

## **Battling "the bane of our cities": Class, territory, and the prohibition debate in Toronto, 1877**

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Article abstract

In the nineteenth century, the tavern was an important institution in urban working-class life. Because of the social ills associated with alcohol abuse and public drinking, there were frequent attempts to lessen the tavern's importance or to eliminate it entirely. This paper examines several tavern-related issues that emerged in Toronto in the 1870s and 1880s. The Crooks Act, passed in 1876, employed powerful measures to deal with political and temperance questions simultaneously. The intersection of class, politics, temperance, and urban life led to a territorial solution to the liquor question. These issues were dealt with by the people of Toronto in 1877, when they declined to prohibit public drinking in the city via the Dunkin Act, a local option prohibition statute of the Province of Canada.

# ***Battling “the bane of our cities”: Class, territory, and the prohibition debate in Toronto, 1877***

***M.P. Sendbuehler***

## ***Abstract***

***In the nineteenth century, the tavern was an important institution in urban working-class life. Because of the social ills associated with alcohol abuse and public drinking, there were frequent attempts to lessen the tavern’s importance or to eliminate it entirely. This paper examines several tavern-related issues that emerged in Toronto in the 1870s and 1880s. The Crooks Act, passed in 1876, employed powerful measures to deal with political and temperance questions simultaneously. The intersection of class, politics, temperance, and urban life led to a territorial solution to the liquor question. These issues were dealt with by the people of Toronto in 1877, when they declined to prohibit public drinking in the city via the Dunkin Act, a local option prohibition statute of the Province of Canada.***

Taverns were an important aspect of the nineteenth-century urban working-class experience, yet there are few systematic examinations of tavern life, and fewer still that assess its significance in the culture of the city as a whole.<sup>1</sup> This paper will make a case for closer scrutiny of tavern life and its regulation, as part of a call for a more inclusive approach to the study of workers and cities. It will survey the class and gender issues of temperance, discuss major changes in the regulation of Ontario’s taverns in the 1870s and 1880s, and examine events that preceded what I call a *territorial solution* to the liquor question.

By the end of the 1880s, Ontario’s laws included mechanisms that effectively eradicated taverns within many residential areas, but created a relatively large number of them in commercial areas. Residential areas that retained licensed<sup>2</sup> establishments were usually inhabited by members of the working class. I call this feature of liquor law a “territorial solution” because territorial division and areal differentiation were used to achieve a compromise on a contentious and divisive issue. This regulatory regime, which persisted until prohibition in Ontario (1916-1927) and was revived afterward, can be traced to class divisions, working-class drinking patterns and ways of life, and the increasing segregation of classes within Canadian cities.<sup>3</sup> In 1877, the citizens of Toronto spent most of the summer debating, via a referendum campaign, the merits of closing all of the city’s taverns at once. The fact that territorial considerations were muted in the campaign show that the failed attempt to combat the liquor trade on a city-wide basis forced the later adoption of territorial options.

## ***The Tavern in the City: Objections, accommodations, and regulations, 1870s-1890s***

During the 1870s and 1880s, liquor control in Ontario moved from being non-existent to being a set of restrictions prescribing acceptable times and places for buying and consuming beer and spirits. These restrictions developed gradually, arising at least in part from social and political conflicts in the province’s cities, particularly Toronto. Three themes recur here: the Province’s desire to promote moderation and abstinence, particularly among male workers; the largely successful effort to wrest political influence from license inspectors and tavern keepers; the accommodation of urbanites who wished to make or preserve “dry” neighbourhoods and the impracticality of enacting local-option prohibition in relatively large urban areas.

## ***Temperance and the Urban Working Class***

As early as 1876, the claim was made that Toronto’s taverns were no longer hotels, but “drinking dens” and boarding houses in disguise. In such places, “simple and straitened young men” paid less for their rooms than they would at ordinary boarding houses, but were drawn into buying liquor, and so paid more in the long run. “Will anyone tell us that the crowds of taverns on Yonge and Queen streets, or, still more, in all the out-of-the-way places in the city, are for the accommodation of travellers?”<sup>4</sup> The notion that the tavern’s exclusive function was to accommodate travellers stood in opposition to important realities. By the time the *Globe* had made this complaint, the urban tavern was primarily a place of leisure for the city’s residents. In most establishments licensed for public drinking, working-class men were the bulk of the clientele; the *Globe*’s lament suggests

**Résumé**

***Au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, la taverne était une institution importante de la classe ouvrière urbaine. Il y a eu, du aux maux sociaux associés à l’abus de l’alcool et à sa consommation publique, des essais fréquents d’amoindrir ou éliminer cette importance. Cette monographie examine d’abord plusieurs débats, axés sur la taverne, qui ont émergés à Toronto aux décennies 1870 et 1880. Ensuite, l’auteur examine en bref les implications du mouvement anti-alcool vis-à-vis la classe et le genre, ainsi que les conséquences du ‘Crooks Act’ de 1876, un tentatif à résoudre simultanément les questions de politique urbaine et du contrôle de la taverne. L’auteur développe l’argument que l’intersection de classe, de politique, de prohibition, et de la vie urbaine s’est résolue avec une solution territoriale— la concentration des établissements licenciés aux zones commerciaux. Finalement, cette monographie offre une discussion des actions et des interprétations des Torontois à propos de ces issus en 1877, lors d’un tentatif, abortif, à fermer les tavernes de la ville par référendum selon les provisions du ‘Dunkin Act’, un statut de prohibition locale de la Province de Canada.***

that for some of these men, the tavern was not only a social centre, but a home. Moreover, the tavern helped to define working-class masculinity and thus became a significant, but problematic, institution in urban working-class life.

The tavern’s economic aspects led both to an assault from the middle class, and to divisions within the working class. Ultimately, labour leaders, the workers most inclined to temperance activism, came to tolerate, if not to accept, the tavern’s significance in the lives of fellow-workers. The tavern was a labour exchange and a home for unattached men whose work was sporadic or seasonal. The economy of the day included a significant contingent of transient workers. For migrant labourers who jammed urban taverns and boarding houses during the winter doldrums, *licensed* taverns were a necessity. Without a liquor license, a tavern could not provide a large indoor common space, and no such space was available elsewhere. In 1876 two Ottawa aldermen wrote to Provincial Secretary Adam Crooks that more licenses than those allowed under a newly-imposed statutory limit were needed, for “owing to the floating population that numbers three thousand during a good portion of the year the city is obliged to provide special accommodation [in the form of numerous taverns], as it is a class that will not mix with others.”<sup>5</sup> Since the new statute required the closing of the lowliest establishments, Ottawa faced the prospect of social unrest among drovers and loggers or, worse, of mingling between these rough workers and respectable fellow-citizens. There was also a danger that the City’s relief bill would soar in the absence of tavern keepers’ services.

Being an important lake port, rail transportation hub, and general regional centre, Toronto was host to a “floating population” and it had many taverns that

performed service functions above and beyond serving the “travelling public.”<sup>6</sup> In some eyes, alcohol’s relationship to other economic relations made tavern life heinous and thus grounds for prohibition. Ironically, these aspects of tavern life forced labour leaders, if not others, to retreat from pressing for prohibition. While capitalist social relations made some people migrants and under-employed casual workers, one could not fully oppose the institutions in which they were housed and fed, or the alcohol that financed the only indoor common spaces available to them.<sup>7</sup>

The use of taverns by urban workers who were not transient, underemployed, or without other lodging was also problematic. The emerging working-class consensus on the liquor question held that while heavy drinking and tavern life may have been integral parts of older plebeian cultures, such traditions had no place in an effective “culture of solidarity and resistance.”<sup>8</sup> Even if workers were organized, radical, or disposed toward challenging capitalism, respectability could be difficult to attain if a few bad examples encouraged stereotyping. Achieving respectability was not simple: individually sobriety was enough, but for it to be recognized at the class level, widespread sobriety was necessary. There were, as in other segments of the population, disagreements among workers on whether widespread sobriety was best achieved through liquor control or prohibition. It was precisely because values and opinions were not universal among the working class that tavern life threatened the sober worker far more than it did the sober architect, dentist, banker, or lawyer. All of the latter would be respectable despite the state of affairs in taverns, even if one of them was as sodden as the most miserable “jack”, barring public disgrace. Public disgrace was unlikely, however, as professionals were less likely to be found drunk in public,

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and hence to be arrested. Also, nineteenth-century magistrates were inclined to leniency if the accused was respectable.<sup>9</sup>

The perceived need for widespread sobriety within the working class did not result in a great wave of working-class prohibitionism, though such sentiments did appear.<sup>10</sup> For example, prominent labour leaders Alfred Jury and Samuel Heakes voted for prohibition in Toronto in 1877. Such decisions highlighted the gap between prominent worker advocates and the large body of people who posed a threat to working-class respectability by defending the right to drink. That defense persisted strongly enough under prohibition that upholding the right to drink in public became the sensible choice. For this reason Heakes changed his mind in the 1890s. “After my experience of *Scott Act* [dry by local option] counties and towns,” he concluded, “I am afraid prohibition won’t work. ... Five years ago I was an ardent prohibitionist; I would have voted for it.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Heakes “would oppose any increase [of taverns] in the neighbourhood where I live.”<sup>12</sup> Like other labour leaders, he had no personal use for taverns, and even abhorred them. But he came to believe that the only way to lessen their importance as social centres was to provide alternatives, and to improve the material conditions of the working class. Meanwhile, the next best thing was to locate taverns in places where workers would not be tempted to frequent them. Thus, arose the territorial solution that was to be articulated beginning in the 1880s: keep the taverns, but keep them away from residences.

