

The decline of the artisans on Toronto City Council during the nineteenth century: 1834-1901

Richard DuWors

Volume 98, numéro 2, fall 2006

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065827ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065827ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

DuWors, R. (2006). The decline of the artisans on Toronto City Council during the nineteenth century: 1834-1901. *Ontario History*, 98(2), 226-244. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065827ar>

Résumé de l'article

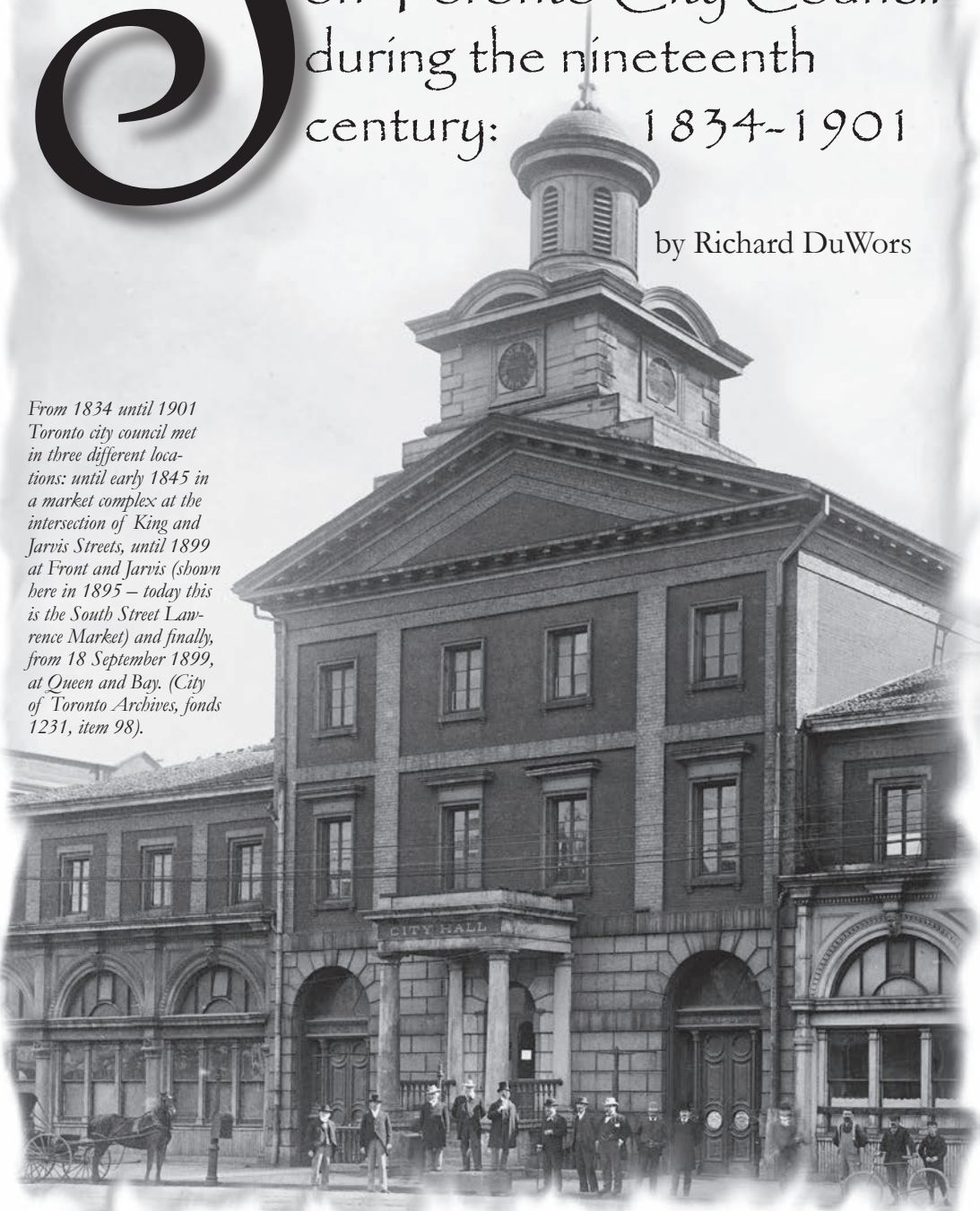
Un bouleversement fondamental marqua les milieux de travail de l'Ontario du centre-sud vers la moitié du dix-neuvième siècle. Des artisans furent obligés de quitter leurs petits ateliers pour aller s'aliéner dans des usines, perdant le contrôle de leurs moyens de production. L'intention de cet article est de montrer une diminution de la participation des artisans auprès du conseil municipal de Toronto à la même époque. Les figures sont présentées dans le cadre de Toronto et de villes semblables afin de tenter d'expliquer ce déclin dans la participation des artisans. La « dépossession » des artisans au service de la production est un exemple retenu par beaucoup d'historiens comme s'appliquant fréquemment. Ceci se traduit souvent par le terme de « prolétarisation ». Nous y ajoutons une autre conséquence d'importance : la dépossession politique.

T

he decline of the artisans on Toronto City Council during the nineteenth century: 1834-1901

by Richard DuWors

From 1834 until 1901 Toronto city council met in three different locations: until early 1845 in a market complex at the intersection of King and Jarvis Streets, until 1899 at Front and Jarvis (shown here in 1895 – today this is the South Street Lawrence Market) and finally, from 18 September 1899, at Queen and Bay. (City of Toronto Archives, fonds 1231, item 98).



INTRODUCTION

Why did the number of artisans on Toronto's city council decline at the mid-nineteenth century? Why, indeed, had they been on council in the first place? They were working class after all. Most importantly, why were they no longer participating at all after the 1860s; had economic changes undermined their workplace culture and led to their political exclusion?

