



**Labour and the politics of alcohol:
The decline of a cause**

An Institute of Alcohol Studies report

**By Dr Peter Catterall
University of Westminster**

September 2014

LABOUR AND THE POLITICS OF ALCOHOL: THE DECLINE OF A CAUSE¹

Dr Peter Catterall, University of Westminster

The index to James Nicholls' recent survey of the history of the drink question in England to the present day contains precisely no references to the Labour Party.² Anxiety to curb the deleterious effects of alcohol is presented therein largely as a Liberal preserve. He is not alone in overlooking the importance of the drink question in the early history of the Labour Party. Even John Greenaway's analysis of the high politics of alcohol since 1830 only briefly discusses Labour's attitude to the subject, and then primarily in terms of intra-party divisions.³

Many Labour historians have also largely written the subject out of the Party's history. There is only brief mention of 'fringe issues like temperance' as an obsession of Edwardian Labour in Andrew Thorpe's magisterial history of the Party.⁴ It does not appear at all in Matthew Worley's recent edited volume on the founding influences shaping Labour, or his standard account of the inter-war Labour Party.⁵ More surprising, given his concern to explore how effectively the Party became the expression of the values of and was able politically to mobilize the British working classes, Martin Pugh's recent synoptic history of Labour similarly treats the drink question as an issue which faded with the onset of the First World War.⁶ Studies of the inter-war party refer to temperance, if they mention it at all, as having become by then a matter of personal morality. Even then, it is largely written out of biographies of leading Labour figures. For instance, Arthur Henderson was not only general secretary of the Labour Party 1911-32, during which period he played a key role in steering the new

¹ I am grateful to Paul Jennings and audiences at presentations in London and Leeds for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² James Nicholls, *The Politics of Alcohol: A history of the drink question in England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

³ John Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics since 1830: A Study in Policy-Making* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp.133-5.

⁴ Andrew Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party* 2nd ed, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.17.

⁵ Matthew Worley, *Labour inside the gate: A history of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008); Matthew Worley (ed), *The Foundations of the British Labour Party: Identities, Cultures and Perspectives 1900-39* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

⁶ Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A new history of the Labour Party* (London: Vintage, 2011).

organization from being a parliamentary ginger group to being a party of government, but also a lifelong and active temperance advocate. This central aspect of his life, however, only receives brief mention twice in Henderson's latest biography.⁷

The attitudes of such Labour leaders to alcohol have been generally assumed to reflect an inheritance from their origins in late Victorian Liberal Party and a political order then concerned more closely with personal morality. The drink question was thus framed by historians as a nineteenth-century and individualistic cause, with little relevance to the more solidaristic politics pursued by Labour. Party histories instead tend to concentrate either on the organizational development to which Henderson was devoted, the crucial relationship with the trade unions which financed Labour, furnished many of its voters and also arguably skewed its policies, or on those policies themselves and the political economy adopted by the Party.

Within such themes drink is indeed seen as a fringe issue. Labour historians have accordingly rarely explored in any detail attitudes towards drink in the Party, beyond seeing it as a quixotic obsession of many of the first rank of Labour MPs which died out as they did by the late 1930s. A rare exception is Stephen G. Jones' analysis of the role of the drink question in intra-Party debates in the inter-war years. This perceptively concluded that drink was not for those engaged in these debates simply a matter of individual predilections or religious precepts, but rather reflected arguments about the place alcohol might play, if any, in an improved social order.⁸ None, however, as yet have followed him in exploring these issues.

My aspiration here is to write the politics of alcohol back into labour history, to support and develop Jones' argument that these politics remained important for Labour after the Great War, and to consider the range of ways in which that was the case. In the process, the highly-politicized atmosphere surrounding alcohol policy in which Labour pioneers grew up was internalized and adapted to the socialistic creeds they adopted. The politics of alcohol, it will be argued here, affected thinking about the moral responsibilities of the individual Labour politician, and about the changed moral and social order they aimed to engender. Furthermore, the politics of alcohol certainly had a continuing

⁷ F. M. Leventhal, *Arthur Henderson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp.2, 32.

⁸ Stephen G. Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question in Britain 1918-1939' *Historical Journal* 30 (1987), pp.105-22.

electoral dimension into the inter-war years. Labour faced the problem of managing the tension between the idealism of the many temperance advocates amongst its early leadership and its aim to win the suffrage of a sometimes hard-drinking working class.

These conflicts had been shaped in the nineteenth century and ensured that alcohol continued to occupy an ambivalent position in the social and political life of the organized British working classes – the electoral backbone of the Labour Party – in the early twentieth century. On the one hand, there had been a long tradition of working-class temperance advocacy. The consequences of the 1830 Beerhouse Act had associated eighteenth-century anxieties around the consumption of spirits – especially gin – with beer as well. This led to the foundation of several total abstinence societies, of which the most famous, not least because of the proselytising efforts of Joseph Livesey, was that established in Preston in 1832.⁹ Thereafter temperance was to play a significant part in nineteenth-century working-class political movements such as Chartism.¹⁰ Temperance, for its advocates, both protected against individual moral degeneration and from resulting social evils such as brawling and domestic violence. Drink, in contrast, was depicted as a major cause of poverty and associated social problems. It, warned the ardent teetotaler Philip Snowden (later to be Labour's first Chancellor of the Exchequer)

[I]s largely responsible for murder, suicide, immorality and petty crimes; it is poisoning the bodies of the children before they are born; it sends thousands to the grave before they have learnt to lisp; it gives to tens of thousands who survive a shattered constitution and weakened will; it predisposes them to every form of illness; it is destroying the capacity for motherhood, and weakening the natural instinct of the mother. It wastes all this human life, and it involves an incalculable loss of social wealth, through physical inefficiency, mental incapacity, and loss of self-respecting ambition.

Its costs, he argued, burdened public health, the prisons, police courts and asylums.¹¹ Indeed, George Edwards (lifelong abstainer and Labour MP for South Norfolk 1920-24) estimated that drink was the causal factor in nine-tenths

⁹ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* 2nd edition, (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), pp.113-20; Nicholls, pp.90-100.

¹⁰ Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp.41, 147-9, 188-9; Brian Harrison, 'Teetotal Chartism' *History* 58/193 (1973), pp.193-217.

¹¹ Philip Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1908), p.17.

of the cases that came before him as a magistrate.¹² It was also an effective opiate of the people, dulling the senses to the need for social protest. As Will Crooks complained in 1908: if you ‘chloroform men day by day with drink they care not for the conditions under which they live.’¹³

On the other hand, beer in particular was a significant part of male working-class culture. This was not the only attraction of the public house. As even Edwards acknowledged, the exhausted agricultural worker often found more warmth and comfort at the alehouse than in his own home.¹⁴ Pubs remained important sites for predominantly male relaxation and recreation.¹⁵ However, as the nineteenth-century teetotaler and Unitarian minister Henry Solly found, recreating these as improving and alcohol-free establishments was far from easy. In 1861 Solly founded the Club & Institute Union [CIU], which by the end of the century had become the largest working-men’s club organization. Within four years he was convinced that beer had to be available in the clubs he had founded, having found ‘by sad experience that the men whom we specially wanted to attract from the public-house would not come to clubs where they could get only the drinks which they did *not* want.’¹⁶ By 1924 only 36 out of the 2,401 clubs affiliated to the CIU were dry.¹⁷

If drinkers could not be persuaded to give up their beer then, many temperance advocates concluded, the state might be used to protect them from themselves. Instead of sanctioning ‘socially injurious trades’, the prohibitionists who founded the United Kingdom Alliance [UKA] in 1853 argued that the state should facilitate their suppression.¹⁸ This is what the Permissive Bill, regularly introduced by Sir Wilfrid Lawson from 1864 during a long and varied career as a Liberal MP, sought to do through Local Option, whereby voters could choose to suppress the drinking establishments of a given area. The nearest to success achieved for this campaign in the nineteenth century, however, was the local ballots on Sunday closing in Wales enacted by Gladstone’s second government in 1881.

¹² Norfolk Record Office, Norwich [henceforward NRO]: Sir George Edwards Papers: temperance sermon.

¹³ *House of Commons Debates* 4th ser., vol.187, col.1506, 30 April 1908. See also Alex Glasgow’s 1971 protest song ‘As soon as this pub closes’ [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B96qKs4-EI8>].

¹⁴ NRO: Sir George Edwards Papers, ‘Religion and Labour’ undated (1920?) broadsheet. See also Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Teetotalism* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1909), p.3.

¹⁵ Ernest Selley, *The English Public House as it is* (London: Longmans Green, 1927). See also Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure 1918-1939* (London: Routledge, 1986), p.84.

¹⁶ Henry Solly, *These Eighty Years* (1893) cited in George Tremlett, *Clubmen: The history of the working men’s Club and Institute Union* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), p.22.

¹⁷ *Alliance Year Book and Temperance Reformers’ Handbook* [henceforward AYB] (1926), p.74.

¹⁸ Nicholls, pp.114-16.

The high politics of alcohol had its extra-parliamentary counterparts, particularly after the Liberals, in Gladstone's first ministry, introduced the Licensing Act 1872. This involved a form of Local Option, but of licensing rather than suppression, including a maximum number of licences per district.¹⁹ Temperance propaganda had already built a picture of a malignant and powerful 'Trade' promoting alcohol consumption and resisting such impositions. This was misleading as at the time brewing interests were not so co-ordinated or organized. It was therefore equally misleading for Gladstone two years later to refer to his ministry being washed away in the general election 'in a torrent of gin and beer'.²⁰ His licensing reform, however, seems to have subsequently encouraged consolidation in the industry. The suppression of licences drove up the value of remaining public houses. This also led to over-capacity, encouraging marketing innovations much disliked by temperance reformers, such as extra beer supplied by what was known as the 'long pull'.²¹ Brewers responded by becoming publicly quoted and extending control over licensed premises, particularly from the 1880s.²² In a classic 'Baptist and Bootlegger conspiracy' this process combined with the efforts of local, temperance-minded magistrates led to the suppression of licences they did not control. When, however, the extensive licence suppressions of 1900-03 combined with the post-Boer War trade downturn to hit brewers' profits, brewery companies defensively combined to found the Brewers Society in 1904. That same year, in the eyes of temperance reformers, they were rewarded by the Conservative government's Licensing Act, which both weakened the licensing magistrates' powers and required financial compensation for suppressed licences.²³

Alignment of the politics of alcohol with the major political parties was by then also happening at local level. Local licensing regulation led to the consolidation of Local Victuallers' Associations. As Jon Lawrence has shown in his work on ward-level politics in Wolverhampton, these became bastions of a Tory defence of working men's pleasures against the perceived aggression of Liberal temperance reformers.²⁴ For the tightening of licensing regulation in 1872 had

¹⁹ Nicholls, pp.122-3.

