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# From Scavengers to Sanitation Workers Practices of Purification and the Making of Civic Employees in Toronto, 1890–1920

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## ARTICLE

# From Scavengers to Sanitation Workers: Practices of Purification and the Making of Civic Employees in Toronto, 1890–1920

**Chris Hurl**

“A manure wagon was looked upon by the controllers as not the proper place to fly the flag. Whether the flag is on a manure wagon or on a mansion in Rosedale it means the same.”

– S. Vance, Speech to Toronto scavengers and street cleaners,  
Victoria Hall, 26 September 1917<sup>1</sup>

ON 29 SEPTEMBER 1917, OVER 500 SCAVENGERS, street cleaners, and sanitation workers walked off the job, halting collection from thousands of households across Toronto and leaving residents to burn or bury their refuse in their yards. Workers were incensed that the Street Commissioner had ripped the Union Jack off a manure wagon, apparently exclaiming that he “did not want any darned rubbish like that around here.”<sup>2</sup> The wagon driver’s son had just died in the war, and the workers felt that he had as much right to fly the flag as anyone else. In response, the entire street cleaning department took a two-week “holiday,” refusing to return to work until the Street Commissioner was removed from his position.

The actions of the scavengers speak to the contested moral, political, and technological claims underpinning waste work at the time. Through the early 20th century, the duties and responsibilities of waste workers were widely debated by local elites, public health officials, civic reformers, ratepayers associations, and labour unions. Questions were raised around the appropriate

1. *The Evening Telegram*, 26 September 1917.

2. Board of Control Minutes, Board of Control Minute Book, No. 2, July–Dec. 1917, September 26, 1917, 713, Fonds 200, Series 779, City of Toronto Archives (hereafter CTA).

relationship of municipal services to civic and national identity. How should the work of waste collection and disposal be displayed to the community? What was the proper disposition of waste workers – as representatives of civic authority – in their day-to-day interactions with local residents and businesses? Moreover, beyond questions of good taste, the concerns about decorating manure wagons also touched on larger issues of management and control. It highlighted problems of discretion in the performance of municipal services. To what extent should workers have the freedom to treat civic property as their own? And how could their conduct be supervised in a rapidly expanding urban environment?

In this article, I draw from the civic employees' strikes of 1917–18 in exploring the changing ways in which waste work was framed as an object of regulation. I begin by situating waste work at the intersection between a deeply entrenched political machine and an emergent civic reform movement. Until the 1920s, civic employment in Toronto was governed by a clientelist arrangement through which jobs were distributed on the basis of community loyalties and political favours. Through such networks, various religious and ethnically-defined working class communities attempted to keep local elites accountable to them. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, civic reformers increasingly challenged the distribution of jobs on the basis of community affiliations and sought to interject more impartial and scientific forms of management in achieving an economy of service. While waste work was an occupation coveted by Tory ward heelers and Orange Protestant lodges, it was also a central target for emergent reform programs.

In this context, I explore the efforts of civic officials to apply technomanagerial forms of control to the labour process, reframing waste work as a technological issue to be directed by a distinct class of managers. With the transition from rationalities of public health to public works, I highlight how the efforts to normalize waste management services were paralleled by efforts to centralize managerial control in the hands of the Street Commissioner. Through the application of new methods of classification, measurement and supervision, I explore how civic officials actively targeted the workers' day-to-day contact with private residents, their role in transporting waste by wagon across public thoroughfares, and their employment relations with local ward bosses. In problematizing the illegitimate mixing of public and private, I argue that these officials developed practices of purification, seeking to cleave apart an abstract general interest from the particular interests of specific community actors.

Finally, in the last half of the article, I explore how the efforts by civic officials to disentangle a public sphere from the taint of community interests also created the conditions of possibility for new forms of class solidarity. Hence, I examine how workers spoke back to the technomanagerial regulation of their labour during this period, establishing new forms of organization and novel approaches to claims-making. At the nexus of a complex sociotechnical

network, connecting together wagons, refuse bins, roads, incinerators and local dumps, I argue that workers were at times able to make counter-claims, challenging the intensification of the labour process and their marginalization as waste brokers in the community. Initially, this entailed appealing to racialized, gendered, and sectarian understandings of community. However, while workers at times emphasized their embeddedness in a specific set of community relations, I examine how they also skillfully took up and applied a managerial discourse in asserting their rights.

Such struggles, I argue, are important in understanding the emergence of modern regimes of civic employment in Canada, a realm of struggle that has been hitherto neglected by many labour historians.<sup>3</sup> Beyond the political campaigns for civic reform, which overturned clientelist machines and introduced professional management practices to Canadian cities, it highlights the complex reshaping of public authority through the employment relationship itself. Through a secular governmental framework that aspired to neutrality and impartiality, waste work was repositioned through this period as an object of management in relation to community interests. More broadly, the growing segmentation of managerial knowledge, which was increasingly removed from the city's streets and alleyways, had important implications in reframing civic identities. As I will show, the struggles at the end of World War I were formative in the establishment of a new framework for employment and citizenship, contributing to the view that public workers somehow stood apart from the community as an anonymous and uniform service.

### **Reframing Waste Work: Between Clientelism and Reform**

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND the significance of the British flag for waste workers, it is important to first examine the changing political arrangements through which their work was organized. Through the late 19th and early 20th century, the City of Toronto was notable in the Canadian context as both a haven for "machine politics" and a bastion for civic reform. Waste work very much stood at the intersection – occupying a coveted position in clientelist networks brokering access to city jobs while at the same time targeted as a key area for restructuring through the application of managerial knowledge and the growing coordination of workers across increasingly integrated infrastructural networks.

From the mid-19th century onwards, Toronto was dominated by a powerful political machine, through which jobs were distributed on the basis of political

3. There are a few notable exceptions to this. For instance, see the edited collection by Michele Dagenais & Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Municipal Services and Employees in the Modern City: New Historic Approaches* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003); Jim Pringle, *United We Stand: A History of Winnipeg's Civic Workers* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Labour Education Centre, 1991); Stephanie Ross, "The Making of CUPE: Structure, Democracy and Class Formation," PhD thesis, York University, 2005.

loyalties and personal favours. In his recent study of municipal politics in Toronto, Smyth describes the city as operating under clientelist framework until 1920, which was “community-based and depended heavily upon social linkages and personal contacts for their effective operation.”<sup>4</sup> Closely resembling the machine politics in America cities, it was very important in this context to find “link persons or organizations” that “bridged the gap between the local community and those who controlled municipal office – the conduit through which commodities and jobs were distributed.”<sup>5</sup> Operating in such networks, individuals were granted access to publicly funded posts, which were valued for their relatively decent wages, security, and social status. Access to employment was carefully controlled, with appointments made on the basis of personal connections. Political influence was important and very often ward organizations would play a decisive role in the selection of candidates.

