

The Virtuous Capitalist, The Poor and the Wasteland

[Factory Workers] pamper themselves into nervous ailments by a diet too rich and exciting for their in-door occupations
(Andrew Ure 1835, p. 298)

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Bubbles and Wasteland

The trader, in rude ages, is short-sighted, fraudulent, and mercenary; but in the progress and advanced state of his art, his views are enlarged, his maxims are established: he becomes punctual, liberal, faithful, and enterprising; and in the period of general corruption, he alone has every virtue, except the force to defend his acquisitions. He needs no aid from the state, but its protection; and is often in himself its most intelligent and respectable member.

Adam Ferguson (1767 Pt 3, Section 4)

Ferguson's description of 18th century Western European gentry in the 2nd half of the 18th century is in stark contrast to Thomas Jefferson's description,

...they have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate. This is a true picture of Europe. ...man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder

term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor.

(Thomas Jefferson, 1787 ¹)

Jefferson was a visitor to Europe and his reaction is that of a relatively detached outsider witnessing the consequences of the enlightened self-interest of the gentry: injustice and oppression of those least able to defend themselves - the poor.

Ferguson was a Scottish gentleman. He had lived inside the bubble of middle class Western European society all his life and saw everything outside that bubble as a wasteland which needed to be reclaimed.

If that wasteland was to be reclaimed, its inhabitants rescued from poverty, moral depravity and sloth, it would be because the gentry set the example and took responsibility both for 'developing' their environments and for re-educating the indolent poor. Those who practised enlightened self-interest did so for the most moral of reasons. They were securing the future for everyone. They needed protection from the state to ensure that all the benefits which flowed from enlightened self-interest were realised ².

The wasteland was a 'nursery for thieves and villains'. They were poor because they were indisciplined and lazy, not because of the rapacious greed of the gentry! ³ The poor lacked the virtues that had become natural to the gentry.

When middle ranking people looked at a gentleman they saw a virtuous man. Adam Smith, in a book appropriately entitled *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, explained it well. It was from the realisation that such people were securing the future for everyone in society that there,

arises that eminent esteem with which all men naturally regard a steady perseverance in the practice of frugality, industry, and application, though directed to no other purpose than the acquisition of fortune. The resolute firmness of the person who acts in this manner, and in order to obtain a great though remote advantage, not only gives up all present pleasures, but endures the greatest labour both of mind and body, necessarily commands our approbation.

(1759 Part 4 Ch. 2)

Such people did not merely pursue prudent self-interest for their own gain or because others insisted they should. They knew, in their own hearts, that prudent, self-interested industry and frugality were amongst the most important of the virtues:

In the steadiness of his industry and frugality, in his steadily sacrificing the ease and enjoyment of the present moment for the probable expectation of the still greater ease and enjoyment of a more distant but more lasting period of time, the prudent man is always both supported and rewarded by the entire approbation of the impartial spectator, and of the representative of the impartial

spectator, the man within the breast.
(Smith 1759, Part 6 Section 1)

The 18th and 19th centuries were the centuries in which capitalism was to flourish, unfettered by laws and regulations. It was to be the period when the long-term impact of capitalism on the living conditions of the poor would become obvious.

What would happen to the least fortunate, to the inhabitants of the wastelands, when the 'steady perseverance in the practice of frugality, industry, and application, though directed to no other purpose than the acquisition of fortune' was allowed full play?

Who were 'The Poor'?

They were the dispossessed, inhabitants of the wastelands of Western Europe. They were the rubble of feudal society. For them, feudal understandings, inevitably warped and altered by the centuries of turmoil, confrontation and change in western Europe, were still central. But, the patron-client structures of the feudal past were gone. There were no patrons on whom they could rely, no institutional supports which might protect their rights. They had lost those over more than three hundred years of feudal decay and collapse. They had become "hordes of thieves and desperados who defied the law... a class resembling savages in their appetites and habits" (James Kay (1832)).

Thomas More had described their plight two centuries earlier, when their patrons resolved 'to enclose many thousand acres of ground'.

... [T]he owners as well as tenants are turned out of their possessions, by tricks, or by main force, or being wearied out with ill-usage, they are forced to sell them.

By which means those miserable people, both men and women, married and unmarried, old and young, with their poor but numerous families (since country business requires many hands), are all forced to change their seats, not knowing whither to go; and they must sell almost for nothing their household stuff, which could not bring them much money, even though they might stay for a buyer. When that little money is at an end, for it will be soon spent, what is left for them to do, but either to steal and so to be hanged (God knows how justly), or to go about and beg? And if they do this, they are put in prison as idle vagabonds
(1516, *Utopia*, Book 1)

Not much had changed in two centuries! They were the dispossessed of Western Europe, the weak who could not defend themselves against patrons turned capitalist (or, as Jefferson put it, 'turned wolf'). They constituted separate communities from the gentry, money makers and aristocracy of Europe, only connecting with them as menials, labourers, vagabonds and thieves. They had not socialised with or shared the interests and understandings of the middle ranks. The gentry, with their distinctive ways

of living, moved in social spheres beyond their vision, and, largely, beyond their interest.

Among the more intemperate descriptions of these people is that given by [Daniel Defoe \(1725?\)](#), son of a tallow chandler (a member of the *Worshipful Company of Butchers*) and aspiring member of the gentry. His writings grew in popularity through the 19th century:

How many frequent robberies are committed by these japanners? And to how many more are they confederates? Silver spoons, spurs, and other small pieces of plate, are every day missing, and very often found upon these sort of gentlemen; yet are they permitted, to the shame of all our good laws, and the scandal of our most excellent government, to lurk about our streets, to debauch our servants and apprentices, and support an infinite number of scandalous, shameless trulls, yet more wicked than themselves, for not a Jack among them but must have his Gill.

By whom such indecencies are daily acted, even in our open streets, as are very offensive to the eyes and ears of all sober persons, and even abominable in a Christian country.

In any riot, or other disturbance, these sparks are always the foremost; for most among them can turn their hands to picking of pockets, to run away with goods from a fire, or other public confusion, to snatch anything from a woman or child, to strip a house when the door is open, or any other branch of a thief's profession.

In short, it is a nursery for thieves and villains; modest women are every day insulted by them and their strumpets; and such children who run about the streets, or those servants who go on errands, do but too frequently bring home some scraps of their beastly profane wit; insomuch, that the conversation of our lower rank of people runs only upon bawdy and blasphemy, notwithstanding our societies for reformation, and our laws in force against profaneness; for this lazy life gets them many proselytes, their numbers daily increasing from runaway apprentices and footboys, insomuch that it is a very hard matter for a gentleman to get him a servant, or for a tradesman to find an apprentice 5.

Innumerable other mischiefs accrue, and others will spring up from this race of caterpillars, who must be swept from out our streets, or we shall be overrun with all manner of wickedness.

Who's to blame for their poverty and degrading circumstances? 🐞

They were childish ingrates, who expected something for nothing, who refused to take life seriously and suffered the consequences of their indisciplined laziness. It was time for them to grow up, to accept responsibility for life, not live on unearned handouts.

Bernard Mandeville expressed it well. If one supported people through offering them unearned handouts they would become lazy and dependent on

welfare.

Charity, where it is too extensive, seldom fails of promoting Sloth and Idleness, and is good for little in the Commonwealth but to breed Drones and destroy Industry.

(Appendix to 1724 edition of *Fable of the Bees* entitled 'An Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools')

Samuel Smiles (1859), in a popular book of the mid 19th century, entitled '*Self-Help*', provided the reasons why, after one hundred and fifty years of capitalism, the poor were still poor, all-too-often living and working in sub-human conditions. They were 'the extravagant', who 'wasted their resources'. It was their own fault if they were poor!

...the lesson of self-denial—the sacrificing of a present gratification for a future good—is one of the last that is learnt. Those classes which work the hardest might naturally be expected to value the most money which they earn. Yet the readiness with which so many are accustomed to eat up and drink up their earnings as they go, renders them to a great extent helpless and dependent upon the frugal.

Any class of men that lives from hand to mouth will ever be an inferior class. They will necessarily remain impotent and helpless, hanging on to the skirts of society, the sport of times and seasons. Having no respect for themselves, they will fail in securing the respect of others. In commercial crises, such men must inevitably "go to the wall." Wanting that husband power which a store of savings, no matter how small, invariably gives them, they will be at every man's mercy, and, if possessed of right feelings, they cannot but regard with fear and trembling the future possible fate of their wives and children.

"The world," once said Mr. Cobden to the working men of Huddersfield, "has always been divided into two classes—those who have saved, and those who have spent—the thrifty and the extravagant. The building of all the houses, the mills, the bridges, and the ships, and the accomplishment of all other great works which have rendered man civilized and happy, has been done by the savers, the thrifty; and those who have wasted their resources have always been their slaves. It has been the law of nature and of Providence that this should be so; and I were an imposter if I promised any class that they would advance themselves if they were improvident, thoughtless, and idle."

(1859, Chapter 9 Para.5)

[Samuel Scriven's 1842 report](#) to the House of Commons on factory conditions in 'Mines and Manufactories', outlined the problems in dealing with the poor. No matter what good, virtuous gentlemen did, nothing could be improved so long as the poor behaved as they now did.

To contextualise his views, one needs to remember the contemporary

situation in which he was writing.

The Speenhamland decrees in the late 18th century allowed employers to pay "market rates" for labour, which soon drove wages below what was necessary to maintain subsistence. Parishes were required to make up the shortfall from their rates. The significance of this is that wages really did fall below what was considered necessary to ensure subsistence. It was not possible to live on the wages of just one or two members of the family without parish support.

In 1834 the Poor Laws were amended to remove this 'burden' from the parishes, transferring it to the poor. After all, what had they to complain about? All they had to do was 'get a job'. Parents, in 1840, did not send children to work because they were 'proverbially improvident'. They desperately needed every penny they could get.

This, however, is clearly not the view of Samuel Scriven:

The manufacturers are gentlemen who 'evince a warm-hearted sympathy for those about them in difficulty or distress, contribute as much as possible to their happiness, and are never known to inflict punishments on the children, or to allow others to do so':

The manufacturers are a highly influential, wealthy, and intelligent class of men: they evince a warm-hearted sympathy for those about them in difficulty or distress, contribute as much as possible to their happiness, and are never known to inflict punishments on the children, or to allow others to do so. It, would be invidious to particularise individuals, but I should do them injustice as a body if I did not acknowledge their liberality in allowing me unrestrained admission to every department of their works, as well as the desire they have shown to render me every assistance and co-operation, with the view of carrying out the objects of the Commission...

They can hardly be held responsible for the consequences of the lifestyles of their proverbially improvident employees.

The processes being such as to admit of the employment of whole families father, mother, and some two, three, or more children - their united earnings are sometimes 3l. or 4l. per week: but, proverbially improvident, and adopting the adage, - "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof", they squander the proceeds of their labour in gaudy dress, or at the skittle-ground and ale-house; so that, when overtaken by illness or other casualty, and thrown for a few days out of work, they resort to their masters for a loan, or to the parish workhouse for relief.

Thoughtless and improvident parents, showing no regard for the consequences to their offspring, permit them to continue working in sub-standard conditions. So long as they can reap the advantages of their labour they encourage them to work in conditions like these:

The processes and departments to which I beg leave to direct your especial attention are the dipping, scouring, throwing, plate, saucer, and dish making, and printing, as those in which very young children are found. The effects I have observed in the first and second, on many of the older hands, and the evidence I have recorded from all, have satisfied me that they are the most pernicious and destructive in the whole process of potting.

It is true that in many instances persons have been known to have worked as dippers many years without any material consequences resulting, or being perceptible, and they will tell you "'tis not so bad now as formerly, when a greater proportion of the poisonous metal entered into the composition of the liquid;" but even in them, whose constitutions may have been less susceptible of its influences, I have been able to trace in their dull and cadaverous countenances its insidious workings.