Toronto's artisans were living through an economic upheaval in the nineteenth century, an upheaval not uncommon around the world ever since: industrialization. According to prominent theorists such as H. Clare Pentland, south-central Ontario, one of the country's leading economic regions at the time, had many of the characteristics of an industrial society: steam power, railroads, the large-factory system, the

development of class conflict, and the first labour movement – including the Nine-Hour Movement, Knights of Labor, and the activity of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada.¹ It also saw

Abstract

In the mid-nineteenth century a major upheaval occurred in the work places of south-central Ontario. Craftsmen (artisans) were forced out of their small workshops into alienating factories, and lost control of their means of production. The contribution of this paper is to show a fall-off of participation by artisans on Toronto City Council at the same time. Data are presented from Toronto and similar cities to help explain the decline in participation by artisans. A model thought to apply widely by many historians is the "dispossession" of artisans from the means of production. This is often referred to as proletarianization. We add another important consequence: political dispossession.

Résumé: *Un bouleversement fondamental marqua les milieux de travail de l'Ontario du centre-sud vers la moitié du dix-neuvième siècle. Des artisans furent obligés de quitter leurs petits ateliers pour aller s'aliéner dans des usines, perdant le contrôle de leurs moyens de production. L'intention de cet article est de montrer une diminution de la participation des artisans auprès du conseil municipal de Toronto à la même époque. Les figures sont présentées dans le cadre de Toronto et de villes semblables afin de tenter d'expliquer ce déclin dans la participation des artisans. La « dépossession » des artisans au service de la production est un exemple retenu par beaucoup d'historiens comme s'appliquant fréquemment. Ceci se traduit souvent par le terme de « prolétarianisation ». Nous y ajoutons une autre conséquence d'importance : la dépossession politique.*

¹ Gregory S. Kealey, "Pentland and Working Class History," in *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 32-47. Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow, *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario: Structural Patterns and Cultural Communities in the 1871 Census* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism: 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979). Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," in Laura Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds., *Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc, 2000), 81-109. Michael B. Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982). Gregory S. Kealey, and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1987). Gregory S. Kealey, "The Honest Workingman and Worker's Control:

the first workingmen's political candidates such as Daniel John O'Donoghue (see sidebar) who was known as the "father of the Canadian labour movement."² These technological and economic changes transformed the existing class system that, in turn, as we shall demonstrate, impacted the social composition of Toronto city council. The large-scale processes of industrialization are well documented in an impressive literature, but they are rarely as easily visible in the history of municipal politics as they are in the case of Toronto.³

At the same time, these changes were creating proletarianization among craftsmen. Instead of working in traditional small shops with a clear path of upward mobility, they were now employed in large, alienating factories. Proletarianization has many meanings but the key to understanding it is *dispossession*, "as Marx portrayed the forcible wresting of control over the means of production from artisans..."⁴ Gordon Marshall identifies several different empirical types of proletarianization of which two are relevant to this research:

growth in the relative proportion of working-class places in the class structure; and chances of downward mobility into the working class.⁵ The latter is also close to the prediction made by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* that in time the *petite bourgeoisie*, including artisans and masters, would fall into the working class, and that two major classes would subsequently polarize.

One form of proletarianization in Hamilton, reported by Katz, Doucet, and Stern,⁶ was a relative increase of skilled workers or journeymen compared to master craftsmen. Between 1861 and 1871 journeymen increased from twenty-seven per cent to thirty-seven per cent of the labour force, while the proportion of master craftsmen stayed constant at five per cent, a change that could be viewed as incipient proletarianization. Downward social mobility was also a highly likely feature. The artisan group that Michael Katz found on Hamilton's city council was very affluent.⁷ Their eventual disappearance could have been due to downward mobility. Put otherwise, downward mobility may have been

The Experience of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892," in **Laura Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth**, eds., *Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press Inc., 2000), 112-42.

² "Daniel John O'Donoghue," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography On-Line*, edited by Ramsay Cook. (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada), <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/index.htm>> (accessed on 27 April 2006); Gregory S. Kealey, "O'Donoghue, Daniel John," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Historica Foundation of Canada, 2006), 1559; Kealey, "The Honest Workingman."

³ Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, Mass.: Second Beacon Paperback, 2001).

⁴ Charles Tilly, *Road from Past to Future* (Landham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

⁵ Gordon Marshall, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Katz, Doucet and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*.

⁷ Michael B. Katz, "The People of a Canadian City, 1851-52," *Canadian Historical Review* 53:4 (1972), 402-426.

Daniel John O'Donoghue

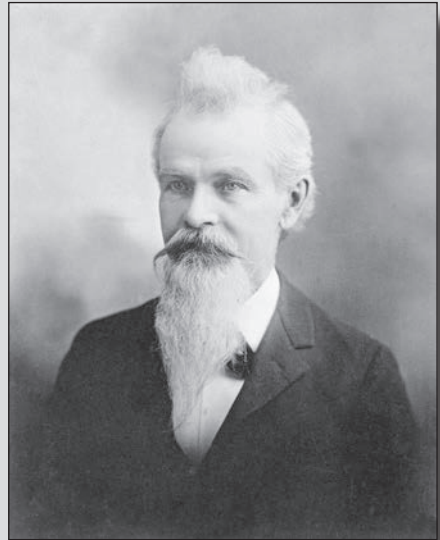
Consider the work and political career of another Toronto artisan, Daniel John O'Donoghue, known as “the father of the Canadian labor movement.”*

O'Donoghue immigrated to Canada with his family. At age 13 the death of his father led to his apprenticeship to a printer in 1857 and, in the 1860s, he became a journeyman printer. He was active as an important labour/political leader in Ottawa (the nine-hour day strike), in Ontario (the first labour member of a Canadian provincial legislature), and federally, (lobbying Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald to pass legislation legalizing trade unions).