While the liquor question was being framed increasingly in terms of class division (and growing intra-class consensus), its implications for gender roles and relations within the working class also received considerable, though less

explicit, attention in this period. As the main location, along with the street, of working-class public life, the tavern was an institution in which the ideals of masculinity, one of them being male dominance in domestic life, were passed on. The attack on the tavern was therefore an attack on men’s freedom to practice what many saw as masculinity.<sup>13</sup> The plight of women drinkers was targeted by some reformers, but concern was more commonly for women and children who suffered privation, violence, or both at the hands of drunkard husbands. This, too, was seen largely as a working-class problem. Temperance was thus part of an effort to construct a different set of patriarchal relations within the working-class household. Figure 1, a J.W. Bengough cartoon used in Toronto’s 1877 temperance campaign, provides an example of the ideal working-class household: the man is still the breadwinner, his wife and children his dependents. However, they can depend upon his coming home smiling and sober, his pay intact. Sobriety, discipline, and consent to the dominance of industrial capitalism could not be produced within the factory alone: they had to be inculcated into every member of the working-class household.

The interrelations between class divisions, gender relations, and the liquor question were being articulated with some clarity by the early 1890s. The majority report of the Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic (1892-95) contained a conclusion based on the comments of the handful of labour leaders who had spoken:

The spending of money unnecessarily on, and the over-indulgence in liquor amongst the working classes, the [Commissioners] are convinced frequently result, not so much from a love of liquor, as from the love of sociable society; and the comfort that is found

in the places where the sale takes place, but often is not to be met with in their own homes. Discomfort, badly cooked food and ill-ventilated dwellings have much to answer for in connection with intemperance. Attention to these matters, and more especially to the training of the female portion of the population in a knowledge of domestic economy and household duties, the undersigned are satisfied would have an elevating and most beneficial effect.<sup>14</sup>

The commissioners placed inferior housing behind working-class women’s bad “domestic economy” as the main culprit behind the liquor trade’s popularity, ignoring the long hours, low wages, and multiple-earner strategies that would have made it impossible for working-class people to keep house to middle-class standards of comfort and cleanliness. But even this modest nod to the working-class viewpoint highlighted the myopia of the widely-held prohibitionist view that virtually all social ills, particularly working-class domestic strife, could be traced to legal liquor alone. The Commissioners’ assessment owed much to the views of labour leaders such as Heakes, who claimed that

As the people have increased opportunities for studying and reading, there spring up demands for public libraries and reading rooms ... and people in my line of life prefer to occupy their time in these ways to spending it around saloons. As a rule, among the working people the ones who drink are those who work the longest hours, obtain the smallest wages, and never reach the line of comfort in life. ... I think if more attention were made to the social question ... and more serious efforts were made to remove the poverty that exists among the people through uncertain employment and small wages, we would hear less of the drink traffic.<sup>15</sup>

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*Figure 1: From Grip 9(12), August 11, 1877. McMaster University, William Ready Archives and Research Collections, Bengough Papers.*

For middle-class prohibitionists, improving material conditions was anathema: to them, the *only* thing standing in the way of material improvement was the liquor traffic. Thus, two very different perceptions of the causal relationship between liquor and poverty were in evidence, and, at least until the early 1890s, the two perceptions were strongly conditioned by class.<sup>16</sup> William Sandilands showed clearly the gulf separating temperate, anti-liquor unionists and middle-class prohibitionists when he said that as far as the working class was concerned, "the only other problem that is equal to [the liquor traffic] is the combination of capital."<sup>17</sup>

*Politics and the Territorial Solution: The Significance of the Crooks Act*

Ontario's *Liquor License Act* as amended in 1876 was known as the *Crooks Act*.<sup>18</sup> Prior to its passage, corruption was widely thought to have undermined attempts to cut liquor consumption through legal restrictions. Some even thought that the liquor trade was the most powerful force in local politics. In 1873, an attempt was made to root corruption out of Ontario's liquor licensing system by moving the power to grant licenses from corruptible, politically-appointed Inspectors to police commissions and municipal councils. "The certificate of the Inspector in favor of any applicant was absolute, and with it [the Inspector] could demand a license from the [Police] Commissioners or [municipal] Council. Now the latter only have all the power and it is upon these bodies that Temperance efforts can be made immediate and effectual," wrote Adam Crooks in 1874. He noted that "[t]he Government can interfere more directly under the Act than it has thought fit to do, but it lies more properly with the municipalities to enforce the provisions of the law."<sup>19</sup> The 1873 law had received the approbation of the Province's major

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temperance societies, yet by 1876 it was clear that local officials could not be trusted to work for temperance and that more direct interference would be necessary. Under the *Crooks Act*, independent boards of commissioners were appointed for each municipality by the Provincial government. This centralized control was a key feature of the Crooks Act.

Even if, as some of its critics claimed, an important effect of the provincial appointment of commissioners was to create new opportunities for patronage at the Provincial level, the Act was still a major achievement in that it placed tavern keepers under the supervision of persons who did not depend on their favors. Under a system in which the municipal council granted licenses through the agency of an Inspector it had appointed, "the liquor interest virtually controlled the council; the licensees therefore practically issued their own licenses."<sup>20</sup> By favouring applicants of a particular political affiliation, the Inspector could have a profound influence on elections, since taverns served the crucial function of hosting political meetings, which generally had to be held indoors because local elections were held in January. In exchange for good work at elections, in hosting meetings, getting out the vote, and organizing mobs, tavern keepers could expect the opportunity to dispense petty patronage and to have a blind eye turned to minor license violations. For over a decade before the enactment of the Crooks Act, Toronto's Inspector had been Ogle Gowan, founder of the province's Orange Order, an organization with well-documented ties to Toronto's Tory machine.<sup>21</sup> It was for such reasons that George Albert Mason, Toronto's chief liquor detective, in 1868 called taverns "the bane of our cities."<sup>22</sup> As shown in Figure 2, the *Crooks Act* was not intended to stop



*Figure 2: from Grip, May 6, 1876. McMaster University, William Ready Archives and Research Collections, Bengough Papers.*

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the liquor trade, nor could such a result have been expected; but the trade was “decapitated” in that under the *Crooks Act*, the liquor trade ultimately lost its “head” for politics. Nevertheless, the Province downplayed this aspect of the law, taking pains to point out that no political party had been targeted either by the appointment of Commissioners or by the *Act’s* other noteworthy innovation, also depicted in Figure 2: durable reductions in the number of licensees.<sup>23</sup>

The *Act’s* population-based formula for determining the maximum number of licensees in a jurisdiction led to the closure of 80 Toronto taverns in 1876, leaving 220. Further reductions followed in subsequent years. Next to prohibition, license reduction was the temperance measure of choice at the time: older Ontario laws had made it possible at municipal discretion. Toronto, however, had never seen a lasting license reduction before the *Crooks Act*.<sup>24</sup> License reduction was soon followed by a series of companion measures affecting the geographical distribution of the remaining licenses, which gave franchised citizens significant opportunities to influence the process.

Throughout the 1880s, the list of objections from citizens that the Boards of License Commissioners were to consider admissible was lengthened considerably. While the regulations initially provided mainly for objections based on the applicant’s reputation, peace and quiet soon became a key concern. By 1884, the Province had enacted that

It shall be the right and privilege of any ten or more electors of any polling subdivision to object by petition, or in any similar manner, to the granting of any license within such sub-division. The objections that may be taken to the granting of a license may be one or more of the following:

...  
That the licensing thereof is not required in the neighbourhood, or that the premises are in the immediate vicinity of a place of public worship, hospital, or school, or that the quiet of the place in which such premises are situate will be disturbed if a license is granted.<sup>25</sup>

Three years later, provisions were added allowing seventy-five electors from a polling subdivision to file a petition based on the locality in question being residential and not commercial; ten electors, prior to organizing the petition, could ask the Commissioners to decide whether the area was residential or commercial.<sup>26</sup> (Unfortunately, records of the Commissioners’ deliberations on such questions are not known to survive for Toronto or any other Ontario city.) By the early 1890s, such means of neighbours’ opposition and accompanying measures, notably local councils’ ability to cap the total number of licenses (a power first used by Toronto in 1887),<sup>27</sup> had had important impacts on Ontario’s cities. In 1892, Toronto’s Chief Constable, Henry Grasett, claimed that “[t]he dwelling districts of the city have a very sparse number [of licensed houses], but sufficient for the local requirements. The trade is more concentrated in the central parts of the city.”<sup>28</sup> The Council’s 1887 action had frozen the number of licenses at 150, a number that held until it was further reduced to 110 after a referendum early in 1909. Under such a freeze, the city’s growth alone would have caused a concentration of licensed premises in the centre of the city. Unlike Toronto’s Grasett, London’s Inspector indicated to the Commission that other processes were at work:

There was an agitation among the temperance people to centralize the trade in order that it might be under better supervision by the police and the

Inspector. The argument was made that there was no use for those places in the residential part of the city, and consequently a great many of these places in the outskirts ... were refused licenses. ... The ground was taken that they were of no use to the travelling public, and that they were only patronized by mechanics and labourers going to and from their work.<sup>29</sup>