²⁰ H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management: Politics in the time of Disraeli and Gladstone* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1978), pp.222-5.

²¹ T. R. Gourvish and R. G. Wilson, *The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.251-5.

²² David W. Gutzke, *Protecting the Pub: Brewers and Publicans against Temperance* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989).

²³ Nicholls, pp.142-7.

²⁴ Jon Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism 1880-1914' *English Historical Review* 108/428 (1993), pp.639-41.

not weakened the temperance movement, which in the late nineteenth century boasted a complex range of local and national organizations. At local level these organizations were often actively pressurizing licensing magistrates and aligned closely with or sought to control local Liberal associations.²⁵ In the aftermath of the 1904 Licensing Act the *Licensed Trade News* told its readers ‘Identity with the Unionist [Conservative] cause just now is compulsory’.²⁶

The result is that the Labour Party founded in 1900 emerged in a setting in which the politics of alcohol, both in the public mind and through association with civil society organizations, was closely aligned with existing Tory/Liberal divisions.²⁷ The Party could not, however, ignore the politics of alcohol as an irrelevant concern of the older parties, even though some prominent members wished to. This was partly because drink was an important political dividing line and means of mobilizing voters as was apparent, for instance, in the Peckham by-election of 1908. This was a beer-fuelled Unionist victory in the midst of the Trade’s campaign against the Liberals’ abortive Licensing Bill.²⁸ It was also because so many Labour leaders had been – 193 signed a manifesto supporting a Local Option Bill in 1893 – and remained active in the temperance movement.²⁹

Labour concern could be expressed on economic as well as temperance grounds. As David Shackleton in his chairman’s address to the 1905 party conference put it, the 1904 Licensing Act would both increase the evils of alcohol and strengthen a monopoly.³⁰ Although Gourvish and Wilson have shown this to be an over-statement, the Trade was portrayed as almost the epitome of the rapacity of capitalism in the view of its detractors, paying itself large dividends whilst its contribution to total employment was only half a million.³¹

To this indictment could be added the selective, and to some extent sexist, nature of employment in the Trade. In 1908, for instance, the party’s General

²⁵ David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p.46; Wilfrid Winterton, *Harvest of the Years* (Birmingham: Templar Press, 1969), pp.62-4.

²⁶ Cited in James Clifford Dunn, *A Force to be Reckoned with? The Temperance Movement and the ‘Drink Question’ 1895-1933*, unpub. University of Central Lancashire MPhil Thesis, 1999, p.61. Not all publicans agreed: see Gutzke, *Protecting the Pub*, p.160.

²⁷ See, for instance, the editorial of the *Morning Advertiser* 13 January 1906.

²⁸ Dunn, p.64.

²⁹ Vero W. Garratt, *Labour and the Liquor Traffic* (London: International Bookshops, nd, 1920?), p.14.

³⁰ *Labour Party Conference Report* [henceforward *LPCR*] (1905), p.39.

³¹ Gourvish and Wilson, chap.7; Garratt, p.11. At the start of the 1930s total employment in the trade was estimated at 617,000: G. P. Williams and George Thompson Brake, *Drink in Great Britain 1900-1979* (London: Edsall, 1980), p.86.

Secretary, Ramsay MacDonald, complained to the Commons that of 350 recent advertisements for barmaids in the *Morning Advertiser*, 220 stipulated that ‘the applicant should be under twenty years of age, and should be attractive in appearance’. This, as well as the use of their youthful charms to sell their wares, was grounds for him objecting as much to the employment of women in pubs as underground in the coal industry.³² Concerns about the use of sex to sell alcohol did not disappear after the Great War, and continue in the twenty-first century.³³

Labour also had to respond to the pre-existing explanation of poverty offered by temperance advocates: that the poor exacerbated their penury through their own agency by drinking away their wages, whilst the Trade’s exploitation of their folly impoverished the community as a whole. Temperance advocates thus offered a powerful alternative, if often largely monocausal explanation of social problems. Snowden, one of the most committed of Labour teetotallers, noted in 1908 that this approach led a number of Labour pioneers to attack the temperance view of the causes of poverty. This was not least because it very much reflected a liberal emphasis upon individual agency, responsibility and failure. Labour viewed poverty more systemically as principally the result of the unemployment and inadequate wages produced by a system based upon ‘landlordism and capitalism’,³⁴ with both resulting from the cyclical crises of late Victorian capitalism:

The Socialist looked upon Temperance work as useless, as a mere cutting of the weeds or covering of the sores. ‘Capitalism, not drink, is the enemy. It is no use trying to make men sober. It cannot be done so long as wage slavery exists. If it could, it would but make men more profitable machines for exploitation.’³⁵

Furthermore, the assumptions of Liberal temperance advocates like Sir George White MP that a reduction of spending of drink would necessarily free up more productive expenditure and thereby increase employment were demonstrably false.³⁶ Snowden nevertheless accepted that there was a clear connection between poverty and alcohol.³⁷ Indeed, the following year he pointed out a

³² *House of Commons Debates*, 4th ser., Vol.195, cols.871-6, 2 November 1908.

³³ Selley, p.49; Patrick Barkham, ‘Use of sex to sell alcohol is criticised’ *The Guardian* 7 January 2005.

³⁴ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.94-5.

³⁵ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.47-8.

³⁶ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.105-8.

³⁷ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.47-50.

statistical relationship between overcrowded conditions and convictions for drunkenness.³⁸

This growing sophistication of analysis was informed by Charles Booth's analysis of London's poor in the 1880s and the study of York published by the Quaker chocolate manufacturer, Liberal and teetotaler, Seebohm Rowntree in 1901. Booth's analysis suggested that drink was directly responsible only for 14 percent of the poverty of London's East End. Snowden accordingly concluded that abstinence could not of itself cure poverty.³⁹ Nevertheless, he argued, 'while poverty causes drinking, drinking aggravates poverty and in many individual cases is the cause of it'.⁴⁰ Similarly for Edwards, if drink was not the root of all evil it was undoubtedly a major contributory factor.⁴¹

One individual for whom this certainly seems to have been the case was the alcoholic stepfather of Keir Hardie.⁴² Hardie was the leading advocate of independent labour politics in the 1890s, preparing the ground for the founding of the Labour Party in the new century. His family background led him to apply the politics of alcohol in a very personal, didactic and exemplary way to the Party he did so much to create. He urged in the newspaper of the Independent Labour Party [ILP], the forerunner body he helped to establish in Bradford in 1893, that its members should bear in mind that 'the man who can take a glass or let it alone is under moral obligation for the sake of the weaker brother who cannot do so, to let it alone'.⁴³ To indicate their moral seriousness, he sought to impose this position upon the Parliamentary Labour Party [PLP] as a whole in the years before the First World War.⁴⁴

According to Snowden a majority of Edwardian Labour MPs were in any case teetotal.⁴⁵ The attempt to exact a temperance pledge upon the whole PLP whilst Parliament was in session nevertheless proved ineffective amongst the minority of weaker brethren. The founding of the Trade Union and Labour Official Temperance Fellowship [TULOTF] in 1905, many leading members of which

³⁸ Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Teetotalism* (London: Independent Labour Party, 1909), p.8.

³⁹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London* first series, vol.2, revised edition (London: Macmillan, 1902), p.147; Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.88-90.

⁴⁰ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, p.48.

⁴¹ George Edwards, *From Crow-Scaring to Westminster: An Autobiography* (London: Labour Publishing Company, 1922), p.89.

⁴² Kenneth O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: Radical and Socialist*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), p.4.

⁴³ Keir Hardie, 'Drink and Clubs' *Labour Leader*, 15 July 1895.

⁴⁴ David E. Martin, 'The Instruments of the People? The PLP in 1906' in David E. Martin and David Rubenstein (eds), *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays presented to John Savile* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.125f.

⁴⁵ Snowden, *Socialism and Teetotalism*, p.2.

were to be prominent in the first tranche of some 30 Labour MPs elected in 1906, may have reflected the strength of temperance sentiment within the Party at leadership level.⁴⁶ However, that first tranche also included MPs like Ben Tillett, a former temperance advocate who was nevertheless now critical of the temperance influence upon the Party.⁴⁷ Nor did TULOTF prove long-lived; by 1920 Snowden could not even recall its name.⁴⁸

At lower levels of the Party there could be even more vehement opposition. Initially the Independent Labour Party largely followed the lead of its most eminent founder: only 3 per cent of its clubs served alcohol in 1908.⁴⁹ This was not true, however, of most working-class clubs. Many, indeed, depended upon the sale of alcohol for their financial viability.⁵⁰ Hardie's strictures against the promotion of alcohol in working-men's clubs in the 1895 article cited above therefore produced a torrent of abuse.⁵¹ The CIU contended that alcohol was commonly consumed by 'probably 90 per cent of the adult male population'.⁵² A Party inquiry in 1923 chaired by the founder of the Fabian Society, Sidney Webb, found this to be generally true for the 80 per cent of the population who were manual wage-earners.⁵³

Drinking was clearly an important aspect of working-class life. This was not the same as drunkenness. The debates about the moral responsibilities of the moderate drinker which had played out in the early temperance movement were replicated in the Labour Party.⁵⁴ As Snowden pointed out in 1908, the binge-drinking that destroyed Hardie's stepfather was going the way of St Monday, the alcohol-induced day of rest on the first day of the working week. Its diminution in the late nineteenth century he attributed to shifting patterns of employment. Factory work was more capital-intensive and the numbers of employees therein had gone down. Overall, however, there had been a large increase in those working in mining, engineering, domestic service or railways, sectors 'under the strict discipline of industrial direction', where workmen were 'liable to dismissal for absenting themselves from work [due] to drink.' Among

⁴⁶ There were 19 teetotallers and seven who took the sessional pledge according to *Alliance News*, February 1933.

⁴⁷ He told the *Brewer and Wine Merchant*, September 1909: 'for myself I would back Socialism and beer in preference to Nonconformist conscience and tea'.

⁴⁸ V. W. Garratt, *A Man in the Street* (London: Dent, 1939), p.273.

⁴⁹ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, p.31.

⁵⁰ Williams and Thompson Brake, p.93.