O'Donoghue settled in Toronto in 1880. He took a place as a compositor, and as a member of Toronto Typographical Union, Local 91, which provided leadership out of proportion to its numbers.† For the next nineteen years O'Donoghue used his position as chair of the legislative committee of the Toronto Trades and Labor Council to promote his policies. As well, he was active after 1882 in the Knights of Labor, especially Excelsior Local Assembly 2305 from which he and other experienced labour leaders plotted the strategies of the next decade.

O'Donoghue's major contribution to Toronto's local politics occurred in 1886 when his labour and social-reform alliance successfully supported the election of Mayor William Holmes Howland, who campaigned on a platform to reform the social and moral of life of Toronto's working class. O'Donoghue was rewarded with a position in the Ontario Bureau of Industries, a provincial statistical agency formed in 1882, and became Canada's first fair wage officer in 1900.

O'Donoghue had many children: one son, John, was to become Canada's first prominent labour lawyer. Daniel died in 1907.



*Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online <www.biographi.ca/EN> entry for Daniel John O'Donoghue. G.S. Kealey, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, (2006 Historica Foundation of Canada).

† Gregory S. Kealey, “The Honest Workingman and Workers Control: The Experience Of Toronto Skilled Workers, 1860-1892” in *Canadian Working Class History* edited by Laurel Sefton MacDowell and Ian Radforth, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1992), 112-42.

structurally unavoidable as the number of places open to masters, relative to journeymen, withered away.

Between 1851 and 1861, twenty-seven per cent of master artisans, and in the next decade, forty-three per cent of master artisans, moved into the ranks of skilled wage workers in Hamilton.⁸

These artisans overlapped the upper levels of the newly emerging working class. There is every reason to believe that this large group of artisans fell erratically into the class of wage labourers, and, for this reason were unable to participate on the city councils of the new industrial cities.⁹

⁸ Katz, Doucet and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*.

⁹ Gordon Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth-Century, Central Ontario: A Reassessment of the Crisis

1. HISTORIOGRAPHY

Labour historians such as Gregory Kealey, H. Clare Pentland, who wrote about strikes on the early canals and railroads, and Bryan Palmer, who conducted a community study of Hamilton in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, have traced the development of the Canadian working class from the 1840s to the 1890s.¹⁰ They have tracked the development of industrialization and the appearance of militant unions and strikes in Toronto and elsewhere. Quantitative researchers – urban (Katz), rural (David Gagan), and regional (Gordon D. Darroch and Lee S. Soltow) – referred to here simply as “social” historians, have tested some of the crucial theoretical assumptions of the labour historians.¹¹

The labour historians have empha-

sized the difficult aspects of the life of the new working class such as degradation, fragmentation, intensification of labour, deskilling, labour discipline, mechanization, and loss of control. Palmer, for example, claimed that during an economic downturn, the first to feel the pinch were the small independent craftsmen; many independent masters fell into the ranks of the wage-earning class at such times.¹² This dispossession model is still widely consistent with research findings, even by Canadian researchers examining nineteenth-century data from as far away as Germany.¹³ On the other hand, Robert Kristofferson found strong craft influences in Hamilton as late as 1870.¹⁴

In locating this paper in the body of Canadian historical research, it speaks to what Kealey identifies as a shortcoming of his community study of the Toron-

and Demise of Small Producers During Early Industrialization, 1861-1871,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 13:1-2 (1988), 49-71. Darroch found over the decade 1861-1871 that the proportion of artisans did not shrink and, more importantly, the labouring group – instead of growing – shrank. However, he was describing the occupational structure for all of Central Ontario, and all artisans in one group, rather than proprietors, employees, etc. Darroch states that independent producers would have been much more common in small towns and villages than in large cities, and that acquiring property or a home was easier outside the cities. Needless to say, there was a much larger rural population than urban population in the 1860s in Central Ontario.

¹⁰ Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*. H. Clare Pentland, “The development of the capitalist-labour market in Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 25 (1959), 450-61; H. Clare Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1981). Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*.

¹¹ Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975). David Gagan, *Hopeful Travelers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). Darroch and Saltow, *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario*.

¹² Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*.

¹³ Michael John Neufeld, “From Artisans to Workers: The Transformation of the Skilled Metalworkers of Nuremberg, 1835-1905” (Ph.D. diss., John Hopkins University, 1984).

¹⁴ Robert Kristofferson, “Craft Capitalism, Craftworkers, Industrialization, and Class Formation in Hamilton, Ontario 1840-1872” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2003).

to working class: the imperfect linkage between the economic situation of the working class between 1867 and 1892, and the politics of that period.¹⁵ The present paper is unique in that it draws linkages between economic change, class formation, and political institutions. Proletarianization – as reflected by the decline of artisan representation on council – had a major effect on Toronto’s city council. On a more positive note, the new working-class trade unions were able to elect the reform mayor, William Howland, before the turn of the century.

Social historians have questioned the assumptions made by labour historians about the origin of wage labour in Ontario in the key 1860s. According to the “proletarianization thesis,” the 1860s and 1870s was the turning point when the rural population was forced off the land.¹⁶ This, along with a deluge of rural immigrants, many of them oppressed Irish, was thought to be the source of the sudden emergence of the new industrial working class. However, Darroch and Ornstein,

in what is known as the “egalitarian interpretation,” found that family farming was still predominant in 1861 with neither a class of landless labourers nor a substantial landed elite in evidence.¹⁷ Even the Irish were mainly farmers, not locked into labouring jobs.¹⁸ Ownership of real property (e.g., home ownership) was widespread.¹⁹ Darroch and Soltow argued that the economy of urban workers was based not only on their workplace but upon such non-wage economies as gardening and boarding.²⁰ Furthermore, this was not a rootless urban proletariat pushed about by an unpredictable labour market.

