

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

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Paper presented at the RC21 International Conference on "The Ideal City: between myth and reality. Representations, policies, contradictions and challenges for tomorrow's urban life" Urbino (Italy) 27-29 August 2015. <http://www.rc21.org/en/conferences/urbino2015/>

ABSTRACT:

In confronting the filth and decay of the early twentieth century city, civic reformers often undertook ambitious programs that sought to not only eliminate the sources of disease from the urban environment but also to *civilize* urban dwellers, teaching them to live in pure and morally hygienic ways. Historical studies have tended to focus on the consumption side of this process, looking at how sanitary reformers and public health officials worked to establish fundamentally new understandings of household waste and its disposal, laying the foundation for the 'throwaway' society of the 1950s and 1960s (Strasser, 1999; Melosi, 2000; Melosi, 2005). However, they have tended to neglect the parallel efforts to fashion a new kind of city worker. Drawing on Toronto as a case study, this paper examines how the rise of a modern, scientifically managed waste regime in the early twentieth century contributed to fundamentally new conceptions of civic employment, premised on the 'purification' of the worker from the contaminating influence of neighbourhood-based patronage networks and an informal waste economy. Drawing from the labour geographies literature, I explore how efforts to expunge filth from urban space were paralleled by struggles to disentangle class from community-based solidarities in the labour process. Moreover, drawing from Mitchell's (1991) notion of the 'state effect,' I explore how this contributed to the view that public workers somehow stood apart from the community as an anonymous and uniform service. I conclude by discussing the broader implications in how we think about city workers and their struggles today.

Introduction

“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 Committee of Civic Employees, Victoria Hall, September 26, 1917

On September 29, 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”.¹ 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 sanitation workers speak to the complex and contested moral and political claims underpinning waste work at the time. Through the early twentieth century, the nature of their work had rapidly changed as civic reformers in Toronto aspired to a ‘technological fix’ in the collection and disposal of waste, viewing refuse as ‘public property’ to be enclosed, sealed off, and expunged from the urban environment. In this context, there were efforts to render the work of scavengers invisible – to contain their labour in sanitized and unornamented wagons, incinerators, and receptacles. While waste work had been previously taken as an object to be brokered between various community actors, it was increasingly described as a homogeneous and uniform service to be managed from a distance by a cadre of professional administrators.

In this paper, I explore the contested ways in which waste work was articulated as an object of regulation through this time, as civic officials took aim at the ambiguous position of workers at the boundaries of the private and public. Through the application of

¹ City of Toronto archives. Fonds 200, Series 779. Board of Control Minutes. Board of Control Minute

scientific management techniques, 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. Moreover, drawing from the notion of 'waste regimes', I argue that this was also a state-building project. By applying technoscientific methods of control to the labour process, civic officials were simultaneously able to expand the vision of the state, which came to be viewed as something that both encompassed urban territory and encircled disparate communities.

However, the efforts 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 technoscientific regulation of their labour through this period, establishing new forms of organization and new methods of 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 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 technomanagerial discourse in asserting their rights. Through the course of these struggles, I explore how waste work was repositioned, leading to new imaginaries of the 'civic employee'.

Practices of Purification: Waste Regimes and the Regulation of Labour

Over the past decade, there has been a renewed interest in the cultural politics of waste (Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; O'Brien, 2008; Gregson and Crang, 2010). Drawing

from Mary Douglas (1966), it is argued that the classification of things as 'dirty' or 'unclean' reflects underlying assumptions about order and organization. "Dirt," Douglas notes, "offends against order." Hence, eliminating it should not be seen as a "negative moment but a positive effort to organize the environment" (2). Following from this thesis, recent studies have explored the production of waste as the outcome of cultural processes of sorting and classification in which variously positioned social actors seek to define and order their environment.

The scholarship has explored how the sorting and organization of waste involves 'practices of purification,' in which that which is considered to be unclean is ritualistically expelled. As Kristeva (1982: 72) notes, this involves fashioning "the body into a *territory* having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect, of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed or exerted." The work of purifying space involves drawing boundary lines, facilitating the movement of waste – taking it from the 'inside' and removing it to the 'outside'. In modern liberal societies, the constitution of such spatial boundaries often reflects underlying assumptions about the proper relationship between the 'public' and the 'private,' speaking to certain normative relationships between the domestic household and the public landfill.

