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## **The Liquor Question and the Formation of Consciousness: Nation, Ethnicity and Class at the Turn of the Century**

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The papers in the present issue are concerned with manifestations of the "liquor question" in very different sociocultural environments in the decades before the First World War. While a temperance movement or anti-drinking interests are a part of the story in each paper, the papers are also concerned with patterns of drinking and rates and trends in alcohol-related problems, and with the nature and extent of societal reactions to alcohol problems. Each of the papers also considers the role of the "liquor question" in forming a national or class or ethnic consciousness in politically subordinated groups.

Let us consider for a moment an idealized natural history of large-scale changes in alcohol consumption, alcohol problems, and societal reactions to alcohol problems in a given culture or society. A simple model would posit that a big rise in consumption will be succeeded by a rise in alcohol-related problems, often with some lag, and then, with a longer lag, by a societal reaction of increased concern about drinking and collective action to reduce the problems. The lags are likely to be particularly long where the increased drinking is not immediately socially disruptive -- where the cultural matrix for drinking discourages explosive drunkenness -- since the primary manifestation of alcohol problems will then be eventual increased morbidity and early mortality. The initial rise in consumption may result from one or more of a variety of factors increasing the availability or attractiveness of alcohol -- technological improvements in production or transport, policies favoring alcohol sales, increased disposable income for consumers, population movements into areas of increased availability, an identification of alcohol or drinking with positive aspects of a culture.

Versions of this scenario have been played out on a relatively small scale in many historical instances -- in this issue, the Winnebago history described by Hill, and the Finnish-American history described by Sariola, might both be seen as fitting it, with only a few years or decades of lag between the changes in amount or circumstances of drinking and the cultural response to the changes. On a larger scale, we can see the scenario as being played out in many industrial nations over a time period of a century or more. A tidal wave of spirits drinking, partly stimulated by new efficiencies in production and transportation, partly by government policies, and partly by changes in tastes and in the situation of the population, swept over many European societies in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Eventually a reaction set in. We can see, for instance in the United States (Note 1), in Australia (Note 2) and in Sweden (Note 3), with some bumps along the line, an overall decline in consumption reaching across the decades from the early or middle 19th century up to around 1930. Then consumption started rising again, and continued to do so at least through the early 1970s (Note 4). Skog's recent time-series analysis (Note 5) of the Norwegian consumption data found this "long wave of consumption", a V-curve stretching over a century and more, to be stronger than any short-term undulations.

We may outline variations on this basic scenario of challenge and delayed response. For societies with a long history of sustained high consumption, the precipitating factor leading to a rise in societal reaction might be not a rise in consumption but rather a shift in consciousness whereby

the problems associated with drinking become recognized. This might be seen as part of the story for the early history of the temperance movement in the United States. For societies where alcohol production becomes a wide and entrenched interest, or where heavy drinking acquires a strong positive cultural valuation, the societal reaction may be muted and ineffective. Both these factors may be seen at work in France, for instance, diffusing the societal reaction to the big increase in alcohol consumption in the 19th century (Note 6).

In common with the initial model, these variations view temperance and other anti-drinking movements as rational reactions to an objectively serious situation. This view reflects a perspective which has come to the fore again only in recent work in social history, and which is at odds with earlier interpretations of temperance movements in terms of status politics rather than as pragmatic responses to real problems (Note 7).

But some histories of societal responses to alcohol problems cannot be fitted into any of these variations on a simple natural history of challenge and delayed response. Take, for instance, the cases described in Pinson's and Sulkunen's papers in the present issue. As both authors imply, it is difficult to discern, in an international perspective, what all the fuss was about in the rise of Icelandic and Finnish temperance agitation in the late 19th century. Or, rather, it is difficult to believe that the agitation represented only a rational and direct response to problems caused by drinking. (It should be kept in mind, on the other hand, that neither per-capita consumption nor cirrhosis mortality are good indicators of "explosive drinking" and the associated casualties and social disruption, which have traditionally been the dominant aspects of alcohol problems in Iceland and Finland.)

