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THE SCOTTISH PROHIBITION PARTY  
AND THE MILLENNIUM

In his most recent return to a thesis first stated in 1957, Professor Norman Cohn remains convinced of the “parallels and indeed the continuity” between medieval millenarianism and modern totalitarianism.<sup>1</sup> While Professor Cohn’s treatment of this theme has in 1970 been stated “more briefly” than in 1957, it is difficult to share his view that it has simultaneously been rendered “more clearly”.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the latest edition of *The Pursuit of the Millennium* might easily persuade the reader that Professor Cohn had surrendered that hypothesis which formed a major interest of his work.

Considerable scepticism greeted Professor Cohn’s original attempt to link medieval and modern revolutionism. One fairly typical dissenting reviewer noted that while medieval revolutionaries “had no chance to be anything but destructive”, modern Communism emphasised “planning and making”. Furthermore, the similarities discovered by Professor Cohn were “too general to be significant”, for all parties “tend to personify their enemies as bogeys”.<sup>3</sup> In a study of millenarianism which owed not a little to Professor Cohn’s analysis, Professor Eric Hobsbawm considered, nonetheless, that Professor Cohn had made the error of assuming that all revolutionary movements were millennial, and that this clarified “neither our understanding of the Hussites nor of modern Communism”.<sup>4</sup> It seems a pity that Professor Cohn has not only declined to answer his critics, but has gone in for brevity when elaboration was needed.

It is the purpose of this essay to show how the Scottish Prohibitionists were characterised by a millennialism which placed the party firmly in that category of revolutionary phenomena described by Professor Cohn as being “psychopathological”. But psychopathological only as that word connotes extravagance – and dangerous extravagance –

<sup>1</sup> N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (London, 1970), p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> B. Smalley, in *English Historical Review*, LXXIV (1959), pp. 101-03.

<sup>4</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (London, 1959), p. 57.

of belief and conduct. It is no part of the essay to trace the fanaticism of the Prohibitionists to what might be deemed its ultimate psychological roots. There can be, therefore, neither adoption nor rejection of Professor Cohn's explanation of revolutionary movements in terms of individual neurosis.<sup>1</sup> Beyond what can be learned by common-sense generalisation, the concern of the essay is not to explain why the Scottish Prohibitionists were as they were but to indicate how, in what they were, they bore remarkable resemblance to totalitarian ideologists.

The Scottish Prohibition Party was founded in Dundee in 1901 when "fifty Good Templars and friends" met to secure "nothing less than drink's abolition" by means of independent political action "as in the Labour movement". The records give little guidance as to the numbers recruited to the Prohibitionist ranks, but in 1903 some "600 Prohibitionists and their sympathisers" were expelled from the Independent Order of Good Templars. What can also be said is that branches of the party were quickly established in Airdrie, Arbroath, Auchtermuchty, Brechin, Cowdenbeath, Crieff, Dunfermline, Falkirk, Glasgow, Kirkcaldy, Lochgelly, Nairn, Paisley and Perth.<sup>2</sup>

Even for Dundee, the official headquarters of the party and the "centre of operations", it is impossible to discover the numerical strength of the Prohibitionists. What is not in doubt is the impact which the party had in the city. In 1908 the Dundee Town Council included two Prohibitionist members and two Labour members one of whom had previously been president of the Prohibition Party.<sup>3</sup> While a "Labour and Socialist" monthly journal in the city failed to survive one year of publication,<sup>4</sup> the Prohibitionists produced a long-lived weekly newspaper.<sup>5</sup> It is true that the Labour Representation Com-

<sup>1</sup> An explanation which Professor Cohn has expanded in another work: see N. Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide* (London, 1967), pp. 251-68.

<sup>2</sup> *The Prohibition Pioneer and Almanack for 1913* (Glasgow, 1913), pp. 4-6. This publication is to be found in the Scrymgeour Collection (hereafter SC), Box 10, in the Dundee Reference Library. The collection consists of the correspondence of Edwin Scrymgeour (leader of the Prohibition Party) together with propaganda literature and other items. The collection is uncatalogued but has been placed in numbered boxes. The library also has a complete file of the Scottish Prohibitionist (hereafter Prohibitionist). The temperance and prohibitionist sources quoted are all located in the Dundee Reference Library.

<sup>3</sup> *The Rev. Walter Walsh*: see *infra*.

<sup>4</sup> Christened the *Tocsin*, the premature collapse of Labour's first publishing venture can be traced to a cultural pretentiousness which never marked the pages of the Prohibitionist.

<sup>5</sup> The paper survived, however, only with difficulty. It had to meet the charge that it was "far too local in character" (W. Wheatley to Scrymgeour, March 8,

mittee in the city returned a candidate to parliament before the Prohibitionists succeeded in doing so. In 1922, however, the Dundee electorate reserved to the leader of the Prohibition Party the distinction of ending Winston Churchill's fourteen-year representation of the city.<sup>1</sup>

The Prohibition Party was in some ways a development of the militant temperance tradition of nineteenth-century Dundee. Prohibitionists shared with their temperance predecessors the same elements of moral intransigence, demonstrative religion, and a cloying sentimentality. The movements were also linked by a dynastic tie. In the nineteenth century the outstanding drink reformer in Dundee was James Scrymgeour. In the twentieth century his son Edwin dominated the Prohibition Party throughout its existence.

James Scrymgeour fully deserved that accolade of Dundee's popular culture – he was “a worthie”. Happy to confess his “egregious egotism”<sup>2</sup> and suspected by Dundonians of being other than “a yonder”,<sup>3</sup> Scrymgeour senior was superintendent of the Dundee Band of Hope, a Worthy Councillor of the Good Templar Order, the agent of the Prison Aid Society and a “great favourite” in Dundee's “Home for Fallen Women”. Rejoicing in the title of the “greatest beggar in Dundee”, he distributed charity to “respectable working men and the uncomplaining poor” and where doubtful of deserving cases, he sought the judgment of “the police and the detective”.<sup>4</sup>

In the Band of Hope children were instructed in the habits of “subordination, obedience, and self-command”,<sup>5</sup> and the organisation paid “domiciliary visits” to Dundee's textile workers. The Band of Hope also entertained the female residents of a model lodging house. A popular song among the mill-girls, entitled *Hard Times Come Again No More*, was taken by Scrymgeour as a text:

“We are rapidly getting nearer and nearer the shores of an eternal world. But rejoice ye faithful – ye are Homeward Bound. Look

1910, SC, Box 4), and that “prohibition is not to the front” (W. Innes to Scrymgeour, June 5, 1912, SC, Box 5).

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this event see my “Dundee's Disenchantment With Churchill”, in: *Scottish Historical Review*, XLIX (1970).

<sup>2</sup> From a cutting of an undated newspaper review of the Fourth Biennial Report 1861 of the Dundee Band of Hope, in the Dundee Band of Hope Historical Scrapbook (hereafter DBHHS), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> W. Norrie, *The Life of James Scrymgeour of Dundee* (Dundee, 1887), p. 35. The fact that James Scrymgeour, when well, was still the object of the citizenry's banter, makes it difficult to estimate just how unbalanced he was.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> J. Arthur, president of Dundee Band of Hope to Editor of Northern Warder, May 25, 1853, DBHHS, p. 19.

ahead through the storm. Look with the eye of faith [...] and behold the glittering headlands of a glorious place – ‘where hard times will come again no more.’”<sup>1</sup>

James Scrymgeour was always on call to Dundee’s middle class, and his missionary and charitable enterprises were largely financed by Dundee’s textile employers. The “Cowgate” – the meeting place of merchants and manufacturers – was described as Scrymgeour’s “field of the cloth of gold”.<sup>2</sup> And not withstanding his (nominal) Toryism, the Liberal Establishment in Dundee took care of Scrymgeour’s personal welfare. As agent of the Prison Aid Society he received an honorarium of eighty pounds per year. When he was himself the victim of hard times, Scrymgeour was offered employment by the proprietor of the Liberal *Dundee Advertiser*. Although afflicted with serious deafness and “constitutional nervousness”, he won appointment in 1868 as registrar of births, deaths, and marriages, only to be relieved of the post eighteen months later. When recommended by his doctor to take an extended holiday, he received 150 pounds from a clergyman and “a number of gentlemen” in the city that his family might be supported.<sup>3</sup>