Moreover, trash is not only associated with particular spaces, but it becomes identified with particular people and their practices. There is an element of judgment or 'taste' expressed by individuals in gauging what is worth keeping or throwing away. In this sense, Strasser (1999, 9) notes that "sorting is an issue of class: trashmaking both underscores and creates social differences based on economic status". Beyond exploring the influence of social class in shaping the perceived value of discarded objects, this perspective has also been taken up in examining how value is assigned to occupations that are associated with waste collection and disposal (Reid, 1991; Burnstein, 2006; Reno, 2009). The work of scroungers, scavengers, street cleaners, and ragpickers is often situated on the margins of respectable society. Operating at the borderlands of private

and public, their activities tend to be viewed with suspicion by both state officials and local residents. As Ferrell (2005: 3) notes, “to pick through the city’s trash is to engage all manner of unpleasant questions about cleanliness, propriety, danger, and deviant career.”

The ‘refuse revolution’ of the early twentieth century reflects the changing ways in which this borderland was defined, involving new discursive formations governing the ordering and classification of trash, the rearticulation of spatial boundaries between the public and the private, and the repositioning of those who were responsible for waste collection and disposal. As many studies note, this was a pivotal moment in the transition from a culture of reuse and repair to a ‘throwaway society’. “Trash and trashmaking,” Strasser (1999: 15) argues, “became integral to the economy in a wholly new way: the growth of markets for new products came to depend in part on the continuous disposal of old things.” With industrialization and the rise of mass production technologies, it came to be seen as acceptable and even encouraged for consumers to get rid of their junk, making way for new stuff rather than recycling it or putting it back into circulation for re-use by other actors.

Moreover, Clark (2007: 256) notes that the transition “from a domestic culture of reuse and recycling to technocratic management of waste *disposal*” was reflective of a wider “revolution in government”. A central dimension of the refuse revolution was the transformation of waste into an object of technoscientific regulation. With the growing prominence of public health discourses, waste became a matter to be dealt with by sanitation experts with the requisite knowledge for handling potentially hazardous material. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, these professionals became involved in new ways in the regulation of abject material with the aim of ensuring the health and security of the wider population

Historical studies have tended to focus on the relationship between civic officials and local residents, looking at how sanitary reformers and public health officers worked to cultivate new public understandings of household waste and its disposal (Strasser, 1999). Through the nineteenth century, it is noted, the establishment of a whole network of

pipes, sewers, incinerators, and dumps created the conditions of possibility for the development of new kinds of liberal subjectivity. Through “interventions in the supposedly objective ‘material’ world of urban infrastructure,” Joyce (2003: 70) argues that the ‘social’ was “permitted to operate freely,” defining “a space in which individual volition, and consequently the moral self-regulation of the individual, could work naturally without undue interference, particularly in this context bodily interference”. Burying filth in sewers, enclosing it in receptacles, or burning it up in incinerators created the possibilities for individuals to move freely through the city, unencumbered by the potential risks posed by ‘matter out of place’. Moreover, such infrastructures enabled individuals in a rapidly urbanizing environment to be rendered responsible for the day-to-day management of their refuse. By establishing a clear and consistent waste regime, residents could be habituated to the process of regularly sorting and disposing of their rubbish, placing their bins on the roadside for collection on a weekly basis, and to regular engagement with municipal officials and authorities at the intersection between public and private space. However, while waste management technologies have tended to be described as ‘liberal’ to the extent that they circumscribe a space for the free circulation of people and things, very little research has been undertaken in examining the dirty underbelly of civic rationality as it was manifested in the regulation and valuation of municipal waste work.

In this paper, I examine how civic officials attempted to intervene in the regulation of waste work in early twentieth century Toronto. Through this time, I explore how the conduct of waste workers posed significant problems for civic officials insofar as they undermined liberal fantasies of free circulation, standing as potential disruptors to the silent flow of waste through the city. Embedded in a clientalist regime, in which waste was presented a complex object to be brokered between community actors, waste workers – including sanitation workers, scavengers, street cleaners, and scroungers -- very much occupied the ambiguous border of ‘public’ and ‘private’. In this context, the regulation of the labour process involved the creation of a variety of governmental programmes and technologies that sought to bring waste work under control.

Beyond simply viewing this as a process in which state agencies came to assume responsibility for waste collection and disposal, I argue that the vision of 'the state' as a single coherent actor was effectively produced through the adoption of technoscientific approaches to controlling the labour process. In other words, the state came to be viewed as both encompassing urban space and encircling disparate communities precisely to the extent that civic reformers were able to cleave the 'public' apart from the 'private,' purifying the state through removing waste work from its connections with the community. In the process, the 'public' came to be bound up with high modernist abstractions of the city, while more localized community efforts at expunging waste were either rendered invisible or actively targeted for their impurity.

