

“To Ensure the Continued Life of the Industry”: The Public Relations Campaign of the Ontario Brewers during WWII

MATTHEW J. BELLAMY*

The Second World War witnessed the resurgence of the temperance movement in Canada. In an effort to keep prohibition a thing of the past, the brewers of Ontario undertook a public relations campaign to convince Canadians that brewing and beer drinking were beneficial to the war effort. This paper examines the evolution of that campaign in order to add to our understanding of “the ethos of advocacy.” The paper argues that during the war public relations became a subtle form of lobbying as the brewers attempted to improve their public image so as to achieve several political and economic objectives.

Il y a eu au Canada résurgence du mouvement en faveur de la tempérance au moment de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Or pour faire en sorte que la prohibition demeure une chose du passé, les brasseurs de l'Ontario ont entrepris une campagne de relations publiques afin de convaincre les Canadiens qu'il était bénéfique pour l'effort de guerre de brasser de la bière et d'en boire. L'article traite de l'évolution de cette campagne et tente de mieux nous faire saisir la philosophie qui inspire la défense d'une cause. Il soutient que pendant la guerre, les relations publiques sont devenues une forme subtile de lobbying, car les brasseurs ont cherché à améliorer leur image publique de façon à atteindre plusieurs objectifs politiques et économiques.

IN THE SUMMER of 1941, Matthew H. Halton, a war correspondent, arrived in Solum, an Egyptian village near the Mediterranean Sea, just east of the border with Libya. The British army there was under heavy attack by General Erwin Rommel – the fabled “Desert Fox.” As the shells of the German Afrika Korps rained down on Solum, Halton fearlessly recorded the fighting and dying in the searing sands

* Matthew J. Bellamy is an associate professor of history at Carleton University, specializing in Canadian business history. He is the author of *Profiting the Crown: Canada's Polymer Corporation, 1942-1990* and *Canada and the Cost of World War II: The International Operations of Canada's Department of Finance, 1939-1947* (with R. B. Bryce) and is currently working on a book-length history of the Labatt's Brewery. He wishes to thank Bev Brereton at Western Archives, as well as the anonymous readers and his colleague James Opp for commenting on an earlier draft of this article.

of North Africa. The fact that “one brigade with a few guns” ultimately held off the German assault left Halton “shaking with pride.” When the fighting was done, a charming young British lieutenant approached Halton and offered him a drink. But Halton knew that it was an unforgivable sin in the desert to accept water or other drinks from people, and as a result he replied “No thanks.” The lieutenant, however, insisted. “Save your protest and drink the beer,” he commanded. “It’s Canadian.”¹

Versions of the story appeared in various Canadian newspapers during the Second World War. There was nothing factually wrong with the reporting. Nevertheless, the facts were presented in such a way as to portray the brewing industry in the most positive light. At a time when moral reformers were attempting to use the war as a lever to lift the lid off the tomb of prohibition, Halton’s article and others like it were designed to highlight the brewers’ contribution to the war effort by demonstrating that beer was necessary for promoting camaraderie and good health while maintaining civilian morale at home. As such, these “news items” were a part of the brewers’ public relations campaign to keep Canada wet during the Second World War. This article examines the unfolding of the brewers’ public relations campaign in Canada’s most populated province, Ontario. By casting light on the cultural basis, organizational structure and rationale, and day-to-day practices of the Public Relations Committee of the Brewers of Ontario (PRCBO), it adds to our understanding of what Robert Jackall and Janice Hirota term “the ethos advocacy.”²

During the war the brewers undertook a public relations campaign to convince Canadians that brewing and beer drinking were beneficial to the nation at war. The brewers employed professional communicators not only to improve their public image, but also to achieve a number of political and economic objectives. As a result, public relations became a subtle form of lobbying. By capturing a significant portion of the press and disseminating pro-beer propaganda, the brewers sought to keep public opinion on the industry’s side and, ultimately, to prevent the federal government from passing prohibitionist legislation.

The Origins of the Public Relations Committee of the Brewers of Ontario

Prohibitionism had never fully faded from the collective consciousness, although for most Canadians it had lost its lustre in light of the failed “noble experiment.”³ According to the Ontario brewers’ internal polls, in 1940 only 6

1 Western University Archives, Labatt Papers [hereafter Labatt Papers], box LATXT28, Matthew H. Halton, “They Drank Canadian Beer at Solum.”

2 Robert Jackall and Janice M Hirota, *Image Makers: Advertising, Public Relations, and the Ethos of Advocacy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 7.

3 In Canada, due to the division of powers between the central and provincial governments, prohibition lasted longer in some regions than in others. Under the terms of the nation-forming *British North America Act* of 1867, the provinces had the constitutional power to prohibit the retail sale of intoxicating drink. This vast power was first exercised by Canada’s smallest province, Prince Edward Island; its prohibition period lasted the longest – from 1901 to 1948. Nova Scotia was the next Canadian province to jump aboard the wagon (1916 to 1930), then came Ontario (1916 to 1927), Alberta (1916 to 1924), Manitoba (1916 to 1923), Saskatchewan (1917 to 1925), New Brunswick (1917 to 1927), British Columbia (1917 to 1921), and the Yukon Territory (1918 to 1921). Newfoundland, which was not part of Canada at that

per cent of the province's population desired a return to a bone-dry state.⁴ The same survey, however, showed that 19 per cent of the population believed that it would be better to prohibit the sale of beer, wine, and spirits during the war.⁵ What was worse for those in the business of brewing in Canada's most populated province was that there seemed to be growing support for stricter laws on the production and consumption of all types of liquor. The leaders of the prohibition movement had begun tapping into this sentiment. While the ultimate objective of the dries remained full-fledged prohibition, they were now more willing to wage a piecemeal campaign. Across the nation, they lobbied for the closing of beverage rooms, the elimination of wet canteens, voluntary abstinence, and restrictions on beer production. Those at John Labatt Ltd., one of Canada's oldest and most successful breweries, worried that "the public, in its present emotional state, might favour some form of anti-liquor legislation."⁶ Even more worrying were the rumours that "the majority of the Members of the Federal Cabinet were inclined to favour Prohibition."⁷

On January 20, 1941, the elite of the Canadian brewing industry met at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto to consider the tactics to be used to keep the nation wet at war. John S. Labatt, Hugh Labatt, Hugh Mackenzie, and Larry C. Bonnycastle travelled from the Labatt brewery in London, Ontario. Waiting for them in Toronto was D. C. Betts, vice-president of Canadian Breweries Ltd. Making the trip from Montreal were Norman Dawes, the president of National Breweries, George Pierce, owner of the infamous Four Hundred Club, and H. William Molson, president of Molson's Brewery Limited. Never short of an opinion on what needed to be done, Dawes proposed creating a new lobbying body to be named the Brewer's Industrial Foundation of Canada (BIFC). As Dawes conceived it, the foundation would have "a broad membership, which would stress the national aspect of its operation and would have a strong influence on Provincial and Federal governments as well as the public itself."⁸ He felt that the brewers could best protect their interests by undertaking "educational work amongst the public, propaganda work amongst the influential, and active anti-prohibition work everywhere."⁹

While all agreed on the need for such an organization, the Ontario and Québec brewers were at odds when it came to the foundation's strategy and structure. The Ontario brewers believed it was essential to have an outside, independent organization to act as an executive front for the foundation. "If domination and

time, imposed prohibition in 1917 and repealed it in 1924. Québec's experiment with banning the sale of all alcoholic drinks, in 1919, lasted only a few months. Québec has always been an exceptional case in Canadian history. The Protestant moral urge towards prohibition that existed in English Canada was simply not evident in the predominantly French-speaking and Roman Catholic province of Québec.

