

Brewers, Publicans, and Working-Class Drinkers: Pressure Group Politics in Late Victorian and Edwardian England

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At the turn of the century the English drink trade boasted a reputation for political effectiveness which other pressure groups could only envy.¹ The brewers had money and MPs, while the publicans swayed votes of working-class drinkers. This political influence was real but not unlimited. Sometimes Liberal politicians and temperance reformers depicted the trade as more formidable than it was in order to excuse their own defeats and to provoke a reaction against what they alleged to be corruption by privileged monopolists.²

As a controversial licensed trade the retail sale of drink was subject to elaborate parliamentary regulation, administered by licensing committees of the justices of the peace, whose discretionary powers increased as a result of judgements in the high courts. Its ambiguous legal status, combined with a national consensus disturbed by excessive working-class drinking, made the trade politically vulnerable. Moreover, alcoholic drink was taxed heavily; in 1879-80 liquor taxes provided the Exchequer with 43.4 percent of the national revenue, a proportion which fell to 38.4 by 1899-1900 as a result of the growth of other taxes.³ Alarmed by the financial ruin which a many-sided temperance movement threatened, trade leaders struggled with incomplete success to arouse the apathetic to defend their livelihoods and to quiet the quarrels which alienated retailers from wholesalers and set metropolitan and provincial brewers at odds. The big London brewers who by the close of the nineteenth century dominated trade defence had to compromise with moderate reformers to fend off more dangerous proposals for temperance reform.

Late Victorian drink trade societies, like their temperance counterparts, developed out of reorganizations of older, less structured and politicized societies, often as federations of local and regional bodies, and like the temperance organizations, employed propaganda and protest both to rally immediate adherents and to

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¹ Basil L. CRAPSTER, "'Our Trade, Our Politics': a Study of the Political Activity of the British Liquor Industry, 1868-1910" (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1949), is the pioneering work.

² William Gladstone's celebrated explanation of the Liberal defeat in the general election of 1874, that he had been "borne down in a torrent of gin and beer", illustrates the danger of confusing a well-coined phrase with accurate analysis. For a critique, see H. J. HANHAM, *Elections and Party Management* (London, 1959), pp. 223-25.

³ George B. WILSON, *Alcohol and the Nation: a Contribution to the Study of the Liquor Problem in the United Kingdom from 1800 to 1935* (London, 1940), p. 197.

appeal to a larger public. When private lobbying of politicians no longer sufficed, the drink trade, like the temperance reformers, demanded that parliamentary candidates answer test questions and campaigned for sympathetic politicians. Although it nominally endorsed only individuals, by the end of the nineteenth century the trade had allied itself with the Conservative Party and the Liberal Unionists.

Until the 1880s the big brewers showed little interest in forming organizations for trade defence. The immensely rich London and Burton brewers stood aloof from vulgar agitations and instead, as respected MPs, cultivated influence within both parties. With the help of brewer subsidies, the retailers operated what little effective organization there was. The London Licensed Victuallers' Protection Society, organized in 1833, acquired a prominent role in trade defence, aided by its location, a concentrated and relatively numerous membership, and a salaried staff. It depended heavily on a few long-serving officers and officials.⁴ In the provinces, two regional societies, the Birmingham-based United Towns Association (founded in 1836) and the Manchester-based Provincial Defence League (1854) joined to form the Licensed Victuallers' National Defence League in 1873.⁵ In the same year the London society organized a rival league, most of whose affiliates were in the Home Counties.⁶ Despite their jurisdictional quarrels the two English leagues managed to join with representatives of the Scottish and Irish retail trade in 1883 to set up the Parliamentary Committee of the Licensed Victuallers of the United Kingdom.⁷

Until the 1880s the brewers' societies did little other than hold dinners and elect officers. The Brewers' Company, a City livery company which dated from the fifteenth century, acted as a symbol for the big London brewers and helped coordinate their policies, but the governing Court busied itself mostly with charitable trusts. In addition there was the Country Brewers' Society, which, despite an ambitious name, for long consisted of medium-sized and small brewers near London. When founded in 1822, before railroad travel, it had only fourteen members, none more distant than Reading and Brighton.⁸ In the North the drink trade, like the temperance reformers, showed special militancy. New legislation provoked the trade, namely: the Wine and Beerhouse Act (1869), which abolished what Parliament had authorized in 1830, free licensing in beer, or allowing virtually anyone to sell beer in return for paying a licence fee; the unsuccessful licensing bill introduced two years later by the Home Secretary, H. A. Bruce, which would have closed many licensed houses; and Bruce's Licensing Act of 1872 which restricted hours of sale. In response the northern brewers founded the Manchester Brewers' Central Association (1869), the Yorkshire Brewers' Association (1870), and the Liverpool and District Brewers' Association (1871). Somnolent in quiet times, the provincial societies awakened and made noise during crises. These organizations were kept alive

⁴ For instance, an influential honorary treasurer, J. J. Homer, held office for over forty years. *Morning Advertiser*, 5 March 1888, pp. 5-6.

⁵ *Great National Conference of Licensed Victuallers' Delegates to the Exchange Assembly Room, Birmingham, January 8th and 9th, 1873, Full Report* (Birmingham, [1873]).

⁶ *Licensed Victuallers' Guardian*, 21 June 1873, p. 212; *Licensed Victuallers' Year Book* (1874), pp. 68-69.

⁷ *Country Brewers' Gazette*, 23 May 1883, p. 183; 18 July 1883, pp. 244-45; 1 August 1883, p. 264.

⁸ Richard Moss, in *Country Brewers' Gazette*, 5 November 1884, p. 401.

by a handful of activists such as Thomas Clowes, the founding chairman of the Manchester society, who continued in office until his death in 1889.⁹

In the decade from the mid-1880s through the early 1890s external attack, real and anticipated, the policies of the licensing justices, and commercial reorganization reshaped the pattern of trade defence. Virtually all responsible opinion regarded the abuse of drink as a major social problem. Traditionally the concern had been for the drinker and his family, the sinner and his innocent victims. By the end of the nineteenth century sociological arguments about the national interest came to the fore. Drink allegedly undermined economic efficiency in an increasingly competitive world and caused or aggravated poverty, crime, disease, and social disorder.¹⁰ A majority of people believed that moderate drinking was natural, acceptable, and inevitable, and simply sought to reform the conditions under which drink was sold and to reduce the excessive number of drinksellers. In England and Wales there was one licence for on-premises consumption for every 251 persons in 1886, which declined to one for every 285 in 1896, with a greater concentration of drinking places in older urban districts.¹¹

A minority of people believed that drink was intrinsically evil and favoured teetotalism and sometimes prohibition. Teetotalers and prohibitionists — concentrated in the industrial towns, among the lower middle class and respectable skilled workers, most of them Nonconformists — worked harder for their ideal than did more moderate licensing reformers, and were organized into a network of societies which provided their members with a social life free from alcohol.¹² Prohibitionists looked to the United Kingdom Alliance, founded in Manchester in 1853, for political leadership.¹³ In a shift from moral suasion which had characterized the earlier total abstinence movement they considered statutory coercion necessary. They regarded the drink trade as their adversary and those who drank as exploited victims. The advanced temperance reformers helped their cause by asking for prohibition in the form of Direct Local Veto, which would end the sale of drink locally after

⁹ *Brewers' Journal*, 15 October 1889, p. 504; 15 December 1889, p. 643.

¹⁰ For the connection between drink and poverty, see James B. BROWN, "The Pig or the Sty: Drink and Poverty in Late Victorian England", *International Review of Social History*, 18 (1973): 380-95; A. E. DINGLE, "Drink and Working-Class Living Standards in Britain, 1870-1914", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 25 (1972): 608-22.

¹¹ WILSON, *Alcohol and the Nation*, p. 380.