In most of the rooms there are one or two adults, with their attendant boys, whose business it is to bring the ware in its rough, or, in the phraseology of the potter, in its biscuit state, from the warehouse or painting-room to the tub. By constant handling, the fingers become so smooth and delicate that they sometimes bleed, and thereby render the process of absorption more certain and rapid. The dipping itself; performed by the man, is momentary, and, when completed, the article is passed on to the boys for shelving and drying; the liquid consists of borax, soda, potash, with whiting, stone, and carbonate of lead, finely ground and mixed together with water; for coarse goods a large proportion of lead is used, and in some cases arsenic.

The workers seem to have a complete disregard of the dangers around them. They recklessly eat their meals in the the most unhygienic of surroundings.

Both men and boys have their hands and cloths almost always saturated with it; and reckless of the danger they incur, seldom or ever change, or use precautionary measures, frequently taking their meals in the same room, sufficiently satisfied to wipe their hands on their aprons. I have never seen rooms provided for cleansing, although it appear in some of the returned schedules that there is plenty of water and at their command.

From their disregard of prophylactic measures; you will not be surprised that paralysis, colica pictonum, epilepsy, and a host of other nervous diseases; are to be met with in all their aggravated forms. The most constant, however, is that of partial paralysis of the extensors of the hands in men, and of epilepsy in children, accompanied at all times with obstinate constipation of the bowels and derangement of the alimentary canal.

But the strongest assurance that can be adduced of the deleterious effect that this process has on children, to be found in the evidence

of the men themselves, who, when their affections have been appealed to as fathers of families, have invariably, to the question "Would you bring your own son to the dipping-tub?" replied "No:" and in the instance of John Cooper he continued because I love my child, and would rather that should live."

The average amount of weekly wages for men in this department is 30s., for boys 5s., which is higher than in many others, and obtained as an equivalent for "the risk they run." This pay is a strong temptation to the thoughtless and improvident parent, who, regardless of consequences to their offspring, permit them, so long as they reap the advantages of their labour, to continue in this pest-house.

The parents seem to have no interest in educating their children, sending them at too early a period of life to labour from morning till night.

The masters show the concern one would expect from socially aware gentlemen. They acknowledge and lament the children's low and degraded condition.

The problem really is the total indifference of the parents.

I almost tremble, however, when I contemplate the fearful deficiency of knowledge existing throughout the district, and the consequences likely to result to this increased and increasing population, and would willingly leave the evidence to speak for itself, did I not feel that I should ill discharge my duty were I to shrink from the task; on an examination of the minutes of evidence which I have the honour to forward from Cobridge, Burslem, &c. &c., it will appear that more than three-fourths of the persons therein named can neither read nor write.

An internee may be possibly drawn that I may have been partial in my selection of them, but I beg distinctly to be understood as having on all occasions had them before me irrespective of any educational competency they may have possessed. But it is not from my own knowledge that I proclaim their utter, their absolute ignorance. I would respectfully refer you to the evidence of their own pastors and masters, and it will appear that as one man they acknowledge and lament their low and degraded condition.

My experience has satisfied me that this state of things is attributable to the three following causes:

30) The first, and perhaps most prominent, I conceive to be that of sending children at too early a period of life to labour from morning till night, in hundreds of cases for 15 or 16 hours consecutively, with the intermission of only a few minutes to eat their humble food of "tatees" and "stir pudding", and where they acquire little else than vice, for the wages of 1s. or 2s. per week, whereby they are necessarily deprived of every opportunity of attending a day or

evening school.

31) Another is the total indifference of parents, who, although in numberless instances earning from 2s. to 3s. or 4s. per week, and not requiring the early labour of their offspring, nevertheless care so little about their immediate or future welfare, as to be equally satisfied whether they continue in ignorance or not.

32) A third is doubtless the poverty of others unemployed.

The workers appear to have no self-respect. They live in disgusting, squalid conditions,

The position of the town being elevated, and upon the brow of a hill, it is consequently exposed to the winds from all quarters, but more especially to the north-east, for a valley approaches the town in this direction, and serves to give force and increased effect to the cold winds which prevail from that quarter.

It is to this elevated position and free ventilation that I am disposed to attribute our comparative exemption from epidemic and certain endemic diseases, especially to the common fever of the country, which in the summer and autumn more particularly prevails in the surrounding towns of Burslem, Newcastle, and Stoke; whilst Hanley and Shelton suffer much less from the disease. But owing to this position and particular exposure to the most ungenial wind of the heavens, the north-east, I conceive a peculiar character is, to a certain extent, given to the diseases of the town-pulmonary affections prevailing very extensively.

The direction in which the streets are built might have slightly counteracted this unfavourable exposure, but unfortunately the inhabitants have, no doubt in ignorance and without design, given it increased effect by arranging most of the streets on the north-east and eastern side of the town in a direction parallel to the current of the wind when it blows from this quarter.

There is a small closely-built district near the centre of Hanley, called Chapel Field, and a series of blind streets branching off from the main street in Shelton, both which places are crowded with inhabitants living in squalid poverty. Many of the inhabitants of these spots, but especially the children, have a peculiarly sickly aspect, most probably from the poor and improper food they take, conjoined with the impure air they breathe. Numbers of children die during infancy in these quarters of the town, and fevers and other epidemic diseases prevail there most extensively and in their most virulent forms.

In different parts of the town and on its outskirts there are many stagnant pools in which vegetable matter is constantly undergoing a process of putrefaction, for they are used for the purpose of steeping hazel-rods in, to render them more pliant in the use to which they are applied, that of forming crates, in which the earthenware of the

neighbourhood is packed.

They are very well paid in comparison with workers in other manufacturing districts but their improvidence is their undoing!

The wages paid in this neighbourhood are good, better than those of most other manufacturing districts. Habits of improvidence prevail notwithstanding extensively; and it not unfrequently happens that men who draw 3s. a-week for their own work and that of their children, suffer some of the evils and many of the irregularities of poverty.

Intemperance in intoxicating drinks is a serious evil among the working class. Many of them allowing their families almost to starve to beg in order that they may indulge in this vice. The numbers of public-houses, beer, and spirit shops being great, and the latter appearing to enjoy a very prosperous trade...

The women do not acquire those domestic habits which would best fit them for housewives and mothers. They continue to work while they are pregnant and then send out their infants to nurse during the day.

The females, from being employed from an early age in the manufactories as transferrers painters, burnishers, &c., do not acquire those domestic habits which would best fit them for housewives and mothers: and it frequently happens that when they are bearing children they continue to labour in the manufactories, and send out their infants to nurse during the day, This is a source of great mortality amongst infants, for they are fed by their nurses chiefly with bread steeped in water, and they early become sickly, and die of various diseases of the digestive organs, those of the chest, or head...

One could continue with this report, but it is simply more of the same: atrocious conditions, and improvident, irresponsible inhabitants who seem to disregard both their own and their children's wellbeing.

The Report concludes with a set of appendices in which both responsible people of the towns and employees in the various factories are given a voice. The conclusions to the first and last of these is given below.

Scriven Report: Doctors report on health conditions: Appendix No. 1. A few REMARKS on the GENERAL and sanitary condition of the town of HANLEY and SHELTON, and its Inhabitants, more especially with respect to the Health of the Children of the Working Classes:

...In conclusion I may add, as the result of my observation from a residence of 17 years in this town, during which time I have practised as a surgeon, that children are sometimes cruelly overworked, in the process of plate-making especially, and that in other labours, and in the collieries, they are exposed to very unhealthy occupations. They also suffer greatly from the improvident and intemperate habits of their parents. In such cases their clothing

is defective, and especially towards the end of each week their food very scanty. Their education is exceedingly imperfect, and the religious instruction they receive ought to be much more contemplate in the department of morals.

(Signed) J. B. DAVIS, Surgeon

Perhaps we should allow the Reverend Aitken to have the final comment. Scriven Report: Teachers & Clergy reports: Appendix No. 119. LETTER from the Rev. R. E. Aitkens, incumbent of Hanley:

Sir;

To the inquiries which you have been pleased to submit to me respecting the moral condition of the children employed in the manufactories in this place, I cannot give any additional evidence to that which you have received from the worthy master of the National School, which you read in my presence before him, and which with some slight alterations, in which he concurred, I confirmed viva voce. I am not sure whether it was expressed in your notes that the school is under the superintendence of the incumbent of Hanley.

Respecting the two subjects of inquiry (at the bottom of p.10 and the top of p.11) to which, by your marginal mark, you have directed my especial attention, I beg to offer the following observations, which are the result of considerable experience.

I have almost invariably found that the habits invariably acquired by women, rendering them more or less fit to perform their duties as wives and mothers, depend infinitely less on the occupations by which they procure their maintenance, than in their domestic training by the instructions and examples of their mothers. Let the mother be industrious, notable, decorous, and devout, and generally you will find her daughters of the same character, whether they continue to reside at home and earn their livelihood by the use of the needle, or whether they are employed in the manufactories. I have uniformly found the case in this rank of life similar to the oft-debated and endless question of the respective advantages of public or private schools among the higher and middle classes of society. In both cases the eventual moral habits of individuals will depend more on the dispositions which they bring from home than what they acquire in the school or manufactory.

No reference is made to the consequences of changes in the Poor Laws. Wages are assumed to be more than adequate for the legitimate needs of the inhabitants. And adverse conditions are largely of their own making.

These were the conditions of 'the poor' in Britain after one hundred and fifty years of politically dominant capitalist development.

We need to ask how conditions like these emerged.

[What shall we do with The Poor?](#) 

In the 18th and 19th centuries, 'the poor' were to find that it was time for them to be re-educated. They were to become the 'mission field' for morally upright, responsible Western Europeans. And for the good of both 'decent society' and their immortal souls, they were to be taught discipline and obedience, they were to be taught to work. It would be a long, drawn-out and painful process, and those being re-educated would endure much misery and heartache, but they were going to be taught.

Although it might seem a cruel policy, the only reasonable way of dealing with those who needed help was to compel them to work. There were times in life when one had to be cruel to be kind. As James (in Wilson 1969, p. 119) argued, "the social legislators of the Restoration aimed at nothing less than making the poor a source of profit to the state by forcing them to work for reduced wages." But they did not do so vindictively. This was not a 'class war', it was a class-focused re-education program. As Wilson says,

what came to be regarded by later critics as a system of calculated brutality and repression arose in the first place not from unconcern or harshness, but out of a desire to protect the efforts of those local authorities who were trying hardest to improvise remedies.
(1969, p. 134)

The Poor are lazy with no desire to Better Themselves! 🐼

A major problem encountered in dealing with 'the poor' was that they seemed to have little desire either to accumulate possessions or to save for the future ⁷. And, perhaps more importantly for those who now held the reins of power in Britain, and, increasingly, in the rest of western Europe, the poor did not seem to understand or appreciate the vital importance of work, for its own sake, that is, for its character building potential ⁸. This was not merely a concern of the 18th century. It had become an increasingly important concern of 'responsible' people over the previous two hundred years.

[Edmond Fitzmaurice \(1895, p. 220\)](#) explained that Sir William Petty, writing in 1665, recognised how intractable the problem was of getting 'The Poor' to work consistently. They seemed content "to live in a condition little above that of animals".

His own observations of the habits of the cloth-workers in England and of the Irish peasantry compelled him, however reluctantly, to the opinion that the general standard of living was as yet too low to make high daily wages of any advantage to the labourer, because of their tendency at once to reduce their hours and be content with wages just sufficient to support existence at a very low level of material civilisation.

"It was observed," he says,

by clothiers and others who employ great numbers of poor people, that when corn is extremely plentiful that the labour of the poor is proportionately dear and scarce to be had at all, so licentious are

they who labour only to eat, or rather to drink.

It was the same in Ireland, especially since the introduction of that breadlike root, the potato. A day of two hours labour was there sufficient to make men to live after their present fashion, and the cheapness of food was the excuse for the people to live in a condition little above that of animals.

Sir Josiah Child, in 1668, put his finger on the problem,

And for our own Poor in England, it is observed, that they live better in the dearest Countries for Provisions, than in the cheapest, and better in a dear year than in a cheap, (especially in relation to the Publique Good) for that in a cheap year they will not work above two days in a week; their humour being such, that they will not provide for a hard time; but just work so much and no more, as may maintain them in that mean condition to which they have been accustomed.

(Child 1668)

The poor seemed focused on the present, unaware of the future, living from hand to mouth.