On the other hand, Palmer in Hamilton, and Kealey in Toronto have established that, as early as the 1860s and 1870s, capitalism had created an industrial revolution in many workplaces. This, in turn, led to class protest, and resistance based on shared labour experience. Katz, Doucet, and Stern stated industrialization promoted the militancy of the labour movement, especially in the 1870s.²¹ Local unionism thrived in as many as eighty societies in Ontario.²²

¹⁵ Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*.

¹⁶ Pentland, “The development of the capitalist-labour market in Canada;” Pentland, *Labour and Capital in Canada 1650-1860*; Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth Century, Central Ontario”; Gagan, *Hopeful Travelers*.

¹⁷ Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein, “Ethnicity and Occupational Structure in Canada in 1871: The Vertical Mosaic in Historical Perspective,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 61 (September 1980), 305-337.

¹⁸ Gordon Darroch and Michael Ornstein, “Ethnicity and Class, Transitions over a Decade: Ontario, 1861-1871,” *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* (1984), 111-37.

¹⁹ Darroch and Soltow, *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*. Katz, Doucet and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*.

²² Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience* (Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworth and Company (Canada) Ltd, 1983).

On the other hand, for the unions whose numbers are known, none had as many as 100 members by 1867.²³

There is a contradiction between the prosperity and security documented for Ontario artisans on the one hand, and the working-class protests and the founding of militant trade unions during the 1860s and 1870s on the other. Perhaps a comment by Tilly, to the effect that classes may rebel, not once they have lost everything, but when they are threatened with the loss of land, craft, tools, and other means of production is apropos.²⁴ Certainly the changes in the labour process documented by Palmer, Kealey, and others were at least a “threat.” One or the other of these two hypotheses – proletarianization or egalitarian – should prove more relevant to the fate of the artisans on Toronto’s city council in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁵ However, there is yet another possibility, namely that the economic situation of the artisans – whatever it may have been – was paired with their exclusion from the political process due to the aggressive political advance of business interests.²⁶ We found considerable evidence of this business thrust,

Data from Toronto may help us rep-

licate and better explain an observation by Michael Frisch.²⁷ He reported that in the 1850s, prior to the Civil War boom in the US, one-third of the executive body of the city council in Springfield, Massachusetts, was composed of “artisans” and “workingmen.” Furthermore, he reported that by the end of the 1870s, this group had been virtually excluded from city council. A new business class had forced them off council both from self-interest, which is suggested by evidence, and a duty to meet urban needs, which is not. This article tracks a similar rising business class in Toronto over the mid-century. Using data to assess Toronto’s new urban needs, such as per capita expenditures and population change in Toronto and Springfield, we can assess whether Frisch’s hypothesis may help explain the sharp decline of the artisans’ numbers on Toronto’s city council.

The Artisan

One necessary step to conduct this research was to clarify the meaning of the complex term: “artisan”. This is, in Marxist theory, a transitional group who labours on the one hand but owns some means of production on the other. Frisch²⁸ uses the terms “artisan” and

²³ Stephen Langdon, “The Emergence of the Canadian Working Class Movement,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 8:2,3 (1973), 3-15, 3-26.

²⁴ Charles Tilly, *Sociology Meets History* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

²⁵ Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*; Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*.

²⁶ Michael H. Frisch, “The Community Elite and the Emergence of Urban Politics: Springfield, Massachusetts, 1840-1880,” in *Nineteenth-Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History*, edited by Steven Thernstrom and Richard Sennett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 277-96.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Frisch, “The Community Elite and the Emergence of Urban Politics.”

“workingman” interchangeably, which is unfortunate. Artisans are a complex group, hard to differentiate from remaining records into their basic levels of master (proprietor), journeyman (employee), and apprentice. Katz, Doucet, and Stern found that five per cent of the Hamilton labour force in 1861 were master craftsmen in trades, while the skilled workers in these trades made up twenty-seven per cent of the labour force.²⁹ Smith found that master craftsmen had greater property and tax assessments in the nineteenth century than workers in the same trade.³⁰ We found up to thirty per cent of Toronto’s city council to be artisans in the 1860s using a framework developed by a group of historians.³¹

According to Katz, an artisan, unlike the skilled worker of today, usually worked alone in a small workshop, or perhaps with a few journeymen.³² Artisans differed from other manual workers in that they worked steadily, were more affluent, and worked in a relative-

ly nonhierarchical setting, but they were threatened technologically by innovations such as machinery which replaced their skills. For these reasons, we expected that, unlike Frisch who was not clear on this issue, that we would find many artisans and few or no labourers on Toronto’s city council in the nineteenth century.³³ This was correct. In his study of Hamilton, Katz found an artisan group on city council, but he also states that eighty-three per cent of these men were in the wealthiest twenty per cent of the city in terms of assessed property.³⁴ Based on Katz’s findings, we predicted that the Toronto council artisans would demonstrate an affluence that exceeded that of most artisans if not most of the population. This, too, was correct, and consistent with contemporary research that found few poor people elected to local government.³⁵

Linking Katz’s findings to those of Frisch, this paper proposes the following: 1) artisans participated at an earlier

²⁹ Katz, Doucet and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*.

³⁰ Thomas Smith, “Reconstructing Occupational Structures: The Case of the Ambiguous Artisans,” *Historical Methods Newsletter* 8 (1975), 134-46.

³¹ Theodore Hershberg, Michael Katz, Stuart Blumin, Laurence Glasco, and Clyde Griffen, “Occupation and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth-Century Cities: A Collaborative Inquiry,” *Historical Methods Newsletter* 7 (June 1974), 174-217.

³² Michael B. Katz, “Social Structure in Hamilton, Ontario,” in *Nineteenth-Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History*, edited by Steven Thernstrom and Richard Sennett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 209-244.