“The temperance people” could be found in any North American locality in the nineteenth century, and “agitation” was something in which they specialized. Generally, their first preference was for total prohibition of the liquor trade, on the grounds that drinking was detrimental to family life and to working life, and that the trade represented a waste of resources that would be better spent in producing useful items. Faced with resistance to prohibition, however, temperance activists were sometimes willing to settle for a say in regulation. In the case of London, as Inspector Henderson noted, this included upholding the often-ignored technicality that taverns existed for the benefit of the “travelling public.” That argument stood in opposition to another common claim, that the tavern was the “poor man’s club” and hence the rightful territory of the working-class male. It is significant that Toronto’s move to a 150-license ceiling was achieved on the initiative of Mayor W.H. Howland, whose election in 1886 had been made possible by the support of Toronto’s organized labour movement. Like other planks of Howland’s platform, this one could not have been achieved without the support of Toronto’s male working-class voters, a support denied ten years earlier, when Howland had chaired the committee that sought to deny all licenses for public drinking. “The coalition of antidrink and labor causes was a potent political force” but the “antidrink” forces would not have seen their candi-

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date elected had the temperance plank been total prohibition.<sup>30</sup>

Despite almost annual tinkering with the statutes, the Province's temperance efforts were never enough to make liquor problems go away completely. In some eyes, voluntary temperance and regulated taverns would never be enough. Prohibitionists had, in federal law, an easily accessible alternative to licensing. In 1864 the legislature of the Province of Canada passed the *Temperance Act*, known as the *Dunkin Act* after its sponsor, Christopher Dunkin.<sup>31</sup> Under this law, thirty qualified electors in cities, counties, and towns could petition for a referendum. If the electors then voted in favour of the *Act*, council would be compelled to enact a bylaw forbidding the retail sale of alcohol within the jurisdiction. Under the “five-gallon” clause, producers and wholesalers of alcoholic beverages would be permitted to continue their trade, with a minimum sale of five gallons or twelve quarts if in bottles. The *Dunkin Act* was therefore directed at taverns and not at the consumption of alcohol *per se*. This reflected a widely-held belief that public drinking occurred under conditions that encouraged excess, whereas private drinking was moderate thanks to familial social controls. The five-gallon clause, meanwhile, would in principle have put liquor out of the common labourer's reach. Consequently, the *Dunkin Act* was often attacked as “class legislation.” Soft support from those who liked the idea of prohibition was one result of the five-gallon clause. Investigating the *Act's* working in 1876, the province's chief licensing official, Henry Totten, asked residents of Prince Edward County why so few people had voted for the *Act*. He found that “although morally in favour of temperance, if they were in principle opposed to the *Dunkin Act* [because it was class legislation], they would not vote against it, as such a vote was liable to be, and

would be, misinterpreted by the advocates of the measure” as a vote against temperance.<sup>32</sup> Totten did not comment on the fact in 1877, Toronto became the largest city to reject the *Dunkin Act* before it was replaced by the *Scott Act* in 1878.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Class Conflict and the Tavern: Toronto's Dunkin Act Referendum, August 1877***

Prohibitionists did not wait long before deciding that *Crooks Act* licensing was the same “licensed murder” as any other liquor licensing. Between September 1876 and September 1877, fifteen Ontario counties and three cities, Brantford, Kingston, and Toronto, held referendums on the *Dunkin Act*. Most of the rural areas passed the measure by a slim margin, the most notable exception being Wellington County that, with its major town, Guelph, voted in the negative by a substantial margin. Toronto's campaign was one of the last, followed by passage of the measure in Bruce and Lanark counties less than a month after the Toronto setback.<sup>34</sup> As the province's largest city, Toronto held special significance for temperance activists; it also posed special problems. All three themes discussed above played a part in the Toronto contest. Entrenched political power and the mobilization of working-class men defeated the *Dunkin Act* in Toronto. A willingness among temperance advocates to work within the confines of the *Crooks Act*, and the subsequent emergence of the territorial solution, were some more notable, albeit indirect, results.

The Toronto campaign began with the presentation to City Council of a petition, bearing forty-five signatures requesting a *Dunkin Act* referendum. Motives related to the depression, then in its fifth year, are implicit in the presence of at least twenty merchants among the 45 signato-

ries.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, though the motive for launching the campaign might have been to shift cash flow from the liquor trade to other sectors, the focus of the debate quickly shifted. The *Dunkin Act* referendum in Toronto was also a forum for a clash between class interests.

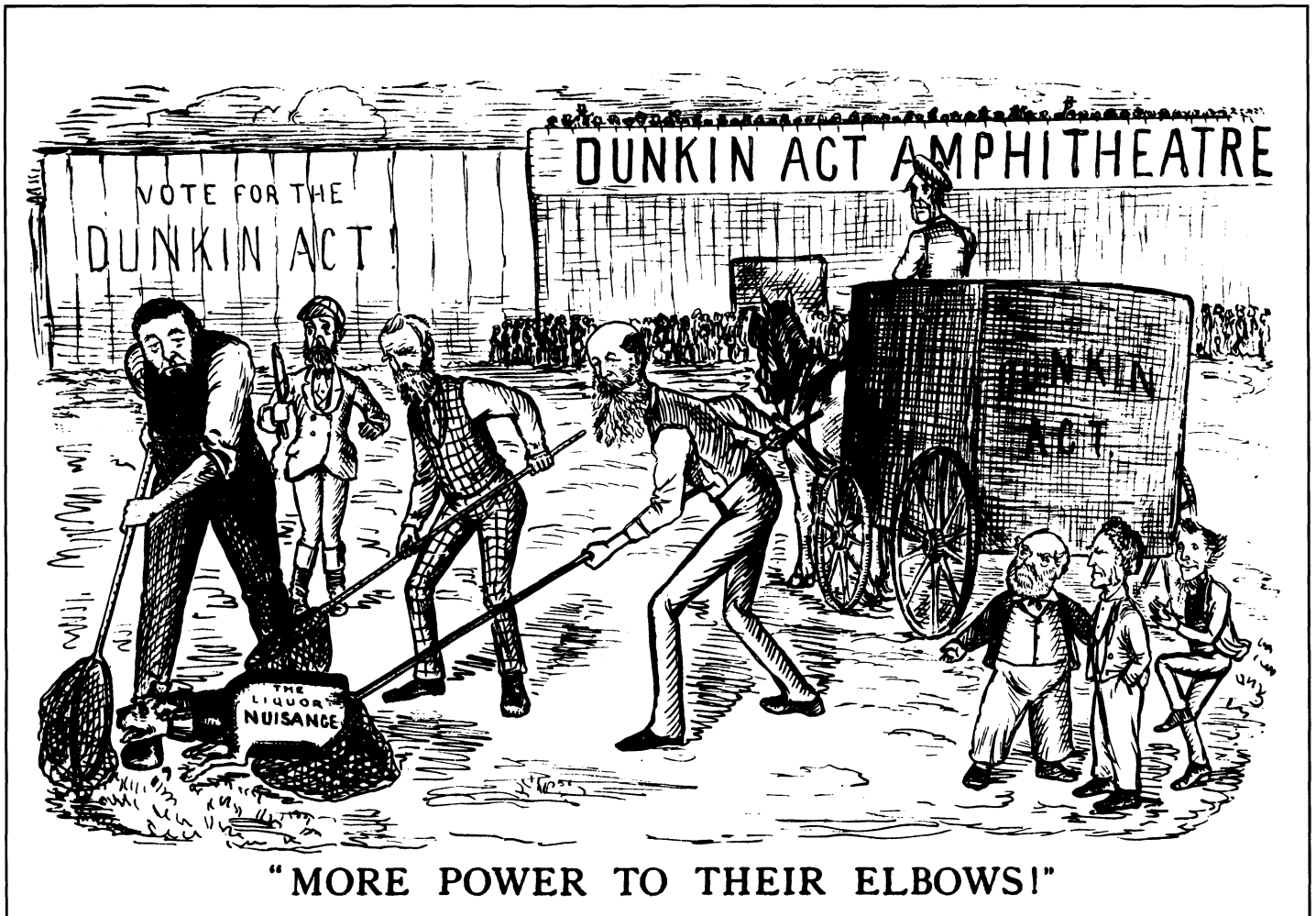
Despite any ulterior motives, the referendum's sponsors hoped that the right measure would, with one dose of prohibition, remedy the various evils thought to be related to the tavern, paramount among them drunkenness. As “Grip” (J.W. Bengough) put it,

This is a cur—a very beast of prey,  
That roams our city's streets both  
night and day,  
A monster whose foul, pestilential  
breath  
On all it touches brings the blight of  
death.  
But now the Public heart is beating  
high  
In hopes his end at length is drawing  
nigh,  
So let each valiant arm its right  
assume,  
Let's scoop him up, and cart him to his  
doom!<sup>36</sup>

In the cartoon accompanying these lines (Figure 3), public opinion can be seen in the background, filing into the *Dunkin Act* Amphitheatre to hear speeches and sermons, while several gentlemen put their elbows into the task of catching the cur.<sup>37</sup> This was prescient in a way that Bengough did not intend: while many citizens attended the Amphitheatre regularly, not enough of them used their “elbows.” But if too few voted, a good many participated and made themselves heard on either side in other ways by going to rallies held for and against, by writing letters, by appearing drunk in Carlton Street on a Sunday evening. The *Dunkin Act* campaign brought a host of



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**"MORE POWER TO THEIR ELBOWS!"**

Figure 3: from *Grip* 9(10), July 29, 1877. McMaster University, William Ready Archives and Research Collections, Bengough Papers

tavern-related issues up for unusually heated discussion.