⁵¹ J. H. Hudson, 'The Promised Club Legislation', *The New Campaigner* 48 (1936), p.20.

⁵² Sidney Webb (Chairman), *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, (London: Labour Party, 1923), p.16.

⁵³ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.6.

⁵⁴ Nicholls, p.112.

these groups, representing 10 million out of the 16 million workforce, Snowden felt regular drinking may have increased, but excessive drinking had declined.

On the other hand, Snowden contended that the less-disciplined commercial classes – into which he lumped groups such as salesmen, building workers and general labourers – had increased by 200 per cent in Northern England since 1861. These ‘have occupations which bring them into constant contact with the temptations of the public-house and the social drinking customs which are responsible for so much senseless drinking’. He also pointed to growing drinking amongst women, which he felt reflected principally growing off-sales and female industrial employment. Nevertheless, overall Snowden’s 1908 analysis suggested greater general sobriety, a conclusion which he accepted had ‘an important bearing upon proposals of temperance reform’.⁵⁵

As the secretary of the Bootle Labour Party told the secretary of the Webb enquiry in 1923: ‘The average man is not a habitual drunkard, but is a being who desires social life, and who finds what he needs in the better type of public house’.⁵⁶ Fifteen years earlier, Snowden’s more sophisticated analysis of drinking habits and the causes of drunkenness led him to similar conclusions about how to promote greater sobriety. In *Socialism and the Drink Question*, published in 1908, he went in turn through various possible schemes. State Prohibition, he concluded, would bring chaos to labour and commercial markets, as well as requiring repressive policing.⁵⁷ Local Option also had substantial drawbacks: it was most likely to be voted for where least needed, and often simply saw licensed premises replaced by clubs which were not subject to licensing law.⁵⁸ Snowden therefore turned to ways of producing instead a better public house through, for instance, the creation of monopolies with no interest in profiteering from the sale of alcohol as pioneered in the Swedish city of Gothenburg in 1865.⁵⁹ A variant on this was the subsequent spread of trust houses in Britain and elsewhere. The most successful of these was the People’s Refreshment House Association founded by the Bishop of Chester in 1896, which by 1907 had 60 public houses under its management.⁶⁰ These organizations, by employing ‘disinterested’ managers and paying a

⁵⁵ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, chap.4. These views were supported by a 1907 Board of Trade survey: see Dunn, p.50.

⁵⁶ People’s History Museum, Manchester, Labour Party Archives [henceforward LPA]: LP/LIQ/22, Garratt to Middleton, 13 February 1923.

⁵⁷ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.99, 118.

⁵⁸ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.122, 138.

⁵⁹ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, p.142.

⁶⁰ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, pp.152-3; Selley, pp.69-72.

maximum 5 per cent dividend, sought to replace excessive consumption with rational recreation.⁶¹ According to Snowden, however, these lacked the monopoly of the Gothenburg system and tended to fail to eliminate the profit motive. The only way to get round these drawbacks, he suggested, was by municipalisation.⁶²

As Snowden pointed out, this would deliver a different form of local control of consumption. Indeed, local authorities could then use the profits of alcohol ‘to counteract the drink temptation’. Despite these advantages, however, he acknowledged there were also substantial objections, the most serious of which he felt was the risk of local authorities deliberately promoting drinking in order to increase revenue and reduce pressures upon ratepayers.⁶³

Snowden had nevertheless successfully passed a motion in favour of general municipalisation at Labour’s 1901 conference.⁶⁴ Subsequently the 1905 conference adopted municipalisation of the drink trade without discussion.⁶⁵ This, however, was not seen as incompatible with Local Option. As Henderson argued the following year, it was much more democratic that local people rather than magistrates should determine how many licenses there were in a given area, however the Trade was itself organized. On such grounds Local Option was carried by 666,000 to 103,000.⁶⁶ The argument that the party needed to have a clear line on the Liberal government’s impending Licensing Bill led to this line being reaffirmed with acclamation in 1907.⁶⁷ Labour’s line, however, was not simply one of support for the Liberals. They also moved amendments to curtail hours of labour, provide compensation for employees as well as owners when licences were suppressed and to protect organizations like the CIU against bogus clubs.⁶⁸ This concern about labour within the Trade was reflected when conference returned to this issue in 1911 and 1913, on the latter occasion passing a resolution in favour of allowing licences only when trade union rates were paid.⁶⁹

⁶¹ David W. Gutzke, ‘Progressivism and the history of the public house 1850-1950’ *Cultural & Social History*, 4/2 (2007), pp.237-8.

⁶² Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, chaps 14-16.

⁶³ Snowden, *Socialism and the Drink Question*, chap.17.

⁶⁴ *LPCR* (1901), p.19.

⁶⁵ *LPCR* (1905), p.55.

⁶⁶ *LPCR* (1906), p.62.

⁶⁷ *LPCR* (1907), pp.15, 50-1.

⁶⁸ *LPCR* (1909), p.29.

⁶⁹ *LPCR* (1911), p.94; (1913), pp.97-8.

The party was formally committed to Local Option, but it was only debated twice at conference before 1914, and on neither occasion were other schemes such as municipalisation rejected. Local Option was meanwhile enacted for the first time when, with Labour support, the Liberal government passed the Temperance (Scotland) Act 1913. Its Scottish implementation, however, was to be delayed by the conflagration that shortly after engulfed Europe.

One of the collateral effects of that Great War was a considerable improvement in Labour's electoral prospects. It ended in 1918 with the party being transformed by Henderson from a loose federation of labour and socialist organizations into a much more unified body. Henderson and Sidney Webb drafted a constitution and a more coherent manifesto, *Labour and the New Social Order*, expressing the party's aspirations. Proper constituency-level organization supported by individual membership was steadily rolled out over the ensuing decade. Not least, the division and decline of the Liberal Party as a political rival now inclined the hitherto reluctant trade unions to provide the finances required if the party was to achieve electoral breakthrough.⁷⁰

These developments meant that it was a somewhat different Labour Party which came to re-consider the politics of alcohol after 1918. That politics had also been transformed by the Great War: so much so that the Party was to spend much more time on the subject in the 1920s than in the Edwardian years. It might be expected that many of the changes resulting from total war would reduce the salience of this subject. After all, wartime restrictions managed by a Central Control Board [CCB] which included Snowden among its members – imposed because of the exigencies of efficiency in the munitions industry – had by 1918 reduced per capita consumption of beer and spirits to less than half the figures of the last full year before the war. The strength of beer was meanwhile greatly reduced whilst duty rose thirteenfold, so that the tax per pint rose from one-twelfth to half of the price.⁷¹ Output was also restricted, with shortages of beer contributing to the industrial unrest of 1917.⁷²

Additionally, these wartime developments were followed by the restrictions of hours of sale in both licensed premises and clubs and abolition of liquor purchase on credit and the 'long pull' under the 1921 Licensing Act, which also

⁷⁰ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁷¹ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.24.

⁷² Gourvish and Wilson, p.321.

wound up the CCB. Then, in 1923, the maverick Conservative temperance advocate, Lady Astor, successfully introduced as a private members' bill the Intoxicating Liquor (Sale to Persons under Eighteen) Act with strong Labour support.⁷³ Annual expenditure on drink may have peaked in 1920 at £469.7 million, but that largely reflected wartime inflation. Beer consumption itself fell considerably. Per capita consumption did begin to rise again in the 1930s, but it remained well below pre-war levels, as did other key indicators such as convictions for drunkenness.⁷⁴

However, whilst legislation during and immediately after the First World War thus seems to have produced a sustained drop both in alcohol consumption and in alcohol-related social problems, this was not necessarily apparent to contemporaries in 1918. Temperance reformers' wartime successes therefore merely whetted their appetite for more. This perhaps bears out their opponents' view that what many of them sought was not sobriety but prohibition. The introduction of the latter in various places overseas – most notably the USA in 1919 – during and immediately after the war meanwhile encouraged the view that the tide was running strongly in favour of temperance. So did, for instance, the more widespread use of motor cars. Clear that drink and driving should not mix, the High Chief Ruler of the Rechabites could accordingly blandly state in 1923 that he expected prohibition within 20 years.⁷⁵ Prohibition had indeed been passed by the ILP conference in 1920, under the influence of the growing Clydesider presence.⁷⁶

It was a different wartime development, however, which had more influence upon the wider Labour party. This was the way in which state control, advocated so eloquently before the war by Snowden, was furthered during the conflict. In particular, alcohol-related problems in the local munitions industries led to the taking into state ownership of 119 public houses and four breweries (subsequently extended) in the vicinity of Carlisle and Gretna Green in January 1916, with smaller schemes in other armament-producing areas such as Enfield.⁷⁷ An advisory committee on which Snowden served in 1915 even advocated their extension to the entire country, an idea that was rejected both on

⁷³ Williams and Thompson Brake, p.77.

⁷⁴ *AYB* (1941), pp.80-82. The low point of £224.8 million was reached in 1933, whereafter a slow increase saw annual expenditure still only at £310.0 million at the outbreak of the Second World War. These figures of course included – as trade interests frequently complained – the duties on alcohol paid to the government.

⁷⁵ Cited in *Morning Advertiser*, 30 August 1923.

⁷⁶ Philip Snowden, 'Labour and the Drink Problem', *Alliance Year Book* (1921), p.65.

⁷⁷ Williams and Thompson Brake, pp.104-6.

grounds of the estimated £250m cost and because of the vehement opposition of the temperance lobby.⁷⁸

In the face of these developments, alcohol policy was necessarily included in the general review of Labour's policies overseen by Henderson during the Great War. The 1918 party policy document co-authored by Henderson and Sidney Webb, *Labour and the New Social Order*, however, essentially re-affirmed the pre-war position of combining Local Option with possible public ownership.

Additionally, in 1918 an internal Advisory Committee on Temperance Policy was set up. Its first chairman was the railwaymen's union leader and Labour MP for Derby, J. H. Thomas. Henderson seems to have some influence on its composition. He was a Wesleyan Methodist and the committee included three ministers from his church. The most active of these was Rev. Henry Carter, who had already come to prominence as a leading figure in the Temperance Council of the Christian Churches set up in 1915.⁷⁹ He also served on the CCB. Carter was to become one of the most eminent Christian Socialists of the inter-war years. In October 1919 he replaced Thomas as chairman of the Advisory Committee.