Regulated through complex community hierarchies, employment relations were mediated by gendered, racialized, sectarian, and imperial imaginaries. To a large degree, they were brokered through the Orange Order, the largest voluntary association in the city, which was made up of a network of lodges celebrating the principles of Irish Protestantism, Monarchy and Empire. Indeed, studies of the period have often echoed Kealey’s description of the city as “an impenetrable bastion of Orange-Tory strength.”<sup>6</sup> Between 1850 and 1920, Smyth notes that the Orange Order dominated Toronto politics through “[i]ts organizational structure of lodges and districts, its control of the mayoralty, and its dominance of City Council and powerful positions such as that of city clerk,” which was augmented by “a membership that was numbered in the thousands, transcending social class and geographical districts.”<sup>7</sup> Operating through 56 lodges across the city by 1895, the influence of the Order was reflected in the employment records of the municipality, with a hugely disproportionate number of Protestants serving in city departments, often directly or indirectly affiliated with the Order.

Beyond serving the interests of local elites, such clientelist relations also provided a political vehicle for privileged segments of the working class in

4. William Smyth, *Toronto: The Belfast of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 134.

5. Smyth, *The Belfast of Canada*, 136. Smyth further states that Toronto “was probably the closest Canadian equivalent of the machine politics of American cities” and bore a striking resemblance to the politics of Tammany Hall in New York City.

6. Gregory S. Kealey, “Orangemen and the Corporation: The Politics of Class in Toronto during the Union of the Canadas,” in Victor L. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); See J.M.S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1984); Cecil J. Houston & William J. Smyth, *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867–1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

7. Smyth, *The Belfast of Canada*, 134.

Toronto. Though they were often stigmatized as old and unemployable, scavengers achieved a degree of recognition through such arrangements. Through the course of their work, their status in a complex community hierarchy was often put on display. For instance, scavengers participated in annual parades in which they would march their proudly painted wagons down the streets of the city. A *Toronto Star* article notes that “[f]or many years, it has been the custom of the city scavengers to have a drive,” putting their wagons on display for the community.<sup>8</sup> In spite of complaints from wealthy residents, there was a degree of support for these kinds of practices from civic officials who granted permission to workers to use city-owned wagons to parade through the city. Scavengers often decorated their wagons with windmills, flags, and other ornaments as a point of personal dignity and civic pride. Operating under the guidance of public health officials, through clientelist employment arrangements, and at neighbourhood dump sites, the work of scavengers and cleaners was granted a degree of recognition – an expression of a complex civic identity.

However, from the 1890s onwards, middle-class professionals and business elites in the city, often affiliated with the Liberal Party but also pressing from within the Tories, increasingly problematized the status of waste work and the system of loyalties and personal connections in which it was embedded, which were viewed as crooked, old-fashioned and inefficient – in other words, “dirty.” Building from the early leadership of reformers like W.H. Howland – who was Mayor from 1886–88 – there was a growing emphasis on securing “honest men” for public office.<sup>9</sup> From the 1890s onwards, a series of investigations were spearheaded into the contracts and hiring practices of city departments with the aim of rendering city services more efficient.<sup>10</sup> Through this time, a vision of clean and scientific government was counter-posed to the corruption and wastefulness that came with the clientelist system. For instance, *The Globe* noted that the “struggle for ... favors” that came with public employment “clings to politics as an unhealthy growth, and

8. “Scavengers Parade,” *The Evening Star*, 10 February 1894.

9. For a discussion of the discourse of “honest men” in the Toronto context, see John C. Weaver, “The Modern City Realized: Toronto, 1880–1915,” in Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter eds., *The Usable Urban Past* (Ottawa: The Carleton Library, 1979). Weaver notes that in late 19th century Toronto, there was more of a focus on finding capable people to govern the city than with changing the structures of governance. See also Desmond Morton, *Mayor Howland: The Citizen’s Candidate* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1973).

10. For instance, typescript copies of inquiries can be found in the Appendices to Council Minutes, CTA, including: *Investigation into Toronto Water Works at the Main Pumping State, 1899*; *Fire Brigade Investigation*; *Investigation into Civic Elections, 1904*; “In the Matter of Investigation of the Assessment Rolls of the City of Toronto,” *Minutes of the City of Toronto ... 1904*, Appendix C; *Parks Investigation Report*, April 11, 1908; *Works Department Investigation, 1911*; *Toronto Fire Department Investigation, 1915*.

it is lamentable that ward associations can unblushingly proclaim their conception of this unhealthy appendage as all that is implied by politics.”<sup>11</sup>

Major structural reforms were advanced from the 1890s onwards, which aimed to clean up the city, generating an efficient and economical approach in the regulation of services that were deemed to be essential to the city.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, by the early 20th century, Toronto was often described as a centre for urban reform. This was reflected in the reorganization of city government, with the creation of a Board of Control in 1894–95, which aimed to minimize the influence of ward politicians and make a few good men accountable for the administration of services across the entire city.<sup>13</sup> City services were increasingly administered by a growing array of professionals, with the appointment of a Medical Officer of Health (1883), City Auditor (1908), Commissioner of Works (1912), and Commissioner of Finance (1915) providing oversight for spending in city departments. As Rutherford notes, such measures “were designed not so much to make government more efficient or ‘more responsive to the popular will,’ but rather to lessen public participation in municipal government by minimizing the effect of ward politicians.”<sup>14</sup> Reformers sought to depoliticize service provision and access to employment, and pursued structural reforms allowing municipal government to operate more efficiently, like a business.

In targeting the corrupt, wasteful and inefficient practices of private actors – including both monopolists commanding large public utilities and the contracted workforce – civic reformers generated new conceptions of public management. This entailed the advancement of public ownership over various services that were deemed essential to city life, such as water (1872), electricity

11. “Politics in Council,” *The Globe*, 28 January 1908.

12. A variety of studies have highlighted Toronto as a centre of civic reform through this period. See Christopher Armstrong & H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); Christopher Armstrong & H.V. Nelles, “The Rise of Civic Populism in Toronto 1870–1920,” in Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus*; Heather MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates: Toronto's Health Department, 1883–1983* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990); H.V. Nelles & Christopher Armstrong, “The Great Fight for Clean Government,” *Urban History Review* 5 (1976): 50; Patricia Petersen, “‘Leave the Fads to the Yankees’: The Campaigns for Commission and City Manager Government in Toronto, 1910–1926,” *Urban History Review* 20 (1991); Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880–1920,” in Gilbert A. Stelter & Alan F.J. Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991); John C. Weaver, “The Modern City Realized: Toronto Civic Affairs, 1880–1915,” in Alan F.J. Artibise & Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1979); John C. Weaver, “Order and Efficiency: Samuel Morley Wickett and the Urban Progressive Movement in Toronto, 1900–1915,” *Ontario History* 69 (1977): 218–234.

13. See Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880–1920,” in Stelter & Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City*, 432.

14. Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow's Metropolis,” 432.



