepted that some education for the poor was desirable and in any case was now inevitable but that it had to be limited and controlled.

Law put the point as follows:

"The Almighty has given to his creatures different faculties and endowments, both of mind and body. There must be the Philosopher, the Statesman; the Artisan ... the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. On the combined operations of all, grounded in the conviction of mutual interest and utility, depends the proper working and the harmony, of the great machine of the world."

So he accepted education that was sufficient for each person to do his task.

"But to go beyond that we render them dissatisfied with their station, we lay the foundation of civil insubordination and discord."¹

In the third and fourth decades, the Bishops had to face the development of highly organised working class political activity, and some of them, notably Wilberforce of Oxford and Thirlwall of St. David's were prepared to accept that the Church must do much more for the working class in order to compete with non-Church influence. In particular they argued that the Church must not automatically accept the world as it is and justify it

1 G.H. Law, A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Chester, (1831), pp. 16-17.

in terms of God's will and classical political economy. Thirlwall and Wilberforce both argued that the Chartists and socialists were mistaken, but the Church should sympathise with a not unnatural way in which working men were trying to make sense of their exploitation. The Church, once their security,

"only gave the unpalatable truths of political economy ... the iron sinews of a proclaimed necessity which must always sound as a taunt in the sufferers ear."¹

Such a view had echoes from the Radical Tories and Young England movement in the third and fourth decades of the century.

With such a wide range of attitudes within the Church at all levels, it is to be expected that there were varying responses to mechanics' institutes. The case for opposition was most thoroughly argued by Rev. G. Wright, the vicar of Askham Bryan, near York, in a pamphlet written in 1826 as a reply to Brougham's *Practical Observations* under the title:

"Mischiefs Exposed. A Letter to Henry Brougham, Esq.M.P., showing the Inutility, Absurdity and Impolicy of the Scheme developed in his Practical Observations."

Wright first developed the familiar theme that to provide lectures on science and political economy for the labouring class might have terrible effects.

"To meddle in such a way is to play with fire, for you may unleash forces which you cannot control as those aristocrats who supported the people in the French Revolution found to their cost. Before any man sounds the tocsin and calls forth the swarming population of our streets and lanes ... let him pause a moment in his ill-fated course, and weep over the irretrievable errors of misguided patriots who have preceeded him."²

1 R.A. Solloway, *Op. Cit.*, p.61. The quotation is from S. Wilberforce.

2 Quotation in J.F.C. Harrison, *Op. Cit.*, p.173.

The mechanics' institutes would become jacobin clubs and centres of disaffection and sedition. The good and virtuous men will leave in disgust: the bad and disaffected will come to dominate the institute, and if there are numbers of them over the country, there will be a terrible threat to law and order.

Coupled with this familiar condemnation, was the attack on institutes as irreligious bodies. The teaching of science was seen as dangerous to the doctrines of revealed truth. It would lead men to free-thinking, deism, Unitarianism and other forms of unbelief, for want of any person in the institute who could present adequately and convincingly the religious issues as seen by the Christian Church. Wright had little doubt that the writings of Paine would displace those of Paley, that the superficial attractions of Godwin and Voltaire would outweigh the deeper insights of the Christian apologists. All this he thought was a correlate of teaching science and trusting the intellect of artisans to arrive at true conclusions.

Finally Wright comes back to the argument that education makes people discontented with their lot. They surrender their present content for a restless and unsatisfiable ambition. Much better that each man should accept his station in life and concentrate on living well and happily within it.

Wright's concern which was echoed by many other clerics, revolved around three fears: that the institutes would destroy the natural order of things by educating men to be discontented with their lot and inclined to follow radical solutions; that

the institutes would become secularist or anti-Christian; and that the institutes would become power bases of the Dissenting churches. With different emphasis other clergymen echoed these fears, often mixing them all up together. At Woodlesford and Oulton in Yorkshire the vicar wrote

"Our little institution is a spark which if encouraged will burst into a prodigious conflagration and destroy every desire for labour and order."¹

The Liverpool Mechanics' Institute was opposed at its inception by many of the town's clergy no doubt because of its obvious non-conformist character.² There was some niggling from the Anglican clergy at Taunton in 1830³ and at Bristol in 1840,⁴ and at Haworth although the Institute was patronised by Charlotte Bronte and lectured to by her father, it was accused of sectarianism by neighbouring clergy.⁵ The general suspicion of mechanics' institutes in their early days by local clergy is discussed by Dean Hook in his essay in Meliora.⁶

It was however these very fears that caused many clergymen to espouse the cause of mechanics' institutes. The Established Church had traditionally and fairly effectively controlled education.

If the Church was concerned not only with religious indoctrination but also with the preservation of the social order and its values, opposing as threats to this Jacobins, Radical agitators

1 ARYUMI, 1849, p.94.

2 H. Silver, Op. Cit., p.211

3 Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, 9 October 1830

4 Bristol Mercury, 24 November 1840.

5 J. Popple, Op. Cit., II, p.186

6 On the Institutions of Adult Education, (1852), p.33.

and secularists, then the mechanics' institutes offered an opportunity to extend its influence among adult working men. Bishop Otter of Chichester argued this point strongly, pointing out that Radicals were already preaching infidelity and disloyalty in non-church institutions.¹ In many clergymen's eyes it was not a field to leave undisputed to the activities of the non-conformist clergy. The Dissenters should be challenged and defeated in their attempts to invade a supposed Anglican monopoly.

The Anglican cleric was further spurred to activity by the growing general concern over the condition of England - the apparent neglect of the well-being, spiritual as well as physical of the working classes. Very many vicars organised night school classes for adults, lectures in the parish hall, classes for domestics run by the vicar's wife, and small lending libraries often consisting solely of the vicarage books. These irregular and informal efforts were on occasions formalised into a mechanics' institute, meeting in the vicarage or Church schoolroom. At Hull in 1825 the vicar organised a mechanics' institute in the schoolroom, at Wednesbury in 1838 and at Frome in 1845 the vicar did the same in his own house.² Yorkshire was scattered with village mechanics' institutes under the wing of the vicar, many of them started in the 1840s under the encouragement of the Dean of Ripon. Examples are at Masham, Netherton, Ripley, Thorp Arch, Wetherley, Thirsk, Northallerton, Knaresborough, Tadcaster, Boroughbridge and Kirby Malzeard.³

1 R.A. Soloway, Op.Cit. p.382

2 F.W. Hackwood, Wednesbury Papers, 1884, pp. 48-9.

3 ARYUMI, 1850, p.64.

Few institutes could have received quite such public approval from the Church as that at Hereford where on its anniversary a special service was held at the Cathedral and the Dean preached a sermon on its behalf.¹

A common figure in the mechanics' institute was the clergyman schoolmaster. It is reasonable to expect that such men were more fully aware of the power of education to induce desired behaviour and attitudes as well as desired learning. At Coventry Mechanics' Institute the first Anglican clergyman to join was the schoolmaster of the Free Grammar School.² The same situation held at the Taunton Mechanics' Institute and the first Wakefield Mechanics' Institute,³ and for some time the only Anglican clergyman in the Leeds Mechanics' Institute was the headmaster of the Grammar School.⁴ The headmaster of Shrewsbury School and some of his clerical staff supported the local institute.⁵ A particularly notable example was Dr. Thomas Arnold who became increasingly concerned with the education of the adult working man through his career, and attempted to establish a Rugby Mechanics' Institute in the home of one of his teachers. Although this failed through lack of support, his successor as headmaster, Rev. Dr. Tait, refounded the institute more successfully in 1844.⁶

We should note that some of the clergy were as concerned as any other enthusiast to encourage science and technical teaching.

1 Gloucester Journal, 6 March 1841.

2 Infra, pp. 287-8.

3 Taunton Courier, 13 November 1830, Wakefield and Halifax Journal, 12 August 1825.

4 Institute reports, particularly Annual Report, 1830.

5 Institute reports.

6 H. Lodge, The History and Origins of the Public Library, Rugby. Ms. (1916). A.P. (Dean) Stanley. Life of Thomas Arnold (1901 ed.) p. 335.

Among the clergy was much of the scientific knowledge of the day, and we find in a number of institutes that it was the parson who was lecturing or taking classes in science subjects. At Keighley Mechanics Institute for example, the vicar gave lectures on Electricity,¹ although there are other examples of science being tamed by religion as when at the Frome Institute a lecture was given on the Harmony of Geology with Revelations.²

This initial analysis of the stance of the Anglican Church will be further illustrated by the case studies in the latter half of this section.

3.3 The Old Dissent

The Old Dissent is defined here as the churches of the Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists or Independents, Unitarians and the Society of Friends or Quakers. It involved in membership only a minority of the nation, and was predominantly middle-class. Its strength had grown among the professional classes and industrialists, and there was much criticism in the 19th Century that it was becoming steadily more exclusive and class-bound.³ One commentator acidly remarked of the Birmingham Society of Friends that

"it has made its fortune and might now retire."⁴

while A.M. Thompson claimed to sum up the feelings of many working

1 W. Keighley, Keighley, Past and Present (1858), pp. 184, 203-4.

2 Institute Records.

3 K.S. Inglis, Op. Cit., pp.85, 86, 100.

4 R.B. Rose, "Protestant Non-Conformity", Victoria County History, Warwickshire, (1964), Vol.7, p.422.

men when he wrote

"religion has become so identified within my observation with black clothes, kid gloves, tall silk hats, and long faces, that it and I appeared to have parted for ever."¹

The Dissenters had traditionally forged close links with the Whigs and tended to oppose Tory governments that supported the exclusive power of the Established Church, and discriminated against them in irritating if in minor ways. In so far as the leaders of Dissent tended to be local businessmen or actively involved in encouraging industrial progress, Dissent became associated with opposition to protectionist policies of the Tory party. In so far as Dissent still carried beliefs from the 17th Century about the rights of individual conscience and the creation of political institutions facilitating such rights by curbing absolute or arbitrary power, then it had a more natural affinity with the Whig than the Tory party.² It should be emphasised however that many Dissenters were politically very conservative.

The support given by Dissenters to mechanics' institutes was very considerable, particularly in the industrial towns. After 1835 many towns were controlled by an oligarchy of non-conformist Whig families, where commercial interest, political power and religious tradition combined to make them instigators of many kinds of local reform - for example in Public Health and Housing,

1 Quotation in Inglis, Op.Cit., p.217. See also F. Engels, Socialism, (1892), p.14.

2 H.U. Faulkner, Chartism and the Churches, (1970), p.10, pp.13-14.
R. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent, (1959), Chapter 5.

rudimentary social services, in Education, in Temperance, and in efficient and frugal local government. Frequently among such activities was the active support of a mechanics' institute. It was a useful vehicle for propagating beliefs in social progress, economic freedom, the moral values of the work ethic, which would mould an adult working force to the needs of urban industrial capitalism.

If we now distinguish between the churches of the old Dissent, the Society of Friends had still a section of its thinking dominated by a quietistic attitude,¹ but an increasing number of individuals were becoming involved in schemes of social amelioration. Some Quakers made their mark in mechanics' institutes, most obviously and outstandingly George Birbeck himself. One of the Seebohm family was active in the Bradford Institute, and in Birmingham Mechanics' Institute, and later the Polytechnic Institute, the Lloyd banking family, Joseph Sturge, and from the late 1840s the Cadbury's were in active support. At Leicester Mechanics' Institute the secretary was a Quaker, as was the president at Chapel Allerton.²

The Congregationalists carried on some of the traditions of the 17th Century Independents, though the leadership of the church had become very conservative by the early 19th Century.

However each congregation was autonomous, and many Congregationalists in the provinces, such as Edward Miall, campaigned on various Radical issues.³ Congregational ministers gave

1 E. Isichei, Victorian Quakers, (1970), pp.188-193. A reversal of the attitude post 1830 is described in pp.193-200.

2 Names taken from the records of these institutes.

3 Miall co-operated with Sturge in founding the National Alliance in 1847, and edited the Radical newspaper, Nonconformist.

strong support to mechanics' institutes in many towns, for example, in Nottingham, Leeds, Bradford, Wolverhampton, Taunton, Birmingham, West Bromwich, Hanley and Tewkesbury.

Baptists were rather less commonly found in the institutes but do appear in support of some large institutes and were particularly well represented at Bradford. Baptist ministers are found active in institutes at Leeds, Birmingham, Aberdare and Evesham, Leicester and Shrewsbury.¹

There were relatively few Presbyterians involved in the institutes, which reflects their much weakened position, at least outside Scotland, after the schisms of the 18th Century which led to the growth of Unitarianism.

The Unitarians occupy a special place in our consideration of dissenting churches. One historian of their church states that

"civil and religious liberty to Unitarians is not merely part of a political programme but an expression of their deepest faith."²

They appealed to reason and natural right rather than to revelation and tradition, and were in the forefront of Radical reform from the late 18th Century and throughout the 19th Century. They were distinguished by the very high calibre of many of their members who held deserved renown in many fields at national and local level, and their influence on many issues of reform was out of all proportion to the numbers of their congregations.

1 Information on religious affiliation of mechanics' institutes' supporters is taken from the totality of records available.

2 R.V. Holt, The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England, (1952), p.69.

In religious terms, Unitarians stood apart from the other churches. Their stand against the Trinity brought against them charges of deism, and many people of other sects did not regard them as christians at all.

"People who believe at the most in one God" was the comment of one wit. It is likely that at a time when atheism was not a very easy position to hold openly, the Unitarian society was a refuge for many freethinkers.

In political terms, Unitarians were seen correctly enough as Radicals. They were almost unanimously convinced of the need for political reform and particularly in the period before 1815 heavily participated in the campaign. They were strong supporters of the rights of women. The work of improving housing and health in the industrial towns was a special Unitarian concern, expressed at national level by Chadwick, Southwood Smith, and Mary Carpenter. Unitarians were heavily involved in the Anti-Slavery campaign, in the Anti-Corn Law League, in the Public Libraries campaign, and in the reform of local government. Indeed many of them were already prominent as local officials before the Municipal Corporation Reform Act gave them the chance to take power in the major cities. In Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Leicester, the Unitarians exerted very great power on the reformed or new councils. The first five mayors in Leicester after 1835 were all Unitarians. Not surprisingly, the Unitarians were also heavily involved in supporting various educational ventures, through universities, secondary and elementary schools, Sunday Schools, literary and scientific institutions, and mechanics'

institutes. Before we look at support for mechanics' institutes, however, we need to investigate further the nature of Unitarian Radicalism.

In general terms Unitarians' view of life was atomistic or individual rather than social. They believed in, and campaigned for individual rights, but were influenced in their social and political thinking more by Ricardo, himself Unitarian, and Bentham, than Owen or Hodgskin. Although they supported the cause of political reform, they did not as a body show the same concern subsequently for universal suffrage. The most common view amongst them was gradual extension of the franchise to parallel increased education among the masses. Their economic philosophy derived directly from that of the utilitarians. They accepted the wage fund theory and were therefore led as a body to oppose the factory acts, to have almost nothing to do with the growth of unionism, to support the 1834 Poor Law, which indeed was very much the work of a Unitarian.¹

That Unitarian reformist action did not extend to the areas which were most vital to the programmes of working class Radical movements is a reflection of the class-bound nature of Unitarianism. Its strength lay almost entirely in the industrial towns and cities. Its membership was heavily centred in the prosperous middle classes. It had a high proportion of factory owners particularly in the newer textile industries, and of traders and merchants. Their self-interest supported by a

1 R.V. Holt, Op. Cit., pp. 157-60, 179.

Benthamite political economy did not lend itself to supporting state intervention in factory conditions of work, or union combinations for altering the wage structure, or campaigns of socialism aimed at changing the nature of power and privilege in relation to property and political assemblies. It is probably true, as Holt argues, that Unitarians were concerned that factories should be run more humanely and themselves had a reasonably good record in this respect, that they wished to temper the severity of the application of the Poor Laws, that they desired an extension of political rights to artisans, that they genuinely desired the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

But by and large they were not to be found alongside Chartists, socialists, unionists. They were indeed basically conservative in their life style and successfully competitive in their public and work life. Holt remarks that

"a marked characteristic of Unitarians was an intense regard for respectability and conventionality in manners",

quoting a contemporary paper that

"a radical theology was curiously wont to be the conservative handmaiden of ancient custom in externals."¹

There were of course exceptions to the mixture of reformism and reaction we have here suggested as typical of the Unitarian body. When Philip Carpenter lectured at the Radcliffe Mechanics' Institute the audience all went to hear his common tirade against

¹ Ibid, pp. 331-332.

¹
the masters. Fielden can hardly be accused of reaction in relation to factory reform, nor a supporter of the Poor Law. There were many individuals who were committed to a much greater degree of political reform than their fellow members. It would not be correct to assert that no Unitarians associated with socialism or Chartism, but it is the contention that Unitarian churches were not typified by such activity.

The Unitarian impact on mechanics' institutes was very considerable indeed. The provision of debating chambers, newsrooms, libraries and places of scientific and technical enquiry for the working man made an immediate appeal to a major strand of Unitarian thought. Unitarians can claim, through the Birmingham Brotherly Society, to have founded the first mechanics' institute ² and they were very influential in founding and running institutes in the major cities. It was a Unitarian minister who first ³ suggested the idea in Manchester, and Heywood and Fairburn were both Unitarians. At Liverpool Roscoe and the Rathbone family, at Leeds Charles Wicksteed, at Birmingham Lee, the Hills, Kenrick, Osler, and several ministers, at Leicester the Biggs family and Clepham, at Derby the Strutts and Higginson, at Bristol the Carpenter family, Estlin and Worsley, at Halifax Stansfield, at Newcastle Rev. W. Turner, and others at York, Plymouth, Newport, Taunton, Wolverhampton, Hanley, Banbury and Cheltenham, all testify to the strength of Unitarian influence in the town institutes.

It was not difficult, however, for Unitarians to run the institute into trouble. This happened at Sheffield where the majority of

1 R.V. Holt, Op. Cit., p.190.

2 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., pp. 29-31.

3 This was Rev. Dr. T. Barnes.

the committee were non-conformists. The chief promoter had been T. Asline Ward, a Unitarian and past-president of the Sheffield Political Union, and other leading Unitarian members were Dr. Holland and the political Radical, Sam Bailey. One of the most influential figures in the institute, however, was another physician, Dr. Knight who was a Roman Catholic, and in 1837 he took offence against a lecture given by Sam Bailey on Martin Luther. In 1839, when Knight became president, he was able to manoeuvre a rule that prohibited party politics and controversial theology from the institute.¹ Much the same thing happened at the Edinburgh Mechanics' Institute in 1848. This institute was formed as a rival to the middle-class controlled Edinburgh School of Arts, and refused to have any kind of patronage. It intended to be an arena of open political discussion but it collapsed as a result of a bitter controversy over a history lecture by a Unitarian minister.² At Cheltenham within the first year of its existence the mechanics' institute was split when the committee decided to let its room to the Unitarians as a place for worship. Even the Radical press attacked the institute for its action, though less through religious prejudice than the danger it perceived the institute was courting from its many enemies. After the split a rival body, the Cheltenham Atheneum was formed with a similar programme aimed at the same target group.³

1 J. Taylor, 'A Nineteenth Century Experiment in Adult Education', Journal of Adult Education, XI, (1938), p.157.

2 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., pp.80-81.

3 Cheltenham Free Press, 7 March 1835.

Although the presence of Unitarians on committees of mechanics' institutes was always likely to cause concern among conservative churchmen, the strength of their contribution to these organisations was very considerable indeed. It is probably safe to argue that their involvement had greater impact on mechanics' institutes than that of any other sect.

3.4 The Methodist Church

The Methodist Church was by far the largest of the non-conformist sects. By the mid-century it numbered over two million adherents, and in some areas, notably the industrial parts of West Riding, Derbyshire, Durham, Cornwall, parts of central and northern Staffordshire, parts of Norfolk, and parts of Lancashire contiguous to Yorkshire, it was the dominant church. Its numerical strength was partly offset by such concentration in parts of England, for outside these areas it was not a serious rival to the other non-conformist churches. However, it drew many more adherents from the working class than did the old Dissent and could make some claim to be the only religion that touched the common people.¹

Politically however it was more conservative than any of the other major Dissenting churches. The early Wesleyans and John Wesley himself were opposed not only to social revolution but to moderate Whig reforms, and throughout the first part of the 19th Century this position was reinforced by Jabez Bunting, president of the Methodist conference. The Wesleyan Methodist

1 P. Hobsbaum, Labouring Men, (1964), 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution', pp. 26-28.

Magazine typically commented that infidelity and democracy convert human beings into fiends¹ and Cowherd's conclusion on the political role of the Wesleyan church was that

"(Methodist)preachers frequently admonished their congregations against the dangers of political reform; and their most eminent ministers, Jabez Bunting and Robert Newton, eschewed democracy as much as sin."²

The researches of Gowland into the Methodist churches of Manchester, Liverpool and Stockport have further established the close connection of the Wesleyan elite with Toryism and although many of the rank and file voted Whig in 1832, there was solid backing for the Tory cause in 1839. The movement of Wesleyanism to the Whig party in the 1840s was mostly, argues Gowland, a reaction against the specific policies of Peel.³

The effect of this political stance was twofold. Firstly it made the sect palatable to industrialists who were non-conformist in belief but were unhappy with some of the political reformist attitudes of the older Dissenting bodies. The Wesleyan Church became the spiritual home of many of the least reformist of the mill and factory owners, and they further confirmed the church in its reactionary political and social attitudes. Gowland shows manufacturers and merchants as the largest occupational group in the three Lancashire towns that he studied.⁴

1 Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, Quotation in H.U. Faulkner, Op.Cit., p.89.

2 R. Cowherd, Op.Cit., p.17.

3 D.A. Gowland, Methodist Secessions, (1979), pp.120-21,131. See also the descriptions of secessions in W.R. Ward, Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850, (1972).

4 Ibid, p.171

The second effect was that those Methodists who sought for changes in the social or political system were either expelled or seceded to form separate branches of Methodism.¹ The only ones of these which achieved any numerical force were the followers of Alexander Kilham, who formed the New Connexion in 1797, and the Primitive Methodists who seceded in 1811. This latter sect fully developed the revivalist camp meetings, the itinerant lay preachers, and the class system, which had a profound influence on working class movements in the 19th Century. It became almost exclusively a proletarian church. It was, said Mary Simpson

"the only real religion of the working classes."²

The secessionists however were even more localised than the Wesleyans and only outnumbered the parent body in Derbyshire, Norfolk and the rural parts of Yorkshire. In 1850 the combined secessionist churches did not number more than 200,000.

The effect of Methodism at least in its Wesleyan aspect was to hinder the material advance of the working class. E.P. Thompson argues that it was the carrier of the new work discipline of industrialism. It was generally the upholder of industrial exploitation of the worker by a methodist millocracy, and through its doctrinal teaching of hell and salvation it was the wielder of a psychological terror that resulted in political submissiveness.³

1 Ibid, pp.24-25, 119.

2 M. Simpson, Ploughing and Sowing, (1861), p.137 .

3 E.P. Thompson, Op.Cit., His argument is developed pp. 350-400.

Although many Chartists had been educated in or influenced by the Methodist church, few remained in it once they became involved in Radical working class politics. One sympathetic historian of Methodism notes with regret that

"the church which had the greatest influence among the industrial workers was strongly and even bitterly opposed to Chartist agitation."¹

The Methodists, of any persuasion, tended to keep clear of educational enterprises, such as mechanics' institutes, which were outside their own limited organisation of Sunday schools and adult classes. There was amongst them an ambivalence towards education that is not found in the other non-conformist churches. Much of their activity was concentrated on the saving of the individual soul, and besides this, concern for material welfare was insignificant. Emphasis was on the three R's of Ruin, Redemption and Regeneration, and on changing the character of the saved sinner in matters of personal piety, general sobriety, and self discipline. There was a distrust, which was probably strongest amongst the Primitive Methodists, of the intellect, and a discouragement of wide reading and intellectual speculation. The Bible was the only work of literature which they felt worthy of study, and while their religious affiliation encouraged them to become literate, it did not encourage wide education. J. Barker, the ex-Methodist, recalled his experience of his local Wesleyan church when he was young.

"Neither the preacher nor the leading members among the Methodists appear to have had the least desire to spread knowledge or to make people intelligent or wise."²

1 M. Edwards, Methodism and England, (1943), p.47.

2 J. Barker, His History and Confessions of a Man as put forth by himself, (1846), p.79.

Such an attitude to education, as it applied to mechanics' institutes is well illustrated by events at Gloucester. The Gloucester Mechanics' Institute was no Radical body such as was its near neighbour at Cheltenham Spa. After some obscure early years, it was properly constituted in 1840 and run by a committee of respectable gentlemen and tradesmen along non-controversial lines. It had the usual classes in English, Writing, Arithmetic and Drawing, and provided a mixed bag of lectures, though with some attempt to emphasise science and technology, and it seemed sensitive to religious pressure. In January 1841 the committee cancelled the order for the Weekly Despatch, replacing it by the Times, because

"religious matters were treated in it with profanity,
if not infidelity",

and three lectures on phrenology were given special reference¹ to Christian doctrine and education. Among the clergymen supporting the institute were an Anglican and Unitarian.

One speciality the institute developed was its concerts, sometimes of classical music, sometimes of popular ballads. The concerts were very successful, critically acclaimed by the local press and attracting the patronage of some of the leading gentry in and around the town. They could hardly have been more respectable, but the attendance at one of the concerts in 1841 of a number of Wesleyans who belonged to the institute, started a lengthy controversy.² The members were threatened with expulsion from their chapel unless they ceased attending the institute.

This led to a vigorous protest from the institute secretary,

1 Gloucester Journal, 23 January 1841, 17 July 1841.

2 Mss. in Gloucester Public Library

William Higgs, to the superintendent minister of the Wesleyan circuit, at the intemperate behaviour of one of his ministers. He claimed that

"the institution having for its objects the rescue of the working classes from ignorance and debasing sensuality, of supplying them with the means of moral and intellectual culture, and of providing them with an innocent and unimpeachable species of recreation"

was not a body that the Methodists could fairly condemn.¹ He got little joy from the superintendent or minister, and the small number of Methodists affected made their choice between the chapel or the institute.

However a former friend of Higgs carried on a correspondence with him over the affair in an attempt to bring Higgs back to the Methodist fold in which he apparently had once dwelt.² In a revealing passage in one letter, the friend wrote,

"As respects the office you sustain as secretary to the mechanics' institute, I do most candidly confess that I never cast my eye upon the announcement of those meetings and see your name appended to them, but with a degree of anguish of mind. What glory have you brought God thereby, and what real, lasting or permanent benefit to your soul or the soul of others."

In another passage he criticises Higgs' habit of forming friendships with intellectuals which he construed as a temptation from the true path of God.

One of the reasons for the lack of Methodist involvement was unwillingness of that church to work in organisations which also contained members of other non-conformist bodies who were likely to accept more Radical views in politics and religion than most Methodists would take. This was true at Gloucester, where Higgs

1 Gloucester Journal, 26 March 1841.

2 Mss. letters in Gloucester Public Library.

claimed that a Young Men's Union he had started for young Christians foundered after Wesleyans were unable to overcome their suspicion of Baptists and Independents who attended it, and attacked it from their pulpits. The same problem befell the Gloucester Sunday School from which Higgs was eventually forced to resign as superintendent.¹

A similar situation occurred in Macclesfield where a Sunday school had been set up with the intention of being non-sectarian. It was supported by the Unitarians, Baptists and Independents, but the Methodists and Anglicans would not support it.² It was from this Sunday school that the Macclesfield Mechanics' Institute was launched in 1833 with the backing of the three non-conformist churches and the majority of the town's silk manufacturers.³ It would be hard to describe it as other than a very middle class institution which eschewed Radical working class or middle class politics. Indeed a number of the silk manufacturers on its committee had suffered in the silk workers' riots of 1829, including its chief benefactor and Whig MP, John Brocklehurst.⁴ Nevertheless the Methodists kept well clear of it.

While Methodism can clearly be seen as a body not supporting and very often opposing the efforts of working men to improve their economic, cultural and political situation, it has been argued that in one sense it greatly facilitated working class

1 Information in the Higgs' letters.

2 C.S. Davies, A History of Macclesfield, (1961), p.219.

3 Ibid, p.225

4 Ibid, p.181

advance. The very experience of Methodism, with its democratic organisation, class system, and open air meeting, was educational in one sense, and it gave many men their first training in handling meetings, preparing speeches, organising tours, and debating in classes. And though the leadership frowned on political Radicals, and regularly expelled them from the Church, many local communities were involved in political activities of Luddites, unions and the like.¹ Among working class leaders who were once Methodists, and received their early training there, were Joseph Barker, John Culpan, Abraham Hanson, and Ben Haigh. Hobsbawm considers that the effectiveness of the official conservative Wesleyan line over the rank-and-file has been exaggerated. In areas where working men felt themselves forced into revolutionary activity, the Methodist workman would not inevitably set himself apart.²

Nevertheless it is easier to argue that the total impact on society of the Methodist movement was to add support to those forces which aimed to preserve the economic status quo at the cost of increased exploitation of the working class, and that political Radicals were generally expelled from the Methodist rank. It is their political conservatism and ambivalent attitude towards education that made Methodists such uncertain supporters of mechanics' institutes. There were of course some exceptions, notably the Rev. T. Allin of the New Connexion at Sheffield, who wrote a pamphlet in defence of mechanics' institutes

1 This is a central argument in R.F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850. (1947).

2 E. Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution', Op. Cit., p.31.

in 1833, and at Ripon the Williamson family, Wesleyan Whig manufacturers were the main force behind the mechanics' institute.

3.5 The Churches and the Teaching of Science

The non-conformist churches in general would appear to have had a greater commitment to the propagation of science. In the dissenting academies, particularly at Daventry and Warrington, they had demonstrated how science should be incorporated into the school syllabus, and in the scientific and literary institute, and particularly in the Lunar Society, the non-conformists who composed most of the membership, had encouraged and popularised the study of natural philosophy and science. Their support for mechanics' institutes was an extension of that activity.

The Anglicans, though containing among their clerics a number of pioneering scientists, expressed as a body a greater suspicion of the study of science. A clergyman

"expressed his fears that the mechanics would have no time to say their prayers if they were scientific."¹

And Wilberforce could add

"I cannot but entertain a strong persuasion, that to instruct any class of men, but especially our artisans of all sorts, in the various branches of philosophy, leaving them altogether ignorant of the grounds on which we rest the Divine Authority of Christianity, will be but too sure and expedient for training up a race of self-conceited sceptics."²

¹ Quotation in J.G. Godard, George Birkbeck: The Pioneer of Popular Education, p.88.

² R.I. and S. Wilberforce, A Life of William Wilberforce, (1838), Vol V, p.255.

Cattell quoted a clergyman who commented on the study of cerebral physiology:

"I conceive that everything that tends to exalt man, his intellect, his power, his greatness, his wisdom, etc. is calculated to bring the soul into that state of independence of God by which our first parents were seduced."¹

Two writers in the Quarterly Review in 1825 made the common relationship between science, infidelity and revolution.

"A public lecturer, who is so inclined will find no difficulty in insinuating, together with geometry or chemistry, the elements of infidelity and sedition."²

The opposing view was expressed by Brougham who claimed that

"It is preposterous to imagine that the enlargement of our acquaintance with the laws which regulate the universe, can dispose to unbelief."³

The strongest counter-blast to Brougham came from the Anglican clergyman at the Laura Chapel, Bath, the Rev. E.W. Grinfield, in a pamphlet impressively moderate in tone and lucid in argument.⁴ Grinfield, although a well-known supporter of popular elementary education, saw Brougham's suggestions as totally misconceived. He argued that Brougham had ignored the prior need for a sound basis of elementary education, and was mistaken in believing the working people in mass would show any great interest in science education. He was unhappy with the 'crabbed doctrines of political economy' which he believed would be propagated by Brougham and his friends in the institutes.

1 C. Cattell, Op.Cit., p.10.

2 J.B. Sumner and J.T. Coleridge, 'Mechanics Institutions and Infant Schools', Quarterly Review, 32, 1825, p.414.

3 H. Brougham, Op.Cit., p.31.

4 E.W. Grinfield, 'A Reply to Mr. Brougham's Practical Observations', (1825), in G. Levine (Ed.), The Emergence of Victorian Consciousness, (1967).

"A man whose hours are chiefly devoted to handicraft labour or mechanical operations is likely to derive more benefit from reading on moral and miscellaneous subjects than any researches into the philosophy of trade and commerce."¹

Grinfield's position was one of Tory orthodoxy.