4 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, "Memorandum Re: Brewers Public Relations," n.d.

5 *Ibid.*

6 John Labatt Ltd., *Report of the Management Committee to the Chairman of the Board of Directors*, November 1940, p. 1.

7 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, "Minutes of a meeting held at O'Keefe House," February 26, 1941.

8 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, L. C. Bonnycastle, "Memorandum on the Brewers' Industrial Foundation," February 15, 1941.

9 *Ibid.*

direction appears to come largely from Montreal,” Labatt’s general manager Hugh Mackenzie maintained, “it would be very difficult to attract the other Ontario brewers into the organization.”¹⁰ Norman Dawes, on the other hand, was against handing over “complete directional and financial control to an outsider.”¹¹ In addition, Dawes felt that it was more important to create an organization that was national in scope. The Ontario brewers, however, believed that such a far-reaching public relations effort should come later. “We are convinced that each province must look after its own problems,” stated Hugh Mackenzie, “and that the nation-wide organization should come into being after the individual provinces have developed their own plans.”¹² Given the structure of the Canadian brewing industry (which, unlike in the United States, was absent of truly national brewers) and the distinctive nature of provincial drinking cultures, Mackenzie was of the opinion that it was “wiser to develop a public relations campaign within the Province of Ontario and directed by the brewers of Ontario.”¹³ The other Ontario brewers agreed.

Having made the decision to go it alone, the Ontario brewers contracted the advertising firm of Lord & Thomas to help them structure and orchestrate a public relations campaign in the province. Lord & Thomas was chosen because of its recent success in the art of public relations south of the border. At the time, public relations expertise was much more developed in the United States than in Canada. Indeed, by the end of the New Deal era, public relations were a permanent fixture in American corporate life.¹⁴ Corporations south of the border were spending huge sums of money to create an “image” (an external perception of the organization) and a “soul” (an internal conception of self). In 1939, General Motors, for example, had budgeted \$2 million for public relations and employed over 50 people to “sell” itself and the capitalist system to the American people. During the Second World War, public relations played a critical role in uniting Americans behind the war and simultaneously refurbishing the image of American business and free enterprise – an image that had been tarnished during the Great Depression.¹⁵ Every medium was exploited, including lectures, surveys, exhibits that travelled

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, Hugh Mackenzie to Frank Mathers, February 24, 1941.

13 *Ibid.*

14 Richard S. Tedlow, “The National Association of Manufacturers and Public Relations during the New Deal,” *Business History Review*, vol. 50 (Spring 1976), pp. 25-45; Roland Marchand, “The Corporation Nobody Knew: Bruce Barton, Alfred Sloan, and the Founding of the General Motors ‘Family,’” *Business History Review*, vol. 65 (Winter 1991), pp. 825-875, and *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); David Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); Russell Johnston, *Selling Themselves: The Emergence of Canadian Advertising* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Robert Griffith, “The Selling of America: The Advertising Council and American Politics, 1942-1960,” *Business History Review*, vol. 57 (Autumn 1983), pp. 388-412.

15 Inger L. Stole, *Advertising at War: Business, Consumers, and Government in the 1940s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Cynthia Lee Henthorn, *From Submarines to Suburbs: Selling a Better America, 1939-1959* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Andrew Workman, “Manufacturing Power: The Organization Revival of the National Association of Manufacturers, 1941-1945,” *Business History Review*, vol. 72 (Summer 1998), pp. 279-317.

from town to town, advertisements, and sponsorships of radio programmes.¹⁶ Public relations advisors were seeking to make the large corporation the symbol of progress and the stage on which individual initiative and the aspirations of the human spirit could be played out. Against this portrayal, public relations experts contrasted the “New Dealers,” “bureaucratic planners,” “radicals,” “collectivists,” and “socialists” who wanted to rob Americans of the fifth freedom – “the freedom of enterprise.”¹⁷

Lord & Thomas were very much a part of the American public relations experience. Under the leadership of Don Francisco, the firm had handled a campaign for chain stores in California, which were facing higher taxes. Lord & Thomas’s approach in that case was to influence the culture around the issue of reaching out to consumers who would be adversely affected by the higher prices resulting from the tax hikes. Lord & Thomas also oversaw a campaign designed to get Californians to “re-image” the chain store as the agent of lower prices and mass consumerism. The brewers believed that Lord & Thomas’s “progressive approach” was ideally suited to assisting them in defending their commercial interests in Ontario. By bringing more “modern” methods of shaping consumer perceptions to the situation in Canada, Lord & Thomas would help the brewers improve their image with the public.

At its first formal meeting with the brewers, Lord & Thomas suggested establishing a new body to be called the Public Relations Committee of the Ontario Brewers. In terms of its structure, the PRCOB would be made up of five units. The Plan Board would be “the heart” or command centre of the public relations programme; the Coordinating Unit, “through which would pass all the operations of the [Ontario] programme,” would act as a liaison between the various provincial brewing public relations organizations; a Mechanical Department would engage in clipping services and library work to procure pro-beer propaganda; and a Distributing Department would disseminate pro-wet and anti-dry information. The Plan Board was made up of G. F. Mills, J. W. Spitzer, and A. F. Blake of Lord & Thomas and Larry Bonneycastle of John Labatt Ltd. Reporting directly to the Plan Board were a handful of field workers assigned the task of building bridges to the community at large. Miss Jane Alexander, for example, was to work with “influential women and organized women’s groups.” For her services, she was given a retainer of \$50 a month plus \$60 a week. James Cowan, on the other hand, was paid \$415 a month to organize conventions and special events “in specific communities ... where action is urgently required.” In total, the PRCOB employed 24 people during its first year of operation.¹⁸

Although the PRCOB’s immediate goal was to improve the brewers’ image with the public, its ultimate objective was to “ensure the continued life of the industry” by defending the established drinking culture and the existing system

16 Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, “Creating a Favourable Business Climate: Corporations and Radio Broadcasting, 1934 to 1954,” *Business History Review*, vol. 73 (Summer 1999), pp. 221-255.

17 Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, pp. 288-291.