In the language of Troeltsch as adopted by Professor Hobsbawm, James Scrymgeour could be regarded as a “non-aggressive” sectarian<sup>4</sup> who served as a propagandist of working-class respectability and, where that was unobtainable, of working-class docility. In the “enthusiastic Christianity”<sup>5</sup> of James Scrymgeour there was, however, a rigour not at all congenial to the city’s liberal elite. While he was welcomed as a working-class improver, Scrymgeour could irritate with his strictures to textile employers on how frivolous mill-girls “have hearts to feel under that [apparent] hilarity”.<sup>6</sup> While grateful for his missionary zeal among quarrelsome and drunken navvies, patriotic middle-class citizens were repelled by his denunciations of the “immortal Burns” as a “drunkard, a blasphemer, an infidel, a seducer”.<sup>7</sup> Members of the Band of Hope were criticised for “speeches of venom, fanaticism, insolence, and ignorance”, and for the “state of intellec-

<sup>1</sup> J. Scrymgeour, *Hard Times Come Again No More* (Dundee, 1860), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Norrie, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> “Enthusiastic” in the manner described by R. A. Knox (*Enthusiasm* (Oxford, 1950), p. 2) as that type of Christian who “insists that the members of his society, saved members of a perishing world, should live a life of angelic purity” and, among whom, there are “strange alternations of rigorism and antinomianism”.

<sup>6</sup> J. Scrymgeour, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Undated newspaper cutting, DBHHS, p. 124.

tual delirium" which pervaded their meetings.<sup>1</sup> An editorial column devoted entirely to the subject described the Band of Hope as "the maudlin offspring of that intense conceit that leads Total Abstainers to look upon themselves as pre-eminently the salt of the earth". Noting how the organisation assumed responsibilities which were more properly those of parents, and detecting what was thought to be the influence of Rousseau and of socialism, it was concluded that the Band of Hope was "dangerous if not deadly in practical effect".<sup>2</sup>

In James Scrymgeour and the Dundee Band of Hope it is possible to see the way in which a species of Christianity maintained only an uneasy alliance with nineteenth-century liberalism. With Edwin Scrymgeour and the Prohibition Party there was a rejection of liberalism as "intellectual delirium" was intensified, as "conceit" blossomed into outright messianism, and as men who thought themselves the "salt of the earth" became convinced that they were destined to inherit it. In the Prohibition Party eschatological fantasy, combined with a social and political critique, replaced the quest for working-class improvement by sponsored ministry with the idea of proletarian purification by revolutionary resolve.

Edwin Scrymgeour was very much the son of his father. After the 1922 election a journalist who was puzzled by Scrymgeour's victory over Churchill ruminated that for twenty years Scrymgeour had been "practically a local joke, a man whom Dundee tolerated and laughed at and almost loved".<sup>3</sup> Such an assessment would have been as accurate if made of James Scrymgeour. While it is difficult to explain the transition from militant temperance in the father to revolutionary chiasm in the son, what will not serve is Professor Cohn's view of totalitarians as victims of "Oedipal projections".<sup>4</sup> Edwin Scrymgeour faithfully followed his father into the Good Templars and rose to the rank of "Worthy Chief".<sup>5</sup> The correspondence between father and son reveals a deep and devoted relationship. In the 1880's Edwin was obliged to seek employment outside Dundee and his father wrote to him: "We are all delighted with your letters. You are so good & correct in your judgement & so natural in your expression. God bless you Edwin."<sup>6</sup> After his father's death, and when he had embarked upon a more radical course, Edwin insisted that he was only "Fighting the fight" that his father "fought before him".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Northern Warder, (May?) 1853, *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Prohibitionist*, November 25, 1922.

<sup>4</sup> Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide*, p. 258.

<sup>5</sup> Norrie, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> James to Edwin Scrymgeour, November 17, 1882, SC, Box 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Prohibitionist*, January 15, 1910.

It can be agreed with Professor Cohn that the emergence of apocalyptic fanaticism has to some extent “depended on the chance appearance of exceptional men”.<sup>1</sup> The Scrymgeours – father and son – were in their way exceptional. Professor Cohn has also written that many *prophetae* of the middle ages were “obscure laymen who had somehow contrived to acquire a cleric’s education”, and who formed a “frustrated and rather low-grade intelligentsia”.<sup>2</sup> This description too fits James and Edwin Scrymgeour. But of frustration, the son had more than the father, and this may explain Edwin’s leap into millenarianism. The fundamentalism of James Scrymgeour occasionally offended the sensibility of Dundee’s employing class, but in a period when the city was experiencing the trauma of an emerging proletariat the services of James Scrymgeour were worth securing. By the time the mature son had appeared on the social scene, Dundee’s working class was less malleable and the hiring of agents of respectability had a diminished efficacy. Indeed, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, the city’s working class had found a self-assertiveness which demanded a heightened radicalism from those who hoped to influence its progress. It is of some significance that the independent political stance adopted by the Prohibitionists was acknowledged to be a cue taken from the Labour Party then coming into existence.

Edwin Scrymgeour had great difficulty in finding employment in Dundee.<sup>3</sup> His unsuccessful excursions into romantic fiction and short-story writing was another source of frustration and disappointment.<sup>4</sup> In 1898 he was elected to the Dundee Parish Council and this was immediately seized upon by him as reason for abandoning his employment as a clerk. Thereafter he became a full-time unpaid social worker. The amalgamation of that role with a subsequent leadership in Prohibition politics (which did fetch a modest income), placed Scrymgeour among those “déclassé intellectuals and semi-intellectuals” who are seen by Professor Cohn as being important contributors to revolutionary ideology.<sup>5</sup> In 1905 Scrymgeour was elected to the Dundee Town Council upon which he served – almost continuously – until 1919. In 1909, however, he found recognisably orthodox employment, and scope for his literary talent, when he founded and edited the weekly *Scottish Prohibitionist*. Publicity for the cause was

<sup>1</sup> Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium* (1962 edition), p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> For details of Scrymgeour’s early unemployed struggles, see correspondence in SC, Box 5.

<sup>4</sup> Rejection slips and returned manuscripts show Scrymgeour to have been no more successful with the local press than with the *Pall Mall Magazine* (SC, Box 6).

<sup>5</sup> Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium* (1962 edition), p. 318.

also obtained by Scrymgeour's electoral opposition to Churchill – “a star of no fixed magnitude”<sup>1</sup> – on five occasions between 1908 and 1918. In the election of 1922 he fulfilled what he had long prophesied by coming top of the poll and by defeating Churchill in the process. In the election of 1931 Scrymgeour was himself defeated, and from this point he lived on his memories and lived by memoirs published intermittently in the local newspapers. Ultimately he was given a sinecure as chaplain to a hospital and adjacent home for the destitute – a job which reminded of the type of work undertaken by his father. Scrymgeour died in 1947 at eighty-one years of age and an obituary-notice in the local press told of how a Dundee man had asked the British parliament that alcohol be labelled poison.<sup>2</sup>

An analysis of the Scottish Prohibition Party cannot be conducted in a series of biographical sketches, but mention must be made of two outstanding recruits to the party – the Rev. Walter Walsh and “Bob” Stewart. While their association with the party was a fairly brief one, the mere fact of their membership provides insight into the kind of fascination which Prohibitionism exercised. What is more, they helped to make the party what it was.

