Prohibition’s Failure in Pittsburgh

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Introduction

In late 1920, one year after the Eighteenth Amendment had become law in the America, Pittsburgh was considered “the wettest spot in the United States” by Washington Prohibition leaders. Though not as romanticized as New York or Chicago, Pittsburgh provided more than its fair share of gangsters, open saloons, speakeasies, stills, and corrupted officials to the nation’s Prohibition enforcement woes. Pittsburgh’s disregard for the temperance amendment is in many ways not surprising. With its large population of recent immigrants, heavy industry, ward politics, and large size, the city faced the same cultural and political problems with enforcement as did the other major northeastern industrial centers, such as New York, Cleveland, Chicago, and Detroit.

Pittsburgh has always been, and continues to be, a unique city. From its days of military significance in the eighteenth century through its development into the premier industrial center in North America by the late 1800s, the city at the point has been crucial in the growth and maturation of the United States. In the early twentieth century Pittsburgh was at its peak as a diverse and dynamic city, its character determined by men of industry, education, religion, and labor. Its neighborhoods and boroughs, cut from the hills to line the rivers, were shaped also by race, religion, class, and ethnicity. The city, rather than being a unified entity, consisted of a collection of autonomous areas. Prohibition, as a policy difficult to enforce even within the most homogeneous of communities, made little headway against the established, and often wet, traditions of diverse Pittsburgh.

The corruption of police officers, elected public officials, and judges was the most damaging of Prohibition’s many vile children. Street crime and violence are blights on an city’s facade, but pervasive corruption, in which the national law and federal officials are disregarded by the leaders of a community, is a danger reaching deeply into the population. The difficulties experienced by federal enforcement officials were mainly not in finding the illegal alcohol, but in working against those city institutions which held and enforced power. Pittsburgh’s police and courts, whose duty it was to uphold
the American constitution, had to be overcome by federal forces in order for Prohibition to be anything more than an empty statute. Prohibition via the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, its legislative means of enforcement, created a federal bureaucracy which had been intended to coordinate with local law enforcement bodies. Instead, there occurred a gap in cooperation which ranged from poor communication to outright criminal activity on the part of police forces. This paper will focus on the role played by corruption in Prohibition’s failure in Pittsburgh.

As the largest community and center of commerce, Pittsburgh was made the Prohibition enforcement Fourth District’s administrative center, a district encompassing the counties of western Pennsylvania. Through this office paraded seven men, each unable to curb Pittsburghers’ powerful thirst or to organize effectively with Pittsburgh enforcement agencies. With strategies varying between each man, these Chief Agents attempted to shut down the supply of alcohol, the various consumption establishments, or if feeling really confident, attacking both ends of the market at once. Immediate success was often achieved, but lasting change was decidedly elusive. Those institutions which held power in Pittsburgh were amazingly adaptive in their ability to work beneath, around, and within the federal bureaucracy established to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment.

In ways other than criminal was the enforcement administration challenged in western Pennsylvania. The midwest saw the birth and growth of the Crusaders, an anti-Prohibition movement organized to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment in order for temperance to be made a state and local regulatory affair. Dismayed at the lawlessness generated and worsened by federal efforts to curb alcohol, the Crusaders campaigned along non-partisan lines to repeal Prohibition. This movement worked through legal channels to end Prohibition as a federal issue. Pittsburgh Prohibitionist also faced Samuel H. Church, the president of Carnegie Institute, and his eloquent speeches against the inadequacy of federal Prohibition. Federal enforcement officials were forced to deal with assaults from both ends of Pittsburgh’s cultural and political spectrum, from the illicit saloon owners to prominent figures in the city’s social circles. Often caught in the middle with no support from the local law enforcement agencies, Prohibition withered on Pittsburgh’s alcohol-fed vine.