18 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, G. F. Mills to J. C. Ryan, August 3, 1941.

of liquor legislation in Ontario.¹⁹ The liquor regime that emerged in Ontario after prohibition came to an end in 1927 gave the state a monopoly on the wholesale purchase and retail sale of alcoholic beverages. The state, through its regulatory agency, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, also had the responsibility of controlling those spaces where public drinking was taking place. Canadians had long been more willing than their neighbours south of the border to accept a large government presence in their economic lives. The system benefited the brewers over the distillers because only beer and wine could be consumed in the province's public beverage rooms.²⁰ In part, this accounted for a shift in consumer behaviour during the interwar period. By 1939, each Ontarian was consuming on average 7.38 imperial gallons of beer and only 0.37 imperial gallons of hard liquor per annum.²¹

To achieve its goal defending the *status quo*, those at the PRCOB felt that it would be advantageous to build a broad-based coalition of pro-beer advocates. The first group to be identified as a potential ally was the military. A recent Canadian survey conducted by Lord & Thomas indicated that "the soldiers are likely to be more anti-dry than any other classification."²² The report also put the veterans of the First World War in the same camp. In addition, the PRCOB believed that labour would "be tremendously displeased by any changes to the existing system [of liquor legislation]" and thus it too would be an ally. Long gone was the prim, teetotaling working-class masculinity of the pre-prohibition years. By the time of the Second World War, those of the working class were ready to defend publicly the right to drink responsibly and moderately, seeing beer-drinking as a small reward for their breadwinning.²³ The PRCOB immediately targeted these groups by contacting their chief representatives – a technique that had long been used in the United States. South of the border, public relations practitioners had always oriented themselves toward "opinion leaders" with the expectation that these leaders would then spread the desired messages through their own networks of communication.²⁴ As the profession of public relations got its hesitant start in Canada during the Second World War, the same modern methods were utilized by the PRCOB. For example, in September of 1941 the PRCBO contacted Tom Moore and Aaron Roland Mosher, who directed the two largest unions in Canada, with the view of "developing a general picture of the labour situation and at the same time opening the way for distribution, through them, of material."²⁵

19 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, "The Necessity of Maintaining a Brewers' Public Relations Programme to Ensure the Continued Life of the Industry," February 8, 1941.

20 Dan Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself: The Regulation of Public Drinking in Post-Prohibition Ontario, 1927-1944* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012).

21 Brewers' Association of Canada, *Brewing in Canada* (Montreal: Ronalds-Federated Ltd., 1965), p. 123.

22 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, Lord & Thomas to the Ontario Brewing Industry, March 20, 1941.

23 Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2003), pp. 231, 284-293, and "The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-class Hamilton, 1890-1946," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 86 (September 2005), pp. 411-452.

24 Jackall and Hirota, *Image Makers*, p. 138.

25 Labatt Papers, LATXT76, "Lord & Thomas Contact Report," September 18, 1941.

The PRCOB identified the Canadian press as the final group whose service was deemed absolutely essential to the brewers' lobbying efforts.²⁶ Those at PRCOB recognized that any public relations campaign "must have the support of at least a portion of the newspapers in the province." They also knew that it would be difficult to get such support unless "the newspapers receive some consideration for any favourable publicity they give the brewing industry."²⁷ Even before the war, circulation growth had become the yardstick by which newspapers measured their success, and advertising dollars became the means to that end.²⁸ The Great Depression, however, had taken a heavy toll on the daily and weekly newspapers of the nation. The reduced revenues from advertising led to decreased circulation and many bankruptcies. Those newspapers that managed to survive the depression limped into the war. The brewing industry, on the other hand, had fared remarkably well during the 1930s. As a result, the brewers had the money that the newspaper owners and editors sorely needed. "Publishers are human," noted a PRCOB memo, "and therefore an industry which represents large space purchases is much more likely to get the co-operation of the press when publicity of a controversial nature is desired."²⁹ Thus the PRCOB decided that "the best way to do this [gain favour from the press] was to authorize an institutional campaign." The campaign would "in no way touch on the point at issue between the dry organizations and the industry" but rather would "aim at creating good will both with newspaper editors and with the public at large."³⁰

During the winter of 1941, the PRCOB began calling on the editors of weekly and daily newspapers to determine whether they were friends or foes of the brewing industry.³¹ Brewers needed a way of influencing the public. By the summer of that year, the PRCOB had contacted 47 editors and had compiled a detailed list of their personalities, views, and opinions. The PRCOB knew, for example, that Rupert Davies, publisher of the Kingston *Whig Standard*, was "violently opposed" to the liquor interests and that "advertising dollars alone would not convince him of the worthiness of the brewers' cause."³² Similarly, they were aware that the editor of the Acton *Free Press*, A. C. Dill, was no friend of the liquor traffic. "He has no sympathy whatever with the wets," noted the PRCOB's Frank Mills, "and would refuse advertising."³³

The industry did have its supporters, however. For example, Col. R. F. Parkinson, managing director of the Ottawa *Journal*, "would accept brewery advertising and ... will put the campaign over, if all stick together."³⁴ Likewise, W. C. Scott, editor of the *London Ledger*, a newspaper with a circulation of 8,000

26 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, Lord & Thomas to John Labatt, March 1941.

27 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, "Memorandum Re. The Necessity of the Promotional Public Relations Programme for the Brewing Industry."

28 Minko Sotiron, *From Politics to Profits: The Commercialization of Canadian Newspapers, 1890-1920* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997), especially pp. 52-69.

29 Labatt Papers, box LATXT28, Lord & Thomas to the Ontario Brewing Industry, March 1941.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, L. C. Bonneycastle to Hugh Mackenzie, October 24, 1941.

32 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, A. F. Blake to L. C. Bonneycastle, August 28, 1941.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

in the rural areas surrounding London, Ontario, was squarely in the wet column. Speaking on behalf of his stakeholders, Scott told Henry Janes, a field worker at the PRCOB, that, "if we can help bury the prohibition movement, we will."³⁵

Just as important to the PRCOB was determining which newspaper editors had not yet made up their minds on the liquor question. When Henry Janes first interviewed W. G. Elliot, editor of the *Woodstock-Ingersoll Daily Sentinel Review*, Janes was unable to ascertain "his personal views as to liquor or beer." In his report, Janes noted that Elliot was a "bonafide newspaper man of about 52, who smoked a pipe." He was "approachable, well-informed, very conservative minded ... but would give careful attention to both sides of the question before he makes up his mind." Following up a few days later, Frank Mills found out that Elliot's principal criticism of the liquor traffic was that the brewers were profiting too much from the war. "You have only to see Labatt's trucks rolling through here day and night to realize this," Elliott told Mills.³⁶ Nevertheless, Elliot felt that "prohibition was *not* a practical issue," and thus the PRCOB counted him among those who "are likely to be influenced."³⁷

When interviewed by the PRCBO, the editor of *The Farmers' Advocate*, W. H. Porter, also noted the omnipresence of the Labatt's trucks as evidence of the size and prosperity of the brewing industry. Asked whether the breweries provided a good market for too-abundant grain crops, Porter stated that the "farmers can make more profit feeding their barley to hogs than selling it to the brewers." In his final analysis, Mills stated that he "suspects that *The Farmers' Advocate* will listen to both sides of the question." Nevertheless, the PRCOB put Porter in the category of "unlikely to be influenced."³⁸

By the end of January 1942, the PRCOB had interviewed 155 newspaper editors and publishers and determined that the "general opinion was inclined to be favourable to the present liquor control system." Only 29 per cent of those interviewed by the PRCOB completely disapproved of the existing liquor laws, whereas 31 per cent completely approved, and 40 per cent generally approved. In regard to co-operating with the brewing industry in its public relations campaign, the PRCOB determined that 74 per cent of all editors were inclined to accept the brewers' advertising, assuming that it did not contravene the law. Perhaps more importantly, approximately 40 per cent of all editors stated that their news columns would be available for publicity releases.³⁹ A separate report noted that this response was "a considerable improvement over the situation even a year ago."⁴⁰

Defending the Right to Supply Beer to the Troops Overseas

Much of the early activity of the PRCOB was dedicated to defending the brewers' right to supply beer to the troops overseas. In January 1941, Canadian brewers

35 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, Henry Janes to Hugh Mackenzie, June 24, 1941.