"Every friend to our present establishments in Church and State is bound now to lend his influence to keep things in their proper channels by making the knowledge and the education of the poor subservient to their advancement in piety and morals and by increasing their attachment to the laws and institutions of our country ... if the education of the labouring orders is not to produce confusion and jealousy, it ought to harmonise with that of the upper classes of society."²

Grinfield failed to see how science education would help to achieve these education goals, and advocated instead the study of history, biography and moral tales. His opinion of Brougham's suggestions for mechanics' institutes, though not of adult education in general, was that they were

"enough to alarm all sober and prudent persons amongst the middle and upper orders of society, and to render the labouring classes uneasy, unhappy, and dissatisfied."³

Opposition to mechanics' institutes was not confined to Anglicans. Some non-conformists were equally suspicious of the science-based institutions. For example, at Adwalton, the mechanics' institute initially used the schoolroom of the Methodist New Connexion chapel, but in 1847 the schoolmaster

"refuses to let them have it any more, unless the Institute is founded on religious principles, because ... it will make the members all infidels."⁴

1 Ibid, p.230.

2 Ibid, p.232 and 234.

3 Ibid, p.229.

4 Annual Report, YUMI, 1847, p.22.

At Eccleshill, near Bradford, the Independent minister expelled the mechanics' institute from the school building on the grounds that

"so mich lornin nobad made foulks infidels".¹

Cattell linked all the churches together in his sweeping attack

"What has been more opposed to science and free instruction than the churches? The bigotry of the sects prevents the spread of everything which is calculated to enlighten the masses of the people. Knowing that free enquiry generally ends in discussion, the Church tries to prevent it. The Church is the place for obedience and submission. If you want to exercise your reason and moral courage you must come out of it."²

In general, however, the non-conformist clerics were in broad sympathy with education for the working man, though with various qualifications. Rev. T. Allin, the Sheffield Methodist, argued that

"Christianity not only allows but requires the acquisition of general knowledge."³

And J. Acworth, a Baptist minister, argued the same line in a published address given at Bradford Mechanics' Institute.⁴

Disagreements about the wisdom of setting up mechanics' institutes did not normally extend to disagreements about the purpose of providing for the working man. The aim of creating a God-fearing church-going body of working men who accepted the equity of the society they were in, and internalised the values and behaviour which were harmonious with the continuing existence of that

society, bound most of the warring clerics together. The

1 J. Popple, Op. Cit., p.160.

2 C. Cattell, Op. Cit., p.10.

3 T. Allin, Mechanics' Institutions and the Universal Diffusion of Knowledge Defended on Christian Principles ..., (1833).

4 J. Acworth, An Account of the Proceedings Connected with the Inauguration of Rev. J. Acworth ..., (1837).

common view was well expressed by the Unitarian, the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, president of the Mechanics' Institute at York, in a pamphlet published in 1828. He defended his support for the mechanics' institute movement on the grounds that it would check presumption by the lower classes to aspire towards the life and status of the prosperous middle classes. He dismissed the likelihood of any working man having the ability to acquire enough learning to reach parity with the educated middle class, except in the case of rare genius. To come into contact with the extent of universal knowledge would, he claimed, teach mechanics humility and diffidence, and check 'any tendency to self-conceit'.¹ There was no danger, he concluded, that

"universal diffusion of science should produce universal disorganisation of society".

Wellbeloved joined with two other Unitarian ministers from Manchester College, York, in sponsoring the institute, and its broad support for Whig reformism ensured the support of its local members of parliament. Another Unitarian, Rev. E. Higginson of Derby wrote in a pamphlet published three years earlier that through education

"respect for the laws and a ready obedience to them; that due subordination of rank on which the well-being of every gradation in society depends; and the faithful discharge of those duties which we owe the whole community, are among the plainest results of that intelligence which shall teach to every man the obligations which he contracts as a member of a social state."²

1 C. Wellbeloved, The Large Extent of the Subjects of Knowledge a Motive to Diffidence and Humility, (1828) in particular pp. 5-6.

2 E. Higginson, Observations Addressed to all Classes of the Community on the Establishment of Mechanics' Institutions, (1825), p.9.

Acworth had argued that the expansion of the mind was a compensation for the necessary absence of the goods of fortune, and Allin made it clear that he did not see the purpose of mechanics' institutes as elevating any man in rank. It was not necessarily the case that even a Unitarian minister was seen, or saw himself, as anything but a conservative influence. This is perhaps best illustrated at Tyldesley in Lancashire where the institute was in disfavour because seven of its members had been publicly denounced as Owenites and infidels. To restore respectability to it, a local Unitarian minister, the Rev. Dr. Harrison, was persuaded to become a member and teacher of its classes.¹

In concluding this analysis of clerical response to mechanics' institutes, we would emphasise the urgency with which many in the churches perceived the need for some effective mechanisms that could be used to influence the religious beliefs and social values of the people. The churches did not possess in their membership anything like a majority of the working class. The census of public worship in 1851 revealed clearly that the churches did not touch most working men, and in some areas, notably, Lancashire, the North-East, and the Black Country there was a high level of indifference or hostility to the churches. The pertinent comment of the census is:

"it is observable how absolutely insignificant a portion of the congregations is composed of artisans".²

1 R.V. Holt, Op.Cit., p.269

2 Census of Religious Worship, 1852-3, p. clviii.

In the following section of this chapter we examine a number of mechanics' institutes as case studies in which various struggles for dominant influence took place. At Barnsley and Bradford the story is one of vigorous efforts by the churches to prevent secularists and free-thinkers having a platform within the institute. At Ripon and Redditch a non-conformist body is successfully invaded by the Church of England. At Coventry an alliance of non-conformists with Chartists and socialists is broken by the Church of England. At Leeds the non-conformists in alliance with Whig Radicals occasioned a long-lasting debate within the Anglican community which raises the viability of independent Church institutes. At Chester the Anglican establishment with the help of some non-conformists takes effective control of the institute.

3.6 The Barnsley Mechanics' Institute¹

The first institute presented in dramatic form the intermingling of religious and political hostilities. It was founded in 1831 and lasted little over a year. Problems arose from the presence of Joseph Crabtree, the leader of the working class Radicals, who with his supporters raised religious topics for discussion in the institute.

"The infidel party challenged anyone to prove the existence of God, or to prove the truths of revealed religion."

1 This account is based on the research of J. Popple, Op.Cit., Vol.2, pp. 74-88, and J. Popple, Notes and Queries, Vol.5, No.7, (1958), and Vol.6, No.1, (1959).

There was a strong reaction from the Church and Crown faction who tried to stop the discussions and expel the ringleaders. Over a minor matter, whether or not to admit fiction to the library, the institute was formally closed, but it had already disintegrated through the religious squabble.

Almost at once a new institute was formed of a more conservative nature. Lord Morpeth and Lord Wharnccliffe, political rivals but at one in desiring a more orderly institute, joined forces with Charles Tee, a prominent linen manufacturer, and the Rev. H.B. Cooke, the vicar. This did not appeal much to many of the working class. Only four years before Tee had been stoned by strikers, and Cooke was to achieve notoriety in 1839 for his severity as a magistrate in dealing with rioters. The institute never really got under way and received very little support.

As a rival to this institute, a group of working men set up a working men's institute. They included a joiner, two weavers, a shoe dealer, a warehouseman and a druggist, and were led by John Widdup. The subscription was one penny a week, and admission to the body was by ballot of the members. Politically it was a Radical body, but it broke up on religious issues again when Crabtree was admitted. He carried on his attacks on christianity and alienated many of the members. Widdup, Crabtree and another member, Amos Maudsley, were all to be sent to prison for their part in the riots of 1839.

The fourth institute was formed in 1836 and was a successful defeat of the non-believers' challenge for the right of free speech. The institute broadly represented the middle-class reformist Whigs, and two of its leading members were the Congregationalists, Rev. Tully Crubbace and Dr. G.H. Smith. Most of the committee were professional or businessmen, and the Hon. J.S. Wortley and the Wentworths of Wentworth Castle gave support. Agitators and troublemakers were kept out. The years of 1837-39 were ones of depression and disturbance in Barnsley, but the institute report was able to announce that

"not one of the members was ever found to associate himself with any of the meetings or engage in any procession of an intimidating character."¹

While much of the dissension in the Barnsley institutes was political, religious dissension played a key part in bringing down two of the institutes, and the fourth was established within the broad stream of non-conformity that dominated the town.

3.7 Bradford Mechanics' Institute²

The first initiative towards an institute, which seems to have sprung from a group of workers, ran into trouble very quickly. A meeting was held in February 1825 at which at least some manufacturers were present, and Edward Baines addressed the meeting. Edward Baines, a key figure in the development of the mechanics' institutes in Yorkshire, was a great admirer of

¹ Annual Report, YUMI, 1842, p.15.

² The history of this institute is recorded by C.A. Federer, The Bradford Mechanics' Institute: A History (1906). The institute still exists and holds its records.

Lord Brougham, whose political views he endorsed, and was well favoured by the mill owners. He cannot have been pleased at the way things developed at the institute, for a group of working men gained control and were viewed with great suspicion by the middle classes. Considerable pressure was put on the institute, and its support drifted away, on account of

"the strict aloofness observed by both churchmen and dissenters in Bradford, the promoters being known as men of pronounced sceptical opinions."¹

There was probably more to it than opposition to non-Christian working class leadership. The town was in a turmoil in 1825 as a consequence of the great turn-out and the creation of an institute run by some of the workers' leaders was almost bound to have a hostile reception.

When the idea of an institute was revived, arrangements were carefully made so that no similar situation could arise. The leader was Joseph Farrar, a devout Baptist, and a self trained worker-scholar, son of a Scottish packman, and apprenticed as a reedmaker and wool comber. With the help of the local school-master he drew up a scheme for another institute, and managed to get support from some of the influential people in the town. He was publicly backed by ministers of the Independent, Baptist, and Methodist churches, a Roman Catholic priest, and some leading Quakers. At a public meeting, the feeling was that the institute could only succeed if the religious problem was solved, and on the initiative of one of the Quakers, a complicated formula was devised and accepted for publication as a preamble to the rules:

¹ Ibid, p.6.

"Although the institution does not profess to assume the character of a religious society, yet it fully recognises the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures and the important truths of Christianity as recorded therein - and it is understood that everything calculated to throw discredit on these, or to encourage irreligion, immorality or scepticism, shall be entirely excluded from its discussions and proceedings; and further that all subjects immediately connected with controversial theology or party politics shall also be wholly inadmissible."¹

This was much more than the usual disclaimer attached to institutes' rules, but it was effective in getting the institute under way. The first president was a well-known Baptist scholar, Rev. Dr. Steadman, head of the Baptist college at Little Horton and others of his staff helped in running the institute. Many independents were active on the committee, and one Wesleyan, Dr. Beaumont, was a keen supporter. Nevertheless the Church of England remained aloof for many years, and some Methodists disapproved of it to the point of teaching against it.²

While the institute reflected non-conformist and Whig views it did not altogether exclude those of more Radical opinions. One of the originators of the earlier doomed institute was a well-known freethinker, Christopher Wilkinson, and he was accepted as a member because he was so well-liked by the members and because he was prepared to abide by the rules. It is significant however that he was seen by the Bradford Chartists as a fringe member whose loyalties were suspect and it is doubtful if his influence on Bradford working class politics was very strong.³

1 Ibid, p.46 .

2 Ibid, p.46 .

3 A.J. Peacock, Bradford Chartism, 1838-40, (1969), p.9.

The case studies at Barnsley and Bradford show a struggle between the churches on the one side and secularists on the other. The following case studies of institutes at Ripon, Redditch, Coventry and Leeds concern the struggle for power between the non-conformists who had set up mechanics' institutes and the Church of England which at some point decided to challenge non-conformist control.

3.8 Ripon Mechanics' Institute¹

A mechanics' institute was founded in 1831, primarily on the initiative of two varnish manufacturers, the Williamson brothers. They, like other of the instigators, were Wesleyans and Whig reformists, and were on that account opposed by Anglican and Tory interests. The gentry as a whole opposed the body, and there was general criticism of its political bias and objection to the name and character of mechanics' institutions. The working class did not much favour it, not only because of its Broughamite policy, but also because of its constitution which gave the ordinary member no voice in the management. In 1844 a Literary Society was run in association with the mechanics' institution, and this brought in many middle and upper class people, giving the whole body much greater respectability.

In 1847, a decisive change in the fortunes took place with the appointment of the Rev. Dr. Henry David Erskine as Dean of Ripon. He was a great enthusiast for mechanics' institutes, and a

1 J.F.C. Harrison, Living and Learning, p.179, based on the Annual Reports of the YUMI.

reorientation of attitude by the Anglican party rapidly manifest itself. Most of the local gentry gave it support, a new room was acquired for its use, and membership trebled to nearly three hundred. In 1848 the institute had the distinction of playing host to the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes, with the Dean presiding and many County notables in attendance. The Dean gave his support to many small institutes, like Kirkby Malzeard, Thorp Arch and Ripley as well as to the large town institutes and Union.¹

The effect of the support of the Dean of Ripon was often to change institutes from their predominant non-conformity to Anglican aligned bodies. This was the avowed purpose of many vicars under his influence, as for instance at Slaithwaite. There, an institute had been started in 1839 by a group of young men who, having no premises, met for lectures and classes in their cottages. They had

"to struggle for the right to exist in defiance of covert opponents, in the absence of patronage, and in the dark shadow of cold indifference."²

They were in dire straits by 1847, but the situation improved rapidly when they offered the presidency to the Vicar. He laid down as a condition of acceptance that the institute must work within the spirit of the Anglican Church. It then gained the support of the gentry and farmers, although the committee continued to be chosen from among working men.

1 A R Y U M I, 1850, p.64.

2 J. Popple, Op.Cit., Vol.2, p.372.

The mechanics' institute at Weston-super-Mare got into such a parlous state that in 1854 it made an approach to the local clergy who had previously stood aloof from it, which was virtually a take-over offer. The committee suggested that in return for the formal backing and accrediting by the clergy, they would change the rules so that the institute was 'subordinate to the essential principles of Christianity' they would get rid of books that were of dubious morality, and reject members who were of unsound opinion.¹ The deal did not, however, go through, and the institute closed down.

3.9 Redditch Literary and Scientific Institute²

Redditch was one of the many towns that had grown from minute settlements in 1800 to thriving industrial centres within three or four decades. Its economy was built on the manufacture of needles, a highly skilled craft involving a number of specialised and diversified processes, all of which relied on skill of hand and very little on machinery. Most manufacture was done by men in their homes on contract to merchants or manufacturers. The men were highly-paid and the general level of education in the town was remarkably high. So too were rates of mortality. The men suffered from a disease caused by grinding needles, and commonly died in early middle life.³

1 Somerset County Gazette, 26 June 1854.

2 Details taken from institute minute books, except where otherwise stated.

3 For a description of the town of Redditch, see The Working Man, 3 March 1866.

The mechanics' institute was founded in 1850, partly as the result of pressure from a number of workmen, partly through the enthusiasm of a number of manufacturers. Dr. Herbert Page writing in 1884 ascribes the foundation to

"the spontaneous and laudable aspirations of some young men of the town, willingly supported by the manufacturers."¹

Most of the manufacturers were non-conformist, and although the curate, the Rev. Fessey, was not unsympathetic to the idea of an institute, the vicar at Tardebigge, the Rev. Dr. MacKarness, who later became Bishop of Oxford, looked at it coldly.

Nevertheless the institute was started in a room belonging to a stationer's shop in Prospect Hill, after an application to use the National School was turned down by the vicar. Once it was clear that the body was well-supported and there was every indication that it would be successful, the Church and Tory party decided it was time to take control. The chief landowner and local squire was Robert Clive who held the title of Earl of Plymouth in abeyance. At a meeting between the promoters and Clive, MacKarness, Fessey and the Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Caldwell, the terms on which the Anglican Church and its friends would support the institute were thrashed out, and agreement was reached on the hiring of the National School for institute classes and lectures.² Herbert Page's comment on this is revealing. He wrote that the institute

1 H. Page, Mss in Minute Books, and Redditch Indicator, 5 February 1884.

2 Letter from W. Avery, 14 September 1898, in minute books.

"was not non-conformist as were the originators of the scheme, but Churchmen, who, seeing the scheme was going to be carried out therefore they must control matters."

Robert Clive became president, and on the committee with Fessey and MacKarness were a number of needle-manufacturers, a local doctor and solicitor, some of the tradesmen of the town, and one or two gentlemen. At a later stage Lord Beauchamp of Ragley Hall was associated with the body, and one of the occasional lecturers, Coleridge, later became Lord Chief Justice. Henceforth the Church was very influential in the institute, and although the non-conformists were also well-represented, the tone of the body was highly respectable and politically innocuous.

3.10 Coventry Mechanics' Institute

Apart from the political struggles in this institute, which we have already examined in Chapter 2, there was much connected religious trouble. Among the early supporters of the institute were four Independent ministers and two Baptist ministers. Most of the prominent laymen associated with it were non-conformists and some were agnostics. Some of the non-conformists were persistent antagonists of the Established Church, vigorously attacking the Cathedral party, and there was a long 'drawn-out' battle over Church rates which resulted in a magistrate, A. Hands, and some of the Dissenting ministers having their goods distrained.¹

1 P. Searby, Op. Cit., p.6.

Not surprisingly, the Bishop opposed the institute from the start, and only one Anglican clergyman was prepared to give it any support. The Coventry Standard accused the institute of within twelve months packing the committee with young men, all of whom were Dissenters.¹ In 1829, Dr. W.F. Hook became vicar of Holy Trinity. He was a man who made an important impact on the development of education for the working class, particularly after 1835 when he was in Leeds, but his work at Coventry was of considerable significance. His sympathy with the working man is clear enough. He had a concern to improve his material conditions, a missionary zeal to reinterpret Christianity for the working man through an enlightened system of education, a flexibility towards many of the rigidly held prejudices of his day, a personal faith that drew from both evangelicism and the High Church movement.

It seems that many of the working class accepted his concern and trustworthiness, even if they rejected his beliefs and programmes. He was certainly no political Radical, nor Chartist sympathiser, but his views were treated with some respect. In 1847 he addressed an audience of Leeds working class as follows:

"I may sometimes have given you offence, but I hope that you will believe that I am your friend, desirous in every possible way to promote your interest. My heart is right, my heart is yours, and I call upon you to prevent the cause of education being retarded in its progress."²

1. Coventry Standard, 12 November 1841.

2. W.R.W. Stephens, Op.Cit., Vol.II, p.213.

In spite of the wide differences between them, his speech was cheered by the Chartists who were present. But it was philanthropy, not political or economic change that motivated his activities.

"Living as I do among the working people, I cannot but share in their feelings to a certain extent, and this, not political reforms, this social reform is the grand point which must occupy the mind of the philanthropic politician."¹

As 'the working man's vicar', he supported the Ten Hours Bill, the Early Closing Movement, the development of amenities like public parks and libraries. He looked sympathetically on some of the co-operative ventures, and was trusted enough by the workers to be asked to arbitrate in the coal strike of 1858. He was opposed to reformist Whiggism and was in attitude and belief one of the Radical Tories who followed Oastler.

When he arrived in Coventry, he set about breathing life into the Church and providing for the wants of the people. He built up a large Sunday school and an infants school, and he started a people's dispensary and a penny savings bank. He was sympathetic to the idea of a mechanics' institute, but could not approve of the one at Coventry because of its aggressive non-conformity.

This became somewhat of a problem when his Sunday school got under way. More and more of his pupils stayed on there to become teachers, and looked for somewhere to carry on their own

1 W.R.W. Stephens, Op. Cit., Vol. II p.213, pp.494-9, December 1891.

education. They went along to the mechanics' institute which was the only body providing classes and lectures.

"They had resorted to the mechanics' institute where political topics were frequently brought under discussion in a manner offensive to their feelings, while a spirit hostile to religion, and especially the Church, prevailed."¹

They therefore approached Dr. Hook with their problem, and he decided to set up a separate Christian body which he called the Coventry Society for Religious and Useful Knowledge. The Bishop was president, the Archdeacon was vice-president, and a number of clergymen were on the committee. It claimed to be politically neutral:

"It offered a banquet where Whig, Tory and truly reforming Radical may intermingle for good",

but it was specifically Christian.

"While no species of knowledge calculated to benefit its members will be neglected, instruction in the faith and discipline of the Christian Church is recognised as a primary object of the Society."²

The initial reaction was good. Six hundred members enrolled in the first year, a library was formed. The mechanics' institute attacked the new body and accused Dr. Hook of trying to destroy them. All Dissenting churches except the Wesleyans joined in the attack, but Hook rather welcomed this as he thought it increased the support his own body got. It is unlikely that any of the members of Hook's Society would otherwise have joined the mechanics' institute, but the existence of the two rivals polarised religious differences, and to a large degree political differences as well.

1 Viscount Ingestre, (ed.), Meliora, (1852), p.36.

2 Coventry Standard, 1 September 1837.

In 1836, Hook moved from Coventry to Leeds, but the situation he left behind became more and more tense. By 1838, the heightened feelings caused by the political activities of the radicals turned the Tory spotlight onto the mechanics' institute again. The Coventry Standard stated that

"Among the pamphlets offered for sale at the rooms of the institute are many whose tendency is decidedly towards unbelief and deism."¹

At the Annual General Meeting in 1839, one of the platform party, Arthur Adams, made a vigorous attack on Dr. Hook's Society. Another proclaimed to applause that

"the doctrines of the Church of England have destroyed more souls than it has saved."²

The Coventry Standard whipped up a campaign against the mechanics' institute, and some gestures were made to placate the Tory wrath.

"Deistical works were available in their library for years, and were not suppressed until public indignation was aroused by the Standard."³

The rule about religious and political neutrality was reaffirmed for what it was worth, and things were kept quiet for a few months. But in 1841, at the Annual General Meeting, two non-conformist clergymen made a biting attack on the Established Church. This was a regular occurrence, and nothing was said at first, but the committee was put in a quandary when the Rev. W. Drake, an Anglican schoolmaster, offered to support the institute, if he could be convinced that the rule on political neutrality was effective.

1 Coventry Standard, 1 June 1838.

2 Ibid, October 1839.

3 Ibid, 19 November 1841.

Drake was an astute man, and a good deal wiser than most of his fellow Churchmen. While they were taking up opposing, conflicting positions, he timed his emergence as a consensual figure with fine judgement. He threw the responsibility for decision-making firmly on the mechanics' institute, and the committee responded by very belatedly condemning the speeches of the ministers, whereupon Drake became a member.

The reaction to this was strong. Many people felt that the committee was guilty of blatant hypocrisy, in condemning for convenience attitudes they were known to support. Various correspondents to the Coventry Standard undertook the duty of revealing to the Rev. Drake what a band of infidels he had joined.

"Notwithstanding the boasted neutrality in politics and religion, its objective was to provide radicalism in politics and dissent in religion"

wrote one.

"It would be honest and creditable to the committee at once to acknowledge that in the educating of the people their objective is to give a radical and dissenting bias to the instruction given; this their leading advocates virtually admit by their partisan oratory"

wrote another.

"I call to mind many who have become infidel socialists since joining the institute: I know of none who have been converted from infidelity"

said a third.¹

1 Coventry Standard, 19 November 1841.

The attack on Drake was made more in sorrow than anger, but he answered his critics in a letter to the Coventry Herald. He regretted that in the past any men

"should have infringed the neutrality and violated the spirit and constitution of the Society",

but was convinced that this would not happen again. He was fortified in his position by a letter published in The Leicester Journal which recounted his good work for the artisans of that town and the beneficial results that had flowed from it. This was reprinted in the Coventry Herald.¹

Drake had thus placed the burden of proving that they did mean what they said firmly on the committee of the institute, and not only was the searchlight of publicity played on them to make sure they did not hoodwink the public, but also Drake was inside the walls, and soon on the committee, to keep an eye on things. Thus in order for the institute to carry on in its accustomed way, it would have to initiate open conflict, and while this was not impossible, the members in fact began to redefine the situation in order to reach some kind of consensus. It is not easy for any social organisation to remain in conflict with a powerful and well-organised opposition without eventually looking for ways of reducing tension. Once this opposition materialised in 1838, the institute was likely to make some move of accommodation to a truce position. The more extreme members who opposed such a compromise tended to drop out, and the definition of a truce area became easier.

¹ Coventry Herald, 12 November 1841, 2 December 1841.

From 1842 the rule on religious and political neutrality was rigorously applied, and a number of Anglican clergymen joined the institute, obtaining places on the committee and offering their services as lecturers. Of seven lecturers in 1853, five were clergymen.¹ By 1849, the Annual Report was complaining of growing apathy by the townsmen to the institute and attributing it to the ban on politics, and in 1855 a member wrote to The Coventry Herald criticising the monopoly the Church and Parson influence had obtained.² The ultimate conclusion to this was reached in 1855 when the mechanics' institute amalgamated with the Religious and Useful Knowledge Society under the name of the Coventry Institute.³ 127 members voted for the amalgamation and only 8 against. Most people appeared to feel that there were no longer any important differences of opinion between the two bodies, which is a comment on the extent to which the mechanics' institute had compromised in the direction of the Anglican position.

3.11 The Church Mechanics' Institutes

Following the establishment and success of the Coventry Religious Institute, a number of Anglican bodies were started in various parts of the country. At Islington an Institute for the Promotion of Religious and Useful Knowledge was started in 1838. There were Societies for the Diffusion of Religious and Useful Knowledge at Northampton (1839) and Bridgnorth (1851). Church Institutes

1 Annual Report 1853.

2 Ibid, 23 February 1855.

3 Coventry Institute Inaugural General Meeting, 1855.

were founded at Rochdale, Bolton, Bury, Burnley and Warrington in Lancashire; at Wakefield, Sheffield, Bradford and Leeds in Yorkshire.¹

Some of the propagandists for the mechanics' institute movement were not happy with this development. Thomas Coates wrote in 1839:

"The clergy of the Established Church have recently been occupying themselves in founding Mechanics' Institutions in towns where others already existed; and with the express condition in some of them that all office bearers shall be members of the Established Church, and that instruction in the evidences of the Christian faith, as professed by the Church of England, shall be given in the institution. As these societies depend principally upon honorary members for support, the subscription to them is usually very small...and the workmen have all the advantages of a Mechanics' Institution at a very cheap rate..... this rivalry divides the small funds, which united are seldom adequate to the efficient support of a single institution it opens a fresh field for those sectarian and political animosities which have already a sufficiently wide range; and it gives the workmen a distrust of institutions which seem founded by the opulent classes, or at least are used by them, less for his benefit than for the purpose of obtaining a triumph over those who differ from them in religious or political matters." 2

Hudson was prepared to accept that Church institutes had been successful in towns where Dissent was weak, but in towns like Sheffield and Burnley, where opinion was more divided, antagonism to them caused the promoters heavy losses.³ Relationships between mechanics' institutes and Church institutes were not always unfriendly. At Warrington, the leading patrons of

1 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., pp. 262-4. They are variously listed in T. Coates, J. Hudson, the Census and J. Langley in works cited.

2 T. Coates, Op. Cit., p.15.

3 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., 202.

the mechanics' institute were also vice-presidents of the Church institute, and they hoped that there would be

"No strife or ill-feeling between the members of the different institutions in the town."

The Church institute there felt, however, that the mechanics' institute was not likely to attack the evils which they wished to overcome. These evils were generally defined as socialism, rationalism, and sometimes popery thrown in for good measure.¹

At Wakefield a rival Church institute to the mechanics' institute was set up in 1845, but a number of Anglican clergymen still continued to attend meetings of the mechanics' institute in the next two or three years, and there seems to have been no bitterness between them.²

The issues involved in the establishment of two institutes were most fully explored at Leeds, where Dean Hook had arrived after his experience of guiding a Church mechanics' institute in Coventry.

Leeds Mechanics' Institute

The Leeds Mechanics' Institute had been started in 1826 on the initiative of middle-class Whig non-conformists.³ It remained firmly under an oligarchy of such men, and was frequently criticised for lack of democratic organisation.⁴ Only the first-class subscribers, who paid two pounds entrance fee and ten

1 C. Gerrard, The Church Institute: its objects and the means it uses to attain them, (1855).

2 See J.T. Wilson, Op. Cit., and institute records, 1845-48.

3 The following details taken from the institute records 1824-50 and J. Hudson, Op. Cit., pp.89-93.

4 For example, Brougham Mss., letter from J. Marshall, 12 January 1825.

shillings a year had a share in the management, and there was little working-class support for it. The principal members behind it in the early years were Baines, father and son, who ran the whig Leeds Mercury, Dr. Williamson, and John Marshall, MP, a textile magnate and close friend of Brougham. Several mill owners backed the body, and a number of doctors. Although most were prominent Whigs and Dissenters, one textile magnate, Benjamin Gott, was Anglican and Tory, and the Anglican school-master clergyman from the Grammar School was also involved.

But mostly Anglicans and Tories steered clear of a body so clearly inclined to non-conformity. The Unitarian ministers, Dr. Hutton and Charles Wicksteed, were on the committee, and lay Unitarians included John Marshall, Edwin Gaunt, and the Lipton, Luccock and Kitson families. Dr. Hudson, the historian of adult education, was also Unitarian. Among the Congregationalists represented were the Baines family, the Rev. R. Hamilton, and the Rev. T. Scales, and the Baptists included the Rev. James Acworth and the Rev. J. Giles.

The institute avoided deliberately provocative action aimed at the Established Church, and its political line (which was officially neutral), was some distance from the Radicalism of the Chartists and socialists, although Gaunt and James Hole did represent associationist views and were critics of utilitarianism. The library had the odd copy of works by J.F. Bray and other Radical writers, and took the Northern Star, but in greater number, the library contained the works of writers like Knight, Harriet Martineau and other utilitarians.

The mechanics' institute was thoroughly identified with the Whig non-conformist interests of the town, and in Leeds these interests were very powerful.

The Leeds Mechanics Institute was important because it bore all the outward marks of success. It eventually numbered over one thousand members and had in 1850 an annual income of £1,200.¹ As one of the greater institutes in the country, it had considerable influence, and was a model and source of advice for other smaller bodies. Furthermore, when the Yorkshire Union came into being in 1841, it was for many years run by a committee centred in Leeds, and thus a number of the leading figures of the mechanics' institute movement were associated with the institute there. These included Dr. Hudson, James Hole, and W.H.J. Traice, all of whom wrote influential works on mechanics' institutes.

Hook was inclined to be sympathetic to the Leeds Mechanics' Institute, though he could not approve of some of the activities that went on there.

"In the discussions, offensive principles have been asserted without rebuke; and while books, newspapers and periodicals of an objectionable character have been admitted into the reading room, those have been excluded which could have supplied the antidote."²

Hook conducted an investigation into the Leeds Mechanics' Institute on behalf of the rural deaconary of Leeds, and presented his report to the Chapter in 1851.

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.92.

2 Viscount Ingestre, Meliora, (1852), p.44.

"Your Committee have felt bound to take into consideration the manner in which the clergy should regard the various scientific institutions for the working classes, which, in all directions, are springing up around us.

Some of the clergy, seeing what a great instrument for good they may be turned to, have felt constrained to unite themselves with them; while others, finding the question of religion to be passed over, have felt compelled to withhold their countenance and support. The time, however, seems now to have come for some united action upon this question; it will not do to ignore their existence.

A committee of this Chapter after a careful investigation, reported that a great number of young members of the Church were members of the (Mechanics') Institute - that no books of an immoral or irreligious tendency were admitted to the library, and that generally the working of the institution was not unfavourable to religion; but rather had a decided tendency to improve the moral as well as the intellectual condition of our young men.

Your Committee conceived that the members of the Church ought to take a more decided and leading part in the literary and scientific instruction of the people. If unwillingness exists among any considerable number of their body to unite in institutions which exclude theology as well as politics, and it appears necessary to establish one under no such restriction, they believe that instead of one great institution for the whole town, it would be advisable to combine several adjoining parishes or districts, into smaller affiliated societies, with which libraries, courses of lectures, and night schools should be connected; and it would be very practicable for the whole body to meet in a central place, and together celebrate their anniversary by some social and intellectual entertainment."¹

Following this report, a number of Leeds clergy joined the mechanics' institute, but others maintained that a more Christian institute was needed.

1 W. Hook et al, 'What are the best means of reclaiming our lost population', Report to Ruri-Deaconal Chapter of Leeds, (1852).

Hook had already in 1839 set up a series of Anglican libraries and reading rooms, each under the supervision of a clergyman, and providing some classes and lectures. These, he hoped, would help to counteract the socialists who were busy in the town on their own account at this period.¹

In 1851 he elaborated an ambitious plan for providing each town with a college or institute, employing professors and lecturers, and aiming at the literate workingman who wanted to follow an exacting course of self-improvement. The need was for really adequate premises, a really adequate income, and the appointment of highly competent and well-paid teachers. This could only happen if the resources of the existing institutes were vastly increased. Hook feared that state assistance, if obtained, would be given to mechanics' institutes, and he despaired of obtaining much further support for Church institutes, so he saw as the only practical step the amalgamation of Church and mechanics' institutes. It would be necessary, of course, that controversial politics and religion were excluded from such hybrid bodies.

This scheme, first put to the Wakefield Church Institute and later published in the book, Meliora, had little immediate effect.² The large mechanics' institutes like Leeds could see little in such proposals to their own advantage, and many dangers, not least that a predominantly non-conformist body might find itself taken over by the Church of England.

1 W.A.W. Stephens, Op. Cit., p.287.

2 On the Institutions of Adult Education, pp. 24-50, in Viscount Ingestre, (Ed.), Meliora, (1852).

Hook therefore was led to support the founding of a Leeds Church Institute which opened in 1857. He defended the new body against the charge that it was meant to attack or rival the mechanics' institute. He himself, he claimed, was an old friend of mechanics' institutes, and the leading officials of the Church institute were also members of the other body. The new institute was intended to cater for those who wanted to study theology. No-one would be excluded whatever his creed.