Walter Walsh was the minister of Dundee's Gilfillan Memorial Church. Having joined the party from its inception, and having been made its first president, he then deserted after three or four years for “the simple reason” – or so he claimed – “that it conceived itself to exist for the purpose of fighting all other temperance bodies, whereas I had helped to bring it into being to fight the liquor traffic.”<sup>3</sup> In the light of a great deal of evidence, it seems unlikely that Walsh genuinely objected to Prohibitionist extremism. What can be believed is that he was not content to play John the Baptist to Scrymgeour's Messiah.

The Gilfillan Memorial Church was a most unusual religious congregation with an extraordinary pastor. The product of a number of heresy hunts and schisms, the church was opened in 1888 to those of a theological simplicity which required no more than an acceptance of “the Spirit of Christ as the Governing Principle of Life and Conduct”. The Gilfillan was “literally and emphatically the Free Church of the city”,<sup>4</sup> made up of “the best of the operatives and lesser officials in the mills”.<sup>5</sup> The Sunday evening service was “nothing so much as a great public gathering” with lectures by Walsh on such topics as “Wat

<sup>1</sup> Prohibitionist, November 12, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Dundee Courier and Advertiser, February 3, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> For The Right (the monthly magazine of the Gilfillan Church), January, 1908.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., January, 1899.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., January, 1907.

Tyler, John Ball, and the Rising of the Labourers",<sup>1</sup> and "How Mr Blatchford Mis-Reads the Bible".<sup>2</sup> In 1908 Walsh estimated that since his arrival at the Gilfillan he had delivered 955 sermons and 916 "Lectures and Addresses".<sup>3</sup> During the Boer war the tone of his pro-Boer speeches led to a storming of the church by "a surging mob of Brigade boys and Volunteers [...] wild beasts rioting, fighting, swearing, blaspheming [...] doing their best to wreck the premises dedicated to my ministry".<sup>4</sup>

The Gilfillan was not unlike the Labour Church although it is doubtful if Walsh had many contemporary counterparts. A native of Dundee born in 1857, he worked for a time in a jute office before entering Glasgow University. He left Glasgow without having graduated and became a Baptist minister at Pitlochry and then at Newcastle. In 1897 he presumably felt that adult baptism was of minor importance when he accepted "the hand and the succession" to the leadership of the Gilfillan.<sup>5</sup>

In 1905 the Dundee Social Union, a philanthropic and reforming body, published its *Report on Housing and Industrial Conditions in Dundee*. Walsh popularised this damning survey in a book entitled – significantly – *Jesus in Juteopolis*. From this point he went on to make his major contribution to civic affairs. With a programme of sweeping social reform bolstered by the conviction that Dundee needed to be "purified and saved",<sup>6</sup> Walsh was successful in the municipal election of 1906 as a candidate of the Labour Representation Committee. Two years later, and one year sooner than would normally have been the case, he again presented himself for the Council. The circumstances of a dramatic resignation and bid for re-election were largely of his own making although he was pleased to publicise the matter as *The Tale of a Trick*.<sup>7</sup> He was again elected despite what he called the "wiles of sophists, demagogues and pretenders".<sup>8</sup> While certain that "the majority of the Town Council will [...] oppose and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, January, 1899.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, January, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, June, 1904.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, July, 1904.

<sup>5</sup> From a biographical sketch: *ibid.*, October, 1902.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, November, 1906.

<sup>7</sup> Walsh argued that he had been obliged to seek a fresh electoral mandate since a "conspiracy" of Dundee Town Council members had prevented him from laying before the Council a policy document on housing reform (W. Walsh, *The Tale of a Trick* (Dundee, n.d., probably 1908), p. 2). In a spirited polemic an opponent on the Town Council explained that Walsh had infringed Standing Orders by trying to by-pass the Housing Committee and lay his report directly before the Council (A. F. Burke, "Burke" and "Hair" or *The Tale of a Whole Bag of Tricks* (Dundee, 1908), *passim*. "Hair" was a nickname earned for Walsh by his abundant locks, and Burke clearly could not resist the pun.)

<sup>8</sup> For *The Trick*, December, 1908.

thwart the improvements which I am pledged to set on foot”, Walsh was obliged to confess that this same Town Council “at its very first meeting” made him the city’s very first housing convener.<sup>1</sup> The Dundee electorate always had a soft spot for the practising martyr.

Walter Walsh could have become a dominating influence in municipal politics had he not over-played his hand in religion. In the *Contemporary Review* in 1895 he predicted a secularisation of belief within the Labour Church given its indifference to “the ordinances, the Bible, and the historic Christ”.<sup>2</sup> But not at all surprisingly he set the Gilfillan on precisely the same path. With increasing boldness and carrying a majority of his congregation with him, Walsh demoted Christ and decried a creed in order to promote “Universal Religion” – “a spirit, a temper, a disposition, an attitude of mind”.<sup>3</sup> As had happened many times in the history of Protestant schism, a minority of Gilfillan members was successful at law in preventing the attempted theological innovation.<sup>4</sup> In 1912 Walsh left Dundee for London there to take up leadership of the Free Religious Movement.

After Walsh had broken with the Prohibition Party, Scrymgeour found an able lieutenant in Bob Stewart. A carpenter by trade, Stewart’s thoroughly proletarian origins set him apart from both Scrymgeour and Walsh as did his sense of humour and earthy matter-of-fact manner. The image which Stewart projects in his memoirs requires, however, to be treated with caution and certainly so his account of the relationship between himself and the Prohibitionists. Stewart presents his years in the party – where he became a paid official – as an early aberration which he ended when he could no longer “stomach the religious prattlings of Scrymgeour and some of his adherents”.<sup>5</sup> It is true that some time before the first World War Stewart had founded his own “Prohibition and Reform Party”, but he has misrepresented (or forgotten) the timing of that event, the reasons for his creation of a rival body, and the nature of the new organisation. Stewart dates his departure from the party “a year or so” after the Dundee by-election of May 1908.<sup>6</sup> In October 1910, however, he was still trying to win municipal honours for the party. It may be that at some point he became unhappy with the fervid religious tone of the Prohibitionists, but in 1910 he was commending

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> K. S. Inglis, *The Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London, 1964), p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> W. Walsh, *From Presbyterian Dogma to Universal Religion* (Dundee, 1912), p. 8, SC, Box 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> R. Stewart, *Breaking The Fetters* (London, 1967), p. 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

to Dundee electors “the principles of religion which have stood in all time”.<sup>1</sup> Stewart, in his *Breaking the Fetters*, has written of the “pamphlets” produced by the Prohibition and Reform Party entitled *En Route To the Sober Commonwealth and Socialism*.<sup>2</sup> In the local archives there is one publication with the briefer title – *En Route To The Sober Commonwealth*.

In 1920 Stewart played a part in founding the Communist Party and later he became a member of the Comintern. It is fairly clear that in his venerable years the man who found Stalin “a quiet, painstaking and efficient chairman”,<sup>3</sup> is embarrassed that when he ought to have been a hard-headed secularist, he was instead a Christian Prohibitionist ranter. Stewart’s discomfiture is self-inflicted for his revolutionary instincts were as sound in Prohibitionism as in Communism.

That prohibitionism in Britain and America had millennialist overtones has been fairly well attested. In a recent study of the anti-drink movement in Britain, it has been noted that in the nineteenth century members of the United Kingdom Alliance “conceived of prohibition in millennial terms”.<sup>4</sup> Of American prohibitionists it has been written that they “looked forward to a world free from alcohol and, by that magic panacea, free also from want and crime and sin, a sort of millennial Kansas afloat on a nirvana of pure water.”<sup>5</sup>

The millennialism of the Scottish Prohibition Party is its most obvious characteristic. In his election campaign in December 1910 Scrymgeour posed the question: “What if Dundee Returns The First Prohibitionist?” He offered the answer:

“In every part of the Empire, and especially among the poor, actual rejoicings of an imperishable character would be manifested, as the unreal type of reformer would have to give way for that Prohibition Party movement, which has been raised by God Almighty to save Britain [...] On, on to victory! until the kingdoms of the world shall become the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

Even in the defeat of 1931 Scrymgeour’s faith was unshaken. In a post-poll speech he declared:

“The ramshackle world we are living in now controlled by money grabbers must inevitably dissipate all hopes as to the League of

<sup>1</sup> Prohibitionist, February 5, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> B. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (London, 1971), p. 377.