Sir Henry Pollexfen pronounced in 1697 that

the advances of wages hath proved an inducement to idleness; for many are for being idle the oftener because they can get so much in a little time;

and Bernard Mandeville in 1714 asserted that

Every Body knows that there is a vast number of Journey-men ... who, if by Four Days Labour in a Week they can maintain themselves, will hardly be persuaded to work the fifth; and that there are Thousands of labouring Men of all sorts, who will... put themselves to fifty Inconveniences... to make Holiday.

(Hatcher 1998, p. 68)

Ferguson identified the problem as one of being 'uncivilised'. In straying from speaking of the poor to speaking of the barbarian, Ferguson, in common with most other writers of the century, betrayed his view of the poor in his own country. It was as though they belonged to another society, alien and devoid of the moral virtues of the civilised; impetuous, artful, rapacious, violent, deceitful and slothful,

Actuated by great passions, the love of glory, and the desire of victory, roused by the menaces of an enemy, or stung with revenge; in suspense between the prospects of ruin or conquest, the barbarian spends every moment of relaxation in the indulgence of sloth. He cannot descend to the pursuits of industry or mechanical labour: the beast of prey is a sluggard; the hunter and the warrior sleeps, while women or slaves are made to toil for his bread. But shew him a quarry at a distance, he is bold, impetuous, artful, and rapacious: no bar can withstand his violence, and no fatigue can allay his activity.

(1767 Part 2, Section 3)

As Foucault (1971) claimed, for 'responsible' western Europeans of the 17th and 18th centuries, sloth had become the worst of all sins, and productive labour the best of all disciplines and virtues, having its own, inevitable rewards. 'The poor', like the barbarians, appeared unable to understand why this should be so. Consequently, they laboured for only so long as was necessary to supply their meagre wants and needs and then focused on other activities, more often than not, various forms of 'time wasting' such as socialising and 'loitering'.

For 18th and 19th century reformers, 'loitering' was a pernicious past-time of those who were 'slothful', those who seemed content with their miserable lot and who clearly lacked all motivation to 'better themselves' ⁹. John Marshall (1698), in a commentary on John Bunyan's writings, put it well,

Bunyan well knew that idleness engenders poverty and crime, and is the parent of every evil; and he exhorts his runner to the greatest diligence, not to 'fool away his soul' in slothfulness, which induces carelessness, until the sinner is remediless...

WHAT SHALL I SAY? Time runs; and will you be slothful? Much of your lives are past; and will you be slothful?

Your souls are worth a thousand worlds; and will you be slothful?

The day of death and judgment is at the door; and will you be slothful?

The curse of God hangs over your heads; and will you be slothful?

Besides, the devils are earnest, laborious, and seek by all means every day, by every sin, to keep you out of heaven, and hinder you of salvation; and will you be slothful?

Also your neighbours are diligent for things that will perish; and will you be slothful for things that will endure for ever?

Would you be willing to be damned for slothfulness?

Would you be willing the angels of God should neglect to fetch your souls away to heaven when you lie a-dying, and the devils stand by ready to scramble for them?

Was Christ slothful in the work of your redemption? Are his ministers slothful in tendering this unto you?

And, lastly, If all this will not move, I tell you God will not be slothful or negligent to damn you—whose damnation now of a long time slumbereth not—nor the devils will not neglect to fetch thee, nor hell neglect to shut its mouth upon thee.

[Born Again or Not - They need to Learn Discipline!](#) 

The nature of the activity in which 18th century responsible people were to engage in getting the poor to commit to consistent work was strongly

influenced by their religious predisposition. For those less religiously inclined, they could be disciplined to work through legal compulsions; for those who saw religious commitment as central, no amount of discipline, no depth of punishment could bring about the needed transformation until the heart and soul of the individual had been *reborn* 10.

For the great majority of middle ranking people, the answer lay in laws and regulations, in disciplining and directing the activity of those who threatened the prosperity of the age. But, for a significant minority, those who still strongly identified with the religious longings and ambitions of the 17th century, the problems of the age could not be overcome simply through compulsion and legislation. Before people could even contemplate such transforming changes in their lifestyles they needed to be empowered by God. People needed to be 'born again', starting out on a new life empowered by God to become sanctified in mind and body.

They would still have to yield to discipline, and they would still have to show that perseverance and industry which marked the truly moral person, but the transformation could not begin until they had been made into new people, saved to serve God in the way He chose (and Responsible Western Europeans knew) they should. Having yielded their lives to God, they should focus on the life before them, determined to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling".

[John Wesley, in 1762](#), adjured his followers, "Be always employed; lose no shred of time; gather up the fragments, that nothing be lost. And whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might". Only God could perform the miraculous transformation which was needed in the lives of those who were trapped in sloth and its consequences. Unless there was true repentance, born of clear understanding of the depths of depravity in which they were sunk, there could be no redemption.

The redeemed, in gratitude to God, would apply themselves unstintingly to virtuous, productive lives. As Charles Wesley, in a popular hymn of the period, wrote, "Depth of mercy, can there be, mercy still reserved for me? Can my God his wrath forebear, me the chief of sinners spare?" Isaac Watts put it equally eloquently, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see!". Once that transformation had been made, it was the responsibility of the redeemed to make the most of the new lives they had received at God's hand.

Over the next two hundred years these alternative focuses were to produce very different determinations in those who held them. Those who saw the future as one of discipline and punishment *knew* that attempting to relieve the sufferings of the poor would be counter-productive. [Herbert Spencer \(1884\)](#), in the late 19th century, was still wrestling with how best to ensure that 'The Poor' acquired 'the capacities needful for civilized life'. This had exercised the minds of 17th and 18th century writers like Petty, Child, Pollexfen, Marshall, Mandeville, Defoe, Ferguson and Townsend. Yet, at the

end of the 19th century, it had still not been resolved.

Spencer explained what he believed was required to make the lower classes 'fit for the social state'. Those who felt sorry for the poor, who wanted to rescue them from the harshness of their lives, were working against the tide of human evolution. All the evils of the age; the poverty, degradation, maltreatment of the lower classes 'are unavoidable attendants on the adaptation now in progress':

To become fit for the social state, man has not only to lose his savageness, but he has to acquire the capacities needful for civilized life. Power of application must be developed; such modification of the intellect as shall qualify it for its new tasks must take place; and, above all, there must be gained the ability to sacrifice a small mediate gratification for a future great one. The state of transition will of course be an unhappy state. Misery inevitably results from incongruity between constitutions and conditions. All these evils which afflict us, and seem to the uninitiated the obvious consequences of this or that removable cause, are unavoidable attendants on the adaptation now in progress.

Humanity is being pressed against the inexorable necessities of its new position -- is being moulded into harmony with them, and has to bear the resulting unhappiness as best it can. The process must be undergone, and the sufferings must be endured. No power on earth, no cunningly-devised laws of statesmen, no world-rectifying schemes of the humane, no communist panaceas, no reforms that men ever did broach or ever will broach, can diminish them one jot. Intensified they may be, and are; and in preventing their intensification, the philanthropic will find ample scope for exertion. But there is bound up with the changes a normal amount of suffering, which cannot be lessened without altering the very laws of life.

(1884 Ch. 3, p. 40)

For Spencer, as for the vast majority of 'responsible' Western Europeans of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, human beings were on a millennial evolutionary journey. There was a *direction* to social change and that direction, provided people took their responsibilities seriously, was upwards, into a future of growing material prosperity and well-being.

The utopian presumptions of the previous two centuries ¹¹ had become a part of the background of understanding for the 'middle sorts' of western Europe. And, with the absorption of these presumptions into the unconscious substrate of reasoning, the implied dangers of not pressing toward that goal of the 'upward call of God' became similarly internalised, no longer a matter of belief but one of certainty, no longer religiously justified, but now materially certified. The progress of humanity was written into the material constitution of human beings, just as the changes in the earth's surface and in the heavens were increasingly being seen as consequences of inescapable and unstoppable 'forces of nature'.

The attitudes of western European employers in the 18th century toward the poor were hundreds of years in the making. By the 15th century, employers and landowners were already convinced that 'the poor' would only work consistently if compelled to do so. Their experiences following the Black Death of the mid 14th century ¹², when labour became very scarce while the tasks to be done remained about the same as they had been when there was a much larger workforce, convinced them that they could not rely on the goodwill of those they employed.

Of course, if one sees the situation from the labourers' point of view, the demands made of them from the early 1350s onwards were entirely unreasonable. The presumption that those who remained would meet all the labouring demands previously met by as much as double their number five years earlier, resulted in them being required to work for very long hours, for very little more reward.

Since they were geared to labour as a means of meeting needs and wants rather than as a means to the open ended accumulation of money and possessions, once they obtained the cash they needed it seemed pointless to continue working. There were better things to do than work when the product was no longer needed. How deep-seated such understandings and motivations in life are, and how difficult it is to retrain people to new perspectives, can be seen when one realises that 'responsible' western Europeans had been passing laws and organising processes of retraining for 'the poor' for more than three hundred years before the concerted efforts of the 18th and 19th centuries.

The 'responsible public' of the 18th century was, undoubtedly, largely comprised of self-serving, self-interested, self-promoting individuals who wanted the world organised to their benefit. They were, however, nonetheless, convinced of the historical necessity underpinning the reforms they supported. The world, for them, was becoming, more and more certainly, a world of resources and a world of productive, wealth-generating activity. They were the vanguard of the future, creating a world which would benefit all. But, to effectively pursue these goals, the laziness, indiscipline and profanity of the 'lower rank' had to be addressed. [Daniel Defoe](#), of *Robinson Crusoe* fame, described the problem in the 1720s,

... the conversation of our lower rank of people runs only upon bawdy and blasphemy, notwithstanding our societies for reformation, and our laws in force against profaneness; for this lazy life gets them many proselytes, their numbers daily increasing from runaway apprentices and footboys, insomuch that it is a very hard matter for a gentleman to get him a servant, or for a tradesman to find an apprentice.

In the 18th century, following a relative lull in activities during the later 17th century, the enclosure of common land, dispossession of peasant landholders and consolidation of landholdings took on new momentum. As it did so, the ranks of dispossessed and indigent people were swelled by those moved from the land. The common view of 18th century reformers was that

almost half of the land available for farming in Britain was 'waste', that is, not used 'profitably'. They set out to make it economically productive and efficient.

They'll work if they're hungry! 🐜

The poor know little of the motives which stimulate the higher ranks to action - pride, honour, and ambition. In general it is only hunger which can spur and goad them on to labour; yet our laws have said, they shall never hunger. The laws, it must be confessed, have likewise said that they shall be compelled to work. But then legal constraint is attended with too much trouble, violence, and noise; creates ill will, and never can be productive of good and acceptable service: whereas hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but, as the most natural motive to industry and labour, it calls forth the most powerful exertions; and, when satisfied by the free bounty of another, lays a lasting and sure foundation for good will and gratitude...

The wisest legislator will never be able to devise a more equitable, a more effectual, or in any respect a more suitable punishment, than hunger is for a disobedient servant. Hunger will tame the fiercest animals, it will teach decency and civility, obedience and subjection, to the most brutish, the most obstinate, and the most perverse.
(Joseph Townsend 1786)

Sir Josiah Child had identified the problem in the 17th century, the poor "work so much and no more, as may maintain them in that mean condition to which they have been accustomed". It was time to make sure that they received no more than would keep them working. And it was time to take away any supports the poor might be relying on other than wage labour.

The 'responsible' people of the mid 18th century found a way to do this which would both force the poor into a consistent commitment to work and ensure the rational reorganisation of the countryside. They accelerated the alienation of common lands and the dispossession of smallholders. As Arnold Toynbee (1884) described,

The enclosure of commons had been going on for centuries before 1760, but with nothing like the rapidity with which it has been going on since, it is known that 554,974 acres were enclosed between 1710 and 1760, while nearly 7,000,000 were enclosed between 1760 and 1845.