36 *Ibid.*

37 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, Frank Mills to Hugh Mackenzie, June 24, 1941.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Labatt Papers, box LATX76, "Field Work Report," January 31, 1942.

40 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, "Propaganda Releases," April 2, 1942.

had been asked to supply the British Navy, Army, and Air Force Institute, which operated the wet canteens for Commonwealth forces in all fighting theatres. Canadian brewers were already distributing beer to canteens on airfields and army bases across the nation, where there was a preference for bottled beer.⁴¹ Close to a million men and women had enlisted in the Canadian military, and to this group was added the young men from other countries who were in Canada to receive their flying training under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. Despite the growing demand for beer on the home front, Canadian brewers responded to the British order. Within weeks, 400,000 dozen quarts were shipped in the first allotment for the British government.

The fact that Canadian beer was being exported to troops overseas enraged many temperance advocates. Dry critics like Rev. C. W. DeMille of the Canadian Temperance Federation argued that beer was detrimental to the war effort. Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, DeMille stated that Britain had three enemies, “Germany, Italy and Drink. And the greatest of these is Drink.”⁴² The statement was a variation of a famous WWI quote by the prominent British Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George.⁴³ That DeMille chose to employ words from his teetotaling predecessor demonstrated that the brewers were fighting history as much as present circumstances, since the issues of a generation earlier persisted and remained culturally relevant. As Lloyd George had done in 1915, DeMille argued that the consumption of beer resulted in “the lowering of efficiency in both the armed forces and war industries through the narcotic influence of alcohol.”⁴⁴ In addition, it depressed the level of national morale “through debauchery of both civilians and enlisted persons.”⁴⁵ DeMille called on the federal government “to stop the scandal of having ships loaded with Canadian liquor while quantities of war supplies so desperately needed at the front lie on railway lines.”⁴⁶ Others, like Rev. A. E. Runnells of the Trinity United Church, argued that the government’s liberal liquor laws were undermining the war effort by creating “puffy beer drinkers.”⁴⁷ Mrs. Edgar D. Hardy, president of the National Council of Women, agreed, and her organization demanded that the federal government prohibit the use of shipping space for transporting beer to troops in the Middle East.⁴⁸

The brewers, however, were eager to see these shipments continue, not because they were of great benefit to the industry’s bottom line, but rather because of their value in the public relations war. The PRCOB wanted the public to see the shipments as a valuable contribution to the war effort and therefore as serving a public good. Shortly after Canadian beer began arriving in the Middle East, the

41 Albert Tucker, “Labatt’s: A History – From Immigrant Family to Canadian Corporation” (unpublished manuscript in author’s possession), p. 277.

42 Quoted in Gault MacGowan, *The Canadian Veteran*, April 30, 1943, p. 7.

43 In a speech at Bangor on February 28, 1915, Lloyd George stated: “We are fighting Germany, Austria and Drink; and as far as I can see the greatest of these three deadly foes is Drink.” See *The Times*, March 1, 1915, p. 8.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Toronto Daily Star*, July 3, 1942, p. 11.

47 *Newmarket Era*, December 5, 1940, p. 1.

48 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, L. C. Bonnycastle to J. A. Cowan, June 8, 1942.

PRCOB began exploiting the Canadian-beer-in-Egypt story for all it was worth. “Arrangements have been made for publicity and pictures of the arrival of the beer in Egypt to be released,” Larry Bonneycastle wrote in a PRCOB memorandum.⁴⁹ The pictures that appeared in the press challenged the prohibitionists’ image of the fighting men. The men looked healthy, happy, and well nourished – nothing like the depressed, beer-bloated soldier that the prohibitionists had depicted.

Shortly thereafter, Matthew Halton’s article, “They Drank Canadian Beer at Solum,” appeared in various Canadian newspapers. After the story’s initial publication, the PRCOB had it reworked slightly to incorporate a few “facts” of its own. Internally, the story was marked as a “propaganda release,” but, when it was sent to editors and publishers, it was marked as a “news item.” In the reprinted versions of the story the PRCOB reached back into history to justify sending Canadian beer to the troops. At a time when pro-British sentiment was high, the PRCOB emphasized the Britishness of beer-drinking and Canada’s imperial connection. “The importance of beer as a beverage for the troops,” read one news item, “was recognized by Lord Allenby commanding the British fighting forces in the Near East during the last war, whose brilliant campaign brought such a large section within the sphere of the British.” A separate news item informed the reader: “One of Lord Allenby’s first actions was to order large quantities of beer to be shipped to his troops in Palestine.” The article then emphasized the essential role that beer had played in maintaining the physical strength and mental health of the military. “Exposed to the burning heart of the semi-tropical terrain over which they were forced to fight, it was noticed that there was an appreciable lowering of physical resistance and morale owing to the trying climatic conditions. But not long after the arrival of the first shipments of beer there was a noticeable improvement in the general condition of the troops.” In a final appeal to its audience, the article ended with the lessons of history: “Profiting from this experience, beer is now being made a regular part of the rations of the armies in the East and in North Africa.” Versions of this story continued to be printed in the press during the war.⁵⁰

What exact role these “news items” played in swaying public opinion is difficult to determine. The universe of public relations does not readily submit to easy measurements of cause and effect, especially when the product to be measured is as diffuse as attitudes about the moral-economy of beer drinking in wartime. The fact that the brewers continued to disseminate the story of how “They Drank Canadian Beer at the Solum” indicates that those at the PRCOB, at least, believed that the item was having a positive effect. Perhaps more importantly, when it came time for the federal government to weigh in on the issue, the brewing industry’s position prevailed. When the subject became a matter of debate in the House of Commons in the summer of 1942, Minister of Finance James Lorimer

49 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, “Memorandum of the Meeting of the Plan Board of the Ontario Brewers Industry Public Relations Committee,” September 17, 1941.

50 See, for example, “Beer Shipments,” *Windsor Daily Star*, November 10, 1942; “Canada is Not Providing Ships to Carry Beer,” *Galt Daily Reporter*, November 12, 1942; “Beer for the Troops,” *Ingersoll Daily Sentinel*, November 24, 1942.

Ilisley stated that he saw nothing wrong with shipping beer to the troops overseas. To deny beer to those who were putting their lives on the line for freedom in the scorching-hot theatres of the Far East was a position that Ilisley considered “wholly reprehensible.”⁵¹ As a result, the export of beer to the troops overseas continued for the duration of the war.