(1905), and street railways (1921). Indeed, Armstrong and Nelles (1984) note that Toronto, through this period, “was in the forefront of those cities pushing out the frontiers of what municipal government ought legitimately to provide.” Driven by men like Samuel Morley Wickett, there was a growing embrace of the municipality as a corporation through which services could be more efficiently organized than through private enterprise. Along these lines, reformers were centrally focused on public health and sanitation as a key area for expert management. From the 1880s onwards, officials pursued large scale infrastructure projects, including improving the city’s water supply and rolling out a new system of trunk sewers, while at the same time more carefully regulating the waste disposal practices of private businesses and households.

As in much of the historical research on North American cities, urban historians writing on Toronto have noted the tensions between ‘machine politics’ and civic reform through this period.<sup>15</sup> Very often, this is described as a conflict between differently positioned elites, with professionals and business interests affiliated with the Liberal Party drawing support from thickening professional networks and new immigrant communities in their pursuit of scientifically minded reform policies, while the Tories typically advanced a paternalistic appeal to Orange Protestant networks.<sup>16</sup> Others have highlighted the role of reform strategies in assuaging the tensions between boosters – insisting on use of city resources to simulate growth – and cutters, demanding stringent economies to save ratepayers from excessive burdens.<sup>17</sup> More recent studies have pointed to the tension between popular politics and expertise, as a nascent group of middle-class professionals drew from specialized knowledge in developing new schema for managing the city while at the same time depending on consent from civic officials and voters who were “innocent of their theories, ignorant of their data, and often suspicious of their motives.”<sup>18</sup>

15. For the broader context, see John M. Allswang, ed., *Bosses, Machines, and Urban Voters* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986); Blaine A. Brownell & Warren E. Stickle, *Bosses and Reformers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Alexander B. Callow, Jr., ed., *The City Boss in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Bruce M. Stave & Sondra Astor Stave, eds., *Urban Bosses, Machines, and Progressive Reformers* (Malabar: Krieger, 1984).

16. Careless, *Toronto to 1918*, 190. Careless notes the limited success of civic reformers through this period: “Despite these structural changes ... and the preachings of reformers, urban politics in prewar Toronto kept much of its former character. There still were political in-groups linked with Conservative and Orange machinery, lawyers and contractors steering land-lot schemes, merchants and manufacturers keenly guarding business interest – and not very many labour representatives.” See also Weaver, “The Modern City Realized.”

17. For instance, this approach was adopted in the historical survey by Warren Magnusson & Andrew Sancton, eds., *City Politics in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

18. See Don S. Kirschner, *The Paradox of Professionalism: Reform and Public Service in Urban America, 1900–1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 63; Mariana Valverde alludes to this dynamic in the context of Toronto in *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water* (Toronto: McClelland



Certainly, the literature on progressive-era civic reform is useful in understanding the context in which waste work was framed as an object of contestation. However, while these studies speak to the ideological struggles of civic reformers in the electoral domain and their quest for knowledge in the realm of professional discourse, not as much attention has been paid to the specific ways in which civic officials were able to generate control over the labour process *within* city departments. A study of the changing management of waste work, which I explore in the next section, reveals how civic reforms were instituted as a managerial program, drawing from specific kinds of expert knowledge and administrative technologies, which facilitated intervention in the labour process in new ways. Moreover, it reveals how city workers as actors in their own right played a significant role in shaping how such arrangements were rolled out.

### **From Public Health to Public Works: The Industrialization of Waste Collection and Disposal, 1910–17**

A RANGE OF STUDIES HAS highlighted the techno-scientific imaginaries that informed civic reform through the late 19th and early 20th century. As Joyce notes, civic reformers emphasized technological solutions to political questions, seeking to depoliticize urban problems through the advancement of forms of administration at a distance from the electoral realm.<sup>19</sup> Through this period, civic engineers, public health officials, and other professionals worked to generate new ways of knowing and intervening in urban life. Cities were increasingly taken up as an object of scientific investigation in their own right to be surveyed and mapped by specialized personnel with the aim of facilitating rational planning and administration. At the same time, there were efforts to roll out a uniform infrastructural edifice, a complex network of trunk sewers, water mains, gas and electrical lighting, street cars, and paved roads, all of which facilitated the free passage of people, things, information – and also waste – across the urban environment.

Of course, waste had been framed as a technoscientific problem from the mid-19th century onwards, something that required a significant amount of

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and Stewart, 1991).

19. See Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003). See also Thomas Osborne & Nikolas Rose, "Governing Cities," in Engin F. Isin, Thomas Osborne & Nikolas S. Rose, eds., *Governing Cities: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, Advanced Liberalism* (Toronto: Urban Studies Programme, York University, 1998); Thomas Osborne, "Security and Vitality: Drains, Liberalism and Power in the Nineteenth Century," in Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne & Nikolas Rose, eds., *Foucault and Political Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996); Christopher Otter, "Cleansing and Clarifying: Technology and Perception in Nineteenth-Century London," *Journal of British Studies* 43 (2004): 40; Donald Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen: Realities and Representations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

professional ingenuity in order to address.<sup>20</sup> As in many other municipalities across Canada and the United States, the work of collecting and disposing of Toronto's waste was one of the most technical areas of city management, a responsibility for the Medical Officer of Health (MOH), who was granted considerable professional discretion in undertaking inspections and embarking on new infrastructural projects. Through the 1890s, civic officials tackled the unhygienic practices of local residents through enlisting a growing army of sanitary inspectors; confronted the nuisance of neighbourhood dumps through the construction of crematories and the centralization of dumping at Ashbridge's Bay; and, drawing from new cadastral mapping techniques, designed increasingly complex circuits for the flow of refuse across the city. Alongside efforts to extend the power of the Public Health department across the city, there were also efforts to incorporate all work related to waste removal and street cleaning under one roof, including the construction of sprinklers, rotary sweepers, automatic loading carts, and snow scrapers, not to mention the making of harnesses and shodding of horses.<sup>21</sup>

In North America, Toronto was considered to be a leader in spearheading an innovative public system for street cleaning and waste disposal. Under the leadership of public health officials and civic engineers, Toronto had built a reputation by the late 19th century for "clean" government.<sup>22</sup> No longer was the city looked down upon as "Muddy York"; it was quickly becoming known as the "Queen City."<sup>23</sup> The revolution in waste management was a central facet of urban reform, which was praised by civic reformers and scientists when they visited the city as part of the British Association meeting in 1897. Thanks to the pioneering work of Street Commissioner John Jones, the progressive journal *Review of Reviews* noted that the street cleaning department had "revolutionized the care of the streets of the city," and was described as one of the two "cleanest" cities in North America, next to New York City.<sup>24</sup>

20. For instance, see Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For the Toronto context, see Heather MacDougall, *Activists and Advocates*.

21. George E. Hooker, "Cleaning Streets by Contract – A Sidelight from Chicago," in Albert Shaw, ed., *Review of Reviews* 15 (1897): 437; Robert Wilson, *A Retrospect, a Short Review of the Steps Taken in Sanitation to Transform the Town of Muddy York into the Queen City of the West* (Toronto: Department of Public Health, 1934), 11, Fonds 200, Series 365, File 46, CTA.