¹² See the magisterial work by Brian HARRISON, *Drink and the Victorians: the Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (London, 1971); and Lilian L. SHIMAN, "Crusade against Drink in Victorian England" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1970). For the other nations in the United Kingdom, see W. R. LAMBERT, "Drink and Sobriety in Wales, 1835-1895" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wales, 1969); D. C. PATON, "Drink and the Temperance Movement in Nineteenth-Century Scotland" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1976); George Cornelius BRETHERTON III, "The Irish Temperance Movement: 1829-47" (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1978). For denominational studies, see George Thompson BRAKE, *Drink: Ups and Downs of Methodist Attitudes to Temperance* (London, 1974); Gerald W. OLSEN, "Pub and Parish — Beginnings of Temperance Reform in the Church of England, 1835-1875" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1972); Lilian L. SHIMAN, "The Church of England Temperance Society in the Nineteenth Century", *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 41 (1972): 179-95.

¹³ For the United Kingdom Alliance, in addition to HARRISON's *Drink and the Victorians*, see A. E. DINGLE, "The Agitation for Prohibition in England: a Study of the Political Activity and Influence of the United Kingdom Alliance, 1871-1895" (Ph.D. thesis, Monash University, 1974); and D. A. HAMER, *The Politics of Electoral Pressure* (Hassocks, 1977).

a referendum.¹⁴ By the 1880s many Liberals who themselves drank supported the Veto as a right of local self-government.¹⁵

Virtually every comprehensive scheme for temperance reform wanted to suppress public houses and consequently raised the question of compensation. Some reformers, for the most part prohibitionists, opposed paying compensation in principle. Others conceded only partial compensation with that to be paid by the surviving public houses. The trade denounced anything but full market value compensation as confiscation and usually demanded that tax revenues pay for disruption caused by a change in public policy.

Only beerhouses licensed before 1869 had a statutory right to renewal, and they had slight commercial importance as compared with the larger and more numerous public houses which sold both beer and spirits. Although public house licences were granted for one year only, the justices seldom refused to renew except when there had been a serious violation of the law. Despite a rising population the justices granted few new licences for the on-premises consumption of drink in the late nineteenth century. Consequently the existing drinking places acquired a monopoly value.

Anxious for outlets for their beer, brewers vied for exclusive rights to supply available public houses. As licences were attached to particular premises, brewers purchased their freeholds or leaseholds at inflated prices, or in London tied licence holders by extending large mortgage loans. The publican who brewed his own beer disappeared. Some breweries damaged their future profitability with overly expensive acquisitions which in the early 1900s a decline in beer sales made untenable. The tied house system strengthened the brewers' opposition to any reform scheme which denied compensation. Between 1886 and 1913 the proportion of licensed premises in England and Wales tied to brewers rose from seventy to ninety-five per cent.¹⁶ In 1904 a prohibitionist MP with a reputation as a statistician used insurance figures to offer an estimate of £125,000,000 for the market value of the public houses of England and Wales, including both tied and free houses. Other estimates went much higher; for instance, another prohibitionist MP suggested twice that amount in 1890.¹⁷ Unfortunately for the brewers, whatever the figure, the high

¹⁴ For temperance motives and programmes, see Henry CARTER, *The English Temperance Movement: a Study in Objectives* (London, 1933); and David M. FAHEY, "Drink and the Meaning of Reform in Late Victorian and Edwardian England", *Cithara*, 13 (1974): 46-56.

¹⁵ For the Liberals and temperance, see David M. FAHEY, "The Politics of Drink: Pressure Groups and the British Liberal Party, 1883-1908", *Social Science*, 54 (1979): 76-85; J. R. GREENAWAY, "The Local Option Question and British Politics, 1864-1914" (Ph.D. thesis, Leeds University, 1974); and David E. WRIGHT, "The British Liberal Party and the Liquor Licensing Question, 1895-1905" (Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1972).

¹⁶ On tied houses, see John VAIZEY, *The Brewing Industry, 1886-1951* (London, 1960); D. N. KNOX, "The Development of the Tied House System in London", *Oxford Economic Papers*, new ser., 10 (1958): 66-83; Mark GIROUARD, "The Great Pub Boom", *Times Literary Supplement* (20 December 1974): 1444-46.

¹⁷ T. P. WHITTAKER, in *Hansard*, 4th ser., 134 (1904): c. 809; W. S. CAINE, in *Hansard*, 3rd ser., 344 (1890): c. 738. In 1918 an official inquiry into State purchase of the drink trade estimated that the cost for England, Wales, and Ireland would be £350,000,000, including brewers, free houses, on-licence holders, and retail off-licences, but excluding distillers. The estimate also left out Scotland, for which the cost was calculated at more than £50,000,000. Derek H. ALDCROFT, "Control of the Liquor Trade in Great Britain, 1914-21", in *Trade and Transport*, ed. W. H. CHALONER and B. M. RATCLIFFE (Manchester, 1977), pp. 246-47.

courts interpreted the law to deny this empire any security. The justices could refuse to renew licences even when the public houses had broken no law.

In addition to its precarious legal status the drink trade differed from most industries in its commercial concentration. Frequent mergers and investment in tied houses created economic giants. Beginning in 1886 with Guinness, most breweries became public companies which sold shares on the Stock Exchange. By 1905 seventeen of the forty-seven largest industrial companies in the United Kingdom were breweries and another was a distillery. The brewery firm of Watney, Combe, and Reid reported the second highest valuation of any industrial company, nearly £15,000,000.¹⁸ Individual brewers numbered among the very wealthy. For instance, in 1893 and again in 1899 a brewer left personal property valued for probate at nearly £2,900,000.¹⁹ The wealth of the brewers opened doors for them in society and in politics, but it also aroused resentment which made the agitation of temperance reformers more dangerous. The size of the brewery firms and the wealth of the brewers alarmed people who feared that so powerful an interest group might threaten the integrity of political life.

Confronting a broadly based, if fragmented, temperance assault, and lacking statutory security for tied house investments, trade defence became centralized, politicized, and staffed with paid officials. The Country Brewers' Society was reorganized in 1883-84, the National Trade Defence Fund was founded in 1888 and reorganized early in the 1890s, and the metropolitan publicans' association was reorganized early in the 1890s. The big brewers who increasingly dominated the wholesale and retail trade also dominated the new structure of trade defence.

T. O. Wethered, a former MP, promoted the first of the great reorganizations, that of the Country Brewers' Society. It acquired permanent offices, employed a paid staff, and published its own newspaper. It furnished speakers, polemical literature, statistics, and in test cases legal assistance. It provided the county brewers' societies which sprang up in the mid-1880s, with places on its governing committee.²⁰ The Country Brewers' Society became in fact what it had been only in name, an organization which hoped to enroll all country brewers. The reorganization produced an increase in membership from 316 in 1883 to 637 eight years later, in affiliated societies from twelve to forty, and in subscriptions from less than £400 to more than £2,100.²¹ By way of comparison the Manchester Brewers' Central Association, which retained its independence, had an income in the year 1890-91 of somewhat over £900.²² The reorganized Country Brewers' Society owed much of

¹⁸ P. L. PAYNE, "The Emergence of the Large-Scale Company in Great Britain, 1870-1914", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 20 (1967): 530-32, 539-40.

¹⁹ W. D. RUBINSTEIN, "British Millionaires, 1809-1947", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 47 (1974): 210-11.

²⁰ Brewers' Society, 42 Portman Square, London, C.B.S. minutes, 30 April 1883, f. 247; 15 October 1883, f. 254; 29 October 1883, f. 257; 10 December 1883, ff. 261, 266-67; 11 January 1884, ff. 269-72; *Country Brewers' Gazette*, 24 October 1883, p. 384; 7 November 1883, pp. 391-94, 406; 19 December 1883, p. 444; 13 February 1884, p. 58; 22 October 1884, pp. 374-76; *Brewing Trade Review*, November 1888, p. 407.

²¹ C.B.S., annual report, in *Brewing Trade Review*, November 1891, p. 335.