<sup>5</sup> A. Sinclair, *Prohibition* (London, 1962), p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Prohibitionist, December 3, 1910.

Nations [...] But for those who believe, as we do, in the Second Coming of Christ, there is instead of cause for relaxation, stronger reasons than ever for Lifting up a Standard, casting up the stones, and preparing the way of the people."<sup>1</sup>

The millennial longing of Scrymgeour was not something expressed only on those occasions when oratory would have been excusable. In 1912 during a delicately poised strike in the jute industry involving the very survival of Dundee's Jute and Flax Workers' Union, Scrymgeour infuriated union officials and clouded the vision of impressionable strikers by calling for "intervention of the General Federation of Trade Unions to institute immediately a National Strike [...] to compel the Parliamentary representatives to demand a general election on the issue of State ownership".<sup>2</sup>

The ways in which Prohibitionist supporters could reduce eschatological doctrine to the abolition of the liquor traffic may have surprised even Scrymgeour. As one female correspondent wrote to him:

"Perhaps you will remember in the Apostle's vision of the Apocalypse, the last stone in the foundation of the Heavenly City was the Amethyst which as you know in Greek 'Amethystos' means the opposite of Drunkenness [...] so good luck and blessing to him who is striving to lay the last foundation of the Heavenly City, for, where that is done, then Christ himself will come to reign with his Saints on this Earth."<sup>3</sup>

While unanimous in identifying drink with the devil, the Prohibitionists had different claims on learning just as each had their own vision of the dawning great day. A correspondent of Scrymgeour expounded under the heading, "Drink its 3 attitudes what it is doing, power of silence – does and *done*":

"The Angel of Darkness shall always continue to *brew* and *bruise* unless some *very extreme men* arises [sic] in our midst and declares until our country is freed from the curse of drink [...] only then will the Angel of Light appear and crush out the Angel of Darkness. then the Angel of Light bursts the dark clouds, and goes forth with all her glory, silence power and force. people stand in amazement [...] the scales are removed from their eyes and they are at last convinced that Prohibition shall win the day [...] Blocks of ice are on either side but with Scrymgeour marching with his army through the icecles [sic] they simply melt away."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dundee Free Press, October 30, 1931.      <sup>2</sup> Prohibitionist, April 6, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> M. Moore to Scrymgeour, November 22, 1922, SC, Box 9.

<sup>4</sup> Anon. to Scrymgeour, n.d., SC, Box 10.

For those whose every day was excited by notions of the “last day”, that event had only prospect of reward. History was on the side of the Prohibitionist. The party comprised people who normally were vegetarians, anti-vivisectionists, non-smokers, and pacifists besides being prohibitionists. Members of the party wore “purity badges”, were expected to “Vote As You Pray”, and to follow a leader who believed that “God’s enactment against evil” necessarily involved a policy of “smashing out against everybody that agrees not with your attitude”.<sup>1</sup> By their “purity” the Prohibitionists demonstrated the viability of a future paradise by exemplifying their present fitness for it. In this scheme of things, every convert won was conviction justified. Where, however, sanctity was achieved by resolve, and resolution and its rationale in a world in which the truth was knowable and perfectability attainable, there was danger for doubters and deserters. To be sceptical of the wisdom of prohibition was wilful perversity while, to be merely indifferent, constituted objective guilt.

Those who were not primarily for prohibition were regarded as being decidedly against it. An injunction of the party forbade members to vote in elections where a candidate pledged to prohibition was not present. In 1910 a clergyman resigned from the Coatbridge branch of the party having concluded that the question of Irish Home Rule required his vote even in the absence of a parliamentary aspirant favourable to prohibition. The Coatbridge secretary replied in terms warmly approved by Scrymgeour: “Your action reveals the fact that you have not yet appreciated truth in its correct proportions, and are putting minor things first.”<sup>2</sup> While Prohibitionists could only vote for prohibitionists, no one at all was thought to have a natural right to vote themselves drink. Local option was the supreme heresy: voting, as Scrymgeour put it, “to establish a moral wrong”.<sup>3</sup>

In a long and bitter correspondence with a free-lance professional prohibitionist who was prepared, pending prohibition, to support licensing restriction, Scrymgeour in sneering tones and brusque terms pronounced on the nature of objective guilt:

“You now admit [that] to adopt Prohibition as we have done, would involve you in making ‘a great financial sacrifice.’ And yet I am ridiculously asked to believe that you would be prepared to face it if you felt it to be your ‘duty.’ [I] emphatically insist that only the man who refuses to vote for any Candidate who intends continuing the Liquor Traffic is a Prohibitionist, while those

<sup>1</sup> Prohibitionist, January 15, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., January 29, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> From an undated propaganda leaflet, SC, Box 5.

voting for such a candidate are Anti-Prohibitionists – conscious or unconscious.”<sup>1</sup>

A revealing criticism of the Prohibitionists, and of their leader, is to be found in a letter written to Scrymgeour by a person who had exiled himself from the party along with a number of others. The writer complained:

“I was somewhat surprised to find that a letter I had marked ‘private’ and ‘confidential’ had received a prominent position in your paper [...]

While the motto of the party to ‘vote as you pray’ was continuously sounded forth I found that praying was last in the thoughts of those who took a prominent part in the work, and a Venom (I used the word advisedly) was introduced [...] altogether foreign to the spirit of Jesus Christ. You appear to treat with contempt my desire to ‘close the place of sale next to that home’ and the ‘saving of that one man.’ You are working for something grander and more glorious than that.”<sup>2</sup>

Judged by his reply, Scrymgeour was not even disposed to be reflective. To his correspondent he declared that he always had “plenty of writing in hand, and could not afford to put time and effort into a reply for one only”, especially when “it could quite well be utilized in helping readers of the ‘Pro.’” With disdain for “prayerful criticisms” Scrymgeour dismissed his correspondent as being “still unripe for the Prohibition conflict”.<sup>3</sup>

Few things infuriated Scrymgeour more than advice to be practical, tolerant, or moderate. It would be unfair not to relate his extremism to his hatred of human debasement: it would be unwise not to trace it to a millennialism in which obliteration was constituent. In articles which first appeared in the Socialist weekly *Forward*, Scrymgeour unburdened his moral anguish:

“But then we are told to be practical [...] you may be convinced of manifest injustice and utterly scandalous wrong-doing [...] There may arise within your soul such a burning indignation as to suggest very daring action [...] But you have got to attempt nothing impracticable. The preposterous action of Nihilists, Anarchists, and others who murder without waiting for uniforms is condemned. But [fighting the first World War] is considered

<sup>1</sup> Scrymgeour to Tennyson Smith, July 30, 1909, *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> J. Grahame to Scrymgeour, May 14, 1914, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Scrymgeour to Grahame, May 16, 1914, *ibid.*

thoroughly practical [...] to go forth for what is then blasphemously termed Righteousness.”<sup>1</sup>

With Walter Walsh there is the problem of deciding whether conflict was thought necessary for the sake of society or just for the sake of Walsh. In an early Prohibitionist pamphlet he claimed that there was biblical warrant for destroying the drink trade in “the charge to go and smite Amalek”. Contemptuous of compromise, he continued:

“Mournfully it is objected ‘we shall lose the support of many excellent persons without whose votes we cannot carry anything.’ Not a single one, say I, whose vote is worth the paper it is crossed on. We do not want votes; we want to get rid of drink [...] We advance no hairsbreadth [...] with amiable fools whose unspoken prayer is for a scheme that will settle the whole question in an amicable way.”<sup>2</sup>