Prominent among such issues was the relationship between tavern keepers and City Council. "As citizens of Toronto it is humiliating to confess that we are ruled by the whiskey ring," wrote "An Elector" in *The Evening Telegram*.<sup>38</sup> For Elector it was obvious that some members of Council, including the Mayor, were actively helping the Anti-Dunkin Association, the organization arrayed against the prohibitionists. Claims that a "whiskey

ring" controlled council had been circulating for at least a decade, and were now renewed as an argument in favour of the *Dunkin Act*. To judge from the leanings of the newspapers (the *Tory Mail* and *Leader* alone were opposed to the Act)<sup>39</sup> and the "whiskey ring" claims, the *Dunkin Act* campaign was an assault not only on the liquor trade, but also on Toronto's Tory machine.<sup>40</sup> For example, the outspoken alderman John Hallam went so far as to assert that

He had been one of those who had voted against the reduction of the liquor licenses, by which the city lost \$14,000. He would say, although he was sure he would be called in question for it, that the sum had been voted away by a ring in that Council, simply with a view of perpetuating the liquor traffic.<sup>41</sup>

That reductions in the number of licenses were really a Provincial assault on municipal revenues was an argument frequently used by Tory defenders of the

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old system. In response to such claims, the Government noted that municipal revenues were maintained at their old levels or higher under the new system by the institution of higher fees and an appropriate provincial/municipal division of the money.<sup>42</sup> Yet Hallam was arguing not in favour of the Tory machine, but against it. He was apparently unconvinced that the *Crooks Act* was an effort to deal a blow to the Tory machine ("whiskey ring" in Hallam's lexicon).

The *Dunkin Act* was not the best way for reformers such as Hallam to achieve their goals. First, voting was by open, not secret, ballot. Under the open ballot, there was only one polling station for the city, in the drill shed behind City Hall (at Front and Jarvis). Because of the slowness of the procedure, the poll could have taken forty days to complete; in fact, in fifteen days, excluding Sundays, just over 7,000 people voted. There were myriad opportunities for trickery in such circumstances. According to contemporary observations, the only side that took advantage of such opportunities was the anti-Dunkinite coalition, or the "Antis." The Antis were accused of forming an intimidating mob at the poll, swapping whiskey for votes, hiring the city's hacks to give free rides, and trying to influence people while they were voting. All this trickery depended upon an alliance between the Anti organizers, known at other times as the Licensed Victuallers' Association, and a segment of the working class.<sup>43</sup> The five-gallon clause of the *Act* helped to solidify that alliance.

In the summer of 1877 the conflict in Toronto regarding the tavern was one of the last Canadian attempts to deal with drinking problems by launching a city-wide assault on the retail liquor trade. Although in the 1880s and 1890s saw vigorous local option activity in rural areas, Canada's larger cities, and most of its smaller ones, remained "wet" until the

total prohibition of wartime. Most prohibitionists recognized early that broad consensus would be necessary if prohibition were to be workable. The referendum of 1877 provided a strong indication that Torontonians were far from consensus. For Canada as a whole, local option referendum results reveal that throughout the nineteenth century, prohibition was most strongly opposed by city dwellers and Québécois.<sup>44</sup>

In Toronto, the group most persistently opposed to prohibition was the working class, both immigrant and native-born. Despite their social, cultural, and material diversity, Toronto workers in 1877 had among them a broad consensus that the *Dunkin Act's* passage would unjustly have deprived the workingman of his principal recreation: socializing at the tavern over beer or whiskey. The wealthy would still be able to afford their private clubs or to keep liquor at home, and would have enough room there to be able to drink it with guests.<sup>45</sup> Since the *Dunkin Act's* minimum legal purchase of five gallons of beer represented roughly two days' work for a common labourer and about four days' work for the same amount of whiskey, most workingmen would do without both liquor and a place to drink it, at least in theory. Some observers feared that the workingman would not only consume the same amount of liquor, but also place it (perilously) before women and children. Drunkenness would become virtually impossible to police, let alone prevent.<sup>46</sup> Workers shared such concerns, but were more vocal about the affront to their liberty and respectability implicit in the *Act*. In arguing that the mere presence of taverns caused people to drink excessively,<sup>47</sup> the *Act's* supporters called into question working-class men's ability to do as they pleased without descending into wretched excess. Workers thus stood largely united alongside self-interested tavern keepers and brewers, and a

few old-fashioned patricians (old-guard Tory Councillors and their supporters) in the fight to preserve the tavern.

In some newspapers, particularly the nearly neutral (but on the whole pro-Dunkin) *Telegram*, correspondents engaged in lively debate over the *Act's* true significance for the workingman. Other papers carried more esoteric correspondence; the *Mail*, for example, printed letters ranging from a long discourse based on Spencerian sociology on the inevitable harmfulness of prohibition to debates about the price of beer. Other letters provide insight into the importance of the English working-class Torontonian to the debate. "A Cockney" wrote to the *Mail* that the Dunkinites were close to endangering themselves by their behaviour:

I am what is called a "Cockney" resident in Toronto, and, I assure you, I have been astonished at the self-command and quietness exhibited by the workingmen and the liquor trade during the discussions of the last few weeks. Had any crotchety people dared to put forward such a measure as the *Dunkin Bill* in the British metropolis, with any probability of its being carried, I can tell the Dunkinites they would have had worse to encounter than a little pushing and jostling [at the poll]. There would have been exciting popular demonstrations, window-smashings, and unpleasant *charivaris* at the houses of the leading supporters of such a foolish, uncalled-for, and unjust law.<sup>48</sup>

The absence of *charivaris* and window-smashings was hardly a sign of the masses' good behaviour, as far as the Dunkinites were concerned. To them, the majority of voters favoured the measure, but abstained from voting because of the Antis' dirty tricks. Moreover, "exciting popular demonstrations" had indeed occurred on both sides, though not the

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violent rampages described in Cockney's letter. Every evening in the weeks before and during the vote, between two and three thousand people gathered at the Amphitheatre, a temporary structure consisting of bleachers and a stage, in a vacant lot at the corner of Yonge and Queen streets. These gatherings were held by the pro-Dunkin side, but featured debate on both sides until the polling station opened; after that they were support rallies that resembled religious revivals more than political gatherings. Prayers opened the meetings; ministers dominated the podium (with promises of damnation and hellfire for their opponents, whatever the result of the earthly contest); hymns were sung between speeches and at the close of proceedings. The main difference between such meetings and revivals was that clergy shared the stage with capitalists and aldermen.

For the *Act's* supporters, the measure's defeat was a function of “the combined influence of the Licensed Victuallers and the English workmen.”<sup>49</sup> This combination had been bound together by unwarranted cries of “class legislation” and “arbitrary measures.” The *Globe* denounced such arguments, for “in Canada such a thing as class legislation is impossible.”<sup>50</sup> This position was explained in an editorial entitled “English Workmen and the *Dunkin Act*,” in which it was argued that

Whatever grounds there may be for such class jealousies in England, there are literally none in this country, inasmuch as the social circumstances with us are such that anything like caste is out of the question, and, consequently, anything like partial and oppressive legislation is not to be thought of. Whatever is done is done for the whole of the community, and by the votes of a clear majority of the people.<sup>51</sup>

The absence of long-established, rigidly defined classes made no difference to the *Act's* working-class opponents. Their concern was not with the historic divisions of the Old Country. They considered the new country's class divisions to be every bit as real, notwithstanding their theoretical impossibility or the absence of an explicit “caste” system: “the cry of the supporters of the *Act* [is] the same old cry: the rags and the wretchedness of the working man. ... The workingmen of Toronto [do] not want gentlemen ... to come to them and mourn over them and tell them what they should, or should not, do.”<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the city's coopers “in mass meeting assembled” resolved, among other things, “That we call upon our fellow-workmen and all other electors who can sympathize with us, to go to the polls and aid us in voting down this piece of class legislation” that they claimed had already, before the casting of the first vote, led to a decline in the coopers' trade.<sup>53</sup> It was argued in response, reasonably it seems, that cooperage should have benefitted from the *Dunkin Act*, through an anticipated boom in five-gallon kegs.<sup>54</sup> Even if claims about negative effects on coopers' trade were inaccurate, coopers did have a strong tradition of Saturday night tavern life that meshed closely with established labour processes in the work-shop. To have eliminated the licensed tavern from the Toronto landscape would have been to outlaw an important part of what it meant to be a cooper.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, the *Globe*, though ever loyal to the Queen, was not ready to credit fellow subjects newly arrived from Britain with the same loyalty. In the “English Workmen” editorial, the nativism that would later permeate the prohibition movement was given an early airing:

A change for the better in this respect [drinking] has been silently going on for many years past, and the result is

seen in the manner in which this so much denounced *Dunkin Act* is carried in rural and more or less purely Canadian districts, while in towns and cities ... there is a disproportionately large amount of those who still have not only their Old Country prejudices ... , but their Old Country habits to which they cling with even greater tenacity.<sup>56</sup>

Years later, the same accusation would be levelled at the German, Italian, and Slavic immigrants who gathered in cities and helped to defeat prohibition and license reduction when it was put to a vote.<sup>57</sup> In Toronto in 1877, several largely working-class voting blocs had been identified in the aftermath of the poll: the city's approximately 200 voters of German-origin, and almost 1,000 Catholics. “The credit justly due to our German fellow citizens for their steadfastness in the [Anti] cause, should not be ignored: the principle of freedom of the subject *versus* sumptuary laws, found in them able and resolute defenders.”<sup>58</sup> Together with English Protestant workers, who had put class first and Christian duty second, the Germans and the Catholics had formed a group of voters oblivious to the (intended) true nature of the measure, thanks to their unfamiliarity with the *Globe's* version of true democracy.