²² Manchester Brewers' Central Association, *Annual Report... for the Year Ending 31 July 1891* (Manchester, 1891), p. [14]. It nearly doubled in the next year, presumably because of the general election. *Annual Report... 1892* (Manchester, 1892), p. [10].

its energy to J. Danvers Power who served as its general secretary from 1884 until 1891.²³

Years of mistrust divided the Country Brewers' Society from the Brewers' Company. In 1885, for instance, the Society's chairman told an audience of publicans that "during the last thirty-five years, in the working of political matters from first to last, the interests of the licensed victuallers had been absolutely betrayed by the London brewers."²⁴ In 1895 the newspaper of the Society explained that "ten years ago the Court of the Brewers' Company... thought, to put it mildly, that the Country Brewers were generally indiscreet, and the Country Brewers thought, also to put it mildly, that the Brewers' Hall were [sic] generally indifferent to the interests of the trade outside London."²⁵ The big London brewers had sneered at the demagoguery in which the provincials indulged themselves, while the country brewers had resented the selfishness with which the Londoners had exploited their powerful political connections without regard to the needs of the rest of the trade. Despite this history an alliance was to emerge in the late 1880s, through which the Country Brewers' Society learned political realism and the Brewers' Company adopted a broader and more active policy of trade defence.

Events taught the need for unity. In 1888 the brewers disagreed about support for the licensing clauses in the local government bill introduced by the Home Secretary, C. A. Ritchie. The Conservative Government offered the trade compensation for those public houses refused licence renewal, in return for increased taxation to pay for it and a reduced number of licensed premises. "On the strong representations of the London Brewers", the Country Brewers' Society decided that "to obtain Parliamentary recognition of the principle of compensation" it would not oppose the licensing clauses on the second reading. By contrast the Manchester brewers rejected the clauses entirely. In private a leading London brewer feared that by encouraging the licensing authorities to reduce the number of public houses the compensation clauses would hurt the trade. The publicans seemed most interested in the fight against Sunday closing. Lacking the wholehearted, united support of the trade, and under attack from the temperance reformers for offering compensation, the Government abandoned its licensing clauses.²⁶ In 1890 the same Conservative Government introduced and then, under temperance pressure, withdrew the purchase clauses of its local taxation bill which, by authorizing the county councils to spend public moneys to purchase public houses where they were too numerous, would have created a tacit right of public houses to renewal or compensation. Again the moderate brewers failed to improve the legal position of licensed property.²⁷

²³ Apparently Power had been recommended by W. H. Smith, the Conservative politician; he was related to Smith's wife. C.B.S. minutes, 11 January 1884, ff. 271, 273; 29 January 1884, unfol. Power resigned when he married Wethered's daughter and joined his brewery. Later Power returned to the Society as its elected chairman.

²⁴ H. A. SIMONDS, in *Country Brewers' Gazette*, 18 June 1885, p. 240.

²⁵ *Brewing Trade Review*, November 1895, p. 306.

²⁶ C.B.S., annual report, in *Brewing Trade Review*, November 1888, p. 414; *Country Brewers' Gazette*, 17 May 1888, pp. 247-48; *Brewers' Journal*, 15 July 1888, pp. 337-38; *Brewers' Guardian*, 29 May 1888, pp. 161-62; 26 June 1888, p. 193; Guildhall Library, Brewers' Company minutes, 6 April 1888, MS. 5468, ff. 177-80; Parliamentary Committee of the Licensed Victuallers of the United Kingdom, *Sessional Report, 1888* (London, n.d.).

²⁷ W. H. Smith and Son, Ltd., the Strand, London, Hambleton Papers, PS 15/26, J. Danvers Power to W. H. Smith, 16 May 1890; Brewers' Society, N.T.D.F. minutes, 19 May 1890, f. 35; Brewers' Company minutes, 20 May 1890, MS. 5468, f. 259.

The case of *Sharp v. Wakefield* jolted the trade even more than the failure to obtain a statutory right to compensation. In 1887 the licensing bench in the Kendal division of Westmoreland refused to renew the licence of the Low Bridge Inn on the ground that it was not needed. The Westmoreland Quarter Sessions, whose chairman was named Wakefield, sustained the refusal. When successive appellate courts ruled against the owner, Susannah Sharp, the case threatened the tradition that any licensed house which did not violate the law had a right to renewal.

The Country Brewers' Society refused to pay Miss Sharp's expenses when counsel advised that the case did not provide favourable grounds for a test of the law; the Brewers' Company also refused help. After the Court of Queen's Bench ruled against Miss Sharp in 1888, the two organizations jointly offered to purchase her property to avoid further embarrassment. Although Miss Sharp would not sell, she agreed to let the brewers conduct her next appeal. When the Government abandoned the licensing clauses of Ritchie's bill, the brewers shortsightedly withdrew from the case. Miss Sharp stubbornly carried it to the Court of Appeal, which ruled against her late in 1888, and then to the House of Lords which in 1891 definitively affirmed the discretionary authority of the licensing justices to deny applications for renewal.²⁸

By 1891 the trade had begun to grope its way toward political unity. Three years earlier a London brewer, Cosmo Bonsor, had suggested that the Country Brewers' Society start an agitation in favour of Ritchie's compensation clauses. The Society's secretary Danvers Power had countered with the proposal that a new propaganda organization be created which would supplement older defence societies by enlisting the financial support of all brewers.²⁹ After two trade conferences had rallied support, the National Trade Defence Fund was set up in 1888.³⁰ Bonsor was elected to head the Fund as treasurer, and Power was appointed its salaried manager.

Dissident brewers and trade newspapers criticized the new organization as oligarchic in structure and narrow in its objectives.³¹ Its constitution vested absolute power for a period of three years in a committee on which the northern brewers lacked representation. Power argued that to be effective the Fund had to restrict its membership to a few large brewers and distillers and confine its programme to matters on which the subscribers could agree.³² In its annual report for 1888 the Country Brewers' Society modestly defined the purposes of the new organization as "enabling speakers to be sent to all meetings hostile to the interests of the Trade, in order that the other side of the case may be fairly represented; and also... providing writers who will be able to state our case in the Press."³³

²⁸ Cosmo BONSOR, and C.B.S., annual report, in *Brewing Trade Review*, November 1888, pp. 415-16; May 1888, pp. 197-98; June 1888, pp. 231-32; August 1888, p. 344; April 1891, pp. 97-98; Brewers' Company minutes, 11 May, 8 June, 4 December 1888, 11 January 1889, 30 April 1891, MS. 5468, ff. 189, 193-94, 211, 294-95. In 1891 the Licenses Insurance Corporation and Guarantee Fund, Ltd., was organized to insure owners of licensed property.

²⁹ C.B.S., annual report, and Bonsor, in *Brewing Trade Review*, November 1888, pp. 416, 418; July 1891, p. 207. See also Henry A. NEWTON, "The National Trade Defence Fund", *Brewers' Almanack* (1898), pp. 260-62.

³⁰ N.T.D.F. minutes, 1, 7, 11 August 1888, 20 November 1888, ff. 2-8, 11.

³¹ *Brewers' Guardian*, 11 December 1888, pp. 399-400.

³² *Brewing Trade Review*, December 1888, pp. 457-60.

³³ *Wine, Spirit and Beer*, Exhibition no., 24 October 1888, p. 836.

Perhaps in part to appease its critics within the trade the Fund launched a General Election Scheme in October 1890. The Fund offered a subsidy of £250 to help support an electoral agent in each of the ten districts into which it had divided England and Wales, exclusive of London. In December a trade meeting, convened by the Country Brewers' Society and the rival Manchester Brewers' Central Association, endorsed the proposal. New trade electoral associations were organized in the ten districts.³⁴ Dominated by local brewers, they also admitted publicans, beer-house keepers, wine merchants, and others. The local trade matched the Fund's subsidy and appointed the agent.