These examples, along with those discussed in the other articles in this issue, underline that the simple model we have offered above must be expanded if we are to understand the relation between alcohol problems and societal response movements. Societies and cultures do not exist in isolation, and neither do the responses they propound to alcohol problems. Furthermore, large societies are usually complex, embracing competing interests and subcultures. Groups within them or on their periphery -- colonies or subjected groups -- frequently construct a reaction to specific problems they face, such as alcohol problems, with an eye to how the reaction will "play" to the audience of other sociocultural groups significant to them (Note 8). Thus, for Sariola's Finnish-Americans, as for the early Black temperance workers in the U.S. (Note 9), temperance was in part a way of demonstrating the worthiness of a subordinated and derogated group to the larger society. Similarly, the abstinent socialists portrayed by Roberts advocated working-class temperance not only for immediate practical reasons but also as a symbolic witness to the virtues of the coming socialist commonwealth.

Also, new ideas are rarely purely immanent, arising entirely from within a culture. Often they are passed from one culture to another along lines of prestige. Those in a peripheral cultural situation are likely to consider with particular care ideas gaining currency among those seen as closer to the "core". Apart from considerations of its prestige value, such an idea has a special value if it can be turned to the purposes of those on the periphery. We can see this process at work on both sides of the alcohol question in the case studies presented in this issue. As Mills shows, Hofmeyr, the leader of the subjugated Afrikaners in the Cape Colony and the defender of their wine and spirits production, relished catching his English adversaries in a conflict between their principles of no special restrictions on Africans and of a protective prohibition of alcohol sales to them. On the other hand, the earliest Icelandic temperance society, as Pinson shows, was organized in the

"metropolitan" country, Denmark, and temperance ideology was initially attractive to Icelanders in part as an argument against the Danish state trading monopoly.

To understand movements of societal response to alcohol problems, then, we must pay substantial attention to the objective alcohol situation in the culture or society, but we must also consider the symbolic meanings of drinking and alcohol issues and the role of such issues in conflict or competition or interaction between groups.

As noted above, the articles in this issue are united by the attention that they focus on alcohol issues in subordinated groups in the nineteenth century. In each of the cases examined, the alcohol issue became an element in the formation of a national or a class or an ethnic consciousness. Of all the groups considered, only for the Afrikaners was the consciousness formed around a defense of a "wet" position, in a multi-ethnic situation where they were defending their interests against the "dry" proclivities of both the dominant English and the subordinated Africans. But we know from other studies that there are a number of historical instances where a subordinated group have used a "wet" position as a tool of insubordination (Note 10).

In all the other groups considered, the public presentation of alcohol issues by the oppressed took the path of temperance. To a certain extent, this usually involved picking up an idea as it diffused to the periphery. But in each case, the idea of temperance was adapted and melded with other concerns and ideologies of the subordinated. The divergence is perhaps most explicit in the case of the Winnebago, where the syncretic solution of peyotism coexisted with but proved more attractive than the orthodox white American solution of temperance Christianity. An analogous syncretism is also clear in the melding of temperance, working-class consciousness and socialism which is analyzed from various perspectives by Sulkunen, Sariola and Roberts. What had started as an elite concern about others' drinking or a middle-class concern about self-control and drinking took on a rather different coloration as temperance became a "means of liberation" (Note 11) for many nationalist, working-class and socialist movements in the late 19th century.

In general, the temperance initiatives in the cases considered in this issue seem to have positively affected the objective situation, that is, to have reduced the prevalence of alcohol-related problems in the group. But it is worth noting that these gains did not come without conflict or cost. The melding of temperance with group consciousness-raising was significant not only to the external relations of the group but also in competitions for prestige within the group. For the most part, the voice of the drunkards, saloonkeepers and others who lost status from the triumph of temperance is hard to find in the historical records, although their countermoves in the internal conflict can be discerned, for instance, in Sariola's account of Finnish-American pastors appointing known drunkards to trusted positions in the parish.

