

# POLITICS

C. A. "Tony" Joyce  
Kingston, Ontario

## *Ideology and the Arena :* **Sport, State and Political Legitimacy in Nineteenth Century Toronto**

The roles and functions of a nascent Canadian state in a developing capitalist economy were, according to political scientist Leo Panitch, "often mutually contradictory," but by legitimizing the social and economic status quo the state created and maintained optimal conditions for capital accumulation. For example, in the decades following Confederation, legislators started using the legitimizing function of the state, present but essentially dormant in the 1840s and 1850s. The provinces and Ottawa shared the potential for legitimization; the former responsible for hospitals, charity, education and the maintenance of local governments and the latter for matters of national importance such as John A. Macdonald's 1872 Trades Union Act and the anti-combines legislation of 1889. Despite these examples, Panitch claims that the legitimization function of the state was the least developed. And his observation is correct, but only in the limited context of state legislation. Formal legitimization and rationalization of the social and economic status quo, in the form of government edicts, became necessary only when non-formal structures broke down,

Panitch fails to consider that agents of the state constructed an effective legitimization process in the form of hegemonic ideas and behaviors. For example, in contrast to the spontaneous, non-utilitarian nature of working-class recreation and sport, the rites and rituals of sporting competition among an emerging bourgeoisie legitimated and reinforced what Gruneau terms "traditional domination." Such behaviors, he contends, contributed to the maintenance of a widespread commitment to 'traditional' values in social institutions and the state and militated against the spread of ideas that might challenge the foundations upon which power customarily rested. In this context the state and members of the dominant class controlled and utilized sport. By developing in sports clubs the institutional and ideological components upon which class power was based, they reinforced and legitimized Canada's political economy.

As sport emerged as a mass cultural phenomenon in the 1880s state involvement intensified. Bourgeois society recognized the role of sport in political socialization, social control, civic booster-ism, nationalism, and capital accumulation. Such agendas necessitated efficient legitimization mechanisms and the power of the state and its representatives was mobilized. Factors that helped affirm the logic of traditional patterns

of domination were many. Among others, they included the hierarchical and militaristic orientation of sport clubs, deference to church and authority in club organization and proceedings, class specific sport and physical education in schools, clubs' nationalistic and patriotic philosophies and their unswerving allegiance to the Queen and her representatives. These all helped to legitimize, and thus to perpetuate, an economic, political and cultural system based on specific social relations of production.