Police Power, Clientalism, and the Mixed Social Economy

"The Corporation must not permit any trifling with its duty of protecting the city as far as possible against the approach of the cholera. No more serious task has devolved upon it for many years, and no personal interests must be allowed to stand in the way where the public welfare is so deeply concerned."

--*The Globe*, 4 January 1866, "The City and the Cholera"

In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, waste work was brought under the mandate of public health officials who were granted considerable discretion over the classification, regulation and removal of trash. Drawing authority from local boards of health, a growing constellation of local ordinances and bylaws, and a small army of inspectors and police, these professionals were the chief architects of regulatory regime that targeted public nuisances and assembled an expansive sociotechnical system for the collection and disposal of waste. Drawing from recent scholarship on the 'police power' (Novak, 1996; Dubber, 2005; Valverde, 2008), I highlight four aspects of the nineteenth century waste regime that shaped the capacities of civic officials in regulating the work of collection and disposal.

First, the regime was characterized by what Novak (1996) describes as a 'public spirit,' in which 'public' interests were deemed to overrule the interests of 'private'

individuals. Civic officials maintained the view that “government and society were not created to protect preexisting private rights, but to further the welfare of the whole people and community”. Hence, in confronting epidemics of disease, pollution, and overcrowding in a rapidly expanding urban environment, civic officials came to argue that waste collection and disposal could not simply be left to ‘private’ interests. In the name of security, hygiene and good order, they argued that processes of waste collection and disposal should be either carefully policed from a distance or directly managed by civic officials.

Second, individuals were expected to conform to rules and expectations as set down by local authorities. While cities in Canada were considered to be ‘creatures of the province’ under the *British North America Act* (1867), civic officials were granted considerable discretion in addressing public nuisances (Valverde, 2006). As in many other cities across North America, a Board of Health was established in Toronto in the mid-nineteenth century, made up of the Mayor and four members of council, who were given the task of making “diligent enquiry with respect to all nuisances which may exist in the city” and were given “full power to order removal of the same at their discretion”.² Through the Board of Health, civic officials interjected in the lives of local residents in new ways through sanitary inspections and public policing.

Third, the public health regime was characterized by a tendency to associate the freedom of the people with their ‘internal good police’ (Novak, 1996). Through acting on the environment, creating a space in which people and things could freely circulate, civic officials set out to create the conditions for individual freedom in the city. Numerous scholars have highlighted the significance of the ‘police power’ in shaping Western European regimes of waste disposal through this period. As Valverde (2007: 70) notes, this mode of governance was shaped by a rationality that “reconciles or aligns the welfare of the people in general – the public interest in prosperity, public health, and public order –

² City of Toronto Archives. Fonds 200, Series 365, File 46. Department of Public Health reports. Wilson, Robert. 1934. *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, p. 11.

with the concern to preserve or enhance state power”. From this perspective, the enhancement of the police powers of the state – through the enlistment of an army of police, inspectors, and waste workers – was viewed as consistent with liberal rationalities that aspired to the free circulation of individuals across the urban landscape.

Finally, the public health regime was characterized by the importance of nonconstitutional public law. Through the mid- to late-nineteenth century, a plethora of bylaws, ordinances, statutes and common law restrictions were applied in regulating the filth of Upper Canadian cities. It is especially important here to emphasize the significance of ordinances around public nuisances, beginning with the *Nuisance Bill* adopted by city council in 1834, which made it unlawful to throw dung, manure, or ‘filth of any description’ on the road, beach or in the water under a penalty of five shillings. By the end of nineteenth century, a whole constellation of rules and regulations were taken up in governing the kinds of things that could be disposed of and the sites to which they were to be removed.

Through appeals to public interest, local authority, police power, and a plethora of ordinances and bylaws, civic officials claimed authority to oversee the collection and disposal of municipal waste. A number of studies have explored how oversight took the form of public policing which targeted the conduct of domestic households (Valverde, 1991; Strange and Loo, 1997). For instance, in her history of Toronto’s Health Department, MacDougall (1990: 12) discusses how the Medical Officer of Health oversaw house-to-house surveys in 1880s, gathering information on the sanitary conditions of local neighbourhoods, which then provided the basis for a campaign to educate citizens and politicians to improve their households’ waste disposal practices. However, it also entailed the formation of a whole sociotechnical apparatus for the collection and disposal of municipal solid waste. Hence, building from their police powers, civic officials were given the power to “employ one or more Cartmen with their Carts, as Scavengers, to remove the filth and other Nuisances from the Streets to the Public Receptacles pointed out by

the ... Board of Health”.³ Through the nineteenth century, the city government employed a range of scavengers, street cleaners, and sanitationmen who assumed responsibility over the handling of hazardous materials. Public collection and disposal practices were facilitated through the use of teams of horse-and-wagons that would remove waste to neighbourhood dumps, dispose of it in the lake, or eventually burn it up in one of the city’s two incinerators, which were established in the 1890s.