"We are a Church institute, not a Churchman's institute", he said. The principles on which it was founded was the acceptance of the Thirty-Nine Articles, but those who did not accept them were at liberty to join with those who did.

"....We are merely in the position of other literary and scientific societies. In the Mechanics' Institute and at the Philosophical Hall the claims and rights of free thought are admitted. We admit the same. But they place a limit to their freedom, for the sake of peace. Polemical lectures are prohibited, whether they relate to politics or religion. We permit the discussion of religious subjects, but for the sake of peace we require that nothing shall be advanced which is at variance with the formularies of the Church of England."¹

The first rule of the institute was as follows:

"That the object of this institute is to unite Churchmen in an endeavour to extend religious and secular knowledge, consistently with the principles of the Church of England."²

3.12 Chester Mechanics Institute

The congruence of the landed and Church interests is very well displayed in the situation at Chester Mechanics Institute. Chester was dominated politically by the Grosvenor family and ecclesiastically by the cathedral clergy. It had little

1 Leeds Intelligencer, 17 January 1857.

2 Leeds Church Institute Rules (1855).

industry and its importance as a port and market centre had been in decline for some centuries. It was however the social and cultural centre of a large area, and contained many service occupations and a professional class.

The mechanics' institute was launched in 1835. It seems to have been stimulated by the public advocacy of the Rev. E. Stanley, then vicar of Alderley, but shortly to become Bishop of Norwich.¹ With the financial backing of William Wardell, a banker, and the enthusiasm of a local doctor, the institute was organised, and got under way with massive support of the established classes.² The president was the Duke of Westminster and others of his family were involved in one way or another. The Bishop of Chester, the Archdeacon, and the Chancellor were on the committee as were two other Anglican clergymen and a Wesleyan minister. The leading non-conformist minister in the town, the Rev. S. Luke, gave prominent support in the first year and was then elected on to the committee. The local members of parliament, Sir S.R. Glynne, George Wilbraham and John Jervis were on the committee. Glynne was a conservative free trader, Wilbraham a reformer but protectionist who had family connections with Lord Skelmersdale and the Earl of Fortescue. Jervis was a reformer, though opposed to the ballot. He became Attorney General in 1846 and Lord Chief Justice in 1850.³ The institute later attracted the support of other members of parliament, such as the liberal E.G. Salisbury and conservative P.S. Hamberton and in 1862 W.E. Gladstone became chairman of it.⁴

1 R.C. Wilson, Op. Cit., p.115.

2 Chester Chronicle, 21 Nov 1834.

3 Annual Report 1835

4 See subsequent annual reports.

There is some reference in the first annual report and in a letter in the Chester Chronicle to some initial misgivings and suspicions by some conservative forces in the town¹ but the strength of support from the Church, landed interests and professional and trading classes quickly removed them. The institute reflected in its work and objectives, its origins and the nature of its support. It had a moral purpose underwritten by a theological belief, and its concern was to educate men into a proper sense of their political, religious and social responsibilities. Emphasis was placed on family responsibility and duty. At the same time there was a real concern to spread knowledge and interest in scientific and mechanical subjects.

The formally stated objects of the institute were

"to communicate useful knowledge and thereby to increase the respectability and happiness of individuals and to promote the welfare of society."²

At the first annual meeting the object was described as

"expanding the minds and improving the moral feelings", and the moral purpose of the institute was stressed in the arrangements made for the library. An existing library was purchased but it was

"submitted to a careful examination and such as had an immoral tendency were disposed of."

The committee

"confidently recommend (it) to the special notice of parents and guardians of youth as it assumes a character as to a moral tendency wholly different from indiscriminate collections of circulating libraries."³

1 Chester Chronicle, 10 April 1835 .

2 Rules and Regulations, 1835 .

3 Annual Report, 1835 .

The library rules stated that

"works on party politics and controversial theology
shall be excluded"

but this certainly did not mean that the library was empty of works on divinity. The reverse was the case. Large numbers of theological books were obtained, including for example the works of Archbishop Sumner. Nor were theological topics barred from lectures. Rev. S. Luke, for example, gave a widely acclaimed lecture on the harmony of science and religion. It became apparent what was meant by controversial religion when the mutual improvement class proposed to discuss a member's essay on 'Education and the best means of extending it'. In 1847 this was a topic of national and divisive debate, and the committee refused to sanction it.¹ The mutual improvement class was, unlike the library or lecture room, not allowed to deal with religion or politics at all, presumably because control of what was said or read by the authorities in the institute was much more difficult. The extension of education was defined as a religious topic, and after much discussion was not allowed as a proper topic for the class.

Political neutrality likewise was not all it seemed. In the very first year the president, Edward Walker, delivered Brougham's lectures on political economy, and the library obtained works by Adam Smith, William Horton and Andrew Ure. None of this was defined as politically controversial.²

1 Minute Book, Mutual Improvement Class, 1847.

2 Annual Report, 1835.

The underlying assumptions of those providing the Chester Mechanics' Institute are perhaps well summed up in a lecture delivered there in 1847 and subsequently published.

"Mechanics' institutes are calculated to cultivate habits of sobriety and industry, instruct us in the principles of trade and commerce, teach us something of the human mind and the human passions, in order to purify and elevate the sentiments and although they do not profess primarily to teach theology, they acknowledge its paramount importance."¹

Thus respectable behaviour, acceptance of capitalist economy, and Christian belief are neatly tied together. The lecturer further developed a familiar theme of the natural brutish man, drunkenness and the joys of family life.

"It is one of the great benefits of education, that it raises people above the gratification of brute creation, and gives them pleasures worthy of rational beings a man with nothing to do will ... fly from himself and seek his alternative in the tavern. If you give him more permanent sources of enjoyment... he will ever find his own fireside and the bosom of his family his best repose."²

As might be supposed, the institute did not attract large numbers of working men. It was always occupied by a majority of middle class members. The initial membership at the first meeting consisted of six working men - three foundry workers and three plumbers - and 20 professional or commercial men - including surgeons, solicitors, doctors, bankers, bank clerks, excise officers, hoteliers, mercers, ministers, reporters, and newspaper office workers. A study of the membership books

1 E. Whitley, A Lecture on the Utility of Mechanics' Institutes, (1847), p.5.

2 Ibid, p.8.

3 Minute Book, 1835.

shows that this picture remained substantially unaltered as the membership figure rose to about 200. The minority of working men however did have provided for them elementary classes in Reading, Writing and Arithmetic which attracted 31 members by 1837, and a class in Mechanical Drawing with eight.¹ There was considerable interest, mostly inspired by Rev. E. Stanley and Dr. T.H. Moor, but abetted by a number of other clergymen, in developing a scientific programme. An experimental museum was started, and lectures in the first year included ones on astronomy, hydrostatics, geology, natural history, anatomy and experimental philosophy.²

Chester Mechanics' Institute thus presents us with a case where the Church was very thoroughly in control, and had the support of some non-conformist clergy, plus the most powerful of the landed families. Its influence on the members was towards those social beliefs which were common in Anglican thinking at that time, with which it combined a concern with scientific exploration provided it was presented as compatible with Christian belief, and a propagation of the general tenets of orthodox political economy. There appears to have been no place for critical approaches to the capitalist economic system nor the prevailing social institutions, and there is no evidence of the manifestation of working class independent activity or Radical political belief.

1 Annual Report, 1837.

2 Annual Report, 1836.

3.13 Conclusions

From this study of the institutional attitudes of the churches to mechanics' institutes, we can provisionally draw the following conclusions.

Firstly the churches' reactions combined political with religious elements, though in a manner that was by no means simple or consistent.

Secondly the reaction of the Church of England varied from support to antagonism at all stages from 1825 to 1850. The number of Anglican clergymen involved in mechanics' institutes did increase over the years, and this is partly explained by the way the movement spread from areas of non-conformist strengths in the towns to areas of Anglican strength in the countryside. Anglican support, however, was normally conditional upon the acceptance by the institute of restrictions on political and religious matters. Such restrictions did not prevent the Church assuming that the institutes could be used to transmit attitudes which it believed essential to the continuance of Christian society. In practice such attitudes embraced a conservative view of the political social and economic nature of society and stressed the mutual duties and responsibilities of the rich and poor. In places where the Anglican clergy were enthusiasts for working class adult education, then they were prepared to support church mechanics' institutes. Anglican clergy generally attacked institutes which allowed free-thinking or non-Christian debate to take place, particularly if it was allied to socialism. Although willing in some places to work

with non-conformists, Anglicans frequently joined issue with them in order to establish their own control.

Thirdly, the non-conformist churches, with the exception of the Methodists, gave a great deal of support to mechanics' institutes, though a number of their clergy were very hostile to them. The Unitarian church in particular was prominent in support of mechanics' institutes. Although a number of non-conformists were involved in or sympathetic to such working class movements as Chartism, socialism and unionism, most of those supporting mechanics' institutes were within the broad spectrum of reformist Whiggism or utilitarianism.

We should add a note of caution at the end of this chapter. Nearly all institutes incorporated rules affirming political and religious neutrality, and banning controversial politics and religion from its activities. Not to do so was in effect to declare an institute sectarian, secularist or political. However it will have become apparent from the evidence produced in this and the following chapter that the disclaimer rule meant different things in different places. No controversial religion might be interpreted to mean nothing at variance with the Established Church: no political discussion might mean nothing that challenged the prevailing view in the institute, whether old-fashioned Toryism or laissez-faire liberalism. Sometimes the rule meant specific opinions were excluded - Unitarian, Owenite or socialist. Each institute worked out its own limits of toleration within the accepted norms of its social environment. So we should not be surprised to find at Filey that, although

the rules stated that there should be no debates on religion or politics, two of the debates held in 1859 were:

"Is a new translation of the Bible necessary or desirable"

and

"On creation, scripturally and geologically considered".¹

At Frome the 1845/46 programme included a lecture on

"the Harmony of Geology with Revelation".²

At Hackney Mechanics' Institute the committee were clearly surprised when there was some opposition to the acquisition of the reports of the Society for the Propagation of Christianity among the Jews. Although the committee agreed to apply its rules banning works of religious controversy more strictly, their view was that the reports in question were non-controversial.³

1 Annual Report, YUMI, pp.78-79.

2 Annual Report, 1846.

3 1st Annual Report 1826.

CHAPTER 4

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES AND THE PREVAILING MORALITY

"Dear Mother, Dear Mother the Church is cold
But the alehouse is healthy and pleasant and warm
Besides I can tell where I am used well
Such usage in heaven will never do well

William Blake Songs of Experience

4.1 Introduction: Morality and Capitalism

4.2 Forms of Approved Recreation:

Tea Parties and Conversaciones
Recreational Clubs
Excursions
Musical Concerts

4.3 Morality in the Institute Library

4.4 Moral Persuasion in the Lecture Room

4.5 Working Class Culture

4.6 The Development of Cultural and General Interest Programmes

4.7 Conclusion

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Introduction: Morality and Capitalism

So far we have examined how the churches attempted, and generally succeeded in gaining control over mechanics' institutes. This section examines the way in which institutes were used to control the behaviours and shape the attitudes of members to fit in with the social, moral and religious codes of industrial capitalism. This commitment of mechanics' institutes in general to function as a moral and religious agency was unambiguous enough. Traice claimed on evidence of the first thirty years of their existence that one of the two aims of mechanics' institutes had been the 'promotion of moral and religious culture'.¹ The churches were the premier vehicle of such positive cultural and moral education. Typical of the attitude of the churches in the period under review is that contained in the following statement issued by the Bishop of Oxford to his clergy in 1848.²

"It appertains to their office as instructors and guides of thought and opinion, that they should closely watch all measures which tend to promote the general welfare and, above all, the morals of the people."

He continues that the clergy should take a particular interest in saving fallen women, limiting licensing hours, enforcing Sunday observance, and securing the abolition of animal sports,

1 W.H.J. Traice, Op. Cit., p.5.

2 S. Wilberforce, A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Oxford, (1848), pp. 12-14.

apart from having a general concern for the sanitary state of the towns. From quite another position, that of an orthodox reforming political economist, Kay Shuttleworth argued for the conjoining of moral and religious instruction with the development of industrial capitalism. He held the common position that the capitalist system was demonstrably the most beneficial system for the mass of the people and for the advance of civilisation. He therefore wanted mechanics' institutes, of which he was a great advocate, to teach working men the ascertained truths of political science and make them understand their position in the order of things. He went further however than many orthodox reformists. He believed that instruction must cover family life and social relations, and dwelt particularly on imprudent marriages, idleness, improvidence and moral deviations. This instruction he wished to be linked with religion.

"With pure religion and undefiled, flourish frugality, forethought, and industry"

So the workers should be

"acted on ... by the ministers of an enobling faith."¹

He thus argued that

"Morality is therefore worthy of the attention of the economist."²

This was not unlike the argument of Patrick Colquhoun in 1806, incorporated into his advocacy of Bell's monotorial system.

1 J. Kay -Shuttleworth, Four Periods of Public Education, (1862), pp. 39-40.

2 Ibid, p.52 .

"If the morals of the inferior orders of society are not of the highest importance to the state and to the country, it is difficult to discover in the various ramifications of political economy what is really important...without possessing a strong sense of religion and virtue, it is in vain to hope for industry, subordination, or loyalty. To be useful, the great body of the people must also be discreet, sober, and provident the only means of securing the peace of society is, by enforcing the observance of religious and moral principles."¹

The relationship between capitalist economy and value systems which Kay-Shuttleworth expressed so clearly was commonly assumed by reformist Whig and Tory prelate, and we would expect to find evidence of activities in mechanics' institutes that express it.

Most commonly this relationship was expressed in the language of Christian morality. Johnson however argues perceptively that the use of the word 'morality' and an analysis of behaviour in moral terms disguises the fact that this was a battle over rival cultural codes.² There was to use his words, a campaign of 'cultural aggression against working people', an attempt by the bourgeoisie at class cultural control. He argues that this campaign was remarkable for its pervasiveness, through sermons, childrens books, building inscriptions, public speeches, legislation. The everyday ways of living common among working people were subjected to constant attack - their sports and pastimes, manners of speech, drinking habits, family and

1 P. Colquhoun, A New and Appropriate System of Education for the Labouring People, (1806), pp. 68-70.

2 R. Johnson, 'Notes on the Schooling of the English Working Class', in R. Dale (ed.), Schooling and Capitalism, (1976) The argument is further developed in R. Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', Past and Present, 42, 1969.

friendship relations, sexual behaviour, attitudes to work, to the future, to punctuality, property and stealing, their systems of child rearing, their street life, their consumption patterns, their use of customary rights of relief, their paganism.

Clearly developments in the economy did call for new habits of behaviour and relationships, both in the interest of capitalists and also in the interest of working class advance, though their solutions were very different. The capitalist cultural attack was neither gratuitous nor moralistic. Traditional social habits and customs seldom fitted into the new pattern of industrial life, and they had therefore to be discredited as hindrances to progress. The cultural attack was expressed in factory legislation, in the reform of relief systems, of attacks on football and other sports, in temperance societies, insurance clubs, and most clearly in the moralisation of children (and adults) via mass schooling. It was the necessity to transform the culture of the common people into something that was more compatible with an industrial capitalist society that lay behind the encouragement of mass education, so Johnson and others have argued. Mass education was a way of attacking working class parenthood and its power to socialise the young into anti-pathetic cultural patterns. It replaced some of the family functions by the school. Hence followed also an increasing concern by the government over surveillance by clergymen or school inspectors over self-taught teachers and private schools.¹

1 R. Johnson, Notes , pp.50-51.

Shapin and Barnes, in accepting Johnson's thesis, have argued that underlying the cultural attack of the middle classes were some assumptions about the nature of working class man.¹ The key thing about him was assumed to be his lack of self-control. He was seen as a victim of sudden passions, easily tempted into indulgence, unlikely to follow through a course of action because of an inability to accept routines, habits, and a regular ordering of his life. In particular he was sensual, a victim to bodily pleasures, and alarmingly energetic and volatile. Though he might have a quick intelligence, it was likely to be superficial and unable to comprehend underlying rules and concepts. His knowledge was fragmented and unrelated. He had a remarkable capacity for rioting and organised conspiracy, which if left unchecked would bring down civilised society.

Kay-Shuttleworth can be taken as an example among many of proponents of this view of the working man.

"They live precisely like brutes to gratify ... the appetites of their uncultivated bodies, and then die; to go they have never thought, cared, or wondered wither they have unclear, indefinite and undefinable ideas of all around them; they eat, drink, breed, work and die."²

As late as 1887 James Runciman was typifying the working class pupil as having the 'fluid mind of the true barbarian'.³

It follows from the argument of Johnson, and Shapin and Barnes, that the basis of class cultural control in the mechanics'

1 S. Shapin and B. Barnes, 'Science Nature and Control: Interpreting Mechanics' Institutes', in R. Dale (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 56-8.

2 J. Kay, Social Conditions and Education I, (1850), pp. 580-1.

3 J. Runciman, Schools and Scholars, (1887), p.6.

institute lay in the encouragement in the working man of regular habits, self-control and frugality and the discouragement of irregular habits, self-indulgence and expressions of individuality. The expressed aim of the Royal Cornish Polytechnic Society, and common to so many other institutes,

"To promote industrious habits among the working class"

implied not only a concern to exploit their labour but also to change their values and life styles.¹ Pollard argues that the whole of the incentive basis of factory discipline depended on such a change.

"The worker who left the background of his domestic workshop or peasant holding for the factory entered a new culture as well as a new sense of direction. It was not only that the new economic order needed ... part humans : soulless, depersonalised, disembodied, who could become members or little wheels rather of a complex mechanism.¹ It was also that men who were non-accumulative, non-acquisitive, accustomed to work for subsistence, not for maximisation of income, had to be made obedient to cash stimulus, and obedient in such a way as to react precisely to the stimulus provided."²

The industrialists required workers who did not take unwarranted absences, who worked regularly within stated hours, who produced at a regular rate, who exhibited good habits and who were clean and sober enough to do the job properly. They therefore had to fight against the workers' fairly common habit of taking all feast days as holidays and of treating the beginning of the week as St. Monday; of working in spasms of very high and very low production; of turning up when he felt like it; of drinking heavily and swearing profusely. The great significance of this,

1 Rules and Regulations, Royal Cornish Polytechnics Society, 1833.

2 S. Pollard, 'Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution', Economic History Review, 2nd series, 16, 1963-64, p.254.

as Pollard points out, is that

"the capitalist for the first time became a disciplinarian." ¹

Factories were clearly seen as educative institutions for the behaviour and attitudes of the employees. Much concern was expressed about the difficulty of influencing the behaviour of workers in areas where the factory system did not apply, and the superior morals of workers in the factory town of Leeds were compared with the debased behaviour of the workers in ² Sheffield. G.C. Holland wrote of the Sheffield workers:

"Men are masters of their own time and free from ordinary restrictions of well regulated factories. They are not taught daily the value of time, or the effects of its misapplication." ³

The hypothesis to examine is that the mechanics' institutes, controlled as they generally were by local businessmen, were instrumental in fostering the desired attitudes. There is a great deal of evidence that this was so. At Kirkstall Mechanics' Institute, for example, no-one was allowed to enter the building

"Who is guilty of profane swearing, Sabbath desecration, gambling, of the foolish and injurious practice of smoking or chewing tobacco, or taking snuff, or frequenting public houses or beer shops."

At Wells Literary and Scientific Institute the rules stated that

"on no account whatever shall smoking be suffered in the apartments of the institution under pain of immediate expulsion."

1 S. Pollard, Op. Cit., p.259.

2 R.D. Storch, 'The Problem of Working Class Leisure' in A.P. Donajgrodski (Ed.), Social Control in 19th Century Britain, 1977

3 Ibid, Quotation on p. 146

At the Cambridge and Cambridgeshire Mechanics' Institute

"No game of any description or smoking shall be allowed, nor shall refreshments be introduced."¹

The sponsors of institutes tended to define a stereotype of the untutored workman and the effect on him as he responded to this cultural moulding.

"Instead of the dirty and intoxicated husband, entering his abode at a late hour of the night receiving the reproaches of a wife whose patience he has outraged and assailed by the cries of the children he has neglected, we shall behold the happy entrance of the clean and intelligent Artisan .. received by the smiles of his companion of life, and caresses of his interesting babes - we shall see him seated amidst his children, performing some simple experiment, and listening to their expressions of wonder, and enquiries of curiosity, with more delight than can ever fall to the lot of a man habituated to intoxication."²

From the same standpoint there was a reverse argument made by Rev. R.W. Grinfield. He believed that taking the husband away from his family in the evening was likely to destroy rather than enforce family life, and even in mechanics' institutes was likely to lead to temptation or dissipation.

"I should prefer the simplest improvement gained by his fireside and in company with his wife and family, to the most ostentatious meetings of the London Institution."³

For this reason Grinfield advocated working men's institutes, and himself helped organise one in Bath.

1 Taken from Rules of the Institutions

2 C. Hindley, An Address delivered at the Establishment of the Mechanics' Institution, Ashton under Lyme, June 1825.

3 R.W. Grinfield, Op. Cit., p.230.

To defend themselves against this kind of attack, most mechanics' institutes justified their effect on working class members in moralistic terms. The First Annual Report of the Swindon Mechanics' Institute claimed of its work that

"much innocent recreation must thus be afforded, not only to members themselves, but to their families, in many cases superseding vicious indulgence, and at the same time disseminating much useful and valuable instruction."¹

At Camborne Mechanics' Institute the aim was to keep the young worker

"from the allurements of vice and folly".²

At Scarborough Mechanics' Institute an appeal to the public for support was made on the grounds that it would wean young people from low company and intemperance,³ and in 1850 the Annual Report of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes claimed that they would

"carry good books to many a home where listless vacuity or mischievous habits absorb the leisure of the working man."⁴

At York Mechanics' Institute it was claimed that it was

"designed and adapted to check the progress of frivolity, dissipation and vice: to encourage habits of sobriety and a useful employment of time."⁵

At Devonport and Stonehouse Mechanics' Institute, a local newspaper referred approvingly to the aim to provide

"an institution where the appetite of the poor man for pleasurable excitement may be fully gratified, not only without depraving his habits and impoverishing his family, but in such a way as to elevate while it excites and to impart instruction while it imparts pleasure."⁶

1 Annual Report, 1843.

2 Camborne Literary Institution 1829-1929, (1929), pp. 30-31.

3 B. Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, (1971), p.77.

4 ARYUMI, 1850, p.11.

5 Annual Report, 1834.

6 Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald, 10 January 1846.

At Wakefield Mechanics' Institute, although the stated purpose was

"for the instruction of mechanics at a cheap rate in the principles of the arts they practise as well as in other branches of useful knowledge",¹

the Annual Report of 1849/50 referred to

"its great utility in forming the character of young people".²

When draper's assistants and apprentices obtained a half-day reduction in working hours, the Halifax Mechanics' Institute immediately established a class for them, because

"this would relieve employers' fears that the leisure thus afforded would be devoted to pernicious and unworthy pursuits." ³

A similar process to occupy the slight leisure time of shop assistants can be observed at the reformed Cheltenham Institute in 1845.⁴

Charles Hindley in a letter to Brougham in 1834 commenting on his institute at Ashton under Lyme remarked that

"the mechanics fell off one by one and retreated to habits of intemperance, leaving the paths which led to science and fame for those of sensual delights and depravity."⁵

We could multiply these examples of expressions of fear at the workingman's inability to handle his leisure or keep in check his base appetites. Clearly it was a common belief among the middle classes that this was the nature of the working man.

1 Rules.

2 Annual Report, 1850.

3 ARYUMI, 1847, p.39.

4 Cheltenham Free Press, 15 January 1845. See also C.W. Baker, Op. Cit., pp. 237-238, for concern over shop assistants' welfare.

5 Stockport Advertiser, 19 September 1834.

The mechanics' institutes were one of a number of agencies aimed at developing more appropriate behaviours among the common people, and Harrison links their growth with the contemporaneous appearance of such organisations as the British and Foreign Temperance Society, the Society for the Protection against cruelty to Animals, the Friendly Societies, the Lords Day Observance Society. All had a common concern in changing attitudes and behaviours linked to a prevailing culture.¹

The Victorian middle class tended to define working class leisure as a problem. It had not been so defined in the 18th Century when in smaller social groupings there was a considerable amount of leisure activity common between the social classes, and the upper and middle classes did not feel they faced an alien and hostile mass of working class people living in their own territories and following their own degraded devices for passing the time.² It was the gathering together of masses of workers in great cities which seems to have particularly concerned and sometimes frightened the middle class. A common image in Victorian writing is the mob or mass, acting under impulse and out of control, impervious to the actions of individuals, unaffected by the arguments of those who tried to control it. So it was argued that

"unless the people are morally improved, being now brought into large masses and possessing increased facilities for mischief, the result ... may sooner or later, be internal commotion if not a national wreck."³

1 B. Harrison, Op. Cit., p.91.

2 R.D. Storch, Op. Cit., p.142 .

3 Livesey's Moral Reformer, 6 January 1838.

The aim of many middle class reformers was to break the segregation of leisure habits that had occurred between the classes by reasserting common leisure pursuits on their terms, and thus avoiding the supposed threats to the social fabric. It was thus a matter of regaining control. The loss of such control was frequently deplored, as typically shown in the following extract.

"It was no small evil to have a class of (ale) houses thus established, frequented exclusively by the labouring population who thus lose the benefit of some control from contact with persons of superior stations."¹

Working class recreation therefore became a central concern of the middle class, and the basis of it was often fear.

Storch concludes that the

"tendency of middle class early Victorians to define working class leisure as a problem was reinforced by the unavoidable but unnerving encounters they experienced with workers away from their jobs on any occasion."²

As late as 1875 one commentator was arguing that

"our safety, the security of society, of our homes and families, in the long run, are concerned with the form in which they (the working class) take their recreation".³

Mechanics' institutes became key agencies in the attempt to reassert influence over working mens' lives outside their hours of employment. There were generally two arguments made of the value of recreative activity in the institutions.

1 House of Commons Select Committee on the Sale of Beverages, Parl. Papers, 1850, XVIII, p.45.

2 R.D. Storch, Op. Cit., p.140.

3 F. Fuller, Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1875, p.717.

One was the practical argument that without recreation the working men would desert the institutes and they would be compelled to close down. The other was that recreation was a means of changing the habits and character of the members, to prevent all the various ills and disasters to society which would occur if they were left to their own devices. The emphasis on the former of these arguments varied between writers and speakers, but in nearly all cases it is the latter argument that is expressed with greatest intensity and urgency.

The following sections examine the attempted cultural socialisation of members of mechanics institutes firstly by looking at the kind of safe recreation offered as an alternative to existing disapproved recreation; secondly by looking at the control of books and newspapers; and thirdly by looking at the hortatory lecture.

4.2 Recreation

Approved recreation began to appear in force in the institutes in the late 1830s. Before that there was still a strong feeling among many supporters that recreation diluted the real purpose of the institutes, which was the acquisition of useful knowledge.

"The public are easiest gained by amusement", argued one writer,

"but it is not true that when they have been gained by amusement they will remain for study; study must be always laborious, often painful".¹

But by 1839 even the SDUK was prepared to give its seal of approval to the introduction of recreation and amusement, and by 1851 Hudson, in his history of mechanics' institutes, was claiming that one of its three aims was

"the creation of intellectual pleasures and refined amusements tending to the general elevation of character."²

Duppa's SDUK Report argued strongly for the provision of recreation as an insurance against criminality and debauchery by the lower classes.

"Man cannot be permanently debarred from it without souring the temper and spoiling the character. Like the indulgence of other appetites, it only requires to be kept in due bounds and turned upon innocent or beneficial objects".³

Duppa enlisted the support of Sir John Herschel who had become a great advocate of recreation as a means of controlling a labouring population inclined to criminous or immoral behaviour. An equally fervent campaigner was Sir Benjamin Heywood who said at Manchester in 1830

"What then is the modification of our plan which seems desirable? It is to adapt our instructions more to the taste and capacity of the working classes; to make it more elementary and more entertaining; to extend it to a greater variety of subjects, and to connect with it more moral improvement."⁴

Most institutes would have accepted the stated aim of Cwmavon Mechanics' Institute in 1849

"to promote rational amusement of its members and the cultivation of their tastes."⁵

1 Chambers Papers for the People, pp. 27-8.

2 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.55.

3 B.F. Duppa, Op. Cit., p.89.

4 B. Heywood, Op. Cit., pp. 36-7.

5 Swansea and Glamorgan Herald, 16 October 1850.

Indeed the desertion of working men back to their own places of recreation or to bodies like the Lyceum was unlikely to be checked unless the institutes catered for the social needs of the working man and woman. Henry Solly the great champion of working mens clubs, wrote of mechanics' institutes that they

"have languished or been neglected by working men because they have found there no satisfaction for their social, artistic or play impulses."¹

Cox, the editor of the Somerset County Gazette put very clearly the position of many institutes.

"These societies have not wrought the magical changes predicted of them by their first founders - they have not made Newtons of our working men and (have not) diffused science among our mechanics they have diffused among the people a taste for intellectual pleasures in preference to animal pleasures - we offer them cheap amusements of the mind."²

Elsewhere Cox ties up neatly the relationship of recreation and social control.

"By encouraging social mixing, it produces intelligent subordination to one's superiors".³

Certainly, failure to provide recreation proved increasingly dangerous. In 1849 Totnes Mechanics' Institute had to suspend all its activities because it would not arrange recreation.⁴

Herschel on several occasions at various places in the country repeated his aphorism:

"the impelling power that urges men into vice and crime - the want of amusement".⁵

1 H. Solly, Working Men: A Glance at Some of their Wants, 3rd Ed., (1864), p.6 .

2 Somerset County Gazette, 31 October 1840.

3 Annual Report, 1840.

4 The Western Miscellany, 1849, p.65,

5 For example at Windsor Mechanics Library. Quotation in T. Evans, Inaugural Lecture given to the Gloucester Mechanics' Institute, 1846.

If there was to be recreation, however, it was to be controlled most carefully. For even when the necessity of recreational programmes was accepted, there was considerable worry that it might degenerate into idleness or vice. Traice, who argued for the provision of recreation, nevertheless felt that for the workman involved in manual labour all day, intellectual labour was to him properly a recreation:

"the pleasure of acquiring knowledge has rendered other pastimes superfluous, nay, mischievous."¹

What then were the permitted kinds of recreation? They tended to be what Duppa called 'indoor amusements of a tranquil character',² though St. John who was another strong advocate of 'amusement and harmless excitement in mechanics' institutes', recommended sword exercise, practice with the rifle, and various other martial pastimes.³ St. John, who did not apparently consider the danger of such training in the preparation of a seditious army, was like many Victorians beguiled by the so-called Anglo-Saxon virtues of energy, manliness and honest endeavour which he believed to be endemic in ordinary English working men.⁴ St. John's views on appropriate recreation, however, did not have great influence in mechanics' institutes certainly before 1850. C.W. Baker supported Duppa in advocating 'intellectual and clever games' such as chess but excluded 'all games of chance and everything that could lead to gambling and worst excesses.'⁵

1 W.H.J. Traice, Op. Cit., p.24.

2 B.F. Duppa, Op. Cit., p.95.

3 J.A. St. John, Op. Cit., p.211, pp. 215-216.

4 Ibid, pp. 218-19.

5 C.W. Baker, Op. Cit., p.249.

The following are some examples of common forms of recreation taken from very many in the institutes.

4.2.1 Tea Parties and Conversaziones

These were normally annual events which marked the formal inauguration or closing of the season. It was an opportunity to invite local and sometimes national celebrities, and to reaffirm the purposes of the institution. This kind of activity seemed to have started in the late 1830's. At West Bromwich and Stalybridge tea parties started in 1839, at Longport in 1840, at Huddersfield in 1843, and at Keighley, Halifax, Stourbridge and Bradford by 1845. Newcastle under Lyme institute had its first conversazione in 1838 and Birmingham Polytechnic Institute held its first in 1844. Evesham Institute in 1844 started to attach to its conversazione an address, a chemical demonstration and a concert. Others like Newcastle under Lyme attached it to their AGM. The big occasion at the Manchester institute was the Christmas party, the first in 1833, and these became most spectacular affairs in fancy dress and attracted all the leading families in the town. These kinds of rather formal activities generated in time more informal tea and coffee parties throughout the year.¹

4.2.2 Recreational Clubs

Chess clubs, though seen by some institutes as a dangerous innovation, appeared in many institutes in the 1840's - at Stalybridge in 1840, West Bromwich in 1843, Birmingham in 1844,

1 Taken from institute records.

Nottingham in 1848, Evesham and Taunton in 1849. Glee Clubs became common during the same period, and there were a growing number of Floral and Horticultural Societies. Various kinds of sports activities were introduced. At Middlesbrough Mechanics' Institute for example a cricket team was started in 1848.¹

4.2.3 Excursions

These had early precedents.² In 1829 the London Institute made its first trip by steamship to the Nore, and in 1833 Manchester Institute took the railway to Liverpool. Both related entertainment to an inspection of new forms of steam transport. In 1840 Nottingham Mechanics' Institute visited the institute at Leicester travelling by locomotive only 11 weeks after the line was opened. In 1845 Newport (Mon) Mechanics' Institute travelled by steamship to Weston-super-Mare, followed shortly after by Cardiff Mechanics' Institute,³ and Redruth Mechanics' Institute took a steamer trip to the Lizard.⁴ Some institutes visited historic towns. Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute visited York in 1844, and Keighley Mechanics' Institute went to Ripon in 1850. Very often institutes would join together for these trips. Longton and Stoke institutes visited Nottingham in 1850, and in 1847 the small institutes at Bridlington, Beverley and Driffield went to Flamborough Head in 47 coaches with 2,000 people.⁵ In 1841 the institutes at Cheltenham, Tewkesbury and Gloucester took a railway trip to Birmingham with 600 people, visiting the exhibition at the mechanics' institute in the process.⁶

- 1 Taken from institutes' records, except Middlesbrough. W. Lilley, A History of Middlesbrough, (1968), p.265.
- 2 Taken from institutes' records except the following:-
- 3 T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.225.
- 4 C.L. Bowers, Op. Cit., p.104.
- 5 ARYUMI, 1848, pp.27-28.
- 6 Gloucester Journal, 8 May 1841.