The full flavour of Prohibitionism is obtained only by allowing the Prohibitionists to speak for themselves. But the extremism of the Prohibitionists was not something they reserved for political speeches and propaganda leaflets. Active in the social and political life of Dundee, they attempted a reign of terror by means of innuendo, slander, and gratuitous advice on matters of which they knew nothing. Bob Stewart has recorded how when he and Scrymgeour were successful in the municipal elections, they “certainly enlivened the Council meetings”. With considerable satisfaction he recalls that “the first night I took my seat we were both suspended for being ‘offenders against decorum.’ I had called [a] councillor a liar.” And on another occasion: “There was a Baillie [sic] on the Council called Robertson [...] I called Robertson a thief [...] I was taken to Court and fined £5 and £8 costs [...] All this was good political campaigning.”<sup>3</sup>

The *Scottish Prohibitionist* was described by Scrymgeour as a “Torch from God”. Used for burning rather than illumination, the *Prohibitionist* in 1910 told of a Catholic priest in the city to whom “everything had been left [by his housekeeper] through a will attested by an assistant of the Canon’s [...] and a [Catholic] school teacher”. Scrymgeour blithely acknowledged that this information had been given to him by two brothers of the deceased who had been unmentioned in the will, and who hoped that Scrymgeour would “use the information” in retaliation for this priest’s “interference during the recent Municipal

<sup>1</sup> E. Scrymgeour, *The Unanswered Case for Prohibition* (Wishaw, 1920), p. 7, SC, Box 16.

<sup>2</sup> W. Walsh, *The Hewing of Agog* (Dundee, n.d.), pp. 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5.

contest by supporting and inducing others to support your opponent".<sup>1</sup>

Scrymgeour was never imprisoned for anything more serious than dislocation of the traffic. It may be that this was tribute to his expertise in innuendo, or it could be that his allegations of corruption in high and low places did not bear indignant denial. What seems more likely, however, is that his victims sought refuge in disdain – in what one victim called “silent contempt”.<sup>2</sup> Scrymgeour was a persistent critic of John Sime the secretary of the Jute and Flax Workers’ Union. Even this powerful and pugnacious man preferred to avoid dispute with Scrymgeour. In 1921 Sime wrote to E. D. Morel the city’s Labour candidate: “Scrymgeour does not hesitate to tell lies when it suits his purpose. He has told some about me [...] I do not worry about him [...] I do not find that his attacks on me have the effects he wishes.”<sup>3</sup> It was perhaps sensible to combat the mischief of Scrymgeour by pretending that he did not exist – but it was not always easy. A year after this letter was written Scrymgeour received the votes of more than 32,000 Dundee electors.

While lesser figures among the Prohibitionists wrote of themselves as “Us who has [sic] the spirit of our Master in us”,<sup>4</sup> it fell to the leaders of the movement to assert the privileges of those claiming supernatural animation. The divine madness of Scrymgeour and Walsh was interpreted by their critics as being merely a gift for self-publicity. In Dundee Scrymgeour earned for himself the titles of “His Master’s Voice” and the “Star of Purity” while of Walsh it was opined that “his vanity may have driven him mad”.<sup>5</sup> At the same time their enemies were happy to emphasise that both men were erstwhile members of the Independent Labour Party and that Walsh had even flirted with the Liberals.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult, however, to see any calculation of political advantage in Scrymgeour’s steady refusal to affiliate to the Labour Party and thereby, conceivably, gain parliamentary nomination for Dundee.<sup>7</sup> Had Walsh been concerned merely with

<sup>1</sup> Prohibitionist, January 15, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson Smith to Scrymgeour, August 12, 1909, SC, Box 5.

<sup>3</sup> J. Sime to E. D. Morel, November 1, 1921, Archives of the Union of Jute, Flax and Kindred Textile Operatives, Dundee, Union Letter-book No 2, fo. 320.

<sup>4</sup> Sect. of Brechin branch of Prohibition Party (no signature) to Scrymgeour, December 3, 1906, SC, Box 4.

<sup>5</sup> Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> In the general election of 1918 the president of the Dundee Trades Council sought but was refused the permission of that body to chair Scrymgeour’s campaign meetings. But there was a “large turn-out” of trade unionists at a meeting called by Scrymgeour to press his claims to adoption as the “Prohibitionist and Labour” candidate (Prohibitionist, March 16, 1918). By refusing to

self-aggrandizement he would not have risked schism in the Gilfillan at a time when he was emerging as a public figure of considerable influence.

That Scrymgeour and Walsh were men of colossal egotism cannot be doubted; but the latter was of a pattern which made sense only in relation to a mystique which totally discounted mere arrogance. A very good example of how leadership was thought to articulate with the imperatives of the mystique is to be found in a statement made by Walsh in 1912. He was explaining a concept of religious congregation which while recommending a nihilistic liberation of the spirit, still left a place for leadership of a type which Orwell was to understand:

“I would desire the Movement to begin, continue, and end absolutely without a creed. I would desire it to have no ordinances or sacraments. I would desire it to be without formal rules. I would desire it to have no property. I would desire it to have no official minister; only a leader, a big brother.”<sup>1</sup>

It was as champions of the working class as much as leaders of an apocalyptic sect that Walsh and Scrymgeour found scope for the discharge of a messianic rôle. Walsh, as one admirer put it, was an “ardent Radical and friend of Labour” quite apart from being “one of the greatest men of the century”.<sup>2</sup> In local politics he chose for concern “those who have no interest and no interests”,<sup>3</sup> and in the general election of 1906 he was the “principal ‘spouter’”<sup>4</sup> on the platform of the Labour candidate Alexander Wilkie.

Scrymgeour too was decidedly a “Labour man” with a programme which called for public ownership of industry with as much vehemence as it demanded prohibition. The Labour Movement in Dundee was more than a little confused by Scrymgeour. To some he was thought to be using the movement as a “stalking horse”,<sup>5</sup> and the secretary of the Labour Representation Committee referred to the Prohibitionists as “a cult apart [...] a congregation of the sanctified”.<sup>6</sup> Yet however difficult it was to understand him, Scrymgeour succeeded in endearing himself to Dundee’s working class and to sections of organised Labour in the city. In 1912 the “West End Calender Workers” thanked

make the token gesture of securing affiliation, Scrymgeour made it impossible for the Dundee Labour Representation Committee to give him official recognition.

<sup>1</sup> W. Walsh, *From Presbyterian Dogma ...*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *For the Right*, November, 1907.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, March, 1905.

<sup>4</sup> Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Prohibitionist*, March 16, 1918.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, June 29, 1918.

Scrymgeour for assistance given during a strike. In poetic gratitude the strikers wrote to him:

“Best Thanks and Success and Good Luck in Life  
For  
Your sacrifice of time  
Your advice and Comforting words  
Your cry to organize.”<sup>1</sup>

On Scrymgeour’s election defeat in 1931 the local Labour press organ commented with irony and bitterness:

“The Democracy has spoken. Given the choice between the Nation and Ruination our people have backed the nation. Let it be known through all the land that we in Dundee, one of the hardest boozing cities in the cosmos of entities have turned a Prohibitionist out of Parliament [...] What to do in the garden today? Dig a hole and bury yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

A letter written to him in 1924, illustrates very well the way in which Scrymgeour puzzled sympathetic Dundee electors:

“I am convinced that an honourable understanding tacit or otherwise, between you and the official Labour member for Dundee [E. D. Morel] would mean that the workers would retain the representation of the city against all comers. Sometimes I feel like hugging you as I would a great *big-hearted baby*. At other times your aggressiveness repels and your tactics appal just like the Communists.”<sup>3</sup>

Scrymgeour and Walsh were men moved to compassion for the multitude but they reserved the right to prescribe for the multitude however much the latter might protest at the ministrations. In an impatience natural to millenarians, the Prohibitionists were more of a scourge than a comfort to Dundee’s workers. After a defeat in the general election of January 1910, and immediately following the suicide of an unemployed Dundee labourer, Scrymgeour flayed the city’s working class as a “pack of craven cowards”:

“Don’t ask them to think [...] however often you may ask them to drink [...] Don’t ask them to gather in their thousands and actually demand justice [...] Allow them to fawn upon their

<sup>1</sup> H. Dailly to Scrymgeour, March 26, 1912, SC, Box 5.