Defending the Domestic *Status Quo*

On July 3, 1942, DeMille’s Canadian Temperance Federation (CTF) took out a full-page ad in the *Toronto Star*, one of Canada’s most widely circulated newspapers. The propaganda piece called on the federal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King to adopt legislation to curb the consumption of intoxicating beverages on the home front during the war. The CTF made no distinction between beer and hard liquor; each was the cause of “poverty, crime, accidents and loss of time.” The CTF listed ten “facts” aimed at convincing the public and the government that liquor “menaces our war effort.” Among them was the claim that “scientific tests have repeatedly shown that alcohol’s narcotic effect on workers is to decrease their efficiency” and thereby diminish the industrial prowess and military might of the nation. The ad also noted that the liquor traffic was profiting more than most from the war: “While the nation faces a crisis, liquor traffic thrives and its promoters are enriched.” In its final appeal, the CTF asked rhetorically: “Do you not think it is inconsistent for a government to ask God’s blessing on their war effort and then for that Government to protect a traffic that is doing so much to undermine the moral and religious life of the nation and to thwart the nation’s effort on behalf of the victory prayed for?”⁵²

The CTF advertisement caught the eye of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, and on September 14, 1942, members of the CFT were invited to his residence on the corner of Laurier Avenue and Chapel Street in Ottawa. A life-long teetotaler, Mackenzie King was sympathetic to the prohibitionist cause. In fact, he had contempt for anyone who made a living from the making or selling of booze. On more than one occasion, he stated that the liquor interests were the “most corrupt force in the country.”⁵³ During the meeting, the prohibitionists pointed to a “disturbing trend” in wartime consumption.⁵⁴ Beer consumption was up, way up, they noted, since the beginning of the war. Nationwide, each Canadian was now consuming on average 8.7 gallons of beer per year, an increase of almost 50 per cent since 1939.⁵⁵ In Great Britain, per capita beer consumption had also increased, but only by 14 per cent between 1939 and 1942.⁵⁶ The increase in Canadian consumption meant that the brewers were selling more beer and making more money. At John Labatt Ltd., for example, sales had more than doubled, while profits had increased by almost 80 per cent since the hostilities began. Mackenzie King was moved by the statistical evidence and vexed by the

51 Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, June 8, 1942, p. 3149.

52 *Toronto Star*, July 3, 1942, p. 11.

53 *Mackenzie King Diaries*, February 26, 1943, p. 143; and March 14, 1944, p. 246.

54 Quoted in MacGowan, *The Canadian Veteran*, April 30, 1943, p. 7.

55 Dominion Brewers Association, *Facts on the Brewing Industry*, p. 37.

56 *Ibid.*

amount of money the brewers were making. "The brewers have profited more than anyone out of the war," King wrote in his diary. "Indeed, the liquor interests and the newspapers have been the real profiteers."⁵⁷ Something had to be done, King concluded, to control consumption and curb the excessive profits and undue influence of the liquor traffic. Just a few hours after meeting with the temperance delegation, Mackenzie King instructed his wartime cabinet to "press on in the matter of curtailing the liquor traffic."⁵⁸ He also told the cabinet that in due course he would make a broadcast on the subject in relation to Canada's war effort.⁵⁹

When news of the Prime Minister's plan reached the PRCOB, it immediately began a grassroots lobbying campaign to prevent the plan from becoming a reality. The PRCOB contacted Frank Mathers of the Western Canada Brewers' Association to advise labour groups in the west of what was pending and to persuade them to protest. In Ontario, contacts established early in 1942 with organized labour were immediately utilized. The PRCOB dispatched a field worker to Sarnia and Windsor to work in those all-important labour communities and later turned its attention to St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Welland. On November 18, 1942, an appointment was arranged with Percy Bengough, acting president of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, to enlist his support. Two other field workers reached out to the veterans' organization for the "purpose of procuring protest against any reductions in the sale of beer."⁶⁰

By the end of the month, the PRCOB could report that "the contact with Messrs. Mathers and Chiswick was productive and numerous wires to the Prime Minister from labor groups as far west as the Rocky mountains [have been sent] protesting any reduction in sales of beer and ale." In Ontario, wires of protest were sent to the Prime Minister from the Trades and Labor Councils of Essex County, Woodstock, Brantford, and the Frontier District group, which covered the Niagara Peninsula. The interview with Percy Bengough had also gone according to plan. Bengough followed through on his promise to wire the Prime Minister reiterating the view of the Labor Congress of Canada that it was "unalterably opposed to any change in the laws affecting the sale of alcoholic beverages." Bengough also wired various members of King's wartime cabinet and endorsed the protests across the country against any reduction in the manufacture of beer or ale. Finally, efforts to mobilize the veterans of the nation had resulted in wires sent to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet from the Canadian Pensioners' Association, the Army and Navy Veterans in Canada, and the Ontario Command of the Canadian Legion.⁶¹

When it came time for members of Mackenzie King's wartime Cabinet to voice their opinions on the matter, most felt that beer-drinking was a highly valued activity among industrial workers, veterans, and military men of the nation and that "it would be a mistake to go too far in the matter of beer."⁶² They thus opposed

57 *Mackenzie King Diaries*, December 10, 1942, p. 1.

58 *Ibid.*, September 14, 1942, p. 2.

59 *Ibid.*

60 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, "Public Relations Efforts on Behalf of the Brewing Industry of Ontario, Nov. 15th to Dec. 17th, 1942."

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Mackenzie King Diaries*, December 10, 1942, p. 2.

King's suggestion to reduce the production of beer by 20 per cent. Mackenzie King spent the afternoon of November 19, 1942, attempting to convince his Cabinet of the merit of his measure, but he could not rally any support. "I get no help from anyone [in the Cabinet]," King lamented, "not even [from] Ralston who is a strong Baptist, teetotaler, etc."⁶³ King was astonished "how [the] standards of men get undermined through influences around him." As a result of the resistance in Cabinet, King was forced to water down his liquor legislation.

When the federal government announced its Wartime Alcoholic Beverage Order on December 16, 1942, the legislation privileged the production and consumption of beer. While the Order-in-Council restricted the annual volume of beer sold by each brewery to not more than 90 per cent of its sales in the previous year, it restricted the production of wine and spirits to 80 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively, of the previous year's production.⁶⁴ The brewers did not get special treatment when it came to advertising, however. King felt that advertising was "clearly not necessary to promote sales, nor is it justifiable if sales and consumption are to be curtailed."⁶⁵ Thus advertising by distillers, vintners, and brewers was prohibited under the new law.

Those at the PRCOB believed that the ban on advertising meant that the brewing industry's public relations campaign would be "severely compromised." As a consequence, they decided that the first step in ending the curtailment of production was to repeal the section of the Order that prohibited advertising. In January 1941, the members of the PRCOB attended a meeting of Canadian publishers to discuss "the ways and means of persuading authorities to amend the government's prohibition on advertising." The decision was made for the publishers personally to pressure members of Cabinet and the House of Commons. It was further decided that they should stress the fact that the newspaper industry's entire existence depended on its ability to attract advertising dollars. The effort paid dividends in March 1942, when the government amended the Wartime Alcoholic Beverage Order to permit the brewers to advertise so long as it was devoted to the war effort.