As Roberts suggests, the debates and actions chronicled in this issue have a relevance for today. On the one hand, they re-emphasize the rational basis of consciousness-raising and collective action on the "liquor question" in 19th-century societies; there were severe alcohol problems, and the net result of all the popular and elite agitation was a substantial reduction in the problems. On the other hand, they also remind us of the symbolic power of alcohol. For a number of reasons -- among them that it involves a psychoactive drug and that it is deeply entrenched in the social interactions of daily life -- drinking, and thus also opposition to drinking, carries a heavy symbolic freight. Public health policymakers thus are ill-advised to pay attention only to the short-term epidemiological findings on the effects of an intervention measure on rates of problems. For instance, it may be short-sighted to determine the issue of a minimum drinking age solely by the

immediate effects on youthful driving casualties, if the long-term effect of a raised age will be to reinforce the "forbidden fruit" attractions of alcohol and the cultural identification of drinking with emancipation and autonomy.

PAPERS DISCUSSED – all from Contemporary Drug Problems, vol. 12, no.2.

Hill, Thomas W., "Alcohol use among the Nebraska Winnebago: an ethnohistorical study of change and adjustment", pp. 173-219.

Mills, Wallace, "Cape smoke: alcohol issues in the Cape Colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century", pp. 221-247.

Pinson, Ann, "Temperance, prohibition, and politics in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Iceland", pp. 249-266.

Roberts, James S., "Alcohol, public policy, and the Left: the Socialist debate in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe", pp. 309-330.

Sariola, Sakari, "The Finnish temperance movement in the Great Lakes area of the Midwest", pp. 287-307.

Sulkunen, Irma, "Temperance as a civic religion: the cultural foundation of the Finnish working-class temperance ideology", pp. 267-285.

#### NOTES

1. William J. Rorabaugh, The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
2. Robin Room, "An Intoxicated Society?: Alcohol Issues Then and Now in Australia" (paper presented at a meeting of the International Group for Comparative Alcohol Studies, Stockholm, Sweden, October 23-27, 1984). A revision was published as "The dialectic of drinking in Australian life: from the Rum Corps to the wine column", Australian Alcohol and Drug Review 7:413-437, 1988.
3. Leif Lenke, "Alcohol and Crimes of Violence: A Causal Analysis", Contemporary Drug Problems 11:355-366, 1982.
4. Klaus Mäkelä, Robin Room, Eric Single, Pekka Sulkunen, Brendan Walsh, with 13 others, Alcohol, Society, and the State: I. A Comparative Study of Alcohol Control (Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation, 1981).
5. Ole-Jørgen Skog, "The Long Waves in Alcohol Consumption" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Alcohol Epidemiology Section, International Council on Alcohol and Addictions, Edinburgh, June 4-8, 1984). Published as "The long waves of alcohol consumption: a social network perspective on cultural change", Social Networks 8:1-32, 1986.
6. Susanna Barrows, "The Uncharted Revolution: Drink and Café Life in Nineteenth-Century France" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Alcohol Epidemiology Section, International Council on Alcohol and Addictions, Helsinki June 28 - July 2, 1982).
7. Jed Dannenbaum, "The Social History of Alcohol" Drinking and Drug Practices Surveyor 19:7-11 (1984); Joseph Gusfield, Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963).
8. Robin Room, "Foreword", pp. xi-xvii in Linda Bennett & Genevieve Ames, eds., The American Experience with Alcohol: Contrasting Cultural Perspectives (New York & London: Plenum, 1985).
9. Denise Herd, "We Cannot Stagger to Freedom: A History of Blacks and Alcohol in American

- Politics," pp. 141-186 in Leon Brill and Charles Winick, eds., Yearbook of Substance Use and Abuse, vol. 3 (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1985).
10. Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "The World's Oldest On-Going Protest Demonstration: North American Indian Drinking Patterns", 40 Pacific Historical Review 311 (1971); Richard Stivers, A Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and American Stereotype (University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976); and Barrows, supra note 6.
  11. Jed Dannenbaum, "Anti-Alcohol Mass Movements: The Cross-Cultural Perspective" (paper presented at the 96th annual meeting of the American Historical Association, Los Angeles, December 28-30, 1981).