Despite the glimmerings of working-class solidarity apparent in the 1877 campaign, it is important to stress, as did the Dunkinites, that except for the coopers' initiative, opposition to prohibition in 1877 Toronto was not worker-led, but worker-supported. At the height of the campaign, local labour movement leaders were occupied with the fifth annual congress of the Canadian Trades' Unions, at which the liquor question was not on the agenda, and was mentioned only briefly. Even in debating the Nine Hours question, the specifics of how workingmen used their leisure time were scarcely

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mentioned in the published version of the proceedings.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, anti-prohibitionist appeals consisted of speeches, mainly by powerful and wealthy men, about the workingman's civil liberties. Liquor interests and their supporters among the elite carefully marshalled their arguments to mobilize sufficient working-class support for their cause to assure victory. This support came in the form of votes and gathering *en masse* at strategic times and places. It is therefore tempting to dismiss the entire process as the directed response of a subordinate class to the sops of a few "bread-and-circuses" Tories. But despite the absence of a working-class leadership, evidently the campaign played a role, however minor, in working-class formation. Even if the alliance between the working class and the liquor trade was fragile and ephemeral, even if the "working class" in this case was heavily weighted toward the common labourer (who was most self-interested of all when it came to the tavern), even if the elite of the labour movement was prohibitionist (though not yet vocal about it) and would be for years to come, it cannot be argued that the exhortation for "Workingmen [to] rally in defense of [their] rights"<sup>60</sup> was merely a sham perpetrated by a desperate elite on rowdy dupes.

Even contemporary commentators who claimed that the Antis had won the referendum dishonestly did not dare claim that the over seven thousand and ten thousand men and women who had gathered at two separate rallies (the August 11 rally, and the victory parade on August 23) had done so merely on the promise of free drinks.<sup>61</sup> Freedom to drink, not free drinks, underlay such massive displays. Moreover, by the late 1870s some members of the working class were examining relationships among poverty, crime, and alcohol in terms of the social relations inherent in capitalism.<sup>62</sup> The claim that the *Dunkin*

*Act* was an infringement of workers' liberty probably was only an implicit critique of social relations, thanks to the Antis' patrician leadership." Nevertheless, even a debate so strongly structured from above had room for more radical perspectives, particularly in the newspapers and out in the streets. More importantly, meetings and rallies provided a common experience and a sense of common interest, no matter who initiated them. The campaign thus promoted a unity among workers that would later be expressed without patrician help.<sup>63</sup> Whether patricians were using workers or vice versa is therefore moot.

Several aspects of the campaign indicate that neighbourhoods were becoming an important part of social organization. Though not "neighbourhoods" in the sense of being small, functional social areas, wards were the commonest territorial units *of the time*. Since neighbourhoods are difficult to define in strict spatial terms, wards are used here as a convenient surrogate (unless otherwise noted) because of their contemporary use in political organization.<sup>64</sup> These political structures and the distribution of votes within them reveal important relationships between class and territory. After the Dunkinites had focused their attention all summer on holding large meetings at the Amphitheatre, William Gibson argued on August 11 that "[i]t would be a better course now to discontinue the meetings at the Amphitheatre and hold ward meetings all over the city."<sup>65</sup> Meetings did continue at the Amphitheatre, but almost halfway through the voting, the Dunkinites set up a committee for each of the city's wards. The only one that managed to hold a public meeting well-enough attended to merit reporting (and that was reported as "not very large") was the St. Thomas's Ward Committee.<sup>66</sup> St. Thomas's was both relatively wealthy and relatively close to the lone polling

station. Of all the ward organizations, this one alone had managed a "comprehensive canvass" of its territory. The importance of territory had become apparent to Dunkinite leaders too late in the game. After two weeks of polling, the Dunkinites grew increasingly alarmed at the other side's growing margin of support. They saw it as a result of the various inconveniences of voting, particularly the shouted insults, pushes, and shoves of the "rowdies" who had been especially numerous and boisterous during the first week.<sup>67</sup> They began to advertise conditions at the polling station:

Poll Clear!

No inconvenience to voters.

COME ON NOW!

John T. Moore, sec'y Dunkin Bill Association<sup>68</sup>

This appeal having failed, a more frantic, and pointed, call for support was forthcoming:

VOTERS READ THIS!

The following is a statement of the number of Votes in the several Wards remaining unpolled:

St. Andrew's	983
St. David's	782
St. George's	548
St. James'	1259
St. John's	953
St. Lawrence	838
St. Patrick's	1163
St. Stephen's	502
St. Thomas'	796

Of this aggregate of nearly 8,000 unpolled votes, we have reason to believe that a very large proportion would, if recorded, be in favour of the *Dunkin Act*. Many hundreds who have promised to support the Act have delayed going to the poll until they could do so without personal inconvenience or loss of time.

## ***Battling "the bane of our cities":***

### THAT TIME IS NOW!

This notice is to ask that the professed friends of the Measure will display their loyalty to the Cause by recording their votes in its favour

### TO-DAY!

If our friends remain indifferent to the present opportunity, the responsibility of the failure of this movement must rest upon those who have thus neglected their duty.

John T. Moore  
Secretary  
Dunkin Bill Association<sup>69</sup>

That the Association should have drawn attention to the number of unpolled votes by ward as well as compiling such detailed figures (which would have required both knowledge of the total eligible vote by ward, and of the home ward of each voter to date), is testimony to the importance of the ward in the nineteenth century.

The turnout problem was especially distressing with respect to St. Thomas' and St. James' Wards: both provided more pro- than anti-Dunkin voters, but at low levels of turnout. St. James' Ward, for one, was said to house 1,500 potential yeas, but delivered only 490.<sup>70</sup> "Were the voters existing of whom the Amphitheatre gentlemen speak so glibly," the *Mail* replied to such claims, "it would be a poor compliment to them to say they are so lukewarm in the cause that they cannot be got to the polls. The fact is, they are not to be found."<sup>71</sup> Wards other than St. Thomas' and St. James', some of them much farther from the poll, accounted for higher levels of both turnout and Anti-Dunkin support (Table 1). On August 21, despite the Dunkinites' pleas, established voting trends continued; the Mayor announced that by the consent of both sides August 22nd would be the final day of voting

should a half hour pass without a vote being polled. Neither side objected, though the announcement must have surprised many, since newspaper reports dated August 21st were based on the assumption that a good three weeks of voting remained, because of the size of the as yet unpolled vote.

Unlike the pro-Dunkin forces, the Anti-Dunkin Association had based its campaign on ward organizations from the start. Not surprisingly, the committees were composed overwhelmingly of tavern-keepers, and also included three wine merchants, three brewers, a soda water manufacturer, and a cigar manufacturer.<sup>72</sup> In canvassing, "the most trusty and active agents were employed by our Executive Committee, with instructions to report daily to the Chairmen of their respective wards, while others were engaged classifying the voters' lists, and registering the results of the returns of the canvassing agents."<sup>73</sup> Class was reflected in the conduct of the ward-by-ward campaign. The nine committees ranged in size from one member in thinly-populated St. George's to seven in heavily-populated, predominantly working-class St. Patrick's. The two largely middle- and upper-class strongholds of support for the *Dunkin Act*, the wards of St. Thomas' and St. James', had committees of three each. On the whole, areas of strong support for the *Act* had smaller committees in opposition, and areas of weaker support, larger committees. This is not to say that committee size determined voting patterns; rather this pattern suggests that the leaders of the liquor trade knew the city well, and knew where to focus their efforts.