Most significant however were the visits to stately homes. Evesham institute visited the home of Lord Northwich at Blockley in 1842,¹ and many of the Yorkshire Institutes visited Wentworth Park. A variation of this was the bazaar held in the grounds of a stately home. Stourbridge Mechanics' Institute for example held regularly a bazaar at Prestwood Hall.² Traice gave strong support to the idea of excursions particularly to the grounds of noblemen and gentlemen,³ and Tennyson describes such an occasion in several lines in The Princess. Among other similar activities, Birmingham Polytechnic Institute⁴ organised a trip to the Lickey Hills for youngsters, and Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute organised a picnic with games on a local common each year.⁵

4.2.4 Musical Concerts

The concert was probably the most common form of social event. London Mechanics' Institute set the fashion early with a⁶ concert of sacred music in 1829. Among the many recorded were concerts at Hanley in 1836, Fenton in 1839, Longport in 1840, Wolverhampton in 1841 and Huddersfield in 1844,⁷ and by 1850 Devenport Mechanics' Institute was devoting one-sixth of its programme to music. This institute had already adopted the practice from 1845 of preceeding each lecture with an hour of instrumental music.⁸ From details of the bills advertising these concerts, it would seem that they consisted of dramatic readings, current popular songs plus the better known excerpts

1 Institute records.

2 H. Palfrey, Op. Cit., p.10.

3 W.H.J. Traice, Op. Cit., p.28.

4 Institute records.

5 Institute records.

6 Minute Book, 1829.

7 Staffordshire Advertiser, 9 January 1836. Ibid, 2 November 1839, Ibid, 14 November 1840.

Wolverhampton Chronicle, 14 April 1841. Annual Report, 1844.

8 Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald, 29 November 1845.

of oratorios. They were clearly intended for entertainment, and indeed Bradford Mechanics' Institute in the 1846/47 season described the concerts as 'for popular taste'.¹ The development of music concerts at Manchester Mechanics' Institute was more ambitious than in most other places. From 1835 to 1850 with brief intermissions it provided regular concerts for members and the public and it was from this that the Free Trade Hall concert programmes developed. The first few concerts were given by the vocal and instrumental music class as part of its work of building up the abilities of local talent. They were gradually reinforced by professional performers though never completely dropping out. In the early 1840s, concerts were given almost every week and more ambitious programmes were given monthly.²

Similar classical concerts were given at Wakefield Mechanics' Institute which ran a series between 1846-50 devoted to the works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini and Mendelssohn.³ What was generally missing from the music concerts as from other forms of recreation was any acknowledgement of the legitimacy or worth of popular culture. Sentimental Victorian songs and sombre religious anthems were a far cry from the vigour of rural folk song tradition or the later musical hall songs, and their setting in the hall of the institute was very different to either the pub or the music hall theatre. It well represents the drive to present innocent recreation that was 'safe', and it also exposes the dilemma that faced the middle class proponents of this form of cultural control.

Whatever they could provide was seldom so entertaining as the

1 Annual Report, 1847.

2 Institute records. See M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., pp. 176-178.

3 Institute records.

recreation it was aiming to replace. Cups of tea and harp music were no competitors for beer and pub songs. The hope of useful side effects from encouraging the working man to participate in music was pointedly expressed by one of Kay's Inspectors.

"The songs of any people may be regarded as important means of forming an industrious, brave, loyal and religious working class ... (and will) inspire cheerful views of industry."¹

These were the commonest forms of recreational activity, and it is not difficult to analyse them both as socialising into behaviours acceptable to and compatible with an industrial capitalist world, and as an attack on behaviours which were deemed dangerous to that world. Harrison in his analysis of Victorian temperance movements describes the attack by teetotal campaigners on the traditional leisure patterns of the working class and particularly on drinking habits which went with lax licensing laws, fairs and sports, and sexual behaviour. As an alternative they particularly encouraged the institute excursion or fete which prevented the participants from spending their leisure in drinking.² The attack on this traditional culture was quite open. There was a continual assault on feasts and fairs, and the sports and customs associated with them. The Rev. R.W. Hamilton, president of Leeds Mechanics' Institutes scathingly condemned them as 'pastimes of village buffoonery and rudeness', and institutes took active measures to combat them.³

1 Minutes of the Committee of the Council in Education, 1840/41 p.145. cf. J. Kay-Shuttleworth, Op. Cit., pp. 353-354.

2 B. Harrison, Op.Cit., Chapter XV.

3 R.W. Hamilton, The Institutions of Popular Education, (1845), p.118.

At Redditch Institute, Saturday entertainments were provided for the members and their families who came into the weekly market,

"so as to keep them out of the public houses and such places".¹

At Otley Mechanics' Institute excursions or galas were organised to coincide with traditional feast and fair days

"to prevent many from being led into serious excesses during the season of festivity".²

At Honley, near Huddersfield, the local institute attempted to provide alternatives to the 'large feudal orgies'. January

Searle wrote in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine.

"This feast is remarkable, and embraces a circuit of nearly eight miles. Beef, pickled cabbage, and ale are the staple provisions of each household; and on the evening of the first day of the feast, Huddersfield, Lockwood, and all the adjoining hamlets are in a state of commotion. Carriages rattle along the streets, filled with merry men and women, who scent the good things far off, and hasten to enjoy them. The roads are fairly blocked up, and darkened with the long lines of foot-passengers, drawn by the same attraction. The feast lasts for a full week; and the usual quantity of sins are committed there, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned."³

Cunningham's study of the metropolitan fairs demonstrates how active the magistrates were in responding to middle class pressure to close the great fairs of London, and indeed many of them were abolished. Edmonton fair which used to attract 40,000 people and Shoreditch which attracted 30,000 were two casualties. Those that survived such as Stepney and Greenwich became transformed into respectable occasions, benefiting from

1 Notes by Herbert Page M.D. in Committee Book.

2 YUMI Annual Report, 1850, p.58.

3 Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, April 1849, p.239. See also E. Baines comments in Leeds Mercury, 16 July 1863.

mechanisation to change the whole character of the event."

Mechanics' institutes were antidotes to the uncontrolled activity of the fairs. They were, as described in an 1853 Report of the Society of Arts,

"places of improving relaxation where people go in the evening to be amused instead of to the public house or the provincial theatre."²

Ben Heywood, in describing his version of what a Lyceum should be (and in this differed fundamentally from Detroisier. Heywood saw them in middle class cultural control terms, Detroisier saw them as part of the political education of the proletariat within their own organisations reflecting their own cultural context) described Miles Platting Lyceum in the following terms:

"We are endeavouring to make our reading room there very popular, to have in the evening a blazing fire, red curtains, easy chairs a capital cup of coffee, chess, pictures, now then a good story read aloud, now and then a good song; in short to see if we cannot make it a match for the public-house, as a place of resort for the working man after his day's work."³

4.3 Morality in the Institute Library

Most institutes exercised control over the political acceptability of books in the library, and this is what we would expect, given

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- 1 H. Cunningham, 'The Metropolitan Fairs' in A. Donajgrodski (Ed.) Op. Cit.
 - 2 Report of the Committee appointed by the Council of the Society of Arts to inquire into the Subject of Industrial Instruction (1853), p.36.
 - 3 B. Heywood, Op. Cit., pp. 107-108.

the political persuasion of the sponsors of many of the institutes. There was also, however, a determined effort to control fiction books in the libraries. Initially there was an argument in the institute over whether fiction in any form should be admitted. Though at the institutes of Birmingham, York, Wolverhampton, Cambridge and Bradford, fiction was purchased from the start, it was banned at such institutes as Sheffield, Leeds, Bolton, Haddington, Scarborough, Morpeth, Hanley, Coventry and Evesham. One argument in favour of this ban was that fiction diverted the institute away from its prime educational purposes into avenues of mere entertainment. At Leeds the institute originally decided the library 'should contain works of science exclusively'. But in time it was agreed that it should widen the scope of non fiction to include History, Travel and General Literature.¹ But fiction was another matter and many institutes fought bitterly over its introduction. So fierce was the battle at Chapel Allerton that the institute broke up.²

At Liskeard Mechanics' Institute there was a running battle over fiction from its founding in 1832, and a presentation of Shakespearian volumes was rejected on the grounds of pornography.³

A long battle was fought at Evesham, and the institute rejected a local magnate's offered donation of the works of Scott, but it capitulated in 1855,⁴ and many other institutes, while

1 E. Baines, The Life of Edward Baines, (1851), pp. 127-128, and Annual Report, 1829.

2 J. Popple, Op. Cit., 2., p.142.

3 E. Spurway, Liskeard Literary and Scientific Institute 1832-1932, (1932), reprinted from the Cornish Times.

4 Minute Books 1848, 1855.

formally keeping their rules banning fiction, in fact began to abandon their practice in the 1830s. At the Sheffield Mechanics' and Apprentices Library, where a rule excluding fiction was in force from 1839 until 1851, the works of Shakespeare were auctioned off and the novels of Scott, Maryatt and Disraeli were rejected, but Byron's tragedies were accepted as were the novels of Bulwer, Washington, Irving and Thackeray.¹

The moral purpose of this institute is clearly outlined in the comment by Hudson that it was to supply a want felt by

"the thoughtful of the working classes, and experienced by the heads of families and masters of apprentices, (who) wished to have a library to which they could send their young people with the entire confidence that there would be no danger of their tastes becoming depraved, or their moral and religious principles corrupted."²

At the Bolton Institute the library accepted works of Maryatt and Cooper despite its rules.³ At Coventry and Hanley the rule⁴ was quite ignored by 1850. At Morpeth, after a battle in 1830 over the admittance of the Waverley novels, the rule was repealed.⁵

The fear remained that fiction would displace rather than supplement serious non-fiction. At Ashton-under-Lyne in 1849 it has been claimed that fewer than 300 of the 1600 books were scientific;⁶ at Manchester by 1849 the largest section was of novels, romances and tales;⁷ at Leeds in 1846 Hole claimed that over half the books circulating were fiction.⁸ At Nottingham

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.160.

2 Ibid, p.159.

3 Annual Report, 1839.

4 Institute records, particularly library catalogues.

5 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., p.218.

6 This is M. Tylecote's calculation, Op. Cit., p.255.

7 Library Catalogue, 1849.

8 J. Hole, Op. Cit., p.27.

while fiction accounted for only one third of the stock of books, it accounted for two-thirds of all issues.¹ At Neath in 1853 38% of books were fiction and 60% of issues were from this class.²

On the other hand at Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute it was claimed

"the books most read were those of a scientific, historical and biographical character."

Lea makes a fair comment when he wrote that there was in total

"no less a proportion of non-fiction issues than there is today in the modern public library."³

Once it was accepted that fiction was necessary in order to attract members in sufficient numbers, the problem was to ensure that this recreational activity, apparently uncontrollable, was in fact controlled and made safe. Again, the key assumption was that the working man was prey to powerful instincts, passions, and urges that could easily be aroused by the wrong kind of fiction but which could be tamed and disciplined by the right kind. There was a belief that most fiction had a tendency to immorality or at least to superficiality. Leaders of the Sheffield Mechanics and Apprentices Library claimed that the great majority of works of fiction were bordering on questionable morality,⁴ and in 1845 G. Ellis put the case strongly in a pamphlet entitled Novel Reading

1 Ibid, p.27.

2 T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.300.

3 J.T. Lea, The History and Development of Mechanics' Institutes, (1950), p.6.

4 G.C. Holland, The Vital Statistics of Sheffield, (1843), p.238.

Intellectually and Morally Injurious.¹ He wrote of works that

"fritter away the distinctions between right and wrong, deceiving the unwary into the paths of vice ... treat with contempt those admirable qualities - industry, frugality, and prudence ... alienate the heart from domestic and retired duties ... works which are polluted by luscious descriptions of sensual pleasures."

In a similar vein, an Annual Report of Newcastle-on-Tyne Mechanics' Institute comments,

"Were the funds to be diverted to the purchase of books of mere amusement, or were the shelves to be filled with those modern works in which fiction and fact are so strangely blended, utter ruin and just disgrace would inevitably fall upon the institute."²

A lecturer at Chester Mechanics' Institute claimed that

"all books must be solid and sterling, not frivolous and flippant".³

At York Mechanics' Institute the headmaster of St. Peter's School attacked the tendency to read light fiction.

"It is the debasement of literature into a mere idle luxury which I apprehend to be one of the great dangers of today."⁴

At Wakefield Mechanics' Institute when there was a run on light fiction, a discussion class was formed

"to meet this evil and to originate a taste for a more useful kind of reading."⁵

So many institutes imposed strict censorship. Uttoxeter excluded works of fiction 'that have not a moral tendency',⁶

1 p.11.

2 Annual Report, 1827.

3 E. Whitley, A Lecture on the Utility of Mechanics' Institutes, (1847), p.11.

4 W. Hey, Address to York Mechanics' Institute, 5 October 1847, p.16

5 Rules of the Institute, 1848.

6 Annual Report, 1849.

while the committee at Ashton-under-Lyne Mechanics' Institute looked

"upon books of this class with the eyes of a rigid censor".¹

At Keighley Mechanics' Institute the Committee stated that

"whilst gratifying the popular taste for light reading", they would

"reject publications, however amusing they might appear, that have the least tendency to immorality".²

At Tamworth Mechanics Library it was the vicar and curate who vetted all books,³ at Keighley Mechanics' Institute a committee of ministers of religion.⁴ At Manchester Mechanics' Institute the censors had been

"so watchful that (the library) does not contain a single work, the perusal of which is not likely either to improve the heart or strengthen the understanding."⁵

Duppa advised institutions of the responsibility they had:

"All institutions ought to be careful in whose hands they repose the trust of making purchases."⁶

"to obtain the help of well-informed persons in advising the purchase of those books which are best ... as to those sound principles of Christian truth and morality, which designing men have often endeavoured to undermine, even in such publications as appear to treat of quite other matters ... You cannot ... accept any book that would lower the foundation of Christian morals, by that cowardly assassin-like spirit of secretly stabbing at revealed religion which characterises so many books."⁷

1 Annual Report, 1843.

2 Annual Report, 1834.

3 Rules, 1841.

4 Annual Report, 1834.

5 Annual Report, 1839.

6 B.F. Duppa, Op. Cit., p.52.

7 J. Bullar, Op. Cit., p.10.

If control was exercised with care, then institutes could expect some benefits. Yeovil Mechanics' Institute admitted fiction in 1840 for the

"recreation of the mind and cultivation of taste and imagination".¹

It was claimed that

"the frivolous and unprincipled books which now circulate among our rural population may be replaced by sound, healthy and genuinely English literature."²

"If we can entice any individual from bad company or the beer shops to turn over the pages of a Walter Scott, a Defoe or a Goldsmith - to dwell for instance on the simple but sublime heroism of a Jenny Deans - the patience and energy of a Robinson Crusoe - or the domestic virtues of a Vicar of Wakefield - something has surely been gained to the cause of morality."³

A still more explicit statement of libraries as agencies of social control was made by Bullar.

"I have seen young men, among the working classes, take a taste for useful reading, which has kept them, in their leisure hours, out of dangerous society, and out of dangerous pursuits; and has elevated their minds, and prepared them better to perform their duties in life as parents, and members of society."⁴

At Shropshire Mechanics' Institute it was reported that members took books of general interest home

"so as to be able to read them to their families ... members gradually learnt to prefer innocent and improving occupations at home during the long evenings of winter to more expensive and pernicious pursuits abroad."⁵

1 Somerset County Gazette, 22 February 1840.

2 Select Committee on Public Libraries, 1849, p.xi.

3 S. Robinson, An Address to the Members of Dukinfield Village Library, (1843), p.19.

4 J. Bullar, Op. Cit., p.13.

5 1st Annual Report, 1826.

The warnings of danger if the activities of the library were not closely supervised were always about. Duppa's influential voice urged institutes to beware of the dangers of desultory reading

"the miscellaneous perusal of books tends to weaken the intellect...connected reading has a tendency to give a steadiness to the character ..."

Much the same kind of debate took place over the provision of newsrooms with newspapers and journals. It is very common to find that the newsroom was the most popular part of the institute.

As an example, the Annual Report of the Leeds Mechanics'

Institute in 1846 stated that the newspapers were

"the chief attraction of the institute, sometimes accommodating over 100 people at a time."

But apart from the concern over the political bias of most newspapers and constant attempts to retain political neutrality or at least to ban all Radical papers, there was also a view that newspaper and journal reading was an idle and frivolous way of passing the time. Baker, in his influential essay on Mechanics' Institutes and their Libraries, argued that

"newsrooms withdrew money from more valuable activities in the institute, and that they led to the neglect of mental and scientific cultivation".²

A number of institutes did ban newsrooms, among which were those at Hanley, Keighley, Bradford, Evesham and Manchester. At Manchester, both of Baker's arguments were used to justify the ban, and they were reinforced by the stance on political neutrality. Heywood, in a significant phrase, argued that newspapers placed

"an undesirable attraction in front of the juvenile members."³

1 B.F. Duppa, Op. Cit., p.49 .

2 C.W. Baker, Op. Cit., p.248.

3 Annual Report, 1837.

Many institutes, however, had developed out of newsrooms in the first place, such as those at Tunstall, Pontefract or Burslem, and many of the major institutes were never troubled at all by the question, as for example Birmingham, London, Leicester or Coventry. Most institutes founded after 1840 provided newsrooms as a matter of course. There was however some control over newsroom activities. The Wells L. and S.I. stated that all members in the Reading Room

"must avoid entering into any dispute or discussion whatsoever",¹

and similar rules were found in many institutes. Leicester Mechanics' Institute would not open its newsroom on Sunday,² and this was true of most Welsh institutes, although that at Neath was opened for religious reading.³

4.4 Lectures

It was in the lecture that the sponsors of mechanics' institutes were able to put over to the working class very clearly their views on how their lives should be conducted and what they should do with their small amount of leisure. One form of the hortatory lecture was aimed at improving their health and welfare. There were many lectures aimed at giving working men and their wives a sounder knowledge of the functioning of the body and personal hygiene. These were often worked into courses on anatomy and physiology, and were most frequently given by a local doctor. This was generally extended to include advice on keeping the home clean and ventilated. Further propaganda was

1 Rules, 1844.

2 Minute Book, 1833.

3 T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.307.

transmitted on the evils of insanitary conditions in the towns. Much of the work done by local committees and statistical societies into the condition of towns, under the encouragement of Dr. Chadwick and Southwood Smith, was fed back to audiences in the mechanics' institutes. Most of the propagandists for public health, including Southwood Smith, Chadwick, and George Godwin, supported and appeared at mechanics' institutes. Many of the audience were experiencing the full evil effects of insanitary conditions in the streets and courts where they lived. An example of this process was at Stourbridge Institute, where an 'Essay on the Sanitary Condition of Stourbridge', written by a member, was highly commended and delivered as a lecture;¹ and at Keighley Institute two lectures were given on 'The Sanitary Conditions of Large Towns'.²

At Plymouth Mechanics' Institute in the 1846-7 session, lectures were given on 'Baths and Washhouses for the People', 'The Causes and Evils of Atmospheric Impurity' and 'The Structure and Diseases of Human Teeth'.³

A central concern, almost an obsession, of much Victorian writing and activity on social conditions was the transformation of the family unit into the key binding force of society. The image most commonly and pervasively portrayed was of the division of marital labour into a husband working to support the family and exerting unquestioned authority over it, and the wife managing the household and expressing for its benefit the so-called feminine qualities of delicacy, affection and patience.⁴ The propagation of such a model, however apparently

¹ H. Palfrey, *Op. Cit.*, p.9.

² *Annual Report*, 1847.

³ C. Bowers, *Op. Cit.*, p.137.

⁴ For example J.A. St. John, *Op. Cit.*, Chapter X and XI, and S. Smiles, *Character*, (1871), Chapter 2 and Chapter 11.

successful, was in some contradiction to the reality of working class life. The model was under attack in particular from three sources. Firstly, industrial capitalism in dividing work from home had produced a contradictory need. There was a heavy demand for female and child labour in factories and small workshops, but somehow or other children had to be cared for and homes managed. The concern for working women was frequently expressed, generally deploring their desertion of homely duties for money and other associated temptations. Shaftesbury commented that as a result of the factory system

"domestic life and domestic discipline must soon be at an end; society will consist of individuals no longer grouped in families; so early is the separation of husband and wife, of parents and children."¹

Ure wrote somewhat unctiously

"factory females have in general much lower wages than males, and they have been pitied on this account with perhaps an injudicious sympathy since the low price of their labour here tends to make household duties their most profitable as well as agreeable occupation and prevents them from being tempted to the mill to abandon the care of their offspring at home."²

One of the inner contradictions of capitalism was exposed by the need for cheap labour and the need for primary social relationships which fitted in with capitalist social philosophy.

A second challenge to the capitalist ideal of family life came from the Radicals, and particularly the Radical feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Anna Wheeler. The St. Simonians,

1 Quotation in I. Pinchbeck, Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution, (1969), p.29.

2 A. Ure, The Philosophy of Manufactures, Quotation in W. Neff, Victorian Working Women, (1966), p.29.

whose missionaries arrived in England in 1833-34, and the Owenites were prominent among those who challenged this version of the ideal family and indeed attached the whole basis of marriage. Thus Anna Wheeler, publishing in Shepherd Smith's journal was arguing that

"up to the present hour, have not all women been degraded, oppressed, and made the property of men ... Let us reject as a husband any man who is not sufficiently generous to consent to share with us all the rights he himself enjoys."¹

Owen's belief that the family as it existed should be destroyed, may well have shocked his middle class reader even more than his proposal to abolish private property, though in effect it was the same thing, as Owen saw the family as

"the main bastion of private property and the guardian of all those qualities of individualism and self-interest to which he was opposed."²

"Separate interests and individual family arrangements with private property are essential parts of the existing irrational system. They must be abandoned with the system. And instead thereof there must be scientific associations of men, women and children, in their usual proportions."³

Marx and Engels separately pursued analysis of marriage and the family as essential supports to capitalism.⁴

The third attack on the ideal of family life was directed against its particularly repressive view of sexual presentation and behaviour. The reason for the growth of this obsessive

1 R. Pankhurst, The Saint-Simonians, Mill and Carlyle, p.109. Quotation in S. Rowbotham, Hidden from History, (1973), p. 43.

2 J.F.C. Harrison, 'A New View of Mr. Owen', in S. Pollard and J. Salt, Op. Cit., p.9.

3 Quotation from The New Moral World, in J.F.C. Harrison Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America, (1969), p.60.

4 For example, K. Marx in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, and The German Ideology. F. Engels, The Origins of the Family Private Property and the State.

view is not established, though a number of historians, and in particular P.T. Cominos, have attempted to relate sex mores and practices to the economic structure of society.¹ Middle class mores certainly ran counter to the norms of the working class, which came typically to be described as

"that promiscuous and indecent concourse of the sexes which is prevalent in towns and which is ruinous alike to health and morals."²

Much of the rhetoric that was broadcast did not stand up to careful analysis. For example one piece of modern research shows that it was not from factory women but from the domestic servants of middle class families that prostitutes were most generally recruited.³ While it would not be justified to regard the working class as sexually promiscuous it would appear from the concern of contemporary moralists that their sexual codes did not accord with those of the idealised Victorian family.

Mechanics' institutes, Yeo argues, portrayed a competitive and masculine culture.⁴ There was certainly a lack of provision for women on terms of equality with men. In all but a few institutes, women were only admitted as associate members generally via their husbands, unable to take advantage of all the facilities or vote in the election for officers. Though James Hole, who was somewhat of a feminist, argued for mixed classes his was not the majority voice in the institute,

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- 1 P.T. Cominos, 'Late Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System', International Review of Social History, VII, 1963. See also S. Marcus, The Other Victorians, (1966). G.R. Taylor, The Angel Makers, (1958).
 - 2 P. Gaskell, The Manufacturing Population of England, (1833), p.29, Quotation in M. Hewitt, Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industry, p.54. (1958).
 - 3 M. Hewitt, Op. Cit., p.59.
 - 4 E. Yeo, Robert Owen and Radical Culture, in S. Pollard and J. Salt, Op. Cit., pp. 89-90, 95.

and where provision was made for female instruction it was in separate classes.¹

"To bring young men and women together under such circumstances"

argues St. John,

"would hardly lead to the prosecution of serious studies. There would inevitably be trifling and unprofitable talk."²

Most of the female classes were in literacy or in the so-called female accomplishments of dress-making, music etc.³ The purpose of such classes was to reinforce the concept of female respectability and occupation. They were to be educated as the future wives and mothers of young men, and as managers of the economy of the household.⁴ At Holbeck it was claimed that

"in one year ignorant factory girls have been trained fit for Sunday School teachers",

which must have been a high measure of acceptance of respectability.⁵

Mechanics' institutes attempted to provide the range of experiences which would satisfy the objectives of female education:

"to elevate their understandings, to regulate their habits, and to purify their minds."⁶

At Manchester Mechanics' Institute there was planned a series of lectures on Domestic Economy, Social Duties and Moral Instruction.

At the Potteries Mechanics' Institute, among many other institutes,

1 J. Hole, Op. Cit., p.39.

2 J.A. St. John, Op. Cit., p.125.

3 Details of classes in M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., pp. 263-5.

4 E.G. W.H.I. Traice, Op. Cit., pp.18-19. J.A. St. John, Op. Cit., pp. 263-5.

5 Y.U.M.I., Annual Report, 1847, pp. 13-14.

6 J.A. St. John, Op. Cit., p.135.

a lecture was given on marriage, at Wakefield Mechanics' Institute, a lecture on 'The influence of their parents over offspring'. At Swindon Mechanics' Institute an annual award was made to the prize essay on 'The Domestic management of the working man's home'. At York Mechanics' Institute a course was run on Domestic and Social Economy.¹

The subordinate role of women in mechanics' institutions which accorded with her expected subordinate role in the home contrasted sharply with the provision for them in those institutions controlled by the working class. The Lyceums for example admitted women to full membership and they took part in all available activities, and the Owenite institutions placed great emphasis on equality and participation of women, encouraging them to become lecturers.²

Even more emphasis was given to temperance than to family life. It was indeed generally assumed that drink was the most frequent and effective destroyer of family life. A programme of temperance propaganda was to be expected in those mechanics' institutes which had grown out of or been associated with temperance organisations, as was the case at Pershore, Rotherham, Middlesborough, Weston-super-Mare, Redditch, Woodehouse, Crumpsall, Hebden Bridge, and Perran Warf. In fact temperance lectures were given in many more institutes than this, mostly because the middle class reformers who were involved in the running of mechanics' institutes were also temperance workers. Harrison

1 Instances taken from the records of these institutes.

2 E. Yeo, Op. Cit., p.97.

records 22 teetotallers who were known supporters of mechanics' institutes.¹ Typical of them was Joseph Livesey, a fairly Radical moral reformer, supporter of the ballot and universal suffrage, who attacked factory owners and landlords for exploitation of workers and tenants but who was opposed to independent working class activity to change this. He was prominent in establishing the mechanics' institute at Preston.² At Leeds, Bradford, Woolton and Halifax leaders of the institutes were also leaders of the local temperance societies. So lectures such as those given at Stourbridge Institute on 'The Chemical Properties of Spirits, Wine and Malt Liquor' or 'True Temperance' were commonly found.³ There was occasional reaction to this from the members. At Birkenshaw Mechanics' Institute the members were unhappy at meeting in the Temperance Hall, and at least one essay was written and published attacking the relationship of the institute with the Temperance Society.⁴

But even apart from the active temperance workers, the association of heavy drinking with sexual indulgence or promiscuity, with lack of thrift or foresight, with general improvidence and imprudence, was commonly accepted by most middle class reformers. In Harrison's phrase

"drinking usages were woven into the very fabric of working class life"⁵

and were widely condemned even though assumed to be unalterable. Such middle class reformers as C. Thackrah, Edward Hall, R. Slaney, and Samuel Smiles, and working class spokesmen like Engels and Sam Kydd joined in attacking the heavy drinking of

1 B. Harrison, Op. Cit., p.173.

2 Ibid, pp. 117-118.

3 H. Palfrey, Op. Cit.,

4 B. Harrison, Op. Cit., p.84.

5 J.F.C. Harrison, Living and Learning, (1961), p.17.

the English working man.¹ Many reformers neatly associated drunkenness with low living standards, over-population and improvident marriages. An increasingly common argument of the reformers was that living standards could be raised by having smaller families, which could be ensured by the practice of moral restraint, a growing popular middle class concept of marital sex relationships. Avoidance of alcohol and moral restraint led to prudent marriage and an assured future.²

A response in John Gast's Trades Newspaper transposed the argument back to a political context.

"Malthus, McCulloch, Place and Co. ... would reduce the whole matter to a question between Mechanics and their sweethearts and wives (rather than) a question between the employed and their employers - between the Mechanic and the corn-grower and monopolist - between the taxpayer and tax-inflictor."³

No-one argued stronger for a reform among the working class of their mode of living than Claxton.⁴ His belief was that upward social mobility for the worker lay in him developing self-respect and building up a reservoir of knowledge and skill. It was essential therefore that he adopted a style of life that gave him the maximum opportunities, and for the worker the most essential thing was to keep his body strong.

"The mechanics frame is his wealth. It is his capital. His all."⁵

1 For example, F. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844, (1892), p.12. Northern Star, 2 December 1848.

2 J.A. Banks, Prosperity and Parenthood, (1954), pp. 29-31.

3 E.P. Thompson, Op. Cit., p.777.

4 J. Claxton, Op. Cit., pp. 56-84.

5 Ibid, p.70.

So Claxton argues for careful and frugal diet, proper hygiene, well ventilated homes and workshops and against all the recreations which dissipate energy or reduce the efficiency of the body. His attacks on alcohol are particularly savage.¹

Another preoccupation of lecturers at mechanics' institutes was thrift and frugality. Members were encouraged to invest in Benefit Societies and Savings Clubs, and many institutes, such as those at Wakefield, York and Stourbridge, founded Penny Banks for their members. The Friendly Societies expanded greatly in the 19th Century. In Leeds for example Smiles estimated that in 1846 there were 14,000 members.² The men who were managers or organisers of insurance and saving in some form or other were heavily involved in mechanics' institutes. We have noted earlier the many banker families who supported institutes but it was also true of insurance agents and the like. Typical was the secretary of the Middlesborough Mechanics' Institute, William Taylor, who was agent for the Provident Friendly Societies.³ Occasionally the Friendly Societies appear on the ritual occasions of institutes. At Swindon when the new building was started in 1854 members of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows and the Ancient Order of Foresters marched with members of the Masonic Lodge through the town to a church service and a banquet.⁴ It was very much in accord with the principles of thrift and prudence taught in them that some mechanics' institutes formed themselves into a

1 Ibid, pp. 142-146.

2 J.F.C. Harrison, Op. Cit., p.53.

3 W. Lilley, Op. Cit., p.160.

4 The Builder, June 1854, and Swindon Advertiser, 29 May 1854.

company and sold shares to finance their building schemes. This was the case for example at Swindon, Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth, and at Bridgwater.