Pittsburgh’s Unique Character

This city at the point is one of remarkable diversity. Of its 1920 population of 588,343 people, 120,266 had been born in foreign countries (Lorant, p 328). The massive Atlantic migration was not legally curbed, with the adoption of quotas based upon nationality, until 1921. At this time, fully two thirds of Pittsburgh’s industrial labor force had been born in a country other than the United States. Separated by rivers, hills, ravines, and disparate ancestry with
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its distinctive cultural trappings, and shaped by the demands of industry, the city's many small parts each developed a level of autonomy not common in other large industrial cities. With large populations of ethnic Italians, Poles, Irish, Slovaks, Hungarians, Russians, Germans, Slavs, Greeks, blacks, and native born whites, divided also by religion, class, and time of arrival, Pittsburgh since the beginnings of heavy industrialization in the 1850s has been more of a collection of neighborhoods and boroughs than a monolithic city.

The 1920s, coming immediately after four decades of massive growth, much of it from different eastern European nations, experienced a city marked by expressive nationalism of many varied sorts. It was a city in which dozens of different languages could be heard and other cultures sampled, in which hundreds of Nationality Halls were created and energetically maintained as domains of the old language and way of life. Coupled with the churches, these institutions kept people welded together in the face of pressing Americanization. Proud of their heritage and suspicious of those who sought to homogenize the population, nationalities remained within tightly knit bodies of social organization to resist forces of change.

The political system in the greater Pittsburgh area reflected the compartmentalization of peoples by ethnicity, class, and religion. Consisting of towns like Braddock, Homestead, Munhall, Etna, Lawrenceville, McKeesport, and other small boroughs surrounding its industrial and commercial center, Pittsburgh developed into a series of distinct communities each with its own officials, police and fire force, and bureaucracy. Proud of their autonomy, these communities were not often willing to sacrifice their traditional and long-cultivated power to an external force, such as that of a federal agent.

In the city proper, political organizations, again often based upon ethnic groups, controlled the official wards with influence garnered through patronage, cultural solidarity, and support for recent immigrants. A single man often manipulated these machines for his own and the organization's best interest. Having learned the ways of political domination through the lessons of Christopher L. Magee, who controlled the city from 1882 through 1899, Pittsburgh politicians sat atop the collection of neighborhoods and boroughs, extracting payment and privilege for the simple price of apparent autonomy. Politically, Pittsburgh and its surrounding communities were united in name only. For practical purposes, power in the city was shared at different levels, with numerous local officials.

This system of fragmented politics could at times be stabilized and pointed in a particular direction by an individual able to entice the many leaders to unite for common profit. One such person was Mayor Charles H. Kline, who took office in 1926, and elevated ward politics and graft to the status of a lucrative city-wide business. Indeed, 1926 was "one of the best years in history, prohibition notwithstanding" for the liquor industry in Pittsburgh. Whereas Prohibition agents demanded a united effort and offered no incentive to local political bosses, organizers of alcohol rings presented
handsome profits and power in return for greater organization. Crime offered clear rewards to those who would take advantage of it.

The Corruption

As with the majority of large industrial cities, Pittsburgh, throughout its many layers of government, was not a stranger to corruption in the years before Prohibition. Relationships within the system of ward and city wide politics were shaped by bribery, graft, contract awards, and blackmail, and a well organized syndicate “exacted large sums of money through vice” (Lorant, p. 266). The political system itself, based upon neighborhoods, wards, and boroughs, with overreaching figures of power and prestige such as the mayoral office, was an invitation for corruption. Officials were elected through their organizational ties and reelected through their ability to present their district with tangible results. The story is not a new one, but for Pittsburgh in the early twentieth century, shady politics were extensive and pervasive.

Those who sought to impose Prohibition and the Volstead Act on Pittsburgh found highly organized political machines which understood the processes of creating money and power. Prohibition did not produce systems of corruption, graft, and violence, it merely provided a situation in which these forces could prosper. And prosper they did using alcohol as a political pawn. Newspaper accounts from the era are ripe with concerns from churchmen, dry advocates, and supporters of the statutory law, calling for devoted enforcement and judicial integrity in the prosecution of alcohol related crimes. A typical entry from April 23, 1928’s Post-Gazette is titled “Churches ask Federal Jury on Vice Here.” The story details a meeting of twenty Northside Protestant churches which petitioned in order to “demand a Federal investigation of commercialized vice conditions and wholesale violations of the prohibition law in Pittsburgh.” The target of the meeting was the indifference to Prohibition related crimes as displayed by Director of Public Safety James M. Clark, and through him, Mayor Charles Kline. Corruption, ranging from active participation to simple disregard of wrongdoing, was the rule in regards to political life in Pittsburgh in the Twenties. But who was there to stop it? Many people, including police, city officials, and judges, gained from the booming alcohol business, the moralists were not being personally injured, and the federal administrators were taxed to their limits. That profit was desired over compliance with a detested law is the fundamental truth of Prohibition in Pittsburgh.