The committee members included people like Ben Tillett. It thus represented a range of opinions on alcohol policy within Labour, though several seem not to have in practice attended. Co-opted members included B. T. Hall, the general secretary of the CIU. Also co-opted were two leading figures in the Labour Campaign for Public Ownership and Control of the Liquor Trade established in 1919, J. J. Mallon and Arthur Greenwood. Like Thomas, Greenwood was subsequently to become one of the most notorious of Labour's parliamentary drinkers. At the time, however, he was the most effective advocate of the nationalization solution. For him and his supporters nationalization was a means of attacking not the working-class pleasure provided by the consumption of beer, but the profit motive and the promotion of drunkenness that was felt to ensue.⁸⁰

Greenwood popularised these views through his 1920 book arguing for *Public Ownership of the Liquor Trade*. This enjoyed a good circulation throughout the

⁷⁸ Arthur Greenwood, *Public Ownership of the Liquor Trade* (London: Parsons, 1920), pp.22-3; David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, New Edition, vol.1 (London: Odhams, 1938), pp.196-7, 791-2; Philip Snowden, *An Autobiography* I (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934), pp.378-9.

⁷⁹ Henry Carter, '1915-1921' *The New Campaigner* Apr.-Sept. (1927), pp.20-33.

⁸⁰ Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question', p.107.

party. The speaking tour through which he and Mallon promoted it nationally was subsequently cited by a number of constituency branch secretaries as convincing their members to support nationalization of the Trade.⁸¹ A number of influential party and union organizations seem to have been similarly persuaded.⁸²

Greenwood also convinced his comrades on the Advisory Committee. In December 1919 the committee agreed that Carter should prepare a memorandum on Local Option, while Greenwood and Mallon offered one combining this with state purchase. When the committee considered these in February 1920 it concluded that Local Option, except on new housing estates, should be deferred until its effects in Scotland – where it finally came into force in 1920 – had been analysed. Instead, it was agreed that Mallon and Greenwood should prepare a report on nationalization,⁸³ and this was endorsed by the party's National Executive Committee [NEC] on 9 March 1920.⁸⁴ The TUC was similarly convinced, passing a resolution in favour of nationalization at its 1920 conference.⁸⁵

Labour thus approached its own 1920 conference with nationalization having been endorsed by the NEC, but with the alternatives of prohibition and Local Option both enjoying substantial support amongst swathes of the membership. Prohibition was, however, decisively defeated. Despite considerable Scottish support, the motion put forward by Glasgow Trades Council was lost by 2,603,000 to 472,000 on the only occasion conference addressed the subject.⁸⁶ The following year the Scottish TUC also dropped prohibition, instead resolving that 'no real reform of the Licensing Laws is possible that seeks to force or wrench the people from long acquired social habits by means of restriction or Prohibition'.⁸⁷

More surprisingly, despite NEC support, nationalization was also more narrowly rejected at Labour's 1920 conference, by 1,672,000 to 1,352,000. Experience at Carlisle seems to have been a telling factor. Snowden had, as a member of the CCB, been one of its architects. However, he told conference:

⁸¹ See, for instance, LPA: LP/LIQ/22, Egan (Birkenhead Labour Party) to Middleton, 8 February 1923.

⁸² Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question', p.110.

⁸³ LPA: JSM/TEM/1, minutes of the Advisory Committee on Temperance Policy.

⁸⁴ Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question', p.110.

⁸⁵ Snowden, 'Labour and the Drink Problem', p.66.

⁸⁶ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.27.

⁸⁷ Cited in Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question', p.111.

Carlisle stands at the head of a list of 136 municipalities for the number of convictions for drunkenness, and it is quite true to say that the Carlisle experiment has been a complete failure.⁸⁸

This undermined the argument of Greenwood and his supporters that nationalization would diminish drunkenness. Snowden's change of heart was instrumental in an overwhelming, and seemingly decisive re-endorsement of Local Option by 2,003,000 to 623,000.⁸⁹

Support for this motion was swollen by an emphasis on disinterested management. Local Option clearly continued to appeal to the older generation running trade unions and other affiliated organizations, hence the substantial card vote in its favour led by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.⁹⁰ Experience was, however, soon to undermine this idea. The view that Local Option was the way to promote sobriety was first tested in Scotland in the ballots of autumn that year. In these only 36 out of 584 districts voted to go dry. Temperance advocates could nevertheless comfort themselves with the thought that a substantial minority of about 38 per cent had voted for no licences.⁹¹ The tide, however, was not running in their favour. In the next ballots three years later some districts which voted to go dry in 1920 switched back.

Jones' focus upon the advocates of nationalization ensures that he completely overlooks the extent to which Labour figures nevertheless remained committed to Local Option in the early 1920s. Even Thomas in 1922 introduced a Local Option Bill in the House of Commons. This Bill – which provided for ballots on a four yearly cycle on the options of (a) no change, (b) reorganization or (c) no licences – had first been put forward by the Bishop of Oxford in 1921. It was to be introduced a further five times by 1928, almost invariably by teetotal Labour MPs, although it never got beyond the first reading.⁹²

These were, however, private members' bills, without official party support. Local option seems to have remained the majority position within the PLP. Of the 287 Labour MPs elected in the 1929 election, the UKA alleged 163 were supporters.⁹³ The party as a whole, however, despite the 1920 conference, was

⁸⁸ Cited in *AYB* (1920), p.75.

⁸⁹ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.27.

⁹⁰ Greenaway, p.135.

⁹¹ *Justice*, 8 February 1923; Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.10.

⁹² Foreword by C. G. Ammon to (W. G. Hall), *Let the People Decide: Some Notes on the Drink Problem*, (London: Liquor (Popular Control) Bill Committee, 1928).

⁹³ *Alliance News*, June 1929.

increasingly reluctant to take a stand on this issue. The politics of alcohol clearly caused internal divisions. These, in turn, could be blamed for electoral setbacks. Temperance, it was alleged, could prove deadly at the polls, alienating groups otherwise like to support Labour. This was a theme the CIU played upon assiduously, not least in the run-up to the 1922 general election.

At the time there was widespread working-class grievance about the high price of beer as a result of wartime duty increases and the effects of the 1921 Licensing Act.⁹⁴ In consequence, the CIU claimed:

The Labour members more than any other should support a reduction in [the price of] this most common commodity in working class consumption. If they do not it can only be that teetotal prejudices operate on them to the exclusion of, and detriment to, all others.⁹⁵

The CIU was thus arguing that temperance was preventing some Labour MPs from representing their constituents' concerns effectively. After the 1922 election there was also complaint that the result was punishment at the ballot box, with the National Union of Vehicle Builders [NUVB] protesting that the candidate they had sponsored found his temperance advocacy so used against him 'that he failed to poll as many votes as trade union cards in one works alone in the constituency'.⁹⁶

Nationalization advocates were also concerned about the risk of attracting the opposition of the trade by being too clearly associated with the temperance cause. Greenwood in his 1920 publication had drawn attention to the trade's emphasis on securing 'the return to the House of Commons and other elected bodies, of candidates favourable to trade interests'.⁹⁷ This was a natural consequence of being an industry that was subjected to a unique degree to regulatory control as well as the active political hostility of the temperance movement. As a result it remained a special interest group which tried to present itself as an electorally-formidable foe. This was despite the fact that the widening of the electorate meant that, with one on-licence for every 320 electors by 1930 – as opposed to one for every 47 in 1891 – its capacity to directly influence the electorate was clearly reducing.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, in the

⁹⁴ Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question', p.112.

⁹⁵ *Club and Institute Journal*, January 1922, p.2.

⁹⁶ LPA: LP/LIQ/22, Nicholson to Middleton, 13 February 1923.

⁹⁷ National Trade Defence Association cited in Greenwood, p.76.

⁹⁸ *AYB* (1931), pp.186-92.

mid-1920s the trade was reported as still claiming that each public house could influence ten votes and that collectively it might control around 2,000 votes per parliamentary constituency,⁹⁹ assuredly sufficient potentially to swing the outcome in some marginal seats. It also had its own press, most notably in the *Morning Advertiser*, the daily newspaper produced for publicans by the Incorporated Society of Licensed Victuallers.

There were also a number of associated organizations to combat and undermine the political campaigns of its opponents. As with the Brewers' Society in 1904, the True Temperance Association [TTA] was founded in 1909 to combat legislative pressure, in this case the abortive Licensing Bill put forward by the Liberal government in 1908.¹⁰⁰ It and the Scottish Public House Reform League, for instance, promoted the notion that the best way to tackle the problem drinker was through the provision of what was called the improved public house, welcoming to women and offering food and a comfortable atmosphere rather than concentrated 'perpendicular drinking'.¹⁰¹ They were joined by other bodies such as the Anti-Prohibition League or the Fellowship of Freedom and Reform (established 1920). Several Labour MPs, including Tillett, were active in the latter organization.¹⁰² Another former teetotaler, Robert Richardson MP, was President of the CIU.

These MPs, however, were not representative of the PLP as a whole. Nor did they deflect the opposition of the trade. Lord Astor, who was that rarity, a teetotal Tory politician, pointed out after the defeat of the first Labour government in 1924

If Labour leaders had read the Drink newspapers after the last general election they would have found conclusive proof that although in selected constituencies the Trade might work for Labour candidates – that although individual Labour candidates might even get offers of financial help from suspect sources – nevertheless the Liquor Caucus as a whole was inextricably interwoven with Capitalist Conservatism and so inevitably anti-Labour at elections.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Lord Astor, *Temperance and Politics*, (London: The Daily News, n.d. [c.1925]), *The New Way*, no. 12, p.11.

¹⁰⁰ Selley, p.117.

¹⁰¹ Gourvish and Wilson, pp.420-2.

¹⁰² The others listed in *Alliance News*, April 1929 were Arthur Hayday, Rev. Herbert Dunnico, T. E. Naylor, Jack Jones and C. H. Sitch.

¹⁰³ Astor, p.17.

In fact the hostility of the *Morning Advertiser* at the time seems to have been mainly directed at Lord Astor and his press organ, *The Observer*. And the presence in their ranks of figures like the Astors certainly diminished the trade's enthusiasm for the Tories.¹⁰⁴ However, as the brewer Allen S. Belsher put it in his chairman's address to the London Central Board in 1923,

when they bore in mind that party's past record they were bound to draw the conclusion on the present occasion that, generally speaking, they would receive more favourable replies [to their election questionnaire] from the Conservatives.