The dispossession of smallholders gathered momentum as the 18th century unfolded. Toynbee (1884) summarised the movement,

A third result of landlord supremacy was the manner in which the common-field system was broken up. Allusion has already been made to enclosures, and enclosures meant a break-up of the old system of agriculture and a redistribution of the land. This is a problem which involves delicate questions of justice. In Prussia, the

change was effected by impartial legislation; in England, the work was done by the strong at the expense of the weak. The change from common to individual ownership, which was economically advantageous, was carried out in an iniquitous manner, and thereby became socially harmful. Great injury was thus done to the poor and ignorant freeholders who lost their rights in the common lands.

In Pickering, in one instance, the lessee of the tithes applied for an enclosure of the waste. The small freeholders did their best to oppose him, but, having little money to carry on the suit, they were overruled, and the lessee, who had bought the support of the landless 'house-owners' of the parish, took the land from the freeholders and shared the spoil with the cottagers. It was always easy for the steward to harass the small owners till he forced them to sell... The enclosure of waste land, too, did great damage to the small freeholders, who, without the right of grazing, naturally found it so much the more difficult to pay their way.

Those who lost access to lands joined the ranks of 'the poor', forced to live on the charity of parishes or move to the outskirts of towns in an attempt to find some alternative means of subsistence. As they did so, the 'problem of the poor' became increasingly obvious to responsible citizens ¹³.

The problems attending the enclosure of common lands were just the tip of the iceberg. At the same time as people who relied on common lands found themselves denied access, smallholders who held sufficient land to make ends meet but whose lands, in the eyes of those who held political power, could be 'more productively' used, found the political conditions of the time stacked against them. Large landowners had gained the whip hand and set out to dispossess the yeomen of England of the lands they held. As Toynbee (1884) says

To summarise the movement: it is probable that the yeomen would in any case have partly disappeared, owing to the inevitable working of economic causes. But these alone would not have led to their disappearance on so large a scale. It was the political conditions of the age, the overwhelming importance of land, which made it impossible for the yeoman to keep his grip upon the soil.

People who, until the mid 18th century, had felt themselves relatively safe from the dispossession experienced by rural labourers and others who relied heavily on access to the commons for survival, now found themselves the target of land reform.

Their problems were not only brought on by rapacious landlords and changes in statutes which were strongly weighted against them. They were compounded by the movement of industry through the 18th century from the countryside into towns. Traditionally, smallholders had augmented their income by spinning, weaving and other forms of handicraft. As these activities became the focus of factory development, the returns for their labours were greatly reduced, and often the market for their produce simply

disappeared.

Many who were not evicted or defrauded of their properties, found that they could no longer make a living from the land they held, and were either compelled by circumstance into sending more and more members of their households into towns in search of work, or found themselves having to accept the very low prices being offered for rural land and move to the rapidly growing towns and cities of western Europe (but particularly of England). And, as is always true under capitalism, the increased labour which became available to employers resulted in constant reductions in wages. Toynbee (1884) summed up the period,

The misery which came upon large sections of the working people at this epoch was often, though not always, due to a fall in wages, for, as I said above, in some industries they rose. But they suffered likewise from the conditions of labour under the factory system, from the rise of prices, especially from the high price of bread before the repeal of the corn-laws, and from those sudden fluctuations of trade, which, ever since production has been on a large scale, have exposed them to recurrent periods of bitter distress. The effects of the industrial Revolution prove that free competition may produce wealth without producing well-being. We all know the horrors that ensued in England before it was restrained by legislation and combination.

We'll Compel Them through Laws and Regulations!

For the Middle Ranks, of course, the problems were not those of dispossession and abuse, they were problems of sloth and intemperance, which inevitably resulted in crime and violence. The poor were fundamentally lazy and unwilling to put the needs of the country above their own petty concerns and interests. They would, if they could, undermine all that was being achieved in ensuring the 'wealth of the nation'. They must be compelled to contribute to the prosperity of the country, and the government must act strongly and decisively to deal with what was rapidly becoming not 'the poor' but 'the criminal' class. [John Simon \(1908 P. 63\)](#) described the scene,

Sir Samuel Romilly [1736?] in his *Observations on a Late Publication, intituled Thoughts on Executive Justice*, reviews the criminal law of England, and says – "The first thing which strikes one is the melancholy truth that among the variety of actions which men are daily liable to commit, no less than one hundred and sixty have been declared by Act of Parliament to be felonies without benefit of clergy; or, in other words, to be worthy of instant death."

In succeeding years the number of crimes punishable by death expanded considerably. As Boswell records Samuel Johnson as saying in 1783, when told that criminals to be hanged were no longer to be publicly paraded on the way to execution,

executions are intended to draw spectators. If they do not draw spectators, they don't answer their purpose. The old method was most satisfactory to all parties; the public was gratified by a procession; the criminal was supported by it; why is all this swept away?

(Boswell 1791)

Punishments were not to be viewed as acts of vengeance, but as cautionary devices, discouraging others from similar behaviour (reminiscent, of course, of [Thomas More's 1506 description](#): "...the severe execution of justice upon thieves, who... were then hanged so fast that there were sometimes twenty on one gibbet" – there has been a long history of blaming and punishing victims in western Europe).

Throughout the century, the vastness of the problem, and the difficulties of dealing with it, occupied the minds of socially aware, responsible people. Those most directly involved in addressing the problem felt a sense of hopeless frustration at the immensity of the task which confronted them. It was not that a *few* of the 'lower rank' were lazy and degenerate, this seemed to be the condition of everyone. E. P Thompson (1967, pp. 80-81) describes the attitude of Josiah Tuck, dean of Gloucester, in 1745,

'the *lower* class of people' were utterly degenerated. Foreigners (he sermonized) found 'the *common people* of our *populous cities* to be the most *abandoned*, and *licentious* wretches on earth': 'Such brutality and insolence, such debauchery and extravagance, such idleness, irreligion, cursing and swearing, and contempt of all rule and authority... Our people are *drunk with the cup of liberty*.'

Daniel Defoe in the 1720s seems to have put the common view of 'responsible members of the public' into words in a pamphlet entitled, [Everybody's Business Is Nobody's Business Or, Private Abuses, Public Grievances: Exemplified In the Pride, Insolence, and exorbitant Wages of our Women, Servants, Footmen, &c.](#), which rapidly ran to five editions. As he says in the preface to the fifth edition, his intentions, in writing the pamphlet have, " had the good fortune to meet with approbation from the sober and substantial part of mankind; as for the vicious and vagabond, their ill-will is my ambition." His language is blunt and his views uncompromising,

It is with uncommon satisfaction I see the magistracy begin to put the laws against vagabonds in force with the utmost vigour, a great many of those vermin... having lately been taken up and sent to the several work-houses in and about this city; and indeed high time, for they grow every day more and more pernicious... I, therefore, humbly propose that these vagabonds be put immediately under the command of such taskmasters as the government shall appoint, and that they be employed, punished, or rewarded, according to their capacities and demerits; that is to say, the industrious and docible to woolcombing, and other parts of the woollen manufacture, where hands are wanted, as also to husbandry and other parts of

agriculture.

His solution to the problem of the unreliability of day workers and servants was to pass innumerable laws and regulations governing their behaviour with which they "must either comply or be termed an idle vagrant, and sent to a place where they shall be forced to work. By this means industry will be encouraged, idleness punished, and we shall be famed, as well as happy for our tranquillity and decorum".

Not only were the poor idle, irreligious and wanton, those who were employed could simply not be trusted. Defoe's pamphlet provides one example after another of the duplicity, deceit and light-fingeredness of servants and other employees. They displayed "saucy and insolent behaviour, ...pert, and sometimes abusive answers, [and] daring defiance of correction". If they were not watched constantly, they would cheat their employers of all their belongings.

E. P. Thompson (1967, pp. 81-2) describes the lengths to which Crowley, owner of the Crowley Iron Works, went in attempting to get his employees to work and in trying to protect himself from their blatant dishonesty. In preambles to two of the 'Orders' of the extensive 'Law Book' of the Company, Crowley wrote,

I having by sundry people working by the day with the connivance of the clerks been horribly cheated and paid for much more time than in good conscience I ought and such hath been the baseness and treachery of sundry clerks that they have concealed the sloath and negligence of those paid by the day... To the end that sloath and villany should be detected and the just and diligent rewarded, I have thought meet to create an account of time by a monitor, and do order and it is hereby ordered and declared from 5 to 8 and from 7 to 10 is fifteen hours, out of which take 1½ for breakfast, dinner, etc. There will then be thirteen hours and a half neat service... [This service must be calculated] after all deductions for being at taverns, alehouses, coffee houses, breakfast, dinner, playing, sleeping, smoaking, singing, reading of news history, quarelling, contention, disputes or anything foreign to my business, any way loytering.

The stress on the 'period of work', and of ensuring that employees worked their full number of hours, was, of course, not new to the 18th century. It was a growing concern of merchants and landowners through the late 14th and 15th centuries, and it grew in importance in succeeding centuries ¹⁴. By the 18th century, Crowley felt it unnecessary to justify this stress.

Everyone who mattered *knew* that people laboured for a set period of time each day, and that they *ought* to spend all of that time 'on the job'. Work was not simply 'labour', it was spending *a set time* in a 'place of employment' where the time was 'owned' by the employer. Not only 'the poor' were organised to 'work time' and 'leisure' or 'non-work' time, so were the industrious middle sorts. Only the gentry, who spent their time in 'public' activities, were not organised in this way. But they too had their sphere of

service and should, also, allot a period in each day to the performance of their 'duties'.

While one could rely on responsible members of the community taking their work commitments seriously, this simply could not be assumed of 'the poor'. They would cheat and steal and rob employers of the time they wanted to be paid for. Only constant vigilance, thorough regulation and supervision could ensure that they spent their time in work rather than in taverns, alehouses, and coffee houses, 'loitering' rather than working. The poor were, as they had been seen for centuries, unreliable, untrustworthy, dishonest, lazy and duplicitous. Responsible people in the 18th century realised that if they continued in this 'savage' state they threatened all the advances of civilisation which seemed promised in the century.

Something had to be done to address what, to the responsible citizens of Britain and the rest of western Europe, was both a disgrace and a dire threat to the well-being of every responsible person. This mass of unredeemed, degenerate humanity had to be redeemed, retrained, made responsible.

Let's Train their Young

In the 18th century, as in earlier centuries, the means to ensuring conscientious commitment to work by employees were all based on external regulations and legal compulsions. If enough pressure was applied, and people were organised and supervised thoroughly, their work commitment would improve. Government provided the background legislation compelling the poor to work, and individual industrial enterprises provided additional structures and regulations ensuring that labourers really did labour.

But, despite all these measures, the problem of getting the poor to take their labouring responsibilities seriously seemed worse than ever. It was clear that the problem could not be addressed simply by trying to coerce and police adults. It was very difficult to change the habits of a lifetime.

Aphorisms were at hand to justify one of the approaches to retraining the poor: You can't teach an old dog new tricks; you've got to break a horse when it's young. If laws and regulations alone did not work, perhaps overt training of the young would do it. As [Edgar Furniss \(1920, p.114\)](#) described of a range of opinions on the matter expressed during the 18th century,

Very significant of the point of view of these writers are the projects which they advanced for shaping and moulding the characters and destinies of the children of the labouring classes. Many of these projects strike the modern reader as almost fantastic distortions of justice, but it is necessary that we bear in mind, in attempting to gain an insight into the attitude of their authors, that the proposals were advanced for the good of the nation, and not for the immediate benefit of the children who were to supply the material for experimentation. William Temple, always an extremist in his point of view, devised one of these:

When these children are four years old, they shall be sent to the

country workhouse and there taught to read two hours a day and be kept fully employed the rest of their time in any of the manufactures of the house which best suits their age, strength and capacity. If it be objected that at these early years, they cannot be made useful, I reply that at four years of age there are sturdy employments in which children can earn their living; but besides, there is considerable use in their being, somehow or other, constantly employed at least twelve hours in a day, whether they earn their living or not; for by these means, we hope that the rising generation will be so habituated to constant employment that it would at length prove agreeable and entertaining to them...
(William Temple, *Essay* (1770))

(1920 p. 114)

Children had to be taught, as John Locke (1692) had explained in the late 17th century, to defer gratification of immediate, imprudent desires and lusts in favour of working towards long-term, prudent rewards for diligent endeavour. This would benefit not only the individuals themselves, but also their dependents and communities. They had to learn the immorality, the sinfulness of sloth and the virtue, the sanctifying power of industry. The evangelist of the age, John Wesley, put it very clearly in a [1741 sermon](#),

Know ye not then so much as this, you that are called moral men, that all idleness is immorality; that there is no grosser dishonesty than sloth; that every voluntary blockhead is a knave? He defrauds his benefactors, his parents, and the world; and robs both God and his own soul. Yet how many of these are among us! How many lazy drones, as if only fruges consumere nati! "born to eat up the produce of the soil." How many whose ignorance is not owing to incapacity, but to mere laziness!

