

LEISURE

PENALTY OR PRIZE? BY RALPH GLASSER



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Penalty or Prize?

By the same author

PLANNED MARKETING
THE NEW HIGH PRIESTHOOD

LEISURE

Penalty or Prize?

RALPH GLASSER

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For Jacqueline
When the Sirens Sing

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INTRODUCTION

*Now the till and the typewriter call the fingers,
The workman gathers his tools,
For the eight-hour day but after that the solace
Of films or football pools,
Or of the gossip or cuddle, the moments of self glory,
Or self-indulgence, blinkers on the eyes of doubt.*

Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal* (1938) III¹

Leisure means many things: fullness and nothingness; a dream world of fulfilment; boredom and stress. To many it is merely a free gift, a bonus to life, made for unthinking enjoyment. There is much more than this to consider in it. The present age is one of increasing leisure, and the future will produce more of it, in various ways and guises. It concerns a vast and increasing proportion of the economy. Its employment involves growing personal and social perplexity.

Leisure is assumed by many people to be a clear right to pleasure as distinct from a devotion to work, and all work is assumed to be unpleasant. Indeed any occupation which you cannot avoid doing, and which therefore stops you doing other things you would rather do, becomes stigmatised as 'work'. Accordingly, 'leisure' is often defined as a period you devote to pleasurable activity, a time you endeavour to escape to as often as possible from that other, unpleasurable activity called 'work'.

Again, the word leisure has acquired overtones of *dolce far niente*, of lotus-eating, of time thrown away, in short, of time devoted to no 'useful' purpose. The question of 'purpose', as we shall see, is crucial to the consideration of leisure.

¹ *Collected Poems 1925-48* (Faber & Faber, 1949).

First of all, I must clear away a lot of misconceptions and tangled theories, the rubble and debris of generations of speculation, argument and agitation about the purpose of doing certain things, the place of man in his environment, and his use of the resources within him. This quest may take us to some unexpected places, some possibly unwelcome perceptions – of what leisure is, what it means and can mean, and where its present pursuit may take us.

CHAPTER I

I

The magic of a dream : leisure and non-work ; the individual in his own right ; leisure, a modern, still unfamiliar phenomenon

This book is an excursion into the meaning of a modern dream. Dreams resist capture in words, for words sometimes enchain the free-ranging visions from which man's dreams emerge. Some dreams owe their special charm to the fact that they resist precise delineation. Yet a very great number of people sustain themselves through life with the illusion that they have defined their dreams, and that only malevolent circumstances prevent them from reaching out to this allegedly clearly seen fulfilment.

It has been the role of the poets, and the other creative people among us, to give body to these visions and to explode the fantasies supporting some of them. Eugene O'Neill, in his play, *The Iceman Cometh*, gives us the archetype of this situation. He shows us a group of down-and-outs in a sleazy bar in New York, each of whom sustains his position on the fiction that 'if' certain circumstances came to pass, he or she would proceed to an apparently clearly envisaged personal fulfilment. A *deus ex machina* in the form of the tragic character, Hickey, does produce this change in circumstances for each of the dreamers, who then for various known reasons cannot proceed to the fancied fulfilment. The result is unbearable disillusion. Having failed to see their own situations clearly, their visions of fulfilment were doomed to disappointment also.

You, at this very moment have in your mind an idea of certain things you would do *if* you had the free time. 'Free time' –