Within this new advertising environment, the PRCOB proposed embarking on a propaganda campaign to get Canadians to perceive beer as a "nutritious" item and therefore essential to waging an effective war at home and abroad. The prohibitionists had long argued that beer was one of the "three poisons" (along with distilled spirits and wine) and that drinking it was weakening the nation from within. The brewers had begun to challenge this negative representation at the end of the noble experiment, when individual beer companies could say something more directly about the character of their products. The wartime restrictions on beer advertising, however, made a direct assault on the dries' unflattering imagery much more difficult. Shortly after its meeting with the nation's publishers, the

63 *Ibid.*, November 19, 1942, p. 2.

64 Malleck, *Try to Control Yourself*, p. 227.

65 William Lyon Mackenzie King, *Canada and the War: Temperance and a Total War Effort* (Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, 1942).

PRCOB thus decided on a “public service” advertising campaign to link beer indirectly to nutrition.

During the war, nutrition emerged as a national priority, not just for the armed forces but also for those on the home front, war industry workers in particular. In 1941, leading nutritional experts warned that upwards of 60 per cent of Canadians were suffering from some form of vitamin and mineral deficiency. Soon thereafter figures were released showing an alarming rate of medical rejections by the Canadian military. The federal government responded by launching its first-ever national nutrition education programme.⁶⁶ Starting with the creation of a federal Nutrition Services Division in 1941 and the inauguration of the Canadian Nutrition Program the following year, Canadians were inundated with nutrition advice during the war years. A proper diet, they were told, would go a long way toward maximizing energy, strength, efficiency, and above all productivity. At the heart of this campaign was Canada’s Official Food Rules – the precursor to Canada’s Food Guide – which listed the six food groups needed to maintain a healthy diet: milk, cereals and breads, fruits, vegetables, eggs, and, finally, “meat, fish, etc.” As the slogan of the Food Rules reminded Canadians, the goal was straightforward: “Eat right, feel right – Canada needs you strong!” Or, as one headline in *Saturday Night* put it more bluntly, “Canada’s Faulty Diet is Adolf Hitler’s Ally.”⁶⁷

In Britain, where there was more freedom when it came to product advertising, the brewers themselves stressed the potential health benefits to be derived from drinking beer during the war.⁶⁸ Prohibition had never become a fact of social life in Britain, as it had in Canada and the United States, in large part because of the lobbying efforts of the brewers. In reaction to vehement attacks by temperance reformers in late Victorian times, British brewers and publicans had formed “the trade.” In a relatively short period, “the trade” gained a formidable reputation that other pressure groups could only envy. Having reached out to working-class drinkers and moderate reformers as well as overcoming internal divisions, “the trade” was able to resist government support of anti-drink legislation. “The brewers had the money” writes the historian David Fahey, “while the publicans swayed votes of working-class drinkers.”⁶⁹ With the freedom to advertise their products during the Second World War, individual brewers emphasized the positive effects of beer consumption. In 1942, Ireland’s Guinness, for example, ran a “backs-to-the-wall” advertising campaign. Under the tag line “What the Situation Demands” was an image of a seemingly random set of objects. Below the image was a list that described the wartime purpose of each item: “Wheel, for putting shoulder to; socks, for pulling up; stone, for not leaving unturned; brass tacks, for getting down to; trump card, for playing; bold face, for putting on it; belt for tightening; Guinness for strength.”⁷⁰ Throughout the war, Guinness continued to emphasize

66 L. B. Pett, “Nutrition as a National Problem,” *Canadian Welfare*, vol. 18 (April 1942), pp. 21-29.

67 Hiram McCann, “Canada’s Faulty Diet is Adolf Hitler’s Ally,” *Saturday Night*, June 14, 1941, p. 8.

68 Brain Glover, *Brewing for Victory: Brewers, Beer and Pubs in World War II* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1988), pp. 7-17.

69 David Fahey, “Brewers, Publicans and Working Class Drinker: Pressure Group Politics in Late Victorian and Edwardian England,” *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 13, no. 25 (May 1980), p. 85.

70 Glover, *Brewing for Victory*, p. 13.

that its beer was helping to maintain the health of the nation's population. In the United States, brewers like Anheuser-Busch informed the public that they were helping "to guard your well being" by producing products rich in essential vitamins. Both the American and British governments decided that beer was a valuable beverage for military and civilian health and morale.⁷¹

The PRCOB was profoundly aware of the developments taking place in Britain and the United States. Those engaged in clipping services had filled dozens of file folders with newspaper and magazine articles summarizing the British and American brewers' efforts to emphasize the nutritional aspects of beer. In Canada, the PRCOB also argued that there was "an obvious and direct link between this industry and nutrition since beer is a continuing item in the diets of millions of Canadians and is particularly important to workers in heavy industry – key men in the industrial war effort located in plants on which much official nutrition effort has been concentrated."⁷² In the early years of the war, the brewers had distributed a pamphlet entitled "Beer, the drink of the Moderate" to thousands of Canadians informing them about the food value of beer and its nutritional effects: "Three quarts of a pint of mild ale is equal in food value to 4.7 ounces of potatoes, 1.8 ounces of bread, 6.4 ounces of milk, 1 ½ eggs, 3.7 ounces of lean beef and 8.8 ounces of cod-fish." The problem for the beer lobby was that it could no longer make such claims after the federal government's ban on advertising came into effect. As a result, the PRCOB embarked on a programme of public service advertising.

The brewing industry's "Nutrition for Victory" ads were published in every daily across the province, including those traditionally of a prohibitionist bent – such as the *St. Catharines Standard* and the *Toronto Star*. In regard to the weeklies, only 25 of the 275 in circulation declined to run the PRCOB's ads.⁷³ Appropriating the words of one of its harshest critics, the Ontario brewers stated in their ads: "Health is a vital dynamic thing contributing to Victory ... a proper diet ... a matter of national concern." The quote was correctly attributed to William Lyon Mackenzie King.

The ad, and many others like it, touched on wartime notions of femininity. While an unprecedented number of women entered the workforce during the Second World War, women were still expected to be good mothers. "MOTHERS! YOU CAN HELP!" proclaimed one of the PRCOB's ads (see Figure 1). "Family health is in your hands," the ad continued. Tapping into the same deep social assumptions regarding a woman's place in wartime society, another PRCOB ad stated: "That's why it is every Canadian woman's duty to know and apply the basic rules of Nutrition." The imagery also reflected and reinforced the underlying cultural logic regarding gender roles. In the corner of the ads was an image of an ideal Canadian family – healthy, wealthy, and happy. A fit-looking boy and

71 Thomas C. Cochran, *The Pabst Brewing Company: The History of an American Business* (New York: New York University Press, 1948), pp. 394-396.

72 Labatt Papers, box LATXT176, "Draft of suggested letter to Prof. McHenry *et al.*"

73 Labatt Papers, box LATXT176, "Report on Public Relations Brewing Industry Ontario: Response from the Nutrition Campaign," April 29, 1943.

girl stood each side of their mother, as their father looked over their shoulders. The ad placed the woman at the centre of the nuclear family, bestowing on her the responsibility for building “stamina ... resistance ... vitality ... by serving the proper food.” The ads stressed the importance of nutrition and suggested that the brewers were interested in improving the diets of the Canadian people. All the ads were clearly marked as being “sponsored by the Brewing Industry of Ontario in the interests of nutrition and health as an aid to victory.”

MOTHERS! YOU CAN HELP!