It was becoming clear to 18th century responsible people that the horse must be broken when young, or not at all. As Sir John Eardley Wilmot, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas explained late in the 18th century,

Obedience is one of the capital benefits arising from a public education, for though I am very desirous of having young minds impregnated with classical knowledge, from the pleasure I have derived from it, as well as the utility of it in all stations of life, yet it is but a secondary benefit in my estimation of education; for to break the natural ferocity of human nature, to subdue the passions and to impress the principles of religion and morality, and give habits of obedience and subordination to paternal as well as political authority, is the first object to be attended to by all schoolmasters who know their duty and do it.

([The Gentleman's Magazine \(1811\) Volume 109 p. 449](#) (originally in Volume 73 p. 136))

Through the second half of the 18th century, and on into the 19th, both focuses were to be developed. On the one hand, laws and regulations compelling people to work would be strengthened and applied more and more vigorously, and alternative means of material support would be

removed wherever possible. On the other, increasing emphasis would be placed on training the young.

This was not, of course, *education*, as given to the children of the middle ranks. That might well back-fire, giving the children of the poor ideas which were beyond their station. Among those who had not been directly involved in or affected by the religious revivals of the period, the view of education for the masses which Bernard Mandeville expressed in 1724 seems to have been standard,

From what has been said it is manifest, that in a free Nation where Slaves are not allow'd of, the surest Wealth consists in a Multitude of laborious Poor; for besides that they are the never-failing Nursery of Fleets and Armies, without them there could be no Enjoyment, and no Product of any Country could be valuable. To make the Society happy and People easy under the meanest Circumstances, it is requisite that great Numbers of them should be Ignorant as well as Poor. Knowledge both enlarges and multiplies our Desires, and the fewer things a Man wishes for, the more easily his Necessities may be supplied.

(*Fable of the Bees* (1724) Appendix: [An Essay On Charity, and Charity Schools](#)).

This view of the educational requirements of the poor remained dominant through the century. An anonymous writer to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1797 put it even more clearly,

Industry is the great principle of duty that ought to be inculcated on the lowest class of the people, as it is the best and most effectual barrier against vices of every kind; as it occupies the mind, and leaves no vacancy for licentious thoughts and mischievous projects...

The laborious occupations of life must be performed by those who have been born in the lowest stations; but no one will be willing to undertake the most servile employment, or the meanest drudgery, if his mind is opened, and his abilities increased, by any tolerable share of scholastic improvement: yet these employments and this drudgery must be necessarily performed... and, surely, none can be more properly fitted for this purpose than those who have been born in a state of poverty.

The man, whose mind is not illuminated by one ray of science, can discharge his duty in the most sordid employment without the smallest views of raising himself to a higher station, and can take his rest at night in perfect satisfaction and content. His ignorance is a balm that soothes his mind into stupidity and repose, and excludes every emotion of discontentment, pride and ambition. A man of no literature will seldom attempt to form insurrections, or plan an idle scheme for the reformation of the state.

(in Goldstrom 1972, p. 22,3)

Mr Davies Giddy, member of parliament, in a debate on the Parochial

Schools Bill in 1807 [15](#), expanded on the problems of educating the poor:

[‘The giving of education to the labouring classes’ would] 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...

(in Goldstrom 1972, p. 29)

For these people the problem was one best dealt with by direct means, through finding a variety of ways of compelling the poor to work; reducing the circumstances of those who refused to work to such low levels that they would have no option but to accept whatever work was offered; and by retraining their offspring to become habituated to work.

The impact of the [18th century revivals](#) resulted in a very different approach being employed by those who accepted that they had a duty of care for the weak and the poor. The 19th century saw the proliferation of day schools for the poor. The aim of the schools, however, was quite different from the aim of public school education for the middle classes. An advertisement explaining the object of the Kennington District Schools, in 1824, provides a clear explanation of their purpose,

The object in forming Establishments of this nature, which now happily exist in almost every Parish and District throughout the Kingdom, is, to train the Infant Poor to good and orderly habits, - to instil into their minds an early knowledge of their civil and religious duties, - to guard them, as far as possible, from the seductions of vice, - and to afford them the means of becoming good Christians, as well as useful and industrious Members of Society: - These are the benefits proposed by the Promoters of these Schools; benefits, it is presumed, not more essential to the Children themselves, and their Parents, than to the Community at large.

(Silver and Silver 1974, p.1)

As a consequence of the 18th century revivals, Sunday Schools [16](#) emerged in the second half of the century as a means of providing a rudimentary education to both children and adults in association with religious worship services.

Samuel Scriven, in his 1842 Report to Parliament, described what he considered to be the value of the Sunday schools he investigated,

There are in the district Sunday-schools belonging to the church, and to dissenters of many denominations, but chiefly to Methodists of the

"Wesleyan", "New Connexion", "Christian Association", and "Primitive" connexion. In these are congregated immense numbers of children of both sexes. The practice of all is to open their doors at nine o'clock in the morning, and close them at half past ten, when they retire to the religious worship of their respective churches or chapels: to open again at one o'clock, and retire at half past two generally, for the same purpose, thus giving three hours of instruction deducting half an hour for prayer and singing, with which they commence their duties.

There are defects in the system of Sunday-school training, or whence arises the fact of children whose depositions I hand you from Burslem, the very pride of the potteries, their very seat of learning, being so profoundly ignorant as not to know one letter from another, and yet regularly "attend Sunday schools" my deliberate opinion is; that in an educational point of view they are not doing the good which is attributed to them: first, on account of the limitation of the hours of schooling; next; from the absence of writing, and other such secular instruction; and, thirdly, on account of the teachers; who with honour be it spoken, are eight-tenths of the working classes, yet unequal to the task of teaching.

I do not mean to detract from the merits of Sunday-schools as a source of religious knowledge, which by some is considered the basis upon which all others should be built, or from the moral effects resulting from the congregating of children in religious places; or from associating with religious friends; but would rather give my humble praise to the many sects who have with such determined efforts striven to stem the torrent of infidelity, profligacy, and drunkenness, and continue with pious zeal, in imitation of their founder, to extend the knowledge and love of God.

Thomas Jordan (1993) has summed up the value of education during the first half of the 19th century,

In 1851, Henry Mayhew reported that costermongers sent their children to school only to "save the trouble of tending them" (Quennell 1969). In the early decades, reformers established Sunday schools to promote access to the Bible, although some of them were anxious about educating the poor beyond their presumed station in life.

At a more political level, the tension between the Anglicans' National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church and the Chapel's British and Foreign Schools Society delayed reform of education. The National Society was the larger, and the Royal Lancasterian Society was smaller than either.

Overall, the pattern of schooling was spotty in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, and Bedfordshire had the highest rate of illiteracy. Wolverhampton, according to the Morning Chronicle's special correspondent in 1851, had "... 15,000 children in

a space of a few square miles growing up in dense and total ignorance."

It should be noted that education in the period owed much to the efforts of individuals. Hannah More, early in the nineteenth century, promoted literacy through Wesleyanism, Robert Raikes' Ragged Schools laid a foundation for later efforts, and Mary Carpenter directed her efforts toward delinquents through scholarship and penal reform. With the Elementary Education Act of 1870, the government finally undertook serious educational planning. A series of commissions from the Devonshire Report in 1872 subsequently undertook further reform of education. In 1902, public policy led to administrative changes and to promotion of secondary education.

And... No Charity!!

Among the most unfortunate consequences of government 'hand-outs', in the minds of many writers of the 18th and 19th centuries, was their negative impact on the willingness of the poor to work. One of several writers quoted by [Edgar Furniss \(1920\)](#), in examining the issue, was William Temple,

Temple wrote at a time when the poor rates were computed at two and a half millions of pounds annually and were continually on the increase; when the minds of men were filled with fresh memories of the destructive riots which the past four years had seen; when, in fact, there seemed to be lacking no evidence of the despair-engendered viciousness of the lower classes necessary to convince the short-sighted observers of the day of their innate depravity.

Temple proceeded to find the cause of this immorality in the existing laws for poor relief:

Our poor laws are at present a snare to the poor, and leave them loose to idleness, debauchery and insolence; because they depend on these laws for support in necessity; and knowing that a justice of the peace will relieve them, they despise parish officers, insult the inhabitants, and do not feel themselves obliged to their benefactors for what they receive. It is upon the poor laws that the poor rely and not upon their own behavior and conduct; and this tends to destroy all subordination as well as gratitude and mutual esteem. (William Temple, 1770, *Essay*)

But the writer's belief that the poor laws were responsible for the condition he decried, did not cause him to absolve the laborer from all blame for his "idleness, debauchery, and insolence."... (Furniss 1920, p. 106)

Joseph Townsend, in *A Dissertation on the Poor Laws*, in 1786, provided perhaps the most rational, calculated solution to the problem of compelling the poor to work when he suggested that the best means was to strip them of all alternative means of livelihood; and reduce wages to the bare minimum required for subsistence. The problem, as many had explained through more than two centuries, was that the poor would work for only so long as they absolutely had to in order to obtain their subsistence. If they

could do this in three or four days of work then they would only work for that period. So, it was clearly counterproductive to provide them with above-subsistence wages.

For Townsend, as for Mandeville, Temple, Ferguson and many other writers of the century, one of the greatest errors of reformers over the previous two centuries had been that they attempted to deal with the problem of poverty by providing welfare payments of various kinds to those who were destitute. In doing so, they expanded and perpetuated the very problem they were trying to address.

First, Townsend states the problem, stemming, he believes [17](#), from the old monastic system which supported the poor in their indolence and was dismantled when Henry VIII, in the early 16th century, broke up the monasteries and appropriated their possessions.

At the dissolution of the monasteries, the lazy and the indigent, who were deprived of their accustomed food, became clamorous, and, having long since forgot to work, were not only ready to join in every scheme for the disturbance of the state, but, as vagrants, by their numbers, by their impostures, and by their thefts, they rendered themselves a public and most intolerable nuisance [18](#).

According to Townsend, these wretches, once succoured by the Church and, in the main, a product of the foolishness of misplaced charity, were, with the breakup of the feudal Church in England, forced to fend for themselves. Only, having for so long been fed and clothed by the religious communities, they no longer possessed the skills, motivation or inclination to work for their own living.

Now, according to Townsend, in the latter part of the 18th century, it was time to seriously address the problem posed by the descendants of those lazy and indigent wards of the Church. And, since the responsible people of the age now approached everything rationally, presuming that in a rational consideration of the elements of a problem the solution would become plain, this problem should be approached in that way.

There never was greater distress among the poor: there never was more money collected for their relief. But what is most perplexing is, that poverty and wretchedness have increased in exact proportion to the efforts which have been made for the comfortable subsistence of the poor; and that wherever most is expended for their support, there objects of distress are most abundant; whilst in those countries or provincial districts where the least provision has been made for their supply, we hear the fewest groans. Among the former we see drunkenness and idleness clothed in rags; among the latter we hear the chearful songs of industry and virtue.

So, the solution was obvious, take away charity. Misplaced charity breeds the problem it claims to address. Force the poor to fend for themselves and they will develop those skills which they presently lack. Having learned to

work, they will come to enjoy it and their regions will resound to "the chearful songs of industry and virtue".

How could the state go about this without provoking widespread civil unrest? Again, Townsend claimed, to understand the solution one needed to examine measures previously tried and determine why they had failed. Through the previous two hundred years, the major approaches to the problem of the laziness and indigence of the poor had involved legislation and social compulsion. Innumerable laws had been passed compelling the poor to work. None had succeeded. Even more laws had been passed, and draconian penalties applied to address the immorality and dishonesty of the idle poor; again, without any apparent success in dealing with the problems of crime and immorality among the poor. So, to continue with either of these seemed pointless.