³³ Frisch, “The Community Elite and the Emergence of Urban Politics.”

³⁴ Katz, “The People of a Canadian City, 1851-52.”

³⁵ Suzanne Keller, *Beyond the Ruling Class* (New York: Random House, 1963). Also see Donald R. Matthews, *The Social Background of Political Decision-makers* (New York: Random House, 1967); Lester W. Milbrath, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics* (Washington, D.C.: U.P. of America, 1977); Herbert B. Asher, Bradley M. Richardson, and Herbert F. Weisberg, *Political Participation: An ISSC Workbook in Comparative Analysis* (Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag, 1984); and George A. Kourvetaris, *Political Sociology: Structure and Process* (Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).

period because some of them constituted a very affluent sub-group, and; 2) they ceased to participate when structural changes (the Civil War and post-war booms, and the attendant onset of industrial capitalism) led to their sudden decline. Generalizing from Frisch's data, it was successfully predicted that the artisans would disappear in large part from Toronto's city council at mid-century, specifically at the time of industrialization in south-central Ontario. Following Frisch, the decline of the artisans was mapped against the rise of business representatives, and the result showed that as the artisans disappeared, the business group replaced them.

Toronto and Hamilton were largely comparable until about 1870 when Hamilton pursued an explicit industrial strategy.³⁶ There can be little doubt that artisans were replaced by wage labourers as the predominant form of manual workers in both cities. However, although the blue collar/white collar divide seems obvious today, it did not have the same meaning for artisans in the nineteenth century. Artisans were very diverse in their wealth and their roles at work. They could be masters (employers) or journeymen (employees). Many were propri-

etors, although most (fifty-two per cent) on a list of artisan shops, stores, offices, and manufacturers in the 1851 census for Hamilton, listed no employees.³⁷ A man may have been an affluent businessman despite having an artisan job title such as tinsmith, druggist, grocer, auctioneer, hardware merchant, printer, carpenter, etc. Altogether the artisans were a middling group pushed about from above and below. And it must be remembered that Darroch concluded that most artisans were petty producers based on their widespread ownership of real property.³⁸

Artisans did not traditionally work in factories but, in time, the factory replaced the artisanal workshop. Therefore we were interested in the development of the factory system and the resultant change in the labour process, i.e., in the work itself, in the relationships at work, and in the class system. It is also possible to exaggerate the changes associated with industrialization.³⁹ The earlier periods may be romanticized as more stable and socially integrated than, in fact, they were. For example, a large body of research has shown high rates of social mobility and geographic mobility in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁰

³⁶ Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West*; Katz, Doucet and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*.

³⁷ Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West*.

³⁸ Darroch, "Class in Nineteenth-Century, Central Ontario."

³⁹ Alfred A. Hunter, *Class Tells: On Social Inequality in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1981).

⁴⁰ Darroch and Ornstein, "Ethnicity and Class, Transitions over a Decade: Ontario, 1861-1871." Katz, Doucet and Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism*. Darroch, "Class in Nineteenth-Century, Central Ontario." Peter R. Knights, "Population Turnover, Persistence, and Residential Mobility in Boston, 1830-1860," in *Nineteenth-Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History* edited by Steven Thernstrom and Richard Sennett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).



Toronto from the top of the Rossin House Hotel, looking west along King Street West in 1856. Note the Pianoforte "Manufactory" and Coach "Manufactory." The language is significant as historically "manufacture" preceded mechanized factories by several decades (Marx, 1887; Blumin, 1976). It was a transitional form in which large numbers of craftsmen were organized to work together in sequence or to do the same kind of work (making needles, etc.). According to Blumin, a large number of workers appeared before the advent of factories. In some ways, they were craftsmen, but in a state of degradation. (City of Toronto Archives. fonds 1498, item 13).

There can be little doubt that by the 1880s much work formerly conducted in small workshops was undertaken in factories. The important change was an increase in the size of the workplace. In 1870, thirty-eight per cent of Toronto's industrial work force was employed in factories of over a hundred workers. Another twenty-one per cent worked with between fifty and ninety-nine other employees, and eleven per cent worked in shops with between thirty and forty-nine other employees.⁴¹ In

spite of the population increase of the city in the most recent twenty years, a corresponding increase of the number of masters (each employing a handful of journeymen in 1851) was impossible in a world where the size of the typical workplace might have expanded by dozens of employees. The need for masters must have decreased accordingly. Many of those master proprietors must have gone under and/or become employees, albeit skilled employees such as foremen, in the new industrial factories.

⁴¹ Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*.

Some may have become employees of other master/proprietors in traditional but larger shops, such as manufactories. Something similar may have happened to their sons. The transformation probably removed much of the hitherto affluent and economically autonomous stratum of artisan/proprietors from the civic political arena. One might also speculate that this experience of downward mobility may have prompted the emergence of trade unions in Ontario in this period. Heron reports that the early craft unions of the 1850s to 1870s, which consisted of skilled workers, allowed their members to resist “employers who threatened to disrupt customary patterns of work and wages.”⁴² They also allowed them to control the labour market for their skills, and to pursue respectability, an unsurprising motive, given the experience of downward mobility.

The new industrial system created two basic new classes – capital and labour – which must have existed alongside, or interpenetrated for some time, the older artisan classes. However, in time, the new capitalists and their large factories displaced the artisans, including many of the master/proprietors among them. A growing body of wage labourers emerged and replaced the old groups of apprentices and journeymen, and, ultimately, many master/proprie-

tors.