<sup>2</sup> Dundee Free Press, October 30, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> J. Scott to Scrymgeour, November 17, 1924, SC, Box 4.

traducers while man, woman, and child fall on every side through the cold-blooded brutality of a sunken working class."<sup>1</sup>

As a "friend of Labour" Walsh was obsessed with "Dundee's Degenerate Bairns".<sup>2</sup> In a reform programme designed to deal with the city's "physical and mental incapables" he recommended "first and foremost" a closing of the "drink-shops".<sup>3</sup> Education was next in importance and was to consist in "instruction for half or three-quarters of the school day in the laws of health, manners, morals, manual-training, simple horticulture, games, gymnastics as well as in the more purely intellectual elements".<sup>4</sup> In further proof of Platonic influence, Walsh insisted that "physical culture must be of the right kind – not mere movement – but in accordance with the anatomical structure of the body".<sup>5</sup> Walsh also owed a debt to the tradition of socialist communitarianism. On "farm colonies or co-operative estates" he proposed to "gather all the unemployed". There would be no financial difficulty in such a venture for, as he explained, "I would not buy the land [...] it already belongs to the people [...] but I would say 'The Lord hath need of it.'"<sup>6</sup>

When he became Dundee's housing convener, Walsh received an allocation of £12,000 for "the housing of the working classes". After months of deliberation he submitted a report on how the money should be utilized. In these proposals he acknowledged that it "might not be possible to realise at once the principle of one family – one house" but "a great approach could be made to it by encouraging the erection of cottages, one or two storey with gardens". Despite the limits of his budget, Walsh went on to discuss the benefits of "clumps of evergreen", "fountains of water", "tamed animal life", and "open spaces". His enthusiasm was most appropriately tempered with provisions for an army of "Lady Health Visitors", "Sanitary Inspectors", and "competent voluntary workers". These were to "deal with the filthy tenants" for, as Walsh made clear, "in protecting the owner [...] against the dangerous tenant, the community is protecting itself against social plagues". As a critic of Walsh summed-up: "What need for Schemes of Work for the Unemployed? They may all become Sanitary Inspectors."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prohibitionist, April 2, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> For The Right, April, 1905.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.      <sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., May, 1905.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., February, 1905.

<sup>7</sup> Burke, *op. cit.*, *passim*. For evidence of the housing reforms proposed by Walsh it could be wished that a more reliable source existed than the polemic of Burke. At the same time, the quotations taken from Walsh by Burke do have a convincing tone.

The Scottish Prohibition Party was altogether an odd political phenomenon in that its values and style appear to be anachronistic. It is true that the party came out of temperance, popular religion, and militant respectability and this enables us to “place” the party. The millennialism of prohibitionists in nineteenth-century England and twentieth-century America, also assists identification of type. But the Scottish Prohibition Party, while it developed out of a temperance milieu, developed into something radically different. Similarly, the prohibition groups of England and America, unlike the Scottish Prohibitionists, did not have a comprehensive political philosophy and programme.

As an apparent anachronism, the Prohibitionists resembled some of the “archaic” political forms outlined by Professor Hobsbawm in his *Primitive Rebels*. Professor Hobsbawm has shown how millenarian movements rejected the “present, evil world”, longed for “another and better one”, and espoused a passionate “revolutionism”. Further, they had a “standardized ‘ideology’ of the chiliastic type as analysed [...] by Professor Cohn”, and shared a “fundamental vagueness about the actual way” in which the new epoch would be inaugurated.<sup>1</sup> This characterisation comes near to the Prohibitionists but it does not encompass them. The Prohibitionists were indeed vague about how their new moral world would be secured in the sense that they imagined it could be called into existence by will and demonstrated into reality by example. But they also thought to bring it into being by the adoption of a political programme not markedly different from that of the Labour Party. This element of pragmatism marks the Prohibitionists off from the millenarians studied by Professor Hobsbawm. The Prohibitionists fail to fit his model in another way. While he recognises that there is “no *a priori* reason” why millenarian movements “should not be urban”,<sup>2</sup> Professor Hobsbawm clearly does not expect to find urban millenarians in the twentieth century. The Scottish Prohibitionists not only survived well into the twentieth century but were created in it.

If the Prohibitionists were in some ways like the millenarians of Professor Hobsbawm, so too did they have affinities with the “labour sects” as he sees the latter to be. As people unwilling to “bow down in the House of Rimmon”, and in their search for a religion which would “mirror not only the fate but the collective aspirations” of wage-workers,<sup>3</sup> the sects came close to the Prohibitionists. Once again, however, there are significant differences. Professor Hobsbawm

<sup>1</sup> Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139 and 134.

notes that the labour sects were “easily absorbed into the general current of left-wing activity”,<sup>1</sup> and required only the arrival of official and national Labour agencies for this to happen. But the Prohibitionists were more obviously a sect – “a cult apart” – with their exclusiveness based on the belief that only a Prohibitionist could genuinely be a socialist. And just as Professor Hobsbawm doubts if millenarian movements can be urban, so he is sceptical of finding “religious labour movements” which are revolutionary.<sup>2</sup> In the activity which expressed their apocalyptic yearnings the Prohibitionists were no less than revolutionary.

Millenarian movements and labour sects are seen by Professor Hobsbawm as being fairly distinct phenomena. The Prohibitionists, however, combined the elements of both and corresponded fully with neither. It is precisely for this reason that they form a morphological bridge between medieval millenarians and modern totalitarians. In their patient build-up of a party which would rival Labour and yet annex its socialism, the Prohibitionists were far from that millenarian passivity in which revolution is expected “to make itself”.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, it was in their millenarianism that the Prohibitionists asserted a difference from and a superiority over a Labour Movement which they regarded as being effete.

Two sources contributed to the mystique of Prohibitionism. Following earlier Christian sectarians, the Prohibitionists hated the world that they might love more the world that was to be. Every compromise with the world was a postponement of the eschatological finale and further delay of a promised inheritance. On the best possible authority the Prohibitionists had it that those who were not for them were against them, and a defeat for Scrymgeour in a local election could elicit from a party colleague the commiseration: “the Hosts of Evil have triumphed and I shake your hand in sympathy.”<sup>4</sup> It may not be unusual as the critic of Professor Cohn has claimed, for political parties “to personify their enemies as bogeys”, but not all political bogeys have been presented in equally horrific terms. As chosen men entrusted with the exalted task of ensuring what they called “the glorious victory of Right against Wrong”,<sup>5</sup> the Prohibitionists felt entitled to a great anger at those who questioned their divine commission.

The second source of the Prohibitionist mystique came from modern

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> J. Forgan to Scrymgeour, November 3, 1909, SC, Box 4.

<sup>5</sup> M. Smilie to Scrymgeour, October 30, 1924, *ibid.*

socialism. The gospel of socialism complemented the message of Prohibitionism in a number of ways. The belief that history promised all things to the Prohibitionists was given a tangible and up-to-date form in the socialist satisfaction that the gyrations of the dialectic guaranteed the triumph of the workers. The perfect justice of the proletarian paradise would be attained by ridding society of capitalists, and the reign of the Prohibitionist saints would be accomplished by the elimination of the capitalist-controlled liquor traffic.