The ability of politicians to benefit from disregarding Prohibition was a powerful motivational force in determining the direction of Pittsburgh’s enforcement policy. In December of 1933, just days before the official repeal of Prohibition by the Twenty First Amendment, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ran a three part series summarizing the problems that Chief Agents had had
with enforcing Prohibition in the city. The second installment’s title indicates
the role played by corruption in Pittsburgh’s behavior towards Prohibition.
“Politicians Take Over the Regulation of Bootleg Business, Proving of Little
or No Help to Enforcers” reads the bold line. The story attacks city figures in
a blistering fashion, indicting police officers, ward politicians, Mayor Kline,
and his administration for disenforcement of Prohibition and distancing
themselves from cooperation with the federal administrations. The system of
corruption, which grew until its perfection in 1926, worked from the bottom
up. Ward politicians, with the cooperation of the immediate police, protected
and harbored bootleggers and establishment owners. Police would then be
paid from the money provided to the politicians for their services rendered.
Initially this behavior caused scandal after scandal in downtown offices, but
before too long the high officials realized the extent of easy money being lost
by siding with the enforcers. The mayoral forces became involved in cor­
rup­tion, receiving numerous benefits by not enforcing the law. Men like
Mayor Kline, Director of Public Safety Clark, and Police Superintendent Peter
Walsh became non-actors in their elected or appointed roles as upholders of
the law, a decision which had distasteful criminal ramifications for one of
these men.

The extent to which Pittsburgh politicians acted counter to the Prohibi­
tion enforcement administration can be seen in the breakup of the “rum
conspiracy” in mid June, 1928. One hundred and sixty seven individuals
were caught in the dragnet and indicted by a Federal grand jury, including
powerful officials throughout Pittsburgh’s many areas. Judging by the sur­
names of those captured, the ring consisted of many different nationalities, as
well. Three Irishmen named O’Malley were taken from the Strip area, while
several East End Italians found themselves posting the $5000 bond. From the
South Side were taken several men of Polish and Irish descent. This ring was
not restricted to one group of people, and given the assumption that
Pittsburghers tended to congregate by national origin, the rum conspiracy
must have been a massive organization to work across so many different
communities.

Another indication of the rum conspiracy’s magnitude can be seen in
the positions of several of the indicted. This list reflects some of Pittsburgh’s
most powerful men, and the extent to which corruption had soiled the highest
places in the city. Superintendent of Police Peter P. Walsh, mentioned above,
was charged with conspiracy to violate the Prohibition laws. The charge read
that Walsh “did know and permit certain dealings in concessions for the
unlawful traffic in intoxicating liquor by various persons within the said City
of Pittsburgh.” Another powerful individual taken was Samuel J. Grenet, a
leading figure on the Northside since its Allegheny City days. Known as “the
power” over the river, Grenet’s position in the summer of 1928 was as a
member of the state legislature. One of his peers, Legislator Luke Sullivan,
was also nabbed, his base located in the Strip District. The conspiracy also
contained three police inspectors, two police magistrates, ten police lieuten­
ants from stations across the city, five ward chairman, the city golf champion (who was also one of the police lieutenants listed above), a former pugilist, assorted city workers, relatives of powerful officials, a former Prohibition agent, and several local politicians. The list is long and detailed, and reveals the depth of this organization which blatantly ignored the law in return for handsome profits. Pittsburgh's fragmentary political system, usually more of a collection of officials than a hierarchy, had been manipulated to create a organization with bases throughout the city which fed money up, and received from above the ability to be free of the law's hindrance.