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 community-based assemblages of collection and disposal. In Toronto, the management of solid waste services through the late nineteenth century was shaped by a division of labour in which ‘professional gentlemen,’ such as physicians and 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 Medical Officer of Health (MOH). As late as 1905, the MOH gives each inspector “absolute power regarding the control and ordering of the men”.⁴ 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.

Through the late nineteenth century, scavengers were enmeshed in a complex set of proprietary relationships, standing as intermediaries in brokering access to waste by various communities. Building from Valderde’s (1995:34) research on early twentieth century Toronto, this might be described as a ‘mixed social economy,’ reflecting “not so much the autonomy of the non-government sector [from the state] but rather the complex web of relationships linking the two supposedly separate realms”. “The State” in effect did not stand apart from “community,” but rather was entangled in a complex web

³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴ City of Toronto archives. Fonds 200, Series 518, File 5. Medical Officer of Health letter book. 3 August 1905, p. 791.

of brokerage relationships connecting together a variety of regulatory actors. In this context, waste collection and disposal was not regulated through hard and fast rules; rather public nuisances were governed as “embodied, experiential, and relational categories” (Valverde, 2011: 280).

Sanitationmen stood as intermediaries facilitating the brokerage of waste collection and disposal. They operated, Smyth (2015: 134) notes, in a ‘clientalist’ framework, which was “community-based and depended heavily upon social linkages and personal contacts for their effective operation”. 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”. Operating in such networks, individuals were granted access to publicly funded posts, which were highly valued for their relatively high 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, clientalist practices operated in a largely exclusionary fashion, mediating employment relations on the basis of racialized, religious and colonial imaginaries. Very often the employment was unapologetically white, Protestant, and monarchist. To a large degree, employment relations 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 Protestantism, monarchy and empire. Between 1850 and 1920, Smyth (2015: 134) 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.”

The influence of the Order was reflected in the employment records of the municipality: out of 919 total employees, only 53 (6 percent) were listed as Catholic.

Though they were often stigmatized as ‘unemployables’ and ‘old men,’ sanitation workers achieved a degree of recognition through such clientalist 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. In spite of complaints from city aldermen, there was a degree of support for these kinds of practices from civic officials, who granted worker permissions 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 clientalist 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 waste regime.

The Fight for Clean Government: Civic Reform and Scientific Management

However, by the late nineteenth century, Toronto’s waste regime came into crisis. This was symptomatic in part of the changing scale of urbanization, which made it increasingly difficult to transport waste across growing distances or delimit adequate sites for disposal. Between 1883 and 1921, the city’s population expanded from 86,000 to 521,000 and the city boundaries more than doubled as civic officials pursued a series of annexations with the hopes of increasing the city’s revenue. In this context, the ‘old’ community-based solutions to waste disposal were no longer considered to be viable by many civic officials. Fighting ‘waste’ became not simply a matter of engineering new sanitation technologies or policing public nuisances; rather, it was something that was imminent to the process of collection and disposal.

Drawing from the growing prominence of scientific management discourses, civic officials came to see 'waste' as not simply an issue of stewardship over natural resources; increasingly, a cadre of middle class professionals would rearticulate the problem as one of social organization. "We can see our forests vanishing, our water-powers going to waste, our soil being carried by floods into the sea," F.W. Taylor (1911) noted, but the real problem is "our larger wastes of human effort, which go on every day through such of our acts as are blundering, ill-directed; or inefficient". From this perspective, 'waste' was not simply a problem of 'matter out of place'; the labour process itself was targeted as wasteful, inefficient, and unhygienic – directly contributing to the filth and grime on the city's streets.