The poor were clearly not motivated to work through any sense of pride in achievement, ambition or self-respect. They were 'not yet civilised'. But they must be taught to work. Best, therefore, to resort, not to manmade laws and compulsions, which are seldom successful, but to those 'natural' motives which drive human beings to labour.

The poor know little of the motives which stimulate the higher ranks to action - pride, honour, and ambition. In general it is only hunger which can spur and goad them on to labour; yet our laws have said, they shall never hunger. The laws, it must be confessed, have likewise said that they shall be compelled to work. But then legal constraint is attended with too much trouble, violence, and noise; creates ill will, and never can be productive of good and acceptable service: whereas hunger is not only a peaceable, silent, unremitted pressure, but, as the most natural motive to industry and labour, it calls forth the most powerful exertions; and, when satisfied by the free bounty of another, lays a lasting and sure foundation for good will and gratitude.

The slave must be compelled to work; but the freeman should be left to his own judgment and discretion; should be protected in the full enjoyment of his own, be it much or little; and punished when he invades his neighbour's property. By recurring to those base motives which influence the slave, and trusting only to compulsion, all the benefits of free service, both to the servant and to the master, must be lost.

The second half of the 18th century saw the final push to strip away small-holdings from the rural poor of Britain, making them entirely dependent on wage-labour for subsistence.

The enclosure of commons had been going on for centuries before 1760, but with nothing like the rapidity with which it has been going on since, it is known that 554,974 acres were enclosed between 1710 and 1760, while nearly 7,000,000 were enclosed between 1760 and 1845. (Toynbee, 1884)

If the poor were going to eat, they would have to accept wage labour. And the wages they would receive would be those which the market set. Of course, in a labour market flooded by the rural dispossessed, competition for work gave employers an enormous advantage and wages dropped below amounts required for subsistence.

The [Speenhamland decrees](#) in the late 18th century allowed employers to pay "market rates" for labour, which soon drove wages below what was necessary to maintain subsistence. Parishes were required to make up the shortfall from their rates. This soon placed parish finances under great strain.

In 1834 the Poor Laws were amended to remove this 'burden' from the parishes, transferring it to the poor. After all, what had they to complain about? All they had to do was 'get a job'. As Andrew Ure insisted in 1835, many workers "pamper themselves into nervous ailments by a diet too rich and exciting for their in-door occupations"!

Don't allow them to Organise - it's Bad for Them! 🐞

... Before the "strike" of 1836-7, many of [the houses] were tenanted by their owners; but that unfortunate and mistaken attempt to coerce their masters, provoked by some few itinerant demagogues that visited the neighbourhood under the pretence of improving the condition of their occupants, occasioned most of them to change hands, and contributed to reduce those who were in a previous state of prosperity and happiness, to one of dependence, humiliation, and poverty, from which they have never recovered. (Scriven Report 1842 Point 11)

Confrontations between employers and workers were not new to the 19th century. They had occurred throughout western Europe over more than three hundred years [19](#). And, because legal force has always favoured employers and landowners [20](#), it was inevitable that throughout the period laws would exist constraining united action on the part of workers.

Adam Smith (1776), in his most famous work, *The Wealth of Nations*, described the nature of confrontation between workers and employers in the mid 18th century. A description which has proved valid over the past two hundred years:

[In any confrontation between workers and employers] ...the common wages of labour, depends everywhere upon the contract usually made between those two parties, whose interests are by no means the same. The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible. The former are disposed to combine in order to raise, the latter in order to lower the wages of labour.

It is not, however, difficult to foresee which of the two parties must, upon all ordinary occasions, have the advantage in the dispute, and force the other into a compliance with their terms. The masters, being fewer in number, can combine much more easily; and the law,

besides, authorizes, or at least does not prohibit their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen. We have no acts of parliament against combining to lower the price of work; but many against combining to raise it.

In all such disputes the masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master manufacturer, a merchant, though they did not employ a single workman, could generally live a year or two upon the stocks which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist a week, few could subsist a month, and scarce any a year without employment. In the long run the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate.

We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account, that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate. To violate this combination is everywhere a most unpopular action, and a sort of reproach to a master among his neighbours and equals.

We seldom, indeed, hear of this combination, because it is the usual, and one may say, the natural state of things, which nobody ever hears of. Masters, too, sometimes enter into particular combinations to sink the wages of labour even below this rate. These are always conducted with the utmost silence and secrecy, till the moment of execution, and when the workmen yield, as they sometimes do, without resistance, though severely felt by them, they are never heard of by other people.

Such combinations, however, are frequently resisted by a contrary defensive combination of the workmen; who sometimes too, without any provocation of this kind, combine of their own accord to raise the price of their labour. Their usual pretences are, sometimes the high price of provisions; sometimes the great profit which their masters make by their work. But whether their combinations be offensive or defensive, they are always abundantly heard of.

In order to bring the point to a speedy decision, they have always recourse to the loudest clamour, and sometimes to the most shocking violence and outrage. They are desperate, and act with the folly and extravagance of desperate men, who must either starve, or frighten their masters into an immediate compliance with their demands.

The masters upon these occasions are just as clamorous upon the other side, and never cease to call aloud for the assistance of the civil magistrate, and the rigorous execution of those laws which have been enacted with so much severity against the combinations of servants, labourers, and journeymen.

The workmen, accordingly, very seldom derive any advantage from the violence of those tumultuous combinations, which, partly from the interposition of the civil magistrate, partly from the necessary superior steadiness of the masters, partly from the necessity which the greater part of the workmen are under of submitting for the sake of present subsistence, generally end in nothing, but the punishment or ruin of the ringleaders.

(1776, pp. 84-5)

In the 19th century and later there would be two quite distinct groups of 'workers'. One group would have its roots in the artisanal groupings of the 18th century and feel a 'natural' connection with their employers. The other group would come from 'The Poor' and bring quite different motivations and understandings with them into the 'workplace'. Both groups would confront employers with their demands, but laws would apply most effectively to the second group, to the 'working poor'.

The anti-combination laws of 1799-1800 most directly addressed the artisanal workers who were already effectively organising at the start of the 19th century. And it was toward them that many of the restrictions on worker protest activity written into the 'repeal' of those laws during the 1820s would be directed. It would not be until the second half of the 19th century that the second group would begin to have an effective voice in protesting working conditions.

Organisations of Artisans

Christiane Eisenberg (1991) provides an account of the emergence of the 'labour aristocracy' of the 18th and 19th centuries,

The guilds split into the wealthy masters' and merchants' Livery Companies (whose functions were soon restricted to sociability) and the Yeomanries of poorer artisans, masters as well as journeymen. Most members of the Yeomanries becoming sooner or later dependent on merchants and other putters-outs, the numbers of self-employed artisans diminished. In his 1776 *Wealth of Nations* Adam Smith wrote of twenty men working for wages for every one who was his own master. In a more recent study, this calculation has been confirmed for London, which by the end of the eighteenth century was by far England's largest centre of artisanal production.

As a consequence of the 18th century Revivals, the lower middle ranking people of Western Europe were reorganised and firmly placed as an urban small-business and artisan 'class', with some of the more ambitious providing the manufacturing elites of the 19th century. The artisanal groups provided a skilled labour force. They were allied to those whose morality and self-image came out of the 18th century revivals. They were capitalist, not pre-capitalist in orientation [21](#). They held many of the capitalist understandings of the world and attitudes toward the idle poor even more strongly than the 'old-money' middle ranking people of the time [22](#).

Artisans, employing artisan apprentices of their own, either maintained their

own small businesses or became attached to large manufacturing enterprises. As productive enterprises grew in size, many became either sub-contractors to those businesses or became skilled employees.

From the 1820s there was a rise in the size of establishments, the introduction of machinery, and falling apprenticeship and wages. It was in this period that the balance of power shifted away from the skilled artisan to the larger scale unit.

This dramatic break between the large and small producers appeared to prevail in most of the town's industries between 1829 and 1840, whether they were 'traditional', such as tailoring or the leather trades, or new mechanised industries, such as steel-toymaking. The large-scale units dominated the town by 1840, and the small firm depended on the credit and market facilities controlled by the larger...

Often, independent artisan producers moved by choice into the factory, where by subcontracting they could maintain the viability of their small enterprises
(Maxine Berg 1993).

In either case, they remained detached from the 'ordinary worker', a distinct group of small-scale capitalists who supported each other and met in their own clubs and institutes. They increasingly needed to organise to protect their interests and, in the process, became recognised as a radical force within British society.

Inevitably, since through the later 18th and the 19th century they increasingly found themselves working in the same enterprises as the 'working poor', the distinctions between the groups blurred at the boundaries. Some of them, over time, became leaders in Union movements among the 'working poor', a 'labour aristocracy', concerned to improve the lot of less fortunate workers. However, most remained aloof, a group with their own interests to pursue.

As James Jaffe (2000) has described, even now, when unionisation is weak, it is as often because workers mistrust unionisation as because employers and governments deliberately attempt to prevent workers from collective bargaining. At the start of the 19th century, articulate workers and tradespeople, the artisans of the period, were as suspicious of organisations which focused on the independent rights of the labouring poor as were their employers. This made attempts at worker organisation very difficult. "The 'working man' that Victorian commentators had in mind" was, as Christine Macleod (1999) observed, "almost certainly 'the respectable artisan'", a member of the lower-middle classes of Victorian Britain. Robin Pearson gives a description of them in the 19th century,

...the lower middle class, a heterogeneous body of tradesmen and small employers who came to dominate the public life of the industrial suburbs in the mid-Victorian decades... In the local press, in almanacs and histories, in lectures at political clubs, school halls

and mechanics' institutes, shopkeepers and small employers invoked a community sentiment which was at once radical in its hostility to central authority, and conservative, in that it sought to maintain their hegemony in the out-townships at the expense of a labor solidarity based on class opposition. The latter was attempted, for instance, via repeated homilies to the worker to accept his lot. Praise for the nobility of work was qualified by strictures on the need for humility and caution, "knowing one's place," both in the sense of loyalty to one's local community, and in the sense of social deference.
(1993, p. 21)

The emerging lower middle classes of Britain felt as threatened (or, perhaps, more threatened because of their own social proximity) by attempts at political organisation amongst the recently 'idle poor' as did their social superiors. The 'Working Classes' of Britain were composed of people like those described by Don Herzog,

workers banded together in clubs, some more formal than others, and met in alehouses to talk about politics. One churchman catalogued the rise of "Revolutionary Clubs" figuring they meant the onset of riots and worse. Other conservatives were unhappy, too, pondering the malignant example of France's Jacobin Clubs. In 1802, the *Leeds Mercury* printed a letter musing over such nightly meetings: "Almost every street in a large town has a little senate of this description; and the priviledges of sitting in council over the affaires of the nation, and a pot of porter has long been claimed by free Britons... "
(1998 p. 60)

Their experiences during the 18th century had made them suspicious about the moral reliability of those who still held political power and control of most major financial institutions ²³. This had left them with a reinforced conviction of the importance of the separation of commerce and politics, and a growing belief in the moral inadequacy of state institutions, including the state church. They were even more dismissive of the poor.

Organising the 'Working Poor'

In 1834, in response to continued concern among the middle ranks about the laziness, lack of moral fibre and costs of maintaining the 'idle poor', the Poor Laws were amended. As [Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1839](#),

The New Poor-Law is an announcement, sufficiently distinct, that whosoever will not work ought not to live. Can the poor man that is willing to work, always find work, and live by his work? ... A man willing to work, and unable to find work, is perhaps the saddest sight that Fortune's inequality exhibits under this sun.
(1885, p. 21)

John Fielden, a member of parliament and, himself, a cotton manufacturer from Lancashire, spoke against the conditions applying to the 'working poor'

in 1836:

Here, then, is the "curse" of our factory-system; as improvements in machinery have gone on, the "avarice of masters" has prompted many to exact more labour from their hands than they were fitted by nature to perform, and those who have wished for the hours of labour to be less for all ages than the legislature would even yet sanction, have had no alternative but to conform more or less to the prevailing practice, or abandon the trade altogether.