The coincidence of advice on living habits with capitalist self-interest was particularly clear in the many lectures given on the value or morality of work. In a world of massive alienation in the process of work, it was not unlikely that representatives of capitalism would try to elevate the concept of work. Lord Morpeth lectured to a number of the Yorkshire institutes on The Dignity of Work,¹ the Earl of Carlisle, lecturing in the same area, used to claim in his lectures that manual work, apart from its many other virtues, was a positive aid to literary achievement,² and in Plymouth a typical lecture of the genre, was The Philosophy of Work and Play.³ It was a point implicit in Smiles' description of successful men, and was made explicit in a chapter of Character entitled 'Work!'. Kay Shuttleworth summed up the views of very many reformers when he stated that

"among the labouring class no habit is more essential to virtuous conduct than that of steady and persevering labour."⁴

The particular concerns of industrialists to change the working man's perception and use of time has been the subject of much comment, particularly from E.P. Thompson,⁵ and the emphasis on

- 1 Wakefield Mechanics' Institute Annual Report, 1844.
- 2 Earl of Carlisle, 'On the Utility of Mechanics Institutions', Lectures and Addresses in Aid of Popular Education (1853), p.76.
- 3 C.L. Bowers, Op. Cit., p.136.
- 4 J. Kay-Shuttleworth, Op. Cit., p.298.
- 5 For example, 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', Past and Present, Vol.38, December 1967.

punctuality and regular attendance was not only apparent in the lectures of mechanics' institutes but still more so in the schools. It is clear that a major problem faced by the proponents of government-aided mass education, primarily by the Church schools, was that of obtaining regular attendance.¹ Behind this, so argues Frith in his study of Leeds elementary education, lay a battle between the providers and the working class parents.² The providers saw the provision of age specific, full-time, graded, pupil competitive schools with agreed curricula as the expression of rationality in education that was in line with the prevailing political and social economy. The consumers on whom they relied, commonly preferred schools which were non-specific, did not require full-time or regular attendance, had no obligatory curriculum, and stressed working together rather than competing. The answer for many parents was to use the private schools, the Dame Schools, constantly maligned by middle class educationists but arguably providing an educational experience much more valuable to the working class children who attended.³ However such schools were hardly likely to provide the emphasis on punctuality and attendance combined with teaching truths of political economy. Such an association was certainly the aim of the denominational schools. The research of Goldstron on school readers shows by 1840 a move from the simple relationship of submission to religious authority, divinely ordained

- 1 B. Madoc Jones, 'Patterns of Attendance and their Social Significance: Mitcham National Schools 1830-39'. P. McCann (Ed.), Popular Education and Socialisation in the Nineteenth Century (1977) A.L.O. Ellis, 'Influences on School Attendance in Victorian England' British Journal of Educational Studies, XXI, 3, (1973).
- 2 S. Frith, Socialisation and Rational Schooling: Elementary Education in Leeds before 1870. P. McCann (Ed.), Op. Cit.
- 3 For rejection of schools for private and dame schools, see S. Frith Op. Cit. p.87 for Leeds; P. McCann Popular Education, Socialisation and Social Control: Spitalfields 1818-24. P. McCann (Ed.), Op. Cit.

social grades, and the intricate harmony of society to an association of orthodox political economy with good living habits and the avoidance of disturbing the economic order. In Dunn and Crossley's series of readers for the British and Foreign School Society published 1840-42 they included a gloss on the political economy section as follows.

"Folly of thinking it unjust that one man should receive more than another for his labour"

"Impossibility of regulating wages by law - has been attempted - always failed - why (see above).
Way in which a labourer can improve his lot -
increased skill - knowledge of best markets for
labour - habits of forethought, temperance -
economy."¹

Were the youth to graduate from these schools to the mechanics' institute, the message would be reinforced and elaborated.

Yet another strand in the acculturation of the members of the institutes was that concerned with teaching working men the codes of conduct and behaviour that were being established as the prevailing norm by the middle class. There were frequent lectures on manners, on deportment, on the characteristics of gentlemanly behaviour. Frederic Schwann, for example, the benefactor of Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute was in the habit of giving lectures on manners, and advice on neatness and cleanliness of dress and person.² There was also an attempt in some institutes to promote proper elocution and remove dialect speech and syntax. Huddersfield again provides us with a good example. One speaker said

1 J.M. Goldstrom 'The Content of Education and the Socialisation of the Working Class Child 1830-1860', P. McCann (Ed.), Op. Cit., p. 102. See also V.E. Chancellor, History for their Masters (1970).

2 M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., pp. 200-201.

"Persons become confirmed in the peculiar dialect of their district, and however hearty and honest the dialect may be (as is the case with that of Yorkshire), it very materially militates against those who can speak no other and have to push their fortunes where the English language is more purely spoken."¹

One of the more remarkable characteristics of the lecture programme is the ingenuity of the presenters in interpreting a wide variety of topics in terms of morality. For example we find lectures on the Moral Influence of Knowledge (Redruth 1850), Moral Evils of Mohammedanism (Taunton 1840), Moral Evils of Ignorance (Taunton 1840), Moral Uses of the Electric Telegraph (Devenport 1851),² The Moral Influence of Unrestricted Commerce (Keighley 1849).³

That the mechanics' institutes' programmes were part of a mechanism of social control can be assumed from the mixture of advice on social and cultural behaviour with political propaganda. One week the workers would be told how to take care of their teeth, the next why the wage fund theory precluded their having a decent living wage: one week they were warned against the evils of drink, the next against the futility of combinations and strikes: one week they were advised to be frugal, thrifty, faithful in marriage, and good fathers to their children, the next they were told why working hours could not be cut by one minute: one week they learnt how to behave with good manners and speak with decorum, the next they learnt just how rigid were the distinctions of class between the workers

1 Quotation from institute records in M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., p. 202.

2 C.L. Bowers, Op. Cit., p.142.

3 Annual Report, 1850.

and those above them. Not surprisingly, they sometimes associated drains and cleanliness with economic exploitation and political oppression.

The close relationship between capitalist self interest and approved morality is well illustrated at the inauguration of the Taunton Mechanics' Institute. We have observed above that two aims of this institute were to inculcate in members an acceptance of their station in life, and to provide more skilled operatives. The prior purpose however was stated as follows:-

"It would assist the moral correctness of the humbler classes, and infuse into them a taste of the useful application of those principles of art and science, which might be peculiarly applicable to their respective employments. This disposition by inducing a better habit of employment would supercede a proneness to spending their evening at the ale house."¹

The conjunction in this aim of useful application of knowledge to their jobs, good habits of employment and a decline in consorting in pubs is typical of the way the sponsors of institutes associated appropriate values and life styles to the system of economic production they represented.

The relationship between the interest of employers and the behaviours encouraged in the members of mechanics' institutes is demonstrated well in Hill's report on responses from seven institutes. His questions asked of members of the institutes what was their character as husbands and fathers, what was their general

1 Taunton Courier, 13 October 1830.

character for temperance and sobriety, and how far they were valued as good employees. Typical was the response from Liverpool that

"they are decidedly more steady and intellectual (as workmen)"

None was ever charged with a criminal offence and they were most temperate. At Derby it was said

"unequivocally and comparatively speaking to a great degree (they become better workmen)"

They are

"particularly skillful and steady workers"

and

"exemplary and temperate in behaviour".

Leeds similarly comments on the 'exemplary behaviour' of its members, and at Lincoln it was claimed there was no intoxication

"a reading room and books keep many away from the pot house...They, their wives, and children have common sources (in the institute) which tends to humanise, and consequently must induce stronger ties."

Manchester also reported that its members were 'generally known as being temperate and sober'.¹ The reports quoted by Hill from individual members similarly concentrate on the benefits they have received from the institutes in learning to eschew folly and vice, and indeed most kinds of recreation, in favour of hard work and self-improvement. They claim to have developed qualities of diligence, concentration, punctuality, frugality and other of the 'industrial' virtues, which had in most cases enabled them to achieve better positions at their place of employment.

¹ F. Hill, Op. Cit., Taken from replies, 2, pp. 187-202.

The message is perhaps most clearly stated in a poem produced at Wakefield Mechanics' Institute entitled 'The Claims of the Artizan'.¹

I

"Worthy the labourer of his hire",
Hath highest Wisdom said:
But man, that Heavenward must aspire,
Lives not alone by bread.

To lead the child, in Wisdom's ways,
Have noblest minds essayed:
Yet the great mass, unguided strays
By untrained passions sway'd;

Here art's high stores, and beauty's smiles,
To worthier tastes invite:
May gaming haunts, and tavern wiles,
Grow hateful in his sight.

Behold him as his daily task,
His handiworks, regard;
Is this man worthy, who would ask?
Of labour's high reward.

May Science shed her holiest light,
To cheer his toilsome way;
And truth break on his Soul's deep night,
With beams of brightening day.

II

As oft on wild and rugged soil,
The fairest flower appears;
So in the lowliest sons of toil,
The mind an empire rears.

Redeem'd from his degraded state,
Man lives a slave no more;
But nobly dares to emulate
The brightest sons of lore.

He finds that knowledge may be bought,
At very easy cost;
Joy, with no after sorrow, fraught,
And not one comfort lost.

He will not revel in the din,
Of brawling tavern mirth;
To him, in truth, would then begin,
A Paradise on earth.

1 Quotation in J.T. Wilson, Op. Cit., pp. 53-4.

4.5 Working Class Culture

We can conclude from the evidence considered that a case exists that the mechanics' institutes conducted an attack on many prevailing behaviours among the working class and attempted to develop an alternate culture which was compatible with the development of industrial capitalism. It does not follow however that the attack on many working class practices and the encouragement of useful habits was exclusive to middle class reformers. Parts of the middle class cultural programme as activated in mechanics' institutes served equally well the development of an articulate and self-aware industrial proletariat. To argue otherwise would be to suggest that Radical working class leaders and their followers valued filth, disease, drunkenness, cruelty to animals, improvidence and the like. There is indeed a romantic stance, which on occasions R. Johnson¹ seems close to, which sees the practices of the common people, described as traditional working class culture, as in themselves of special value and all attacks on them as attacks against the interests of the common people. Two points in answer to this position need to be made. Firstly if culture is a reflection of working conditions, then as the working class became involved in new productive systems, their culture in so far as they could develop it independently, would reflect these new conditions and reject parts of previous cultural practices. Indeed an attempt to develop a working class culture that was relevant to industrial capitalism and its class conflict was a preoccupation of many working class leaders conscious of the attempts by middle class

1 R. Johnson. Works as cited.

representatives of capitalism to impose their own definition of a suitable culture on the working class.

Secondly, the material conditions upon which industrial capitalism was based had aspects which were adverse to middle class and working class alike. This was particularly true of the health, sanitation and housing problems of the new industrial towns, but it was also true of excessive alcoholism and degradation through individual improvidence.

The alternative working class culture that was developed by Owenite and Chartist associations had remarkable similarities to the cultural programmes of mechanics' institutes. The programmes of the musical concerts held by the Institution for the Association of Industrious Classes at Charlotte Street were very little different from those held in mechanics' institutes, and the lectures which were interspersed with the music and dancing were of the same improving type, though with a very different message.¹ The proponents of Radical culture aimed to wrest from the control of the church on the one hand and the pub on the other as many of the rituals and leisure pursuits of the working man as possible. So their institutions held weekly social festivals of music and dancing, a programme of classes and lectures, meetings for communal hymn singing (of Chartist or Owenite hymns), inverted Christian festivals where secular programmes were celebrated on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, in Lent and during Whitsun, and rituals celebrating

1 E. Yeo, Op. Cit., pp. 53-4.

the crucial rites of passage: baptism, marriage and divorce, and funerals. Much of this caused very great offence to the Church, but Owen in particular realised the necessity of creating a total alternative culture in which the Church had no control. Apart from the specifically anti-Church aspect of Owenite and Chartist cultural programmes, they were in style not dissimilar to the programmes of any of the middle class bodies. The very considerable difference was in purpose. Whereas the cultural programme of the mechanics' institute stressed individual competitiveness and job productivity, and encouraged virtues such as sobriety and self-discipline as an instrument of capitalist labour discipline, the alternative culture stressed communality, brotherliness and joy, loving relationships, and the discipline of selfless work for the community life.¹

4.6 The Development of Cultural and General Interest Programmes

It is within the context of the argument that the institutes were attempting to influence the moral and cultural codes of the working class in the interests of capitalist economy, that we should examine the trend towards general, entertaining and literary lecture programmes.

The facts are not in dispute. A great deal of research has confirmed that the early institutes intended to provide technical

1 E. Yeo, Op. Cit., p.95-6.

and scientific lectures, but that by 1850 in nearly all institutes these came to occupy only a very small part of the programme or ceased to exist altogether.¹ They were replaced by a mish-mash of lectures on literary, travel, biographical or general interest subjects. Many of these were presented in the most amusing possible way and accompanied when appropriate by spectacular visual displays. The policy seems generally to have been to amuse as much as to inform.

The development was condemned by most contemporary commentators on mechanics' institutes. A letter to the Mechanics Magazine sums up the general line of criticism.

"Now it is of the heavens, and now of the coal pits - now of longitude, and now of shorthand - now of two and two, and now of the National Debt - now of the Newtonian system, and now of the Scotch and Quaker rag-system; that the members are lectured to, and all within less than the short space of a lunar month."²

James Hole, in his common puritan way, deplored the tendency of institutes to look for ways of passing away the hours of leisure pleasantly.

"Young men, especially, have to be educated, as well as amused".

He argued that the desultory lecture,

"now a single lecture on chemistry, now a dramatic entertainment - this week a lecture of geology, and next week a concert" were totally inadequate.³

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- 1 For example, M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., pp. 97-8, 309.
C.M. Turner, Op. Cit., pp. 153-154. C.L. Bowers, Op. Cit., pp. 69, 130-139.
 - 2 Mechanics Magazine, VI, 496.
 - 3 A.R.Y.U.M.I., 1855, p.15-16.

Traice attacked

"the passive supineness of the bulk of Members, who wait for something exciting to draw them forth to listen to a lecture, and who complain if it does not, without any effort on their part, stir their curiosity by its novelty, gratify their sense of elegance and propriety by its composition and delivery, or at least give information likely to turn to practical account or leave pleasant reminiscences suitable to be retailed in conversation."¹

A report of the Ipswich Mechanics' Institute stated that

"public lectures alone on varied subjects which the members have never studied before become, after the novelty has worn off, wearisome."²

James Hole claimed that at Leeds Mechanics' Institute

"the question is resolved into, not what are the educational necessities of our young artisans; but, what is required to meet their whims or caprice, - the love of novelty, - of display - or the thirst for excitement."³

The change, when it occurred, could be quite rapid. In 1835 the Leicester Mechanics' Institute was providing a programme of 33 scientific lectures and two elocution lectures. By 1837, the subjects covered were Music, Painting, German Literature, Memory and Cotton Manufacture.⁴ Cardiff Mechanics' Institute took a deliberate decision to recast its lecture programme away from scientific subjects in the hope of bringing back its deserting members.⁵ At Taunton Mechanics' Institute, which had concentrated very strongly on scientific lectures, probably through the influence on its committee of the prominent scientist, A. Crosse, some general lectures first crept in in

1 W. Traice, Op. Cit., p.21.

2 Quotation in B.F. Duppa, Op. Cit., p.34.

3 J. Hole, Light More Light, (1860), p.58.

4 Institute records.

5 T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.233.

1838, and by 1840 two-thirds were of this type. This proportion was roughly the same at Bridgwater Mechanics' Institute. In 1841 Plymouth Mechanics' Institute still had half its lecture programme devoted to scientific subjects, but in 1846 this proportion dropped to one third and by 1848 to one-sixth.¹ Research on mechanics' institutes in the regions have shown the same trend and it is not in dispute.² Two lecture programmes are produced in Appendix A to illustrate the trend.

The process is classically analysed by William Newmarch in relation to York Institute of Popular Science and Literature (formerly titled York Mechanics' Institute). Newmarch, writing in 1840, tabulated the change from almost exclusively science programmes to ones of literary and miscellaneous lectures and observed that the support of members varied inversely to the number of science lectures. The institute altered its rules to allow

"the rational amusement of its members and the cultivation of their taste."³

It should be noted however that there were a few institutes that kept to a totally scientific programme. Most of these were in Scotland, for example at the institutes in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh.⁴

¹ C.L. Bowers, Op. Cit., p.69.

² See the work cited of J. Popple, T. Evans, J.T. Wilson.

³ W. Newmarch, Appendix to the 5th Annual Report YUMI, (1842), in particular pp. 42-44.

⁴ See *infra*, pp. 370-371.

The interpretation of the move to non-scientific lectures is one we can question. The common argument is that the changes in membership from a working class to a middle class membership caused this programme change. The assumption is that the lecture programme of general and cultural interest had a particular relevance and interest to the middle classes, and by implication were of less interest to the working class, however either class is defined. The movement towards the embourgeoisement of the institutes in both membership and lecture content (paralleled by other activities such as library selection) has generally been deplored by modern commentators. The extent to which membership did change in the institutes is discussed in Appendix E. We can however propose one counter argument. If the purpose of the mechanics' institutes was to develop a safe culture and recreational activities which would fit an industrial labour force for social as well as technical demands made on it, then it is irrelevant whether the programme provided was attractive to the lower middle classes or not. Its purpose was not to satisfy the wishes of the bourgeoisie, but to develop tastes, habits, sentiments and social and private pursuits which were part of a distinctive cultural mode, and which were an antidote to emergent alternative cultural modes of the working (or the middle) class. For clearly to the capitalist it was as important that clerks, agents and warehousemen had developed an appropriate cultural mode as had artisans and skilled workers. What is being suggested, therefore, is that the dynamic for the movement towards literary and recreational types of lecture programme came not out of the demands of the lower middle classes

who were moving into positions of power in the institutes. It came from the needs of a capitalist society to develop a cultural mode which embraced as much of the working population as possible. A consequence of this in many towns was that middle class members did flood into the institute and the artisans lost their dominant position there, but it was not a necessary consequence and did not happen in all towns. There is no reason to suppose that the working classes enjoyed chemistry lectures more than the middle classes, nor found less attractive than the middle classes lectures on travel, music or literature.

The key point is that such activities posed no danger to the status quo. Their purpose was in the acquiring of interesting but unrelated facts or the cultivation of individual sensitivity or sentiment in relation to literature or art. Neither end product was bad in itself, and indeed was by no means absent from the educational institutions of the Owenites and Chartists. But when worked into a total institutional experience which included the propagation of the self-help ideas of Smiles, mixed with Broughamite economics, and Whig politics, its functions as a part of a system of social control becomes clearer. For it substituted for, or at least did not exist alongside, studies in contemporary society and in social or communal concerns. The pursuits encouraged in the member who listened to the lectures of a typical programme in 1840 were individual and elitist rather than social and common, as is illustrated clearly enough by the programmes in Appendix A.

It is true that in some institutes, where the controlling members were not unsympathetic to working class aspirations, the value of a general or literary programme was not seen simply as a matter of acquiring a cultivated taste or interesting social conversation for tea parties, but as a way of educating working class leaders for the part they had to play in constructing a new society. For example, the Rev. J. Cameron, a Unitarian and Chartist leader in Wakefield, and the inspiration behind its second institute said:

"How shall we work out in men or people this reformation of reformations? Can scientific or literary or philosophical culture construct for us a social edifice, wherein men shall have, not only provisions for the body, but a heart of love constraining them to live together in brotherhood."¹

He at least could see the possibilities of a programme which would reinforce a radical humanistic view of society.

There was also an alternative argument made by Traice that lectures on travel, history, biography and literature played an important part in moulding the character of the working man. He claimed that while being concerned with science and technical subjects, the mechanics' institutes must also

"keep alive the intelligent sympathy with human concerns"

"subdue prejudices and foster circumspection in the formation of opinion".²

Lectures on history and travel would help them obtain

"a clearer and juster idea of the religious, moral, social, and political circumstances amid which his lot is cast."

1 J.T. Wilson, Op. Cit., p.49.

2 W. Traice, Op. Cit., p.7.

While political education was not possible in the institutes, all the other experiences working men enjoyed there, renders

"them circumspect and painstaking in the formation of opinions, and tending to make them temperate in the exercise of their privileges."¹

4.7 Conclusion

The attempt by the middle classes to influence to their own vision the prevailing morality of the country was an aspect of their struggle for economic and political control. In

J.S. Mill's words:

"wherever there is an ascendent class, a large portion of the morality of the country emanates from its class interests, and its feelings of class superiority."²

The utilitarian political and social philosophy of the middle classes had, in the first three decades of the 19th Century been expressed through the bleakest principles of Malthus.

The primary cause of the problems of the poor were attributed to their moral defects, and their salvation made dependent upon their willingness to accept the virtues and life styles associated with the capitalist work ethic. Evangelical moralism and the scholasticism of political economy had been coded into the principles of the Poor Law of 1834. Tholfsen has argued however that from the mid 1830s there was a mellowing of the utilitarian position which moved toward softer social values of middle class liberalism.³ This reduced the emphasis on the cash nexus

1 W. Traice, Op. Cit., p.11.

2 Quoted in H. Perkin, Op. Cit., p.273.

3 T. Tholfsen, Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England, (1976).

and the iron laws of economics, and emphasised the possibilities of regeneration, the potentialities for improvement that lay dormant in the working class. A new morality was developed, particularly by such writers as Samuel Smiles and William Felkin, which expanded the theme of universal opportunity for moral and intellectual improvement, which was a far cry from the cruder versions of self-help for economic survival.¹

There was also a growing acceptance by the middle class that it was not going to be possible to break working class culture in such a way that all the poor accepted the offered middle class alternative. While some sports could be partially suppressed and some fairs closed, the pubs were uncontrollable as were the singing saloons, the casinos and the like. So an alternative approach begins to emerge in the 1830s which complemented neatly the modifications in utilitarian thinking. Emphasis was laid on the drive for upward mobility by the most ambitious vigorous and educated of the working class, with the aim of psychologically insulating such upward strivers from the culture of their fellows. There were made available for them 'conventicles of respectability', to use Storch's phrase, which were the thresholds to middle class virtues and some kind of success in life.² Such conventicles included chapels, savings clubs, various kinds of societies, reformed beershops such as Godolphin Osborne proposed, Solly's working men's clubs, the Young Men's Christian Association, and numerous educational bodies. One of the key conventicles which provided a middle class morality

1 For S. Smiles, see J.F.C. Harrison, Op. Cit., pp. 135-140.
For W. Felkin, see T. Tholfsen, Op. Cit., pp. 135-140.

2 R.D. Storch, Op. Cit., p. 148.

for working class members was the mechanics' institute and it has been the purpose of this chapter to illustrate the varieties of provision made.

CHAPTER 5

MECHANICS' INSTITUTES AS TEACHING INSTITUTIONS

"The patient leaders of their institute taught them
with facts"

Alfred Tennyson The Princess

"Organs for the dissemination of sciences useful to
the bourgeoisie"

F. Engels

- 5.1 Introduction: the Fate of Scientific Lecture Courses
- 5.2 Classroom Teaching in Mechanics' Institutes
- 5.3 Examples of Institute Programmes
 - Hitchin Mechanics' Institute
 - Birmingham Mechanics' Institute
 - Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute
- 5.4 Teaching as a Political Act in Mechanics' Institutes
- 5.5 Conclusion to Chapter 5

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction

Whatever arguments are made about the functions of mechanics' institutes, their overt purpose was unambiguous. They were intended to be teaching institutions, and a major part of their activity was intended to be conducted in the lecture room and classroom. Almost every institution included this in its aims. Under the influence of Brougham, and the example of the earliest institutions at London, Glasgow and Edinburgh, two policies were commonly pursued, the one which became increasingly difficult to hold to, the other which was to have a considerable influence on the development of technical education. The first of these was the belief, very seldom challenged, that teaching based on the technical and scientific aspect of the artisans trade should be concerned with theory and not with practice. Hole argued that the intention should be to make a workman more intelligent, not more skillful.¹

This was a common theme in comments on mechanics' institutes.

The secretary of the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute wrote of

"the erroneous conception of mechanics' institutes.
I advocate them as the means of elevating the human
race, not of making them more skillful at the lathe
or file."²

The first annual report of the Edinburgh School of Art claimed
it was

1 J. Hole, Essay ..., pp.54-5. See also T. Coates, Op. Cit., p.26.

2 F. Hill, Op. Cit., Vol.2, p.192.

"not intended to teach the trade of the carpenter, the mason, the dyer, or any other particular business; but there is no trade which does not depend, more or less, on scientific principles; and to teach what these are ... will form the business of this establishment."¹

The second of the policies was that teaching should be primarily conducted via lectures and should be of a scientific or practical nature. The course of scientific lectures was attempted by most of the early institutes. We can take as an example that undertaken at the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute. In 1826 in the season between March and November 32 weekly lectures had been given, most of them in short courses - 8 on Chemistry, 3 on Mechanics, 3 on Astronomy, 4 on Scientific History, 3 on the Steam Engine. This was typical of the programme over the next few years. In 1827 a course on pneumatics and hydrostatics was introduced. In 1834 the major course was one given in 12 lectures on Chemistry, with shorter courses on Botany, Gravitation, Atmospheric and Electricity.²

At the London Mechanics' Institute, some difficulty was experienced in finding the right formula. In the 1826/27 season, about 100 lectures were given and they included courses on mechanical science, the structure of the human body, metallurgy chemistry, and other sciences but interspersed with single lectures on miscellaneous matters put in to fill up the programme. The members criticised the unsystematic arrangement of the programme and in 1829 a new plan was adopted, whereby short courses of 4-5 lectures were given in regular and logical

1 Quotation in J. Hole, Op. Cit., p.16.

2 Institute Records.

sequence. Matter and motion was to be followed by Forces, Elementary Mechanism, Astronomy, Hydrostatics and Hydrodynamics, Pneumatics, Optics, Practical Mechanics, Electricity, Magnetism and Heat.¹

The smaller institutes had to be content with a much less ambitious programme. Their resources were very limited but they did their best. Reference has already been made to the lecture courses at Cheltenham. At West Bromwich Institute, between 1837-40, the following lectures were arranged: 3 on cotton manufacture, 1 on mechanical invention, 3 on optics, 2 on electricity, 4 on chemistry, and a course (the number is unclear) on the geology of the South Staffordshire Coalfield.²

The system of science lectures failed under various severe practical difficulties which were rehearsed by Coates, Hole, Traice and others at the time, and are well illustrated and analysed by Tylecote.³ Even without such difficulties as finance, availability of lecturers, enough basic knowledge in the recipients and such like, there were a number of observers who had no belief in the usefulness of this method of teaching. Hole devastatingly dismissed lectures as providing an uninstructed audience with information that was unrelated to any knowledge they themselves possessed, and of which they understood little, and probably forgot nearly all.⁴

1 Details taken from T. Kelly, Op. Cit., pp.112-113, 128.

2 Institute records.

3 M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., pp. 92-101.

4 J. Hole, Op. Cit., pp. 28-29.

A lecturer at Milford Haven Mechanics' Institute in 1850
proclaimed himself

"truly astonished that any person of moderate
reflection can imagine that two or three lectures
on astronomy or half a dozen on chemistry can
give any real insight into these subjects to
one who previously knew nothing about them."¹

William Newmarch at York reported that

"scientific lectures, except when illustrated by a
profusion of brilliant experiments, cannot obtain
an audience"²

and there is evidence that science lectures, to compete with
the attraction of general lectures, had to be presented as a
series of marvels and spectacular happenings. At Stourbridge
Mechanics' Institute in 1839 an exhibition was given of a hydro-
oxygen microscope

"in which the beholder could see in a single drop of
water, the water tiger, the water lion and the
water devil devouring each other"

"one of the most magnificent effects the eye can
witness".³

At Swindon Mechanics' Institute, Professor Pepper of the Royal
Polytechnic gave a 'scientific entertainment' of optical pheno-
mena and illusions. It became common to illustrate talks with
oxy-hydrogen limelight views.

Although scientific lectures, except these kinds of spectaculars,
declined in most parts of the country, this was not the case in
Scotland. The larger Scottish Institutes continued to provide
lengthy courses in the natural sciences. In 1840 the Edinburgh

1 T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.349.

2 W. Newmarch, Op. Cit., pp. 43-44.
1870 Institute Programme.

3 H.E. Palfrey, Op. Cit., p.6.

School of Arts had nearly 800 students involved in these courses.¹
At the Glasgow Mechanics' Institute in 1833/34 337 students attended the natural and mechanical philosophy course, 389 a chemistry course, 123 an anatomy and physiology course, and 26 a mechanical drawing course. The courses were either of 25 or 50 lectures.² Aberdeen Mechanics' Institute organised itself on similar lines in 1835 and was thereafter very successful.³

5.2 Classroom Teaching

As the science lecture as a means of instruction came to be regarded less favourably, so classroom teaching became central to the purposes of the institutions. Its success in turn however was not universal. Whereas William Hawkes Smith could write:

"It is the classes and the library - the unobtrusive, the unglittering portions which form the really, the profoundly beneficial characteristics of such institutions."⁴

Thomas Hogg was much less sanguine.

"Each class is to a great extent isolated from another, and their existence sometimes depends on the fluctuating tastes and wants, often the caprice of the members. There is no regular course of study through which a student is either required or expected to pass. To working men, the classes often present few, if any advantages, except the acquirement of elementary knowledge; and those really desirous of obtaining in the Mechanics' Institution a knowledge of the principles of their trade, seldom find that knowledge there."⁵

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.76.

2 T. Kelly, Op. Cit., pp. 150-151. J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.86.

3 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p.59.

4 'On the Tendency and Prospects of Mechanics' Institutions' The Analyst, Vol.II, 11 June 1835, p.337.

5 T. Hogg, Quotation in J. Hole, Op. Cit., p.60.

Whether the members of an institute experienced something like the first or the second of these states depended primarily on the resources of the institutions, and the objectives which the classes were trying to achieve. There were at least four distinct kinds of classes. The first type consisted of classes in the sciences, the most common of which were in Chemistry, Mathematics, Mechanics and Technical Drawing and Design. A second type was initiated very rapidly in most institutes, being much in demand by members, and a practical necessity if enough were to be found to be enrolled in the science classes. This was the elementary course in reading, grammar, writing and arithmetic. A third type consisted of a rather mixed bag of general or cultural subjects and were introduced into most institutes in the 1830s. Such classes were in French, Latin, Music, Geography, History, Elocution, German, Ornamental Writing and Art. The influx of clerks, who benefited from many of these subjects, led to the introduction of Phonography, Bookkeeping, Commerce, and other directly vocational subjects.

There was a fourth type of class which is not easy to define with precision. This was the mutual improvement class or discussion class which makes sporadic appearances in many institutes particularly in the 1840s. These groups varied greatly in what they did for they could cover any number of subjects, but they were generally discussion groups or experimental science groups. The discussion groups frequently worked to a routine where a selected member read an essay or gave a short talk, and the rest of the group then discussed it. Alternatively a member might read a passage from a book or

journal for discussion. At the institute at West Bromwich on the second and fourth Thursday of each month, a speaker introduced a subject, and the speaker from the previous meeting opened a discussion. Its aim was the

"cultivation of knowledge in the most familiar manner, to hear individual observations and opinions, and to afford opportunities for obtaining explanations on points not clearly understood or of facts which seem at issue with received doctrines."¹

At Birtenshaw Institute there was a reading of working men's essays one night a week. At the Cambridge and Cambridgeshire Institute, there were debates and these could be on papers presented by members, but they had to be sanctioned by the committee to ensure they did not raise religious or political issues. The same situation existed at Chester. It seems likely that discussion groups were commoner in the more radical institutes such as the Manchester New Mechanics' Institute or the one at Cheltenham. Where they existed in more conservative institutes, it was likely that as at Cambridge or Manchester Mechanics' Institute or Chester Mechanics' Institute there was some degree of control and censorship. Experimental classes are recorded in a number of institutes - most of the large city institutes had a class where members in a laboratory or workshop conducted experiments in mechanics or the sciences. There were a number of mutual improvement classes in subjects like reading, arithmetic or geography, but these existed simply because there was no teacher available so the members got together to help each other the best they could.

1 Institute minute book, 1837.

The problems of effective class work in mechanics' institutes were exhaustively analysed by contemporaries - Hole, Coates, Duppa and Traice amongst them. There were problems in taking into account the varied background attainments of class members, there were problems in smaller institutes of having enough students and teachers either to have initial gradings into advanced and elementary classes, or progressive gradings through which the successful student could advance. Facilities were generally poor with drab premises and inadequate books and equipment. There were relatively few competent teachers and many institutes had to rely on volunteers in default of money for a paid teacher. There were some problems caused by the mixing of adults and youths in the same class. It seems likely that youths from 1¹/₄ to 20 came to occupy an increasing proportion of the clientele of mechanics' institute classes, and it was often claimed that adult men felt unhappy learning alongside such youths.¹ Men and women were nearly always placed in separate classes, but social classes were mixed up and this supposedly caused some discomfort.² Problems were also caused by the irregular and short term attendances of many members. This could be through illness or overtime but also from discouragement that seems to beset most experiments in adult education over the last two centuries. There was not a regular attendance at class of many of the members. Indeed the membership of the institutes was very volatile. At Leeds Mechanics' Institute among weekly wage earners and youths one half to two-thirds changed every year.³ At Manchester Mechanics' Institutes in 1847 it was said 400-500 members left each year.⁴ At Bolton

1 W. Traice, Op. Cit., p.15. J. Hole, Op. Cit., p.60.

2 W. Traice, Op. Cit., p.15. J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p. VIII.

3 Annual Reports, 1843-51, referring to class attendance.

4 M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., p.165.

Mechanics' Institute the average length of stay among members in handicrafts was nine months, among mechanics and ironworkers six and one-third months and among building workers and factory hands four and four-fifths months.¹ Newcastle on Tyne Mechanics' Institute lost 125-150 members a year out of a membership of about 500. 80 per cent of its membership only paid subscriptions over winter months.² At Birmingham Mechanics' Institute in its first five years 1550 members joined but in no single year was membership higher than 372.³

5.3 Examples of Institute Programmes

As the work of classes in institutes varied so much from one to the next we cannot easily make generalisations, but some idea of the variety of experience can be gained from a consideration of three institutes - one small, one middle range and one large.

