

After Work Hours

By WEAVER W. PANGBURN

RECREATION is universally a precious interest of individuals; and its deep social meaning gives it a central position in the growth and perfecting of modern democratic society. The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association holds that recreation is "life enrichment." A modern college text defines it as effort at self expression. "Recreation," says a distinguished religious leader, Rabbi James G. Heller, "is the growing point of culture, the area in which the spirit of the time is best judged." With reference to its effect on the individual, he states, "it completes my life, brings me both ecstasy and release, a joy different from all others and a strong consciousness of breathing a purer, serener air."

Back of these positive interpretations lie many basic changes in the lives of the people of North America, most of them generated by the industrialization of our society. Among these changes are the widespread use of automatic industrial processes, which demand much less than the total personality of the worker, leave unsatisfied his hunger for skill and conflict with his desire for adventure, variety and social experience; a decline in the size of and functions of the family; increase in cheap and rapid transportation, contributing to the mobility and restlessness of life; a reduction of working time to its lowest point in modern history and, for a time, a widespread unemployment and the drastic reduction of the purchasing power of millions of people.

The young man works on an assembly line in a factory or in a routine job in an office or store. After work he "invites his soul" among the dubious leisure resources of an unplanned city, built to

advance manufactures and trade and not much like Aristotle's conception of "a place where people may live a good life."

There was a fortunate compensation for the machine workers in the enormously reduced hours of work, but they were not prepared for their new leisure. Recreationally illiterate, they became the customers of alert business interests, which alone were prepared for leisure. Stuart Chase says that recreation should not be vendible. Yet passive amusement was the most conspicuous diversion in the urban community.

For a long time the struggle of many of the civic leaders for playgrounds and recreation centres was a crusade for a therapeutic, to prevent juvenile delinquency, check accidents to children, reduce ill health, help cure the mentally ill and even serve social eugenics by contributing to family stability and fertility.

Eventually a larger idea, democratizing recreation, emerged. Hundreds of North American cities created departments or bureaus for the community organization of recreation on a year round basis. There developed in the United States and Canada a type of service and a kind of municipal employee unknown elsewhere in the world. Trained recreation leaders undertook to stimulate and administer recreation service for children, youth and adults regardless of class, creed, economic condition or national origin. The public schools began to educate pupils in the wise use of leisure. Recreation became a matter of interest to city planners. The decade 1930 to 1940 furthermore witnessed the construction of great public works projects in recreation. New York City built 400 new playgrounds, a dozen great swimming pools, many athletic fields and parkways. Cincinnati created a great 200 acre play field at its airport, offering 25 types of outdoor facilities for family and co-

EDITOR'S NOTE: Weaver W. Pangburn, a graduate of Columbia University, is on the staff of the National Recreation Association in New York. He is author of *Adventures in Recreation* and other books on that subject.

recreational use. The park systems of Toronto, Chicago, Minneapolis and other cities greatly increased their facilities. Hundreds of training institutes prepared thousands of lay persons to organize and conduct recreational activities for the organizations to which they belonged.

While this public development, aided by government funds, was being prosecuted, there occurred an unprecedented expansion of public school musical organizations, of travel and vacation trips, of hunting and fishing, of popular interest in art, amateur drama and music. On the verge of World War Number Two, it appeared that a golden age of leisure and recreation was about to dawn.

Apparently the war has only deflected the course of community recreation. The armed forces employ athletics, music and other activities on a wide scale for the discipline and the relaxation of the fighting soldiers and sailors. Similarly, broad recreation and social programs have been developed for the millions employed in war industries and other civilians and their children. In war-torn England recreation was not abandoned but it was re-focused. In a recent lecture Margaret Bondfield pointed to the following emphases in that country: mobility of recreational services, reliance on volunteers and leadership by young people 14 to 20 years old, a broadened scope of activity including a musical revival and physical fitness. Miss Bondfield emphasized the new sense of community values "won at such great cost."

One of the great functions of organized recreation is to teach people to get on together. A journalist who had just returned from the Olympic games in Paris years ago told a clergyman friend that the games should be stopped. "Why?" asked the clergyman. The journalist replied, "This is what I saw. When an American athlete was defeated in competition, he shook hands with his successful opponent and congratulated him. English athletes did the same thing. However, the men of other countries took defeat in bitter spirit and I actually saw defeated athletes leap at their success-

ful rivals and try to bite them! So, the games should be stopped." The clergyman said, "I cannot agree. For if we cannot learn to play together, how can we learn to live together?"

