DRINK, POPULAR PROTEST AND GOVERNMENT REGULATION IN COLONIAL EMPIRES: A COMMENT ON PAPERS BY KICZA, PENVENNE AND AMBLER*

Robin Room
Alcohol Research Group
Medical Research Institute of San Francisco
1816 Scenic Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94709

*Presented at the 104th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Francisco, December 30, 1989. The papers to which this was a comment were: John Kicza (Washington State University, Pullman), "Drinking, Popular Protest and Governmental Response in 18th and 19th-Century Latin America"; Jeanne Marie Penvenne (Brandeis University), "The Cantina vs. the Compound: Labor Control and the Sale of Colonial Wine, Lourenço Marques, Mozambique, 1880-World War I"; and Charles Ambler (University of Texas at El Paso), "Alcohol, Racial Segregation, and Popular Politics: Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in the Colonial Era."

The material of these interesting and instructive papers is spread across three centuries, carrying us up to the early 1960s, across three continents--North and South America and Africa--and across three colonial empires--British, Spanish and Portuguese. There is, of course, considerable diversity in the material, but I also found striking commonalities. Some of these commonalities reflect recurrent patterns of relationship between governments and the governed, particularly when the consent of the governed is not freely given. And some of these commonalities reflect the colonial predicament; specifically, the predicaments of non-European populations finding themselves under European suzerainty and being compelled to add their labor to a world market economy, and the predicaments of their European governors, with thinly spread forces, required to make the empire a paying proposition, and often having to take into account the interests of local European settlers and elites as well as "home country" interests.

Reflecting on the rich and diverse historical experience laid out for us in these papers, I was reminded of a paper by Mäkelä and Viikari on the general interests that the state has with respect to alcohol (1). Drawing on Mäkelä and Viikari's discussion, we may note four such general interests. First, alcoholic beverages are a form of agricultural or industrial production, and the state has a general interest in developing the economy and thus in promoting production. Second, the state has a fiscal interest in alcohol, which has often been a significant source of state revenue. Third, the state has an interest in reproduction, and thus, for instance, in family life, which drinking may disrupt. And fourth, the state has an interest in public order and public health, which are often threatened by or perceived as threatened by drinking and drunkenness. Obviously, these state interests will often be in conflict, and how these conflicts are settled will tell us much about the interests and concerns which determine state policy. It is interesting to see, in particular, how the colonial situation tips the balance in the state's aggregation of these interests.

The most constant theme in these case studies is the fiscal interest. The local government or the metropolitan government or both benefited fiscally from the alcohol trade, whether in the form of a state-enforced monopoly, an excise tax, or license and other fees and fines. The fiscal interests gave the governments an interest in encouraging commercial production to replace traditional home production, since revenues were much more easily extracted from commercially marketed alcohol. And the fiscal interests meant that alcoholic beverage producers and distributors automatically had a stronger voice than temperance interests in government policies, at least in normal, nonrevolutionary times.

In each of the case studies, the people already had their own alcoholic beverages before Europeans arrived. From a fiscal point of view, the state needed as far as possible to replace home with industrial production of alcoholic beverages. In Mexico and Northern Rhodesia, this was primarily done by promoting and indeed monopolizing commercial production of the indigenous beverage. In Mozambique and New Grenada, the primary vehicle was the introduction of European beverages--spirits in both places, and "colonial wine" in Mozambique. If we looked only at the southern African examples, we would conclude that the choice of strategy simply reflected "home country" experience with and beliefs about alcoholic beverages. British views of the effects of spirits on poor populations had been permanently influenced by the experience of the "gin epidemic" in 18th-century London, while Portugal's wine culture had been much less affected by the advent of com-

Drinking & Drug Practices Surveyor 23 (May 1990) pp 3-6.

mercial spirits. But then we have the Spanish empire to contend with. Why did Mexico end up with a commercialized native beverage, pulque, while New Grenada ended up with an introduced beverage, aguardiente? Is this simply a reflection of agriculture and rainfall, of the cultivation of sugar cane versus cactuses, or are there other factors involved?

With respect to the state's interests in production, alcohol plays an inherently split role. On the one hand, alcoholic beverages are themselves an item of production, usually one of the most profitable industries; often the emergence of distilleries or breweries has marked the first stage of industrialization. On the other hand, drinking and heavy drinking plays an equivocal role with respect to production of other goods and services. Getting money for drinking may be a motivation for joining the workforce and for continuing to work. But with too much drinking, people do not show up for work, or are inefficient and clumsy at work. And money spent on drinking is not available for consumption of the products of other industries.

The balancing of these conflicting interests varies with time and place. Low wages, an unlimited labor pool, and work that does not require precise concentration, will mitigate concerns about alcohol's interference with efficient production. Where other goods are in short supply, as in Breznevian Eastern Europe, alcohol's efficiency in sopping up surplus spending-power may be positively appreciated. In the colonial examples considered here, the authorities were typically of two minds about alcohol's role in production. Thus Professor Kicza reports that the authorities tried to prohibit the pulque trade in 1692 in part because of the worktime lost by inebriated laborers, but then justified restoring it in 1697 in part because the prohibition had impoverished many pulque producers.