Delegates from these district agencies, as they were called, met in London in June 1891 to form a central committee to manage the General Election Scheme.³⁵ The organization created, the General Association of the Licensed Trade, was more representative and more aggressive than the National Trade Defence Fund. The existence of the General Association reflected the tensions between the brewers of the North and the Midlands and those of London and the Home Counties. Its central committee included four representatives of the central Fund, outnumbered by four from each of the provincial districts.³⁶ Charles Showell, a young Birmingham brewer, was elected treasurer.³⁷ Although the new organization was pledged to disband after the general election, it was seen to threaten the leadership of the big London brewers and their allies in the Country Brewers' Society; the latter's newspaper hinted about friction.³⁸ When the General Association was persuaded to dissolve itself after only a few months of existence, the *Brewers' Guardian*, an independent newspaper, blamed the premature demise on the "personal ambitions" of "selfish wreckers".³⁹

In return for the dissolution of the General Association the Fund adopted a new constitution which conciliated its provincial critics. After November 1891 the district agencies elected a majority of the Fund's governing committee.⁴⁰ A year later it was reorganized further to guarantee the retailers representation on the committee. In 1900 the Fund was renamed the National Trade Defence Association or the N.T.D.A.⁴¹

Since the N.T.D.A. increasingly became a liaison body representing all sections of the trade, the brewers needed an organization of their own to formulate policy. Late in 1904 the Country Brewers' Society was reorganized as a national association which dominated trade defence, the Brewers' Society.⁴² Although its

³⁴ *Brewing Trade Review*, January 1891, pp. 14-18; N.T.D.F. minutes, 31 October 1890, ff. 36-37.

³⁵ N.T.D.F. minutes, 24 April, 21 May, 11 June 1891, ff. 42-43, 45, 50, 52.

³⁶ GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF THE LICENSED TRADE, *Objectives, Constitution, and Works* [Proof Only, Private and Confidential] (London, [1891]), pp. 5-6.

³⁷ Showell's role in trade defence ended in 1904 when he was sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment for fictitiously adding to the stock of the brewery which bore the family name, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 17 March 1904, pp. 6, 11.

³⁸ *Brewing Trade Review*, July 1891, pp. 207-08; N.T.D.F. minutes, 15 October 1891, f. 58.

³⁹ *Brewers' Guardian*, 1 March 1892, p. 60.

⁴⁰ *Brewers' Journal*, 6 November 1891, pp. 535-36; *Brewing Trade Review*, December 1891, pp. 351-52.

⁴¹ *Brewing Trade Review*, December 1892, p. 362. In the 1950s the N.T.D.A. became the National Trade Development Association.

⁴² *Brewing Trade Review*, January 1905, p. 3.

membership largely consisted of those who had belonged to the old Country Brewers' Society, the newcomers were big London and Burton firms. The new society's income in its first year exceeded that of its predecessor by nearly half.⁴³ Regional organizations continued to exist, notably, the London Brewers' Association which at the turn of the century had taken over the metropolitan defence functions of the Brewers' Company.⁴⁴ Perhaps thirty percent of all brewers, however, belonged to no organization.⁴⁵

The N.T.D.A. remained under the control of the brewers. All the early treasurers except one came from the great London firms: Cosmo Bonsor from Combe's, Alfred Money Wigram from Reid's, George Croft from Charrington's, E. N. Buxton from Truman's, and after a few years under Sir John Brickwood of Plymouth, the popular Frank Whitbread, "the perfect liaison officer", who served from 1907 to his death in 1941.⁴⁶ Bonsor, who served until 1895, epitomized the influential Londoner in the variety of his business, public service, partisan, and philanthropic involvements. Described as "a consummate chairman", he arranged the merger of Watney's, Combe's, and Reid's, as well as a railroad amalgamation, in the late 1890s. He also was a director of the Bank of England for more than forty years, a Commissioner of Income-Tax for the City of London for almost as long, an influential backbench Tory MP, and a prominent philanthropist who was created a baronet for his services to Guy's Hospital.⁴⁷ The big London brewers restrained the militancy of the provincial trade. They imposed their traditional policies of caution, negotiation, and compromise. In 1896 Wigram sternly told trade activists that the business of the Fund was not to initiate legislation but to respond to Government proposals and otherwise "to sit quiet".⁴⁸

The rise of strong defence organizations of brewers diminished the status of the Licensed Victuallers' National Defence League. In return for financial support the brewers asserted a right to a voice in what the League did.⁴⁹ The League resented this tutelage and also the greater willingness of the brewers to restrict controversial retail practices in response to the criticism of reformers, for instance, by agreeing to legislation in 1901 which required sealed containers in sales to children who fetched beer for their parents. Outside London the tied house system often obligated the public house tenant to buy more than beer from his brewer; in a bitter saying of the 1890s he might be "tied for everything but sawdust".⁵⁰ In the Midlands and the North brewers often replaced tied house tenants, who were entrepreneurs working for a profit, with salaried managers. Provincial publicans also resented the "long

⁴³ BREWERS' SOCIETY, *First Annual Report* (London, 1905), pp. 5-6.

⁴⁴ For information about the London Brewers' Association I am grateful to David W. Gutzke, who is writing about the relations between the brewers and the Conservative Party.

⁴⁵ *Brewing Trade Review*, July 1904, p. 298.

⁴⁶ *Times*, 31 October 1941, p. 7; 5 November 1941, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *Times*, 6 December 1929, p. 16; 10 December 1929, p. 18. The Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, asked Bonsor to serve as the hospital's treasurer, a sign of the social circles in which the big brewers moved.

⁴⁸ *Licensed Trade News*, 26 December 1896, p. 11.

⁴⁹ *Brewing Trade Review*, December 1886, p. 55; January 1887, pp. 91-92; June 1892, p. 188.

⁵⁰ Quoted in E. M. SIGSWORTH, *The Brewery Trade during the Industrial Revolution* (York, 1967), p. 30.

pull", by which the brewers expected them to encourage business with a costly extra measure of beer.

Probably the National Defence League reached the peak of its strength in 1883 when it moved its headquarters to London and briefly acquired the proprietorship of the *Licensed Victuallers' Guardian*. In that year the League had 250 affiliates with members in 350 towns and received a subsidy from the wholesale trade of slightly more than £800.⁵¹ In the 1890s, with less than £100 a year from the wholesalers, the League faded into relative obscurity, from which it emerged only during its blunt-speaking annual and semi-annual conferences. The League could spend only £69 on the general election of 1892, supplemented by another £19 scattered among 189 meetings.⁵² At the end of the nineteenth century the societies affiliated with the League claimed only 10,000 members.⁵³

Local retail societies often were ill-organized and apathetic; frequently they attracted no more than a quarter of those eligible. For instance, in 1899 out of a total of over 2,300 publicans in Liverpool only 500 belonged to the local society. In the same year out of an annual income of only £140, the Liverpool society got £105 from one brewer, ten guineas from a second, five guineas from a wine company, and almost nothing from the membership.⁵⁴

The district agencies of the National Trade Defence Fund could only partly take the place of vigorous retail organizations. In a series of reminiscences published in 1894 the Midland agent of the Fund depicted the frustratingly casual spirit typical of local retail societies. In one article he described a visit to a small mining town, "to wake the Trade up, and at the same time to interest the public in our cause". The local trade chairman entertained him in a dingy parlour "from which the flies would certainly easily have ejected us if they had made anything like a combined effort". From there the local trade marched to the site of an open air demonstration, with a mercenary temperance band furnishing the music and with customers lounging outside public houses joining the motley parade *en route*. The agent discovered that the platform from which he was to denounce a Liberal bill for prohibition consisted of a rickety table without a sound leg, and that the only person prepared to make a seconding speech was an itinerant dentist with a heavy foreign accent. Anxious to catch his train and escape, the agent ignored a pair of temperance reformers who wanted to reply; the temperance band was ordered to play, to drown out their complaints.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Licensed Victuallers' Guardian*, 24 February 1883, p. 85.