Pittsburgh's problems with corruption did not begin or end with the rum conspiracy. This incident was merely the largest action by the federal forces and not necessarily the biggest alcohol syndicate, and definitely not the end of criminal collusion on the part of city officials and policemen. From the top of Pittsburgh politics to the most junior cop on the beat, corruption during Prohibition had become a way of life. Policemen drank after their shifts in bars which they were to have closed, ward politicians regulated the inflow of alcohol to their districts, and stills operated next to police stations. With no real incentive to comply, and a tangible monetary reason to disregard or actively break the law, Pittsburgh's officials and law enforcement were a hindrance to the federal Prohibition administration's Chief Agents. These men found a city filled with dozens of language and cultural barriers, pounding heavy industry and its workers' habits, complete with an established tradition of political machines with their questionable policies. Pittsburgh was unorganized for enforcement but always ready for profit and power.

The Federal Prohibition Administration

Prohibition, as a nationwide policy, faced two great problems. The first was its purpose: to change the living habits of the majority of adult Americans. The second was managing a system capable of dealing with such a tremendous challenge. The system created by the Volstead Act was essentially an extensive bureaucracy. Broken into large regions consisting of smaller subsets, with headquarters in particular cities, this bureaucracy did not escape the problems which so often plague that type of institution. The primary reason that Prohibition failed was the lack of cooperation between the unwieldy bureaucracy and local law enforcement officials. It is impossible to enforce an unpopular law from an alien position if the usual enforcers, who could act as intermediaries in conveying the proper action to their constituents, instead become part of the problem by aiding the law breakers. With collaboration between local leaders and federal forces, prohibition may have changed the living habits and tendencies of Americans. With this gap in cooperation and planning, however, the policy was doomed to fail, as it did in Pittsburgh. This generalization, I believe, is valid across the country, and
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very obvious in the case of Pittsburgh, as the following brief history of Prohibition's Chief Agents here in western Pennsylvania shows.

As the largest city in the region, Pittsburgh was the Prohibition administration's command post for western Pennsylvania and later West Virginia. The city received appointees who served in the federal enforcement bureaucracy just below General L.C. Andrews, the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. The first Chief Agent was John W. Connors, who arrived in Pittsburgh early in 1920. In July of that year he rashly predicted that "before another anniversary of the prohibition laws is observed, Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania will take on the semblance of a Sahara, and the whisky (sic) dealer will gradually become extinct." Big words from a man whose agents left a wet town in a higher state of luxury when they had entered. Connors soon quit, to be replaced by John English, "the idol of the drys." His stint was even shorter and less successful, and a suitable administrator was sought from the federal system.

In October of 1921 the federal administration found John Exnicios "the terror of the Pacific coast" and brought him to Pittsburgh from sunny California. Exnicios had worked in the government for years with efficiency and thorough planning, cracking down on squatters, opium rings, and smuggling in San Francisco. He intended to bring solid Prohibition enforcement to Pittsburgh, and was initially successful. Uncovering three large whiskey rings in the city, the Chief Agent sent evidence and requests for more men to Washington headquarters.

For the next few weeks Pittsburgh was dry of whiskey and all seemed positive for the dry forces. But something was amiss. The supply of beer into the city was suddenly a veritable flood, with loaded trucks arriving at all hours of the night. Those police detectives who had agreed and cooperated with Chief Agent Exnicios in the daylight had become armed guards for the beer trucks at night. The cooperation gap between federal and local forces is at its most obvious in this example. City officials sat quietly by, looking on as local police actively aided the arrival of alcohol. The amount of money changing hands must have been substantial. The courts, too, played their hand in disrupting Exnicios' attempts to dehumidify Pittsburgh. Federal Judge W.H.S. Thompson and a grand jury branded a remark of the Chief Agent's as "erratic and unfit," and recommended to Washington that he be removed. The only people openly in support of the Administrator were Pittsburgh's church leaders, who invited Exnicios to speak to their congregations on Sunday mornings. While vindicated of the jury's charges by the Prohibition Administration, the Chief Agent received no reinforcements from Washington, and beer continued to pour into the city. While Exnicios continued to promise action, he had lost his momentum with Pittsburgh's dry population. The final straw was the dismissal of Agent C. C. Gregg, one of the more conscientious enforcers in the district. When the churches on June 23, 1922, led by Rev B. L. Scott, pointed out the increase in beer and open
disregard for Prohibition under Exnicios’ reign,\textsuperscript{10} it was clearly time for another Chief Agent to step into Pittsburgh’s hot seat. Exnicios remained until November, when he returned to California under a cloud of angry denunciations of the government and its Prohibition policies.