Much has been written about the application of scientific management techniques to the labour process by large corporate firms through the early- to mid-twentieth century (Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979). In the context of rapid industrialization, and with the scope and scale of manufacturing contributing to a growing distance between workers and employers, there was a demand for new, more systematic ways of managing workers. Confronting the 'traditional' integrity of craft knowledge as something possessed by skilled workers, an emerging cadre of management professionals applied scientific techniques, breaking down the labour process into its component parts. Through developing new methods of investigation and analysis, these professionals were then able to reconstitute the labour process, shifting the locus of decision-making from the factory floor to the drawing boards of the central office. As Edwards (1979) notes, this involved developing new forms of 'technical control,' in which the pace of work came to be set by the motive power of machines and assembly lines. It also involved 'bureaucratic control' embedded in administrative structures that facilitated the 'institutionalization of hierarchical power' through the establishment of clearly delineated occupational categories.

A variety of studies have identified municipalities as early progenitors of scientific management techniques in their aspirations to achieve a transparent and efficient service

(Schachter, 1989; Schiesl, 1977). Through the early twentieth century, civic officials struggled to disentangle municipal employment from the taint of private influence by reframing municipal employment as a question of merit. These ideas were diffused through professional networks that cut across cities. For instance, in 1913 Toronto reformers enlisted the expertise of the New York's Bureau of Municipal Research (BMR) 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".⁵ They did not keep lists of "eligibles for appointment to temporary or permanent position".⁶ 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".⁷ 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. It was thought that this would curtail the discretion of inspectors and foremen and lead to the establishment of more orderly and efficient employment practices.

Alongside the centralization of employment records – generating information about the work force and classifying workers on the basis of rank – reformers also took aim at the labour process, targeting the entanglement of workers in a complex set of

⁵ City of Toronto archives. Fonds 1002, File 2. Civic Survey Committee Fonds. November-December 1913. *Report on the Survey of the Treasury, Assessment, Works, Fire, and Property Departments*, Part 1, p. 76.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

cultural, material and institutional arrangements. Between 1910 and 1914, the city undertook a comprehensive review of waste collection and disposal services, assisted by New York-based engineering consultants, which in conjunction with the Works Department and various civic reform organizations rendered the labour process visible and comparable in novel ways. In a series of reports, inspectors carefully measured the number of loads of garbage per day deposited at each dumpsite, divided 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. Moreover, the number of horses and workers were enumerated. 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.

Building from these studies, and drawing support from civic reformers and state officials, the Street Commissioner was then able to restructure the labour process with the aims of establishing a 'clean' and 'efficient' service. 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. Moreover, they were charged with the task of maintaining a pure 'public' realm, ensuring that all waste was contained, 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.

The pace of work was targeted, placing heavy emphasis on eliminating loitering. Workers were to be 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'.

This was supervised 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 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".⁸ 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 explaining 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".⁹ However, decisions on rewards and penalties would be the responsibility of the Commissioner and Division Superintendents.¹⁰ Ranging from 10 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.

⁸ City of Toronto archives. Fonds 200, Series 1234, File 312. Department of Street Cleaning, City of Toronto. General Order No. 1. Code of Discipline. Issued by G.B. Wilson, Street Commissioner. 1 September 1915.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The application of scientific management techniques to waste work contributed to the reimagination of civic authority. As the work of waste collection and disposal was charted across the city, the Street Commissioner was capable of achieving 'distance' in the management of waste work through an overarching system of control. Beyond management at the scale of the neighbourhood, waste collection and disposal increasingly became visible as a unified process facilitated through a complex system of supervision. 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. Beyond positioning civic administration at the sinews of complex community networks, the reconfiguration of waste work through this time increasingly contributed to the impression that civic authority encompassed urban space, managing waste through maps that charted the city as a unitary system. Moreover, 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 networks, to claim that they represented the city as a whole.

From Mixed Social Economy to State Ownership: Changing Repertoires of Contestation

How did sanitation workers respond to these efforts to transform their labour into an object of technoscientific regulation? To what extent were they able to effectively position themselves between public, private and community interests in confronting the intensification of the labour process and the steep decline of their wages in a period of wartime inflation? It is notable the degree of ambivalence expressed by city workers at this time in confronting both the 'private' discretion of ward bosses and the 'public' authority of civic reformers (Ross, 2005). 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 clientalist networks, making a case that their

employment was entrenched in long-established gendered, racialized and sectarian ‘community’ relationships. However, they also skillfully took up the language of scientific management in advancing normative claims that effectively displaced the authority of ward bosses when it served their interests. The dynamic is especially notable in Toronto at the end of the First World War, as workers struggled to establish new forms of solidarity in confronting the declining power of clientalist 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 substantially reconfigured under the much-reviled Street Commissioner. “We are striking,” the scavengers noted in a joint letter to the *Toronto Star*, because the commissioner “has made our lives a misery and our work slavery”.¹¹ 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.