⁵² *Licensing World*, 1 June 1893, pp. 194, 198-99; 12 March 1906, p. 326.

⁵³ ROYAL COMMISSION ON LIQUOR LICENSING LAWS, *Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 3, in *Parliamentary Papers*, 1897 (C. 8694), XXXVI, quest. 39,520, p. 437. A few years later the League claimed that its affiliated societies had 30,000 members. *Licensed Trade News*, 11 May 1907, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Guy HAYLER, *A Peep into the Enemy's Camp* (Newcastle, 1899), pp. 6-7. A typical local society, the Croydon Licensed Victuallers' and Beersellers' Protection Society, founded in 1883, claimed 150 members, who paid an annual subscription of five shillings, with a monthly committee meeting and a quarterly general meeting. "Directory of Trade Associations", *Breweries and Distilleries*, 30 January 1892, p. 128.

⁵⁵ E. Lawrence LEVY, "An Open-Air Meeting" [Meetings I Have Attended: Temperance and Otherwise, No. 6], *Licensed Trade News*, 26 May 1894, p. 10.

The London licensed victuallers had the most effective retail organization. During the early 1890s the London publicans reorganized under the leadership of Charles Walker, head of the Marylebone and Paddington society. He and other district leaders had complained that the old London Licensed Victuallers' Protection Society had become unrepresentative and that its leadership had lost the confidence of the National Trade Defence Fund and the London brewers.⁵⁶

The reorganized society came into existence on New Year's Day, 1892, under the name the Licensed Victuallers' Central Protection Society of London, and was incorporated early in the next year. Ordinarily the society was called the Central Board after its large governing council. The Central Board did not instantly mobilize the strength of the London publicans. As late as 1894 more than a third of all metropolitan publicans belonged to no trade society.⁵⁷

Walker's personality led to controversy; his own newspaper described him in his obituary as "at times perhaps a little too severe with those who ventured to oppose him".⁵⁸ Sensitive about status, he dreamed about ending the absence of English publicans from the House of Commons through his own election. He quickly quarrelled with the National Defence League. The Central Board withdrew from membership in the League, with which the old London society had affiliated in 1890, and also from the Parliamentary Committee.⁵⁹ Although the London and provincial societies agreed in 1892 to form a new joint committee with the wholesalers, under the chairmanship of the League's president, it never met; the League protested that the committee had been "murdered".⁶⁰ Walker preferred to cooperate with a rival Joint (Wholesale and Retail) Parliamentary Committee which the Fund had organized and which he had the honour to chair.⁶¹ In 1896 the League and the Central Board formed the United Parliamentary Council of the Retail Trade, also with Walker as chairman. Under his leadership the Council actively recruited members. The Central Committee of the Liquor Trade of Ireland (1893) joined enthusiastically, while the Scottish Licensed Trade Association (1879, reorganized 1890) did so reluctantly after pressure from brewers who wanted Walker's good will.

Despite his foibles Walker worked well with the brewers and saw the need for cooperation with competitors such as licensed grocers and workingmen's clubs. Following a dispute over dilution of beer early in 1887 the Brewers' Company had discouraged financial support for the London Protection Society.⁶² Walker restored

⁵⁶ Bonsor to Walker, n.d., quoted in *Morning Advertiser*, 6 June 1891, p. 2; Brewers' Company minutes, 12 June, 24 July 1891, MS. 5445, ff. 463, 499; N.T.D.F. minutes, 25 June 1891, f. 54; *Brewing Trade Review*, July 1891, p. 210.

⁵⁷ *Licensing World*, 4 May 1894, supplement, p. ii.

⁵⁸ *Licensing World*, 10 January 1903, p. 20.

⁵⁹ National Defence League, annual conference, in *Brewers' Guardian*, 10 May 1892, pp. 141-42; *Licensing World*, 1 June 1893, pp. 98-99; Central Board, *Annual Report, 1892*, p. 11; Licensed Victuallers' Central Protection Society of London, Ltd. (hereafter cited as the Central Board), executive committee minutes, 1 March 1894. After I consulted its papers the London society was absorbed by the National Federation of Licensed Victuallers, 2 Downing Street, Farnham, Surrey.

⁶⁰ *Licensing World*, 1 June 1892, p. 193.

⁶¹ N.T.D.F. minutes, 4 March 1892, ff. 78-79.

⁶² Brewers' Company minutes, 4, 7 March, 13 May 1887, 4 December 1888, 10 January, 14 February 1890, MS. 5468, ff. 147, 151-53, 163, 211, 242.

friendly relations and extracted a guarantee of £3,000 a year.⁶³ Ordinarily individual brewers announced their donations during the Central Board's annual banquet. The brewer or distiller who presided, and his firm, were expected to contribute with special generosity. In the crisis year of 1903 the banquet raised more than £10,000 and in another year of danger, 1908, more than £9,500. In the dull year of 1902 no brewer or distiller would accept the expensive honour of presiding.⁶⁴

A new trade press developed in the late Victorian years. The old trade press — proprietary newspapers owned by journalists, and the *Morning Advertiser*, a London daily published since 1794 by the Incorporated Society of Licensed Victuallers, a charitable organization — often inflamed internal quarrels. To encourage unity and commitment the more vigorous defence societies published their own newspapers: the Country Brewers' Society, the *Brewing Trade Review* from 1886; the London publicans' society, the *Licensing World* from 1892; and the district agencies of the National Trade Defence Fund, led by Birmingham, the *Licensed Trade News* from 1894. The Central Board also published a yearbook, the *Licensed Victuallers' Official Annual* from 1891, and the Country Brewers' Society, the *Brewers' Almanack* from 1894.

Two or three dozen salaried officials gave trade defence its continuity and expertise. Often they previously had followed careers as journalists, teachers, lawyers, or small businessmen, and sometimes had served as constituency agents for MPs or candidates. For example, Henry C. Edwards, secretary of the National Defence League from its founding until his death fifteen years later, had pursued all these callings except law, and also had been an engraver and a publican.⁶⁵ John Massey, a long time N.T.D.A. agent, had been a boot and shoe manufacturer and also was a lay preacher at the Ebenezer Methodist New Connexion Church in Newcastle.⁶⁶ Charles Beevers, part-time secretary of the Yorkshire Brewers' Association, was a chartered accountant.⁶⁷ R. Mitchell Banks, hired by the N.T.D.A. as a special organizing agent in 1906, was a barrister.⁶⁸

Trade officials frequently served long years and received decent salaries, often supplemented by bonuses. Albert E. Deane, known for his "keen grasp of detail", acted as secretary of the London publicans from 1891 until he retired in 1926, and also edited their publications. In 1891 the job he assumed had been advertised at £300. Deane managed to acquire an estate of more than £13,000.⁶⁹ The first manager of the Fund started work at £300 and left at £500.⁷⁰ Henry A. Newton, formerly Bonsor's private secretary, held the twin offices of secretary of the Country Brewers' Society and manager of the Fund from 1893 until 1917 when he retired because of ill health. Newton began with £200 for his duties at the

⁶³ *Licensing World*, 1 December 1892, p. 62.

⁶⁴ *Licensing World*, 16 May 1903, p. 373; 2 May 1908, p. 307; 26 July 1902, p. 484; 31 January 1903, p. 75.

⁶⁵ *Licensed Victuallers' Guardian*, 1 February 1873, p. 45.

⁶⁶ *Licensed Trade News*, 22 June 1906, p. 6.

⁶⁷ Yorkshire Brewers' Association, *Twenty-Second Annual Report... for the Year Ending December 31, 1891* (Leeds, 1892), p. 8.

⁶⁸ N.T.D.A. minutes, 19 September 1906, f. 196.

⁶⁹ *Licensing World*, 10 September 1927, p. 209; Central Board, executive committee minutes, 3 July 1891; Deane's will filed at Somerset House, under the year 1927.