He concluded, to acclaim, that they ought to 'show the Conservative party that they relied upon their doing the right thing by the liquor industry'.¹⁰⁵

Conservative parliamentary ranks contained a number of prominent members of the Brewers' Society. Even at local level the party was also strongly associated with the trade. For instance, of the candidates endorsed by the Bradford and District Licence-Holders' Association at the 1925 municipal elections, there were 12 Conservatives, two Labour and one Liberal.¹⁰⁶ It was the same story at national level, as is apparent from the lists of endorsed candidates in the *Morning Advertiser* in the 1922 and 1923 general elections. F. P. Whitbread of the eponymous brewing firm may have claimed that the trade were receiving increasing numbers of satisfactory answers to its surveys from Labour and Liberal candidates as early as 1923.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, of the 140 candidates endorsed by the *Morning Advertiser* in that election all were Conservatives, except for four Liberals.¹⁰⁸

Whether this activity had as much effect as temperance advocates sometimes claimed is another matter. J. H. Williams, the Labour candidate in Llanelli in 1923, complained about posters against him in the local pubs.¹⁰⁹ This did not stop him being successfully returned. Even *The Observer* was driven to doubt how much of an electoral asset the drink trade really was for the Conservatives.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, in certain circumstances it seems to have been effective. For instance, drink was the only major issue in Labour's defeat in the

¹⁰⁴ *Morning Advertiser*, 14 September 1923.

¹⁰⁵ *Morning Advertiser*, 27 November 1923.

¹⁰⁶ *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 2 November 1925.

¹⁰⁷ *Morning Advertiser*, 11 December 1923.

¹⁰⁸ *Morning Advertiser*, 4 December 1923.

¹⁰⁹ *Morning Advertiser*, 25 November 1923.

¹¹⁰ Cited in the editorial of the *Morning Advertiser*, 10 December 1923.

1922 Newport by-election, as well as a key element in the Tories' retention of this Welsh constituency at all but one election down to 1945.¹¹¹ It was also clearly a major issue at election time in nearby Caerphilly.¹¹² Furthermore, there was clearly a sense of electoral struggle against the Trade, voiced in the late 1920s in the complaint, admittedly by a group of temperance-supporting Labour politicians, that 'Labour ever has its hardest fight in districts where the drink evil is rampant'.¹¹³

The Newport by-election precipitated the fall of the Lloyd George coalition and the subsequent 1922 general election. That year's Labour conference, meanwhile, saw moves to contain the potential for the politics of alcohol to have such seismic effects within the party. As W. G. Hall later noted, the conference order paper was so thick with competing resolutions about alcohol that the whole matter was remitted to a special inquiry.¹¹⁴ This was chaired by Sidney Webb, who had in 1903 published a major history of liquor licensing.¹¹⁵ Ramsay MacDonald, who became party leader in 1922, made clear the rationale for this move in his foreword to the inquiry's report, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, published the following year.

What is known as 'the Drink Question' is one of the most troublesome and difficult that the honest politician has to face today. The 'Trade', the clubs, the prohibitionists, the local vetoists, one and all, are apt to come down upon him just at the critical moment of an election, and present an ultimatum that if he does not do exactly what they want they will throw their influence against him.¹¹⁶

Electoral considerations were thus clearly central to the objectives of the inquiry. They also very much shaped its findings. For instance, prohibition was swiftly disposed of. Edwin Scrymgeour had won a Dundee seat as a Scottish Prohibitionist in 1922 with support from the Left, but in the 1923 by-election in Whitechapel in Labour's stronghold of East London a similar candidate only won 130 votes. Scrymgeour's prohibitionist bills in 1923 and 1931 garnered negligible support, even amongst Labour and Liberal teetotallers outside of a

¹¹¹ John Ramsden, 'Newport and the fall of the Coalition', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds), *By-Elections in British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp.35-37.

¹¹² *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol.169, col.1260 (Morgan Jones), 15 February 1924.

¹¹³ Hall, *Let the People Decide*, p.11.

¹¹⁴ Hall, *Let the People Decide*, p.7.

¹¹⁵ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *The History of Liquor Licensing in England, Principally from 1700 to 1830* (London: Longmans, 1903).

¹¹⁶ J. Ramsay MacDonald, 'Foreword', in *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, pp.2-3.

Glaswegian contingent. Webb's inquiry was quite clear that such measures could not be supported because, as Chesterfield Labour Party pointed out, prohibition was in most parts of the country political suicide.¹¹⁷

The inquiry was, however, clear about the social and financial costs of alcohol abuse, finding that 'a very large proportion of our social expenditure is a direct consequence of alcoholic excess'. This included, for instance, an estimated £25 million charge on the criminal justice system.¹¹⁸ The hitherto favoured solution of Local Option was, however, seen as a problematic remedy. It was portrayed as class legislation, preventing the poor from drinking, but not the rich who could more easily bring in supplies from wet districts. It was suspected, not without reason, as being seen by the temperance movement as merely a staging post on the road to prohibition.¹¹⁹ The CIU was particularly hostile. It is also noteworthy that, in the identical resolution submitted by many local branches to the Webb inquiry in 1923, Local Option was denounced as 'antagonistic to Individual Freedom'.¹²⁰

This inquiry, and the local responses it generated, indicates that the political salience of alcohol did not suddenly end at some point before 1918. Jon Lawrence has suggested that the 'beer-barrel politics' he identifies in the 1890s – a political culture that amongst the largely male electorate of the time favoured the Conservatives as the party best able to defend masculine pursuits and pleasures from the nannying morality crusaders represented by Liberal Nonconformists – was undermined in the Edwardian years by the advent of workingmen's clubs.¹²¹ These, after all, were as much an attempt by working-class interests to get round the increasingly stringent late Victorian licensing laws as the product of middle-class moral reformers like Henry Solly. Furthermore, the clubs, and the CIU in particular under Richardson as chairman, arguably by the 1920s provided alcohol-related organizations which more or less strongly identified with Labour. They were class-based monocultures which reflected Labour's solidaristic values. The CIU was also clearly keen to capture Labour's alcohol policy from its teetotal, often chapel-based competitors. The Webb inquiry was for the CIU an opportunity to pursue this struggle. CIU

¹¹⁷ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.8; LPA: LP/LIQ/22/41, J. H. Harvey to Middleton, 10 February 1923.

¹¹⁸ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, pp.6-7.

¹¹⁹ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, pp.18-19.

¹²⁰ These resolutions are scattered throughout LPA: LP/LIQ/22.

¹²¹ Lawrence, 'Class and Gender', pp.629-52.

returns to the inquiry accordingly showed that the rise of the clubs did not so much end as change the nature of beer-barrel politics.

They could not end beer-barrel politics because, however important they might have been in Lawrence's case study town of Wolverhampton, they were insufficiently ubiquitous elsewhere. Of the 1,023 licensing districts in England and Wales in the 1920s, there were no clubs in 171 of them.¹²² The clubs also at the time only attracted 5 per cent of the expenditure on alcohol. Their importance lay, however, in the fact that they were particularly concentrated in Labour constituencies. The clubs had some 4-5 million members, some 1.15 million of them in the 2,400 clubs affiliated to the CIU.¹²³ This made the latter an effective pressure group on Labour. This was not least because of a perception that the CIU spoke for large numbers of Labour supporters, a view sedulously promoted by the CIU itself.

To some extent they accordingly brought beer-barrel politics into the Labour party. As clubs run by their own members, they represented an amalgamation of Liberal ideas of self-help, Tory working-class drinking culture and a labourist, class-based political milieu. The CIU's willingness to use their leverage was marked by their mobilisation during the Webb inquiry and their reaction to the Wales (Temperance) Bill the following year. This private legislation – introduced by a group of Liberal Nonconformists and teetotalers – reflected demands in the chapels for Sunday closing in Wales to be extended to the clubs. Their co-religionists in Labour were by then in power for the first time, a minority Labour government under MacDonald having formed following the 1923 election. They did not, however, join their Liberal counterparts in supporting this legislation. Arthur Henderson Jr, a Wesleyan like his father, singled out the sections dealing with the clubs for criticism in his speech on the Bill.¹²⁴ Although he still voted for the second reading of the Bill many of his fellow Labour Nonconformist teetotalers did not. The warning given by B. T. Hall of the CIU that 75 per cent of his members voted Labour might account for this. Temperance organizations certainly assumed that the Labour government's non-committal approach to this legislation reflected the efficacy of Hall's intervention.¹²⁵

¹²² George B. Wilson, *The Club Movement: Its Membership and Influence* (London: United Kingdom Alliance, c.1931), p.2.

¹²³ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, pp.15-16.

¹²⁴ *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol.169, col.1238, 15 February 1924.

¹²⁵ *AYB* (1926), p.87.

Labour, it seems, was more willing to risk the wrath of the still largely Liberal-supporting chapels than that of the CIU. The former were, however, well-represented on the Webb Committee of Inquiry consisting of Ethel Bentham, R. J. Davies, W. H. Hutchinson, Morgan Jones, Susan Lawrence, and F. O. Roberts along with Webb himself. The CIU were not directly represented at all. Similarly, there was no place on the committee for Labour MPs closely connected with the Trade, such as Tillett, Fred Bramley or C. W. Bowerman. This was because the composition of the committee primarily reflected the range of bodies within the Labour movement, from the trade unions to the Labour Women's Organization represented here by Bentham, rather than the various positions within that movement on the politics of alcohol. Nevertheless, Bentham, Davies and Jones were all Nonconformist teetotallers. This does not, however, mean that there was strong support in the committee for Local Option. Bentham had, after all, written enthusiastically in favour of the Carlisle scheme and nationalization.¹²⁶ Susan Lawrence was also a keen supporter of nationalization. If anything, this was the most widely-supported position held by members of the inquiry.

Henderson's assistant J. S. Middleton, the Labour Party's Assistant Secretary, acted as clerk to the inquiry and drafted its report.¹²⁷ It seems probable that he shared a pre-disposition in favour of nationalization. Certainly, sentences in the report such as: 'Until the nation is convinced that the freedom to drink in moderation is wrong and must be prohibited no locality should have any right to interfere with a national habit recognised by law',¹²⁸ do not suggest that Middleton's sympathies lay with Local Option.

Nationalization was not felt to pose the electoral problems associated with other positions on the politics of alcohol. Indeed, it would eliminate the baleful electoral effects of the Trade, provide for rationalisation of the breweries and reductions in the numbers of public houses, and remove the incentive to maximise sales that went with private enterprise. However, it would also prove extremely costly: the compensation to existing stockholders was by then estimated at a minimum of £400-500 million in pre-war prices.¹²⁹ Middleton mollified Susan Lawrence, who had wanted positive conclusions in favour of State Purchase, by pointing to divisions in the committee as an excuse, but it

¹²⁶ Ethel Bentham, 'The drink trade in Carlisle' *The Labour Woman* January 1920.