5.3.1 Hitchin Mechanics' Institute

In many of the smaller institutes classes were a very chancy affair as demand fluctuated, premises moved about, and teachers appeared and disappeared. Many institutes quickly gave up the struggle. When the Hitchin Institute was formed in 1835,

1 Manchester Guardian, 5 October 1844.

2 L.J. Dyer, 'Newcastle Mechanics' Institute', Adult Education, XXII, 1949-50.

3 Annual Reports, 1825-30.

classes were started in Arithmetic, Geography, Geometry, Astronomy and Grammar but within two years they had all failed, and future attempts to revive them met with no success at all.¹ More typical was Coventry Mechanics' Institute,² an Institute with a membership ranging from 150-250. Here, classes were formed, disappeared and were reformed year after year. It was impossible to plan ahead. Each year the committee tried to assess what the demand was and arrange to cater for it.

In its sixth year classes were going quite well with provision for Writing, Drawing, Practical Geometry, Geography, Music, and the Use of Globes. Two years later these had all ceased. In 1849 it had classes in Drawing, Grammar, Reading and Chemistry. In 1851 it dropped the Chemistry and Reading classes but added French, Arithmetic, Writing, Geography and the Use of Globes. The next year all except the French class closed down, but vocal music was added.

Twelve months later there were no classes at all. This intermittent pattern was continued throughout the 1860s and was very typical of the smaller institute. What is perhaps surprising is that there was not more support for elementary classes. At Coventry there was certainly need for more education. The secretary of the institute was Joseph Squiers, a man of some fame for he is credited with the first use of the phrase 'Christian Socialism'. He was headmaster of a school built by

1 L.G. Dyer, 'Hitchin Mechanics' Institute', Adult Education, XXIII, 1950-51.

2 Annual Reports, 1831-1852.

the ribbon-weaving family of Cash, and he estimated that in 1847, four thousand children attended no school at all in the town, and of the 1,590 infants who had been through his infants school, only 90 had attended regularly enough to justify transferring them to an elementary school.¹ In spite of this the demand for elementary classes in the institute was very fitful.

The small institutes were most successful when they limited themselves to a short-term objective in a specific field. This was done at Filey. Only in December and January were the fishermen at home in the evenings, so the committee arranged a course for them in reading and writing over this period. Nineteen of them, some over sixty years of age, were taught basic reading and writing with great success. Nine of them had started quite illiterate.²

5.3.2 Birmingham Mechanics' Institute

Birmingham Mechanics' Institute was a middle range institute with a membership normally a little above 300 members. Although the workmen of the town were generally skilled, relatively well paid, good depositors in Friendly Society accounts, and of noted intelligence, the schools in the town could not keep pace with the very rapid rise in the population. The town's statistical society estimated that in 1838 51.5 per cent of the age group 5-15 were not attending any kind of school and of the 48.5 attending, 45.6 went only to Sunday School. There were 24

1 Coventry Herald, 23 April 1847.

2 Y.U.M.I. Annual Report, 1849, p.35.

evening schools of various types but they educated only 273 boys and 142 girls.¹ The bulk of the work fell on the Sunday Schools and in 1831 it was stated that 4,000 were attending Church of England schools, 500 schools belonging to the Sunday School Union, 1,400 were in Unitarian Sunday Schools and 3,000 were in the Wesleyan Sunday Schools. As most children did not attend for much more than two years, it is likely that the majority of Birmingham children got some smattering of education, but few were even adequately trained in basic elementary subjects.² There was certainly plenty of room for activities by the mechanics' institute.

In its first year the institute organised classes in Mathematics, Geography, Grammar and Drawing. The Mathematics class had 30-40 pupils, the Geography class had 15-20, Grammar drew 40-50, and Drawing 50-60. The classes were taught in the school room of a Unitarian chapel by a dozen young gentlemen who offered their services free, and no charge was made. By 1828 the running of classes had been taken over by that most brilliant of teachers, Daniel Wright. The Mathematics class had increased its numbers, and the Drawing class had 118 members on roll. A Writing class for Juniors was started with 70 members.

In 1835 the classes were still flourishing with about 90 members in the Arithmetic, Writing and Drawing classes, and attendances

1 J. Langford, A Century of Birmingham Life, Vol.II, (1868), p.515.

2 'Report on the State of Education in Birmingham', Birmingham Society for the Improvement of Education, Journal of the Statistical Society, Vol.3, 1840.

ran at 66-75 per cent. Classes in French, Latin and English were taught gratuitously by three members of the institute.

In 1837 an experimental science class was formed, and shortly complained to the committee that its facilities were very poor. Promises of improvement were made. The class charged 6d. a quarter and gave lectures among themselves on Physical Science. Among the prizewinners of that year, one youth was specially commended. He was George Holyoake.

In 1838 attendances for the elementary classes were given as follows:

	1st Quarter	2nd	3rd	4th
Drawing	137	128	70	126
Writing & Arithmetic	110	167	60	102

In 1840 these classes suffered a grievous blow with the death of Wright, but maintained rolls of 140-154. There were now adult classes in Arithmetic, Algebra, Grammar and Geography, and elementary classes in Grammar and Reading, all well attended.¹

The various disasters that befell the institute in 1842-43 led to the cessation of the classes. They had been a considerable success for 15 years. It is noticeable that at Birmingham classes concentrated on basic subjects and made no charge for

1 Annual Reports, 1825-40.

tuition. The success of the work depended to a very great extent on the ability of the teachers, and particularly Daniel Wright. A separation into classes for youths and for adults was made at an early stage. No science was taught, for this was dealt with in lecture courses.

The Birmingham Polytechnic Institute tried to learn from the mechanics' institute's mistakes and arranged a complicated programme to give some attraction to everyone.¹ Certainly it attracted more support than the old Institute for it averaged about 600 members over the first ten years. A member could pay a different subscription according to what services he required. For 5/- per quarter he could recommend a pupil to the Public Classes; for 4/- a quarter he could use all the facilities and himself attend all Public Classes; for 2/- youths could attend the Public Drawing Class and use the Juvenile Library, or alternatively attend all the Public Classes except Drawing. Ladies could pay 5/- per annum for a Lecture ticket.

Great emphasis was placed on classes which were divided into two sections. The Public Classes, under a paid schoolmaster, were free and were held in Reading, Writing, Grammar, Geography, History, Arithmetic and Drawing. The numbers in the school room steadily grew from 150 in 1844, 195 in 1847, to 335 in 1850. About sixty of these were normally recommended pupils. There were in 1847 94 pupils attending each of the four class evenings. The general class had an average attendance of 113, and the Drawing class 74. 32 of the pupils were adults.

1 Institute Reports, 1844, 1847.

The experimental science class continued over from the mechanics' institute with about 30 members. Private classes were held for which payment had to be made to the teacher. These consisted of French, German, and Latin; for a time there was a Vocal Music class, and in 1846, under the promptings of Sir Isaac Pitman, who was a member of the institute, a Phonographic and Phonotypic class was started and proved very popular. These private classes were very popular with the clerks who formed a substantial sector of the membership. The local Drapers and Grocers Association had recently joined up with the Clerks Association to form a body entitled the Literary and Mercantile Association, and in 1846 it joined the Polytechnic Institute and contributed 69 members. The German and French newspapers and journals in the newsroom testify to their influence.

In 1851 a Women's class in the three R's and in Sewing was started, and a charge of 3d a week was made. It was very popular and a limit of 40 had to be placed on the roll. The only failure the institute had was in attempts to start a Chemistry class. In 1853, when the Polytechnic Institute was taken over by the newly formed Birmingham and Midland Institute it passed on a lively class system which was in time greatly expanded by the new body.¹

There were many institutes which fell within the middle range of size, and were able, though not without struggle to provide

1 Details of Birmingham Polytechnic activities taken from the institute Annual Reports, 1844-50.

a regular programme of classes. We can give as an example the class programme at Swansea Mechanics' Institute, a body which had upward of 300 members. In 1839-40 there were 100 enrolments in eight classes among 73 members. Classes were held in Chemistry, Geometry, French, Welsh, English Grammar and Composition, Music, Reading and Orthography, and Writing.¹

5.3.3 Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute

The first institute really to show what could be done with classes was the Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute.² This had the advantages of learning from others' mistakes as it was not founded until 1843, and of having a large membership in excess of one thousand. Most importantly, however, the management at the very start made the decision to put most of its resources into the provision of classes. In the classes

"lie all the true power, worth and influence
of the institution".

It set out to create a continuing structure of graded classes with courses lasting two or three years in each, with entrance standards laid down, with a hierarchy of teachers under a supervisor. Members under 18 were taught in Junior classes, and wherever possible Adult classes were graded in proficiency. The effort and energy put into the class system received the success it deserved. In 1843 average weekly attendances were given as 373; in 1847 nearly 800; and in 1850 one week recorded 1,400 attendances. Most of the students were aged

1 The Cambrian, 18 July 1840, and T. Evans, Op. Cit., p.384.

2 Details of the Huddersfield classes are taken from M. Tylecote, Op. Cit. pp. 202-15 and 310-11, and from institute records at Huddersfield Polytechnic

between 12 and 30, and a very high proportion were working class. It was this fact that led Hudson to say in 1850 that it was one of the three mechanics' institutes that had achieved complete success.¹

The largest department was that giving elementary instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic. All pupils entering these classes were first placed in a probationary class where they were tested and their attainment recorded, and were then assigned to the most suitable class. In 1847 there were nine reading classes on Monday catering for 231 students, seven writing and arithmetic classes on Wednesday for 244 students, and six writing and arithmetic classes on Friday catering for 179 students. Two classes existed for adult reading, taking 47 students. Four more advanced grammar classes provided for 53 students. Geography and history were taught separately as well as in the reading lessons. Fifty students attended the class in this.

Although basic education was considered the main aim of the institute, provision was made for cultural subjects as well. A French class had 8 students, a German class had four, 13 were in a vocal and instrumental music class, another 29 in a singing class, 12 in an Elocution class and 13 in a Literature class. The musicians regularly presented concerts, mainly of psalms, anthems and oratorios.

1 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p. viii.

Vocational classes also had their place. The clerical subjects did not do particularly well in this proletarian institution. A class in ornamental writing had a short existence, and there was generally a class in phonography functioning. In 1848 a class in book-keeping was started. None of these classes had, however, more than 20 members.

There was a class in Mechanical Drawing with 23 members, in Architectural Drawing with 8 members, and a School of Design within the institute with 28 members and which in 1848 obtained some assistance from the Government School of Design at Somerset House. Constant appeals to local manufacturers for support in this work of encouraging design and drawing among young men, met with little response, though it was the centre of fancy manufacture in England. A chemistry class was started among the students whose work involved some application of chemical knowledge, and a three years course was devised but problems of expense and lack of a laboratory caused its temporary abandonment. It restarted in 1850 with better success.

Any institute that used 36 teachers for 46 classes catering for 1,071 students in 18 subjects was offering something impressive. What stands out, however, is the carefully organised programme offering a complete educational experience whereby the beginner from a state of complete ignorance could progress through various stages until he had a thorough knowledge of reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, with some elementary history and geography, and if he desired it, courses

in Drawing and Design in Music, in Literature and in Languages. There were occasional inconsistencies in the course, and many students gave up because they could not afford the charges for books and equipment, or because they found the going too heavy. Most of them laboured under the handicap of what the teachers termed 'our barbarous northern dialect'. But relative to the times, the institute was a great success. Up to a hundred students moved from the lower to the senior school each year, and though many dropouts in the early stages were recorded, these were reduced to a minimum by the system of extensive home visiting of absentees. Between October 1850 and January 1851, the Secretary visited over 400 homes for this purpose.

Summary of Lecture and Class Activity in Mechanics' Institutes

The generally acknowledged failure of the lecture system as a method of formal instruction led to greater emphasis on class teaching as the main or sole means of learning. Lectures continued to be given but as part of a recreational or general interest activity, not as a means of instruction. The extent and effectiveness of class teaching varied very considerably from institute to institute. The smaller institutes could not maintain continuous programmes though they did on occasions satisfy specific and short term needs. The larger institutes could maintain classes for several years though the opportunity for progression of students was very limited. Only rarely did an institute develop a systematic approach to class teaching, with grades, progressions, certificates and the like. Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute was the outstanding example of this, and

it served as a prototype for the extensive class systems that developed in the second half of the century at such mechanics' institutes as Swindon, Keighley and Nottingham.

5.4 Teaching as a Political Act in Mechanics' Institutes

What relationship had this educational activity in the lecture room and classroom to class conflict between different social classes which we have hypothesised as central to the experience of mechanics' institutes? We are concerned with two factors: the pedagogy used and the knowledge content in the teaching that was carried on in the institutes. Both factors raise interesting questions.

Bernstein suggested that both the classification and the framing of presented knowledge are expressed in codes which relate to societal power and control. He defined framing as

"the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organisation, pacing and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship."¹

He claims that

"as classification and framing change, so do relevant meanings, realisations and contexts. Inherent in the classification is the distribution of power: inherent in the framing is the principle of control."²

In his essay on Relations between Education and Production

Bernstein analyses the origins of the dominant code in schools

1 B. Bernstein, Class Codes and Control, (1977), Vol.3, p.89.

2 Ibid. p.181.

and claims that in capitalist society this arises from dominant cultural category of socio-economic class.¹

Such an analysis applied to mechanics' institutes is speculative, even if we accept the general principle, for we have little evidence of how classes were conducted, and most of that suggests the lectorial style was almost universal as indeed it was in schools.² We hear of exceptional teachers and experimental approaches. Pestalozzian principles were used at Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute where the stated aim was to draw out

"the underlying thoughts of the students and compelling them by questions and suggestions to reflect the lessons they have been reading."³

At Rotherham Mechanics' Institute the principles of de Fellenberg were applied, an enterprise which attracted a visit from Lady Byron who was an ardent advocate of his system, as indeed was Brougham.⁴ A number of teachers became famous for their work in institutes, among them Daniel Wright at Birmingham, E. Craig at Rotherham, A.R. Wallace at Neath, John Sherwin at Hanley, and George Wallis at Wolverhampton. Generally, however, we have no real information on teaching method and little enough on curriculum content to draw on, and it can only be an hypothesis that the classification and framing codes were related to issues of political and social power and control that were made explicit in other parts of the institution's work.

1 Ibid, Chapter 8.

2 J. Hudson, Op. Cit., p. xi.

3 M. Tylecote, Op. Cit., p.269.

The desire to have clear divisions of subjects, graded classes within subjects, certificates for attainment, regularly time-tabled classes - in fact an organisation which was as like a school organisation as possible may have some relation to the requirements of capitalism for a disciplined labour force. It is true that most institutes before 1850 did not reach anywhere near this kind of organisation, but it was held up as the ideal at which to aim. Such an organisation embodies certain assumptions which it can be claimed mirror the assumptions underlying the world of organised production. Shipman makes the point in relation to the schools.

"Teaching children to arrive punctually and regularly, to sit still for long periods and listen to the teacher, to carry out instructions quietly and quickly, and to endure these constraints without complaint, was a suitable preparation for working in the large scale organisation of a mature economy."¹

Toffler makes the same point in more detail.

"Mass education was the ingenious machine constructed by industrialism to produce the kind of adults it needed. The problem was inordinately complex. How to pre-adapt children for a new world - a world of repetitive indoor toil, smoke, noise, machines, crowded living conditions, collective discipline, a world in which time was to be regulated not by the cycle of sun and moon, but by the factory whistle and the clock.

The solution was an educational system that, in its very structure, simulated this new world....

The inner life of the school became an anticipatory mirror, a perfect introduction to industrial society. The most criticised features of education today - the regimentation, lack of individualization, the rigid systems of seating, grouping, grading and marking, the authoritarian role of the teacher - are precisely those that made mass public education so effective an instrument of adaptation for its place and time.

Young people passing through this educational machine emerged into an adult society whose structure of jobs, roles and institutions resembled that of the school itself."²

1 E. Shipman, Education and Modernisation, (1971), pp.161-2.

2 A. Toffler, Future Shock, (1970), pp. 354-5.

Grace has pointed out that

"two of the salient characteristics of the social world of the elementary school classroom were the emphasis on order and the reality of constraint ... a culture of silence and immobility."¹

He points also to the social imagery used by educationalists which drew particularly on military and colonising metaphors, which saw the school as 'a citadel of national defence', 'a garrison in every town and village' with 'raw recruits of battallions of drilled teachers'.²

Even though Toffler, Shipman and Grace refer primarily to the elementary schools, their comments have relevance to the schoolrooms of mechanics' institutes, where the common model available was that of the schools, and where many of the students were youths and not adults.

We can form no positive conclusion to the first question posed, but it is a reasonable inference that the pedagogy most commonly used was one which emphasised the authority of the teacher as the source of knowledge, and incorporated the style of lectorial teaching familiar in schools of the time. This is not to suggest that no individual teachers taught with flexibility, imagination and compassion. There were alternative pedagogies available, as is witnessed by writers such as Francis Place and Timothy Claxton in referring to their own learning in mutual help groups.³

1 G. Grace, Teachers, Ideology and Control, (1976), p.30.

2 Ibid, p.29

3 See quotation from Francis Place in R.K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, pp.36-7 (1955) and the first chapter of T. Claxton, Op. Cit.

The Edgeworths had developed a pedagogical methodology which concentrated on the preparation of students for a predominantly scientific and technical culture, and in which self-discovery, experimentation, and problem solving were central.¹ Although we cannot rule out pedagogies similar to this in mechanics' institutes there is no evidence to suggest they were at all common.

A second question we can pose is the manner in which the knowledge content of the curriculum was related to modes of thinking and knowing. We can hypothesise that there was a relationship between the curriculum and such modes as the capitalist class and its representatives wished to develop in its work force. We accept the thesis of Michael Young that knowledge can be considered not as a 'given' but as culturally and therefore class defined, and the definition incorporates the values and interests of groups which wish to exert influence or control over other groups.² Knowledge as made substance in the curricula of institutions was in part a reflection of power conflicts and struggles for control in the economic and political systems.

The relationship between knowledge and control has been extensively explored by Young and his associates in the decade since Bernstein's first seminal article. While it can be argued that knowledge is much more than a mechanism of control, that curriculum choice is not a crude manifestation of the exercise of

1 R.L. and M. Edgeworth, Practical Education, (2nd Ed. 1801).

2 M. Young (Ed.), Knowledge and Control, Chapter 1, (1971) An example of the reverse position is in S. Robinson, Two Addresses, (1838), where he argues that the warring classes are brought together by knowledge which he sees as objective and morally absolute.

power by dominant classes, that knowledge is both autonomous and self-generating, nevertheless the relationship between what is taught and the class interest of those who provide it has won considerable general acceptance.

If we examine the curriculum of mechanics' institutes as it was intended to be by its main proponents, what stands out very clearly is the dominant concern with the natural sciences, mathematics and mechanics. It is true that it became necessary to provide elementary classes in basic literacy and numeracy, and in many institutes the pressure of consumer wishes ensured that such courses were the most common. It is also true that in the 1830s and 1840s classes in general or commercial subjects were introduced for the benefit of middle class members. Nevertheless the major concern of the leaders of the mechanics' institutes movement and of most of the committees of individual institutes before 1840 was to provide courses in science.

A science-based curriculum may serve a variety of functions and interests. In concentrating here on the relationship of such a curriculum to the class-based experience presented by many other aspects of the life of the institutes, as discussed in previous sections, we do not intend to imply that the curriculum did not have direct vocational or intellectually liberating functions as well. But the argument can be made that the curriculum did relate in many ways to the struggle of rival ideologies in the institutes.

Science, it was claimed, was specially effective in inducing

in those who studied it an appreciation of the wonder of the universe, the regularity with which it operated under invariable laws, and the evidence of a grand and supernatural design.

Benjamin Heywood talks of

"the manifestations of a Divine Agency in the structure of the universe and the intimations of the will of the Author afforded by the study of physical science."¹

Thomas Dick says of astronomy, it

"unfolds to our view the most striking displays of the perfections of the Deity, particularly the grandeur of his Omnipotence."²

By understanding the rational ordering of nature it was hoped that the student would by analogy perceive the parallel rational organisation of society. The effect of this understanding would be to make him more reverend towards God and his creation, and more accepting of society and its relationships.

"By studying the properties of matter, and the laws of nature, it will lead them to reverence their God, on viewing scientifically his wonderful works."³

The development of a natural theological science replaced a God who was personalised and unpredictable by regular systematic laws which reflect God's ordering of the universe, and this aided the use of a science curriculum for the common man in so far as it was used as a form of ideological control.

"The whole objects and phenomena treated of in the sciences, are the institutions of God ... we are bound by duty to God, as well as by a regard to our own welfare, ... diligently to study these, and to regulate our own conduct in conformity to their modes of action."⁴

1 B. Heywood, Op. Cit., pp.36-37.

2 T. Dick, On the Mental Illumination and Moral Improvement of Mankind, (1835), p.326. See also W. Newmarch, Op. Cit.

3 S. Shapin, 'The Pottery Philosophical Society 1819-1835', Social Studies, Vol.2, 1972.

4 G. Combe, On Teaching Physiology, (1857), pp.13-14.

Thus Estlin, a Unitarian and SDUK representative argued at an early lecture at Bristol Mechanics' Institute that religion was the basis of all science.¹

Where it was not possible openly to teach political economy in mechanics' institutes, as was the case in many of them, then a science which stressed the rational and immutable ordering of a natural society could be held to induce constructs of thought which were compatible with an economic society organised hierarchically and subject to comparable iron laws.

A particular advantage of science was that it was seen as value-neutral. If politics and religion were banned from the institute, and there was a wish to avoid the trivial or immoral, then science offered a safe and neutral area. Science crowded out less desirable alternatives.

Shapin and Barnes advance the argument that the science that was recommended as suitable for the mechanics was not however to be the same body of knowledge with which the intelligensia was familiar. It was to be a simplified version which concentrated on facts and laws and the way things really are in nature.

"Where Brougham or Horner might orientate themselves in a body of scientific knowledge which was partly hypothetical, wholly provisional, and recognised as theoretically informed, the scientific knowledge presented to the mechanics was to have none of these characteristics. It was hard, factual, solid and enduring; in no way tentative or revisable."²

1 Bristol Mercury, 5 December 1825.

2 S. Shapin and B. Barnes, 'Science Nature and Control' in R. Dale (Ed.) Schooling and Capitalism, (1976), p.58. Shapin & Barnes themselves do not produce much evidence to support this statement.

Bernstein has argued that the ultimate mystery of the subject, by which he meant its potential for creating new realities,

"is not coherence but incoherence, not order but disorder, not the known but the unknown."

But only the select are initiated to the notion that knowledge is permeable, that its orderings are provisional, that the dialectic of knowledge is closure and openness. For the many, socialisation into knowledge is socialisation into order, into the experience that the world's educational knowledge is impermeable.¹ Brougham himself had argued that geometry could be simplified in this way for mechanics,² and the kind of science that was deemed appropriate for the working class was a highly reified body of knowledge. Substances rather than relationships, the observable rather than the imputed, that which which could be demonstrated and experimented with rather than that which was abstract: these were the characteristics of science for the working man. It was an authoritative statement of how nature was. Not only was such a world view compatible with the social and political constructs of orthodox political economy. It also ruled out speculative, creative, innovative and original thought.

A rhetoric of utility was contained within the founding statements of many mechanics institutes. The emphasis of such statements was on the instrumental or utilitarian nature of the proposed educational process, its expected practical value to workers and their employers. Swansea Mechanics' Institute

1 B. Bernstein, Op. Cit., pp. 97-8.

2 H. Brougham, Op. Cit., p.9.

was particularly specific about this, desiring their members to become acquainted with mechanical powers, the lever, the wedge, the pulley, screw and inclined plane plus some knowledge of geometry and algebra

"so as to render them better masons or carpenters or engineers or mechanics of any kind".¹

Most institutes had some such formulation as that at Banbury Mechanics' Institute

"to instruct members in the principles of the Arts and in the various branches of science and useful knowledge."²

In the first Annual Report of the Shropshire Mechanics' Institute there is much reference to the value of ingenious mechanics who should be nurtured in their capacity to make improvements and inventions in manufacture.

Nevertheless this is rhetoric rather than reality. At the Shropshire Mechanics' Institute the programme is concerned mostly with

"understanding the principles which regulate the forces they wield and the trades they practice - their attention would be awakened and their interest excited."³

The stress on pure science and scientific principles and the general though not universal neglect of applied subjects and practical relevant knowledge, the absence of workshops and of any technical research, suggests that the founding statements were not made manifest in actual programmes. That this was an available alternative is shown by the experience of the

1 The Cambrian, 18 March 1826. See also J. Hole, Op. Cit., pp. 167-71.

2 Rules contained in Minute Books .

3 Eddowes Salopian Journal, 20 October 1826 .

Franklin Institute in Philadelphia.¹

The widespread claims that the programmes of institutes would encourage the emergence of new creative inventors may have been useful for obtaining support, but was at variance with the reified, atomised and anti-theoretical version of scientific knowledge which was commonly presented.

Shapin and Barnes suggest that the concepts and procedures of science were particularly suited to expressing the problems of organisation and control experienced by employers and producers. Their conclusion is that science

"could lay down in the mind the general form of a communication system appropriate for controlling and monitoring the current forms of production ... it could help to establish the work habits required of a complexly organised workforce, where individual components had to operate within close physical and temporal margins of error, and were highly inter-dependent and minimally redundant."²

It can be argued that science provided a communication system, a medium for discourse and inter-action, a meeting of those in high favoured and less favoured circumstances. It has been previously noted that mechanics' institutes were praised for their function in bringing together the various classes. Science provided a medium of communication. The point was well made by David Burns, who was very enthusiastic for social mixing in institutes

"Meeting, as both classes do, on the fair field of science, where all are as brothers, and pursuing, it may be, the same glorious objects, the wall of

1 B. Sinclair, Philadelphia's Philosopher Mechanics: a History of the Franklin Institute, (1974).

2 S. Shapin and B. Barnes, Op. Cit., p.62.

separation is removed for ever, and the best possible guarantee given for the inviolable maintenance of the rights of property on the one hand, and the peace and security of society on the other."¹

The Rev. Charles Wellbeloved made the same point in a lecture delivered at the York Mechanics' Institute in 1838 on

"the importance of science in extending and facilitating social intercourse."²

The argument of Shapin and Barnes is that science teaching in mechanics' institutes was such that the working force was manipulated, not necessarily explicitly or consciously, by forms of cultural control which made their accumulating knowledge compatible with the needs of an industrialising capitalist economy. The argument is speculative, because there is insufficient information available on what was taught and how it was taught, though reports of lectures in local newspapers suggest that knowledge was presented in a very classified and fact-based form, with little intellectual speculation or exploration of uncertainty. It is difficult to see however that in the context in which they were given to mass audiences with little though varying education, the presentation of science could in practical terms have taken a very different course to that which Shapin and Barnes postulate as the common model. It can be argued that in the light of available pedagogic competence and knowledge, to proceed from certainty working only slowly towards uncertainty was the only way most lecturers could handle their material.

1 D. Burns, Mechanics' Institutes: Their Object and Tendency (1837), pp. 56-7.

2 Annual Report, 1838.

There is a further problem with the hypothesis of Shapin and Barnes. In so far as there was any scientific activity arising from within the working class itself, unsponsored and apparently a part of working class culture, then it lay in the extensive interest of many working men in collecting and classifying objects of natural history - rocks, fossils, insects, plants, shells and so forth. One of the outstanding examples is the work of Joseph Gutteridge of Coventry who eventually achieved national fame, though never wealth, and whose geological collection is now housed in Coventry Museum. Many contemporary commentators, however, refer to the widespread existence of such activity. Mrs. Gaskell for example writes of botanists

"equally familiar with the Linnaean or the Natural system, who know the name and habitat of every plant within a day's walk of their dwellings; who steal the holiday of a day or two when any particular plant should be in flower, and tying up their simple food in their pocket-handkerchief, set off with single purpose to fetch home the humble-looking weed. There are entomologists, who may be seen with a rude-looking net, ready to catch any winged insect, or a kind of dredge with which they rake the green and slimy pools; practical, shrewd, hard-working men who pore over every new specimen with real scientific delight."¹

In the Report of the Education Commission in 1818 a witness reports:

"We have in our employment a common cutler who found leisure in a bad time of trade to amuse himself with entomology, and who made great progress in arranging a collection of insects for our museum. Another youth in an obscure station is preparing specimens of our Flora for the same."²

1 The extract is in Mary Barton at the beginning of Chapter 5.

2 p.27. See also George Dawson's evidence to the Select Committee on Public Libraries (1849), Q. 1292.

Such activity falls very much within the science of facts, laws and classifications which Shapin and Barnes suggest was common in mechanics' institutes, but it cannot have been under any middle class influence or control, and so cannot have been part of a manipulative system of knowledge control through which the working class mental vision accorded with the interests of capitalism.

The argument concerning the most relevant form of science curriculum for the working man was hardly joined in the first half of the century but there was considerable enthusiasm for scientific learning as such among Radical groups. As a presumed totally rational, non-obscurantist, value-free discipline, it had clear appeal to those Radicals who perceived the state of society to be based on irrational beliefs and erroneous arguments. Owenite educational organisations centrally incorporated science into their curriculum, and the place of science as a basis for the reorganisation of society was expounded by Richard Carlile in his pamphlet Address to Men of Science. Shapin and Barnes do not fully take account of the radical uses as well as the conservative uses of science teaching. After 1850 there was a considerable debate on the most appropriate curriculum of science for working people. Layton has described the alternatives argued by Moseley and by Arthur Rigg which raised fundamental questions over the control of the curriculum and the structure of science as a teaching subject.¹ There was little debate of this, however, in the first half of the century. Such science teaching as existed in the mechanics' institutes was generally provided by local members of the middle class

¹ D. Layton, Science for the People, (1973), pp.87-93.

community, often doctors or clergymen, and it is probably safe to assume that science was not presented, except accidentally, in a way that was subversive of the assumptions of that community.

5.5 Conclusion to Chapter 5

The importance of examining the issues raised in this chapter is that, as Silver has argued, there has been a neglect of research into the process of education in the classrooms and lecture halls of Victorian schools and institutes which is at odds with the enthusiasm for research into the organisational forms and procedures of educational bodies.¹ An examination of the teaching processes in mechanics' institutes gives rise to more questions than answers because of our ignorance of much of the control and process of education that took place. That there was general discontent with the teaching programmes we can gather from the many comments of contemporary observers. We also have evidence illustrated in this chapter that provision varied greatly between institutes and within the same institute from year to year. Much elementary teaching took place, and in this respect mechanics' institutes shared with other bodies the work of compensating for the inadequacy of educational provision for children. There was also a great interest, not always successfully translated into practice, in providing classes in science, and we have summarised some of the speculative arguments on the nature of such teaching and the varieties of

1 H. Silver 'Aspects of Neglect: the Strange Case of Victorian Popular Education', Oxford Review of Education, Vol.3 (1), 1977.

influence attempted over the working class membership. We also suggested possible relationships between the organisation and process of education in mechanics' institutes, and the qualities desired in their workforce by the middle class of a capitalist culture.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

"The object was not to give the people knowledge
for their own sakes but to swell the numbers of
the future partisans of some unimportant dogma."

William Thompson

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the case that mechanics' institutes were arenas of conflict between classes of opposing interests, each of which attempted to use the institutes as a means of influence or control for its own purposes. The assumption of the thesis was that such classes were defined on the basis of their economic position. It takes as its foundation Karl Marx' position that

"in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness."¹

Marx saw two facts as universal: that classes stand in constant opposition to each other because of their irreconcilable interests: and that one class must exert domination over other classes in order to maintain possession of the means of production.

A Marxist interpretation of mechanics' institutes would therefore postulate a conflict between economic classes: dominant classes

1 K. Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, Vols. 1-3, (1962), pp. 362-363.

attempted to use the institutes among other educational and social organisations as a means of controlling non-dominant classes by manipulation of social consciousness.

The evidence and argument presented in this thesis suggest that at a general level there was such a conflict, and that it can be defined as between economic classes. In some of the mechanics' institutes examined, for example at Cheltenham Spa, Coventry, or Ashton-under-Lyne, the conflicts within capitalist economy were particularly graphically presented. At a more detailed level, the evidence produced shows that the pattern was more confused and complex than a crude Marxist interpretation would allow. On the basis of our postulated variants, we discovered evidence in the mechanics' institutes of a variety of conflicts and alliances, and although it was broadly true that by 1850 attempts by working class groups to organise the institutes to their own image had all been crushed, there had been in the process a variety of accommodations. This was noted, for example, in the case of Birmingham and Wakefield Mechanics' Institutes, and tolerance of working class political activity was extended at times in many institutes which were quite firmly set in the ethos of middle class liberal reformism, as for example at London Mechanics' Institute.

If one argues for the primacy of the economic base of society, then a key question is how superstructural phenomena relate to this, and in particular what is the place of the generation of ideologies - the ideas, concepts and consciousness directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse

of men. Marx' comments on this relationship, in so far as they go, are unambiguous enough.