⁷⁰ C.B.S. minutes, 25 January 1887, unfol.

Society and £400 for his work at the Fund.⁷¹ In 1899 he was given a £1,000 bonus for his services in connection with the Royal Commission on the Licensing Laws.⁷² For the same enterprise Deane got £250 as a bonus.⁷³

This little band of salaried officials claimed a colourful personality in E. Lawrence Levy, a champion weight lifter and theatre critic. It was he who told the story about the trade demonstration which featured a hired temperance band. In 1891 he was appointed assistant agent for the Midland district agency and a few years later was promoted to chief agent. Working out of Birmingham he edited the *Licensed Trade News* from its first issue in 1894 until a few weeks before his death in 1932.⁷⁴

Contemporary explanations for the political influence of the trade often pointed in false directions. Enemies of the trade wanted to show that its influence was corrupt. Temperance reformers complained that the brewers bought elections through massive political contributions and that the publicans bought individual votes through bribery. Critics merely guessed as to how much money the trade spent. When he wanted to exaggerate the trade's power one defeated candidate told a prohibitionist convention that the liquor interests had spent more than £3,000 against him. Immediately after the election when he had wanted to minimize the power of the trade, to counter arguments that the commitment to Local Veto had hurt the Liberal Party, he had estimated £300 or £400 for handbills, plus the expense of a canvass, and had calculated that the trade had cost him only two hundred votes, not enough to decide the result.⁷⁵

Enemies often combined undocumented allegations that the trade spent large sums on elections with insinuations that the trade bribed electors with drink or money. A Liberal defeated in a metropolitan constituency managed to join this charge to a criticism of an inefficient water company. "To say that beer flowed like water would be to pay an undeserved compliment to the East London Water Company."⁷⁶ An official inquiry into corruption at Worcester in the general election of 1906 concluded that the small city had "a class of voters numbering approximately 500, and consisting mainly of the needy and loafing class, but including a considerable number of working men in regular employment, who are prepared to sell their votes for drink or money."⁷⁷ To avoid the risk of paying bribes directly the publican at the "Duke of York" left money on the top of a urinal wall where voters collected their payments.⁷⁸

⁷¹ *Brewing Trade Review*, June 1893, p. 174; February 1924, p. 82.

⁷² C.B.S. minutes, 24 April 1893, unfol.

⁷³ Central Board, Royal Commission committee, 28 September, 12 October 1899.

⁷⁴ Although less than five feet four inches tall, he was known as "Levy the Strong Man", after having won English and European weight lifting championships in 1891. Later he was honorary secretary of the English Amateur Gymnastic Association. Prior to his being employed by the trade, he had taught at a Jewish school and served as an official in the Tory organization in Birmingham. *Licensed Trade News*, 21 May 1932, p. 6; 28 May 1932, pp. 1-5.

⁷⁵ W. S. CAINE, "The Last General Election", in *The Prohibition Movement*, ed.: GUY HAYLER (Newcastle, 1896), p. 60; Caine, in *Bradford Observer*, 16 July 1895, p. 5; Caine, in *Daily Chronicle*, 26 July 1895, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Archibald Grove, in *Daily Chronicle*, 30 July 1895, p. 6.

⁷⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Existence of Corrupt Practices at the Last Election in the City of Worcester*, in P.P., 1906 (Cd. 3268), XCV, p. 481.

⁷⁸ *Minutes of Evidence... on the Trial of the Parliamentary Election Petition for the Borough of Worcester*, in P.P., 1906 (198), XCV, quests. 25-51, p. 261.

The legendary sums which the trade spent on elections seem to have been just that. In 1891 a Manchester brewer boasted that the brewers of England "had subscribed £100,000 for mutual defence".⁷⁹ Probably this figure represented a guarantee fund from which trade defence might draw as needed and not actual expenditures.⁸⁰ The treasurer of the Fund claimed that his organization had spent less than £5,000 in the general election of 1892 and again under £5,000 in that of 1895.⁸¹ In the general election of 1895 the Brewers' Company spent £4,000 and the Country Brewers' Society, £1,000. In the election of 1900 the N.T.D.A. spent over £2,000, the Brewers' Company, £1,200, the Country Brewers' Society, £500.⁸² By 1898 the Scottish Licensed Trade Defence Association had accumulated a defence fund of almost £7,000, most of it meant for the next parliamentary elections.⁸³ Occasionally the English drink trade provided the Irish trade with subsidies; for instance, the N.T.D.A. gave the Irish £500 for the general election of 1906.⁸⁴ Outside general elections the Fund spent £2,000 to support the local taxation bill of 1890, while the London licensed victuallers spent nearly £3,700 in 1888 for amendments to the Local Government Bill and against Sunday closing, £4,000 to £5,000 against the Local Veto Bill of the Liberal Government in 1893, and several thousand pounds to fight the Liberal licensing bill in 1908.⁸⁵

In a crisis the trade could raise huge sums; for instance, in 1908 a £100,000 guarantee fund in the "no compromise" fight against the Liberal licensing bill.⁸⁶ Under ordinary circumstances even the most powerful defence societies had difficulty collecting money. Late in 1906 the newly organized Brewers' Society complained that it could not subsidize the N.T.D.A. as it would have liked. The two organizations had a combined income of about £7,500, as compared with the £12,000 attributed to the United Kingdom Alliance, the main prohibitionist society.⁸⁷

Sometimes enemies charged that trade influence in Parliament resulted from selfish personal interests. In 1904 a temperance reformer listed 129 members of the House of Commons and 167 peers as having a financial interest in the trade.⁸⁸ Since drink comprised a major source of income for only a few of them, such a list proved little about the source of trade influence. A trade yearbook, the *Brewers' Almanack*, printed a list of MPs whose principal business was drink. In most years it contained no more than three dozen names: brewers, distillers, wholesale wine merchants,

⁷⁹ *Morning Advertiser*, 28 May 1891, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Morning Advertiser*, 6 June 1891, p. 2.

⁸¹ *Times*, 12 August 1895, p. 14. Of course, brewers presumably contributed as individuals to the Unionist chief whip's fund and to constituency associations.

⁸² N.T.D.A. minutes, 5 December 1905, f. 166.

⁸³ SCOTTISH LICENSED TRADE DEFENCE ASSOCIATION, *Annual Report for 1898* (Edinburgh, 1898), p. 44.

⁸⁴ N.T.D.A. minutes, 11 January 1906, f. 172. In Ireland no more than five percent of the 20,000 licence holders belonged to any trade association. *Licensed Trader*, weekly ed., 10 January 1894, p. 9.

⁸⁵ N.T.D.F. minutes, 19 May 1890, f. 35; Brewers' Company minutes, 12 October 1888, MS. 5468, f. 209; *Licensing World*, 2 February 1894, pp. 80-81; Central Board, executive committee minutes, 2 March 1908.

⁸⁶ *Brewing Trade Review*, April 1908, pp. 232-33.

⁸⁷ BREWERS' SOCIETY, *Third Annual Report* (London, 1907), pp. 9-10.

⁸⁸ George B. Wilson, in *Daily News*, 20 April 1904, p. 6.

maltsters, Irish publicans, and the like.⁸⁹ Temperance reformers also exaggerated when they complained that the trade had bought its way into the House of Lords through political contributions, thereby turning the peerage into a beerge. From 1880 through 1908 only a handful of brewers were elevated to the peerage, among them, two Guinnesses, a Bass, an Allsopp, and a Liberal chief whip, George Whiteley, men whose philanthropies and parliamentary service justified their titles.