It is concluded here that there was a decline in the number of artisans on Toronto’s city council because the most affluent stratum of master/artisans lost their economic base, but our data cannot show just what happened to the group who had been on council. Some, such as Mayor Medcalf, who started as a blacksmith and became the owner of a foundry (see sidebar), may have risen into the capitalist class; others, such as Daniel John O’Donoghue, who was originally a printer’s apprentice (see sidebar), became labour activists.⁴³ Many just disappeared from politics because they were unable to compete politically with the wealthy and powerful newly rising business classes for whom they now worked. Our data will show that ultimately industrialization led to the artisans’ permanent departure from municipal politics. And it was the key decade for industrialization in south-central Ontario – the 1860s – that saw their sharpest drop in numbers. This paper cannot show the exact mechanisms linking industrialization and the decline of the city council artisans in the two cities (Springfield and Toronto), but the facts point to more than a coincidence. Theory suggests proletarianization, or a more deliberate class conflict undertaken by the rising business groups was the culprit.

⁴² Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1996), 9.

⁴³ “Francis Henry Medcalf,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography On-Line*, edited by Ramsay Cook. (Ottawa: Library and Archives Canada), <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/index.htm>> (accessed on 27 April 2006); “Daniel John O’Donoghue,” *Ibid.*



Francis Henry Medcalf

Consider the work and political career of Francis Henry Medcalf, millwright, ironfounder, and alderman and mayor on Toronto's city council:

Medcalf was born in Ireland, emigrated to Upper Canada in 1819, worked as a blacksmith and millwright in Philadelphia from 1823 to 1838, then returned to Toronto. By 1843 he had a business as a millwright and machinist, and four years later opened the Don Foundry specializing in agricultural implements, steam engines, and other machinery.

From a base as a staunch Orangemen, he was an alderman on Toronto's council for much of the 1860s, and was mayor in three of those years. He retained his artisan background and presented himself as "a simple mechanic risen by hard toil...honest and bluff, with no pretence to skill

in argument or finesse in finance."* From 1867 to 1873, the city council chose the mayor, and he was rejected, but when the system of popular election was brought back he was once again elected mayor for two terms in the 1870s.

Medcalf's four sons were trained in their father's trade. The third son entered into a partnership with his father and took over the foundry after the father's death in 1880.

"A favourite with the ambitious and the common man alike, Medcalf was nicknamed 'Old Square-toes' pointing up his utilitarian boots, and he gloried in the name as a mark of his incorruptible ordinariness."†

*Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online <www.biographi.ca/EN>, entry for Francis Henry Medcalf.

†Ibid.

2. METHODS

This research began with a complete list of members of Toronto's city council from 1834 (the date of incorporation) to 1901, as assembled by Middleton.⁴⁴ Occupations were determined by using the city directories which are available for forty-five of sixty-eight years. The assessed values of real property and other variables were found in the assessment rolls, manually linked by year, address and name from the city directories.

Occupational data were found for 1,133 terms of office in the forty-five years.⁴⁵ Because many members of council were re-elected at least once, there were 460 unique individuals. Occupations could not be traced for about ten per cent of the terms. The years in which the city directories – and therefore occupation – were entirely missing were concentrated in the decades before 1870 in which artisan representation on city council was greatest. Occupational

⁴⁴ Jesse Edgar Middleton, *The Municipality of Toronto: A History* (Toronto: Dominion, 1923).

⁴⁵ During the forty-five non-missing years, counting each councilor for all the years in which he held office, yielded a potential total of 1,835 person/years. Actual occupational data were found for 1,133 person/years, while they were missing for 702 person/years.

Table 1: Proportions of major occupational strata on Toronto city council: 1834-1901 (% by decade)

Years:	1834- 46	1847- 56	1857- 66	1867- 76	1877- 86	1887- 96	1897- 1901	Total
Strata: Professional and High White Collar %	34.3	22.5	23.9	39.8	34.5	32.5	30.8	372
Proprietors and Low White Collar %	42.9	50.0	44.9	48.5	57.5	60.7	56.1	611
Artisan %	22.9	25.0	30.4	11.7	8.0	6.8	13.1	148
Unskilled %	0.0	2.5	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2
*Total %	100.1	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Total Number Missing = 702 of 1,835	70	40	138	196	287	295	107	1133

*May not equal 100% due to rounding

Source: Toronto city directories

(class) data are reported in this paper as percentages of non-missing totals for each decade. The mean rate of successful linkage over all years for which there were any data was ninety-one per cent for the city directories (linked to Middleton's list) and eighty per cent for the assessment rolls (linked to the city directories).

A system of occupational stratification was used to aggregate classes.⁴⁶ This classification system is a composite measure of occupational prestige that separates skilled from unskilled work and white collar from blue collar work. Artisans rank higher than unskilled labourers, but below white-collar clerks and proprietors. The limitations of this framework will become evident,

in that proprietors are combined with (low white collar) employees and, as we shall see, many artisans appear to have been proprietors.

3. RESULTS

The Proportion of Artisans and Other Major Strata on Toronto City Council in the Nineteenth Century

Table 1 shows the changing proportions of artisans, and other major strata, on Toronto City Council from 1834 to 1901 with the years collapsed into decades. Four classes are represented: professional and high white collar, proprietors and low white collar, arti-

⁴⁶ Hershberg, Katz, Blumin, Glasco, and Griffen, "Occupation and Ethnicity in Five Nineteenth-Century Cities."

sans, and unskilled.

As expected, there were numerous manual workers on city council in the early nineteenth century and, as the theory predicts, they were almost entirely artisans, rather than labourers. They were there in significant proportions (up to thirty per cent) in the decade prior to 1866, approximately the middle of early industrialization in Ontario and the Civil War boom in the United States. But they did not account at any time for more than thirteen per cent of council membership after 1867. The trend never reversed itself in a sustained manner; the process was quick and, for the most part, final. It also appears to have occurred in Toronto at the same time as in Springfield, and possibly, in Hamilton.