The holding of meetings in a variety of places complemented the Anti-Dunkin Association's ward-committee approach. While the Dunkinites could consistently muster a crowd at the central Amphitheatre, their opponents took their

message to working people. Meetings and rallies at downtown locations such as the Grand Opera House (which also occasionally hosted the other side, as well as D.I.K. Rine's temperance revival meetings)<sup>74</sup> were supplemented with gatherings at places such as Scholes' Tavern/Hall on Queen St. West at Dundas (where the audience was "composed principally of working men"<sup>75</sup>), and in the open air in the heart of working-class Toronto:

### THE EAST END MEETING.

Last night a meeting called by the Anti-Dunkin Association was held on the vacant lot on the corner of Queen and River streets. The audience was very large, and difficult to manage, especially when the speaker's remarks were in favour of the Act.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of territory is made clearer by an analysis of voting patterns. Such an analysis reveals a territorial logic that can be interpreted only in terms of neighbourhood and class. On the crudest level, tabulation by wards, the data reveal a pattern that corresponds to the broad social geography of the city: the highest concentrations of pro-Dunkin votes were in the wealthiest wards, namely St. Thomas' and St. James' (see Table 1). There were also class differences in the composition of the over-all vote (Table 2). The yeas side was weighted toward the upper classes. Though the numbers on either side in the high-middle category are almost equal in Table 2, it should be remembered that almost 300 of the over 1,200 "high-middle" Antis were tavern keepers, brewers, and licensed grocers. Skilled workers were slightly weighted to the Anti side, and semi- and unskilled labourers leaned strongly to opposing the Act: almost 80% of semi- and unskilled workers who voted cast a nay. That the nay side owed its margin of victory to this group is particularly impressive, consider-

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Table 1: Dunkin Act voting by ward

Ward	Turnout <sup>a</sup>		Yeas <sup>b</sup>		Nays	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
St. Lawrence	565	(40)	173	(30)	392	(70)
St. David's	939	(55)	348	(36)	591	(64)
St. Thomas'	630	(44)	349	(55)	281	(45)
St. John's	1092	(53)	458	(42)	634	(58)
St. James'	869	(41)	491	(56)	378	(44)
St. George's	388	(41)	141	(37)	247	(63)
St. Andrew's	865	(47)	305	(36)	560	(64)
St. Patrick's	1125	(49)	474	(43)	651	(57)
St. Stephen's	500	(50)	201	(40)	299	(60)
Totals	6973	(47)	2940	(42)	4033	(58)

*Notes and sources*

- a The total number of eligible voters was estimated by adding actual votes (calculated from Licensed Victuallers' Association, *The Yeas and Nays*) and votes unpolled as of August 21, as reported in the Dunkin Bill Association's advertisement in the *Globe* and *Telegram* of that day. There is thus a slight discrepancy between turnout levels listed here and real figures. The grand total produced by this method (14,797), however, is close to that estimated by the *Mail* on August 6 (between 14,000 and 15,000). Percentages in this column represent percent of eligible votes polled.
- b Percentages in these columns represent vote split, and add horizontally. 'Yeas' are pro-Dunkin votes, 'Nays' Anti-Dunkin. Compiled from LVA, *Yeas and Nays*, in which each voter is listed by address and ward.

ing that most of Toronto's approximately 5,000 unfranchised adult men would have fallen into it.<sup>77</sup>

The class composition of the vote, the ward distribution of the yeas and nays, the territorial organization of the respective campaigns, and the questions of class raised in debate all suggest that voting behaviour was related to class and territory, not to a class-blind desire to rid neighbourhoods of taverns. Is this conclusion, suggested by macro-scale evidence, upheld at the micro-scale?<sup>78</sup> A detailed micro-analysis is not possible here, but there is some evidence to suggest that the answer is yes. That yea votes were sometimes motivated by the proximity of a tavern is implicit in some cases: a tavern at Ontario and Gerrard

Streets, for instance, was surrounded by working-class pro-Dunkin votes. Yet if such behaviour had been common, the working class as a whole would have voted to close the taverns: it was already living next door to most of them. Taverns were typically located on noisy thoroughfares such as Yonge and Queen Streets, or clustered around the St. Lawrence Market, along the Esplanade (presumably sailors' haunts). Some of the most notorious dens were to be found on York and Terauley Streets. The infamous Stanley Street (by 1877, Lombard Street) was located in St. Lawrence Ward, a few blocks west of the Market. Yet around the Market itself, yea votes were scarce. As for the two wards that showed a yea plurality, there was not a single tavern in St. Thomas', and all of those in St. James'

were located on the east side of Yonge Street, the ward's western boundary.<sup>79</sup> An analysis of all votes by residents of a west-end neighbourhood shows that the area mirrored the aggregate figures for the city, while yea voters were not clustered around the local tavern.<sup>80</sup> Despite the fact that the territorial solution's enshrinement in law was still eight years away, the tavern was already a phenomenon associated with working-class neighbourhoods and commercial streets. The class and ward patterns of the vote, together with the geographic distribution of taverns, suggested that a territorial approach to liquor law would be more workable than the outright prohibition of public drinking.

**Conclusions**

On the evening of Wednesday, August 22, 1877, over ten thousand people marched in a torchlight procession through the streets of Toronto, celebrating what had been sold to them as a triumph of workingmen's rights over rich man's law. As members of a capitalist, patriarchal, and class-divided society, that was indeed what they were celebrating. The victory procession was, by some accounts, peaceful and joyous; it ended in Queen's Park with speeches of self-congratulation and motions of thanks to the Licensed Victuallers' Association and to the workingmen of the city. "As yet, no accidents ... have been reported, nor, as far as has been heard, have any cases of disorder come under the notice of the police."<sup>81</sup> By other accounts, the procession was a disgusting display of bacchanalian barbarity, a celebration of social rot and moral decay. For prohibitionists, the fight had just begun. The next evening, they held a rally in celebration of what they considered their great moral victory: the Dunkinite vote was honest and heartfelt, but Anti-Dunkin voters had been influenced through bribery and corruption. The losers were cer-

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Table 2: Class and voting

Occupational class <sup>a</sup>	Toronto 1881 <sup>b</sup>	Voters <sup>c</sup>					
		nay			yea		
		n	column%	row%	n	column%	row%
High-middle Skilled	35.0%	1240	30.5% <sup>d</sup>	49.6%	1260	43.8%	50.4%
Semi- and unskilled	42.5	1300	32.0	55.0	1060	36.8	45.0
Unknown <sup>e</sup>	22.5	1080	26.6	78.3	300	10.4	21.7
	0.0	440	10.8	58.0	320	10.9	42.0
Totals <sup>f</sup>	99.9	4060	99.9	58.0	2940	100.0	42.0

**Notes**

- a Adapted from Katz, *People of Hamilton*, and Sanford, “Origins of Residential Differentiation.” See note 77 for a detailed discussion.
- b Adult males engaged in paid work, classified according to occupation. Source: calculated from Sanford.
- c All estimates in these two columns are calculated from a 5% sample of voters. Source of sample: LVA, *Yeas and Nays*. The sample was cross-referenced with Might & Taylor’s Toronto Directories for 1878 and 1877.
- d Includes approximately 300 tavern-keepers, licensed shop-keepers, and brewers.
- e No occupation listed in directory.
- f Discrepancy between these totals and those in Table 1 arises from calculation of totals from sample (sample n x 20).

tain that further education of the people would see the ultimate victory of the forces of righteousness.<sup>82</sup>

We know now that these hopeful reformers were wrong. Ultimately, no amount of bureaucratic and police control over the tavern could overcome the facts of city life articulated in the campaign of 1877: taverns were social clubs to which workers (specifically, working men) had an established, deeply-rooted claim. (Figure 4, although from a different time and place, provides evidence that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ontario tavern was a man’s world.) Sociable tavern life could not be eradicated by prohibition or missionary zeal. However, the tavern and its long-standing place in the community were changed in the nineteenth century. Appropriate times and

places for tavern life were defined, to the advantage of domestic and working life.

Views on the tavern’s economic aspects also shifted. As late as 1868, one observer claimed that all of Toronto’s poverty was attributable to “thriftlessness and dissipation.”<sup>83</sup> By the late 1870s, five years of high unemployment and “hard times” had spawned the increasingly plausible view that most poor people were poor through no fault of their own. Such views, however, were largely confined to trade unionists and the poor themselves. Nevertheless, as early as 1882, in some official eyes the proliferation of homeless wandering from town to town was seen as the result of hard times, not of any individual tramp’s weak character.<sup>84</sup>

The record of working-class struggles in the nineteenth century reveals that workers’ political leaders—many of the craft unions, the Knights of Labor—were not particularly enthusiastic about the tavern. Their main concerns were with much larger issues of social structure and social justice, and with the working conditions of their rank-and-file members. Yet many of those rank-and-file workers defended the tavern in 1877 and at other times or simply used it. This rift within the working class can be seen as a rift between two different groups of workers, that is, a group who supported the struggle to humanize or even to supplant capitalism, and a group that wished only to live a peaceful and reasonably prosperous life and have access to some form of traditional recreation. Seen in this way, the triumph of “partyism” over working-class solidarity in Toronto in the 1870s and late 1880s takes on a new meaning. The Conservative Party, which won most of the votes of Toronto workers, represented not only the National Policy, but also worked consistently in defense of “the poor man’s club.” Widespread acceptance of the unified “movement culture” that emerged in Toronto in the 1880s would have meant acceptance of the leadership’s prohibitionist stance. It was only with the moderation of that stance in the 1886 and 1887 local elections that labour was able to unite behind wider issues of urban reform under the mayoralty of W.H. Howland. In 1877, loyalty to the party and the tavern triumphed.

The campaign of 1877 was at once about working-class civil liberties and good government. Although the local political scene was soon cleansed of the tavern’s influence, its social aspects remained an important part of urban working-class life. In the 1877 campaign’s aftermath, some reformers began to look more closely at the way urban society worked. There was, for instance, much discussion of substitutes

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**Figure 4:** Interior, Bank Hotel, corner of Talbot and King Sts., London, Ont., 1908. Photo by Clifford S. Bastla. National Archives of Canada, PA 122703.

for the tavern. But attempts to provide alternative recreation were still fraught with difficulty. Coffee houses were not an immediate success; there were as yet no Sunday cars to High Park; parks were virtually useless in winter or at night; and libraries and reading rooms were not good places to socialize. Spectator sports were just beginning, and could not provide regular evening diversion. The tavern was, and is, difficult to supplant. As the subsequent century and a

quarter has shown, other recreations are not so much alternative as complementary. Reformers also began to see the obstacles to their vision of "progress" not as "rings" or faulty institutions, but as social structures and relations. Lack of urban support for moral reform was often explained away by bitter activists as the result of workers' and immigrants' ostensibly inferior moralities. (Although in 1877, poor organization was given as the main excuse for the *Dunkin Act's* defeat:

see Figure 5. Note the portrayal of the Antis' victory procession in the background.) Consequently, class quickly emerged as an important theme in the liquor debate. The tavern served to mark not only divisions between residential and commercial neighbourhoods, but between good and bad ones and between the unclean city and the wholesome suburbs.