In fact, the trade's political power came from the influence which retailers had with their working class customers. Before the Second Reform Act eliminated property requirements in the boroughs, publicans and beerhouse keepers had constituted a significant voting bloc in many constituencies. Afterwards drinksellers had much less importance as voters. Unlike some other industries drink was not concentrated in a few constituencies which its people could dominate. On the other hand, the dispersal of the retail trade meant that the drink interest had election workers everywhere. Few industries could match the drink trade in its access to the newly enfranchised workingmen for whom the public house served as a major recreational centre.⁹⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century drink retailers far outnumbered divines. The men of the pulpit totalled perhaps 45,000. By comparison there were more than 100,000 houses in the United Kingdom licensed to sell alcohol for consumption on the premises, plus thousands more in the growing off-licence trade. The average licensed house employed three and a half persons, other than the wife of the licensee.⁹¹ If each on-licence swayed the votes of one or two electors, the trade could decide the result in many marginal constituencies. Temperance statisticians gloomily theorized that, in 1892, on the basis of one vote per on-licence the trade provided the Unionists with 72 seats and on the basis of two votes with an additional 59 seats. In 1895 one vote per on-licence would be credited with 83 Unionist victories and two votes with 69 more.⁹²

Alas! the tactics of the ordinary retailer seeking to win the votes of working-class drinkers cannot be documented. Fortunately, a paid official described how he helped the South London publicans produce a Unionist victory in a by-election in 1896. He visited every licence holder to arrange for a display of posters and leaflets, and returned to many of the houses to reassure the licensees after the partisans of the Liberal candidate alleged that they had acted illegally. For streets with no public houses to display posters he hired sandwich-men. He visited railway stations to pass out literature to passengers boarding workingmen's trains early in the morning. Supporters distributed propoganda to every elector in the borough, including at work places in or near the constituency during the dinner break and at the end of the

⁸⁹ See also J. A. THOMAS, *The House of Commons, 1832-1901* (Cardiff, 1939), pp. 14, 15, 17; THOMAS, *The House of Commons, 1906-11* (Cardiff, 1958), p. 15.

⁹⁰ On the social role of the public house, see Brian HARRISON, "Pubs", in *The Victorian City*, ed: H. J. DYOS and Michael WOLFF (London, 1973), 1: 169-75; and for more recent years Alan CRAWFORD and Robert THORNE, *Birmingham Pubs, 1890-1939* (Birmingham, 1974), which is mostly architectural.

⁹¹ Edwin A. PRATT, *The Licensed Trade* (London, 1907), p. 275.

⁹² Joseph ROWNTREE and Arthur SHERWELL, *The Temperance Problem and Social Reform*, 7th ed. (London, 1900), pp. 680-94.

day. The agent also arranged for the loan of carriages to transport electors to the polls.⁹³

Late in the nineteenth century a defeated Liberal candidate pointed out that the Conservative victories which the trade helped manufacture could not survive an awakening of political consciousness. "Coercion, blankets, and beer would be useless against genuine conviction."⁹⁴ In the twentieth century the rise of the Labour Party undermined the short-lived capacity of the publicans to persuade working-class electors to vote for Tory candidates. Numerous trade union leaders and socialists were abstainers and temperance reformers; a Trade Union and Labour Officials' Temperance Fellowship was organized in 1904.⁹⁵ In 1907 the *Licensed Trade News* lamented that "where a Labour candidate stands, the [licensed] Trade's customers, pledged to support their man loyally, blindly follow the Union, and the Trade is comparatively powerless."⁹⁶ Without working-class votes the drink trade would have no more influence than other industries.

Temperance reformers and trade activists alike misrepresented the trade defence organization as more combative than it was. The slogan, "our trade, our politics", sounded ruthlessly selfish. In fact it pleaded for solidarity and zeal in an industry long characterized by disunity and apathy. It required a crisis to stir the rank and file into political activity. Unionist politicians knew that they could not rely on the trade for energetic canvassing. In 1903 Joseph Chamberlain told his constituency agent that "the support of the publicans is not worth much in itself — *i.e.* when it is merely passive support. It becomes important when they are really excited and alarmed, as they were in 1895", after the Liberal Government had introduced a bill for prohibition by Local Veto.⁹⁷

A large part of trade propaganda was directed at the trade's own members, to motivate, educate, and discipline them. It played on wounded self-esteem, rubbed sore by the temperance agitation, and even more on fear of financial ruin. In the tariff reform election of 1906 a trade manifesto declared, "Licence Holders, — the General Election may turn on the question of free trade or fair trade. What you have to uphold is your trade!"⁹⁸ The *Licensed Trade News* explained that the brewers did not ask the publicans for their money but only for "what the Retail Trade organisations are so signally rich in, *viz.*, the responsive trained efforts of the men who are the rank and file of the Trade fighting force, and without whom the Wholesale Trade is an army with leaders but no following".⁹⁹ The endless succession of trade dinners, large and small, combined conviviality with efforts to heighten the sense of group identity and loyalty.

⁹³ Central Board, Joint (Wholesale and Retail) Parliamentary Committee minutes, 24 June 1896, memorandum, P. Greenwood Hartley, 20 June 1896.

⁹⁴ C. P. Trevelyan, in *Daily Chronicle*, 30 July 1895, p. 6.

⁹⁵ Guy HAYLER, "Labour and Temperance: A Brief Historical Survey of Labour's Attitude to the Drink Problem", *Alliance Year Book and Temperance Reformer's Handbook* (1928): 65-81.

⁹⁶ *Licensed Trade News*, 3 August 1907, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁷ Julian AMERY, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1969) 5: 173, Chamberlain to Charles Vince, 17 April 1903.

⁹⁸ N.T.D.A. manifesto, in *Licensing World*, 30 December 1905, p. 472.

⁹⁹ *Licensed Trade News*, 1 February 1900, p. 5.

Mass meetings could demonstrate to the politicians that the humbler members of the trade felt strongly about the issue of the moment. Anxious to convince the House of Lords to throw out a Liberal bill in 1908, the trade organized a demonstration at Hyde Park which attracted at least 100,000 persons — the trade said nearly a half million — including 172 special trains from the provinces; the demonstrators wore blue enamel buttons which bore the motto “Honesty and Liberty”.¹⁰⁰ Monster petitions, sometimes carrying more than a million signatures, reminded the politicians that the publicans enjoyed the good will of their customers.¹⁰¹

The trade organizations shaped the arguments which retailers used by providing vast quantities of printed propaganda. Propaganda directed at the working class was confined to leaflets and handbills, little more than slogans, and posters and small cartoons. They defended an Englishman’s right to personal liberty against meddling by narrow-minded faddist reformers and protested the middle-class bias of the attacks on the poor man’s club, the public house. In the general election of 1895 the central office of the National Trade Defence Fund produced about 900,000 leaflets, 90,000 posters, and 77,000 cartoons. Customers liked the cartoons, known as “pictures”, the best.¹⁰²

To present its case the trade tried various other tactics, from humdrum letters to the editor, to a kite flying above an important football match.¹⁰³ In the mid-1890s the National Trade Defence Fund sent Fair Play vans to proselytize the countryside and dispatched one lucky lecturer to the seaside resorts.¹⁰⁴ About the same time the Yorkshire Brewers’ Association advised member firms to direct their clerks, travellers, and other staff to send MPs letters from home addresses, which supposedly would carry more weight than petitions.¹⁰⁵ In 1907 the trade collected about 1,700 firms of suppliers, such as hop merchants and manufacturers of brewers’ sugars, into an Allied Brewery Traders’ Association.¹⁰⁶

Increasingly the trade tried to appeal to middle-class electors on behalf of the rights of private property. As the middle class did not frequent public houses, the trade could not rely on the persuasiveness of the publicans. On the other hand, the reorganization of breweries as public companies brought investors into the orbit of the trade. During 1892-95 and again in 1902 the Midland agency of the N.T.D.A. attempted to organize share and debenture holders locally. In 1907 a national committee was organized to represent them, and in 1908 the N.T.D.A. mailed a special

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1908, pp. 2-13.

¹⁰¹ For instance, *Morning Advertiser*, 2 July 1891, p. 3.

¹⁰² N.T.D.F., *Report, General Election 1895... Executive Committee to the Subscribers for the Year 1895* (London, 1895), pp. 19, 20, 27, 32.