"The dominant ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, and thus of the relationships which make one class the ruling one; they are consequently the ideas of its dominance."¹

Berger and Luckmann's gloss on this is as follows:

"What concerned Marx was that human thought is founded in human activity (labour in the widest sense of the word) and in social relations brought about by that activity. Substructure and superstructure are best understood if one views them as respectively human activity and the world produced by that activity."²

Dominant ideologies were expressed through the educational institution, formal and informal of society. Althusser has written influentially and centrally on the question of ideology and societal control. He argues that, given the Marxist notion that every social system must be able to reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces in order to continue to produce, it follows that it must reproduce the following:

1. The diversified skills of labour power.
2. The relationships of production, established through the machinery and institutions of the state.
3. A set of what he calls 'ideological state apparatuses' reflecting the ideology of the ruling class and ensuring the other classes are

¹ T. Bottomore and M. Rubel (Eds.), Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, (1963), p.93.

² P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, (1966), p.18.

kept in submission by manipulation of their consciousness. In capitalist society, Althusser suggests that the principal ideological state apparatus is the educational system.

Thus the reproduction of the relations of production is both a material and an ideological question.¹

Althusser's particular variant of Marx' political economy stresses the reproductive functioning of social control agencies such as schools, colleges and other educational institutes.

It has influenced the work of such writers in the USA as Gintis, Bowles and Carnoy. Gintis and Bowles allocate to education an important though not exclusive place in the institutional process whereby people are socialised into accepting the power relationships of a capitalist economy.² Carnoy describes the school as a coloniser in its attempts

"to impose economic and political relationships in society, especially on those children who gain least (or lose most) from those relationships."³

The evidence produced in this thesis would suggest that, if we examine institutes in these terms, they were rather arenas of conflict between classes whose own conception of their separate identity and self-interest was not always clear. The definition of common endeavours between classes was as significant at periods in the development of mechanics' institutes as the definitions of conflict.

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- 1 L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in B.R. Cosin, (Ed.), Education: Structure and Society, (1972).
 - 2 S. Bowles and H. Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America, (1977).
 - 3 M. Carnoy, Education as Cultural Imperialism, (1974), p.19.

If one of the ways we are to look at mechanics' institutes is in terms of control in the interest of class, whether we see that as a dominant class, or, as the evidence presented in this thesis suggests as competing classes, we need to be aware of the extremely problematic basis of such control. This has been argued in a recent analysis of Marxism and education.

"While accepting that education is an instrument of class control, we do not accept that it will always be a successful instrument. It is necessary to be alive to the possibility of substantial inefficiencies and discontinuities in the process of power reinforcement through education, of education's capacity to supply socially disruptive knowledge to groups capable of using it, and of wider economic and political forces which can place education's social control function under substantial stress."¹

Whether one interprets the evidence presented on mechanics' institutes in Marxist terms or in Althusserian control systems or in neither, what would appear to be established is that much of the activity of mechanics' institutes was concerned with developing attitudes to the society in which the members lived, and to the institutions and ideologies of that society. This point was particularly developed in Chapter 4. It would also appear that rival classes were in conflict within the institutes in proclaiming alternative attitudes, although by 1850 the incidence of such conflict had been reduced by the success in most places of middle class reformist groups and the defeat of nearly all Radical initiatives.

1 T. Tapper and B. Salter, Education and the Political Order: Changing Patterns of Class Control, (1979), p.xi.

The evidence produced on mechanics' institutes fits in well with the analysis of 19th Century England by Perkin. Perkin's argument is that in the rivalry for dominance between classes, each develops a class ideal which it struggles to present as the universal ideal. The battle to impose class ideals as universal ideals takes place in three crucial areas. One is in the way in which within state institutions, governors are chosen, and legislative and administrative systems organised. A second is a battle for the mind of the nation and is concerned with educational systems and objectives and the formulation of public opinion about society. The third Perkin describes as the battle for the heart and is concerned with control of the prevailing system of morality. It is to this third battle that Perkin allocates primacy, arguing that

"whichever class manages to impose its own morality on the rest of the nation will become the ascendant class."¹

The evidence we have presented has strongly suggested that mechanics' institutes were major instruments in the development of a prevailing system of morality which was often transmitted through the churches or in the name of religion, but which can be seen as the associated morality of industrial capitalism. The evidence also suggests that mechanics' institutes were involved in influencing a public opinion relative to various positions as to how society and the economy should be organised.

In both these cases, there was conflict between rival views

1 H. Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, (1969), p.273.

which were not entirely resolved by 1850, but one major strand in public morality and social and economic ideologies, that of the socialist and Radical working class groups, had been effectively defeated. Conflict between rival groups was related to, though not co-terminous with political affiliation. In Chapter two of this thesis, we described the varying conflicts and alliances between diverse political groups and the influence they attempted on the social, political and economic thinking of the institute membership. In Chapters three and four we analysed in Perkin's terms the struggle to control the prevailing morality.

In summary, whether we use a Marxist or non-Marxist framework of analysis, the argument of this thesis is that mechanics' institutes have to be analysed in terms of conflict. In some institutes conflict was more manifest than others. Where it was not manifest, one interest group had gained and retained dominant control, and this generally reflected the dominant position of that group in its local society.

Much previous work on mechanics' institutes has not assumed such a conflict model. If one examines the theoretical assumptions of the work of Briscoe, Popple, Piper, R.C. Wilson, Evans, Cowan, Bowers among others, there seems to be implicit a functional argument. Mechanics' institutes are perceived as serving the social or economic system in some way, and the problems of the institute are in articulating its activities to the needs required of it to perform its function for society. Most clearly

the institutes are perceived functionally in relation to the economy, either at local or national level. Thus Evans for example relates the development of mechanics' institutes in South Wales to the growth of South Wales industry, and Briscoe follows the same line in Nottinghamshire. At a more general level, mechanics' institutes are functionally related to the development of industrial technology or to the increased demand for skilled personnel. The institutes are also seen functionally in preserving the stability of the social system.

There are major theoretical difficulties with the functionalist model, which have caused it to fall into general disfavour with social scientists.¹ There are three particular practical problems faced by historians of mechanics' institutes who use such an approach.

Firstly, functionalism has to assume that conflict is aberrant, a dysfunctional deviation from the purposes of the institution and an interruption in its service relationship to the social system. Our examination of mechanics' institutes suggests that conflict was pervasive and appeared in common patterns, and this in turn suggests that conflict was endemic rather than aberrant. The model of conflict proposed in Chapter 1 at least provides a rationale for the conflict that was found in mechanics' institutes. The functionalist argument has to assume that conflict from, for example, reactionary Tories or from Chartists was obstructive to the main purpose of the institutes and hindered the service which the country or locality received from these bodies. This politically neutral

1 A review of the arguments is in M. Abrahamson, Functionalism, (1970).

stance, in which mechanics' institutes are not described in terms of alternative competing developments but in terms of some kind of inevitable progress forward of society, makes it difficult for writers who adopt this approach to deal with political disturbance. Two alternatives are adopted. Firstly political disturbance is treated as an untypical intrusive problem which breaks in from the outside but does not last long enough to damage the stable development of the institute. This is the alternative taken by Evans in relation to South Wales mechanics' institutes and Bowers in relation to those in the South West. The other alternative is to suggest that challenges to the prevailing modes of thought in any particular institute were absorbed, or screened out, without difficulty by the homeostatic organisation, and did not alter its general direction or its functional relationships. This would seem to be the position of Kelly, particularly in his work on London Mechanics' Institute. In contrast to these approaches, the conflict model adopted in this thesis assumes conflict to be about substantive issues related to the purposes and ideologies of the institute, and the outcome, which was dependent on which group was dominant, concerned with the choice of alternative futures.

The second major problem for the functionalists is to explain why mechanics' institutes failed to operate efficiently in their functional role or why they changed operations substantially. It can be argued that the mechanics' institutes in fact failed to organise themselves in such a way as to provide a reasonable flow of technically or commercially educated

people to the employment market which was clearly the intention when they were set up and as clearly was an urgent need of the economy. This was a choice made by the organisers of institutes, who, as pointed out in Chapter 5, refused to provide technical training but instead provided a general exposure to scientific principles. It is also difficult to explain in functional terms why institutes changed their operations, for example towards recreative activity or general cultural education. It would be specious to argue that circumstances in the social system changed such that its needs for service from mechanics' institutes changed and these were then implemented. The development of literary and cultural programmes in place of scientific programmes cannot be accounted for on the assumption of a sudden lowering of need for science and an increase in the need for historical, biographical or literary knowledge. Indeed writers on mechanics' institutes accept that one cannot argue that every time there was a major shift in activity, this was because of changes in the needs of society. The argument generally made is that the development of literary and cultural programmes was a diversion for a few years, roughly 1840-1860, caused by an influx of middle class members, but the institutes like all homeostatic organisations righted themselves by 1860 to develop into embryo technical colleges of the latter part of the century.

The alternative explanation derived from the evidence of this thesis is that activities are dependent upon who exerts most influence in the institutes and for what purposes they wish to utilise activities. The assumption is that there is conflict between rival groups over what should be engaged in, and

manipulation of the activities to achieve ends in the class interest of the various groups. Changes in activities are seen thus as endemic, not only as power changes from one group to another but also as a particular group redefines what it sees as its own interest. This was illustrated for example by the changing attitudes of many of the Whig reformers such as Heywood and Baines who had tended to argue for an exclusive programme of science, political economy and basic literacy, but changed in the 1840s to include a considerable provision of recreational activity.

The difficulty created by a functionalist approach is well illustrated by the case of elementary teaching in mechanics' institutes. It is generally argued that a degree of basic literacy and numeracy had become a functional requirement of an expanding industrial society. It was needed by the average workman, and it was the essential base upon which technical education for the skilled could be built. As such it was appropriate that mechanics' institutes responded to these needs of the system by engaging in wide scale elementary teaching.

Sanderson, however, has argued that education developed in spite of rather than because of industrialisation, and that it is forcing the evidence to find links between the growth of educational provision and industrial expansion.¹ If the functional argument is difficult to maintain, there are more obvious modes of explanation. It can be argued that the spread

1 M. Sanderson, *Literacy and Social Mobility in the Industrial Revolution in England*, Past and Present, Vol.56, 1972 and Vol.64, 1974.

of elementary education in mechanics' institutes can be interpreted in terms of the varying interests of identifiable groups. The middle classes wished to encourage literacy along with its programme of propaganda book publishing and suppression of the unstamped press in order to influence the thinking of the masses to an extent that was not open so effectively in any other way. The working class wished to acquire literacy because the weaponry of radical literature, the unstamped press, organisation of activity by handbill and pamphlet, was made available to it. The churches wished to encourage literacy in order to make the bible and religious tracts available in areas where the church was not in existence or was not effective. To examine elementary education activities in terms of the interests of pressure groups would seem to accord with the evidence, in a manner that is not so justified by functional analysis.

A third problem that arises from the functionalist approach is the ignoring of the problematic nature of knowledge. In assuming a correlation between the programme provided and the requirements of society, knowledge is removed from any argument about its political, manipulative or control function. Knowledge as transmitted by mechanics' institutes is assumed to be 'right' knowledge, and the question is hardly raised by functionalist writers on mechanics' institutes - right for whom and in whose interest? There were alternative choices as to what was appropriate knowledge to be presented through institutions for educating the working class, and how such knowledge was to be transmitted. The work instigated by Bernstein and Michael Young

on the sociology of knowledge has stressed the control issues which arise from the classification and framework of knowledge.

The key concept they argued was that the way society

"selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both distributions of power and the principles of social control."¹

At the very least this school of thinking has established that any curriculum or defined sum of knowledge encompassed by a particular educational enterprise such as a mechanics' institute, is not given but created. Once that is accepted, then competing interests which attempt to influence what is taught can be analysed in terms of the benefits any particular set of such decisions bring them.

The evidence in this thesis strongly suggests that the organisers of mechanics' institutes had reasonably clear ideas of what they wanted the members to learn. The amalgam of knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs and skills which was purveyed by the various institutes in the name of religion, science, political economy or high culture, demonstrates clearly enough the institutes' concern to change the thoughts and feelings of members to their own particular solution. This manipulative nature of mechanics' institutes' curriculum, and the attempts to use the institutes as a mechanism for social, political or economic control, has been explored in various ways in this thesis. The assumption has been that there was conflict and co-operation at various stages in defining what should be taught and for what purpose.

1 B. Bernstein, Class Codes and Control, (1977), Vol.3., p.85.

A comparison for example of a Church dominated institute as that at Chester with a Radical institute as at Cheltenham or an institute controlled by utilitarian businessmen as at Manchester, demonstrates how difficult it is to operate with a functionalist framework of analysis when the controllers of different institutes believe in very different ideologies. One serious attempt to analyse a mechanics' institute taking cognisance of its social control aspect, by working on a conflict model, is that of J.T. Wilson's study of Wakefield Mechanics' Institute. In nearly all other studies, the problematic basis of knowledge and the control function of education is ignored or if it is stated is not developed.

The summary conclusion of this thesis is that the activities of people in and associated with mechanics' institutes can be understood in terms of conflict arising from the particular interest or affiliation of their class. It is the interaction between classes resulting in both competitive and co-operative behaviour which can explain the significance of the events which were manifest in the various mechanics' institutes between the years 1820 and 1850.

Appendices

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| <u>Appendix A</u> | Lecture Programme at Bristol, Taunton and Gloucester Mechanics' Institutes. |
| <u>Appendix B</u> | List of members of the aristocracy associated with Mechanics' Institutes. |
| <u>Appendix C</u> | List of clergymen associated with Mechanics' Institutes by denomination. |
| <u>Appendix D</u> | List of members of parliament associated with Mechanics' Institutes. |
| <u>Appendix E</u> | The evidence for analysis of membership of Mechanics' Institutes by class affiliation. |

Appendix A

Lecture Programme of Bristol Mechanics' Institute, 1827

Geology
Astronomy (the last of four)
Animal Organisation
The Steam Engine
Pneumatics (two)
Mechanical Projects
Chemistry
Mathematics
Optics (two)
Electricity
Taste applied to ornamental Manufacture (two)
Perspective in Architecture
Elocution
French Language
History
Poetry

This programme is not untypical of the scientific nature of lectures in the early years of the Institutes

Lecture Programme of Taunton Mechanics' Institute, 1840

Moral Evils of Mohomedanism
Moral Evils of Ignorance
Historical Architecture (two)
Poland
Coins
French Revolution
Powers of the Human Mind
Advantages of Mechanics' Institutes
Popular Education
Natural History (two)
Physiology
Astronomy
Poetry
Phrenology (two)
Geography (four)

Lecture Programme of Gloucester Mechanics' Institute, 1840-41
season

Education in Germany and Britain
Ancient Navigation (two)
Anatomy
Baking (one of a series of useful trades given by members)
Woollen and Silk Dying
Education
Geographical Distribution and Varieties of Human Families
Elocution
Ancient Manuscripts
Phrenology (three)
Animal Mechanics

Appendix B

Members of the Aristocracy associated with Mechanics' Institutes

1824 - 29

Lord Belper (then Strutt)	Derby M.I.
Lord Calthorpe	Birmingham M.I.
Duke of Cleveland (then Powlett)	Stockton M.I.
Earl of Darlington	Darlington M.I.
Lord Dundas	Richmond M.I.
Earl of Durham	Darlington M.I., Stockton M.I., Sunderland M.I. Newcastle M.I. South Shields M.I.
Earl of Egremont	Brighton M.I.
Earl of Elgin	Dunfermline M.I.
Earl Grey	Alnwick S.M.I.
Marquess of Landsdowne	London M.I.
Marquess of Londonderry	Sunderland M.I.
Lord Lonsdale	Carlisle L.S.M.I.
Lord Morpeth	Carlisle L.S.M.I.
Duke of Northumberland	Alnwick S.M.I.
Duke of Sussex	London M.I.
Duke of Sutherland	Potteries M.I., Hanley

1830 - 34

Earl Fitzwilliam	Wentworth M.I.
Lord Leigh	Coventry M.I.

1835 - 39

Earl of Hardwicke	Cambridge & Cambridgeshire M.I.
Lord Leigh	Birmingham M.I., Leamington M.I.
Lord Northwick	Evesham M.I.
Lord Panmure	Breckin M.I.
Earl of Rutland	Leicester M.I.
Viscount Sandon	Stafford M.I.
Lord Saye and Sele	Banbury M.I.

Lord Tankerville
Duke of Westminster

Chester M.I.
Chester M.I.

1840 - 44

Duke of Beaufort
Earl of Bute
Lord Francis Egerton
Lord Hatherton
Earl Howe
Lord Morpeth
Earl of Shrewsbury
Lord James Stuart
Lord Wharnccliffe

Brecon M.I.
Cardiff M.I.
Manchester M.I.
Walsall M.I.
Hinckley M.I.
Wakefield M.I., Leeds M.I.
Walsall M.I.
Cardiff M.I.
Huddersfield M.I.

1845 - 50

Lord Aberdare
Earl of Carlisle
Lord Feversham
Viscount Goderich
Earl Mount Edgcumbe
Earl of Ripon
Viscount Sandys
Earl of Stamford

Bridgend M.I.
Bradford M.I., Loughton A. & M.
Helmsley M.I.
Kirkby Malzeard M.I.
Stonehouse M.I.
Kirkby Malzeard M.I.
Evesham L.S.M.I.
Stourbridge M.I.
Ashton-under-Lyme M.I.

Appendix C

Denomination of Clergymen associated with Mechanics' Institutes

1824 - 29

Birmingham M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.	Ind.	Bapt.	Presbyt.	R.C.
Bristol M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.				
Derby M.I.		Unit.				
Potteries M.I., Hanley	C.of E.	Unit.	Ind.			
Halifax M.I.		Unit.				
Huddersfield M.I. (1st Foundation)	C.of E.					
Hull M.I.	C.of E.					
Keighley M.I.	C.of E.					
Manchester M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.				
Newcastle-on-Tyne M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.				
Shrewsbury M.I.	C.of E.					
Stockton M.I.	C.of E.	Unit		Bapt.		
Wakefield M.I.	C.of E.	Unit				
West Bromwich L. A. K.	C.of E.		Ind.			R.C. Meth

1830 - 34

Barnsley M.I. (2nd Foundation)	C.of E.					
Leicester M.I.	C.of E.	Unit		Bapt.		
Sheffield M.I.	C.of E.		Ind.			Meth
Taunton M.I.	C.of E.	Unit				
York M.I.	C.of E.	Unit				

1835 - 39

Banbury M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.	Ind.	Bapt.		R.C.
Barnsley M.I. (3rd Foundation)			Ind.			
Bradford M.I.				Bapt.		
Cambridge & Cambridgeshire M.I.	C.of E.					
Chester M.I.	C.of E.		Ind.			
Coventry M.I.		Unit.	Ind.	Bapt.		
Evesham M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.		Bapt.		

Leek M.I.			Ind.
Newcastle-under-Lyme L.S.I.	C.of E.		
Nottingham M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.	Ind.
Stafford M.I.	C.of E.		
Tewkesbury L.S.M.I.	C.of E.		Ind.
Uttoxeter M.I.	C.of E.		
Walsall M.I.		Unit.	
Wolverhampton A. & M.L.		Unit.	

1840 - 44

Bath M.I.		Unit.	
Bilston M.I.	C.of E.		
Cardiff M.I.	C.of E.		
Carmarthen M.I.	C.of E.		
Gloucester M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.	
Hereford M.I.	C.of E.		
Leeds M.I.	C.of E.	Unit.	Ind.
Neath M.I.	C.of E.		
Stourbridge M.I.			Presbyt.

1845 - 50

Aberdare M.I.	C.of E.		Bapt.
Aberstwyth M.I.	C.of E.		
Frome L. & S.I.	C.of E.		
Longton A. & M.I.	C.of E.		Ind.
Milford Haven M.I.	C.of E.		Ind.
Rotherham M.I.	C.of E.		
Wednesbury M.I.	C.of E.		

A note of caution should be entered in relation to these figures. It only includes reference to clergymen whose names have been traced in contemporary records. There will certainly be other clergymen who gave support but whose names have not been traced. Furthermore the list does not include those institutes which appear to have received no support from any clergymen. Nevertheless the evidence from this sample supports a revision of view that the Church of England was not heavily involved in the mechanics' institutes, particularly in the earliest period 1824 - 34.

Appendix D

List of Members of Parliament associated with Mechanics' Institutes

Name:	Party:	Institutes Involved	Earliest Known Date
T.Attwood	Radical	Birmingham M.I.	1825
E.T.Bainbridge	Liberal	Taunton M.I.	1835
W.Baring	Cons.	Newcastle-under- Lyme L. & S.I.	1840
Hon.H.G.Bennett	Liberal	Shropshire M.I.	1825
G.Berkeley	Liberal	Bristol M.I.	1845
W.Biggs	Liberal	Leicester M.I.	1833
J.Bright	Liberal	Bristol M.I.	1825
		Rochdale M.I.	1845
J.Brocklehurst	Liberal	Macclesfield M.I.	1833
J.Brotherton	Liberal	Manchester M.I.	1925
H.Brown	Liberal	Tewkesbury M.I.	1849
J.Buckingham	Liberal	Sheffield M.I.	1832
		York M.I.	1834
E. Butler	Liberal	Newcastle-under- Lyme L. & S.I.	1840
F. Burdett	Whig-Tory	London M.I.	1825
R. Clive	Cons.	Redditch L. & S.I.	1850
W.T.Copeland	Lib-Cons.	Stoke A. & M.I.	1845
P. Corbell	Cons.	Shropshire M.I.	1825
E.Dawson	Liberal	Leicester M.I.	1833
J.E.Denison	Tory-Liberal	Nottingham M.I.	1845
G.Dixon	Liberal	Birmingham Poly.	1844
Hon.T.Dundas	Liberal	York M.I.	1836
W.Evans	Liberal	Leicester M.I.	1833
W.Ewart	Liberal	London M.I.	1830
R.Farrand	Cons.	Stafford M.I.	1837
J.Foley	Liberal	Stafford M.I.	1837
C.Forster	Cons.	Walsall M.I.	1841
W.O. Foster	Liberal	Wolverhampton A. & M.I.	1835
F. Gisburne	Liberal	Nottingham M.I.	1845
J.Gladstone	Cons.	Liverpool M.I.	1826

Name:	Party:	Institutes Involved	Earliest Known Date
S.R.Glynne	Cons.	Chester M.I.	1835
D.Gooch	Liberal	Swindon M.I.	1845
Viscount Hatherton	Liberal	Walsall M.I.	1826
R.E.Heathcote	Liberal	Potteries M.I., Hanley	1826
B.Heywood	Liberal	Manchester M.I.	1825
Lord A.M.Hill	Liberal	Evesham M.I.	1846
M.D.Hill	Liberal	Birmingham Poly.	1844
C.Hindley	Liberal	Ashton-under- Lyme M.I.	1825
J.C.Hobhouse	Liberal	London M.I.	1825
J.Holdsworth	Liberal	Wakefield M.I.	1839
E.Holland	Liberal	Evesham M.I.	1838
W.Horton	Tory-Lib.	London M.I.	1830
E.Huskisson	Lib-Tory	Liverpool	1826
Viscount Ingestre	Con.	Walsall M.I.	1841
J. Jervis	Liberal	Chester M.I.	1835
J.V.A.Johnstone	Liberal	York M.I.	1831
H.Laboucherie	Liberal	Taunton M.I.,	1835
J.G. Lambton	Liberal	Stockton M.I., Darlington M.I., Sunderland M.I. London M.I.	1825
J.Marshall	Liberal	Leeds M.I.	1824
J.Martin	Liberal	Tewkesbury M.I.	1849
T.Mellors	Cons.	Ashton-under- Lyme M.I.	1844
C.Paget	Liberal	Nottingham M.I.	1845
R.Palmer	Lib-Cons.	Plymouth M.I.	1848
J.Parker	Liberal	Sheffield M.I.	1832
R.Peel	Cons.	Liverpool M.I., Tamworth M.I.	1826 1841
M.Phillips	Liberal	Manchester M.I.	1835
Hon.W.V.Powlett	Lib-Cons.	Stockton M.I.	1825
G.Prynne	Liberal	Cambridge & Cambridgeshire M.I.	1835

Name:	Party:	Institutes Involved	Earliest Known Date
J.L.Ricardo	Liberal	Longton M.I.	1848
W.C.Russell	Liberal	Birmingham M.I.	1834
P.Rylands	Liberal	Warrington M.I.	1837
J.Scholefield	Liberal	Birmingham M.I.	1825
R.W.Scott	Liberal	Walsall M.I., Stourbridge M.I.	1841 1842
R.A.Slaney	Liberal	Shropshire M.I.	1825
T.Spring Rice	Lib-Tory	Cambridge & Cambridgeshire M.I.	1835
R.Spooner	Cons.	Birmingham M.I.	1825
W.R.C.Stansfield	Liberal	Huddersfield M.I.	1844
G.Strickland	Liberal	York M.I.	1831
T.Talfourd	Liberal	Banbury M.I.	1935
H.Tancred	Liberal	Banbury M.I.	1835
R.A.Thicknesse	Liberal	Wigan M.I.	1845
T.Thornley	Liberal	Wolverhampton A. & M.I.	1836
R.G.Townley	Liberal	Cambridge & Cambridgeshire M.I.	1835
J.Trelawny	Liberal	Plymouth M.I.	1848
J.A.Turner	Liberal	Manchester M.I.	1844
C.P.Villiers	Liberal	Wolverhampton A. & M.I.	1836
H.Warburton	Liberal	Bridport M.I.	1834
Lord Waterpark	Liberal	Uttoxeter M.I.	1848
J.Wedgewood	Liberal	Potteries M.I., Hanley	1825
J.West	Cons.	Birmingham M.I.	1825
G.Wilbrahim	Liberal	Chester M.I.	1835
E.Wilmot	Lib-Tory	Birmingham M.I.	1836
T.Winnington	Liberal	Stourbridge M.I.	1847
G.Wood	Foxite Whig	Manchester M.I.	1825
Hon.J.S.Wortley	Cons.	Huddersfield M.I.	1844

Appendix E

The Evidence for Analysis of Membership of Mechanics' Institutes
by Class Affiliation

Victorian commentators were concerned with estimating the extent to which the membership of mechanics' institutes was composed of working men. Recent work has also addressed itself to this question.

The problem in coming to any conclusion lies in the instability of the category terms used. This instability arises from two sources. Firstly contemporary writers did not use the same categories on each occasion that they analysed membership. Secondly, there was no uniform understanding of what was meant by social class, so there was no stable definition of 'working class' or 'middle class'. The period 1820-50 was indeed a very confused period during which various kinds of class affiliation were forming, and some kinds of reference models were being established which enabled people's consciousness of class to solidify. But there was enough uncertainty and blurring of the boundaries to make it difficult for anyone to relate all the members of a mechanics' institute to self-contained social classes.

Thus we have the problem of unreliable data when we are given statistical returns, and we have a very varied usage of words such as 'working men', 'artisans', 'mechanics', 'the lower orders', 'labourers', 'labouring mechanics' etc. We can however make some progress by noting some of the assumptions

that were universally held by Victorian commentators.

Firstly there was a common distinction made between the respectable working classes and the poor. For example, the Quarterly Review wrote: "A distinction must however be drawn between Institutes for mechanics and artisans, and schemes of a kindred nature ... for the labouring poor, or for the neglected and depraved. The mechanic and artisan class do not really mix with the poor, nor even the lower orders of unskilled labourers."¹ The submerged tenth, or the problem of the poor came to occupy a prominent position in Victorian social thinking, and was dramatically presented in the writings of Charles Booth and George Sims. The poor can be defined as those who were unable to provide for their basic needs at the lowest acceptable standards of the times. The poor therefore included large numbers of those who were not economically self-sufficient and had no-one on whom they could be dependent, and so covered old people, widows, abandoned mothers with dependent children, orphans and abandoned children, physically and mentally disabled, and social outcasts. It also included occupants of some jobs which were particularly poorly paid. The average worker was distinguished from those in this category in that he was economically self-supporting, and could provide at least at minimum level for his and his dependents' basic necessities of food, clothing and housing. The poor as a category of people was never a target area for mechanics' institutes. They were concerned with the economically self-supporting man (or woman in some cases) and his dependents.

¹ Q. in J.F.C. Harrison, Op.Cit., pp.6-7. The tory Quarterly Review might be expected to labour this distinction, but the same point is frequently made elsewhere, e.g. in Chambers Journal, q. in R.Altick, Op.Cit., p.337; in J.M. Ludlow and L. Jones, Progress of the Working Class, 1867, p.3. and M.D. George, London Life in the 18th Century, 1925, pp.160-161.

There was of course a lot of movement among workers into and out of the category of the poor. Most of them were only ever weeks away from total poverty if they were to become unemployed, have a serious accident, or become too old to work. The account by Gutteridge of his life as a Coventry silk-weaver takes him in and out of bouts of desperate poverty interspersed with comparative affluence.¹

The conclusion to this first point must be that a distinction was commonly though not invariably made between those likely to be permanently in poverty because of their total vulnerability in a laissez-faire economy, and those who at least had the capacity to be self-supporting.

The second assumption commonly made by Victorian writers was that there was a distinction between the ordinary worker and the highly-skilled and better paid artisan. The line clearly could not be exact but there was an acceptance that certain categories of worker were 'superior', and formed in Hobsbawn's term, an aristocracy of labour.² The Radical newspaper, the Poor Man's Guardian, refers to the elite of the working classes and Slaney commented in his speech on the Education Debate in 1837 "of those workmen dwelling in large towns there were two classes - the skilled and unskilled."³ The superior position of such workers depended partly on tradition which fed an accepted role image of certain skilled occupations, and partly it depended on the strategic importance of that job in the economy. Industrial

1 J. Gutteridge, Lights and Shadows in the Life of an Artisan, (1893).

2 E. J. Hobsbawn, Op. Cit., Ch. 15.

3 Poor Man's Guardian, 19 Oct. 1833, and J. Slaney Op. Cit., p. 6.

development in the period 1820-50 threw up new occupations which demanded novel and highly valued skills. This was particularly so of those related to machinery - its construction, control, use and maintenance. Men with a highly valued skill formed a part of the working force that was of particular concern to many of the promoters of mechanics' institutes. Their frequent use of phrases such as 'mechanics', 'artisans', 'superior kind of working man', make it clear that they were centrally concerned with this category of worker, however much further they extended their target area. It would be wrong, however, to see this as universally true. Even given the imprecision of the term, the statement by the Stourbridge Mechanics' Institute in its rules that it was founded "to afford information on a variety of interesting subjects especially among the labouring classes", is not compatible with the above argument.¹ Similarly at Banbury Mechanics' Institute the subscription was reduced from two shillings to one shilling per quarter for those least able to afford it, "all journeymen, mechanics, labourers and their sons" which shows both an appreciation of the differences of the three categories and the assumed commonality of their position.²

It was to discourage the less skilled and less well paid that many mechanics institutes put their subscription at rates as high as one pound per year paid quarterly. This was the case in London, and it is evident from the writings of Coates and Hole that

1 H.E. Palfrey, Op.Cit., p.1.

2 Banbury Guardian, 2 April 1846.

quarterly payment was difficult for all except the most prosperous artisans. Hole's figures for the 101 institutes he examined were: 18 charging less than five shillings a year, 51 between five and ten shillings, 21 between ten and twelve shillings, and only 11 between twelve and twenty shillings. No institute therefore charged more than sixpence per week and many charged less than twopence. However, few places organised payment by the week. Coates picks out Keighley Mechanics' Institute as one that did and argued that unless this pattern was followed it is the alehouse that "accumulates the fractional payments of the working man". Coates wanted to lower subscriptions and Hole wished to increase them. The value of either approach depended upon what category of worker the institute was concentrating. In cities like Birmingham and Manchester it was possible to charge a subscription of one pound and expect to find enough skilled artisans able and willing to pay. This could not have been true of many smaller towns and rural communities where such a class of workman did not exist in any strength. In those areas the target population had to be the average or below average paid working man. It was with such men in mind that one commentator argued that "the inertia of their mental darkness must not be confined by their disrelish for a high price."¹ In the South-West, where wages were lower on average than other regions of the country, the subscriptions reflected this. The quarterly payments were 1/6d at the Institute at Sturminster, one shilling at those at Crediton and Yeovil, and sixpence per month at the Loswithiel Institute.²

1 Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse Herald, 10 March, 1846, referring to Devonport Mechanics' Institute

2 The question of the rate of subscription is argued exhaustively by T. Coates, Op.Cit., pp. 35-40, and J. Hole, Essay, pp. 85-90.

There was a third assumption commonly made, that there was a class separate from the working class which we can term a lower middle-class. The frequency with which the distinction is made suggests that it corresponded with a widespread perception of observable differences. It is, however, the cause of much of the confusion in the estimates of class membership in mechanics' institutes. To some extent the problem arises from the occupations of people so marginal to any definition that the line between working class and lower-middle class becomes indeterminate, but this is the case between most classes or categorisations of people. The problem mostly arises because the definition of the category of lower middle-class is confounded by the application of three different criteria.