This has been the case with regard to myself and my partners. We have never worked more than seventy-one hours a week before Sir JOHN HOBHOUSE'S Act was passed. We then came down to sixty-nine; and since Lord ALTHORP'S Act was passed, in 1833, we have reduced the time of adults to sixty-seven and a half hours a week, and that of children under thirteen years of age to forty-eight hours in the week, though to do this latter has, I must admit, subjected us to much inconvenience, but the elder hands to more, inasmuch as the relief given to the child is in some measure imposed on the adult.

But the overworking does not apply to children only; the adults are also overworked. The increased speed given to machinery within the last thirty years, has, in very many instances, doubled the labour of both.

(John Fielden, M.P., 1836, pp. 34-35)

The abject poverty and destitution of vast numbers of casual and low paid workers and unemployed people through the 18th and 19th centuries makes any belief in the *summum bonum* [24](#) consequences of disciplined self-interest seem myopically absurd. If capitalism flourished and bloomed through this period, it provided little relief for the poor. A few contemporary descriptions of Manchester and similar regions, representative of a much larger body of literature from the period, paint a grim picture:

Alexis de Tocqueville, in the 1830s, described the scene as he approached Manchester;

An undulating plain, or rather a collection of little hills. Below the hills a narrow river (the Irwell), which flows slowly to the Irish sea. Two streams (the Medlock and the Irk) wind through the uneven ground and after a thousand bends, flow into the river. Three canals made by man unite their tranquil lazy waters at the same point. On this watery land, which nature and art have contributed to keep damp, are scattered palaces and hovels.

Everything in the exterior appearance of the city attests the individual powers of man; nothing the directing power of society. At every turn human liberty shows its capricious creative force. There is no trace of the slow continuous action of government. Thirty or forty factories rise on the tops of the hills I have just described. Their six stories tower up; their huge enclosures give notice from afar of the centralisation of industry.

The wretched dwellings of the poor are scattered haphazard around them. Round them stretches land uncultivated but without the charm of rustic nature and still without the amenities of a town... Some of [the] roads are paved, but most of them are full of ruts and puddles into which foot or carriage wheel sinks deep... Heaps of dung, rubble from buildings, putrid, stagnant pools are found here and there amongst the houses and over the bumpy, pitted surfaces of the public places... Amid this noisome labyrinth from time to time one is astonished at the sight of fine stone buildings with Corinthian columns... But who could describe the interiors of those quarters set apart, home of vice and poverty, which surround the huge palaces of industry and clasp them in their hideous folds?

On ground below the level of the river and overshadowed on every side by immense workshops, stretches marshy land which widely spaced muddy ditches can neither drain nor cleanse. Narrow twisting roads lead down to it. They are lined with one-storey houses whose ill-fitting planks and broken windows show them up, even from a distance, as the last refuge a man might find between poverty and death. Nonetheless the wretched people reduced to living in them can still inspire jealousy of their fellow beings. Below some of their miserable dwellings is a row of cellars to which a sunken corridor leads; twelve to fifteen human beings are crowded pell-mell into each of these damp, repulsive holes.

(1958, pp.105-6)

James Kay described an area of Manchester between 1831 and 1844,

The cottages are very small, old and dirty, while the streets are uneven, partly unpaved, not properly drained and full of ruts. Heaps of refuse, offal and sickening filth are everywhere interspersed with pools of stagnant liquid. The atmosphere is polluted by the stench and is darkened by the thick smoke of a dozen factory chimneys. A horde of ragged women and children swarm about the streets and they are just as dirty as the pigs which wallow happily on the heaps of garbage and in the pools of filth.

In short, this horrid little slum affords as hateful and repulsive a spectacle as the worst courts to be found on the banks of the Irk. The inhabitants live in dilapidated cottages, the windows of which are broken and patched with oilskin. The doors and the door posts are broken and rotten. The creatures who inhabit these dwellings and even their dark, wet cellars, and who live confined amidst all this filth and foul air-which cannot be dissipated because of the surrounding lofty buildings-must surely have sunk to the lowest level of humanity.

That is the conclusion that surely must be drawn even by any visitor who examines the slum from the outside, without entering any of the dwellings. But his feelings of horror would be intensified if he were to discover that on average 20 people live in each of these little houses,

which at the moment consist of 2 rooms, an attic and cellar. One privy-and that usually inaccessible -is shared by about 120 people. In spite of all the warnings of the doctors and in spite of the alarm caused to the health authorities by the condition of Little Ireland during the cholera epidemic, the condition of this slum is practically the same in this year of grace 1844 as it was in 1831.

(from *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes* by James Phillips Kay MD (1844))

Phil Chapple provides a glimpse into conditions in Preston in 1844,

A visitor entering Queen Street, finds himself facing a row of privies of more than 100 yards long. The doors of the privies are about 6 feet from the house doors opposite and the space between one privy and another is filled up with all imaginable and unimaginable filth; so that the street consists of passages little more than 6 feet wide, with dwelling houses on one side and a continuous range of necessaries, pigsties and middens on the other, with a filthy surface drain running along one side ... 12 houses have their only outlets upon this disgusting and pestiferous passage.

The working-class slums of the mid-nineteenth century English industrial town have fascinated and horrified social historians for decades. The example above, from the Reverend J. Clay's report on Preston in 1844, presented a vision of squalor repeated many times over across industrial urban England. In such environments children were born, lived, played and worked, and for hundreds of thousands life was short and brutal... While industrialisation and urbanisation undoubtedly brought about great national wealth, they also produced misery...

(Chapple 2000, p. 42)

Attempts by the 'working poor' to improve their lot were strongly resisted through both centuries.

In 1835 Andrew Ure examined conditions in factories, with a typical middle ranking understanding of the world in which he lived. As he explained,

It seems established by a body of incontestable evidence, that the wages of our factory work-people, if prudently spent, would enable them to live in a comfortable manner, and decidedly better than formerly, in consequence of the relative diminution in the price of food, fuel, lodgings, and clothing. (p.306)

Earlier in the same publication he described the problem of workers' agitation against their conditions,

The textile manufactures consist of two distinct departments; one carried on by multitudes of small independent machines belonging to the workmen, another carried on by concatenated systems of machinery, the property of the masters...

The operatives of the latter class are necessarily associated in large bodies, and moreover have no capital sunk in machinery or work-

shops. When they choose to strike they can readily join in the blow, and by stopping they suffer merely the loss of wages for the time, while they occasion to their master loss of interest on his sunk capital, his rent, and his taxes, as well as injury to the delicate moving parts of metallic mechanisms by inaction in our humid climate.

There are several cotton-mills in Manchester, of which the interest on sunk capital amounts to from 5,000l. to 10,000l. per annum. If we add to the loss of this interest, that of the profit fairly resulting from the employment of the said capital, we may be able to appreciate in some measure the vast evils which mischievous cabals among the operatives may inflict on mill-owners, as well as on the commerce of the country...

Proud of the power of malefaction, many of the cotton-spinners, though better paid, as we have shown, than any similar set of artisans in the world, organized the machinery of strikes through all the gradations of their people, *terrifying*, *cajoling* the timid or the passive among them to join their vindictive union.

They boasted of possessing a dark tribunal, by the mandates of which they could paralyze every mill whose master did not comply with their wishes, and so bring ruin on the man who had given them profitable employment for many a year. By flattery or intimidation, they levied contributions from their associates in the privileged mills, which they suffered to proceed, in order to furnish spare funds for the maintenance of the idle during the decreed suspension of labour.

In this extraordinary state of things, when the inventive head and the sustaining heart of trade were held in bondage by the unruly lower members, a destructive spirit began to display itself among some partisans of the union. Acts of singular atrocity were committed, sometimes with weapons fit only for demons to wield, such as the corrosive oil of vitriol, dashed in the faces of most meritorious individuals, with the effect of disfiguring their persons, and burning their eyes out of the sockets with dreadful agony.

The true spirit of turn-outs among the spinners is well described in the following statement made on oath to the Factory Commission, by Mr. George Royle Chappel, a manufacturer of Manchester, who employs 274 hands, and two steam-engines of sixty-four horse power.

I have had several turn-outs, and have heard of many more, but never heard of a turn-out for short time. I will relate the circumstances of the last turn-out, which took place on the 16th October, 1830, and continued till the 17th January, 1831. The whole of our spinners, whose average (weekly) wages were 2l. 13s. 5d., turned out at the instigation, as they told us at the time, of the delegates of the union. They said they had no fault to find with their wages, their work, or their masters, but the union obliged them to turn out.

The same week three delegates from the spinners' union waited upon us at our mill, and dictated certain advances in wages, and other regulations, to which, if we would not adhere, they said neither our own spinners nor any other should work for us again! Of course we declined, believing our wages to be ample, and our regulations such as were necessary for the proper conducting of the establishment.

The consequences were, they set watches on every avenue to the mill, night and day, to prevent any fresh hands coming into the mill, an object which they effectually attained, by intimidating some, and promising support to others (whom I got into the mill in a caravan), if they would leave their work. Under these circumstances I could not work the mill, and advertised it for sale, without any applications, and I also tried in vain to let it.

At the end of twenty-three weeks the hands requested to be taken into the mill again on the terms that they had left it, declaring, as they had done at first, that the union alone had forced them to turn out. The names of the delegates that waited on me were, Jonathan Hodgins, Thomas Foster, and Peter Madox, secretary to the union.

(Andrew Ure 1835 pp. 281-4)

Andrew Ure's account of the duplicity and greed of workers in the cotton industry who "pamper themselves into nervous ailments by a diet too rich and exciting for their in-door occupations" is representative of many middle class writings on attempts at unionisation by the working poor during the first half of the 19th century. As he continues,

We have seen that the union of operative spinners had, at an early date, denounced their own occupations as being irksome, severe, and unwholesome in an unparalleled degree. Their object in making this misrepresentation was obviously to interest the community in their favour at the period of their lawless strike in the year 1818.

Subsequently to this crisis, some individuals of their governing committee made the notable discovery, that if the quantity of yarn annually spun could by any means be reduced, its scarcity in the market would raise its price, and consequently raise the rate of their wages. They accordingly suggested the shortening of the time of labour to ten hours, as the grand remedy for low wages and hard work; though at this time they were receiving at least three times more wages than hand-loom weavers for the same number of hours' employment, and therefore had very little reason to complain of their lot.

In fact, it was their high wages which enabled them to maintain a stipendiary committee in affluence, and to pamper themselves into nervous ailments by a diet too rich and exciting for their in-door occupations. Had they plainly promulgated their views and claims, they well knew that no attention would have been paid to them, but they artfully introduced the tales of cruelty and oppression to children, as resulting from their own protracted labour, and succeeded by this stratagem to gain many well meaning proselytes

to their cause.
(1835, pp. 298-9)

William Booth, a Methodist evangelist, at the end of the 19th century could still say,

Alas, what multitudes there are around us everywhere, many known to my readers personally, and any number who may be known to them by a very short walk from their own dwellings, who are in this very plight! Their vicious habits and destitute circumstances make it certain that without some kind of extraordinary help, they must hunger and sin, and sin and hunger, until, having multiplied their kind, and filled up the measure of their miseries, the gaunt fingers of death will close upon them and terminate their wretchedness. And all this will happen this very winter in the midst of the unparalleled wealth, and civilisation, and philanthropy of this professedly most Christian land.

(Booth 1890, Preface)

These conditions had first emerged some three hundred years earlier. They had grown steadily worse over two hundred years. Capitalism was built on these foundations.

In the second half of the 19th century, with wealth flowing to Britain from its considerable empire, conditions for the poor slowly improved. Robert Steinfeld(2007) described the legal developments affecting union activity in the 1870s,

An initial attempt at a new "settlement" was made by a Liberal government in 1871, which passed the "Trade Union Act" to accord legal recognition to unions, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act to loosen criminal restrictions on collective activity. But union officials reacted with hostility to certain aspects of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Its clause on picketing, in particular, became especially controversial. And the courts proceeded to inflame this situation by basing a criminal prosecution for conspiracy on a group violation of the Master and Servant act.