¹²⁷ LPA: LP/LIQ/22, Webb to Middleton, 3 May 1923.

¹²⁸ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.18.

¹²⁹ Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, pp.17-18.

seems that it was this cost factor which in fact proved decisive.¹³⁰ The result was a set of fairly bland conclusions largely re-stating the position adopted in *Labour and the New Social Order*. Nevertheless, MacDonald ignored these and went into the 1923 election advocating nationalization.¹³¹

There was, however, also a hitherto under-explored fourth option. During the inquiry James Nicholson, general secretary of the NUVB, had told Middleton that nationalization would cost too much and therefore the party should simply encourage the brewers to develop what were known as improved public houses.¹³² Offering catering to encourage drinking of the moderate and sociable variety, these were, of course, also establishments being pushed by the brewers themselves through front-organization such as the TTA as the best means of tackling alcoholism. They were also, as the contemporary commentator Ernest Selley argued, seen as a way to ward off further attempts at control of the Trade.¹³³ In the period 1919-24 the Conservative peer, Lord Lamington, three times introduced bills in the Lords to change the licensing laws to encourage their proliferation.¹³⁴

The brewers therefore maintained in their evidence to Webb's inquiry that these establishments were far superior to those 'soulless' establishments provided by the state in Carlisle.¹³⁵ This represented their adoption of some of the principles of the Bishop of Chester's scheme. In their evidence to Webb, they were at pains to state and indeed exaggerate their progress in this direction.

Improved public houses were at the time but a small minority of the total stock of licensed premises in a very slowly changing setting, largely newly-built in the growing suburbs. There were less than 500 of them in the mid-1920s.¹³⁶ Furthermore, as Selley pointed out, they were not so conspicuously a matter of concern in the Trade's various journals as bodies like the TTA implied.¹³⁷ The claim that they promoted disinterested management was also challenged by the committee of enquiry set up by the 1924-29 Conservative government under Lord Southborough when it reported in 1927.¹³⁸ The notion of the improved

¹³⁰ LPA: LP/LIQ/22, Middleton to Lawrence, 29 May 1923, Lawrence to Greenwood, n.d. (c. May 1923).

¹³¹ *Morning Advertiser*, 25 November 1923.

¹³² LPA: LP/LIQ/22, Nicholson to Middleton, 13 February 1923.

¹³³ Selley, pp.121-2.

¹³⁴ *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol.56, cols.741-7, 13 March 1924.

¹³⁵ See, for instance, LPA: LP/LIQ/22, Master to Whitbread, 14 April 1923; LP/LIQ/22/41, Belsher to Middleton, 26 April 1923; Webb, *Labour and the Liquor Trade*, p.17.

¹³⁶ Gourvish and Wilson, p.419.

¹³⁷ Selley, pp.109-16, 119-20.

¹³⁸ Greenaway, p.143.

public house nevertheless proved a good means of seeking to allay public concern about the drink question. Encouraging improvements in existing establishments widely-valued, not least by the male working-classes, could be seen as the easiest and least costly solution both in financial and electoral terms. Compared to Local Option, Prohibition or State Purchase, it was the solution which involved minimal disruption to the existing order. It was still very expensive, with the breweries collectively spending £99m on improving a large part of the stock of licensed premises between the wars and only slowly reaping a return on their investments.¹³⁹ However, at least this did not fall upon the public purse.

The Trade's promotion of the improved public house to the Webb committee and its willingness to spend on these suggests that they were well-aware of their significance as a statement of intent. This rhetoric perfectly chimed with those large sections of Labour opinion that stressed the rights of the moderate drinker to warmth and society, rather than the need to control or ban access to the noxious substance of alcohol for the sake of the weaker brother. It could also be seen as redolent of the Trade setting its own house in order. The *Morning Advertiser* accordingly remarked in 1923 that 'The notion that the public house is a place where the only refreshment to be obtained is alcoholic liquor is rapidly becoming a teetotal fiction.'¹⁴⁰ In fact, the evidence collected by the Webb enquiry does not bear out this sanguine view. It is nevertheless clear from submissions to the enquiry that there was widespread support for them within the party.¹⁴¹ The idea of these establishments, together with the diminishing drunkenness figures, was gradually to undermine the vitality of the temperance campaign.

For the ardent teetotaler, Alfred Salter, the need for that campaign had by no means diminished. The year following Labour's first, brief experience of office, he conducted a survey in the South London district of Bermondsey, where he was the local doctor as well as the local MP. Salter found that the average family spent more per week on beer than on rent, rates, bread and milk put together.¹⁴² His fellow teetotaler, Charlie Ammon, who sat for the nearby seat of Camberwell, similarly claimed that nationally the spending on alcohol of

¹³⁹ David W. Gutze, 'Progressivism and the History of the Public House 1850-1950' *Cultural and Social History* 4/2 (2007), p.248; Gourvish and Wilson, pp.426-7.

¹⁴⁰ *Morning Advertiser*, 6 August 1923.

¹⁴¹ See LPA: LP/LIQ/22/41.

¹⁴² *AYB* (1927), p.54; 'Bermondsey: A Study in Drink Consumption', *AYB* (1930), pp.98-112.

£299m exceeded the combined expenditure on education (£93m), bread (£80m), milk (£70m) and poor relief (£44m).¹⁴³ This bore out concerns expressed by Snowden in 1920: ‘The working classes are their own worst enemies’, he lamented. Their drinking, quite apart from ‘its enormous waste of economic resources, its terrible effects on home life and health and efficiency’ was also, he maintained, ‘the greatest asset the capitalist class has in maintaining its position of domination over Labour’.¹⁴⁴

For Ammon and Salter, drinking also undermined the effectiveness of Labour activists. So attractive were the social and intoxicating pleasures to be had from beer, the latter complained, that Labour propagandists found that when they spoke where alcohol was sold, ‘There are generally more people hanging around the bar than will trouble to attend the meeting upstairs’. Even party activists could find that their enthusiasm for the cause was flagging as closing time drew near.¹⁴⁵ Salter detected a tendency to put booze before politics in other ways too, estimating that in 1926 trade unionists subscribed £400,000 to assist the locked-out miners: a considerable sum which was, however, dwarfed by the £100 million they spent at the same time on alcohol.¹⁴⁶ The then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, may nevertheless have noticed with some alarm that the coal dispute did impact on consumption, so that by 1928 the yield on Beer Duty was £1.5m less than forecast.¹⁴⁷ Salter, however, was clear by 1927 that the extent of Labour’s drinking culture was such that it was increasingly difficult to get a temperance audience within the party.¹⁴⁸ That same year Henderson was allegedly only narrowly persuaded from resigning over the drift away from temperance sentiment within the party’s ruling NEC. Henderson thought, Hugh Dalton grumbled in his memoirs, that temperance was still an electoral asset for winning over old Liberals from that dwindling political party.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ Hull History Centre, Ammon Papers: DMN/9/2, Charles G. Ammon, *A Temperance Policy for Labour* (London: Liquor Popular Control Bill Committee, 1928), p.2.

¹⁴⁴ Philip Snowden, ‘Foreword’, to Garratt, *Labour and the Liquor Traffic*, p.3.

¹⁴⁵ Institute of Alcohol Studies, London [henceforward IAS]: GP Box, Dr Alfred Salter MP, *A Message to Labour*, speech delivered to the United Kingdom Alliance, 19 October 1927, p.2; *Kentish Independent*, 25 September 1936.

¹⁴⁶ Salter, *A Message to Labour*, p.3.

¹⁴⁷ Churchill College, Cambridge: Churchill Papers: CHAR18/100, CWH to Grigg, 12 July 1928; Churchill to Sir Francis Floud, 20 March 1929.

¹⁴⁸ Salter, *A Message to Labour*, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ Hugh Dalton, *Call Back Yesterday: Memoirs 1887-1931* (London: Frederick Muller, 1953), p.172. The NEC minutes are insufficiently detailed to confirm this incident.

Henderson, who had early in his career been a Liberal electoral agent, indeed always regarded winning over Liberals as part of his electoral politics. This was, however, no longer as central to the electoral strategy of Labour as a whole. Instead, the experience of the Webb inquiry appeared to confirm just how divisive temperance was, both internally and as an electoral issue, particularly in the changed drinking environment of the 1920s. The resulting report was rapidly shelved. Labour then ended its first experience of government by going into the 1924 election committed to nothing more than the convening of a Royal Commission on the subject. As the party programme, *Labour and the Nation* put it in 1928:

On the one hand, new experiments in the control and management of the trade have been made, whilst heavy duties on liquor have done something to curb excessive consumption. On the other hand, the advent of the cheap motor car and motorcycle, cheap charabanc transport, wireless and the cinema have produced large changes in social habits....At the same time, the abnormal conditions created by the war and post-war years have led in numerous cases to an increased consumption of liquor, though it is a matter of satisfaction that drunkenness is declining....¹⁵⁰

In the same year, as Ammon noted, a motion in favour of Local Option was heavily defeated at the party conference. Ammon had supported the motion.¹⁵¹ Subsequently he instead, along with a good number of other teetotal Nonconformists in the PLP, put forward the 1928 Liquor (Popular Control) Bill. This was a measure which had first been introduced in 1921 in the Lords by the Bishop of Oxford. It had thereafter been regularly re-introduced there, often by Lord Astor. The 1928 Bill, ironically, was both the first to be introduced in the Commons and the first to be sponsored by Labour.¹⁵² It seems to represent a moment when the most enthusiastic temperance advocates were prepared to try to unite party opinion behind this particular policy. Ammon formed the Liquor (Popular Control) Bill Committee to promote the measure around the country. Pamphlets were written in support. Their bill, however, went undebated. Nor did Ammon succeed in reviving the idea of nationalization within Labour. This attempt proved to be the last time a popular control bill was introduced. Instead, the view was gaining ground that liquor was a diminishing problem. Given

¹⁵⁰ *Labour and the Nation* (London: Labour Party, 1928), p.32.

¹⁵¹ Ammon, *A Temperance Policy for Labour*, p.3.

¹⁵² *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol.219, col.1173, 3 July 1928.

these factors, a Royal Commission was again Labour's favoured policy in the 1929 election.