The tendency of Prohibitionism was totalitarian. As a tendency, totalitarianism is less easily diagnosed than totalitarianism in institutional embodiment. Indeed it could be argued that totalitarianism only exists when a mystique has been imposed upon resistant social forces in society – that it is the manner of enforcement which matters and not the nature of the ideas enforced. But a totalitarian movement cannot emerge in the first place without a totalitarian mystique. While the programmatic content of the mystique may vary from movement to movement, or change over time, its transcendental principles are both consistent and constant. When Bob Stewart enlisted in the Communist Party, it may be hazarded that he modified only the empirical and not the psychic content of his revolutionism. In *En Route To The Sober Commonwealth* Stewart showed how disparate the empirical elements of a revolutionary creed could be by giving equal emphasis to the proposed “abolition of private ownership” and to the conviction that “Drink consumes virtue and produces impurity”.<sup>1</sup> The mixture may have been unusual but extremism was the efficient solvent.

The emboldening passion of the Prohibitionists was exactly what Professor Hobsbawm describes as the “utopianism” of millenarian movements and which he sees as being “a necessary social device for generating the superhuman efforts without which no major revolution is achieved”.<sup>2</sup> The dynamic of Prohibitionism was a mystique in which it was implicit that there was only one truth and one which was so terribly apparent and so obviously valid that only the wilfully blind failed to see it. The truth, naturally, claimed a total loyalty. As one Prohibitionist reminded Scrymgeour:

“To doubt would be disloyalty  
To falter would be sin.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Stewart, *En Route To The Sober Commonwealth* (n.d.), pp. 6 and 2, SC, Box 15.

<sup>2</sup> Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-1.

<sup>3</sup> Unidentified person (signature illegible) to Scrymgeour, October 30, 1924, SC, Box 4.

Only political failure prevented the Prohibitionists from converting total loyalty into total submission. It is not, however, the party's ultimate failure, but its long years of success which demand explanation. At the same time, the achievements of the party must not be exaggerated, and the nature of the party should not be presented as being unduly mysterious.

While they claimed a nation-wide political machine, Prohibitionist victories in local government were won only in Dundee. What is more, the Prohibitionist hey-day in that municipality had ended before the First World War. In parliamentary politics, success was again confined to Dundee, and it required many years of perseverance and careful exploitation of post-war disillusionment to make the party make sense.<sup>1</sup> Another point to be emphasised is that Dundee was a two-member constituency, and so it was possible for electors to cast one solid vote for a conventional candidate while, perhaps, recording a whimsical vote for Scrymgeour. Further, Scrymgeour was a local man and Dundee was intensely proud of its local celebrities. And Scrymgeour was not only a local son but a son of the people who reminded the city's working-class electorate that he "lived up a close" – assuming thereby a special virtue in all who occupied a rented flat in a tenement building.<sup>2</sup>

That Scrymgeour was not an official Labour candidate, but one who called himself "Prohibitionist and Labour", was perhaps regarded by Dundee's working-class electors – many of whom only obtained the franchise in 1918 – as a minor and forgivable eccentricity. Nor would Scrymgeour's prohibitionism in itself, count to his disfavour among active and sophisticated Labour Party members. In 1920 the Scottish Trades Union Congress passed a resolution supporting prohibition.<sup>3</sup> There seems little doubt that to substantial numbers of the Dundee electorate, Scrymgeour was substantively Labour or deserved to be treated as such. This conclusion is borne out by the constituency's pattern of cross-voting in the interwar years. Of the

<sup>1</sup> Scrymgeour's sense of divine mission did not deprive him of a capacity for astute political calculation. After the First World War he assiduously cultivated Dundee's discontented Irish community, and the Irish party in parliament, despite earlier criticism of both for their respective fondness of drink and financial backing by drink interests. There are other examples of how Scrymgeour thought it wise to suspend criticism of groups which might have been the object of Prohibitionist scorn had it not been that they were now deemed to be useful.

<sup>2</sup> In fact the tenement flat occupied by Scrymgeour was a superior example of this type of building.

<sup>3</sup> This resolution was welcomed by the monthly journal of the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union as a "sign of the times" and the "wakening of the people".

32,578 electors who voted for Scrymgeour in 1922, no less than 21,621 also voted for E. D. Morel. In 1924 Scrymgeour gave place at the head of the poll to Morel, but again obtained about two-thirds of his votes in common with him. In 1929 and 1931 the proportion of voters supporting both Scrymgeour and the Labour candidate was even greater.<sup>1</sup> It is significant that only in 1918 did the Labour Party attempt to win the seat additional to the one already in its possession. By securing ten thousand votes, Scrymgeour in 1918 forced the second Labour candidate to the bottom of the poll. Thereafter, even those who in the Labour Party were hostile to Scrymgeour, could see that by contesting both seats they might lose the one which was otherwise safe.

While receiving the support of many Labour voters, Scrymgeour could count upon both the organisational assistance and the votes of those who formed what one Dundee newspaper called "the pure milk of the Prohibition Word".<sup>2</sup> Until the late 1920s when, undoubtedly, he came more and more to be regarded as simply a Labour member, Scrymgeour invariably won a very high proportion of "plumper" voters – electors who voted for only one candidate. In the election of January 1910 almost one-quarter and in December 1910 more than one-quarter of the votes received by Scrymgeour came from people who did not use their other vote. This measure of exclusive support was not available to any of Scrymgeour's opponents, but it is unlikely that they were envious. In December 1910 4.6 per cent of Alexander Wilkie's total votes, and 5.4 per cent of Churchill's, were plumper votes compared with Scrymgeour's 26.6 per cent. But the total votes polled by the candidates were: Wilkie 8,957; Churchill 9,240; and Scrymgeour 1,825.<sup>3</sup>

The parliamentary prospects of Scrymgeour were distinctly bleak so long as he remained the leader of a small sect, however loyal. But Scrymgeour continued to command a significant personal following even when he started to win massive electoral totals. In the 1922 election 15.4 per cent of Scrymgeour's 32,578 votes were of the plumper variety. The candidate in 1922 who had the second largest plumper vote – 5.7 per cent – also lost his deposit. In 1923 almost 20 per cent of Scrymgeour's total poll comprised votes given only to him, and in

<sup>1</sup> The cross-voting figures in Dundee elections were published in the dailies the Dundee Advertiser and the Dundee Courier. My colleague Dr Donald Southgate has made a study of the electoral support of the Prohibition Party in a valuable biographical sketch of Scrymgeour. See S. G. E. Lythe, J. T. Ward and D. G. Southgate, *Three Dundonians* (Dundee, 1968), pp. 16-22.

<sup>2</sup> Dundee Advertiser, December 15, 1918.

<sup>3</sup> The figures are taken from the Dundee Advertiser. The calculation of percentages is my own.

1924 the figure was 11.8 per cent. Only in 1929 (when he again came top of the poll) did the plumper element in Scrymgeour's vote fall to a level comparable with the other candidates.

If in Dundee there were those who would have no Member of Parliament but the Prohibitionist, there were others who combined a vote for Scrymgeour with votes for parties which were very different from that of Prohibition. In 1922 more than 3,700 people voted Coalition Liberal and Prohibition and, in the following year, 5,935 Liberals gave their other vote to Scrymgeour. In 1923, 3,574 electors voted Unionist and Prohibition, and Scrymgeour succeeded in retaining Unionist support throughout the 1920s. One combination of votes which was not favoured by the Dundee electorate was that of Communist and Prohibition. The Communist Party polled extremely well (for Communists) in Dundee. In 1922 Willie Gallacher received 5,906 votes but only 699 electors voted Gallacher and Scrymgeour. In 1924 Bob Stewart contested the election on behalf of the Communist Party and won 8,340 votes but only 229 of them with Scrymgeour.<sup>1</sup>

The ability of Edwin Scrymgeour to preserve a highly idiosyncratic vote and win votes across the political spectrum must, to some extent, militate against the conclusion that he was Labour all but technically. Nor does it necessarily follow that Labour voters who also voted for Scrymgeour did so because they were unable to detect anything unique in the Prohibitionist. It may well be that such people were fully conscious that Scrymgeour was rather special and that for precisely this reason they insisted by their votes that the Labour Party should be disposed to treat him as if he were Labour – a kind of tribute to the Labour Party and a warning too.