These data confirm our hypothesis of a large, but waning, artisan presence on Toronto City Council in the nineteenth century. As predicted from the work of the labour and urban historians, the sudden decrease in the artisan presence on Toronto City Council occurred in the mid-1860s at the time of rapid industrialization.

Frisch's⁴⁷ claim that the rising business class forced out the traditional artisans is supported in Table 1. Between the periods 1857-66 and 1887-96, the proportion of proprietors and low white collar, climbed substantially from almost forty-five per cent to over sixty per cent during the period of artisan decline. With the occupational classification scheme, it is not possible to disag-

gregate the "proprietors" from the total "proprietors and low white collar" stratum but it is a reasonable assumption that most of this increase came from proprietors and not clerical employees, given twentieth-century patterns. It is possible that some of the artisans, who were proprietors in the earlier system, later went on to become "real" proprietors or business people.

Identifying the Economic Characteristics of the Artisans on Toronto City Council.

In his study of Hamilton, Katz also found an artisan group on Hamilton's city council, most of whom were in the wealthiest fifth of the city in terms of assessed property.⁴⁸ These men were almost certainly master craftsmen employing others. In Table 2, the distribution of the assessed wealth of the artisans on Toronto's city council at the mid-nineteenth century (1857-66) is compared to the entire Hamilton population in 1861 (data on assessed wealth were *not* available for all householders in Toronto). This comparison makes sense if the distribution of wealth was the same for the two cities, which is a reasonable assumption given their similar city councils, as well as their respective lack of specialization in industry or commerce, which was to last until 1870. Artisans on Toronto's council were concentrated in the top four tenths of

⁴⁷ Frisch, "The Community Elite and the Emergence of Urban Politics."

⁴⁸ Katz, "The People of a Canadian City, 1851-52."

Table 2: Percentage of artisans on Toronto city council in 1857-66 who fell in deciles of the assessed wealth of the Hamilton population in 1861

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1st (Lowest Tenth)	0	0.0%
2nd	0	0.0%
3rd	0	0.0%
4th	2	6.5%
5th	2	6.5%
6th	1	3.2%
7th	10	32.2%
8th	6	19.4%
9th	6	19.4%
10th (Highest Tenth)	4	12.9%
Total	31	100.1%

* Does not add to 100.0% due to rounding.

Source: Toronto city directories, Toronto assessment rolls, Katz's data on Hamilton.

the Hamilton assessed population. If they had all fallen above the unskilled and below the two highest strata they would be concentrated in the fourth to seventh deciles on the basis of their proportion of the population (about forty per cent). These artisans were more affluent than the mass of artisans at that time, indicating they were probably master craftsmen.

The proportion of artisans who were listed in the business section of Toronto's city directory also provides evidence that many of these artisans were master craftsmen employing oth-

ers, and probably independent proprietors themselves, a point made by several other researchers who have also labeled artisans found in business directories as masters.⁴⁹ Nearly three quarters (seventy-one per cent) of the seventy artisans checked in this study were listed in the business section of the city directory. However, this information was not gathered entirely systematically for all artisans, so it must be viewed with caution.

Artisans' home ownership is shown in Table 3. On average about three-quarters of the artisans on Toronto City Council owned their own home during most of the nineteenth century compared to about twenty per cent of urban labouring families in Toronto in

Table 3: Home ownership: Toronto city council artisans 1843-1901

<i>Years</i>	<i>Artisans (%) owning</i>	<i>Number</i>
1843-46	28.6%	7
1847-56	80.0%	5
1857-66	71.0%	31
1867-76	75.0%	20
1877-86	73.9%	23
1887-96	80.0%	20
1897-1901	54.5%	11

Source: Toronto assessment rolls

the 1860-70 period.⁵⁰ This is also indirect evidence that the city council arti-

⁴⁹ Stuart M. Blumin, "Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century American City: Philadelphia, 1820-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of Philadelphia, 1968). Also see Stephen Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973). Smith, "Reconstructing Occupational Structures."

⁵⁰ Gordon Darroch, "Early industrialization and inequality in Toronto, 1861-1891," *Labour / Le Travail* 11 (1983), 31-61.

Table 4: Toronto city council members with the same address as in the previous year

Year	Same Address (%)	Different Address (%)	Total (%)	Total Number
1857-66	88.9	11.1	100%	18
1867-76	87.8	12.2	100%	90
1877-86	92.7	7.3	100%	164
1887-96	83.4	16.6	100%	199
1897-1901	100	0	100%	81

Source: Toronto city directories, Toronto assessment rolls

sans were affluent masters rather than workers in the modern sense.

Although this research project did not separate artisans from others in its measurement of residential stability, the findings for the entire council are so strong they may apply to such a relatively large group as the artisans with little qualification. Knights has found that about one household in three moved annually in nineteenth-century Boston.⁵¹ In contrast, Table 4 shows that, on average, Toronto City Council members moved about once every ten years between 1857 and 1901. The significance of this stability is that such persistence is closely linked to prosperity.⁵²

Overall, there can be little doubt that the artisans on Toronto City Council in the first half of the nineteenth century were highly skilled workers, and relatively prosperous. Almost certainly they were master craftsmen managing small

workshops and employing journeymen and apprentices within a traditional setting. Many may have been wealthy and by no means “workingmen,” as we usually employ the term. At the same time, the very fact that artisan political representation declined greatly and rapidly, points to the implications of their larger economic decline.

The Consequences of Increased City Populations and Expenditures

Frisch has argued that the political role of artisans declined as a self-interested business community discovered an increased sense of responsibility to manage urban change (caused by a growing population) and the budgetary needs of an enlarged local government.⁵³

The new urban needs, such as street

⁵¹ Knights, “Population Turnover, Persistence, and Residential Mobility in Boston, 1830-1860.”