In 1875 a Conservative government, which had recently replaced the Liberal government in an electoral upset, implemented a more stable "settlement" that endured for a number of decades. The new "settlement" was effected by the passage of two new pieces of legislation, the "Employers and Workmen Act," which eliminated criminal penalties for breaches of employment contracts in most cases, and the "Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act," which repealed the Criminal Law Amendment Act, revised the controversial picketing clause, and completely removed trade disputes between employers and workmen from the reach of the common law of criminal conspiracy. This legislation bestowed on unions broad freedoms (and greater power) to conduct the economic struggle for life in capitalist society.

(2007, p. 663)

While still oppressive, conditions for the 'labouring poor' of Britain were changing for the better. They were rapidly deteriorating for colonial populations.

Conclusion

... If the love of money is the root of all evil, the want of money is the cause of an immensity of evil and trouble. The moment you begin practically to alleviate the miseries of the people, you discover that the eternal want of pence is one of their greatest difficulties. In my most sanguine moments I have never dreamed of smoothing this difficulty out of the lot of man, but it is surely no unattainable ideal to establish a Poor Man's Bank, which will extend to the lower middle class and the working population the advantages of the credit system, which is the very foundation of our boasted commerce.

It might be better that there should be no such thing as credit, that no one should lend money, and that everyone should be compelled to rely solely upon whatever ready money he may possess from day to day. But if so, let us apply the principle all round; do not let us glory in our world-wide commerce and boast ourselves in our riches, obtained, in so many cases, by the ignoring of this principle.

If it is right for a great merchant to have dealings with his banker, if it is indispensable for the due carrying on of the business of the rich men that they should have at their elbow a credit system which will from time to time accommodate them with needful advances and enable them to stand up against the pressure of sudden demands, which otherwise would wreck them, then surely the case is still stronger for providing a similar resource for the smaller men, the weaker men. At present Society is organised far too much on the principle of giving to him who hath so that he shall have more abundantly, and taking away from him who hath not even that which he hath.

If we are to really benefit the poor, we can only do so by practical measures. We have merely to look round and see the kind of advantages which wealthy men find indispensable for the due management of their business, and ask ourselves whether poor men cannot be supplied with the same opportunities. The reason why they are not is obvious. To supply the needs of the rich is a means of making yourself rich; to supply the needs of the poor will involve you in trouble so out of proportion to the profit that the game may not be worth the candle.

Men go into banking and other businesses for the sake of obtaining what the American humourist said was the chief end of man in these modern times, namely, "ten per cent." To obtain a ten per cent. what will not men do? They will penetrate the bowels of the earth, explore the depths of the sea, ascend the snow-capped mountain's highest

peak, or navigate the air, if they can be guaranteed a ten per cent. I do not venture to suggest that the business of a Poor Man's Bank would yield ten per cent., or even five, but I think it might be made to pay its expenses, and the resulting gain to the community would be enormous.

Ask any merchant in your acquaintance where his business would be if he had no banker, and then, when you have his answer, ask yourself whether it would not be an object worth taking some trouble to secure, to furnish the great mass of our fellow countrymen, on sound business principles with the advantages of the credit system, which is found to work so beneficially for the "well-to-do" few.

Some day I hope the State may be sufficiently enlightened to take up this business itself; at present it is left in the hands of the pawnbroker and the loan agency, and a set of sharks, who cruelly prey upon the interests of the poor. The establishment of land banks, where the poor man is almost always a peasant, has been one of the features of modern legislation in Russia, Germany, and elsewhere. The institution of a Poor Man's Bank will be, I hope, before long, one of the recognised objects of our own government.

(William Booth (1890))

William Booth was a Methodist preacher. He would found a movement, *The Salvation Army*, which still, today, accepts a deep responsibility for providing practical help (in Booth's words, 'soup, soap and salvation') to the poor ²⁵. His practical approach to poverty was based on the tried and true principles of Methodism ²⁶. Their influence on both policies and practice in 'reforming the poor' would lead to the development of 'welfare' programs both by other religious organisations and Western governments. The wastelands of Western Europe and its offspring would slowly but surely be converted into a 'lower middle capitalist class'.

True to the vision of John Wesley, the mission to redeem the lost would not stop with the poor of London, or even of Western Europe. Western Europeans now had vast colonial territories. There was a new wasteland - vast and daunting in its scope - and Western Europeans could not escape their God-given responsibility for reclaiming it, bringing 'soup, soap and salvation' to the lost. The West knew that it was destined to bring 'civilisation' and 'development' to the populations of the world.

One could paraphrase the song 'Streets of London', written by Ralph McTell in 1969,

So how can you tell me you're lonely,
And say for you that the sun don't shine?
Let me take you by the hand and lead you through the streets
of - *any of a thousand slums around the world*
I'll show you something to make you change your mind.

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Endnotes

- 1 Letter to Colonel Edward Carrington, Paris, January 16, 1787
- 2 The 'trickle down' theory of economics is not the preserve of the 20th century, it has been an implicit presumption of capitalism since the late 17th century. John Locke popularised the idea in the 1690s,

God gave the world to men in common; but... it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational (and *labour* was to be *his title* to it). (1982, p.21).

See [In the Real World of Work and Wages, Trickle-Down Theories Don't Hold Up](#) for an interesting discussion of the practice in the later 20th century. Experiences in the 18th and 19th century did little to convince the poor that if the rich got richer so would they!
- 3 It seems almost inevitable that those living inside the bubble of capitalism will see everything beyond it as a wasteland which needs to be reclaimed. From the missionary movement of the past 250 years; to the 'colonial endeavour' of the 19th and 20th centuries; to the 'development' drive of the past sixty, Western Europeans have dedicated lives, time and resources to attempting to 'save', 'reclaim' and 'develop' the 'heathen', 'primitive' and 'undeveloped' of

the world.

4 See [The nature of feudalism](#) for more on this.

5 The reference to runaway apprentices and 'gentlemen's servants' makes sense to present ears only when the attitudes to apprenticeship which had evolved over the preceding two centuries are understood.

In 16th century Tudor England, responsible citizens were faced with burgeoning numbers of displaced people. They 'clogged the highways and byways' and presented a menace to 'decent' citizenry. One of the remedies devised for dealing with displaced children and the children of paupers during the period was to place them in apprenticeships. As Henry Craik (1884, p. 6) put it,

It was under the reign of Henry VIII that the chief apprentice laws were added to the Statutes book; and under them, children between five and thirteen who were found begging or idle were to be bound apprentices to some handicraft. The apprenticeship laws were compulsory upon master and servant alike.

Charlotte Neff (1996) explains that this, from the outset, resulted in two forms, 'trade' and 'pauper', apprenticeships being recognised in England.

By the 18th century, pauper apprenticeships had (from a less than auspicious beginning) "grown into what was often little less than serfdom or slavery" (Craik, 1884, p. 9). The situation did not improve through the century. Speaking of the early 19th century, John Burnett (1974, p. 23) claims that, "apprenticeship survived only in the wretched bondage to which pauper children were sometimes subjected by penny-pinching poor law administrators."

It became commonplace for children who found themselves bound in often very abusive relationships, to run away and join the floating population of 'idle poor'. That population, through the 18th century, grew constantly larger as the policies of reformers took effect.

6 Practice of economic relief for the poor that was adopted over much of England following a decision by local magistrates at the Pelican Inn, Speenhamland, near Newbury, Berkshire, on May 6, 1795. Instead of fixing minimum wages for poor labourers, the practice was to raise workingmen's income to an agreed level, the money to come out of the parish rates. This allowance was designated as the price of 3 gallon loaves a week for each man (a gallon loaf was 8 1/2 pounds [about 4 kilograms]) plus the cost of 1 1/2 loaves each for a wife and every child. The money was to cover all expenses. This allowance system lasted until the enactment of the Poor Law Amendment (1834). Contemporary commentators and modern historians alike have condemned the system; the former claim it encouraged the poor in idleness, while the latter stress the opportunity it gave unscrupulous employers and landlords to reduce wages and raise rents respectively, knowing their depredations would be redressed

from the public pocket. ("Speenhamland system". (2010). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved February 08, 2010, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online:
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/559184/Speenhamland-system>)

- 7 See [Living within the Environmental Means](#) for more on this
- 8 See [Capitalism and the Nature of Work](#) for more on this
- 9 This same criticism has commonly been made by 'development' experts dealing with people in 'under-developed' countries. One cannot rely on people turning up for work when they should. They all-too-often find something else they would rather be doing! Of course, the Western belief in the vital importance of 'work' is ideological in nature. The term 'work' encompasses a set of peculiar meanings in Western communities (see [Nature of Work](#)). It is closely related to the Western emphasis on production, consumption and accumulation in determining and maintaining status, and, when taken from that context, loses a great deal of its moral significance.

When status is attained and maintained by other means, work, in the sense of labour, becomes something one has to do, but in which one engages only to the extent required for particular, quite specific purposes. Once the particular objectives have been reached, people stop working until another objective spurs them once more to labour. The central activities of their lives are focused by the social template through which status and prestige are spelt out and contextualised. They are not, as McClelland (1976) suggested people in any society should be, 'achievement motivated'.

- 10 See [Born Again Capitalists](#)
- 11 See [From the Subversion of Tradition to Plotting the Future](#) for more on this.
- 12 See [The emergence of time as currency](#) for more on this. Also, Hatcher (1994) for a discussion of the consequences of the 14th century plagues.
- 13 This problem is not one of simply historical interest. In the present, in non-Western countries, very similar problems of dispossession, inflation of living costs and degradation of land are forcing growing numbers of people out of rural areas and into towns and cities. And, as numbers have multiplied and associated problems of social dislocation and inadequate living conditions have snowballed, governments and international agencies have seen the problem, not as one of dispossession and extortion, but as one of 'development'.

This is remarkably similar to the response which was made in 18th century western Europe to the problems of the age. Only through 'progress' could the problems of poverty be dealt with. And that progress, so far as those in authority were concerned, required the policies, which were resulting in the dispossession and eviction of

smallholders, being promoted throughout the country.

- 14 See [Time and work](#) for more on this.
- 15 Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, First Series, Vol. IX col 798-806 (13 July 1807)
- 16 See [Robert Raikes and Sunday Schools](#) for a succinct discussion of the origins of the movement
- 17 Townsend has a grossly inadequate and ideologically distorted perception of the historical past, common to those who share – even now - his ideological understandings. It is, unfortunately, still the case that gross distortions of history can be and are employed by many social commentators to support their views. It seems that, provided one states such distortions authoritatively and confidently, people who want to agree with the position being presented will readily accept and repeat the distortions.
(One should treat *anything* presented as history with caution. Always check the 'facts')
- 18 See [Thomas More's description](#) of what happened in the 16th century for a more realistic, contemporary explanation.
- 19 See Rosser (1997) for a discussion.
- 20 See [Maximising Profits Through The Law](#) for more.
- 21 See Rosser (1997) for discussion of artisanal labour in both the medieval period and through the 18th and early 19th centuries. As he says, "Crafts guilds and fraternities offered workers to distance themselves from the underclass, but it also provided access to masters and patrons. The networks created through work extended into the political and social lives of medieval workers." Over more than five hundred years, the artisans of western Europe became separated from 'The Poor', a distinct grouping of people with their own networks and understandings of the world.
- 22 See [Attitudes of the 'little gentry' to the 'idle poor'](#).
- 23 See [A New Moral Leadership in the 18th century](#)
- 24 For a discussion of the *summum bonum* see [In Search of the 'Greatest Good'](#). People living in Western communities continue to assume that they deserve the prosperity and wellbeing which capitalism has, by and large, delivered to the middle classes. The 'problems' of the 'non-western' world (or even of their own poor and marginalised) are not their concern. In true capitalist style, the victims have brought it on themselves. The remedy is at hand: summed up in that wonderfully myopic absurdity "teach a man to fish and he has food for life" - in oceans rapidly being emptied by the fishing fleets of capitalism.
- 25 I have a great admiration for the dedication of ordinary Salvation Army officers, often working on their own in the remaining wastelands of the West. In my wanderings I have seen them accept, with amazing patience and kindness, practical responsibility for the dispossessed, the homeless and the outcasts of Western communities

- yes, they still exist, and in growing numbers!

²⁶ See [A New Moral Leadership and Support Network](#) for more on this.