In the past historians have often treated the inter-war years as if they form a coherent period, separated from the rest of history by the conflagrations of the two world wars. As far as the politics of alcohol are concerned, this is reflected in the general tendency noted above to regard these as having largely disappeared by 1918. John Law has, however, recently pointed out the problems of this approach, noting that the 1920s are different in many ways from the succeeding decade.¹⁵³ This was certainly true for Labour and the politics of alcohol. The watershed was the late 1920s, with 1929 the last election in which alcohol was a significant issue.

This was partly because of the professionalization and nationalization of political activity. With the advent of a mass electorate following the 1918 Representation of the People Act, all three parties were concerned to manage more tightly the way in which their message was conveyed to the public. This was not least in the face of the growing number of bodies in the 1920s which joined existing temperance and Trade organizations in canvassing candidates or addressing them with questionnaires. By 1929 Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberals had all mutually agreed that the way to avoid the lobbying MacDonald had complained of in 1923 was to agree that their candidates should not respond to any questionnaires by organizations from outside their own constituencies.¹⁵⁴

The 1929 election nevertheless still featured large and enthusiastic temperance meetings, such as the gathering of 3,000 addressed by Snowden's wife, Ethel in the De Montfort Hall in Leicester.¹⁵⁵ Her views, however, were no longer particularly representative within her party. Two years previously her husband had said that he 'would not cross the street to support a candidate of my own party who was not sound on the temperance question.'¹⁵⁶ During the 1929 election, in contrast, the ardent Quaker teetotaller J. H. Hudson was

¹⁵³ M. J. Law, "'The car indispensable': the hidden influence of the car in inter-war suburban London" *Journal of Historical Geography* 38/4 (2013), pp.424-33.

¹⁵⁴ *Morning Advertiser*, 4 May 1929. See also John H. Millett, 'British Interest-Group Tactics: A Case Study' *Political Science Quarterly*, 72/1 (1957), p.78.

¹⁵⁵ Mark Hayler, *The Vision of a Century 1853-1953: The United Kingdom Alliance in Historical Retrospect* (London: United Kingdom Alliance, 1953), p.124.

¹⁵⁶ *Free Church Year Book* (1927), p.89.

reprimanded by the NEC for campaigning for temperance in another Labour MP's constituency.¹⁵⁷

There was, however, a minor success for such reformers during the 1929-31 term of the Labour government with the passage of the Road Traffic Act 1930. This made it an offence when driving to be under the influence of drink or drugs to the extent of being 'incapable of having control of a motor vehicle'. However, what that extent might be was not specified in the legislation, rendering it somewhat ineffective. Wilfrid Winterton, a Leicestershire Labour activist who was on the executive of the UKA, in 1936 demanded blood tests on motorists. His pamphlet, *The Slaughter on the Roads*, prompted a Lords select committee the following year, but its 1939 report sank unnoticed in the midst of the Second World War. Legislation on blood alcohol levels for motorists was not introduced until 1962 and only made effective with Labour's 1967 Road Safety Act.¹⁵⁸

The 1930 Road Traffic Act was instead primarily concerned with road safety, rather than the promotion of temperance. Even Salter, in making clear his opposition during the Second Reading debate on this legislation, referred exclusively to his concerns about speeding rather than drink.¹⁵⁹ There were to be no more Local Option Bills put forward by temperance-minded MPs during the 1929-31 Labour government, or subsequently. The only attempt to enact a piece of temperance legislation at this time was the private member's bill sponsored by Wilfrid's brother, Ernest Winterton. In the course of introducing his bill, Ernest referred to the idea that drink should be labelled with health warnings, an idea revived in 2014 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Alcohol Misuse.¹⁶⁰ His bill, however, merely proposed to end the £2m per year advertising expenditure by the Trade. It was not an attack on the freedom of the drinker to drink, but only on the Trade's ability to lure him or her into doing so. Temperance interests warned of growing alcohol advertising.¹⁶¹ The bill, however, failed at first reading. Most of the 112 MPs who voted with Ernest

¹⁵⁷ LPA: NEC minutes, 26 March 1929.

¹⁵⁸ Winterton, pp.97-104; Nicholls, p.200.

¹⁵⁹ *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol.235, cols.1259-72, 18 February 1930.

¹⁶⁰ Rebecca Smith and Georgia Graham, 'Wine and beer should have cigarette-style health warnings and calorie contents on labels' *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 August 2014.

¹⁶¹ Friends House Library, London: *Friends Temperance Union Annual Report*, (1930-31), p.7.

Winterton were Labour, but 25 also joined the Tories in the opposing majority, including the Prime Minister's son, Malcolm MacDonald.¹⁶²

The failure of this measure is ironic given the launch in 1933 of the campaign by the Brewers' Society 'to get the beer-drinking habit instilled into thousands, almost millions of young men who do not at present know the taste of beer'.¹⁶³ This campaign seems to have had some success given the increasing consumption figures during the remainder of the 1930s.¹⁶⁴ In response, in 1935 the Labour peer, Lord Arnold, unsuccessfully again tried to get liquor advertising controls introduced.¹⁶⁵ Institutionally, however, the party was instead, both at national and local level, increasingly keen to disassociate itself from temperance. For example, when Salter in 1933 opposed a bill which would have effectively extended the hours of sale and was therefore strongly supported by the CIU, this simply provoked the rejoinder from his fellow Labour MP, E. G. Hicks, that 'The club movement has been a very valuable agency on behalf of Labour.'¹⁶⁶

This particular bill, however, went no further. When the Royal Commission set up by Labour in 1929 finally reported in 1932 it also had no effect. Its majority report revived the suggestion of the 1908 Bill that there should be Local Option in new housing estates, though Carter – who served on the Commission – wanted Local Option extended generally to England and Wales. The report also recommended measures to reduce licences and strengthen magistrates' powers, control clubs more closely, introduce teaching on the dangers of alcohol in schools and a uniform 10pm closing time. Most of these suggestions were welcomed by Ammon.¹⁶⁷ By then, however, he had lost his seat as Labour was buried under the electoral landslide of 1931. The succeeding National government showed no interest in using its enormous majority to implement any of the Royal Commission's recommendations, including various measures to encourage improved public houses. Instead it reduced beer duty by 35 per cent and the retail price of beer by 1d a pint in 1933: the likely impact of the

¹⁶² *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol.250, cols.346-54, 25 March 1931; *Alliance News*, August 1931.

¹⁶³ Sir Edgar Sanders quoted in 'The Trade versus the Nation' *Alliance News*, September 1932, pp.98-9.

¹⁶⁴ *AYB* (1941), pp.80-2.

¹⁶⁵ *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser., vol.96, cols.410-53, 28 March 1935.

¹⁶⁶ *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 282, cols. 2013-14, 8 December 1933.

¹⁶⁷ C. G. Ammon, 'The Road We Have Travelled' *The New Campaigner* Jan.-Mar. (1933), pp.5-9; Williams and Thompson Brake, pp.85, 97.

latter measure on profit margins helping to prompt the brewers' advertising campaign.¹⁶⁸

Labour showed little more immediate interest in the findings of the Royal Commission it had set up. This was despite the fact that the party leaders in the early 1930s were keen teetotallers. Henderson succeeded MacDonald on the latter's defection to lead the National government in 1931, and he was succeeded in turn in 1932 by George Lansbury. Lansbury in 1935 tried to revive Keir Hardie's sessional abstinence pledge.¹⁶⁹ This effort, however, proved even less successful than Hardie's. Furthermore, by the time of the 1935 election, Lansbury had been replaced as party leader by Clement Attlee who, despite supporting Ernest Winterton's bill was a moderate drinker with no strong views on the temperance question.¹⁷⁰

Although 73 of the 154 Labour MPs returned in the 1935 general election were allegedly abstainers (compared to 103 in 1929 and 21 in 1931),¹⁷¹ plenty of the rest apparently more than made up for their abstemiousness.¹⁷² Many Labour candidates indeed now appeared in the *Morning Advertiser's* lists of those they considered sound on the drink question. In consequence, as it went on to note, temperance was a complete non-issue in that year's electoral campaign.¹⁷³ Indeed, the very mention of temperance was something to be shunned. For instance, in January 1934 the local party in Portsmouth even complained to the NEC about the mere association of Henderson, who had but recently been party leader, with the Workers Temperance League [WTL].¹⁷⁴ The following month, Sheffield Trades Council refused to allow the WTL opportunity to express its views 'owing to the controversial character of the subject matter'.¹⁷⁵

The WTL had been re-established by Hudson in 1931 as a replacement for the long-defunct TULOTF.¹⁷⁶ Hudson may have drawn some comfort from an opinion poll in early 1936 which suggested about 25 per cent of the population would support prohibition.¹⁷⁷ Even in Scotland, however, by then Labour had

¹⁶⁸ Gourvish and Wilson, p.352.

¹⁶⁹ *Alliance News*, January 1936.

¹⁷⁰ Winterton, pp.91-2.

¹⁷¹ *Alliance News*, February 1933; January 1936.

¹⁷² John S. Rowett, 'The Labour Party and Local Government: Theory and Practice in the Inter-War Years' unpub. Oxford D.Phil Thesis (1979), pp.81-2; *Labour Abstainer*, Feb. 1950, p.4.

¹⁷³ *Morning Advertiser*, 5 November 1935.

¹⁷⁴ LPA: NEC minutes, 24 January 1934.

¹⁷⁵ Jones, 'Labour, Society and the Drink Question', p.121.

¹⁷⁶ *Alliance News*, July 1939.

¹⁷⁷ *Methodist Times*, 27 August 1936.

long concluded that there was little electoral advantage in being tarred with the temperance, still less the prohibitionist brush. A pro-temperance stance had been relatively easy to adopt before the Great War:

- (a) It was part of a body of social reform proposals long advocated by radical opinion;
- (b) Drink was seen as more of a social menace;
- (c) The club movement was less significant;
- (d) Labour remained unlikely to have to take responsibility for this issue in government.