¹⁰³ For the letters, see N.T.D.F. minutes, 20 November 1888, 12 March 1889, ff. 11-12, 16; N.T.D.F., *Report, General Election 1895*, p. 33; for the kite, Victor FAIRFIELD, “The Allied Brewery Traders’ Association”, *Brewers’ Journal*, Centennial No. (1965), p. 251.

¹⁰⁴ *Brewers’ Almanack* (1894), p. 53; N.T.D.F. minutes, 10 April, 24 May 1893, ff. 114, 125; N.T.D.F., *Report Presented by the Executive Committee to the Subscribers for the Year 1894* (London, 1894), p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Bodleian Library, Harcourt MS. 149, f. 92, Charles Beevers, circular letter, 18 April 1895.

¹⁰⁶ For the subscribers, see *Brewers’ Journal*, 15 July 1907, pp. 396-97.

pamphlet to 150,000 trade investors.¹⁰⁷ The N.T.D.A. and other trade societies published substantial pamphlets for middle-class electors, and in the general elections of 1910, after the new drink taxes in the Budget of 1909, trade organizations outspent all other pressure groups in buying newspaper advertising.¹⁰⁸

The trade also had political allies such as the anti-collectivist Liberty and Property Defence League. George Candy, a barrister often briefed by the trade, wrote some of the League's pamphlets and acted as its parliamentary agent, while Frederic Millar, the League's secretary, also headed a beersellers' defence society.¹⁰⁹ In the twentieth century the trade resorted to front organizations such as the "Common Sense" Library and the True Temperance Association. Ernest E. Williams, who wrote for the Library and acted as the "guiding genius" of the association, typified many of the friends of the trade, in his vocal patriotism, support for protective tariffs, and hostility to socialism.¹¹⁰

Although the drink trade was vital to Unionist success in working-class districts, it seldom got wholehearted support in return. The Tory and Anglican tradition of paternalist reform, to protect society and working-class families from the effects of excessive drinking, combined with the Nonconformist conscience of some Liberal Unionists, forced party leaders to steer a cautious course in satisfying the trade. Trade leaders recognized the wisdom of Chamberlain's private advice, namely, to avoid antagonizing moderate opinion.

If the Trade keep strictly on the defence, confine themselves to principles in which they are sure of support from reasonable men, and do not exert their influence too openly and aggressively, I am certain that they can defeat their enemies, and make themselves absolutely safe against the attacks of fanatics... But tact and prudence are almost more necessary than money, organisation or any kind of electoral pressure.¹¹¹

Anxious for a lasting settlement, the leaders of the drink trade would have yielded major concessions in return for security. The National Trade Defence Fund had hoped that it could rally the trade behind a compromise licensing bill drafted by Lord Randolph Churchill which the Tory maverick introduced as a backbencher in 1890. When this proved impossible, a number of men prominent in the trade, including Cosmo Bonsor and Charles Walker, lent the bill a cautious support as individuals.¹¹² E. N. Buxton, one of the few brewers active in Liberal politics, worked

¹⁰⁷ *Brewers' Almanack* (1909), p. 56; *Licensed Trade News*, 1 February 1908, p. 8; *Brewers' Journal*, 15 June 1907, pp. 323-25; *Facts for Brewery Shareholders* (London, 1908); N.T.D.A. minutes, 10 April 1907, ff. 213-14; N.T.D.A., *Manager's Report, 1906-07* (London, 1907), p. 29.

¹⁰⁸ For examples of the pamphlets, see numbers 42 and 91 in the N.T.D.A. series, *The Licensing Question: Points to be Considered in Connection with Any Proposed Legislation* (London, 1904) and *The Budget Proposals and the Licensed Trade* (London, 1909), and CENTRAL BOARD, *The Case for the Trade* (London, 1906); for advertising, Neil BLEWETT, *The Peers, the Parties and the People* (London, 1972), p. 333.

¹⁰⁹ See Edward BRISTOW, "The Liberty and Property Defence League and Individualism", *Historical Journal*, 18 (1975): 780-82.

¹¹⁰ Viscount Astor, testifying on 8 July 1930, in *Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Licensing (England and Wales)* (London, 1929-30), p. 1647. Williams was best known for his book, *Made in Germany* (1896), designed to awake the public to the German threat.

¹¹¹ University of Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain Papers, JC 6/5/3/9, Chamberlain to Charles Showell, 26 December 1891.

¹¹² N.T.D.F. minutes, 9 January 1890, f. 32; Churchill College, Cambridge, Lord Randolph Churchill Papers, RCHL 1/25, nos. 3369, 3370, 3380, Bonsor to Churchill, 10 January 1890 (two letters), James Wigan to Churchill, 18 January 1890. On 8 May 1890, a trade meeting expressed sympathy with

throughout the 1890s for a compromise settlement which the trade, the reformers, and the politicians could accept.¹¹³ In Birmingham the local brewers contracted with the licensing justices at the end of the century to surrender some licences and pooled the financial loss through a kind of mutual insurance.¹¹⁴ Trade leaders often genuinely favoured reform. For instance, W. Waters Butler, a leader in the Birmingham Surrender Scheme and later a chairman of the Brewers' Society, strongly advocated what became known as public house improvement, "fewer and better" public houses, which would bring the respectability and comfort of the old coaching inn to the modern pub.¹¹⁵

The trade lacked the power to block reforms such as a reduction in the number of public houses. In the licensing crisis of 1903 local reduction schemes, launched by the justices of the peace under their discretionary powers, threatened the investments of the brewers and the livelihoods of the publicans. Despite frantic trade appeals the Unionist Government initially took a hands-off attitude.¹¹⁶ It was easier for the trade to stop hostile legislation than to get a friendly bill enacted. When the Government provided legislation in 1904, it demanded a substantial price to appease temperance-minded Unionists. The trade got statutory security which constituted its first priority, but had to accept reduction in numbers, the funding of compensation from a levy on surviving licensed premises, and other costly reforms.

That it was forced to organize to defend itself showed that the trade was in danger and frightened. When temperance reform collapsed as a political issue after the First World War, the licensed trade faded from electoral politics and became just another business interest group.¹¹⁷ Fortunately for the drink trade, during the years of greatest danger its leaders had the political sense to recognize when to fight and when to compromise in order to minimize the price of reform, and during the years between the franchise reforms of the late Victorian era and the rise of the Labour Party, the publicans could influence the votes of working-class drinkers.

the bill. *Brewing Trade Review*, weekly ed., 1 June 1890, pp. 260-61; *Brewers' Journal*, 15 May 1890, p. 273.

¹¹³ David M. FAHEY, "Temperance and the Liberal Party — Lord Peel's Report, 1899", *Journal of British Studies*, 10 (1971): 134-37, 143, 148.

¹¹⁴ *The Birmingham Surrender Scheme. Statement Issued by Directors of the Birmingham Property Company, Ltd.* (Birmingham, [1904]); *Licensed Trade News*, 24 September 1904, pp. 11-12.

¹¹⁵ *Times*, 8 April 1939, p. 14; 10 April 1939, p. 13.

¹¹⁶ Kent County Archives Office, Chilston Papers, U564 CLp7, A. Akers-Douglas to Cecil E. Kingsford, 2 February 1903; Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, RA R23/43, Arthur Balfour to Edward VII, 19 February 1903. I must express my gratitude to Her Majesty for her gracious permission to make use of materials from the Royal Archives at Windsor.

¹¹⁷ For the First World War and the genesis of the Licensing Act of 1921, see the memoirs of the brewer Sir Sydney O. NEVILLE, *Seventy Rolling Years* (London, 1958); and two short studies, ALDCROFT, "Control of the Liquor Trade"; Michael ROSE, "The Success of Social Reform? the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) 1915-21", in *War and Society*, ed.: M. R. D. FOOT (London, 1973), pp. 71-84, 298-304.