In southern Africa, the solution was one which has been common everywhere for mining and other industries which bring together large numbers of unattached men: to try to separate the drinking from the site and time of work. It is the pattern known in the Australian outback as "work and burst", with periods of strenuous labor interspersed with periods of often strenuous drinking. I found particularly interesting Professor Penvenne's description of the efforts of the Portuguese authorities to accomplish the separation by manipulating where and when laborers were paid for their work. In both Mozambique and Northern Rhodesia, it seems that the split production interests of the state were reflected in continuing friction about where and when drinking should be allowed.

In most empires, matters of finance and of productivity have been of deep interest to the colonial authorities. Matters of reproduction, however, were often left outside the realm of what the state attempted to control, although the European-based religious authorities certainly claimed jurisdiction over family life and reproduction in the colonies. It is perhaps as a reflection of the growing ambitions of the 20th century European state that it is in the most recent case study in our series, Northern Rhodesia in the postwar period, that effects on family life have the most prominence in the official discussion of alcohol issues. Even so, Professor Ambler notes that the complaints about "beerhall women" in Northern Rhodesia in the 1950s reflected class, gender and status cleavages within the African population at least as much as they did the concerns of colonial authorities. It is interesting to compare Ambler's discussion of class and gender conflicts over drinking in urban settings with the patterns of rural development in southern Zambia in the same period recently reported by Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder (2). In that context, women initially gained financially and thus in autonomy as a market became available for their home-brew, but there, too, they then lost decisively as commercial beer, kept under the men's control, became available.

Colson and Scudder's analysis sensitizes us to the fact that in many societies where alcoholic beverages were traditionally home-brewed, consumption of alcohol was informally limited not only by limited agricultural surpluses but also by the fact that the women did most of the brewing while the men did much of the drinking. Commercial production and market distribution took this instrument of social control out of the hands of women, and the sporadic women's temperance crusades of the last 150 years can be seen as attempts to construct substitute, more formal instruments of "home protection." But in none of the colonial situations we are considering today did women's interests in their men's drinking become legitimized or politicized to the extent that they did in the temperance era in North America, or for that matter, as Mac and Leslie Marshall have recently chronicled, on Truk and other Pacific Micronesian islands today (3).

Public order was inevitably a foremost concern of a colonial authority, although, as Professor Kicza notes, the concern was narrowly focused on threats to state authority much more than on private violence and disorder. As Pat Morgan and others have

noted, alcohol can play multiple roles in relations of domination (4). As a true opiate of the people, alcohol can spread disorganization in oppositional movements, and, as Professor Ambler notes, can absorb resources which otherwise could go to the movement. On the other hand, many revolutions, notably including the American Revolution, have been hatched in taverns. As a psychoactive drug, alcohol offers an alternative experiential reality, and perhaps this helps in envisioning an alternative political reality. By their nature, taverns and other drinking places are public spaces for sociability, and thus natural centers for the organization of any organized opposition. State authorities have always been well aware of this; Susanna Barrows and other social historians have made good use of the records of government informers and spies which have often been paid to keep track of the talk in the taverns (5).

In each of the present cases, there were some elements of a state or a state-enforced monopoly on alcoholic beverages. I believe we can discern something about the relative priorities of the different state interests by the form of that monopoly. From a fiscal point of view, it is a production or distribution monopoly which is important in maximizing the state's revenue from alcohol (as I have argued is true for the U.S. state alcohol monopolies today) (6). If the main concern is public order, it is a monopoly at the retail level, at the point of sale and consumption, that is crucial. From this perspective, the beerhall system of British southern Africa, with its close white supervision of black drinking, might be seen as reflecting the special concerns about public order in relatively recently-established colonies where the main capitalist modes of production involved massing together large numbers of young men without families.

In British colonies, much more than in Spanish or Portuguese ones, a symbolic dimension was added to the practical dimensions of drinking's interplay with domination. On the one hand, sumptuary laws defined one kind of alcohol as being for the rulers, and another for the ruled. It is not only in Zambia that this left the legacy at independence of a strong association of the rulers' beverages with prestige and autonomy, so that heavy drinking of European beverages has taken a heavy toll on the post-colonial elites. On the other hand, abstinence also took on a strong symbolic significance, reflecting the influence not only of temperance movements but also of labor and socialist movements in English-speaking lands, in which personal abstention frequently served as a mark of serious purpose (7). I wonder if the anti-beerhall demonstrations of 1957 in Northern Rhodesia reflected not only an attack on government revenues but also an invocation of this tradition of abstention as a politically-charged act of self-denial on behalf of a higher cause. The story Professor Ambler lays out of the history of Northern Rhodesian beerhalls and the independence movement amply suggests the complexity of the relation of drinking and domination when both practical and symbolic dimensions are at stake.