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 clientalism – 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 Kaiser. In other words, there was an element of ‘totalitarianism’ 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 clientalist networks, adopting the discourse of race and nation and speaking to the embeddedness of their services in a particular community. In the midst of imperial

¹¹ *Evening Telegram*. 29 September 1917. “Outbreak of Boss Rule”. P. 1

warfare, 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 to 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.”¹²

However, the hegemony of technomanagerialism in Toronto effectively delegitimized claims to the ‘partial’ interests of community that were espoused on the basis of clientalism. 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”.¹³ They were seen as ‘irresponsible,’ simply seeking to get time off of work and get paid for it, perpetuating the

¹² *The Globe*, 9 October 1917, “Orangemen and the Flag”.

¹³ *The Globe*. 10 October 1917. “Stand by Wilson.”

very 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 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".¹⁴ For the *Industrial Banner*, the garbage strike 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".¹⁵ 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

¹⁴ *Industrial Banner*. 5 October 1917. "Street Cleaners strike is cause for Regret."

¹⁵ *Industrial Banner*. 5 October 1917. "Street Cleaners strike is cause for Regret."

an Orange neighbourhood boss, “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”.¹⁶ They were tricked into undertaking job action for the selfish ends of a residual network of local bosses.

Ultimately, then, it was argued that labour 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”.¹⁷ 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’, but are too hopelessly inefficient to cope with the competition of ordinary working life”.¹⁸

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 street cleaners 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”.¹⁹ Ultimately, their grievances should have been submitted to the proper authorities and redress sought before any drastic action had been taken. It is interesting here how the language taken up by labour parallels the ideas of the civic reform movement. There is an

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Industrial Banner*. 5 October 1917. “The Garbage Strike,” p. 4.

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". 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 to the limits 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.

Towards Managerialist Repertoires: Sanitation Workers Clean Up Their Image

The 'holiday' of the scavengers came to an end on October 11, 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 Toronto District Labour Council 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 February, it roundly condemned the workers, stating that their actions had been "puerile in the extreme and without foundation." Moreover, 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’.

However, in the context of defeat, it is notable how quickly the sanitation workers bounced back. In the midst of the explosive labour militancy at the end of the First World War, they creatively adapted the language of managerialism in advancing their demands. Building from their embeddedness in infrastructural networks, these workers established the union as a hub for systematically documenting the grievances of workers, and relocating the locus of decision-making away from civic authorities.

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 (TLC), 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 clientalist 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, including 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 sanitationmen moved from representing their own ‘particular’ interests to stand as ‘civic employees’ that were responsible for 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 July 5, 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 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. Moreover, 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”.

This time rather than explicitly appealing to clientalist networks, the city workers demanded a conciliation board under the federal *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act* (IDIA), which it was thought would provide neutral, impartial machinery in judging on the claims of workers. Appealing to ‘higher’ levels of government as ‘neutral third parties’ in this way posed a jurisdictional problem for both civic officials, who had traditionally maintained discretion over the administration of city services, and the federal government, which was challenged in its ability to intervene at the municipal level (given that municipalities were constitutionally ‘creatures’ of the provinces). 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.”²⁰

²⁰ *Toronto Daily Star*. 9 July 1918. “Civic Employees are Organizing All Over.”

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 was unclear. Moreover, 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 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 about what constituted '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. Moreover, workers

would note 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?”

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

Discussion and Conclusion

In many ways, the reconfiguration of waste work in early twentieth century Toronto anticipated the development of a modern municipal waste regime. 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 nineteenth century Victorian approaches tended to view waste as a sort of 'common' nuisance to be brokered in a 'mixed social economy,' the shift to scientific management practices in the early twentieth century led waste to be documented, measured and enclosed. 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 the Second World War (see Smyth, 2015), 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 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 multiscalar administrative complex facilitated the generation of new forms of labour discipline.

Moreover, the reconfiguration of waste work contributed to new understandings of civic authority. Beyond positioning civic officials at the sinews of complex community networks, the reconfiguration of waste work contributed to the impression that civic authority encompassed urban space, managing waste through maps that charted the city as a unitary system. Moreover, 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 networks, 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 clientalist 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. Moreover, 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 the First World War 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 scientific management techniques and city workers through a process that was divorced from the community. There was no room here 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.

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