22. A number of studies have highlighted cleanliness as a central organizing metaphor, which came to describe not only hygienic practices but also order, accountability, and proper bookkeeping in modern programs for civic reform. In the context of waste work and street cleaning, see Daniel Eli Burnstein, *Next to Godliness: Confronting Dirt and Despair in Progressive Era New York City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); see also Reid, *Paris Sewers and Sewermen*. In the Canadian context, see H.V. Nelles and Christopher Armstrong, "The Great Fight for Clean Government," *Urban History Review* 5, 2 (1976).

23. See Wilson, *A Retrospect*.

24. See Hooker, "Cleaning Streets by Contract," 437. The *Review of Reviews*'s designation of

However, while public health officers ostensibly ran the show, seeking to provide a lustre of scientific expertise in the management of hazardous materials, it is also notable how such services remained deeply entangled in clientelist networks for the distribution of jobs and resources. In Toronto, the management of solid waste services was shaped by a division of labour in which professional gentlemen<sup>25</sup> – such as physicians and civil engineers – maintained responsibility for the grand designs, while everyday employment matters remained the purview of inspectors and local foremen. This was in part because heads of departments lacked the capacity to systematically intervene in the regulation of employment, which is reflected in the letter books of the MOH. Echoing the decentralized “drive system” that was taken up in many other industries during this period, the MOH, as late as 1905, gives each inspector “absolute power regarding the control and ordering of the men.”<sup>26</sup> His only condition was that they did not increase expenditures or hire new staff without his permission and that they kept interference of the current process to a minimum. In fact, the MOH would only get involved in the management of the workforce in the department through informal personal interventions, and only if exceptional circumstances demanded it.<sup>27</sup>

It was only in the early 20th century that the labour process became framed as a technomanagerial problem in its own right, as, following trends in municipal government across North America, the professional discourse guiding waste management shifted from public health to public works.<sup>28</sup> Through

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Toronto as one of the two cleanest cities on the continent was widely circulated in the press. For instance, see “Two Clean Cities,” *New York Times*, 4 April 1897. For a study of New York through this period, see Burnstein, *Next to Godliness*.

25. The advancement of doctors and engineers as “professional gentleman,” with multifaceted knowledge in a variety of different areas is noted by Heather MacDougall in *Activists and Advocates*. See also R.D. Gidney and W.J.P. Millar, *Professional Gentlemen: The Professions in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

26. Medical Officer of Health letter book, 3 August 1905, 791, Fonds 200, Series 518, File 5, CTA. For a discussion of the “drive system,” see David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, & Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

27. *Medical Officer of Health letter book*, Fonds 200, Series 518, CTA. The degree of personal discretion exercised by the MOH in the administration of sanitation work is reflected in the following letter, in which he appraises the claims of an injured worker: “I may say that I examined Mr. James Jackman some ten days ago. He has a very severely inflamed knee, which he states received injury whilst unloading a scavenger cart in Rosedale. He is certainly unfit to work in his present condition. I allowed him one month’s pay, as he states, and informed him that any further extension would have to receive the sanction of the Board of Control. I think it would be fair and right, as he has, as far as I know, received his injury in discharge of his duties to allow him an extra month’s pay, at the end of which time, I will examine him again, and if necessary report. He has been upon the service for a number of years, and has always been a faithfully and conscientious worker.” *Medical Health Officer Letter books 1909*, 20 August 1909.

28. In his history of sanitation reform in American cities through this period, Melosi notes that, around this time, there was “an internal bureaucratic shift in municipal government from



**City of Toronto Dump Wagon, 7 March 1917.**

Courtesy of City of Toronto Archives, Series 327, s0372\_ss0070\_it0103.

this period, civic officials in Toronto began to lose faith in the discretion of professionals in providing for the efficient and economic ordering of city services. As Weaver notes, “[t]he best government no longer seemed dependent upon a handful of honest men on low salaries; it meant a smoothly functioning and well-paid bureaucracy.”<sup>29</sup> Henceforth, the numerous infrastructural improvements made by the Medical Officer of Health were deemed to be insufficient in facilitating the smooth and economical expulsion of waste from the city’s streets. Fighting waste became not simply a matter of public health, civil engineering or good policing; rather, it was a managerial problem that was imminent to the process of collection and disposal itself. Hence, as the work of street cleaning was taken up by the Public Works department in 1910, civic officials attempted to systematically restructure the work of waste collection and street cleaning. There are two aspects of this technomanagerial program that should be highlighted in understanding the struggles of waste workers.

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health department/health board supervision to management by an engineering or public works department.” Increasingly, bureaucratic networks ossified as more and more cities took street cleaning and sanitation directly under municipal control. See Martin Melosi, *The Sanitary City* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2000), 190.

29. See Weaver, “The Modern City Realized,” 39.

First, civic reformers sought to generate standardized ways of classifying and measuring waste work, and civic employment more broadly. Through the early 20th century, inspired by a broader agenda for uniform municipal accounting spearheaded by the National Civic Federation in the United States and the Union of Canadian Municipalities in Canada, reformers struggled to disentangle municipal employment from the taint of private influence by developing objective standards for the classification and evaluation of performance based on the principle of merit and good service.<sup>30</sup>

These ideas were diffused through thickening professional networks and a growing range of civic reform organizations that cut across cities. For instance, in 1913, civic reformers in Toronto, as in many other cities, enlisted the expertise of the New York's Bureau of Municipal Research in surveying the structure of city departments with the aim of reforming employment relationships. The survey found that personal influence had tainted the administration of city services. The complete disarray of city records had contributed to *ad hoc* hiring practices, facilitating rampant patronage. Indeed, the city had not "maintained any records showing the number and class of employees, other than a list of the employees of the head office and various informal lists maintained in the section offices."<sup>31</sup> They did not keep lists of "eligibles for appointment to temporary or permanent position."<sup>32</sup> In fact, there was no standard procedure for hiring and firing whatsoever.

In seeking to alleviate these problems, civic reformers undertook administrative restructuring beginning in 1910, establishing more centralized employment records and pursuing the "classification of positions of service into class, rank and grade, as a basis for the standardization of work and salaries."<sup>33</sup> Through this period, personnel records were created in card-form, which included information such as the name of employee, their address, the date of their appointment, their position, their salary, their age, and their record of promotions and demotions. By abstracting workers from personal connections, curtailing the discretion of inspectors and foremen, it was thought that these new methods of classification would facilitate more orderly and efficient employment practices.

Alongside the standardization of employment records, reformers also took aim at the labour process itself, targeting the entanglement of workers in a complex set of cultural, institutional, and material relationships that had

30. See Martin J. Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America: 1880–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Daniel W. Williams, "Measuring Government in the Early Twentieth Century," *Public Administration Review* 63 (2003): 643–659.