The Prohibition Administration tried a different approach with the newest appointee, electing to hire a man from the private sector. Frederick C. Baird, a successful railroad executive, assumed the position of Chief Agent in December of 1922. Baird found a city dominated by the alcohol interests. Until the early months of 1926, the status quo, however distanced from the law, was maintained under Baird’s Administration. After the fateful mayoral election of 1925, in which Charles H. Kline ascended to Pittsburgh’s political throne, the city descended into alcohol and corruption sodden depths despite all the efforts of the Chief Agent.

Kline’s administration perfected the coordination of corruption throughout the political system. As revealed in the “rum conspiracy,” the criminal organization reached from the lowest junior cop to the highest positions in Pittsburgh’s civil service. Complacent lenience filtered its way down through the system as money rose upwards. Ward politicians became responsible for controlling alcohol not as an aspect of Prohibition, but to see that the graft continued to reach those in charge. Prohibition enforcement was breaking down, unable to combat the local wet forces. Pushed against an unyielding wall, Chief Agent Baird called for an army of dry volunteers. Advertising in local newspapers, clubs, fraternal organizations, and churches, Baird attempted to create a system of his own in which people would inform on those breaking the Prohibition laws.\textsuperscript{11} It was a feeble attempt to rally a population already disgusted with ineffective enforcement. To add insult to an already painful injury, Baird’s plan was widely criticized by newspapers and civil libertarians as an “espionage system” which “in all probability frequently would, result in casting unwarranted suspicion upon innocent persons.”\textsuperscript{12} Baird’s resignation was received early in 1926. His feelings concerning the Prohibition Administration were put well by James George, writing for the \textit{Post-Gazette} in 1933, “Baird resigned in disgust early in 1926 and went back to the railroad business, where at least one could be reasonably sure of getting an order carried out.”\textsuperscript{13} Having butted up against the entrenched system of corrupted politics, Frederick Baird learned that Prohibition could not be enforced by federal will alone.

Baird’s successor and former assistant Edgar R. Ray lasted about six months. Seeing the hopelessness of combating the Kline Administration without adequate federal support, the Chief Agent quickly threw in the towel. In his resignation, Ray voiced many of the same concerns as had John Exnicios four years earlier. With no desire to remain in Pittsburgh, and claiming that “There isn’t any intention on the part of the United States government to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment” and calling Prohibition “The biggest swindle that was ever perpetrated in this country,”\textsuperscript{14} Ray left the service while still in Washington, DC.
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Having tried professional federal agents and a railroad man, the Prohibition Administration next eyed a more forceful type of person to combat corrupt Pittsburgh. Former navy officer Captain John D. Pennington was appointed to head the Fourth District of the Federal Prohibition Administration on July 6, 1926. Through political attempts to oust him and a restructuring of the district hierarchy, Pennington remained in charge of the western Pennsylvania area until Repeal. He is credited with hundreds of convictions, closures of open saloons, and arrests in speakeasies. The rum conspiracy was broken under his authority, as were countless smaller rings. Dealing with terrible circumstances from an enforcement standpoint, Pennington achieved admirable results. The system in place, however, was not about to be dried up. Too much power had been structured around disregard for Prohibition. As federal enforcement efforts failed to solve the alcohol problems in Pittsburgh, by the late 1920s its citizens looked for solutions other than that which existed.

Temperance Movements Opposed to Prohibition

Citizens organizations, especially the churches, had voiced complaints against policies of the Prohibition Administration since 1921. In October of that year, vocal ministers had charged that the Eighteenth Amendment was not being adequately enforced, and adopted a resolution condemning officials and judges for not putting bootleggers in jail. Having suffered through the early failures and empty promises of the Fourth District’s Chief Agents and seen the growth of Mayor Kline’s city wide conspiracy, Pittsburgh’s dry citizens began to look for alternative solutions to the problems created or worsened by Prohibition.