Firstly certain categories of occupation are considered qualitatively different from working class occupations, irrespective of whether the occupants earn more or as much as working class members. We can cite as examples the occupations of clerks and shop assistants. Secondly economic success would separate out within the same craft or trade those who became prosperous, employed their own workmen and marketed their own goods, from those who made a living only by the efforts of their own hands or received a weekly wage working for someone else. This was commonly found in towns with few factories and many small workshops, as in London, Birmingham or Coventry. At some stage a master craftsman presumably ceased to have his major affiliations with other craftsmen around him. Differences in wealth could be very great.

In Spitalfield, for example, master silkweavers owned property, employed labour and lived in style, while the poorest of the employed weavers lived in very abject conditions.¹ Some mechanics' institutes separated out the category of master craftsmen from ordinary workmen. At Workshop Mechanics' Institute the cheap subscription was only for clerks, journeymen, apprentices and labourers; master craftsmen paid the more expensive contribution, but therefore had the privilege of being eligible for election to the committee.²

The third criterion which was used to define lower middle-class membership was that of life style, either actual or desired. A distinctive lower middle-class style of speech, dress, deportment, attitude, public behaviour, social affiliation and moral belief developed through the 19th Century, and acceptance of such a life style was a self-defining act of lower middle-class membership.

These complications in the definition of lower middle-class lead to some of the contradictions produced by commentators via mechanics' institutes. R.S. Neale argues that there was in fact a class between the working class and middle class which he identifies as the middling class. In this he includes the superior artisans, the self-employed craftsman or tradesman, the small shop keepers and businessmen, the professional men except for those who were propertied or with high incomes. His analysis of shoemakers

1 See Chapter 1 in C. Tomalin, Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft, (1971).

2 H. Briscoe, Op.Cit., p.92.

in Bath establishes the lack of homogeneity of this occupational group both in economic fortune and political attitude. Similarly G.S. Jones' analysis of classes in London establishes the difficulty of class divisions based on occupational stratification, and the heterogeneous nature of those in classes described as upper working class or lower middle-class.¹

In the remainder of the Appendix, the evidence available from a number of sources will be presented and examined. We can consider first the case of J. Hudson. He writes of the London Mechanics' Institute: "The first 500 names enrolled ... consisted almost entirely of master mechanics, shop keepers, and dealers in hardware, with their workmen, cabinet makers, and home painters."² This would seem to span somewhat the working class/middle class division. We can guess however that some at least of the shop keepers sold products they themselves had made, and Kelly puts forward evidence that in the 1920s, at least in London, artisans and shop keepers were collectively described as tradesmen.³ Hudson goes on to deplore the growth in the institute of the number of attorney's clerks in place of working mechanics or those receiving a weekly wage for labour. So he distinguishes clerks from the workers he defines in his embracing phrase. He further goes on to separate from the clerks and foremen, whom he places in a separate class, the warehousemen, packers and carters

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- 1 R.S. Neale, Op.Cit., pp.64-70.
G.S. Jones, Outcast London, (1971).
 - 2 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.49.
 - 3 T. Kelly, Op.Cit., pp.244-245.

whom he saw as working class. Although the rationale of the division is clear, Hudson and most other commentators generally place together clerks and warehousemen in their actual analyses of membership figures. We can place against Hudson comments on the London Mechanics' Institutes, certain evidence. In the Report of the Select Committee on Education is a comment on the Institute which suggests more institutes should be extended throughout the country and the teaching and subjects taught should be "adapted to interest, attract and instruct the lower orders, the really labouring classes of the community. At present the plan of the institution, and the whole course of instruction, is adapted to, and chiefly attended by a class considerably superior to the really operative class."¹ Apart from making the same point as Hudson, this Report uses the phrases 'lower orders' and 'really labouring classes' presumably of the same people Hudson defines as 'receiving a weekly wage for labour'. Other evidence suggests a concern for the division between skilled artisans and the mass of workmen. Thus Place records that 'every man who earned his living by the work of his hands ought for the purpose of admission as a member be considered a mechanic... if more persons should desire to become members than could be accommodated, preference should be given to such people as worked at trades or in some way assisted in them.'² Place's definition of 'mechanic' is wide, but he clearly has a subdivision, however poorly expressed, of some aristocracy of labour. This fits in

1 Report from the Select Committee on the Education of the Poorer Classes in England and Wales, (1837-8), p.105.

2 Place MSS., 27823, f.251

well with J. Marshall's comment to Brougham in 1826 that 'the Mechanics' Institutes are at present adapted only for the elite of working people."¹

There is a check on these rather general observations from the figures gathered by Charles Toplis, a vice-president of the London Mechanics' Institute, in a report for the year 1835.² He provides what is basically an occupational division of membership.

	<u>Percentage</u>
1. Gentlemen, Professional People	2
2. Merchants, Shopkeepers, Shop Assistants	9
3. Clerks, Warehousemen	12
4. Printing Trades	11
5. Building and Decorating Trades	8
6. Cabinet-Making and Furnishing	6
7. Jewelry, Cutlery and Watch making	8
8. Engineering and Metal Trades	5
9. Miscellaneous Trades	12
10. Other Occupations (Labourers, School teachers, etc.)	3
11. Unclassified	16
12. Students and Apprentices	3

Total Number 1,144

Shop assistants are placed with merchants, clerks with warehousemen, and so categories lack precise class definition. There is no way

1 SDUK MSS, Box 22, 13 September 1826.

2 Q. in T. Kelly, Op.Cit., pp.132-133.

of distinguishing between employers, employees and self-employed workmen. The estimate of Toplis is that "one-third of them may be called mechanics for there are a vast number in London who are connected in some way or other with the arts of production that are not strictly mechanics." His strict definition of a mechanic is presumably a working man connected with machinery. The use of the word 'mechanic' without further explanation is always ambiguous. For example, a report at Somerton Mechanics' Institute claimed "it is the more praiseworthy as it originated entirely with some of the mechanics of the town."¹ At Wednesbury Mechanics' Institute the labelling problem was avoided by leaving it up to the members. The more expensive subscription was for those "not styling themselves mechanics". Anyone who did paid the cheaper subscription.²

Hudson used a number of alternative methods of analyses, which presumably reflected the form in which he could get hold of the figures. The categories he uses at Manchester Mechanics' Institute are based on a five-fold division which mixes up occupation, occupational status, skill, sex and age.³

Class I. Professionals, Employers, Merchants, Artists, Engravers, Schoolmasters, No Profession.

Class II. Clerks, Warehousemen, Shopkeepers, Assistants.

1 Somerset County Gazette, 16 November 1839.

2 Rules. 1836.

3 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.131.

Class III. Mechanics, Overlookers, Millwrights,
Spinners, Millhands, Building Trades,
Sundry trades chiefly handicrafts.

Class IV. Females

Class V. Youths

Royle quite properly has criticised this method of classification.¹ Some of the details are strange such as the placing of engravers in Class I or overlookers in Class III. The use of sex and age groups is confusing for we have no way of knowing what socio-economic class would claim them. Nevertheless if we ignore females and youths, we find that, taking Hudson's 1838 figures, the fairly wide Category III of the working class consists of about one-third of the total. The more idiosyncratically defined Class II of lower middle-class which includes shopkeepers but excludes schoolmasters consists of about 40 per cent.

Duppa gives a more refined version of the 1838 figures.

Class I.	Principals - merchants, manufacturers, machinists.	257
Class II.	Mechanics, Millwrights, Engineers	136
Class III.	Overlookers, Spinners and other Mill hands	36
Class IV.	Building Trades	104
Class V.	Sundry Trades chiefly handicrafts	132

1 E. Royle, "Mechanics' Institutes and the Working Classes, 1840 - 60", Historical Journal, 14, 1971, pp. 312-313.

Class VI.	Warehousemen	204
Class VII.	Clerks	150
Class VIII.	Artists, Architects, Engravers	69
Class IX.	Professional men	7
Class X.	Schoolmasters	10
Class XI.	Shopkeepers & Assistants	86
Class XII.	No Profession	11
Class XIII.	Ladies	17
Class XIV.	Youths	173
Total		1,392 ¹

Tylecote has consolidated from these figures two separate classes, the first comprising Classes II, III, IV, and V, the second comprising the remainder. This gives her a figure of 408 out of 1,392 or a little under 30 per cent representing the working class.² The danger of such interpretations can be easily seen. Even if we assume that all those in the occupational skills categories were workers, it would still seem reasonable to argue that Classes VI and VIII could be considered in the working class category. Likewise the placing of ladies and youths in Tylecote's second category, rather than excluding them altogether, introduces another factor of unreliability. If the categories are redefined in the manner suggested then the figure for working class membership is about 40 per cent. The argument is not that this figure is a more accurate one but that with the classification given us by Hudson and Duppa it is difficult to reach any sure conclusions at all.

¹ B.F. Duppa, Op.Cit., p.112 .

² M. Tylecote, Op.Cit., p.297.

Their categorisation of 'youths' is a particularly perverse one, because an age breakdown is also given which completely cuts across it. Hudson's analysis for 1837, shows 84 youths under 14, 558 youths from 14 to 21, and 750 members over 21. His category of youth at 173 must therefore include some though not all in the age range of 14 to 21.¹

Hudson uses a purer occupational division in the figures he gives for 1847 at Aberdeen Mechanics' Institute. The division into Life and Annual membership does not appear to have much significance.²

	Life	Annual
Mechanical Trades	31	7
Building & Furnishing Trades	21	3
Clothing and Dress Trades	32	10
Mercantile, as clerks	42	50
Connected with schools	10	15
Connected with Medicine & Agriculture	14	12
Other occupations	88	18

Such a division tells us nothing about the social class of members.

Hudson does, however, give figures based on occupational status for the year 1847 at Glasgow Mechanics' Institute.³

Workmen in various trades	224
Employers and Professional Men	92
Clerks and Warehousemen	264
Students and Teachers	20

In this case, the working class members amount to 38 per cent, if we leave out students and teachers.

1 J. Hudson, Op.Cit., p.131.

2 Ibid, p.61.

3 Ibid, p.87.

Thomas Coates is more consistent in his method of analysis. He uses the term 'mechanic' and 'working man' co-terminously and within this definition estimates that 42 per cent of members in the 46 institutes he studied, were mechanics.¹ However he seems to have arrived at these figures by using the convenient but dubious device of equating those who paid lower subscriptions (generally quarterly) with mechanics, and those who paid annual or life subscriptions with middle class. It is safest to ignore Coate's estimates. J. Langley summated the data he collected into three categories.² He claimed that 43 institutes were mainly supported by mechanics, 96 were mainly supported by the lower middle-class, and 65 of mixed support. His division into mechanics and lower middle-class would have been useful, had his conclusions been based on less suspect data. He obtained it by writing to the secretaries of the institutes, and many of their replies can be queried for accuracy. For example the membership of Wednesbury Mechanics' Institute was described as consisting mostly of miners but the historian of Wednesbury argues that it was a predominantly middle-class body.³ For what it is worth, however, Langley does not contradict Coate's evidence that working class membership was about 40 per cent.

Hole was inclined to look for evidence that the working man had deserted the institutes, and his essay was a series of suggestions as to why this had happened and what could be done about it.

1 J. Coates, Op.Cit., pp.19-20.

2 J. Langley, Appendix to the Report on the Select Committee on Public Libraries, 1849.

3 F.W. Hackwood, Wednesbury Papers, pp. 48-52, (1884).

He used the word 'mechanic' to mean worker. "The mechanics' institutes have failed to attract the mechanic class, (using the term in its generic sense as including all classes of operatives)"¹ Hogg is quoted by Hole to support his case, and Hogg must have a restricted meaning to "working classes." "From the returns supplied by 32 of the principal Institutes in Lancashire and Cheshire, it is found that in only four do the working classes attend in considerable numbers, and these four are established in mere villages. Out of 21 Institutes in the Midland Counties, only three contained the working classes in considerable number."²

Hole gives one particularly useful figure. Of the 11,150 males in the Yorkshire institutes, he claims that 2,908, that is 26 per cent, were under 18.³ In many of the institutes the number of youths was very high, and makes any analysis in class terms very difficult. Royle, in defending mechanics institutes as working class institutions, argues that one of their major functions was in providing for young males after they left school up to the time they got married.⁴ This may be true, but the existence of such a large number of youths in institutes destroys the possibility of making an accurate estimate of the working class proportion of membership.

The failure of Hudson, Coates, Hogg, Langley and Hole to provide comparable data, makes the use of their comments and conclusions

1 J. Hole, Op. Cit., p.17.

2 Q. in Ibid, p.19.

3 Ibid, p.19-20.

4 E. Royle, Op.Cit., p.309, 314.

on this subject dangerous. Much of their problem was in different interpretation of category terms and unreliable data. The confusion is highlighted by looking at the evidence for Yorkshire. A Report of the West Riding Union in 1840 stated that "the members of Mechanics' Institutes are, nineteen-twentieths of them, not of the class of mechanics, but are connected with the higher branches of handicraft trades or are clerks in offices, and in many instances young men connected with the liberal professions."¹ The York Mechanics' Institute claimed only one in twenty to be of the working class.² This high figure may be caused by the inclusion of handicraft workers with the lower middle-class and it was certainly not to go unchallenged. The 1859 annual report of the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes stated that "some of the most flourishing Institutes are composed almost wholly of the labouring class, and in most of them they form a considerable majority."³ In the same year Barnett Blake wrote "however this assertion (of working class desertion) may apply to other places, it has little or no truth when referring to the Mechanics' Institutes of Yorkshire, the majority of which not only supply the educational wants of working men, but are mainly supported, and in many instances, managed by them."⁴ Samuel Smiles reinforces this view. In his evidence to the Select Committee on Public Libraries in 1849, he claimed that "of 16,000 in the Yorkshire Union, one half may belong to the superior order of the working class."⁵ The 1862 annual report of the Yorkshire

1 WRUMI, 1840, quotation in T. Coates, Op. Cit., p.23.

2 Ibid. See also W. Newmarch, Op. Cit., p.43.

3 ARYUMI, 1859, quotation in S.J. Curtis, A History of Education in Great Britain, (1967 edition), p.473.

4 Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1859, p.335.

5 Report, Q.1881.

Union has returns from 84 institutes showing working class membership as over 70 per cent under their definition. The apparent unanimity of these sources is more suspect if one notes the different phrases used to describe the class at issue: "the labouring class", "working men", "superior order of working class". An example of the vagaries of categorisation can be taken from Sheffield Mechanics' Institute, for which we have membership figures for two successive years. These have been abstracted from the Minute Books by J. Taylor.¹

1835

Clerks, Warehousemen, Shop Assistants	35
Masons, Joiners, Shoemakers, Tailors	60
Engravers, Etchers, Modellers, Painters	40
Cutlery Trades	150
Schoolboys	20
Agricultural Workers	15

1836

Private Gentlemen	15
Professional Gentlemen	52
Tradesmen, Shop Keepers	35
Clerks, Warehousemen, Shop Assistants	61
Masons, Joiners, Shoemakers, Tailors	61
Engravers, Etchers, Modellers, Painters	36
Cutlery Trades	60
Schoolboys	22

These are salutary tables. All the middle-class categories of 1836 accounting for 102 members fail to appear in 1835.

1 J. Taylor, Op.Cit., p.156.

No agricultural workers are accounted for in 1836. The number of clerks, warehousemen and shop assistants doubled from 1835 to 1836 but the members in the ill-defined cutlery trades dropped from 150 to 60. Only three of the categories which appear in both lists have roughly similar numbers. A strong presumption must be that differences arise from the changes in categorising members rather than from real shifts in membership. Had we only had available for study the 1835 figures we would have drawn a very different conclusion from considering only the 1836 figures. In fact the latter figures show an institute with over half its membership in the lower middle or more prosperous middle-class.

Though it is not possible to find reliable evidence for most institutes, that at Huddersfield may be an exception, because it was widely praised at the time as one that had reached and retained the working man.¹ Membership classification is available for the year 1847.² It can be consolidated in the following way.

	Total	Percentage
1. Manufacturers (16); Professions (9); Farmers (6)	31	5.5
2. Shopkeepers (15); Clerks Warehouse- men (33)	48	8.5
3. Textile Workers	285	50.0
4. Craftsmen-builders, metal workers, mechanics, tailors, compositors, cabinet-makers, etc.	197	34.7
5. Unskilled	6	1.3

These figures do not take into account 63 members classed as 'of

1 J. Hole, Op.Cit., p.34. J. Hudson, Op.Cit., viii, and others.

2 M. Tylecote, Op.Cit., p.307.

various trades' and 123 youths (71 students and 52 factory lads or errand boys). Clearly, however, this institute had a predominantly working class membership.

A similar situation probably applied to the factory mechanics' institutes, such as the one at Dowlais built for the 15,000 employees of Gt. Western, or the railway mechanics' institute at Ashford, Crewe and Swindon. The Swindon Mechanics' Institute was almost entirely for factory workers, and subscriptions were deducted from wages at source. "It has differed from the generality of Institutes - it had been maintained and kept up as an institute especially for working men."¹

On the other hand G.W. Wood in a letter to Brougham as early as 1826 was claiming of Manchester Mechanics' Institute that "perhaps the attendance and subscription arise more from clerks in counting houses and assistants in warehouses than labouring mechanics",² and it was claimed at Lincoln Mechanics' Institute that there were few real mechanics. Hill's correspondent at the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute wrote in 1835 that they did not have many actual workmen among their members.³ At the Southampton Mechanics' Institute it was recorded that in 1842 there were upwards of 400 members only 38 of whom were mechanics.⁴ William Newmarch in his study of the statistics of York Mechanics' Institute concluded that "the majority of persons who have

1 Swindon Advertiser, 29 June, 1854.

2 SDUK Mss., Box 22, 22 August 1826.

3 F. Hill, Op.Cit., 2, 200.

4 Hampshire Advertiser, 15 January 1842.

entered the second and third classes have not been mechanics and artisans, but have belonged to the class of tradesmen, clerks and shopmen."¹

We can complete our review of the evidence of membership analysis by reference to a number of examples taken from total institute membership or from classroom membership.

At Coventry Institute we have crude but sensibly-divided figures for the year 1854.²

Men	Independent Means	144
Men	In Business	136
Men	Artisans and Mechanics	212
Women	Wives and daughters of Tradesmen	71
Women	Working in Manufacture	54

These figures tell us that about 43 per cent of men and women were working class. This was after the mechanics' institute had amalgamated with the church institute to form the new Coventry Institute. Earlier figures of the mechanics' institute might well have shown a higher percentage of working class.

At the Cambridge and Cambridgeshire Mechanics' Institute, our expectation would be of few factory workers but a number of craftsmen and many in various service occupations. An analysis of the first fifty names of quarterly members in 1850 shows how difficult it is to draw conclusions of class membership from an occupational classification.³

1 Appendix to 5th Annual Report. YUMI p.43.

2 Annual Report, 1854.

3 Institute membership book.

Printer	3	Builder	2	Plumber	1
Gentlemen	3	Bookseller	2	Farmer	1
Clerk	3	Surgeon/Doctor	2	Seedsman	1
Tailor	3	Honer	2	Grocer	1
Whitesmith	3	Bookbinder	2	Shoemaker	1
Carpenter	2	Cabinet Maker	1	Coachman	1
Painter	2	Law Stationer	1	Baker	1
Innkeeper	2	Confectioner	1	Butler	1
Fishmonger	2	Collector	1	Porter	1
Cook	2	Butcher	1	Schoolmaster	1

Obviously it is an institute with a very varied membership - 30 occupations in the first 50 names. Some of the descriptions are class-specific, such as gentleman, porter or coachman. Others tell us nothing about wealth or class, as for example a seedsman or a whitesmith, nor whether they were employers of labour. One can give a tentative estimate that not more than 23 were working class and probably rather less, but it is no more than an inference.

The figures for Nottingham Mechanics' Institute in 1850 are also in the form of an occupational division.¹

1. Professional Men and Manufacturers	16
2. Shopkeepers and Tradesmen	80
3. Clerks, Warehousemen and Shopmen	236
4. Lace and Stocking Makers	38
5. Joiners, Masons, Plumbers, Painters	10
6. Smiths, Engine, Bobbin and Carriage Makers	35
7. Handicraft Trades	20
8. Servants, labourers, Gardeners	10
9. Artists, Schoolmasters, Excisemen	14
10. Youths	56
11. Females	64
Total	579

¹ Nottingham Journal, 1 February 1850.

This list had the usual problems of occupational categorisations, although it is put in a form where some reasonable assumptions can be made for the purposes of class division. If we assume that Categories 1, 2, 3 and 9 are varieties of middle-class affiliation, and that Categories 10 and 11 must be dispensed with, we can treat the remainder as likely to be working class. This would give us a working class membership of 25 per cent. Categories 1 and 2 which are presumably the prosperous middle-class form about 20 per cent of the whole, and there is a particularly large number of clerks, warehousemen and shopmen who form something like a half of the total considered.

Evidence of membership from schoolroom classes does not necessarily tell us much about the total membership of the institute, and in particular will not normally include the more prosperous members but whether it would emphasise working class or lower middle-class membership would depend on other circumstances.

The Edinburgh School of Arts was renowned for its non-democratic form of control and its successful provision of classes, particularly in sciences. An analysis of 1836 shows the occupational categories of the students.¹

One course consisted of classes in mathematics, chemistry, and natural philosophy (mechanics, statics, dynamics, hydrostatics, and pneumatics). In 288 members of the course are listed 59 occupations. We have no way of being certain members were not masters or major employers, but as students it is unlikely. The list is likely to be mostly of employees or self-employed craftsmen. Of the 288 members, 126 were not connected with

1 M. Duppa, Op.Cit., pp. 14-15.

manual operations, i.e. they were book workers or clerks of some kind. This represents about 43.5 per cent, so rather over half were involved in manual work.

The other course at the institute was in ornamental and Plain Drawing and Modelling. In this case only 25 out of 170 were not involved in manual operation, and well over half (98 out of 170) were from the seven associated trades which utilised ornamental drawing and modelling - plasters, joiners, cabinet makers, carvers and gilders, brass founders. This is what we would expect, from a class giving specific skill training.

The figures do not tell us what the social class structure of the institute was. They do tell us that substantial numbers of working class men were attending classes, in which they formed a majority. Nevertheless we have to be very cautious in drawing any firm conclusions. For example, in the science classes one category is of "no trade". This is the second largest category and it is assumed for the above figures that this refers to people with no occupation because they could support themselves on unearned income. It could however mean something very different, those who were unskilled labourers and had no trade. In that case the figure of 43.5 per cent for non-manual workers is reduced to 28 per cent. This is another kind of ambiguity which makes difficult any firm conclusions based on membership figures.

Science Classes

Shopmen	58	Jewellers	7	Gardeners	5
No Trade	44	Brass Founders	7	Students	4
Joiners	23	Tailors	7	Painters	4
Cabinet Makers	18	Masons	7	Writers	4
Smiths	16	Currier	7	Watchmakers	4
Teachers	10	Printers	5	Coach Builders	3
Clerks	8	Piano Makers	5	Engineers	3

2 each

Sugar Refiners	Opticians	Accountants	Hatters
Architects	Tanners	Shoe Makers	Dyers
Brewers	Chemists	Glaziers	

1 each

Colourers	Figure Caster	Book Binder	Sculptor
Basket Makers	Gold Beater	Carver & Gilder	Cutler
Bakers	Engraver	Die Cutter	
Fishing-rod Makers	Lithographer	Machine Maker	
Bell Hangers	Plan Maker	Blind School pupil	

The third example is taken from the Stockton, Yarm and Norton Mechanics' Institute. The First Report in 1826 gives a membership list with occupations. The following are the first 70 entries.

Joiner	10	Cooper	1
Clerk	6	Butcher	1
Grocer	6	Plumber	1
Currier	5	Draper	1
Founder	3	Baker	1
Printer	3	Teacher	1
Cabinet Maker	3	Sadler	1
Mason	2	Hatter	1
Wine & Spirit Merchant	2	Surveyor	1

Bricklayer	2	Druggist	1
Clergymen	2	Miller	1
Bookseller	2	Builder	1
Gentlemen	2	Silversmith	1
Ships Carpenter	2	Brewer	1
Carpenter	1	Painter	1
Roper	1	Millwright	1

The list is composed mostly of craftsmen, tradesmen, clerks and professional people. There is a significant cluster of craftsmen in the wood trades - roughly 1 in 5 of the membership. While there is a good representation of working men it would be difficult to describe it even in its first year as a working men's institution. A crude estimate is that just under half are artisans, the remainder are tradesmen, professional people or gentry.¹

Any conclusions drawn from this confused evidence must be provisional. We can make an assumption that there was a percentage of the membership which was composed of skilled to unskilled workers. In some institutions, such as those at Swindon or Huddersfield, working class members seem to have formed the majority. In most institutes of which we have evidence they seem not to have fallen below 30 per cent of the whole, so we are probably safe in assuming that at least one in five of institute members was working class. However in most of the institutes examined the figure does not rise much above 40 per cent, and so we can draw a conclusion that working members did not form a majority of the total national membership.

1 SDUK Mss., Box 22. Further membership lists can be found for Chester Mechanics' Institute (Institute records) and for membership of classes at Swansea Mechanics' Institute, The Cambrian, 18 July, 1840.

A sizeable percentage were of that lower middle-class comprising shop assistants, clerks, agents and the like. Not less than 20 per cent seems to be the figure for this class on the basis of the institutes examined, and it was this class that contemporaries most often referred to. The Westminster Review wrote in 1844 "From the very first establishment of Mechanics' Institutions, it has been notorious, that the class of persons who have mainly supported them as members, have not been operative mechanics, but persons belonging to spheres of life more or less above the condition of the ordinary workman, such as tradesmen, agents, merchants and other clerks, overlookers and so forth."¹ Cattell wrote "Things have taken quite a turn. Mechanics have abdicated leaving only their name behind them. Shopkeepers, small tradesmen, and clerks now constitute the majority of members."² G.M. Young's comment that they were "play centres for clerks" or Woodward's that they were "centres of recreation for clerks, mechanics and shopkeepers" were not without some foundation.³ We have noted that Hole, Coates and Hudson had made the same point, and St. John in his analysis of popular education published in 1858 states categorically that "members in most cases are not mechanics or belonging to the humbler classes at all", quoting Brougham in support of such a statement.⁴ The same point was made by witnesses to the Committee of the Society of Arts on Industrial Instruction.⁵ It would be incorrect however to state that the mechanics institutes did not

1 Westminster Review, XL1, 1844, p.427.

2 C. Cattell, Op.Cit., p.5.

3 G.M. Young, Portrait of an Age, (1977), p.60.
E. Woodward, The Age of Reform, (1962), pp. 475-476.

4 J.A. St. John, Op.Cit., p.208.

5 Report of the Committee of the Society of Arts on Industrial Instruction, (1853), pp.36-7. Evidence of Professor Johnston and M. De Cocquiel.

have a working class membership. Tylecote concluded from her study of Yorkshire and Lancashire institutes that "nearly everywhere (they had) ceased to be regarded as a medium for the instruction of the masses and had become select rather than popular institutions."¹ In similar vein a contemporary wrote of "the banquet prepared for guests who did not come."² Clearly it is true that the mechanics' institutes did not achieve the success some hoped for as educators of the common people, but equally clearly they had limited successes in attracting to membership a considerable number of working men and women.

While the general tendency has been to exaggerate the loss of working class members, there have been studies which have argued that mechanics' institutes were more popular with the working class than is commonly assumed. Wilson in his study of Wakefield Mechanics' Institute suggests this.³ He reaches a figure close on one-half for working class membership but it is obtained by putting together with artisans and apprentices, the categories of clerks, agents, and officers, and females. His argument hinges on the very similar wages clerks and artisans receive, and their common experience of a lack of available educational organisations which they could attend. If we want to use a functional argument that mechanics' institutes provided primarily for those who were not prosperous this is undeniably true, but it avoids any analysis of class affiliation, masks over

1 M. Tylecote, Op.Cit., p.258.

2 R. Elliott, "On the Working Mens Reading Rooms as Established in 1848 at Carlisle," Trans. of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences, (1861), p.676.

3 J.T. Wilson, Op.Cit., p.41.

differences of two distinct life styles and cultures, and does not answer the questions on membership that were raised most often by contemporaries. At Wakefield in 1849 the working class membership was, on the basis of Wilson's figures, 21 per cent, thus falling within the range we have tentatively suggested as common.

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For many institutes, no institutional records apparently survive, and their history is pieced together from references in contemporary published books, or more commonly from local newspaper files. In the counties of the south-west, including Gloucestershire and Hampshire, there are almost no institutional records pre-dating 1850. The same is true of South Wales, but the reverse holds for Yorkshire where the work of institutions is fully recorded in the annual reports of the West Riding Union of Mechanics Institutes, subsequently the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes. Frequent, though often rather brief, references are made to mechanics' institutes in the Mechanics Magazine, particularly in its early years, and references are also found in the Brougham correspondence, the SDUK manuscript collection, and the Place manuscript collection.

The following source material is sectionalised into

- (a) Records of Institutions consulted for writing this thesis
- (b) Newspaper and Journal files consulted for writing this thesis
- (c) Other sources of institution records consulted

(a) Records of Mechanics' Institutes Consulted for this Thesis

Ashton-under-Lyne and Dukinfield Mechanics' Institute (founded 1825)

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Rules and Orders, 1825

Rules and Catalogue, 1849

Report of Annual Meetings, 1836, 1843, 1844, 1850

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Banbury Mechanics' Instituted (founded 1835)

Rules, 1835

Minute Books, 1835-1850

These records held at Banbury Public Library

Birmingham Mechanics' Institute (founded 1825)

Report on the Address of the Provisional Committee, 1825

Address to the inhabitants of Birmingham on the proposed institute by the Secretary

Rules, 1826

Annual Reports, 1828, 1835, 1840, 1841

Letter from Lord Leigh to the institute

Catalogue of Exhibition, 1840

Account of the foundation drawn up by T. Clarke in 1826

All records held at Birmingham Public Library except the last item in SDUK Mss.

Birmingham Polytechnic Institute (founded 1843)

Annual Reports, 1844, 1847, 1850, 1853

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Bolton Mechanics' Institute (founded 1825)

Annual Reports, 1826, 1838, 1839

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Bradford Mechanics' Institute (founded 1832)

Annual Reports, 1832-1850

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Burnley Mechanics' Institute (founded 1834)

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Annual Reports, 1835, 1837, 1838, 1847
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Rules, 1824

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Catalogue of Library, 1847

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London Mechanics' Institute (founded 1823)

Committee Minutes, 1823-1845

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Manchester Mechanics' Institute (founded 1824)

Annual Reports, 1825-1850

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Catalogue of Library, 1849

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Annual Reports, 1831, 1839

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Shropshire Mechanics' Institute, Shrewsbury (founded 1825)
Minute Books with Annual Reports, 1825-1844
Rules, 1825
Catalogue of Books, 1834

Records held at Shrewsbury Public Library

Southampton Mechanics' Institute, later Polytechnic Institute (founded 1830)
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before 1850. There is a copy of the rules 1859 in the
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in 1850 by P. Brannon, Picture of Southampton

Stourbridge Mechanics' Institute (founded 1834)

The location of its records is not known but they were used in the compilation of the institute's history by H. Palfrey

Swindon Mechanics' Institute (founded 1843)

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Huddersfield Mechanics' Institute	1st Annual Report, 1826
Stockton, Yarm & Norton Mechanics' Institute	1st Annual Report, 1826
Sunderland Mechanics' Institute	Rules, 1826
	Catalogue of Library, 1826
	1st Annual Report, 1826

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Paisley Mechanics' Institute 1856	Gloucester P.L.
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Totnes Mechanics' Institute 1851	Devon P.R.O.
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Wednesbury Mechanics' Institute 1836	Stafford P.R.O.
Wells Literary and Scientific Institute 1844	Stafford P.R.O.

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ABSTRACT

Thesis title: Politics in Mechanics' Institutes, 1820-50: a Study in Conflict.
Author: Colin M. Turner.

Mechanics' institutes were supported and opposed by members of all the major political and religious groupings in the period 1820-1850. The institutes transmitted different political, economic, cultural, and religious programmes, explicit and hidden, according to which group or alliance of groups was in control. The institutes were used for different purposes by different political groups.

The major power groups, assumed to be in conflict or alliance on any particular institute were: a reformist whig group heavily representative of the middle class and tending to non-conformism; a conservative traditionalist group heavily representative of the landed class and tending to anglicanism; and a radical working class group. Institutes can be categorised on the basis of the conflict-alliance relationship of these three classes, and six categories are postulated and can be tested against the histories of individual institutes. Examples of institutes are found to exist for all six categories, although some institutes are hybrid and others move between categories over time.

Most of the institutes examined reflected the economic and political assumptions of urban industrial capitalism, though in many cases with some accommodation with conservative and anglican thinking. Assumptions of both groups tended to fuse together in presentation of a common programme of moral and cultural education that was harmonious with political and economic beliefs and activities of industrial capitalism and also with middle class concepts of religious and moral virtue.

Because most institutes overtly presented a programme that was based on the economic self-interest of the middle and upper classes, albeit justified on the grounds that their own self-interest coincided with national interest, working class representation was low throughout the period, and radical working class institutes with an alternative political and cultural programme were few and did not survive long.