31. *Report on the Survey of the Treasury, Assessment, Works, Fire, and Property Departments*, Part 1, 76, Civic Survey Committee Fonds, November–December 1913, Fonds 1002, File 2, CTA.

32. See *Report on the Survey of the Treasury*.

33. See *Report on the Survey of the Treasury*.

prevailed under the clientelist regime through the pursuit of new forms of cost-accounting.<sup>34</sup> Between 1910 and 1915, the city undertook a comprehensive review of waste collection and disposal services, assisted by New York-based engineering consultants, Rudolph Hering and John H. Gregory, who in conjunction with the Works Department and various civic reform organizations rendered the labour process visible and comparable in novel ways.<sup>35</sup> In a series of reports, they carefully measured the number of loads of garbage deposited each day at local dumpsites, district by district. They examined the contents of sample loads, accounting for the amount of fish, cases of eggs, mattresses, dogs, cats, chickens, glass and metal, paper and cardboard, tins, rags, bones, straw, vegetable matter, bread, human hair, wood, feathers, leather, and rubber. The number of horses and workers were enumerated, and for each division investigators accounted for the cost of the driver and the horse, the wear and tear of the sanitation cart and associated equipment, and the mortality rate of the horses. The cost of gas, oil, and tires were accounted for in examining the small number of trucks that were used. Based on this information the cost of waste collection was rendered calculable by the ton, per truck mile and per ton-mile haul.

Second, there were efforts to subsume workers under a hierarchized chain of command and to more carefully regulate the everyday practices of workers through an increasingly elaborate code of conduct. After waste work was moved from the Public Health to Public Works in 1910, the Street Commissioner undertook an extensive program of reform. This involved the careful partition of tasks and the enforcement of spatial boundaries. Hence, the Commissioner attempted to enforce the principle that rubbish was the property of the city and should not be tampered with by private individuals. Workers were expected to behave in a civil way with citizens. This meant respecting private property, refusing to trespass, to go into people's homes to collect their waste. Sanitation workers were only authorized to remove certain kinds and quantities of material specified in city by-laws. They were also charged with the task of maintaining a pure public realm, ensuring that all waste was contained and expunged from the city streets. Workers were penalized for failing to keep their hauls covered, and for permitting contents to blow about or spill onto the streets.

34. Again, the impetus for standardization was largely driven by professional associations, with the Refuse Committee of the American Public Health Association devising the "Standard Form for Statistics of Municipal Refuse" in 1913. Attempts to standardize statistics led to recommendation from engineering groups for cities to keep better records. See Melosi, *The Sanitary City*, 194.

35. See "Report of Studies on Collection and Disposal of Refuse, City of Toronto," To Geo. B. Wilson Street Commissioner, 1910, Department of Street Cleaning, City of Toronto, Box 141020, CTA; Appointment of I.S. Osborn, correspondence, 1913–1915, Box 141022, CTA; I.S. Osborn, correspondence, 1912–1917, Box 141023, CTA; "Incineration, Garbage Disposal Report by Hering and Gregory" (1912–14) Box 141024, CTA.



The pace of work was targeted, placing heavy emphasis on eliminating loitering. Workers were penalized if they were caught gossiping, drinking booze, or smoking cigarettes. They were not allowed to hang around the dumps after they delivered their haul. Nor were they permitted to take their wagons back to the dump in a parade or procession, as had been common practice in the past. They were not permitted to impede traffic or monopolize the roadway in any way; they were required to obey the rules of the road. Workers were expected to carry an adequate load that could only be dumped at designated locations, and they were deemed responsible for the cleanliness of their routes or beats.

The rules and regulations set down by the Commissioner were enforced through the establishment of a clear chain of command, which problematized the managerial discretion of local foremen. No longer were foremen left to their own devices. Rather, they were connected to a complex infrastructure for the communication of employment issues. In 1915, the Street Commissioner enacted General Order, No. 1, which established a Code of Discipline for the Street Cleaning Department. The code aimed to "to secure increased efficiency" and "to encourage and reward faithful and intelligent service on the part of employees."<sup>36</sup> It established an elaborate system of rewards and punishments for workers, to be administered through a formally established court. Officers were designated who would be responsible for communicating the schedule and penalties to subordinates. "The fitness of officers will be judged to some extent by the correct interpretation of these orders, and by their intelligent enforcement."<sup>37</sup> However, decisions on rewards and penalties would be the responsibility of the Commissioner and Division Superintendents.<sup>38</sup> Ranging from ten demerit points to outright dismissal, penalties targeted insubordination, refusal to obey orders and failure of foremen to submit reports on insubordinate workers. In order to facilitate reporting, workers were required to show their cart or badge numbers at all times.

The application of new managerial technologies to waste work contributed to the reimagining of civic authority. As the work of waste collection and disposal was charted across the city, the Street Commissioner was capable of governing waste work from a distance through an overarching system of control. Beyond management at the scale of the neighbourhood, waste collection and disposal increasingly became visible through a complex system of supervision across the entire city. Through a chain of command that facilitated the vertical and horizontal flow of information, the Commissioner was then capable of setting down norms and standards across districts. Through

36. "General Order No. 1. Code of Discipline, Issued by G.B. Wilson, Street Commissioner," 1 September 1915, Department of Street Cleaning, City of Toronto, Fonds 200, Series 1234, File 312, CTA.

37. "General Order No. 1."

38. "General Order No. 1."



the application of impartial administrative technologies, civic officials were then able to step away from their entanglement in local brokerage networks, to claim that they represented the city as a whole.

### Changing Repertoires of Contestation: Orangemen and the Flag

HOW DID WASTE WORKERS respond to the subjection of their labour to increasing technomanagerial control? In the literature on industrial relations and the history of scientific management, resistance is often framed as a matter of tactics, employing “weapons of the weak” such as sabotage, work-to-rule, slow downs, and stoppages as a means of challenging the prerogatives of management.<sup>39</sup> While a nascent managerial class increasingly claimed authority over the design of the labour process, devised at office desks at a distance from the shopfloor, workers relied on deeply entrenched community practices in seeking to preserve their traditional control over the labour process.

Certainly, city workers in Toronto appealed to alliances with local elites and working class communities. In responding to reform efforts, which often intensified the pace of their work and undermined their status as waste brokers, scavengers initially appealed to existing clientelist networks, making a case that their employment was entrenched in long-established gendered, racialized, and sectarian community relationships. The dynamic is especially notable in Toronto at the end of World War I, as workers struggled to establish new forms of solidarity in confronting the declining power of clientelist networks.

It is in this context that the “holiday” of the sanitation workers should be understood. When the Street Commissioner ripped the Union Jack off a manure wagon in the fall of 1917, this was not simply the matter of a single flag; it was because their work had been systematically reconfigured with the aim of intensifying the labour process. “We are striking,” the scavengers noted in a joint letter to the city’s newspapers, because the commissioner “has made our lives a misery and our work slavery.”<sup>40</sup> In this context, the act of ripping off the Union Jack was not simply an unpatriotic act; it was an attack on a long tradition of autonomy in the organization of city work.