The Crusaders, a non-partisan political movement, advanced a political solution to the nations troubles. The organization, which grew to hundreds of thousands of voters including many Pittsburghers, had originated in Ohio, a temperance hotbed, and spread east and north through mailings, speeches, and newspaper advertisements. The Crusaders were headed in Pittsburgh by Simon T. Patterson, a University of Pittsburgh graduate and successful attorney. Seeing two great evils in America, alcohol and federal Prohibition, the Crusaders attempted to elect politicians who would vote for Repeal and push the temperance issue back to the state level. In their efforts, the Crusaders were joined in 1931 by Pittsburgh workers and the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform. The movement hoped to end the violence associated with Prohibition by eliminating the federal bureaucracy and thereby rid the nation of the volatile cooperation gap between federal and local officials. It was hoped that officials and judges would obey state and local laws better than they had complied with the Volstead Act, a hope born out by relatively violence-free prohibition in twenty seven states prior to World War One. Temperance, the final goal of the Crusaders, could
become law without resorting to large scale corruption and violence. The Crusaders argued that the manner of legalized temperance attempted by the Eighteenth Amendment, due to its divisions in the enforcement hierarchy, caused more problems than it solved.16

Citizens' action groups, often organized by church leaders, petitioned the federal leaders, vocally supported or called for new Chief Agents, and attempted to work with local officials in an effort to see something accomplished. In late 1926, assured that John Pennington was a man able to provide at least a little enforcement, Pittsburgh's dry forces focussed on the role played by downtown officials in executing the law. In June, a committee of twenty four prominent ministers addressed Mayor Kline to request the dismissal of the obviously complacent Police Superintendent Peter Walsh. The Mayor, skilled at such confrontations, received the ministers warmly and sent them on their merry way, with no change in the city's officials.

The ministers and their dry associates reiterated their demands throughout the summer with no response from Kline. In November a mass meeting was called, in which the Citizens' Committee of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County was formed. The Committee hired William L. King, a strong temperance man from Kansas City, to crusade against vice in Pittsburgh. For months he apparently did nothing but Committee business. Suddenly in April, 1927, he appeared at a downtown speakeasy with federal agents, and shut down the establishment. Having sent out undercover men during the winter of 1927, King had amassed evidence of illegal action all around Pittsburgh, and raids followed in rapid succession. On May 8, with cooperation from the state police, King raided "the biggest and costliest gambling house in the city at 5604 Baum boulevard, seized its cargo of costly liquors and stopped the big roulette wheel."17 King and the Citizen's Committee had learned valuable lessons in dealing with Prohibition's disenforcement. They understood the futility in bridging the cooperation gap by pushing local officials to join with the federal enforcers. These men, by sending out undercover men, gathering information, and coordinating with federal and state officials, themselves bridged the gap between locals and federal, making positive action possible.18

An outspoken opponent of Prohibition in Pittsburgh was Colonel Samuel Harden Church, the president of Carnegie Institute. Church considered social conditions among students in Pittsburgh colleges and universities "very much worse than before prohibition."19 Delivering speeches before his student body, the people of Pittsburgh, and in front of Senate committees, Church attacked Prohibition for its ineffective enforcement, Chief Agent Baird's call for people to inform upon their neighbors, the amount of crime generated, and, as churches attempted to cooperate in action with police forces, for violating the Constitution's separation of church and state clause. Colonel Church made enemies throughout Pittsburgh, a situation which greatly worsened when he illustrated Prohibition's ineffectiveness by being quoted as saying in the United States Senate that it was a "universal custom"
for male students to carry a hip flask to parties.\textsuperscript{20} He attacked the churches for attempting to control the population through law and not Gospel, claiming that the dry forces were “making a kindergarten nation out of a people who want to be men and women, with all the liberties and responsibilities that go with the maturity of life.”\textsuperscript{21} Church was not a popular man in several of Pittsburgh’s circles. His exaggerated claims against Prohibition agents, tirades against established churches, and the fact that his son was arrested for carrying alcohol across the Canadian border did nothing to endear Church to the drys. As an outspoken opponent of the federal law, Samuel Church was scrutinized and criticized by dry forces. Church’s situation is indicative of the complex relationships between individuals and institutions during Prohibition, of the many forces at work, and of the differing solutions to the nation’s problems.