*Battling "the bane of our cities":*



**Figure 4:** Interior, Bank Hotel, corner of Talbot and King Sts., London, Ont., 1908. Photo by Clifford S. Bastla. National Archives of Canada, PA 122703.

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## Battling "the bane of our cities":

Pamela Moss, Wayne Reeves, Edward Relph, and John Weaver.

### Notes

1. See Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience* (Toronto, 1983), 84-89; Peter DeLottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal : Working-class culture and the tavern, 1869-1889" *Labour/Le Travail* 8/9 (1981/82), 9-40; Judith Fingard " 'A Great Big Rum Shop': The Drink Trade in Victorian Halifax," in *Tempered by Rum: Rum in the History of the Maritime Provinces*. ed J.H. Morrison and J. Moreira (Porters Lake, N.S., 1988) and Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, 1989) chapters 1-4.
2. Although "licence" is now the standard spelling, this paper uses "license" throughout, because all contemporary sources consulted used this spelling.
3. On segregation and differentiation, see Peter Goheen, *Victorian Toronto, 1850-1900: Pattern and Process of Growth* (Chicago, 1970); Barbara Sanford, "The Origins of Residential Differentiation: Capitalist Industrialization, Toronto, Ontario, 1851-1881," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto (Planning), 1985; Michael J. Doucet, "Working Class Housing in a Small Nineteenth Century Canadian City: Hamilton, Ontario 1852-1881," in *Essays in Canadian Working Class History*, ed. Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian (Toronto 1976), 83-105; Ian Davey and Michael Doucet, "The Social Geography of a Commercial City," in Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West* (Cambridge, 1975); Herbert Brown Ames, *The City Below the Hill* (Montreal 1897, reprinted Toronto, 1972), 6-9; Sherry Olson and David Hanna, "The Social Landscape of Montréal, 1901," plate 30 in *Historical Atlas of Canada III: Addressing the Twentieth Century* (Toronto, 1990); Daniel J. Hiebert, "Winnipeg: a City Divided," plate 31 in *ibid*; several of the essays in *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*, ed. Robert Harney (Toronto, 1985) contain insights on this point: see especially the contributions of Murray Nicolson, John Zucchi, and Lillian Petroff.
4. *Globe*, 11 Jan. 1876.
5. Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], RG8-II-1 Provincial Secretary, License Branch correspondence files 1870-1890. These files consist mainly of initial responses to the Crooks Act from every jurisdiction in the province except Toronto. There is also a file of form letters (instructions to local officials), a file of names submitted for consideration for appointment to new offices, and a list of the salaries of inspectors in each jurisdiction in 1875 (at which time the Inspector was paid a 6% commission on license fees). The context of the quote indicates a reference not to the city council, but to the city as a whole.
6. Edwin C. Guillet *Pioneer Inns and Taverns*, v. 1 second edition: *Ontario, with Detailed Reference to Metropolitan Toronto and Yonge Street to Penetanguishene* (Toronto 1954), *passim*. Margaret McBurney & Mary Byers, *Tavern in the Town. Early Inns and Taverns of Ontario* (Toronto, 1988), *passim*; John E. Zucchi, "Italian hometown settlements and the development of an Italian community on Toronto, 1875-1935," in *Gathering Place*, ed. Harney, 126.
7. Other cities provide more examples: Montréal's Irish and French Canadian canal day-labourers lived between two poles: the docks and the waterfront taverns, Joe Beef's Canteen being the most (in)famous among them; dockside workers in Montréal were routinely hired and paid in taverns. See DeLottinville, "Joe Beef"; William Sandilands, machinist and Knights of Labor Master Workman for the Montreal district, before the *Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic* [hereafter RCLT], *minutes of testimony*, Québec, 361. In colonial Québec City sailors deserting their ships found new berths with the help of tavern keepers. Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port* (Toronto, 1981), Chapter 2. In Halifax, sailors and soldiers spent their time on shore or on leave in the taverns of the city's high streets and, again, found work (if not already employed by the military) through the tavern keeper. Tavern keeping was also the usual main business of pimps. Fingard, " 'A Great Big Rum Shop' "; and Fingard, *Victorian Halifax*, Chapters 1-4.
8. Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be. The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900*. (Cambridge, 1982), 282 ff. Here, Kealey and Palmer are not referring specifically to the liquor question, though they make clear in their few passing references that the views attributed to labour leaders in this paper are in line with the positions taken by Knights of Labor leaders in the 1880s and 1890s.
9. See, for example, Fingard, " 'A Great Big Rum Shop' "; Perry Duis, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920* (Chicago, 1983), Chapter 6. It should also be remembered that the categories of "respectable" and "rough" are historically contingent. As late as the 1820s, drunkenness had been acceptable for gentlemen regardless of time or place. For a detailed account of the temperance movement to 1855 and the drinking habits against which it was arrayed, see Janet V. Noel, "Dry Millenium: Temperance and a New Social Order in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada and Red River," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1987.
10. Such sentiments waned between the 1870s and the 1890s; widespread working-class support for prohibition again emerged during the First World War. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28* (Toronto, 1971), Chapter 17.
11. Samuel R. Heakes, carpenter, *RCLT*, minutes of testimony, Ontario, 602.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 605.
13. J.M. Kingsdale (1973) "The 'Poor Man's Club': Social functions of the Urban Working Class Saloon," in *The Making of Urban America*, ed. R.A. Mohl (Wilmington, 1988); DeLottinville, "Joe Beef"; E.C. Moore, "The Social Value of the Saloon," *American Journal of Sociology* 3(1), 1897.
14. *Report of the RCLT* (Ottawa, 1895), 506.
15. Heakes, *RCLT*, minutes of testimony, Ontario, 601-602.
16. By 1897, the capitalist reformer, H.B. Ames, recognized that the causal relationship was not clear: he would only go so far as to note the strong correlation between the incidence of taverns and liquor shops and poverty (as he defined it). Ames, *City Below the Hill*, 74.
17. 39 Vic. Cap. 26, *An Act to amend the Law respecting the sale of Fermented or Spiritous Liquors*.
18. Sandilands, *RCLT*, minutes of testimony, Québec, 368.
19. AO, Mowat Papers, MU 2176; memoranda from Crooks to Mowat re liquor law amendments of 1873 and 1874, October 8, 1874.
20. Henry Totten, *RCLT*, minutes of testimony, Ontario, 928.
21. Gregory S. Kealey, "Orangemen and the Corporation. The politics of class during the Union of the Canadas," in *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto*, ed. Victor Russell (Toronto, 1984).
22. George Albert Mason, *The Licensed Victualler's [sic] Association. Their Petition to the Legislature and Conduct of City Officials. Chapter 1: The Mayor and the Clerk of the Police Court*, both published 1868. Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library, Baldwin Room, broadsides collection. Though the latter carries the banner "Published Weekly, by the Whiskey Reformers' Association,"