While the competitive spirit in sport makes for combativeness in soldiers, in peace-time it is desirable to emphasize the social aspects of games and other recreations. It is often the sociable element in recreation rather than the activity per se which attracts people. In general, the co-operative aspects rather than the competitive elements in recreation deserve stimulation.

The prospect that after the war the democracies will try to widen the life of the common man and release his power opens fresh responsibilities in the recreational field. To help the general public to develop disciplined and healthy bodies, to create things of beauty in crafts, painting, music and drama, to enjoy nature in gardens, the mountains and woods—these are a part of the mission of the community recreation leader. The leader should above all invoke the warm, cohesive, social power of music, festivals, games and social centers to draw people together in democratic fellowship. It is community recreation that is badly needed as against the prevalent tendency in urban society for separatism in recreation.

In the post war period there will be unrest, shifts of population, readjustments in employment, possibly moral laxity. There will be the difficult absorption of returning soldiers and sailors, their minds stimulated by new horizons and interests growing out of their extensive travels in this country and abroad. In view of these challenges, war-time lessons and the promise that the resources of the democratic countries will be more fully employed in the common interest, recreation must play a far greater role than it attained at its greatest point prior to the war.

What are the elements in a post war recreation program? The following specific suggestions may be put forward:

1. Neighborhood centers for both outdoor and indoor recreation should be

developed within walking distance of every child in an urban community. Some persons envision a center comprising a public library, school, park and playground, the school building as well as the other properties designed for extensive community recreation use.

2. There should be large playfields of 20 to 40 acres and community recreation buildings, or at least parts of buildings, available for recreation, well distributed through every community for the service of youth and adults.

3. City parks, bathing beaches, metropolitan parks, swimming pools, camps and picnic grounds should be expanded to meet modern standards of adequacy. National and state parks and forests should be widely utilized for recreational and educational purposes under liberal policies designed to make them available to persons of small means.

4. There should be a wide use of public school buildings for neighborhood recreation at the times when such properties are not absolutely required for curricular work.

5. In the event of decentralization of industry, slums in large cities should be razed, to make way for parks and playgrounds. If necessary that such areas be rebuilt for housing, the projects should provide amply for both indoor and outdoor recreational space.

6. To insure a cooperative community attack on recreational needs, every city of 8,000 population or more should have a recreation commission, board, or other authority representing educational, park and the general community interests. Recreation should have its own budget.

7. There should be a thorough revision of the content of programs. Special attention should be given to co-recreation among young people 15 to 24, physical fitness for adults, vigorous promotion of outdoor recreation, the advancement of family play and encouragement of music, drama, crafts, inexpensive art exhibitions and popular science projects. Usefulness as well as sheer fun should be encouraged among participants.

8. Education for the community recreational use of leisure should be developed

throughout the entire public education system, commencing with teacher training institutions and extending upward from the nursery schools to graduate courses in universities.

9. There should be a close correlation between public education and public recreation with references to the use of properties, standards of program and policies.

10. A professional, leadership personnel, well trained in community organization, municipal government, educational methods and sociology and well compensated, should be developed.

11. Tens of thousands of volunteer leaders should be trained in community recreation philosophy and leadership methods through under graduate courses in colleges and urban and rural institutes for selected members of civic and religious organizations.

12. Special attention should be given to the needs of service men and industrial workers in the period of readjustment.

While cities require special departments to organize the community for recreation, it will be impractical to sustain them in rural communities except possibly on a county basis. In the country the existing leadership in churches, schools, parent-teacher associations, farm organizations and government agricultural bureaus should be taught recreational methods through a widespread training program in association with colleges and universities.

The intolerable thing, to be strictly avoided in recreation, is regimentation and bureaucracy. A person's leisure is the very cream of his existence and the last thing he wants is to be dictated to about it. It is obvious that it requires highly competent and very well balanced persons successfully to organize communities for recreation without intrusion in the sacred confines of the individual's leisure. However, there are people who have been doing this and many others can be found to supplement them. They will be among our most important public servants in the period of reconstruction and peace to come.