The weight of evidence suggests that the Prohibition Party was a "mass" party in the sense that its message and its support were pan-class. Whatever the sympathy of Scrymgeour for workers and however much the latter were pleased by it, the Prohibition paradise could not be reserved to the proletariat only. On one occasion in a debate conducted with the London anarchist, Guy Aldred, Scrymgeour made it clear that the Russian revolution was not his revolution and that the partial and transient interest of the working class could not have his complete commitment. Denying that "millions of workers" could "proceed to love one another" merely by "change [in] their economic conditions", Scrymgeour continued that it was "not a matter of picking out one class, and levelling all criticisms and condemnation thereat; but to owning up to all round failure of the human family". A repudiation of class conflict was not a denial of the need of all

<sup>1</sup> Scrymgeour was a harsh critic of those who had deserted the party, but neither in 1924, nor at any other time, was he severe with Stewart.

conflict. The “wretched world”, Scrymgeour allowed, “stood sadly in need of a revolution [but] the revolution must be against sin.”<sup>1</sup> A proper sense of revolutionary direction is apt to be lost when the common enemy is common but Scrymgeour had uncovered venality and discovered a demonology in the drink trade. It is easily seen that the fascination of that demonology would not be confined to those drawn from a single class and it is equally evident that supporters of the Communist Party would be unwilling to attempt a merging of two philosophies, each of which was a total one.

The really difficult problem is to explain why working-class Labour voters who were only amused by prohibition were, nonetheless, prepared to take Prohibition seriously. It seems likely that part of the answer lies in the style of politics pursued by Scrymgeour and his party – the flamboyant rhetoric; the personalisation of political issues of which the naming of alleged public malefactors was one feature; the simplistic, black-and-white political choices offered by the party; the trading in a robust “goodness” supposedly exemplified by a candidate unattached to any of the major political parties and so necessarily uncorrupted; and, finally, the millenarian prospect and promise.

To understand why Dundee was fertile ground for the Prohibition Party, it is helpful to note the circumstances in which similar bodies have taken root. Professor Cohn argues that “*prophetiae* found their following [...] where there existed an unorganized, atomized population, rural or urban or both”.<sup>2</sup> Dr Brian Harrison tells us that “English prohibitionists and American abolitionists found themselves in a rapidly changing society, with uprooted immigrants and new townships lacking in [...] traditional institutions”.<sup>3</sup> Professor Hobsbawm observes that millenarian movements existed in conditions of “abnormal remoteness” and economic and cultural backwardness.<sup>4</sup> Of the labour sects too, he has noted that they appeared in “new industrial areas” and “isolated and remote centres”. In such places “nobody [...] felt a responsibility for constructing any form of human community, except perhaps the publican”.<sup>5</sup>

Dundee in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was an excellent example of precisely these circumstances. By an overwhelming dependence upon textile manufacture,<sup>6</sup> the city’s working class was

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Prohibition Party, Great Debate: Revolution Without Religion or Revolution Through Religion (Dundee n.d.), no pagination.

<sup>2</sup> Cohn, Pursuit of the Millennium (London, 1970), p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Harrison, op. cit., p. 380.

<sup>4</sup> Hobsbawm, op. cit., pp. 67-8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> In 1921 of the total number of persons occupied in industries and services in

homogeneously tied to ill-paid and low-skilled occupations. The presence of Irish immigrants inevitably placed strain on conventional social relationships and traditional political structures at a time when the sporadic progress of the industry would, in any case, have created turmoil.<sup>1</sup> Another relevant feature of the jute industry was its custom of giving the better-paid jobs to women, and this effected among the latter a mode of masculinity. In the years 1879, 1885 and again in 1891, more women than men in Dundee were accused of offences in the grouping "Assault, Breach of the Peace, and Disorderly Conduct".<sup>2</sup> In police arrests for drunkenness, women once again formed a high proportion of victims. In the ten years 1889-1898 almost 40 per cent of total apprehensions for drunkenness were of females. In the decade 1929-1938 the figure was still as high as 32 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Middle-class reformers despaired of Dundee's working-class scene. Time and again reformers deplored a situation where "mill girls and women practically run the public works and, earning more than their husbands and big brothers, over-rule the male element at home".<sup>4</sup> The strike-proneness of Dundee's female workers was also lamented. One minister of religion who was also a self-styled champion of female textile workers, was distressed by familiar scenes of "tousled loud-voiced lassies with the light of battle in their defiant eyes discussing with animation and candour the grievances that had constrained them to leave their work".<sup>5</sup> During a strike in 1874 an indignant male worker complained that "the females" were not behaving with proper decorum. He had witnessed that day, "two or three-hundred female operatives following two of the masters on the street. If there was another scene like that the men and women of Dundee would be disgraced."<sup>6</sup>

If Scrymgeour exploited strikes to propose changes of millennial proportions, textile workers in their strikes behaved as if that event were actually underway. Scrymgeour's reaction to the textile strike

Dundee, 41.2 per cent worked in textiles (Census of Scotland 1921, Vol. 1, Pt 3, pp. 91-2.)

<sup>1</sup> The jute industry experienced periods of great expansion in times of war and especially so during the Crimean War, the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War. See B. Lenman, C. Lythe and E. Gaudie, *Dundee and its Textile Industry 1850-1914* (Dundee, 1969), Ch. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Chief Constable of the City of Dundee for 1939 (Dundee, 1940), pp. 50-1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* My own calculation of percentages.

<sup>4</sup> St. Andrew's Cathedral Booklet (Gloucester, 1935), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> The Rev. Henry Williamson, Dundee's Unitarian minister and President of the Dundee Mill and Factory Operatives' Trade Union, in a local paper, *The People's Journal*, October 14, 1922.

<sup>6</sup> Undated newspaper cutting, Lamb Collection 196(D), Dundee Reference Library.

of 1912 was to demand a general election “on the issue of State ownership”, and mill-workers complemented this perhaps anachronistic and certainly anarchical tendency by their strike behaviour. Of the strike of 1912 the local press observed that the strikers were “really on holiday” and alluded further to the atmosphere of “fun and frolic” which prevailed:

“Light-heartedly the workers in their thousands took up the battle song, ‘We are out for higher wages’. They were a boisterous [...] good humoured crowd, many of whom contrived to decorate themselves for the occasion. Their special taste was for ‘something fancy’ [...] and a dealer who had a chance selection of second-hand hats for disposal was able to clear out his stock.”<sup>1</sup>

While too much could be made of it, it is interesting that when workers felt it necessary to have their occasional day of jubilation, Scrymgeour thought it essential to convert the event into a Grand National Holiday.

Dundee in the nineteenth century was a “frontier” town which then and thereafter suffered from blanket proletarianisation. In common with Scrymgeour and his party, the Dundee citizenry had neither instinctive nor acquired appreciation of the complexities of society and civilization. Whatever was bad in society implied the presence of bad men within it, and workers relished muck-raking and witch-hunting exploits carried on by the self-confessed “discourteous, noisy, rowdy men” of the Prohibition Party. The extremism of the party does not appear to have been a major handicap. The excesses of Prohibition were not so much a cause of alarm, but a source of excitement and intriguing entertainment. In a culturally impoverished city, the favourite pastime of workers was the baiting of street half-wits and the cultivating of civic “characters”. Scrymgeour was not a half-wit, but he was a “character” and a street entertainer too. At least one person, however, succeeded in recognising the pathological nature of the party. The following letter to Scrymgeour composed what might be regarded as the essential critique of Prohibitionism:

“The temperate, moderate man pleases himself. Do you challenge his right! Why! Claim you greater privilege than he? Shall you dictate, he obey? Why! You forget equality, liberty, fraternity [...] Politics has many parties but they fight amicably without asking for law to exterminate their opponents.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dundee Advertiser, March 2, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> “Word” to Scrymgeour, November 12, 1923, SC, Box 7.