**Conclusion**

Prohibition in Pittsburgh was largely a failure. Its few successes can be attributed to the efforts of hardworking individuals, but these bright spots were unlasting and limited in scope. The Prohibition Administration could not combat the imbedded and perfected system of corruption which existed throughout the city’s political system. Pittsburgh’s diverse and large immigrant population, industrial character, autonomous communities, and finely tuned ward politics were not easily tamed by the imported Chief Agents. Working best only when profits were readily available, the city’s many smaller components resisted Prohibition efforts at nearly every turn. Corruption was pervasive, effecting thousands across Pittsburgh’s geographical and social spectrums. Legislated temperance was a task that federal Prohibition, as dictated by the Eighteenth Amendment and enforced by the Volstead Acts, was not able to master.

The people of Pittsburgh realized that Prohibition was being poorly enforced from nearly the outset. After first attempting to sway local officials and failing, concerned citizens often organized through the churches. These groups petitioned federal juries, created an extensive Citizen Committee, and hired their own enforcer in an attempt to bridge the gap between local and federal forces. Organizations such as the Crusaders argued for a reassessment of temperance laws based upon state and local enforcement. Prominent men of the city such as Colonel Church deplored both the conditions under Prohibition and the later 1920s’ means to rectify those ills.

It is clear that Prohibition as a federal issue failed in Pittsburgh. While temperance laws had been passed and obeyed in over twenty five states before the First World War, federally mandated Prohibition was a massive failure until its Repeal in 1933. One is tempted to ask ‘Why?’ The position taken by this paper on the failure of Prohibition rests on the creation of a massive bureaucracy, of which Pittsburgh was but one district, that was
incapable of recruiting local officials, police, and judges to the enforcement cause. These officials, in the main, chose instead to either turn a deaf ear to the breaking of laws, or actively take part in the huge profits to be made in the illegal alcohol business. This gap between federal and local enforcement agencies accounts for the failure of Prohibition in the Fourth Federal District. Any attempt to break up profitable organizations set in a diverse confederacy of communities, without the aid of local officials, is sure to fail as did Prohibition in Pittsburgh.

Bibliography

10. George, James R. "Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To 'Dry-Up' Pittsburgh Area," *Post-Gazette* (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.
13. Kury, Fred H. "Two Years Ago There Were 522 Open Barrooms in the City—Today There Are Only Five" *Press* (Pittsburgh), Feb 2, 1930.
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Notes

1. George, James R. “Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To ‘Dry-Up’ Pittsburgh Area.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.

2. Named for its writer Representative Andrew J. Volstead, an obscure legislator from Minnesota, the act enforced the prohibition of the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating beverages as dictated by the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

3. George, James R. “Politicians Take Over the Regulation Of Bootleg Business, Proving Of Little or No Help to Enforcers.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 2, 1933.


6. George “Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To ‘Dry-Up’ Pittsburgh Area.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.

7. George, “Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To ‘Dry-Up’ Pittsburgh Area.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.

8. George, “Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To ‘Dry-Up’ Pittsburgh Area.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.

9. George, “Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To ‘Dry-Up’ Pittsburgh Area.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.

10. George, “Neither Inefficiency Nor Ignorance Can Be Blamed for Failure To ‘Dry-Up’ Pittsburgh Area.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 1, 1933.

11. “Baird Sounds Call for Dry Volunteers” Sun (Pittsburgh), Jan 13, 1926.


15. “Churches Voice Concern” Chronicle Telegraph (Pittsburgh), Nov 21, 1921.

16. An interesting tactic to find an alternative for Prohibition was formulated by William Randolph Hearst in New York, who in February of 1929 put forth the Hearst Temperance Contest. The intention of the contest was “to find a practicable plan as a substitute for Prohibition” Sun Telegraph (Pittsburgh), Feb 3, 1929.

17. George, James R. “Politicians Take Over the Regulation Of Bootleg Business, Proving Of Little or No Help to Enforcers.” Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh), Dec 2, 1933.

18. See also page seven’s discussion of the church meeting on April 22, 1928, in which a petition is adopted calling for Federal investigation of Pittsburgh’s lack of enforcement. Rather than building a bridge, the congregations are attempting to jump across the gap to bring in adequate federal forces. This meeting endorsed Chief Agent Pennington, but recognized his inability to fairly combat the Kline Administration.