Join "Nutrition for Victory" Drive! Learn **EASY** way to improve your family's health . . . with meals they'll enjoy!

Canada needs us strong, to win this war. And family health is in your hands. You can help build stamina . . . resistance . . . vitality . . . by serving proper food.

Perhaps you recognize the need for well-balanced meals. But you find meal-planning a difficult job. If so—here's help! A FREE new booklet, "Eat-to-Work-to-Win" . . . the **EASY** way to good nutrition.

No need to be a student of dietetics! The careful planning has all been done for you. You have simply to follow menus provided. So do your part! Learn how to feed your family properly!

Send for your FREE copy of "Eat-to-Work-to-Win" today!

FREE!
Send for your copy today!

To get your FREE copy of "Eat-to-Work-to-Win", just send your name and address, clearly printed, to "Nutrition for Victory", Box 000, Toronto, Canada.

*The nutritional statements in "Eat-to-Work-to-Win" are available in Nutritional Services, Department of Postures and National Health, Ottawa, for the Canadian Nutrition Programme.

THE BREWING INDUSTRY OF ONTARIO

Sponsored by
THE BREWING INDUSTRY (ONTARIO)
in the interests of nutrition and health as an aid to Victory.

No. 3680—Fin.P.—4 cols x 75 li.—Can. Nspgs., 1943

Figure 1: PRCOB, “Nutrition for Victory” ad, 1943
Source: Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, “Ontario Public Relations Jan. 1/43-July 1/43”

In the bottom right-hand corner of all the ads was an invitation to Canadians to mail in for a free fifteen-page booklet entitled “Nutrition for Victory: Eat to Work to Win.” The booklet consisted of a three-page overview on the health elements in food, a two-page list of the basic foods necessary for a healthy diet – as guided by Canada’s Official Food Rules – and six pages of breakfast, lunch, and dinner menus. “All the careful, time-taking planning has been done for you,” the brewers proudly informed Canadians. “The Brewing Industry (Ontario), recognizing the vital need of a popular knowledge of nutrition among Canadians ... prepares this booklet as a contribution to this important work.” With the book in hand, all that one needed to do was to pick one breakfast, one lunch, and one dinner from the 21 days of menus that the brewers had provided. For instance, one could choose: a breakfast made up of chilled blackcurrent juice, a foamy omelette, toasted whole-wheat or vitamin-rich bread, jam or jelly, and a beverage made with milk; a lunch

of lima beans with bacon or sausage garnish, bread, raw carrot straws, cupcakes, and a beverage made with milk; and a dinner of veal chops, baked potatoes, baked squash, spice cake with applesauce, and a “beverage of choice.”⁷⁴

In the month that followed the release of the first ads, the PRCOB received requests for more than 3,000 of the 30,000 booklets it had printed. A PRCOB report on “response to the nutrition campaign” noted that the requests came from high school administrators who were seeking to use the booklet in their health classes, nuns who were seeking to teach nutrition in school, Army officers who were seeking to educate the military on the value of eating well, and corporate executives who were seeking to keep their employees strong.⁷⁵ The \$60,000 campaign had a positive effect on the relationship between brewers and publishers. There was now a “ready willingness on the part of publishers to view the industry as one engaged in a legitimate business,” noted an internal PRCOB report, “and operating within the law.”⁷⁶ The same report also noted the goodwill it was generating among the public.

The nutrition for victory campaign, therefore, was not simply aimed at influencing the public by disseminating information regarding a “public good,” but also at getting a toehold in with the publishers by convincing them that the brewing industry was wholesome enough to deal with. The nutrition for victory campaign represented a covert public service style of advertising. Instead of advertising a product, the brewers advertised their “wholesomeness” and “patriotism” while presenting themselves as objective, impartial “experts” in nutrition.

Fanning the Flames of Discontent

On March 11, 1943, approximately 300 people filled to capacity the Army and Navy Veterans’ Hall in Kitchener to endorse a resolution protesting against the “prohibition conditions which are accumulating as the result of the unnecessary and unjustified withholding from the consumers the quantity of beer required for their normal and reasonable use.”⁷⁷ In other cities, the beer shortage brought an outcry from workers, who threatened to boycott the sale of victory bonds if they did not get more of their favourite beverage. “No Beer – No Bonds” was their battle cry. Across the nation, wartime workers and veterans signed petitions to register their disapproval of the beer restrictions. In March 1943, the president of the Canadian Legion, L. M. Heard, wrote to the Prime Minister informing him that the beer shortages were “lowering the morale of the troops” and leading good men “to sneak up back alleys looking for entertainment that should be provided in the open.”⁷⁸ Like many other beer-thirsty Canadians, Heard urged King “to institute

74 The Brewing Industry of Ontario, “Nutrition for Victory: Eat to Work to Win” (Brewing Industry of Ontario, Toronto, 1943).

75 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, “Report on Public Relations Brewing Industry Ontario: Response from the Nutrition Campaign.”

76 *Ibid.*

77 “Curb on Beer Held Unjust – War Veterans, Labor Protest at Kitchener,” *Globe and Mail*, March 8, 1943, p. 10.

78 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, L. M. Heard to Rt. Hon. Mackenzie King, March 3, 1943.

such action as will relieve this situation.”⁷⁹ In the months after the temperance measures were announced, King and many rank-and-file Liberals were flooded with angry protests from citizens all blaming officialdom for the beer shortage.⁸⁰

Those at the PRCOB were profoundly aware of the protests that were taking place across the nation, and on more than one occasion they lent their support to the malcontents. The beer lobby appreciated, however, that the aid had to be given in such a way that it would go unnoticed by the Prime Minister. Such was the case in February 1943, when James Cook approached Hugh Labatt, vice-president of John Labatt Ltd., with an offer to help mobilize protesters at the Toronto Shipbuilding Company where he worked. “I am in a position,” Cook wrote to Labatt, “to supply you with a strong petition of thousands of names and addresses of war workers against the restrictions on beer and the early closing of hotels.”⁸¹ Not wanting to get directly involved, Hugh Labatt forwarded the letter to James Cowan at the PRCOB. “If you would investigate this man and see if he can be of use,” Labatt wrote to Cowan, “we would appreciate it.”⁸² Labatt was quick to add, however, that any relationship that developed between the PRCOB and Cook would have to be kept secret. “Of course, if his idea is carried out,” Hugh Labatt warned, “neither the name of John Labatt Limited nor the brewing industry can appear on the petition.”⁸³ The petition was subsequently signed by over a thousand workers at the Toronto plant and sent to Ottawa. In the final years of the war, the PRCOB became very adroit at stoking the fires of political protest but doing so in such a way that they were not caught with the poker in their hands.

Based on the number of political protests, no other shortage brought more of an uproar during the war than the scarcity of beer. Canadians proved to be willing to put up with a dearth of other items, but the inability to get a glass of beer after finishing a day’s work was something that wartime workers and military men could not stomach. Their protests, which were consistently supported and often encouraged by the PRCOB, were many and frequent and their message was always the same: “We want more beer.” Feeling the pressure themselves, provincial politicians blamed Ottawa for the shortage.⁸⁴ In Ottawa, there was a fiery debate about exactly what should be done given the growing unrest. The pressure was mounting to find a solution, making more than one politician feel uncomfortable. On April 3, 1943, *Macleans*’ magazine reported that some Members of Parliament were “loathe to go home at Easter recess without more beer for thirsty war workers.”⁸⁵

In May 1943, the Liberal government of Mackenzie King responded to the beer shortage by introducing coupon rationing, but the rationing of beer created just as many problems as it solved. King’s handling of the beer question was increasingly criticized in the press. A PRCOB analysis of newspaper “editorials,”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Globe and Mail*, February 11, 1943, p. 4.