⁵² Darroch, “Class in Nineteenth-Century, Central Ontario.”

⁵³ Frisch, “The Community Elite and the Emergence of Urban Politics.” Information on the population of Springfield was obtained from Frisch, *Ibid.*, 296, and on the population of Toronto from Peter Goheen, *Victorian Toronto 1850 to 1900: Pattern and Process of Growth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Table 5: Population of Springfield. 1852-1880

Year	Population	% Change
1852	12,000	—
1860	15,000	25.0%
1865	22,000	46.7%
1870	27,000	22.7%
1875	31,000	14.8%
1880	33,000	6.5%

Source: Frisch (1976: p.296)

Table 6: Population of Toronto. 1834-1901

Year	Population	% Change
1834	9,252	—
1848	23,503	154.0%
1851	30,775	30.9%
1861	44,821	45.6%
1871	56,092	25.1%
1880	86,415	54.1%
1890	144,023	66.7%
1901	208,040	44.4%

Source: Based on the *aggregate Census of Canada (1871-Vol. IV) and Goheen (1970), Table 4, Population and Industrial Growth of Toronto, 1860 to 1901.*

and sewer construction, public health, policing, and fire control, might have reflected rapid population growth or perhaps the attainment of a threshold of size that triggered the decline of the artisan representation. (See Tables 5 and Table 6).

The population of Springfield grew by 46.7 per cent during the Civil War boom (1860-65) with a correspondingly large decline in artisan representation in local government.

Toronto was different, with an earlier

increase in population of 45.6 per cent from 1851 to 1861, and a later decrease in artisan representation from thirty per cent to twelve per cent between the periods 1857-66 and 1867-76. Thus changes in population and artisan participation occur at different times in the two cities, which makes comparisons difficult.

If Frisch is correct, a large increase in *per capita* expenditures by the councils of both cities at mid-century might be expected. But Table 7 shows only a relatively slight jump in per capita expenditure in Toronto in the 1860s (17.6 per cent), while the earlier period (1848-61) is characterized by a large change (approximately 240 per cent). While Frisch's limited expenditure data might show a link between *per capita* expenditures (which grew from \$2 in 1850 to over \$25 in 1874) and the displacement of artisans in Springfield, on the whole data do not support his theory that business forced out artisans to meet the new urban needs of enlarged local government. The increase in business representation was motivated by other factors, such as power, or increasing structured inequality in the society.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Before finishing the analysis, one may ask: was the political decline of the artisans actually caused by their declining personal fortunes, or was it due to a more straightforward inability to meet increased property franchise requirements for gaining elected office? It appears it was not simply a case of tougher rules. Although the property

Table 7: City of Toronto budget per capita: 1834–1901

Year	Per Capita Budget	Per Cent Increase
1834	\$3	–
1848	\$5	67.0%
1861	\$17	240.0%
1871	\$20	17.6%
1881	\$23	15.0%
1891	\$69	200.0%
1901	\$38	-44.9%

Source: Toronto City Council Minutes, Toronto city records, Table 6 (population). City budgets were examined from Frisch for Springfield, and for Toronto from appendices attached to city council minutes, as well as a special report in which a Toronto city official recorded all the early budgets prior to 1860

franchise needed to hold office was increased in 1866 at the time of drastic artisan decline on Toronto's city council, there were no resurgences in the numbers of artisans elected when the requirements were relaxed again in 1873 and 1889. Property qualifications were relaxed at precisely the point when the working class was no longer a threat, and it served to create an ideologically useful fiction that anyone could become a councilor when in fact the council had become the property right of a certain class. It may be argued that the masking of political dispossession in such a manner is critical to the functioning of bourgeois democracy.

According to the logic of the proletarianization thesis, economic decline and political displacement of the artisans in Toronto should closely follow industrialization in south-central Ontario. When they were relatively well established economically and socially,

artisans had a substantial presence on council, but when the economy was transformed by early industrial capitalism, they lost most of their places on council. Strictly speaking, however, it does not mean artisans became impoverished. They may simply have been unable to stand up to the business representatives.

The importance of the growth in size of the

workplace cannot be exaggerated. Between 1850 and 1880 the dominant, if not typical, factory replaced the small workshop. Certainly, there were not enough senior places in the new establishments to accommodate the master artisans who had their own shops under the old system. The artisans in a factory are working class, not members of the petite bourgeoisie. And more concretely, factory work is usually deskilling and alienating compared to work in a small shop, especially if the artisan in question owns the shop.

Formerly affluent artisans could no longer compete politically because, as employers, they were no longer autonomous. Their rivals for council seats – men such as managers and representatives of developers – could very well have been their employers. It was industrialization that created the new and powerful economic class that made it their business to drive the artisans from

council.

The fact is that militant labour actions fell hard on the heels of the changes in the occupational composition of city council. The same forces that led to the decline of artisans led to the emergence of the labour movement. In a

likely cause of their disappearance. Men who were masters falling into the skilled working class is, in fact, proletarianization. We also cannot ignore the reality that a new business class was now exercising considerable power.

These findings are significant because they suggest that economic change and class transformation impacted on political institutions through the mechanism of class conflict. The economic dimension of proletarianization, namely dispossession and downward social mobility, was paralleled by political ex-

clusion. The new working class was increasingly shut out of the public political forum of Toronto City Council, and the artisans who had once bridged class divides through their service on council were no longer capable of fulfilling that role.



Toronto's city hall interior showing council in session, 10 July 1899. This was a historic moment, being the last council meeting in the 1844-1899 building. (Toronto Public Library, acc. JRR 773).

sense, one is a form of the other. The data in this article, therefore, are consistent with the proletarianization thesis, as they indicate, at least, increasing inequality. Although we lack data showing actual downward mobility of artisan council members, that is the most