Psychoactive drugs, it has been suggested, are the glue of empires--particularly if one extends the list of psychoactive drugs beyond opiates, alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee and chocolate to include sugar and some spices. As commodities, psychoactive drugs are readily used up, they create their own demand, people will pay far more than their production cost for them, and they are relatively transportable or at least their supply can often be controlled. On the other hand, as these papers suggest, psychoactive drugs can also play their part as empires come unstuck. With alcohol's variety of forms, and with its already almost global distribution before the advent of European empires, alcohol history is a complex but rewarding medium for those who wish to understand how empires functioned and function--as also for those, more generally, who wish to understand the mechanisms and the experience of domination.

REFERENCES:

(1) Klaus Mäkelä and Matti Viikari, "Notes on Alcohol and the State," *Acta Sociologica* 20:155-178, 1977.

(2) Elizabeth Colson and Thayer Scudder, *For Prayer and Profit: The Ritual, Economic and Social Importance of Beer in Gwembe District, Zambia, 1950-1982*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

(3) Mac and Leslie Marshall, *Silent Voices Speak: Women and Prohibition in Truk*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1990.

(4) Patricia Morgan, "Alcohol, Disinhibition and Domination: A Conceptual Analysis," pp. 405-420 in: Robin Room and Gary Collins (eds.), *Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and Meaning of the Link*, NIAAA Research Monograph No. 12, Washington: USGPO, DHHS Publication No. (ADM) 83-1246, 1983.

(5) Susanna Barrows, "'Parliaments of the People': The Political Culture of Cafés in the Early Third Republic", in Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (eds.), *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, forthcoming 1990.

(6) Robin Room, "Alcohol Monopolies in the U.S.: Challenges and Opportunities," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 8:509-530, 1987.

(7) Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971.

THE CONFESSIONS OF BALDER HARTPOLE: A NOTE ON THERAPEUTIC TEMPERANCE IN MONTREAL DURING THE 1870S

Jim Baumohl
School of Social Work
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Author's Note: I am grateful to Gertrude Lebans, archivist of the Anglican Diocese of Montreal, for her generous assistance and premission to publish Hartpoole's narrative.

Introduction

In 1868 a young, Irish-born Anglican priest, James Carmichael (1835-1908), became assistant minister of St. George's Church in Montreal, Quebec. Like many Anglicans, he was a temperance advocate but not an abstainer, a position that came to trouble him.

> After four years' hard work in St. George's, I was somewhat horrified at discovering...that I had made little or no impression for good on those baptized members of the Church who were given to drink or were confirmed drunkards....I had very few in my Bible Class and a very slight proportion of them attended Church. On the other hand, I had many of them coming of their own free will to my study, telling me their sad and terrible stories, kneeling side-by-side with me in prayer, and giving me verbal promises of abstinence that were broken almost as soon as they were made (1).

At first, Carmichael sent these men to local temperance groups to make a written pledge of abstinence. However, a feeling grew on him that he ought to set a personal example. "Yet," he recalled, "I did not at once see my way to do it."

> One day, however, one of my saddest cases came to me and said: "For God's sake, Mr. Carmichael, give me the pledge!" I sat down and wrote out a pledge, and then prayed with the poor fellow. When he left me and when I sat alone and looked at his willing signature, the evidence of a master struggle against a master passion, and when I remembered how low that poor man had fallen, and how the sheep that night had sought out the Shepherd rather than the Shepherd the sheep, the Divine message seemed to pour itself into my heart, "If meat make my brother to offend I will eat no meat whilst the world lasteth, lest I make my brother to offend" (2).

While he became a pledged teetotaller, Carmichael never favored prohibition, regarding it as inevitably and unnecessarily divisive. Instead, he encouraged all temperance adherents to direct their efforts toward reforming drunkards. He thus stands in the tradition of "therapeutic temperance" that began in the Washingtonian Movement of the 1840s and found renewed expression in the gospel temperance crusades of the 1870s and the several neo-Washingtonian inebriate homes founded across North America between 1857 and 1880. Although the links are indirect, this tradition survives in some of the beliefs and practices of Alcoholics Anonymous (3).

To neo-Washingtonians like Carmichael it seemed that intemperance essentially was a spiritual problem: it resulted from failure to heed the divinely ordained natural laws of health and culminated in disregard of Pauline principles of social obligation and responsibility. Neo-Washingtonians understood reform (among men, at least) to issue from what they often called "moral heroism," or what Carmichael characterized as "a master struggle against a master passion." Sobriety represented a triumph of divinely given freedom of choice over the enslaving physiological effects of alcohol addiction. All drunkards could be reformed if pledged to abstinence and supported sufficiently by a vigilant and prayerful temperance fellowship. Former drunkards were particularly useful in this endeavor, serving as what we now call "role models." Medical treatment, while helpful during withdrawal, was not important to subsequent sobriety.

Inspired by the "sad and terrible stories" related to him in his study, Carmichael worked with the St. George's Temperance Society, founded by a group of