⁸¹ Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, James Cook to Hugh Labatt, February 1, 1943.

⁸² Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, Hugh Labatt to James Cowan, February 3, 1943.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Globe and Mail*, December 17, 1943, p. 4; and March 10, 1943, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Macleans*, April 15, 1943, p. 57.

“columns,” and “news items” indicated that, between February and May of 1943, there were 25 clippings that were “favourable” and 14 that were “unfavourable” to the brewing industry.⁸⁶ This ratio was a marked improvement, the PRCOB noted, over coverage in the past. As in the United States, advertising functions in Canada were changing as market research started to become a more important element in public relations strategies.⁸⁷ By 1943, the PRCOB was no longer just shaping and placing “new items”; it was also monitoring press coverage, collecting data, and quantifying it for the brewing industry.

In the year that followed, the government’s restrictions became the subject of an increasingly intense political controversy. During the same period the PRCOB’s press analysis became more complex. By 1944, the PRCOB was monitoring all press publicity. Previously, when the same dispatch appeared in more than one newspaper, only the insertion in one paper was reported. As a result, the PRCOB did not have a complete appraisal of the total publicity given to alcoholic beverages in the press of the province. In February 1944, new methodology was employed for the first time and indicated “a continuation of the favourable trend in public opinion, relative particularly to malt beverages [i.e. beer].” Of the total 399 relevant news and editorial items that appeared in the press in February 1944, 278 (or 70 per cent) were deemed to be “favourable” to the brewing industry. In comparison, of the 384 press items that related to distilled beverages, only 129 (or 33 per cent) were judged to be “favourable” to the distillers of the nation. Finally, of the 299 news items that related to the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and other temperance federations, none was assessed to be “favourable” to the prohibitionist cause.⁸⁸

The shifting cultural landscape emboldened provincial politicians who had long seen beer as a valuable source of tax revenue. Having recently consulted with the PRCOB, Ontario Premier George Drew wrote a personal letter to the Prime Minister on March 10, 1944, to request a federal-provincial conference on the problems of beer distribution. Drew’s Progressive Conservatives had been elected in the summer of 1943 in part by promising voters that they would do a better job of pressuring Ottawa to end the “system of chaos” created by the Wartime Alcoholic Beverages Order. Drew maintained that the federal government’s beer restrictions created an artificial and unnecessary shortage and that, therefore, the limits needed to be removed to increase the supply of beer to meet the demand.

With a by-election in Ontario looming and a federal election roughly a year away, King decided to avoid the publicity (and possible embarrassment) that would accompany a beer conference. Instead he moved quickly to lift the beer restrictions (the restrictions on spirits and wine would remain), thereby giving back to the provinces complete control over the sale and distribution of beer. King realized the political advantages of depositing the baby on someone else’s doorstep. On March 13, 1944, King stood in the House of Commons and declared that restricting the supply of beer “is not sufficiently important to the war effort to

86 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, “Newspaper Clipping Analysis,” June 10, 1943.

87 Jackall and Hirota, *Image Makers*, pp. 36-46.

88 Labatt Papers, box LATXT76, “Press Publicity, Month of February 1944.”

justify the risk of continuous misunderstanding and friction between the Federal and Provincial Governments.”⁸⁹ Always sensitive to the prevailing political wind, Mackenzie King had reversed course.

Conclusion

As the war neared its end, the *Toronto Star* reported that “anti-prohibition sentiment” was at an all-time high.⁹⁰ In a subsequent survey conducted by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, Canadians were asked: “What do you think is the best way to bring about the temperate use of alcoholic beverages in this country?” Of those who were polled, only 19 per cent answered the solution lay in prohibition.⁹¹ A few years later, a PRCOB report marked “strictly confidential” noted that “the prohibition objective has, by and large, been abandoned.” Having noted that the most important battles had been fought and won during the Second World War, the report concluded that, from a public relations standpoint, “it may neither be practical nor desirable in the future to counter dry propaganda.”⁹² Most Canadians were now inclined to see brewing as a “legitimate business.” The PRCOB was thus successful at attaining a favourable mention by the media and manufacturing a flattering image for the brewing industry.

The ethos of advocacy took on an altruistic tone during the war. On the surface, the PRCOB’s advertisements were dedicated to promoting a public good – camaraderie, high morale, and nutrition and health as aids to victory. The PRCOB’s language and imagery was devoid of any overt product promotion. Below the surface, however, the public relations campaign was rooted in a desire to maintain the gains that the brewing industry had made since the end of prohibition. Judged by the statistical results, the PRCOB accomplished its task. Although there was a slight falling off in 1943, the production of beer increased throughout the war. Between 1939 and 1945, the total number of barrels of beer brewed increased by 144 per cent, from 2.5 million to 5.3 million. In comparison, the volume of beer produced during the seven-year period leading up to the Second World War rose by only 41 per cent.⁹³ The surge in demand led to an increase in per capita consumption in Canada by almost 70 per cent during the war.⁹⁴ In Ontario, per capita beer consumption remained above the national average, increasing from 7.38 gallons in 1939 to 11.38 gallons in 1945.⁹⁵ Export to the troops overseas continued, beverage rooms remained open, and not a single Ontario brewer went out of business. At some breweries, like John Labatt Ltd., record profits were recorded.⁹⁶

89 *Globe and Mail*, March 14, 1944, p. 1.

90 *Toronto Star*, April 1, 1944, p. 18.

91 Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, “Public Opinion News Service Release,” March 16, 1946, p. 424.

92 Labatt Papers, box LATXT0028, “New Trends in the Dry Campaign,” February 15, 1948.

93 Dominion Brewers Association, *Facts on the Brewing Industry: A Manual Outlining the Development of the Industry and its place in the Canadian Economy* (Ottawa, 1948), p. 31.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

95 *Ibid.*

96 Labatt Papers, box LXTXT74, John Labatt Ltd. *Balance Sheets*, 1939-1945.

By capturing a large portion of the press and then disseminating pro-beer propaganda, the PRCOB helped sway public opinion in the brewing industry's favour. The brewers themselves kept a very low profile. More often than not, they were willing to have others fight by proxy. They remained behind the scenes orchestrating the overall public relations campaign. The PRCOB thus provided the structural means through which to promote a certain set of ideas. In its advocacy ads, editorials, and "new items," it used morally loaded messages to project the impression that brewing and beer-drinking were essential to the war effort. The PRCOB tapped into the underlying cultural logic of the age to sell beer-drinking as beneficial to the nation at war. While maintaining an image of acting on behalf of a public good, the PRCOB aimed to influence public sentiment on the meaningfulness of beer during wartime and to generate an unprecedented level of good will toward those engaged in the business of brewing.