The Carlisle scheme, the 1921 Licensing Act and the improved public house undermined the first two of these. Meanwhile, the club movement grew apace in the inter-war years. They were well-organized compared to the drinking dens too many pubs remained.¹⁷⁸ B. T. Hall even claimed that his clubs had done more for temperance than any other organization.¹⁷⁹ By 1935 the CIU was claiming 4 million members.¹⁸⁰ It was also willing, throughout the inter-war years, to lobby for drink interests. In the process it sought, as B. T. Hall put it in 1924, to free the party from ‘the domination of the little Bethel state of mind into which one or two of its leaders endeavoured to thrust it’.¹⁸¹ In this endeavour, they undoubtedly succeeded. By the 1930s licensed victuallers seemingly were more concerned about the competition they faced from clubs than the threats from chapel-going temperance reformers.¹⁸² Furthermore, through the CIU’s agency Labour was able to tap into the beer-barrel politics that had served working-class Tory politics so well at the end of the nineteenth century. Labour was thus able to embed itself in a working-class culture suspicious of Liberal moralising and of statist social (as opposed to economic) controls.

The politics of alcohol did not disappear from the Labour movement with the Great War. If anything, Greenwood’s campaign for nationalization of the Trade added a new dimension to the intra-party debate. This, however, failed to capture the movement. It was undermined first by the need for the party to demonstrate financial responsibility in government in the 1920s, rather than

¹⁷⁸ This was true of 80 per cent in city centres according to Selley, p.46.

¹⁷⁹ Selley, pp.144, 153-5.

¹⁸⁰ *Christian World*, 7 November 1935.

¹⁸¹ Cited in *Primitive Methodist Leader*, 23 October, 1924; See also LPA: LP/LIQ/22, B. T. Hall to Middleton, 5 March 1923.

¹⁸² See, for instance, IAS: *Some Club Problems* (London: Licensed Victuallers’ Central Protection Society of London, 1932).

expensively expropriating the Trade. The perceived need for nationalization was then further undermined by the idea of instead promoting responsible drinking through the improved public house. John Parker revived the idea briefly in 1947 after beer shortages the previous year led to attacks on the Attlee government.¹⁸³ In the end Labour's only move in this direction was the public control of licensed premises introduced for the post-war New Towns by Attlee's government in 1949 (and repealed by the succeeding Tory government in 1952).¹⁸⁴ In the same year Stafford Cripps, although an ardent teetotaler, reduced beer duty from the heights it reached during the Second World War, balancing this by demanding a cut of 1d a pint from prices, as Neville Chamberlain had done in 1933.¹⁸⁵

The party meanwhile responded to the struggle between 'Little Bethel' and the Clubs by temporising enquiries. Furthermore, the 1920s saw all three parties move to contain such pressures, hence the 1929 agreement that candidates should not respond to questionnaires from organizations outside their own constituencies. This was designed to increase central control of party policies. In Labour's case, an increasingly professionalized party was trying its best to avoid becoming the captive of either the chapels or the clubs. This route was chosen even before prohibition became clearly discredited in the USA.

This cleared the way for a straightforward fight with the Conservatives around economic rather than morality issues. Planning, rather than prohibition, was the flavour of the 1930s. From Dalton's point of view, continuing temperance debates only muddied the waters, gave credibility to an alternative explanation of poverty and helped to sustain the struggling Liberals. Labour's deliberate removal of the politics of alcohol from the agenda was thus not just about managing its internal strife over the issue, or of defusing the potential electoral pitfalls it could involve. Nor was it just about ensuring Labour could appeal to working-class Tory as well as working-class Liberal culture. It was also a piece of statecraft whereby Labour's place within a re-configured two-party system was cemented and the Liberals displaced, not in the early 1920s as suggested by Maurice Cowling,¹⁸⁶ but in the early 1930s.

¹⁸³ Gourvish and Wilson, p.358.

¹⁸⁴ Greenaway, pp.151-7

¹⁸⁵ Gourvish and Wilson, pp.352, 366.

¹⁸⁶ Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour: The beginning of modern British politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

Thereafter, Labour's concern was to manage drinking culture, rather than end it. The idea of encouraging the moderate drinker, rather than curbing the problem drinker or alcoholic, became central to party policy. Accordingly, when the licensing laws began to be relaxed, with the extension of hours enacted by Macmillan's Tory government in 1961, there was limited opposition from Labour. Attacks on the Third Reading were led by the Welsh Congregationalist James Griffiths with a spirited evocation of the Nonconformist Conscience. In a free vote, however, only 55 MPs – many of them Labour Nonconformists – joined him in the No lobby to oppose the legislation.¹⁸⁷

What began as a minor increase in hours of sale has since become wholesale liberalization. The controls introduced by the Victorians were gradually reversed, culminating in Labour's 2003 Licensing Act. This introduced 24 hour licences. At a time when the same Labour government was presiding over a moral panic about anti-social behaviour, the legislation's critics argued that it was also actively encouraging it through this measure. As Martin Kettle put it in *The Guardian*, this reflected 'a dangerous delusion...the belief that by liberalising our licensing laws we will reduce heavy public drinking and all the attendant problems of public drunkenness in our city centres'.¹⁸⁸

This delusion was, however, the logical result of the adoption during the 1930s of the idea of the moderate drinker in the improved public house as the solution to the problem of drunkenness. By 2003, however, the public house had changed. The 1989 Beer Orders, intended by the Thatcher government to liberalize the market by replacing the public house tied to the brewery, instead fostered the rise of retail chains controlling or managing on-sales. The results did not support the expectations of those reformers, like Snowden, who had earlier argued for the separation of the commercial interests in manufacturing and retailing alcohol. All too often the new pubcos were seen as having a vested interest in maximising sales through cut-price promotions.¹⁸⁹

In doing so they were operating in a highly-competitive environment shaped by other changes in regulation. Among the most important, though one curiously often overlooked by those promoting the 2003 Licensing Act, was the liberalisation of off-sales since the 1960s. Drinking culture in consequence

¹⁸⁷ *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol.642, cols.1557-1637, 21 June 1961.

¹⁸⁸ Martin Kettle, 'My name is Britain, and I have a drink problem', *The Guardian*, 31 May 2003.

¹⁸⁹ Virginia Berridge, *Temperance: Its history and impact on current and future alcohol policy* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005), p.34.

partly shifted into private space. The clubs had continued to steadily grow in the 30 years after the Second World War.¹⁹⁰ However, young drinkers increasingly turned to a different kind of club from the 1980s. The rapidly-growing student population, for instance, shifted instead towards nightclubs offering loud music and more cocktail-oriented alcoholic beverages.¹⁹¹ Off-sales also meant drinking increasingly took place amongst younger drinkers before they went out to partake of the burgeoning night-time economy. Working-men's clubs meanwhile became instead associated with an older clientele. They were also hit by the smoking ban introduced in by the Labour government in 2007 which the CIU lobbied hard against. The CIU may still boast over two million members, but the number of its clubs has about halved during a long, steady decline since the 1980s.¹⁹² Nor were they assisted by the 2003 Act. The main beneficiaries instead proved to be, not the Trade, but the large supermarket chains. Most of the 24-hour licences introduced when the legislation came into force in 2005 went to them.

Meanwhile, temperance had by the end of the 1930s come to be seen as rigid and moralizing. Mass Observation may have found in their studies of pub culture in Bolton in the late 1930s that drink was still a significant source of conflict within the local Labour party 'between Methodist teetotallers and plain, drinking Labourites.'¹⁹³ According to Salter, a majority of Labour MPs were still teetotallers. Even Labour he complained, however, would no longer touch temperance reform. The image of the drinker had been transformed by the spreading idea of the improved public house.¹⁹⁴ In contrast, it was now the temperance movement which had an image problem. Its concerns seemed peripheral compared to the issues of unemployment of inadequate wages complained the future Labour leader, Harold Wilson, in 1938.¹⁹⁵

The temperance movement had sought to liberate the drinker from the physiological grip of alcohol and the economic grip of the Trade. But even in the late 1920s it was in steady decline.¹⁹⁶ By the time Wilson was in Number

¹⁹⁰ Gourvish and Wilson, pp.457, 569.

¹⁹¹ See Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands, *Urban Nightscapes: youth culture, pleasure spaces and corporate power* (London: Routledge, 2003); *Nightclubs – UK* (London: Mintel, 2008); *Student lifestyles – UK* (London: Mintel, 2008).

¹⁹² Hannah Marshall, 'Last orders for the Working Men's Club?' *Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 2012.

¹⁹³ Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1943) p.167.

¹⁹⁴ IAS: Alfred Salter, *The Prospect before the Temperance Movement in this Country* (London: United Kingdom Alliance, 1939), pp.3, 6-7.

¹⁹⁵ Letter to *Christian World*, 8 December 1938.

¹⁹⁶ Norman Longmate, *The Waterdrinkers*, (London: Hamilton, 1968), p.279; R Murray Hyslop, *The Centenary of the Temperance Movement 1832-1932* (London: Independent Press, 1931), p.31.

Ten in 1964-70, as a young historian Brian Harrison found his work on the history of temperance deeply unfashionable ‘because linked to individualistic attitudes long repudiated, even by the Liberal Party, let alone Harold Wilson’s Labour Party’.¹⁹⁷ Virginia Berridge encountered similar attitudes when she came to reflect on the significance of the movement’s history in the wake of the 2003 Act: she found it was regularly dismissed by historians and policymakers as narrow-minded, restricting and irrelevant.¹⁹⁸

It may be, as Berridge suggests, that temperance interests remained wedded to the idea of Local Option for too long.¹⁹⁹ This ceased to be a serious policy option, certainly within Labour, by the end of the 1920s. Temperance advocates within the party, however, proved unable to build a winning coalition around other policy options. In the process, temperance advocacy became the personal choice of a minority within the movement. The revival by Hudson in the early 1930s of a temperance organization within the party, the WTL, was thus not a sign of the strength of temperance in the Labour movement, but of its steady marginalization. Temperance, like pacifism, became in the course of the 1930s a faith rather than a policy.²⁰⁰

Peter Catterall is Reader in History at the University of Westminster and chair of the George Lansbury Memorial Trust. He has written extensively on modern British political history, and is currently completing a book on *Radicalism, Righteousness and Religion: Labour and the Free Churches 1918-1939*, to be published by Bloomsbury.



Advisory Council

Chairman: Michael Carr, Vice Chairman: Reverend Dr Janet Tollington, Director: Katherine Brown, Professor Rob Baggott, Professor Jonathan Shepherd CBE, Professor David Jernigan, Dr Marsha Morgan, Professor Petra Meier, Professor Gerard Hastings, Dr Jane Marshall
Secretary to the Board: Paul Whitaker

A company limited by guarantee, Registered Charity No 1112671
www.ias.org.uk

¹⁹⁷ Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p.11.

¹⁹⁸ Berridge, p.1.

¹⁹⁹ Berridge, pp.33-7.

²⁰⁰ See Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The defining of a faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).