39. For instance, see Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Bryan Palmer, “Class, Conception and Conflict: The Thrust for Efficiency, Managerial Views of Labor and the Working Class Rebellion, 1903–22,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 7 (1975): 31–49; Dan Clawson, *Bureaucracy and the Labor Process* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980); S.M. Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers Unions and the Transformation of Work in American Industry 1900–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); D. Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labour: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a discussion of “weapons of the weak,” see James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

40. “Outbreak of Boss Rule,” *Evening Telegram*, 29 September 1917.

# ORANGEMEN and the FLAG

In consequence of the many unjust, unfair and untruthful statements published recently by the Press of this city regarding the Orange Order of Toronto, we desire to announce that the Orange Association has a properly - constituted "Organization Committee," to which all complaints are referred. Every district in the city is fully represented upon that Committee, and Mr. William Crawford is the Chairman of it.

The Orange Association claims the same right as the Press or any body of organized citizens to criticize the administration of all public affairs and services, whether Federal, Provincial or Municipal, and will continue to exercise that right. In its expression the Chairman of the Organization Committee must often be the spokesman. No "bossism" is desired, attempted or tolerated by the Order.

Orangemen have sworn allegiance to the King, and will uphold the British Flag and all that it stands for wherever it flies. To the utmost of their endeavor they will compel proper respect be shown it, both by private citizen or public official. Nor will we stand idly by whilst needless tyranny is operating to crush all spirit and liberty out of the lives of men who have nobly given their dearest and best for their country's needs.

THOMAS W. SELF, County Master.

WILLIAM LEE, County Secretary.

Toronto, October 9th, 1917.

An ad put out in support of the striking waste workers by the Orange Order of Toronto.  
*The Globe*, 9 October 1917.

It was considered an act of disrespect – as if these workers were too dirty and defiled to display their patriotism. The treatment of street cleaning as a service best kept invisible, not properly the purview for the display of civic pride, was seen as an attack on the dignity of the workers. In the midst of the war, a longstanding tradition of civic clientelism – built from the Protestantism, monarchism, and imperialism of the Orange Order – was contrasted to the cold, calculating rationalism of the civic reformers. In his efforts to expunge civic pride from the public service, the workers argued the Street Commissioner was no better than the German Kaiser.<sup>41</sup> In other words, there

41. At the meeting of the scavengers on the evening of 26 September 1917, as reported in *The Evening Telegram*, there were numerous references to the Commissioner as a "Kaiser." For

was an element of tyranny in the efforts of the city department head to unilaterally restructure the labour process.

In defending their control over the labour process scavengers appealed to clientelist networks, adopting the discourse of race and nation and speaking to the embeddedness of their services in a particular community. In the midst of global imperial conflict, it was argued that civic services should be properly "British." The street cleaners found some support for their cause in the Orange Order and other civil society groups and associations, which had approached the progressive agenda for civic reform with trepidation, seeing it as a threat to their paternalistic control over the neighbourhoods. There are records of workers appealing for support in the Orange Lodges. The Chairman of the Orange Association's Organization Committee, William "Cap" Crawford headed up deputations to the Board of Control on behalf of the workers; and the Orange Association launched a full-page ad in the local newspapers. While denying accusations of bossism, they asserted,

Orangemen have sworn allegiance to the King, and will uphold the British Flag and all that it stands for wherever it flies. To the utmost of their endeavor they will compel proper respect be shown it, both by private citizen or public official. Nor will we stand idly by whilst needless tyranny is operating to crush all spirit and liberty out of the lives of men who have nobly given their dearest and best for their country's need.<sup>42</sup>

However, the hegemony of technomanagerialism in Toronto effectively delegitimized claims to the partial interests of community that were espoused on the basis of clientelism. Hence, the actions of the scavengers were for the most part condemned by the conservative, liberal, and progressive press alike, who each in their own way supported the movement for civic reform. Against the claims of scavengers to uphold a long tradition of patriotism and civic pride in the provision city services, the liberal-leaning *Globe* condemned the strike: "The striking scavengers and street cleaners profess a great love for the Union Jack, but they are un-British in their demand that the Street Commissioner be suspended or take a holiday while an Arbitration Board is conducting an investigation, and while they themselves are allowed to return to work and to receive pay for the time they have spent in idleness."<sup>43</sup> They were seen as irresponsible – simply seeking to get time off of work and get paid for it, perpetuating the same wasteful practices that reformers were seeking to expunge from city government.

Criticism was not just mounted by the bourgeois press; labour newspapers such as the *Industrial Banner* were also highly critical of the garbage workers' strike. "The flag is no longer an emblem of loyalty and patriotism

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instance, one of the key supporters of the strike, William "Cap" Crawford from the Orange Order, suggested that the Commissioner be "sent over to rule Germany, as the Kaiser would soon lose his job."

42. "Orangemen and the Flag," *The Globe*, 9 October 1917.

43. "Stand by Wilson," *The Globe*, 10 October 1917.

to a large section of Canadians. To them it is the sign of peanut politics, and a means of prosecuting men who would show some independent spirit, and intention to speak and do for themselves."<sup>44</sup> The garbage strike, then, reflected the enduring power of patronage politics, as the reformist politics of Street Commissioner George B. Wilson were targeted by "the boys." It is notable here how the paper's editors came to the defense of Wilson, viewing him as the victim in all this, targeted for his efforts to establish a transparent and efficient civic service.

The position taken by the *Industrial Banner* reflected a deeper dilemma faced by the labour movement. Since the Toronto and District Labour Council (TDLC) largely supported the progressive reformers who dedicated themselves to weeding out "the bosses," the scavenger's strike posed a sticky problem. If the TDLC supported the striking workers, it was thought that the labour movement would be defending the old corruption that it sought to root out of municipal politics. As the *Banner* critically notes, "Wilson is to be fired at all cost, to show the people in the City Hall that the bosses rule the roost. That is the dictum of the politicians, who are nominally employed by the people, draw big sums from the public purse, which are disguised as salaries, and spend their time spreading revolt and disruption in the interest of the party machine."<sup>45</sup> The workers were seen as a part of a corrupt machine that was extorting excess wages from the public; they were seen as symptomatic of the rot of modern city government. Hence, the paper rejected the view that poor working conditions and despotic management practices were the "real cause" of the strike. In reality, the *Industrial Banner* viewed the strike as orchestrated by "Cap" Crawford. The paper argued that Crawford and his henchmen were "out to show what the bosses can do, and the street cleaners, etc, have been misguided into losing several days' pay to show what Crawford can accomplish."<sup>46</sup> They were tricked into undertaking job action for the selfish ends of a residual network of local bosses.