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- Mason's two broadsides are the only such documents known to survive from Toronto during this period.
23. See *Mowat and Good Government: the License Question; Financial, Municipal, and Social. Tory Attacks Disposed of*. September 1882. University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library.
24. For an example of a short-lived license reduction, see Kealey, "Orangemen," 49.
25. Statutes of Ontario, 47 Vic. Cap. 34: *An Act to improve the Liquor License Laws*.
26. RSO 1887, c.194: *The Liquor License Act*, 13.1, 13.2.
27. City of Toronto, Council Minutes for 1887 Appendix 10: By-law No. 1795, *Respecting the issue of Tavern Licenses* (erroneously dated 1886). See also By-Law 1796 which similarly limited the number of liquor shop licenses to fifty.
28. *RCLT*, minutes of testimony, Ontario, 580.
29. Robert Henderson, London, Ontario's License inspector, *RCLT* minutes of testimony, Ontario, 389.
30. Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming*, 213-15 (quote: 214).
31. 27 & 28 Vic. Cap. 18, *The Temperance Act, 1864*. See Ruth Spence, *Prohibition in Canada* (Toronto, 1919), 91-101. The *Dunkin Act* was replaced by the Scott Act in 1878, partly because the *Dunkin Act*, being a statute of the Province of Canada, was restricted in its operation to Ontario and Québec.
32. Ontario Sessional Papers, 40 Vic. No. 42, Schedule F, 33.
33. 41 Vic. Cap. 16, *The Canada Temperance Act, 1878*. There were frequent amendments to this law. Court challenges prevented its widespread use until 1884. Having been carried in numerous rural counties in 1884 and 1885, it was repealed in many of them three years later, the earliest date permitted by the law.
34. Ontario Sessional Papers, 41 Vic. no. 28, Schedule K.
35. The names of the petitioners can be found in Licensed Victuallers' Association [LVA], *The Yeas and Nays polled in the Dunkin Act Campaign in Toronto. Carefully compared with the official returns. With introductory remarks and extracts of speeches delivered during the campaign. With an appendix*. (Toronto, 1877; CIHM microfiche), iv. The exact number of merchants is difficult to determine because several of the names were common ones.
36. *Grip*, 28 July 1877.
37. Bengough is here alluding to another local issue: the same summer, the implementation of the city's first dog-licensing bylaw had led to the capture and destruction of several hundred stray or unlicensed dogs.
38. *Evening Telegram*, 21 Aug. 1877.
39. An additional point of interest is that the *Leader*, the erstwhile Tory organ, was also the publisher chosen by the Licensed Victuallers for printing *The Yeas and Nays*. Though a direct connection is not evident, the *Leader's* stand during the campaign suggests not only support, as shown by the *Mail*, but that the *Leader* was the Victuallers' organ.
40. I use the term "machine" here to refer to a party apparatus designed explicitly for the purpose of attaining and reproducing power. The federal Tory and Ontario Liberal machines in Post-Confederation Ontario were both "based on the pyramiding of patron-client alliances to form networks of exchange in which patronage and other material benefits flowed downward and electoral support flowed upward; and in both brokerage was a vital function." S.J.R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896*. (Toronto, 1990), 276. Noel uses liquor law as a case study of the growth of the Mowat machine without mentioning taverns or tavern keepers; more importantly, he also interprets the Crooks Act solely in terms of underlying political motives, with little reference to temperance (281-93). As the present paper should make clear, the two are not easily separable. Temperance must be understood in terms of its class politics; Ontario politics, whether municipal, provincial, or federal, must be understood at least partly in terms of the street-level liquor trade.
- On the federal Tory machine and the role of the tavern keeper therein, see T. Brady, "Sinners and Publicans: Sir John A. Macdonald's Trial under the Controverted Elections Act, 1874," *Ontario History* 76(1), 1984. See also Barrie Dyster, "Captain Bob and the Noble Ward. Neighbourhood and provincial politics in nineteenth-century Toronto," in *Forging a Consensus*, 87-115. His paper deals with the 1850s and 1860s, not the entire century. To Dyster, "neighbourhood" is defined in terms of political organization, and vice versa. Ward bosses, tavern keepers, and taverns were the people and organizations around which men's lives in the neighbourhood revolved. In his case study, Dyster finds that class issues "were not yet sharply articulated at the provincial level" and that sectarian division provided diversions from class-consciousness" (115). The argument is similar to Ira Katznelson's in *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patternning of Class in the United States* (Chicago and London, 1981), especially Chapter 3. Katznelson argues that class consciousness in U.S. cities was restricted to the shop floor because territorial loyalties were based not on class but on race and ethnicity.
41. *Globe*, 25 Aug. 1877.
42. See *Mowat and Good Government*.
43. Personation and other trickery *Evening Telegram* 20 Aug. 1877 and various other days. The *Globe* and *Christian Guardian* also made claims of dirty tricks, but did not provide the sorts of accounts contained in the *Telegram*. Full details of voting procedures can be found in the *Mail*, 6 Aug. 1877.
44. See *Report, RCLT*, 753-5.
45. See Duis, *The Saloon*, chapter 6.
46. For example, see the letter by "Scrutator" in the *Mail*, 20 Aug. 1877.
47. E.g. *Evening Telegram*, 4 Aug. 1877.
48. *Mail*, 8 Aug. 1877.
49. *Globe*, 29 Aug. 1877.
50. *Globe*, 29, Aug. 1877.
51. *Globe*, 4 Sept. 1877.
52. *Mail*, 4 Aug. 1877.
53. *Mail*, 4 Aug. 1877.
54. *Globe*, 6 Aug. 1877.
55. Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto, 1980), Chapter 4.
56. *Globe* 29 Aug. 1877.
57. Allen, *The Social Passion*, 276; Graeme Decarie, "Paved With Good Intentions: the Prohibitionists' Road to Racism in Ontario," *Ontario History* 66(1), 1974. See also the *Daily Mail and Empire*, 2 Jan. 1909 for an excellent example. In the license reduction referendum of that year, early returns had shown an apparent setback for temperance forces, until "returns from the northern and other outlying districts [of Toronto] began to arrive. ... More and more the big lead began to give way." "The majority against license reduction upon the last occasion of a plebiscite ... had now been turned into a decided victory, and that

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- in spite of the fact that there had been an influx in the last few years of many foreigners from countries still far behind our own glorious land in moral development," said the license reduction committee chairman, N.S. McKendry. These "foreigners" were mostly central-city dwellers.
58. LVA, *Yeas and Nays*, xxi.
59. *Mail*, 9 Aug. 1877.
60. The slogan was contained in advertisements for a "grand mass meeting" held at the Rink, Adelaide St., on August 11. See the *Mail* and the *Leader*, various days.
61. Both sides agreed on these estimates of crowd size.
62. Kealey, *Toronto Workers*; Kealey and Palmer, *Dreaming*.
63. Kealey documents extensive worker-led activism during the 1880s in *Toronto Workers*.
64. For an argument that the ward is an adequate surrogate for neighbourhood, particularly on grounds of political organization, see Dyster, "Captain Bob."
65. *Mail*, 13 Aug. 1877.
66. *Mail*, 11 Aug. 1877.
67. These were traditional tactics under the open ballot. Dyster, "Captain Bob," 106 *et passim*; S. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 133-4.
68. *Evening Telegram*, 16 Aug. 1877.
69. *Evening Telegram* and *Globe*, 21 Aug. 1877.
70. Meeting account reproduced in LVA, *Yeas and Nays* xviii; vote count derived from the list of voters in *ibid*.
71. *Mail*, 21 Aug. 1877.
72. Members of the Anti-Dunkin committees are listed in LVA, *Yeas and Nays*, v.
73. LVA, *Yeas and Nays*, v.
74. Rine led a working-class temperance crusade, aimed at saving toppers through religiously-motivated total abstinence. A.J. Birrell, "D.I.K. Rine and the Gospel Temperance Movement in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 58, 1977. Rine was very active in Toronto in the summer of 1877, but he does not seem to have played a major role in the *Dunkin Act* campaign, thanks to a classic contradiction: though he favoured the sentiment and motive behind the measure, he was not thoroughly convinced that it was the appropriate way to stop people from drinking. He therefore came out in support, but was not especially prominent.
75. *Mail*, 3 Aug. 1877.
76. *Mail*, 4 Aug. 1877.
77. The modified version of Katz's classification (Katz, *People of Hamilton*) used in this discussion and in Table 2 is an imperfect measure of class, since drawing boundaries is bound to be an arbitrary act to some extent. This should lead to extreme caution in interpreting "class" as revealed by such a classification. Nevertheless, this system's use here permits comparison with the male population as a whole, since Sanford used the same measure in "Origins of Residential Differentiation." I have compressed the six categories used by both Katz and Sanford into three, as follows: 1) I have removed the "unclassified" category, which was the catch-all used by both authors to include women's occupations, since women were not eligible to vote; 2) I have combined the "semi-skilled" and "unskilled" categories; and 3) I have combined the "high" and "middle" groups.
- An admittedly crude class breakdown of the franchise can then be inferred. Of Toronto's approximately 75,000 people in 1877, roughly 20,000 were men over 21. Of these, about 4,500 would have fallen into the semi- or unskilled category, 8,500 into the skilled group, and 7,000 into the high-middle group, assuming a distribution similar to Sanford's calculations for 1881. Meanwhile, the *Mail* (August 6) claimed that there were about 15,000 eligible voters in 1877 (see also my estimate in note a, Table 1). Assuming, then, that all of those in the high-middle category had the franchise, the turnout for this group was only about 36% (2,500 votes polled out of a possible 7,000); on the other hand, for the skilled and semi- or unskilled categories together, turnout was about 47% if the "unknown" category is not included, 56% if "unknown" is assumed to be composed mostly of working-class people. (That is, between 3,740 and 4,500 working-class votes were polled out of a possible 8,000.)
78. Unfortunately, even the macro-scale evidence must suffer from a major lacuna: data on class structure by ward are not available.
79. On tavern locations see Might & Taylor's Toronto Directory, various years; on the Esplanade and York and Terauley streets, see *Night Hawks of a Great City* (Toronto, 1885), a compendium of articles from the *Toronto World* on the city's night life, ranging from the activities of bakers to the dissipations of the less respectable classes. University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library.
80. See Sendbuehler, "Making Toronto the Good," 80-2.
81. LVA, *Yeas and Nays*, xxi.
82. *Globe*, 24 and 25 Aug. 1877.
83. A Globe Reporter, *Christmas Eve on Stanley Street* (Napanee, 1868), CIHM microfiche.
84. *Mowat and Good Government*.
85. Certainly the existence of some of these precursors to modern planning have been mentioned by most historians of planning, but the role of the state in urban development before the passage of Planning Acts has generally been downplayed. For example, see Peter W. Moore, "Zoning and Planning: the Toronto Experience, 1904-1970," in *The Usable Urban Past*, ed. A.F.J. Artibise and G.A. Stelter (Ottawa, 1979).
86. This complaint refers to a waning trend, represented by such influential works as E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 2nd. ed. 1980), Kealey, *Toronto Workers*, and Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal and Kingston, 1980). In the interim, there has been a growing trend to a consideration of the importance of urban form and spatial aspects of social life to class formation and social conflict, but there is still a shortage of works that integrate effectively the insights of labour and working-class history and social geography. For important steps in that direction, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What we Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, 1983) and Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, 1990). Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge, 1989), though not about working-class culture, is perhaps the most fully elaborated integration of urban social geography and cultural history to date.