Ultimately, then, it was argued that the labour movement could not support such irresponsible actions, which would undermine support for a progressive liberal program in city politics. "If organized labor was to participate in this strike, it would be placing force in the hands of the men who set out to defeat their own candidates during the election."<sup>47</sup> In fact, the *Industrial Banner* went so far as to advocate that organized labour send a delegation to Queen's Park in order to denounce the workers as part of a machine that was "destroying efficient administration, costing large sums by seeing that inefficient men are placed in Government positions, because they have been 'good workers,'

44. "Street Cleaners Strike is Cause for Regret," *Industrial Banner*, 5 October 1917.

45. "Street Cleaners Strike."

46. "Street Cleaners Strike."

47. "Street Cleaners Strike."

but are too hopelessly inefficient to cope with the competition of ordinary working life."<sup>48</sup>

Of course, it was acknowledged that the scavengers might have legitimate grievances, but these should be dealt with through the proper channels and procedures; they had to conduct themselves responsibly. It was not enough simply to take a "holiday," workers had to go through the process of chartering a legitimate union and work through the procedures that had been set out by the federal government. The organization of waste workers was unaffiliated, not linked to the district councils of national and international labour organizations. "It did not comply with a single requirement that regularly constituted trades unions insist upon before a strike can be legally declared."<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, their grievances should have been submitted to the proper authorities and redress sought before any drastic action had been taken. It is notable how the language taken up by labour paralleled the ideas of the civic reform movement. There was an emphasis on depoliticizing the process, establishing expert modes of conciliation that are held at arm's length from the discretion of the ward heelers. From this perspective, it was argued that "the politicians must be kept out of the game, and their interference should be resented."<sup>50</sup> There is an emphasis on establishing proper procedures – a "fair" investigation based on "sane" and "transparent" methods.

In fact, such attitudes reflect a progressive hegemony that was coming apart at the seams as the limits of pure transparency and communication were exhausted. As the wages of city workers rapidly diminished with wartime inflation, the urban growth machine broke down and fell into growing deficits, and the antiquated horse-and-wagon system of waste disposal was increasingly stretched thin in the face of rapid urban growth, the city workers were increasingly pushed to the limit. While they were denounced for acquiescing to the city bosses and ward heelers, ultimately the scavengers were part of a larger battle, challenging attempts by city administrators to subsume their labour under a wider sociotechnical system, disentangling the status of their work from its roots in neighbourhood networks and rendering it uniform and equivalent across the urban environment – a steady flow, in which hauls were undertaken with maximum efficiency.

The scavengers' "holiday" came to an end on 11 October 1917 after their representatives agreed to a Board of Arbitration made up of three members – the President of the Toronto Board of Trade, the Head of the TDLC and a mutually agreed upon chairman. Over the following five months, the Board undertook a number of hearings, collecting evidence from the workers and the Street Commissioner in investigating a series of grievances that had been made by the workers. However, when the Board released its report the following

48. "Street Cleaners Strike."

49. "The Garbage Strike," *Industrial Banner*, 5 October 1917.

50. "Street Cleaners Strike."

February, it roundly condemned the workers, stating that their actions had been “puerile in the extreme and without foundation.”<sup>51</sup> To add insult to injury, the Commissioner’s vision of service was reaffirmed: “We believe that all vehicles of the department should be rendered as inconspicuous as possible by reason of the nature of the work in which they are engaged. We moreover feel that the Union Jack is not honoured by its association with conveyance used for haulage of objectionable matter.” In short, the consensus that was advanced by representatives of the labour bureaucracy and the financial elite reaffirmed the views that waste work involved dealing with objectionable materials and should therefore be kept inconspicuous.

### **Towards Managerialist Repertoires: Sanitation Workers Clean Up Their Image**

HOWEVER, A STUDY OF THE STRUGGLES of city workers in Toronto also brings out how workers themselves were able to rapidly reframe their identities through appealing to managerial rationalities. Positioning themselves as civic employees, and generating city-wide forms of organization, these workers were able to effectively challenge the discretion of civic officials in defining the parameters of their labour. In the context of defeat, it is notable how quickly the waste workers bounced back. In the midst of the explosive labour militancy at the end of World War I, they creatively adapted the language of managerialism in advancing their demands. Building from their embeddedness in infrastructural networks, these workers established a new model of organization, forming a “Civic Employees’ Union” in order to systematically document the grievances of workers, and relocate the locus of decision-making away from civic authorities. In this sense, workers did not simply resort to place-based tactics and community alliances, but were able to develop forms of solidarity that were embedded in the power to frame and order infrastructural systems as objects of managerial control.

While their actions were deemed to be irresponsible in the fall of 1917, only six months later the Toronto Civic Employees’ Union had become chartered under the Trades and Labour Congress, providing a powerful impetus toward a more sustained confrontation with the city fathers in the summer of 1918. Rather than relying for recognition on local clientelist networks such as the Orange Order, they sought recognition under the law as a registered trade union. Moreover, they moved beyond established craft-based solidarities to make links with city workers in other departments, covering a broad range of occupational categories, including truck men, pipe layers, foremen, engineers, clerks, lavatory caretakers, tree surgeons, and zoo keepers. In drawing common connections, the sanitation men moved from representing their own particular interests to stand as civic employees who were responsible for

51. “Com. Wilson Upheld by Board of Arbitrators,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 1 February 1918.

maintaining the entirety of the city's infrastructure. In this context, the Civic Employees' Union rapidly expanded, reaching 1,100 members by February 1918, and upwards of 1,500 by the summer.

By 5 July 1918, they were prepared for the next showdown, as an estimated 1,200 workers in three departments – Street Cleaning, Works, and Parks – walked off the job. While the *Industrial Banner* had condemned the “holiday” by sanitation workers in 1917, just six months later the responsible unionism of the city workers galvanized a wider show of labour solidarity. The civic workers garnered the endorsement of the Toronto and District Labour Council (TDLC) in the push for a general sympathy strike. The linemen and telegraphers, plumbers and pipe-layers, and most prominently machinists, who were also involved in a series of strikes in the region, had all offered their support. The street railway workers, who had come to achieve representation with two members on city council, also offered to lend a hand. In this context, the delegates representing 30,000 workers at the TDLC were instructed to go “as far as necessary in order to obtain justice for the city workers.”<sup>52</sup>

This time rather than explicitly appealing to clientelist networks, the city workers demanded a conciliation board under the federal *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act*, which it was thought would provide neutral, impartial machinery in judging on the claims of workers. The demands for outside assessment by a third party created jurisdictional problems, as it became unclear exactly who was responsible for regulating employment relations in the municipal context. On the one hand, it called into question the authority of civic officials, who had traditionally maintained discretion over the administration of city services. However, on the other hand, it also posed a challenge for the federal government, which was reluctant to intervene at the municipal level given that municipalities were constitutionally “creatures” of the provinces, with the city's affairs ultimately falling under provincial legislation. In this way, the call for a Board of Conciliation undermined the jurisdictional enclosure of waste work, challenging the purity of civic discretion.

Moreover, the demands also fractured the city administration internally, as civic officials debated who the “employer” really was in the context of complex municipal structures. As the *Toronto Star* noted:

[A] municipal corporation is somewhat handicapped as an employer, there being as a rule no single controlling power. There are various authorities, the Mayor, the Board of Control, the Council, and the department commissioner or head, and these, acting more or less as a check upon each other, do not always look at the matter in question from the same point of view.<sup>53</sup>

There was no sense, then, that the city operated as a singular employer; rather, the proper scale at which the employment contract was to be administered

52. Much of this history is recounted in James Naylor, “Toronto 1919,” *Historical Papers* 21 (1986): 33–55, though he doesn't focus specifically on the city workers.

53. “Civic Employees are Organizing All Over,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 July 1918.



was unclear. Additionally, as a democratically elected body, it was not apparent that city council had jurisdiction over wage increases after having already adopted an annual budget. Under such circumstances, who was responsible for bargaining with city workers, and what power did they have?

In spite of these jurisdictional questions, when faced with the threat of a general strike, City Council eventually caved in, acquiescing to demands for a conciliation process. A Crown Commission was established by the Ontario provincial government under the *Public Inquiries Act* to arbitrate the dispute under the chairmanship of former city councilor and county court judge Emerson Coatsworth, with representatives from both the union and the board of control.

The conciliation report speaks to the nature of city work and how it came to be contested at this time, as the board was organized like a courtroom with evidence presented and exhibits considered. The major grievance advanced by the workers was based on wages, "owing to the recently greatly increased cost of living." However, beyond making claims to municipal conventions, union representatives advanced a comprehensive wage scale covering an array of job classifications in the different departments. They called for an eight-hour day, seniority and clear criteria designating permanent employees who were eligible for holidays and sick pay. And they demanded clear definitions of skilled work.

In addition, the union sent thirty-one grievances to the Board – sixteen from the Department of Works and Parks, eleven from Water Works, and four from Street Cleaning. Grievances were presented in a brief and matter-of-fact way, with a single individual or group of workers presenting the details of their case in a written submission of three or four sentences stating what their problem was and what they were entitled to. At times, they would draw on a moralistic language in speaking to the injustice of their case, but in most cases they would let the facts speak for themselves. Workers would also, at times, attend to inconsistencies and ambiguities in the city's administration of labour. For instance, one grievance submitted by workers in the Sewer section asserted:

We the undersigned, have been in the employ of the City from 1 to 10 years receiving no holidays, Saturday afternoon or two weeks, sick pay, or any other perquisites pertaining to a regular man. Now we would like to know what constitutes a regular man?<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, a central aim of the union was to pressure the city to solidify clear categories for classifying and assigning value to city work. The skillful use of such classifications by workers reflects their capacity to draw on managerial language in making their case. They challenged the civic government to provide workers with the tools and materials necessary to undertake their work, and they demanded that clear and transparent procedures be put in place for the

54. Correspondence of the Provincial Secretary, Coatsworth, Judge Emerson, 10 August 1918, "Re Royal Commission Investigation of Disputes between City of Toronto and Civic Employees," RG 8-5, Archives of Ontario.

ongoing administration of workers grievances at a city level. The emphasis here was on establishing an impartial process that was clearly separated from the political discretion of city fathers, establishing an outside space through which workers could advance their grievances without fear of discrimination.

The changing tactics of the scavengers reflects the rapid recomposition of class solidarities at the time. While distancing themselves from appeals to partial community linkages connecting their interests to a racialized, gendered, and sectarian order, the workers recombined through union machinery that defined membership on the basis of occupational norms and standards. Rather than generating appeals through neighbourhood networks, they demanded adjudication of grievances by neutral third party officials through an impartial process of consultation and arbitration. Moreover, they assembled organizational machinery that enabled them to collect evidence of indiscretions on the basis of norms that were established *across* city departments.

## Conclusion

IN MANY WAYS, THE RECONFIGURATION of waste work in early 20th century Toronto prefigured the development of a modern regime of civic employment. This entailed a redefinition of waste, which shifted from being an external object of regulation to something imminent to the process of collection and disposal itself. While 19th century Victorian approaches tended to view waste as a sort of common nuisance to be brokered in a mixed social economy, the adoption of new managerial technologies in the early 20th century led waste to be documented, measured and enclosed in new ways. The technomanagerial waste regime entailed a discourse of public administration that was neutral and impartial; public services were increasingly presented as unornamented and plain.

While the influence of Protestantism and the Orange Order persisted until well after the conclusion of World War II, the appeals to managerialism entailed a reconfiguration of the civic labour force which became constituted in an ostensibly secular, public service. This entailed the emergence of a cadre of expert administrators, who were increasingly interlinked through a steady stream of information that flowed within and across cities. Rather than leaving services to the ingenuity of local notables, the regimentation of solid waste disposal became increasingly standardized. It was not so much viewed as a problem of a singular environment but more an issue of divisibility and segmentation. The classification and measurement of municipal solid waste and its management through a multi-scalar administrative complex facilitated the generation of new forms of labour discipline.

The reconfiguration of waste work also contributed to new understandings of civic authority. Beyond positioning civic officials at the sinews of complex community networks, the increasingly careful documentation of waste work on maps and tables, and its comparison across jurisdictions, contributed to

the impression that civic authority encompassed urban space, charting the flow of waste across the entire city as a unitary system. It created the impression that the local government encircled disparate communities – standing above particular racial, ethnic, or religious commitments. Through the application of impartial administrative technologies, civic officials were then able to step away from their entanglement in local brokerage relationships, to claim that they represented the city as a whole.

However, while managerial techniques ostensibly aimed to disentangle the work of waste disposal from all of the mess of clientelist relations, they in effect created the conditions of possibility for new forms of class solidarity. Hence, workers confronted the distance that was claimed by civic officials by exposing their partiality, questioning their particular stakes in the process of administration and demanding that their grievances be taken up at a higher level. They confronted the discretion of civic officials in exercising labour discipline by creating institutional structures that enabled the investigation of management patterns that deviated from the norm. And they were able to make demands on the basis of grievances that were systematically documented. If these demands were not met, the development of integrated sociotechnical networks across the city left services open to disruption at scale that had been previously unimaginable. This helps to explain the significance of civic employees at the end of World War I in advancing the call for a General Strike. The recomposition of class solidarities across the city – now seen as a singular unit – created a basis for understanding the potential for shutting down the city taken as a whole.

At the same time, the advancement of a managerialist discourse by civic employees also reinforced the claim that labour relations were not properly the purview of particular community interests, but rather were to be negotiated as a problem of technoscientific regulation between civic officials trained in new methods of management and city workers through a process that was divorced from the community. There was no room for waste as an object to be held in common. Rather, increasingly the public and the private were cleaved apart. This led employees to be viewed as disembedded from specific community interests, forming a distinctive class of workers set apart and often opposed to the interests of the community.